



Leather
By
Belinda McBride

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Cover art by Alex DeShanks, October 2009

ISBN 978-1-60394-367-3

New Concepts Publishing

Lake Park, GA 31636

www.newconceptspublishing.com

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Prologue

Monday Afternoon

“Today, you’re going to call me Master. Do you understand?”

The answer came as a garbled sound.

“*Do you understand?*”

“Yes ...” the sub forced her answer from behind a red rubber ball gag.

“Yes what?” His hand fisted in her short brown hair, forcing her back against the restraints.

“Yes, Master.”

“Louder!”

“*Yes, Master!*”

He released her head, finally satisfied.

The Dom prowled in a circle around the tightly bound woman, evaluating her from every angle, coolly summing her up.

“Today, the word ‘no’ will not be in your vocabulary. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Again. Louder.”

Yes, Master!”

He flicked her ass with a flogger, the leather gently singing against the thin pink fabric of her skirt.

“Do you like this?”

“Yes, Master.”

The whip began to hum with speed, flicking up her ass cheeks and down her thighs, to bare skin. She flinched against the sting. Her ass squirmed under the whip, trying to avoid its bite. Her blue eyes were enormous, swimming in tears.

“Yes! Yes, Master.” He then flicked the flogger lightly between her spread legs.

“And this?”

“Yes, Master!” She blinked against tears, her mascara trickled down her soft cheeks.

Abruptly, he stopped, setting the flogger aside and pulling a pair of utility scissors from the pocket of his leather pants. Without comment, he began to cut away her skirt. His hands appeared enormous against her tiny bottom.

“Are you going to be a good little slave for me today?”

The skirt fell away, and he began to rub her ass, massaging, and then slapping till she was rosy. She nodded vigorously.

“Yes, Master.”

“Yes what?”

Saliva dripped down her chin as she fought to get the words out.

“I’ll be your good little slave today.” Bravely, she fought down her frustration at the gag in her mouth.

He slapped her ass gently and moved to her front, dropping a soft kiss on her forehead. He looked intently into her eyes. And then he took the scissors to her bra

"We have a lot to do today, slave."

"Yes, Master."

"Are you happy to be here with me?"

She nodded, and he leaned down, head cocked in an unspoken command to hear her answer.

"Yes, Master."

"Good girl."

Gently, the Dom unbuckled the straps of the ball gag, letting it dangle loose. He kissed her mouth, catching her tongue between his teeth, and pulled it hard. He followed that up with gentle kisses to her chin, her nose, her forehead.

He slapped her face smartly and buckled the ball gag back into place.

"Let's get to work then, shall we?"

"Yes, Master."

* * * *

"*Cut!*"

The crew bustled around, resetting the scene. The Dom stood back and allowed the make-up girl to swab his forehead. He took a long swallow of water from the bottle that someone handed him, winked at his sub for today's shoot. Her hands had been unshackled. She was unbuckling the sloppy ball gag, spitting saliva on the floor.

"Ready to get tied up and fucked, Shelia?"

"Only if it's with you, Master Wilder."

He laughed, and then his laughter died when he realized she was serious.

Oh shit. A true believer.

"It's Pierce. My name's Pierce."

She smiled gently, rising up to kiss him on the chin.

"Anything you say, Master." Her hand stroked his leather clad ass, causing him to jump a bit. He took a step back.

"Better get over there baby, the rope guys are waiting."

* * * *

Monday Night

Pain lanced through his head. He arched his neck, wincing at the explosion of stars across the darkness of his vision. He panted and reflexively pulled his arms, finding them secured straight out to the sides, as though he'd been stretched out on a cross. Once, twice, he tested his bindings, finding that the harder he pulled, the tighter they pinched. He gave up.

Twisting his head, the Dom could tell that his eyes were covered. His teeth bit down on a ball gag, causing a bit of panic that he stifled. All tools of the trade. All objects that he handled every day. The difference being that these were his tools, he used them on others. Never before had the Dom found himself in this position. It was wrong.

He went silent, listening, smelling, and trying to sense his surroundings. He'd just

finished a shoot in the warehouse, was he still there? Had he made it home? He remembered getting dressed, helping the sub that he'd filmed with gather her things, seeing her safely to her car. It had been a hard shoot for her, a newbie. It had been a hard shoot for them both. She'd been trying to prove herself for the legend. To his surprise, and a bit of chagrin, he was the legend. And she'd more than proven herself.

A group ... Jessie, the cameraman, Ian, the lighting guy. Linda, the director had been with him. But he didn't remember beyond that. A shoot, a tired model, a group going out for drinks.

The smell here was different; damp, maybe dark. He smelled trees, heard wind outside the building. He heard harsh breathing ... his own, so he held his breath to listen. He'd been in the industry a long time, had many fans. Many very strange fans. He thought of that Steven King film about a crazed fan and shuddered.

He heard breathing ... someone else's. The clink of chains, a slight struggle, and then silence, as though the other was listening to him. The Dom tried to communicate through the ball gag. It came out as a grunt. Frustration mounted.

"Hello?"

A female voice, husky, as though she lived on whisky and tobacco. But he didn't smell tobacco. He smelled leather and roses. He heard more sounds of struggle.

"Fuck this! Is someone there?"

All he could do was make desperate sounds, muffled behind the gag.

He sighed, letting go of the effort. His pounding head told him that it was time to sleep. He slipped back into blackness, letting the drug in his system crush his consciousness.

Chapter One

Six Weeks Before

“Hey, Big Guy!”

Pierce Wilder sighed and turned, knowing the voice, knowing the greedy intent behind the friendly façade. He sat at the counter in his favorite little café in the Marina District, back to the room, critically examining a Thai lettuce wrap. The light fare didn’t thrill him, but age was creeping up, and Pierce was finding that he was more willing to film in clothing than he had been in the past. A past that he was preparing to leave forever. Finally.

But for now, the battle to stay fit for the camera was becoming more of a challenge. Even on his six-foot-two inch frame, a pound or two looked like ten through the harsh eye of the camera.

“Hey Trevor. How’s things?” He schooled his rumbling voice into a semblance of friendliness, knowing the light Scots accent would mellow his tone. He hadn’t been home for twenty years now, but the accent hung on. The women loved it.

“Haven’t seen you in ages, bro! Dig the new look! It works for that dungeon stuff you’re doing now.”

Trevor reached out and rubbed his hand over Pierce’s closely cropped hair. He’d grown a goatee as well. Like the cropped hair on his scalp, the silver had begun to dominate the red.

He liked the goatee, it left whisker rashes on the thighs and pussy of his girls when they filmed. It brought up color without being too painful.

What he hadn’t expected was that the camera embraced his new butch look as well. The lines of his rugged, sculpted face were a revelation after being overwhelmed by long hair all these years. His brilliant blue eyes were now mesmerizing.

His experimental foray into Internet-based BDSM films had garnered him a new, ravenous fan base. Mostly female, odd though that seemed. In straight porn, his cock had been the star. Now, in fetish, his fans wanted to see him. All of him. Strutting and snarling, rough sex and bondage. Naked or dressed, leathers or suits, they didn’t care. They wanted rough sex, the occasional gentle caress, a soft kiss, alternated with a stinging slap to the face. They wanted exotic rope work and high-tech spider gags. He gave them brute muscle, hauling the female into position to take his cock while she dangled, suspended from the ceiling.

Strange new world. Well, new to Pierce.

He had to work harder for the money, but it was worth it. It had given him an incentive to get back into the gym, if for nothing other than self-preservation. He couldn’t heft around a hogtied actress with a beer gut. Not at his age.

Pierce ducked away from Trevor’s hand and returned to his lunch. He had an

appointment with his lawyer today and didn't need to get hung up with his old manager. The letter from Pacific West studio crackled in his jacket pocket, an all too-real threat to Pierce's future. And now Trevor sat here, a blast from the past, more than ready to pull him back down.

Back when they'd been buds, Trevor got him the gigs, handled the appearances and red tape. That was before Trev discovered crack cocaine and Pierce discovered serial marriage. Now, Pierce kept his business in the hands of the professionals, and his personal life firmly under wraps. No more quickie marriages in Vegas. No more dating the talent. Hardly any dating at all. Too much temptation and too many young actresses willing to climb his broad back to get to the top.

Seeing that Trevor wasn't getting the hint, Pierce sighed and picked up his plate, carrying it to a table. Trevor plopped into the chair opposite him, still looking him over. Though he looked raffish and disreputable, Trevor still retained that old charm. Against his better judgment, Pierce was glad to see his old friend. Glad that Trev was still around and alive and wearing his salesman's face. He'd used that face to sell Pierce many times over.

"Dieting?"

"Always." Pierce gave a lopsided grin. "Not burning it off like I used to."

"I could get you something for that ... ahhhh ... forget I said that. I'm in twelve-step again."

Pierce shot him down with a glare. His body was his meal ticket, and drugs didn't play into that. Once upon a time, the cocaine had fueled him. The alcohol had brought him down. But that was the life of a foolish kid, long past. This was the present, and Trevor didn't belong here. Trev shifted in the chair. He was edgy, clearly something monumental was on his mind.

"Listen, if you're interested, I've got wind of a gig for you. Some wealthy fool wants to finance a film, saw your internet dungeon shit and really liked it. They want to do an upscale, indie bondage flick."

Pierce took a long drink of water and carefully set his glass down.

"Not interested."

"Come on, Pierce, this'll pay way better than that stuff you're doing, and get you back on top. Where you belong, eh? It's female-directed and has a big romantic angle"

Pierce speared some lettuce with tangy dressing. This wasn't bad. The chicken was really spicy, though.

"I'm retiring."

"No way, man! You've got years left in you! The chicks, they burn out quick, but you're just hitting your stride! Come on! Besides, this is different!"

Trevor was balanced between outrage and desperation. This could be his return to the industry, his moment to go back to what he did best ... managing the careers of others.

Pierce gave up on the pretence of eating and sat back. He folded brawny arms across his chest and gave Trevor a cool once-over. His old friend was looking a bit rough around the edges. Hell, he was as well, but his wrinkles were from laughter, not chemicals. Though still handsome, Trevor looked pasty and flabby. His dark hair was unkempt, his clothing worn. The tremor in his hands testified to recent withdrawals.

"Trevor, I've been doing this for over twenty fucking years. When I started, it was

the dream job for a horny kid, but it's getting old. Really old. I'm still young enough to get a new start with something else. I can go back to school, start a business, whatever I want."

What he wanted to tell Trevor, was that if he never had to see another stretched asshole, another dry, emaciated pussy, ever in his life, he'd be a happy man. But that just wasn't mealtime conversation.

"No, man, you're a star, a legend! This gig, it's a good one, Pierce ... just let me put you in touch"

He trailed off, seeing that Pierce wasn't buying it.

"I'm under contract to the Fetish Group for another year. They have me on a light shooting schedule. I can do one-shot projects after that if I want. I like what I'm doing and I like who I'm working with."

"They're amateurs. Guerilla film makers."

"They're amateurs who pay me well, light me well, and their checks don't bounce. And there's a lot to be said for guerilla shooting. It's never boring."

His last gig had been with a novice sub, they'd shot in the back of an Escalade while driving through the city. His money shot had come coasting down Nob Hill. It had actually been fun, handling the restraints, keeping her balanced, and watching the camera crew scrabbling for the shot in the back of the crowded vehicle. He hadn't just come on her breasts, as intended, but on the windows, the floor of the SUV and probably on the camera lens as well! They'd laughed hysterically, dodging traffic and racing the lights. Illegal as hell, but an adventure.

Trevor rolled his eyes, clearly not buying Pierce's argument. How could Pierce think of walking away from this? Sometimes he hated Pierce. Arrogant prick. He wasn't even listening to the offer. Asshole had never listened to him. If he had ... well, if he had, he'd probably have been in rehab as many times as Trevor had. Might have gone down with AIDs or Hep C with the old crowd. Yeah, he was one to listen to ...

Trevor painted on his best selling smile and went back to work. Feeling desperation creeping into his voice, he took a deep breath and began to pitch the script. It was a good one, a good writer ... his voice began to trail off as he saw that he'd lost Pierce's attention.

Pierce half-listened to Trevor while his eyes roamed the café. The fashionable lunchtime crowd flowed in and out the door. Outside, shoppers filled the streets, the occasional dog walker sailed down the sidewalk with their canine charges, both prized purebred and cherished mutt. Pierce had toyed with the idea of moving out of the city, but he'd miss it here. He was rarely recognized, and the locals seemed to take what he did for a living in stride. Most of the time, anyway. And on days like today, when the sun kissed the winter sky, there was no place as beautiful as San Francisco.

He found the woman he was searching for, caught her eye and winked as she flushed and smiled and looked down at her paper. He wondered if she'd seen his films. You never knew. He continued to watch her. She was probably in her thirties, attractive. Professional. She looked Latin, with wavy dark hair in a French twist, honey colored skin and lovely dark eyes. Maybe under her conservative suit, she had a clit ring, or a leather thong. He hoped not. Pierce's own, secret fetish was vanilla. He hoped she'd never seen his face on film, had never run across him on the Internet. He hoped she just saw an attractive man in his favorite restaurant.

The first thing he planned when he quit the business would be to change his name. It was the final stage of becoming someone else. Ironical, since he used the name he'd been born with. If he were someone else, he'd go to that woman's table, ask if he could join her. He'd offer to buy her coffee, sit across from her, gaze into those warm brown eyes. But he wasn't someone else, and his common sense demanded that he keep to his own kind. He turned back to Trevor.

* * * *

Celeste tried her level best not to stare at the man three tables over. She'd seen him around the Marina District before, usually during business hours. She whiled away her time here, wondering who he was, what he did for a living. He didn't have the independently wealthy, entitled look that prevailed in the neighborhood. His clothes were good enough, but he had a rough-edged air about him, enhanced by the short-cropped silver hair and goatee.

He avoided looking downright tough by bright blue eyes. Friendly eyes ... when he smiled, little lines rose from his cheeks to his eyes, and his hard mouth looked suddenly sweet. The other man called him Pierce, and was talking to him about a job.

She returned to her paper, trying hard to focus on the job at hand, namely, the on-going stakeout of a business down the street. The job was mind-numbing, but someone had to do it. Stupid surveillance didn't even have the promise of an exciting takedown at the end, just endless watching. At least she was on the day shift. Her partner drew the short straw and took nights. Since Bruce had a wife and baby, and she'd been the one to get them this shit job, she should feel guilty. But she didn't.

Bruce had called her a Mexican just one too many times. There was nothing worse than being saddled with an asshole of a partner.

Bored and distracted, her glance strayed again to the man. He listened to his companion, but wasn't receptive. In unguarded moments, his eyes were strangely sad, almost despondent. He caught her gaze again and Celeste blushed at his smile, just like a teenager with her first crush! He looked just a bit wicked under that sweet smile. A little bit bad, like maybe he knew things that the good boys didn't know and that good girls shouldn't imagine.

Under her silk blouse, her nipples went hard and low in her belly, something twisted, leaving her dizzy and breathless.

Now that was new, and somewhat delightful, as well! She hadn't had this sort of a rise since ... well ... ever.

The man gestured to the waitress and paid his bill, rising to leave. She glanced at him, doing her best to hide her appreciation. He was tall and fit, dressed all in black and grey. Broad shoulders tapered to narrow hips, his body was brawny and powerful. His was not the body of a boy. Close-cropped hair glinted with copper and silver. His face was lean and spare, with high cheekbones and a strong jaw. The cropped hair looked good on him. A mature man, probably more in his stride at forty than he had been at thirty. He'd probably look even better at fifty, if his bone structure held any clue.

Celeste wished she hadn't been working; she wished she could smile and gesture him over to the table. She returned her focus to the leather goods store across the street and sighed. The man moved away, leaving the café, entering her direct vision as he reached the door. He paused, turned slightly, catching her eye. He smiled again, and winked. She

smiled and sighed, watching him leave. She wondered if he smelled as good as he looked.

Glancing over at the table he'd vacated, she saw the thin man still sitting there, glaring after the other man although he was already gone. Blood rushed to her head, and she moved on impulse. Celeste never acted on impulse ... oh hell ... who was she kidding? Impulse was her middle name! Otherwise, she wouldn't be sitting here on a scut job in the first place.

"Excuse me ... that man you were just with?" He looked up at her and nodded, an expectant smile wreathing his face.

"That's my bud, Pierce

She cut him off, almost regretting her boldness. "If you see him again, would you give him my card?" He looked at her extended hand and the crisp white card-stock. "I ... well ... tell him I'd like to meet him for coffee sometime." Trevor took the card from her hand, keeping the smile pasted on his face. He slipped it into his pocket, not looking at the inscription.

"I'll be hooking up with him again soon, and I'll make sure he gets it." She flushed again, grateful that her warm skin tone hid her blush. She gave him a once-over, a professional look this time. Maybe this was a mistake. If this man hung with junkies, it might be a big mistake.

"Thank you. I appreciate it." She turned back to her table and her newspaper, focusing again on her work. Trevor threw a bill down for his coffee and headed out the door, down the street to where an idling car was waiting. He got into the back seat and was gone.

Chapter Two

The rhythmic sound of sex echoed through the cavernous space; Pierce ignored the camera that focused right on the point of contact between his body and hers.

Slap. Slap. Slap ... he concentrated on the sound, watching her back, her head.

As she became fatigued, he laid his big hand under her belly, supporting her a bit. The ropes were tight, her gag was off, she made little, mewling noises. Her hips were thrusting back into him as he pistoned slow and deep. He accelerated, grabbing her hips and slamming into her hard before resuming the previous tempo. Sweat gathered on his forehead, he could smell her sex, his sweat mingling with hers.

Toni was a pro, she'd spent her eighteenth birthday filming her first sex act. He knew what her limits were, and they were damned high. She'd taken the flogging on her ass well, as well as the nipple clamps and weights. Now a web of complex binding enmeshed her, holding her completely immobile as he fucked her from the rear.

"Come ...," he leaned down and growled into her ear. "Come ... *Now!*" He angled in deeper and harder while she obediently flew into a flurry of moans and screams, collapsing as he held her bound hands behind her back. She lay supine, panting hard, even as he felt his own breath ripping out of his lungs. He clenched his teeth, biting back on his very real need to climax.

"And ... Cut!"

Pierce gripped the base of his cock, securing the condom as he pulled out. He stepped back, letting the rope guys come in and untie her. Toni hopped up, stretching, shaking her blue-tinged hands. She was as sweaty as he was. The skin on her ass was pink and rosy. He was good with the flogger, giving a sting without leaving welts. Unless he chose to leave welts. Toni wasn't all that much into pain, but her tolerance was good.

"You okay, baby?"

She nodded, the clamps still bit into her nipples. They'd come off in the next shot. Little Toni Grey took way more pain than he would. Or could, for that matter. Pierce didn't do pain.

"Pierce, Toni, you okay to finish tonight? We're running a little late, but I still want to do her anal, then straight into the money shot."

"I'm good, Linda. Just as soon finish tonight."

He evaluated Toni, judging her good to go, and nodded in agreement. He wanted a clean slate tomorrow. Trev had left him a voicemail ... her name was Celeste Morales and she wanted to meet him for coffee. Damn! He still hadn't come down from the high! He tossed the used condom, and then stepped over to the prop table, selecting another, this one a thicker gauge for the anal shot. He'd had them break before, and in this particular business, that wasn't a comforting occurrence.

She was wearing a plug, so wouldn't need much prep other than what the scene required. Pierce pumped himself and slipped on the rubber, following that with a generous

coating of lube. He grabbed a couple unlabeled bottles of water. As the shot started, he cracked one and cradled Toni in his arms, holding the bottle to her mouth as shooting began again. Linda liked to show her Dom nurturing the sub. She felt it projected a bit more of a trust atmosphere. Whatever. He and Toni were being paid for doing this. He just didn't want her health at risk. She'd sweated hard throughout the shoot, and he didn't want her to end up dehydrated.

He wiped drops of water off her chin and kissed her gently, with love that was genuine. He kissed her again, deeper, allowing his erection to surge with anticipation.

Pierce carefully slipped a pair of heavy iron manacles on her hands; the spreader kept her arms immobile. They looked ludicrous on her tiny-boned wrists, but that was the point. He lay back on a wide sofa, settling her into his lap, fondling her small breasts and playing up the contrast between his huge hands and her petite body.

When the nipple clamps came off, she gasped for real as blood surged to the inflamed buds. He angled her across his body, her head lying back over his shoulder, legs crossed and elevated as he removed the plug and replaced it with his fingers. He thrust in and out, pumping harder and harder. He hooked his fingers, it looked nasty and mean on camera, but in reality, only the tips of her fingers remained in her ass.

She was well lubed, and he'd greased himself, so when he worked his cock into her ass, she shrieked, but it was only for the camera. He hefted her upright, into Reverse Cowgirl, growling instructions as he did so. She bounced and slammed onto his dick, making his head spin, making him very grateful that she barely weighed a hundred pounds. Fighting his instincts to grab her hips, to thrust and finish, Pierce lay back with his arms behind his head, enjoying the show, occasionally pumping upward to unsettle her a bit and slapping her ass for the camera.

At Linda's off-camera signal, Pierce pulled her off his dick and laid her flat on her back on the leather couch, doing an up-and-over, propping his foot up behind her head as he slipped off the condom. Her hands were still bound so he fed his cock into her mouth, letting her suck him off, fucking hard into her mouth as Toni rolled her tongue and lips over his head.

He was uncut, his glans almost miserable from the activity this evening. She met his eyes and nodded, letting him know she understood his plight. With her lips, Toni worked the foreskin down over his head, giving him a bit of relief from the contact.

When the feeling was right for the money shot, he pulled out of her mouth, pumping himself to orgasm, moaning and growling with every stroke, watching in abstraction as his seed shot over her breasts, all the way up to her chin. His moans and curses were not just for the camera. He'd been holding back way too long. Pain and pleasure flowed together, and he slumped forward, supporting himself with one hand on the arm of the couch.

He was panting, taking his time to recover, but Linda was still filming; she must want another orgasm from Toni. He roughly palmed Toni's face, forcing flecks of semen into her mouth. She eagerly licked the cum from his fingers. Something else she wasn't crazy about, but again, it was just part of the job.

And part of the reason Toni did mostly girl on girl nowadays.

Pierce grabbed the Magic Wand from the table behind the couch and lowered himself to the floor next to her groin. He worked her cunt with the vibrator, hard and ruthless,

listening to her moan, watching her pelvis rock and grind. This one would be real. Toni loved the Wand. He grinned fiercely as she rocked into the head of the vibrator and gasped, shrieking and bucking into her orgasm. He laughed. Off camera, she came pretty much the same way. Like a porn star. He should know. She'd been wife number three.

* * * *

"You've got something on your mind, Pierce.

He was pulling on a robe, his street clothing was in the men's room. The props people were scuttling around, picking up the scraps of her costume and the leathers he'd worn for the shoot. He looked down into Toni's gamine face. A decade into the business and she still looked fresh and innocent. Her dark hair was feathery around her face. Her lips were flushed and a bit puffy. She was still mostly natural, a rare commodity in the industry today.

"Was I off? Did I hurt you?" He was immediately concerned. Some of the girls that he worked with were true subs, taking anything he'd throw at them. The pain and submission sent them to their happy place. The pros like Toni, they could carry off the image, but not always the pain.

"No, you were great. You're always the best to work with, baby. But you're a little distracted. You have been on the last couple jobs we've worked together." They walked to the locker room together. She followed him into the men's room as he used the shower. Not hearing what she wanted to hear, Toni dropped her robe and joined him. They casually soaped one another down, he scrubbed her back the way he knew she liked. When they finished, he shut down the water and grabbed towels, wrapping one over her short hair and one around his waist. She shrugged back into her big terry robe.

"Oh, God, Toni. I don't like the business, I'm pretty much ready to retire.

Then this bondage gig comes up, and all the sudden I've got crazy female fans following me around, begging me to whip their asses." He scrubbed at his face, anxiety welling, and then receding like a wave. Talking about it helped.

She leaned against the wall, looking tiny in her white robe.

"So I want to retire, but I don't know what to do afterward. Then Trevor shows up, some wealthy investor wants to fund a project. A woman-focused project. Now I'm not too crazy about anything Trevor might come up with, but it's evidently a romance with an actual script. Rehearsals. A budget. Amazing.

"And you're interested? In an erotica project?" She had to bite her lower lip as she raised her hand. "Where can I sign up? And why haven't you signed already?"

He laughed and scooped her up, lifting her over his head.

"I'm getting too old to bench-press women while I lick their pussies. It just looked like an option. But it still keeps me in the industry.

"Why do you want out so bad?"

He lowered her slowly to the floor. "Toni, it's been twenty years. I don't even know what a normal person lives like anymore. There's a woman, a nice, straight, normal woman, maybe around my age. I can't even bring myself to talk to her. Wouldn't know what to say.

"What do you talk about with your Mom? Your brothers and sisters?"

His family lived in Canada, along with his Mum. Pop had died a couple years ago.

"We talk about their kids and their jobs and their homes. They ask if I'm keeping

busy, what exotic locations I've been to. What it's like in San Francisco.

"Hmm. They always were a real exciting bunch.

"They still ask about you.

She smiled, and he knew she was touched. His family really was sweet, and had been amazingly accepting of Toni, even after the divorce. She stood, leading him into the ladies room where she started to dress. He winced at the red marks on her ass.

"Sorry about the flogger." She twisted and looked at the welts on her bottom. Toni pulled a tube of ointment from her bag and tossed it to him. Gingerly, he put the antibiotic on her skin.

"Don't worry, some of the other guys are way more heavy-handed than you." She turned and went on tiptoe to kiss him. "You're really just a teddy bear, aren't you?" She slipped into her underwear. Plain cotton. Bless her for being so normal. "This woman. Why don't you just talk to her?"

"Well, like I said, I wouldn't know what to say." He picked up her gym bag and they walked down a dim hallway. "She was in the same restaurant I was; she gave Trevor her phone number, asked him to tell me she'd like to meet me for coffee.

"Hey, Pierce! Good for you!" He flushed and grinned. "Have you called her?"

He glanced at his watch, it was too late tonight.

"Tomorrow. I'll do it tomorrow.

"I'm holding you to it. I want a report first thing next week.

They pushed out the door together. He walked her to where a car sat idling almost silently.

"Hey Marissa!" He smiled at the woman behind the wheel. She smiled back. Toni had left him for Marissa, and they'd stuck for five years now. Good for her. Toni was a better friend than wife. And he liked Marissa. She was good for Toni.

"Are we shooting together so soon?" She slid into the door he held open.

"No, but I'll be here around five, and waiting for your report. You have a noon call that day, Pierce. Don't forget!" He smiled down at her and closed the door, waving as they drove away. She was still managing him.

* * * *

"He's lonely.

Toni looked over at Marissa and smiled. "Pierce has always been lonely. He's always wanted what he couldn't have." Marissa looked at her, the question in her eyes. "Wife, house, dog, kids. The picket-fence life." Marissa came to a stop at the edge of the parking lot, then slipped into the light traffic of the evening.

"Love. He wants someone to love him."

Toni nodded in agreement.

"You ever look into his eyes when he's not watching? He has such need. He wasn't meant to be alone. I think that's why I married him." She shifted uncomfortably in her seat. "He's probably the gentlest soul I ever met." She met Marissa's wry look.

"He just beat your ass raw, baby. That's not gentle."

Toni shook her head and looked out the window.

"That's the job, just the job. But he's actually an awesome Dom. Takes complete control in the shot, but also monitors his sub's well-being. Linda likes to play that up. She

shoots him checking my circulation under the bindings, giving me water. She shows him being gentle as well as rough. If he stays in this end of the industry, he'll be huge. Hell, he already is huge. Most people don't know, but they're paying him more per shoot than they pay the women." They turned out onto the freeway, heading north on 101. "He wants to retire, but he's been offered a role in a mainstream erotic film. He's thinking about doing it.

"Really? Do you think he's got the acting chops for a movie that actually has dialogue?"

Toni considered that for a moment. "Yeah, I think he does. He's done a few meatier parts over the years. He's really good with the improv we do in role-play and he's damn charismatic. The camera loves him. There was a project a few years back, it never got off the ground, but there are some clips on the internet that you can download. It was a romance. Very nice stuff." Toni trailed off, looking out the window, apparently deep in thought.

Marissa continued driving in silence. She wondered about Toni. When would Toni be ready to quit? She hoped it would be soon, because the job was beginning to eat away at her. Toni looked good, but her body was showing wear and tear in intimate places. A producer had actually pushed her into having plastic surgery on her cunt, to make it less meaty, easier to film. Marissa had cried for days over that. Toni's attitude was changing. She was a little hard around the edges now. She'd cheated on Pierce with Marissa, when would she cheat on Marissa? She and Pierce had stayed too damn close since the divorce. Pierce was needy, and Toni just sucked that up.

Toni stretched and yawned, curling up on the seat, looking child-like. Marissa could smell Pierce on her body, and had to nudge away the jealousy.

It was hard to sit next to your lover, knowing that she'd just fucked her ex-husband.

Chapter Three

Pierce woke with a pounding heart. Her phone number was written on a scrap of paper that he'd left on the table next to his bed. The paper lay there in all innocence, completely unaware of the effect it had on Pierce's well-being. Should he call? Should he just walk away? He sighed and glanced at the clock. Ten AM.

He'd never been a morning person, and hadn't hit the sheets till long after midnight. He'd sat in front of his PC, viewing old footage of himself. He'd been so proud back then. Now it was just embarrassing. He played a DVD of his new stuff on Fetish, and didn't feel a whole hell of a lot better. His waist was thick. Well, thicker than it had been. He'd quit shaving everywhere except his head and face. That was a turnabout. He wasn't a hairy beast, but no longer had the butter smooth chest and belly he'd once boasted.

His arms were massive, not cut and chiseled as they'd been before, but brawny and powerful. In one shot, his arms were resting on the sub's shoulders. His upper arms almost blocked her face from the camera. He couldn't help wondering who that stranger was...that big, powerful man who alternately overpowered and nurtured those poor women on film.

"That isn't you, Pierce," he told himself. That was all well and good. But where had that leather-clad master been hiding all these years? His movies were no longer about the fuck, they were about the capture and bondage, the domination and the submission. He looked down at his big hands, at the wide, flat ring that he'd worn on his left thumb for the past two decades. It had been his first wedding ring, he'd had it reset with blood red rubies. It was a small thing. When he watched his old footage, sometimes the ring was the only sign that he was in the shot. That and his cock. In the new stuff, he dominated the scene. The ring was almost invisible, and his cock was but another tool to make his partner submit.

Pierce had lain awake much of the night, mulling over the meaning of life. Well, the meaning of his life. He had money and a career, friends and some fairly satisfying pastimes. Why would he be so discontent? He'd stretched out on his big bed, memories of past companions running through his mind. Shouldn't a man his age have something more? At Pierce's age, his father had been raising children, taking care of business. His siblings, had done the same thing. Children were unlikely for him. At his age, it was a bit late to find the right woman and get started. But his life should have more meaning.

He needed to help someone. He needed a cause.

Pierce had laughed into the darkness then, Pierce Wilder, Porn Star With a Cause. He'd laughed, but realized that maybe he wasn't too far off the mark. He needed a reason to live. Right now, he didn't really have one.

* * * *

They met at the Mona Lisa. Pierce was grateful they met away from the Marina, it was too close to home, and he didn't want to be tempted into yet another casual hump. Somehow, he just didn't think Celeste Morales did casual.

She looked pretty, not hot-to-trot, but put together and groomed. She was dressed for

a sunny afternoon in the City, a silky floral skirt with a pastel sweater, a jacket in case the breeze came up. Her low-heeled shoes were pretty and practical, not for relentless walking, but she'd be good to go pretty much anywhere. Dark, glossy waves spilled down to her shoulders, copper highlights amped up the brunette waves. When he saw her working, it was usually in a simple updo, professional and conservative. She'd dressed for him, and his inner beast wondered if she'd picked her underwear for him, as well. Good thing they were far from his house. Sex wouldn't be casual with this woman.

Her voice on the phone had been enough to undo him, low, and husky with a sultry, erotic accent. Not Mexican, but something else, something warm and Latin.

When Celeste saw him step out of the cab, she smiled nervously, and actually flushed. While she hadn't told him, he knew she was a cop. But that was okay, everyone had to make a living somehow. If she could deal with what he did, he could certainly accept her career choice. Pierce smiled and joined her at the street side table.

Celeste's inner voice screamed caution with this man; he was a predator of some sort. She simply hadn't pegged it yet. An answering caution radiated from Pierce. He was wary of her. The attraction had been strong in the restaurant, but today, it felt electric. She was glad they were meeting in public, because Celeste wasn't certain she could say no to this man. He made her heart race, her stomach twist. Down lower, she was aware of her sex growing heavy and warm and damp.

"I thought you'd be a Harley man, or at least drive a sports car."

He gave her a devastating smile, those sky blue eyes crinkled at the corners. His light Scots brogue made her head spin, in a really good way.

"I didn't know what you'd be wearing, so I didn't bother with the Harley, though that is what I usually drive when I'm in the City. And my sports car is a Jeep. I didn't want to cruise half the day looking for parking." She smiled and shook her head, she'd left home an hour early just to find parking close enough to walk to the rendezvous.

"I thought if you'd like to go somewhere, we can walk, or just take a cab, if that's okay."

"That would be good. Mine is in all day parking, may as well get my money's worth!"

They chatted over gnocchi and salad, enjoying the people of the city as they flowed past the table.

"So, Celeste, I see you in Marina a lot, usually in a pretty tight vicinity to the Thai restaurant. But you don't live in the City. What sort of business brings you here?" She stabbed a bit of fluffy gnocchi and chewed on it carefully. Her glance scanned the crowd flowing past them while he waited expectantly.

"I'll bet you've already guessed what I've been doing there."

"Stake out?"

She winced. "That obvious?"

He took a drink of his ice tea and smiled at her.

"Only because that's my stomping grounds, and I'm used to certain faces at certain times. Can you tell me what it's about?"

She shook her head. "The case originated where I work, in Sonoma County. The feds have it now, but my Captain offered our services."

“And I’m sure you’re so grateful that he did.” His wry tone had her laughing. “I’m sure you had nothing better to do than to spend your days staring at a storefront. Since it’s Waila’s Leathers, I’m sure its tax-related. Old man Waila probably hasn’t done an honest tax return in his life.”

She had to suppress her surprise at how close he was to hitting the target. It wasn’t Thomas Waila they were watching for, but his cousin. She shook her head and returned to her pasta. The guy was astute.

“The day couldn’t be any nicer, especially for this time of year.”

Pierce smiled as he sipped his coffee, thinking that with Celeste sitting across from him. The day was indeed perfect.

And then the feeling came. He frowned a bit and set his cup down, slipping his sunglasses on.

“Pierce?”

She looked a bit concerned as well, cop’s instinct, no doubt.

That feeling had come often in the past month or so. Pierce didn’t see anything out of the ordinary, and returned to his coffee. The moment slipped away as they continued talking. Pierce was signing the bill when a shadow crossed him. *Bad luck to be crossed by a shade.* He suppressed a shiver at the old superstition. That was his Scottish grandmother’s saying.

“Master Wilder?”

Oh. God. Not now.

He took a deep breath and met Celeste’s surprised expression. A tall, thin man, decked out in Goth leather and multiple facial piercings hovered by the table. His black-haired girlfriend with her ruby lipstick and Cleopatra eyes, hovered slightly behind. He frowned at the bruises on her arms. Bruises left by ropes and bindings.

Kids ... don’t try this at home.

“I told you it was him, Damian!” Her whisper was almost shrill. “We’re sorry to disturb your lunch. ...” She was digging through her studded leather purse. “... but could you sign for us?” Pierce took off his glasses and smiled, scrawling his name down her extended forearm with a blue felt tip pen.

“We went to your seminar at the Festival, and you said you weren’t in your personal life, but that can’t really be, can it?” The man’s words were rushed and worshipful. Were they both subs? “And we wanted to know if you were available for private sessions?”

“No, no private sessions, and no, I’m not really a master in real life. It’s just a job, guys.” He reached out and twisted her forearm. “Your Dom needs to learn to use rope better. He ... or she shouldn’t damage you like this.”

She looked shocked. “But the pain is what takes me”

“Look, the folks that sponsored my seminar also do trainings on rope work and bondage. Go to the website and look it up.”

He shook his head in resignation. No argument would suffice. Pierce reached up and stroked her cheek. “You only have one body, little girl. Honor it.” She gave him a little smile, worshipful in the extreme, and completely oblivious to what he was saying.

He attempted to return to his coffee with Celeste, but her expression told him the mood was shattered. One brow was raised and she hid a smile behind her hand. The couple hovered in the vicinity, not wanting him to leave their sight, not wanting to let go of the

experience.

“Does that happen often?” He scratched his upper lip and squinted his eyes shut.

“Too often, lately. I probably shouldn’t live where I work.” He peeked one eye open. “I’m not really a Dom. I just play one on TV.”

She laughed.

“You’re an actor?”

“Adult film. And the proper term would be Adult Entertainer. Or to be very accurate, Porn Star.” That was delivered with a bitter edge.

“Oh.” Her smile faded. End of fantasy date. She’d get up now, tell him she enjoyed lunch. How could he be so stupid, thinking he could cross over? “So Pierce, they aren’t the typical porn fans, are they?” He smiled wryly and shook his head. She was still in her chair, still there with him. He cleared his throat.

“A couple years back, I decided to leave the industry. It’s a damn ugly world sometimes, and I’ve been in it since I was a kid. One of my studios wouldn’t let me out of my contract, so I started acting up a bit.”

He played with his coffee cup, uncomfortably aware that the couple was still hovering a few yards away. “My signature look was long, dark hair, cut abs, that sort of thing. I started letting my gray show, and finally shaved my head to speed things up. Stopped the body-building and tanning.

“The producer was furious, and fired me from my contracted projects. About that time, a young producer here in San Francisco started up an Internet site dedicated to fetish and kinky adult films. He offered me a good deal to come in a couple times a month to do short bondage projects. They trained me to do the Dom thing, got good response to my work. Seems there were a lot of female members on the site and they liked the new look.” He stirred his rapidly cooling coffee. She was listening with interest, now that the initial surprise had passed.

“Video on Demand is changing the adult film industry, mostly because women are downloading without having to be embarrassed by going into a store. So the Internet producers have stumbled onto a good thing. And for the first time in my career, I have people recognizing me on the street.”

She watched him shut down right in front of her. It made her sad. Okay, so porn star wasn’t what she was expecting, but he was still a person. A seemingly nice person, judging by his behavior towards his fans.

“Do you still want out of the industry?”

“Yeah, but now my old studio is suing me for breach of contract. He’s gotten wind of what’s happening up here. And Fetish offered me a really lucrative deal. I signed with them for a year, then a few projects after that. But it’s still porn.” He was rubbing his fingers through the goatee. “My lawyer doesn’t think it looks good for me, so I owe the studio a couple more years. I just wanted to go back to school. I got my GED a few years back, and started some college courses. I’ve got all the money I need.”

“What do you want to do if you quit?”

He shrugged. What did he want to be when he grew up? He didn’t really know.

“You know, I’d like to get my degree. That would be a good place to start. Maybe be a teacher.” He grinned. “If the students don’t behave, I’ll know how to tie them up!”

She laughed, a real, genuine laugh.

"But really, I've done some seminars on health and sex issues. Those two were at one I did a couple weeks ago. We talked about the fantasy of my films versus the reality of BDSM lifestyle, and the Dom's role in taking care of their partner. The sub's role in communication. How to dominate without bondage and punishment. My little soapbox."

He smiled at the memory of the workshop. "There were a few in that crowd that didn't want to believe that I'm just an actor. It had some ugly moments. One lady in particular ..." he shook his head. She'd accused him of exploiting women. Pierce had experienced his share of exploitation as well. The women he worked with were ambitious and professional. His first two wives taught him all about exploitation.

They rose from the table and started walking, casually and easily. The awkward moment had passed, though its memory hung in the air between the two. They crossed at a corner and stood waiting for the next light to hurry them through the traffic. To the left, strip clubs and adult movie theatres blossomed from the street. To the right, Chinatown. The light changed and they crossed, winding their way through throngs of tourists. Impatient with the crowds, Pierce gestured Celeste up a block.

"So how did you become a police detective?" She hovered on a curb for a moment, waiting for the light to change.

"My father was a police officer back home in Columbia. He was my hero, so of course I copied him."

"Like father, like daughter. He must be proud of you." They stepped down as the light changed and quickly crossed, letting the crowd push them along.

"Daddy was killed when I was twelve. Drug dealers murdered him and Momma. My grandparents brought me to the U.S. after that. The contract included the whole family."

He nodded, knowing not to ask more. Hearing her story reminded him that his life hadn't been so bad.

"I'm sorry, Celeste. That must have been awful for a kid."

It had been, but life had moved along, and clearly, she'd moved along with it.

Pierce was about to turn down another street when he was clipped from the rear. Automatically, he reached out and grabbed the young man, and then quickly let him loose.

"Raphael! Hey, dude, what are you doing in the City?"

Celeste looked at the young man Pierce had caught and steadied. He was in his mid-twenties, mixed ethnicity, probably part Asian. About the same height as Pierce, but lithe and supple where Pierce was solid and brawny.

"Pierce? Hey!" They hugged, slapping backs. She clearly assumed he was also an adult actor. He was pretty enough to be a model, with jet-black hair touched with blue streaks, and luminous grey eyes. His silky shirt was open at the bottom, revealing taut, cut flanks above low-riding pants. Eye candy to the max. If those low riders were to drop just an inch further ... Celeste took a deep breath and looked up, into his eyes. His smile told her he knew exactly what she'd been looking at. If he was into guys, he'd have been looking at Raphael exactly the same way.

"Celeste, this is my friend Raphael Wolfe. Former exotic dancer ... currently?"

"Currently a senior at SMU." Pierce looked at the younger man with pride.

"You did it, then? Good job! What's your major?"

Pierce was worried. Raphael looked like he was dressed for work, and not the nine-to-five type of costume. And he had a glassy look to his eyes. He'd never known Rafe to do drugs. The kid was too smart for that sort of fuck-up.

"Psychology." He looked around in a bit of confusion. "Pierce, I think I'm in trouble here." Celeste automatically checked her purse for her off-duty weapon. "My mom ... did I tell you I found my mom?" Rafe was slurring his words slightly, but Pierce didn't smell alcohol. "My girlfriend's a cop ... or was a cop, now she's not ... but she found my mom. It was her Christmas present to me." His beautiful gray eyes went misty and he reached up, wiping tears away. "Mom's dying. She's here in the city so I came to be close to her. Had to drop the semester. Now I'm trying to find a gig, but I'm not sure where I'm at." He looked around in confusion. "I meant to go to Castro, hit the gay bars, but that's not where I am ..." Celeste met Pierce's eyes. The kid was flying.

"Rafe, did you do drugs?"

"Hell, I never do drugs! Fuck, Pierson, you know that!" His anger was very real.

Pierce did know that. Raphael's mother had been a self-medicating schizophrenic, leaving him on the streets to grow up. Kids this pretty didn't thrive on the streets. Raphael had been smart. Very smart. He'd thrived, and risen above his background.

"OK, Rafe, we'll get you where you need to go. Do you need to call your girlfriend to come meet you?"

Raphael smiled dreamily. "She's so pretty. God, I've loved her forever."

Celeste smiled at him. The young man was wearing the male equivalent of "Fuck Me" clothes, a silk button-down hanging loose over Jim Morrison style leathers. She caught frequent flashes of that flat, hard belly and a substantial hard-on. He frowned suddenly, looking around, suddenly lucid. "Pierce, I had orange juice a couple joints back, I think someone drugged it. I think they're following me. Two guys ..." they began to walk with him, looking for a taxi. That feeling had returned, that feeling that someone was watching. One look at Celeste told him she felt it, too.

"I'm a psyche major, Pierce, I'm gonna be a doctor!" Pierce patted him on the shoulder, still feeling paranoid. "I love Addie so much. Maybe she'll marry me someday. If I'm good enough. Now she just likes to fuck me. Close enough for jazz, I guess." He laughed hollowly.

"Addie? Detective Addison Weaver?" Celeste's stomach flip-flopped. She'd heard her old schoolmate had tangled herself in a scandal with a stripper. Addie had been career cop all the way, and had lost it all because of this gorgeous creature. Had he been worth it? "Yeah, but she's Addie Kendall now. Addie Kendall, PI. Dumped her husband. God, I love her" He trailed off, once again looking disoriented.

"Rafe, do you remember where your mom is? Is she in a hospital?" Celeste had spotted a cab and hailed it.

"A hospice" He rambled a bit, trying to work out the address. They bundled him into the taxi, with fairly clear directions to get him back to the hospice. Pierce programmed his own number into Rafe's cell, instructing him to call if he needed help. They stood back and watched the taxi pull away.

"Do you feel like maybe we should have gone with him?" Celeste frowned after the taxi as it wended its way through traffic. They'd given the driver a hefty payment plus tip to

get Rafe back to the hospice safely.

“Pierce, tell me that beautiful boy isn’t going to lose his soul here.

Pierce smiled at her concern. “Nah, Rafe’s good. He came out of the worst the world has to offer and survived. If he says he’s gonna be a doctor, he’s gonna be a doctor.” He turned and surveyed the alleys and side streets. “And he’s very street smart. If he says he’s being stalked, he’s being stalked.” He watched suspiciously as a pair of men wandered down the street, grungy and full of ill intent. To his surprise, he saw breasts on one. Nothing out of the ordinary, not for San Francisco. He felt malice in their wake, but it wasn’t the same that he’d been feeling for days now.

Shaking his head, he and Celeste headed back toward Fisherman’s Wharf. The next time someone stopped him to ask for an autograph, she simply smiled.

* * * *

They leaned on the railing together, looking out over the water toward Alcatraz. Celeste chuckled and ducked her head.

“What?”

“All these years in the Bay Area, and I’ve never visited the Rock. And I’m a cop!”

He straightened up and gave her a smile. “I’ll take you, but not today. Tomorrow?”

She bit her lip and considered. Why not? He was good company, easy on the eyes. He didn’t try to keep his occupation hidden. If they kept it casual, the brass didn’t have to know. If she could keep it casual. For some reason, the word ‘casual’ just didn’t fit Pierce.

“Saturday?” she countered. He nodded and smiled, and she noticed a flare of relief in his eyes. Was he really insecure? “How did you get into the adult movie industry?” They walked casually up the pier, surrounded by the sound of the surf.

“Same old story as any. When I was a kid, I left school and headed to Hollywood. Figured I’d be a star. The first couple years I scored some walk-ons and a few modeling gigs. When you’re desperate enough, easy money is hard to turn down. A guy on set told me about a gig where all I had to do was be in a group sex scene. Totally anonymous, I just needed to stay hard and whack off at the end.”

He stopped and looked her in the face. “Like any industry, it has its good points and bad points. I honestly don’t know how I survived those early years. The drugs, and the casual sex... I lost a lot of friends when AIDS emerged.”

“Didn’t we all?” She was remembering her local community theatre, and all the talent that had suddenly been gone.

“I took acting classes, classes to get rid of my accent. Personal trainers for the body. But once I was in the field, nobody in the mainstream industry was interested. Couldn’t even get a fuckin’ soap job.” He shrugged and folded his arms. “Next thing I know, I’m a forty-year-old porn star with a gut and grey hair.”

She reached out and patted his hard belly, taking him by surprise.

“It’s silver.” He raised a brow in confusion. “Your hair is silver, not gray. And your belly feels rock solid to me. You just aren’t a boy anymore.”

Oh ... she knew the way to a man’s heart. Celeste started walking. He straightened up and hurried to join her. He’d laid it on the line, his past his present, and his hazy future. She was still here. He didn’t know whether to be happy or afraid.

Chapter Four

She'd watched his stuff. He could see it in her eyes. She met him at the wharf where the boats left for the Alcatraz tour, wearing jeans and carrying a windbreaker. After they boarded, they found a couple seats that were semi-private.

"I went online." He looked away, hoping his dark glasses hid his expression.

"How many women do you think you've been with over the years?" Nothing like the direct approach. Frankly, he was glad it was on the table.

He shook his head. His filmography listed over 900 movies, not counting the forty-or-so films he'd done for Fetish. And the stuff that had never been released. He'd worked with many of the same women over the years.

"It's work, Celeste. I don't really keep a head count." She knew enough about the industry to realize that to Pierce, he was just working, trying to make a living. But how many industries required workers to be STD-tested every thirty days? "I like you, Pierce. A lot. It's just hard to wrap my brain around this." He nodded. That was fair. And he had to admit, she was being more understanding than he'd expected her to be.

"Just think, Celeste, you've seen me naked. How do you think I feel knowing you've seen all my shortcomings?" she laughed at that.

"You think that monster of yours is a shortcoming?" She shook her head. "As difficult as the BDSM is for me to watch, your newer stuff is good. You're good. I'm not surprised film makers are scrambling to get you. The older stuff ..." she shrugged and made a face. "... not so great, but for what it is, you've got presence. But the new stuff showcases you, not your ..." He cut her off.

"Well, they make sure to showcase that, as well." Of course they did.

"But the new ones aren't even about the subs, they're about you. This may not be your thing in private, but on the screen, you're very compelling. And you can act." She smiled as he flushed under his tan. She moved a bit closer to him on the bench, sensing that he was insecure. When he draped his arm over her shoulder, she didn't discourage him. He felt so good there next to her.

When they parted that afternoon, they made another date. And Pierce Wilder felt himself falling again, but this time, it was more frightening than it ever had been before.

Chapter Five

A porn star. She, Celeste Consuelo Morales was dating an honest-to-God, larger-than-life porn star. Her parents were probably spinning in their graves. Of course, she'd never be able to return home to Bogotá to verify the spinning, she'd be taking her life in her hands if she did. After that last trip she'd taken to her birthplace, she'd never be able to visit her parents' graves again. Small cost, really.

Celeste tossed in her bed, pulling the covers up, and then tossing them back. What had really compelled him to take the path that he had taken? She'd seen his website, read his bio, scanned the titles of the movies in which he'd appeared. She'd even seen some of the magazine cover shots. Back then, he'd been a beauty, perfect hair, cut muscles, his teeth white and straight. She liked him better now.

Celeste had peeked between her fingers during most of the first movie she'd downloaded. Okay, as a cop, she'd seen porn before, but sitting alone in the darkness of her house, she'd felt like God and all the neighbors were sitting in judgment on her. She turned the volume low and grimaced through the scenes until Pierce's came up.

She almost didn't recognize him; thick, dark hair swung about his shoulders, his skin was dark, heavily tanned. His muscles were cut and defined. She only knew him by that ruby thumb ring and the occasional glimpse of his blue eyes.

He was in turn sexy and romantic, crass and crude. In his recent bondage work, he was flat out frightening. Compelling. Dangerous.

What would it be like to be at the mercy of that man? Did that man even exist? The Pierce Wilder she knew was tough, sure. But he was also gentle, a bit insecure. A romantic. The Dom was yet another character in the arsenal of characters he'd created over the years.

Celeste suddenly felt assailed by the emptiness of her life. Wouldn't a normal woman have a friend to share with? A sister or mother? Well, maybe she wouldn't want to tell her mother that she was dating a porn star, but she had no one to talk to, no one to listen to her, to give her a little perspective. She had a house in a nice neighborhood, a good job that was currently boring her stiff. A car, a cat. And now, maybe, a boyfriend.

They'd been dating over a month now, and he'd not tried anything other than a kiss at the end of the date. The occasional hug that sent fire through her veins, heat into her imagination. Cuddles. Was he waiting for a sign from her? A signal that she wouldn't run the moment things became intimate? Would she? The reality was, in the time they'd been dating, Pierce had had sex with four or five different actresses, including an ex-wife.

No wonder he wasn't pushing anything. He didn't need her body. So what did he need from her?

Celeste finally gave up and turned off the bedside lamp. Tomorrow, they were meeting for lunch, and then going to the museum.

Maybe he just needed a friend. Celeste sadly realized that she didn't want Pierce as a friend. She wanted him as a lover.

* * * *

He'd forgotten what real sex was like. Pierce had craved intimacy for so long. Most of the partners in his personal life had also been adult entertainers, and a bit of the performer stayed with them off set. Her body wasn't perfect, but it was natural, with no surgical enhancement. Her breasts were soft and supple, her tummy gently rounded. Underneath, she was hard as a rock. Even as a detective, she had to stay in condition to department standards.

They were on his sofa, listening to music, laughing over the day. At lunch, a middle-aged woman had nervously asked for his autograph. She'd then pulled him down and planted a kiss on his mouth. She'd beamed at Celeste.

"I found him through a women's health site, it had photos from Fetish. You tell your boss that I signed up because of you!" He smiled and thanked her, returning her kiss with one to her cheek. "Men like you give me hope ... and make my husband very gratified!" She'd rushed away after that, leaving Pierce looking confused. And perturbed. And pleased that she understood that he was an actor doing a job.

"So Pierce, when did you realize things were changing?" She draped across his lap, fully clothed, his hands wandering her body, causing minor system failure in his breathing and heart rate. He never cuddled in his films. Most of his partners were about the act, not the foreplay.

"I was at an industry convention in Vegas last year. The artists were assigned tables in the basement for autographs. Obviously, the women tend to be the stars of the show. The men's tables were sort of shoved off to the side.

He ran his thumb down her neck, to her cleavage. "I was waiting for my buddy Devon. He's really hot now, especially with the women and gays. He's a big proponent for VOD, does a lot of women oriented projects, has the romantic image, and all. So Devon was giving an interview and I was waiting. When he was done, we went to the signing area together. It was pretty quiet, except there was a crowd of guys for a couple of the actors that have a big gay fan base. Then there was this crowd of women, a few men as well, so many they had to set out those rope things ... like at Disneyland ... crowd control. I figured it was for Devon. Turned out most of these people were waiting in the line in front of my table.

He bent down and ran his tongue down the side of her neck, bringing up Goosebumps. "I ran out of publicity shots. Had to send out for more. My hand was sore for days. Devon was sore for a lot longer!"

Devon had been livid, actually. Pierce was a decade older, most considered him a great professional, but definitely over-the-hill. He'd also been fully aware of Pierce's intention to retire, so the idea that the older man had re-invented himself irritated Devon to no end. That's when Pierce started to realize that perhaps he wouldn't be retiring anytime soon. He also saw another friendship fizzle over jealousy.

Pierce lost himself in her hair, nuzzling and inhaling the good smell of her shampoo combined with her own fragrance. When she moved to unbutton his shirt, he stopped her hand, content to keep them fully clothed as they explored and enjoyed. They'd been seeing one another for over a month now, golden weeks of lunch dates, afternoons in the City, concerts and activities. Holding hands and hugs, keeping a safe distance.

He knew she was confused at his slow pace, but in his world, sex was easy and cheap.

He wanted to savor the romance. He drew a perverse pleasure in kissing her till his cock was hungry and hard, but walking away unsatisfied. He loved lying in bed at night, feeling his erection heavy on his belly, falling into sleep with her on his mind. Pierce didn't think he could take another heartbreak, not with this woman, anyway.

He hadn't intended to have sex with her that night, hadn't intended to let it go too far, but once in motion, the thing took on a life of its own. Still fully clothed, minus shoes, they moved to the bedroom and stretched out, making out like a pair of teens with their parents in the other room.

"Will you stay the night with me, Celeste? All night?"

She smiled and nodded. "The cat has enough food."

Pierce knew she'd been waiting, somewhat impatiently for him to make his move. Celeste was old-fashioned that way. She'd been ready for weeks, waiting on him and probably wondering if he wanted her at all. That was one doubt that he'd laid to rest.

He was hard, painfully, deliciously hard, a moist spot had begun to show on the front of his black jeans. She was wet; while she still had her jeans on, they way she shifted and moved told him she was slippery for him. He wanted to make her wetter still. He wanted her so ready that the lube would stay in the drawer.

Pierce settled her back onto a pillow and carefully unbuttoned her blouse, removing it to show the dark green camisole she was wearing. He nibbled her newly exposed shoulders, careful to not bruise or cause injury in any way. Her caramel-colored skin was fair and fine, he didn't want to mark it. He licked her earlobe, enjoying her swift intake of breath, and then returned to her lips. They hadn't really kissed, just feather soft caresses in passing. Pierce settled on her mouth and began to lick and nibble, coaxing her mouth open. Celeste chuckled, keeping her lips sealed shut, her eyes dancing.

Funny, he couldn't remember laughing during foreplay before. Inspired, he tickled her ribs, when she gasped, he attacked her mouth, tasting, exploring, nipping at her tongue as it came to meet his. Her arms rose, she circled his head and pulled him closer, stopping, looking deeply into his eyes, searching, and then accepting what she saw there. She leaned up and nipped his ear, following that with gentle bites and kisses down his neck, licking his collarbone through the V of his shirt. Pierce felt his own goose bumps rise. For a long time, they made out, letting their arousals build, forcing the heat to smolder rather than flame.

He rolled more fully onto her body, settling between her hips, letting his erection settle against her mound. Automatically, she rose to meet him, they kissed and rocked in imitation of the act they were pursuing. God! He hadn't dry humped since he was thirteen-years-old and in love with his pillow!

He ducked his head into her shoulder and moaned, and the sound took her breath away. She tried to reach down, to unbutton his pants but again, he stopped her, guiding her hand instead to the bulge of his erection, hot and painful and now wet. When she slipped under his waistband, he didn't stop her, riding against her strong, tough hand, shivering when her fingers worked through the cramped confines to spread his pre-cum over his glans.

"I think it's time to kick it up a notch, mister."

He nodded wordlessly, feeling suddenly unsure. The things she'd seen him do on film ... on the Internet. Hard as he tried to believe otherwise, Pierce was certain that was still in her mind. He didn't want those images there; he wanted only the two of them,

making love as normal people.

Pierce rolled onto his side a bit and slid his hand into her tank top, up into the built-in bra of the garment. Impatient, she sat up and discarded the top; her pants were quick to follow. Celeste lay there before him, unsure how she stacked up, not really caring at this point. He propped his head on his hand and trailed fingers along her breasts, brushing over her nipples.

“Close your eyes.”

She did so. His fingers brushed over her curls and slid down to her plush labia.

His cock stretched a bit when he felt that she was indeed as wet as he could wish. Pierce laid his entire hand over her mons, pressing firmly, rotating so that her clit would be carefully stimulated. His hand slid down further, her lips were full and swollen, holding her open and ready for him. He’d felt bad when some of the actress’s had begun to resort to plastic surgery on their pussies. It didn’t feel so good to fuck. Not like this. Not like Celeste.

He went down on her gently, carefully, watching her face to see what felt good, what left her cold. As far as he could see, not much left her cold at all, and inwardly he preened. He licked and sucked, tasting that intimate essence that only lovers know. He loved feeling the gentle stroke of her hand on his head as he made love to her with his mouth. When her hips rocked into his face, the movement was genuine and unpracticed. When he left her to return to her breasts, she moaned a bit in disappointment and opened her eyes.

“You’re still dressed! I’m lying here buck naked, and you’re still dressed!”

Her voice was husky and low, her accent sounded like heaven.

“I’m too busy making love to you to worry about little things like clothes.” He lightly bit her nipple, and then gathered her breast in his hand, licking softly, sucking it into his mouth. Heaven. Her reactions were real and unfeigned. Both hands were on his head, running through his cropped hair, and she hummed in pleasure. Celeste brought up one leg to settle over his hips, laying the sole of her foot on the back of his leg, stroking gently.

“Here, lay back.” She pushed him away and rose, settling on her knees beside him while she began to unbutton his shirt and peel it away. She immediately moved on to his jeans, carefully unzipping and pulling them down and off. Pierce smiled as his erection rose hard against his belly, and her eyes widened a bit. He knew she was having that brief moment of panic about whether it would fit. It would. Still, he wasn’t a porn star for nothing, and he couldn’t help grinning at her consternation.

She settled onto her side next to him, stroking up his body, letting her fingers tease his nipples. Celeste was a bit shy about his cock ... his very large, very aroused cock. She’d never seen an uncircumcised penis before, and curiosity drove her hands south to explore.

His hiss told her that his head was very sensitive. When she grasped his shaft, the skin slid easily over its length. He rocked slightly into her grip and a little more pre-cum trickled from his cockhead. She was ready. Damn ready. It looked like he was, too ... she just wanted to ... ahhhh ... his balls rested in her hands, tight to his body, yet heavy in her fingers. She glanced up. He liked this. Celeste leaned down to inhale his distinctive, delicious male scent and then licked his balls, gently, just a touch. He rocketed upward. “Ahhh ... god, girl!” Emboldened, she gave them a firmer lick, gently stroking his erect shaft as she did so. Her mouth watered.

“Suck my cock ...” He was panting, flat belly heaving rapidly. Celeste wondered how long he’d last if she decided to take him this way. She lowered herself, taking just his head into her mouth, pulling the foreskin back as she did so. Very quickly, he settled into a shallow rhythm, when he began thrusting rapidly, his hands came to her head and pulled her back, gripping the base of his shaft in his own hand.

“Come up here, Celeste.” She slid up, sheltering under his arm, her head resting on his chest. “Do you want me?” She had to smile. His Scots accent had thickened to a brogue.

“I want you, Pierce.”

“Not the Dom? Or the porn star?”

She sat up. “Why would you think that?” Her first instinct was one of anger, but she could understand where the question was coming from. No doubt, over the years, he’d had many women who wanted to fuck him because of what he was, rather than who he was.

He gazed up at her, one hand stroking her thigh. “Because I want Celeste, the woman here beside me in bed. And I want you to want me the same way. Not because of who you think I am.” She saw his point. She lowered herself back to his side.

“I want Pierce. The hot, sexy silver-haired man I kept seeing in the Thai restaurant. The man who helped his friend out of trouble, and who kissed a housewife on the cheek.” He held her tighter.

“You know, you’re a dream come true for me, Celeste.” She didn’t answer. She hadn’t been dreaming of anyone in her life. She’d just been getting by, working, going home, eating, sleeping, getting up the next day. She hadn’t even thought or dared to dream. The dreams that came while she slept weren’t so good, so she did her best to forget those.

“It’s only been a few weeks, Pierce. Let’s just enjoy this.” She smiled as he nodded.

“Funny, I feel like we’re having afterglow, and we haven’t gotten that far yet.”

He kissed her on the forehead. “Disappointed in my performance?” Quickly, he lifted her and had her flat on her back. “Because we can do something about that

He’d positioned himself between her legs, letting the head of his cock bump into her belly, dragging closer and closer to her mons, making her breath catch. Quickly, he had a condom on and nestled himself between her legs, pulling up her knees and rocking in, never quite penetrating, but instead, bumping at the entry to her passage.

“Do you want me here?” He accentuated the question with a little push. He then went back to teasing, his cock head pressing her clit, then sliding down, back up. “Do you want me inside?” He bent down and whispered in her ear, his body giving her the rhythm she needed to move. She nodded. “Say it so I can hear it, darlin’.

“I want you inside, Pierce.” He moved forward a bit, her entrance was swollen and tight, bathing him in warmth. He moved a bit, retreated, moved harder. Her labia were swelled and engorged, ready to take him, but still making a tight fit. He reached between their bodies, spread her lips and worked in a little more, and then pulled back. Suddenly, Pierce slid in, pulling a moan from both of them.

“Good, so good!” He paused a moment to savor the feeling of being inside of wet, willing woman. One who truly wanted him. Celeste had looped her legs up over his, giving them both leverage to move. Her hands roamed over his back, following the movement of his hips, and he began to thrust smooth and steady. Once they were moving easily together,

Pierce carefully lowered himself to her body, letting her take some of his weight. He savored the sensation of skin to skin, nuzzling the crook of her neck, settling down for kisses before exploring elsewhere. Pierce couldn't remember the last time he'd made love in the Missionary position. He sighed in pleasure, and met her smile with his own. .

* * * *

"Oh ... oh, God" She suddenly stilled.

"Are you okay? What is it?" He paused mid-thrust. Her eyes were open wide, breathing coming quickly.

"Oh, I'm gonna come!" She was trying to hold back, instead of stopping with her, he began to move harder, deeper, pulling her hips against his. Her breathing was shallow and labored. The color had gone high on her cheeks and breasts. Pierce grinned and pulled out, thrusting in shallow flurries to stimulate her outer vagina. She needed to come? He was more than willing to accommodate her!

"Oh, damn, Pierce!" She was arching her pelvis upward, following him, trying to pull him in deeper. Celeste had pulled her knees all the way up and was leaning up into him, tightening on his cock. She lay back hard and thrust upward into him. He wasn't gonna let her have it that easy. As her curses became progressively more foul, he relented and lowered his body to hers. She grabbed his ass and began grinding hard, pulling him in deep. For a moment, Pierce dropped his head and gave himself to the sensation, holding back his own orgasm by a thread as she came, and came hard, crying out harsh and low, body undulating, hands clenching and releasing. She finally wrapped him up with her arms and legs in a full body hug. When she slowed, he breathed deeply. Never, but never had he felt so fully used by a woman before.

"Pierce?" He was still rocking into her slowly, letting her come down from her orgasm. "Hmm?"

"I'm sorry I came right off the bat like that ... you're just so ... big inside me.

She was embarrassed, he was flattered. He continued to move, thrusting slowly, deeply seated inside her sheath.

"Do you think you're all finished?"

His voice was a low growl, threatening and dark. "Do you think I'm anywhere near finished with you?" He thrust hard at that, straight to her core. "We're just getting started, little cop." He turned to the side and bit her jaw lightly. "That was just your appetizer, darlin'."

* * * *

Celeste had never been a big fan of doggie style, but Pierce was rapidly changing her mind about the position. She was tucked under him, bolstered by pillows while he steadily pumped, making love to her back and neck the entire time. She didn't feel demeaned or constrained, just easy and good. Facing away from him took all control away from Celeste, which she had some issues with initially, but Pierce so carefully saw to her needs, whispering in her ear, brushing the hair from her eyes. The impact of his cock over her G-spot was enough to make her cross her eyes with pleasure.

She'd told him she didn't think she could come this way, he was determined to make a liar of her! He was hovering over her, hands running up her arms, leaning down, kissing the back of her neck. Celeste felt the sweat break out over her back as the pressure began to

intensify and coil in her body.

“Pierce!”

“Do you want to come?” He was down in her ear, whispering wicked little temptations. Celeste nodded, her breath too ragged to answer. “Speak louder, darlin’. Do you want to come?”

“Yes!”

“Yes, what?” She groaned out loud, in excitement and frustration. She was so damn close. Celeste had never been multi-orgasmic, but he was pulling another one out of her. She arched her back upward, trying to force more sensation into her body, trying to find the right motion to set herself on fire. “Say it, Celeste.” He was rumbling, stern.

“Oh damn ... I want to come, Pierce ... please”

He shifted position slightly, he was pushing in further, to her surprise, she’d accommodated to his length and there was no pain. Using brute strength, Pierce pulled her further upright.

“Touch yourself, darlin’. Right there.” He guided her hand to her clit, and then lower. The sensation was luscious. Not wired and tender like her clit, but something she wanted ... needed to grind into. He freed her hand and then crossed his arm under Celeste’s body, pulling her tight against him. “Does that feel good, baby?” She nodded, almost incapable of coherent thought, much less speech. She groaned out loud as he nipped, then licked the back of her neck, forcing her to drop her head with the pleasure.

“Oh, that’s good, darlin’. Push your fingers down further, feel me ...” His breath caught as she followed his instructions. “That’s right ... do you like that? Do you like feeling me?” She was breathing hard, and then holding her breath as the waves hit her hard.

“Now Celeste, I want you to breathe every time I come in, breath hard ... okay?”

She followed his instructions, hearing herself groan hard with every exhale. “When you think you need to come ... you tell me.” She nodded, still breathing hard. “Do you understand?” Back to the stern voice.

“Yes ... damn, Pierce I need to come now ... can’t ...” His hand slipped low over her belly, pressing her tight.

“You can’t come right now.” She moaned in frustration. “Hold your breath ... count to five and let it go ...” She held her breath, and let it out on a cry. “Again.” His thrusts were faster, deeper. He was holding her as if she was a rag doll. “Do you want to come?” She was panting with his thrusts again, fierce sounds coming from her throat. Somewhere in there he heard her strangled growl. He could barely hold on to talk himself. His cock was pounding and throbbing, blood rushing to his pelvis, sweat dripping down his face. But this was for her. Pierce wanted her to turn herself completely over to his will. Something in the back of his brain remembered this from a domination scenario, but he didn’t care.

“Celeste, I want you to count backwards from ten. After you reach one, you’ll be able to come. Do you understand?”

“Yes! Please!”

They began the count, slowly, though she tried to speed it up. Pierce knew that the orgasm would mostly be triggered in her mind, and he’d given her permission once she finished her countdown. He could feel the heat break on her lower body, preparing to climax, and this time, she would come hard.

“Five ... four ... three. ...” He held the count, laughing at her shriek of frustration. “Two ... one ... come now!” He pushed hard, meeting her wild pumps, but mostly focused on staying upright as Celeste fought her way into the orgasm. She’d already been vocalizing with the breathing, now she was breathing and nearly shouting with every breath she took. She was gripping his cock, both with her hand and with her inner muscles, pulling him close, damn close, he was holding on by sheer will ... or something. A fuck like this left him battered and over-sensitive. At this point, he’d be lucky to come at all.

She was slowing, still impaling herself deep onto his cock, still gripping him, even though she’d dropped forward onto the pillow. He grinned to see her gasping for air, sweat shining on her body. He leaned forward and licked beads of sweat from her spine, smiling as she shivered. Before she fully recovered, he rolled her onto her back, propping a pillow under her bum.

“My turn, baby.” Her legs splayed at the knees, open and ready to take him.

She was still sweating, still panting, but hooked her heels behind his ass, pulling him toward her pussy. He pushed in, fighting her initial resistance, than slipped in freely. She was wet from stem to stern. His balls were tight and painful as they pressed against her butt. When he lay forward, she welcomed him.

Again, he moved slowly, giving himself to the sensation, looking down at her flushed face. He thought his orgasm would come hard, but she soothed him with her warmth, coaxing it out of him, spinning his mind into an erotic web. Celeste made soft, soothing noises, ran her hands over his back and sides, reached down to cup his tight, sore balls. He groaned into her hair and let himself relax, forgetting work, forgetting Trevor, forgetting everything but the woman under him and the heat in his veins.

“Damn ...,” he muttered.

“What do you need, Pierce?” She was meeting him stroke for stroke, her bottom canted perfectly to take him deeply. He only groaned in response. He kissed her deeply, breaking it off to bury his face in her hair. Elusive. Why did it have to be so elusive? Something shifted, Celeste was moving under him, undulating, running her feet and legs up high, then back down his legs. She was bearing down hard, applying just the right pressure to his over-stimulated cock. Her hand slipped down again, grasping his sac, kneading it softly, pulling a harsh cry from his throat. “Ah ... ah ...” Pierce held that moment, that fleeting moment, that second just before ... and then he surrendered with a groan.

He was bucking hard, raising up on his arms, back sinuous as he pumped into her hard and fast and shallow, then plunging deep as the climax gripped him. Somehow, he heard her cries mingling with his, her pussy ramming up against him, tightening and squeezing, pulling his cock, pulling him into completion. As Pierce came, he thought he heard angels sing, fireworks behind his eyelids. The earth moved. If he hadn’t been so damn blissed out, he’d have laughed at his own fancy.

He remained in her arms for long moments, body elevated over hers, eyes tightly shut, sweat beading on his face. He froze in a shocking moment of satiation. Pierce then let loose a huge breath and carefully lowered himself, gathering her in his arms and rolling to the side. He was finished, but a cry that had locked in his throat escaped, dissolving into the silence of the room. Pierce remembered to grasp the condom as his spent cock slipped from her body, slipping it off and discarding it, shivering as the cool air drifted over his hot, wet

body.

Celeste moved in close to him, arm across his chest, her breathing coming under control. He reached up and clasped her hand, lacing their fingers together. He rested their hands on his chest.

“Goddamn, Pierce.”

He grinned, but didn’t say anything. Goddamn indeed.

Chapter Six

Sunday morning came late to the exhausted couple. She woke first, warm and mellow. She snuggled for a moment, smelling his good, warm scent. And then she felt the skin of his chest under her cheek, his arm looped around her, holding her close.

When was the last time she'd awakened in the arms of a lover? Celeste lay and tried to count the times she'd spent the entire night with a man, and came up only with one other night, back before the academy days. Her relationships since then had been short-lived and shallow. It was not always the fault of her lovers, though. Celeste knew she'd often chosen poorly, sometimes on purpose. At first, perhaps, it had been the fear of losing yet another loved one. But then it had become habit to keep to herself, never looking to the future. No thought of a husband or children.

When she thought of that, she saw her own parents, their happy, laughing faces stilled forever in a hail of bullets. She'd been across the street, waiting for them to join her when the car drove by, blocking her view—odd popping sounds had shattered the afternoon. When the car drove away, she saw the faces behind the windows, they'd been forever seared into her mind's eye. As had the image of her parents' bleeding bodies.

The only way to never lose those she loved, was to never love again.

She looked up into Pierce's face, and knew that plan was now a complete and utter failure. He was peaceful in sleep, he looked softer, she saw the vulnerability that usually lurked just under the surface. The loneliness in his eyes had reached out and grabbed her, while the forceful lover she'd spent the night with reeled her in.

Celeste extricated herself from Pierce's arms and headed to the shower, groggy and sore ... and oh so satisfied. She let hot water pour over her weary body and leaned back into the tile walls of the shower, letting it wash away her stiffness. She began soaping, wishing she'd waited for Pierce.

On cue, the curtain parted and he stepped in with her, bleary-eyed and yawning.

He was completely, blissfully comfortable with their nudity, soaping up a loofa and giving her a good back washing. When he finished, she returned the favor, smiling as she noticed a few nail marks on his ass. Celeste didn't think she'd ever done that before! "Hey Pierce, I'm sorry, I left some marks ... do you have to work soon?" He twisted, smiling at the tiny red crescents.

"No problem, they can cover that, but the director will probably leave it." Hell, Linda would probably want some close-ups. Celeste hissed as she found another, longer mark on his back. She was mortified. Pierce gathered her into his arms and hugged her.

"I think that means I did a good job with you, darlin'." And he had. Celeste hurt from head to toe, but she'd never gotten that caught up in sex before.

"How 'bout you ... did I do a good job with you?" Here she was, with a man who'd had sex thousands of times with hundreds of women. How could she think to compare?

"Ohhh ... Celeste ..." He'd wrapped her in his arms and leaned back against the

shower wall, taking her weight. "If only you knew how good it was for me. I can't begin to tell you how good."

"Try." She'd pushed back a little, needing to hear this. If she was going to sleep with an adult performer, she needed to learn how he separated work from private life. Pierce's hands ran lightly down her body.

"It was real sex. No lights, no cameras focused on my dick. Your body is real, no implants, no liposuction. No piercings or mutilations. Your reactions were real. I didn't have to worry about keeping an erection while you faked an orgasm. I didn't have to pull out and jerk myself to ejaculate on your body, 'cause the punters out there don't believe it's real unless they see me cum." He framed her face in his hands. "No gymnastics, nothing kinky. I got to come while I was inside you when I was ready." He leaned down and kissed her gently. "Best of all, I got to kiss you whenever I wanted to." He kissed her again. "And we got to lie back down and fall asleep, all tangled up together, then we woke up and did it again. And now, its morning and you're still here, in the shower with me. In a few minutes, I'm going to go to the kitchen and make breakfast for you. That's how good it's been for me."

She looked at him steadily, letting his comments run through her mind. He craved ... normal. He wanted someone else to share control with him. He'd been a little dominant at times, but reveled when she told him what to do and how she wanted him to touch her. He hadn't wanted her to deep throat his cock or do anything wild, he'd just wanted to make love.

"So what are you making for breakfast?" She took the bar of soap and rubbed it on his chest, running her hands down to his belly, and further down where he was growing hard. The hot water pelted her back, he was beginning to grind against her front. "Never mind about breakfast ... whatever you make will be good."

He bent his knees slightly, running his phallus through her slit, waking up the still tingling nerve endings. His reached outside of the shower, groping for a long moment in the medicine cabinet. Celeste took the condom from his hand and rolled it on; no sooner had she done so, than he hefted her in the air and turned her back against the shower wall. She was able to drop one foot just enough to balance on, bringing the other around his hip, lowering onto his cock. They laughed as water got in their eyes and their skin squeaked against the ceramic tile.

* * * *

Pierce was flipping pancakes as she came into the kitchen, her wet hair slicked back.

"Pierce, do you have a dryer?" She clapped her hand over her mouth as he turned, telephone to his ear. "Sorry ..." she whispered. He smiled and shook his head. Winked.

"Ahhh ... yes, Toni, that's a woman you hear." He held the phone away slightly as a woman's voice elevated in tone. "Yes, she did ... uh ... yes. ..." Celeste stepped to the counter and found plates and silverware, quickly setting the table. He'd fried bacon, which was on her list of devil foods. Foods that were so good and unhealthy they had to have been created by the devil. "Let me ask ..." Pierce lowered the phone, covering the mouthpiece. "Celeste, Toni wants to know if we'd like to go bicycling today, probably along the shoreline."

It was a cold, sunny day, but she didn't have a bike or clothing.

"They rent at the Pier, and Marissa can loan you some clothing, you're about the

same size.” She nodded. Why not? She had the rest of the day free, and she may as well meet some of his friends ... er ... family. She was already sore, why not add a few more muscles?

* * * *

Celeste’s heart dropped when she met the ex. Toni was all she would never be, petite, feminine, helpless and oh-so-pretty. Pierce had mentioned that they’d been married two years. She’d left him for her current lover, Marissa. The two women were companionable. Marissa was tall, fair and coolly elegant. She was indeed similar in size to Celeste. They found a restroom where Celeste gingerly changed into bike pants, a tank, and a jacket, her own tennis shoes were fine for today. Finally, helmeted and geared up properly, the small group took off in the direction of the Golden Gate Bridge.

The bridge was only lightly fogged over, and the scenery was breathtaking.

They paused to look out to sea, tracking tankers and cargo ships, looking down at the breakers on the shore. On occasion, Pierce touched her lightly, but didn’t grope or cling, for which Celeste was profoundly grateful. They’d had sex, not made a life commitment. Admittedly, she was hoping this was a start, not a fling. Pierce made damn fine pancakes!

On the return, once they’d branched out onto a bike path that ran overlooking the shore, the small group scattered a bit. Pierce had pulled out into front, powerful legs moving him along swiftly as the three women biked at a more leisurely pace.

“Nice view.” Toni’s dimples were showing as they rode along, her attention fully on Pierce’s backside. “Buns of steel, eh Celeste?”

She smiled, not certain how to respond.

“Toni, behave.”

“I am behaving, just pointing out the obvious.” She huffed along a few moments.

“Pierce has a nice backside. Even with clothes on.” Celeste couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Toni, she doesn’t need to hear this from you.” They slowed a little more so that Toni could catch her breath.

“She does need to hear this if she’d gonna be banging him.”

Marissa was glaring, wanting to lash out, but not wanting things to get ugly.

“Truth is, both of you, we were married, now we aren’t. We fuck, but only because we get paid to. That’s it.” She peddled along easier now that they’d reached a level spot.

“He’s dear to me, and I don’t want to see him hurt. That’s all.” Celeste rode on in silence, not upset, but not comfortable. “The thing you need to know, Celeste, is that he fucks me and the others cause its work. It’s his job. He fucks you because he wants you. If you keep that clear in your mind, you should do okay. You, too, Marissa.”

Angered, the other woman pulled ahead and left them behind.

“Her ass isn’t too shabby either, is it?” Toni tossed out the line, and this time, Celeste did laugh.

“Thank you.”

“No problem-o. Just thought I’d get the speech in early.” Celeste looked over at the younger woman.

“Do you make the speech often?” Toni glanced over at her, then back at the bike path.

“First time. First time anyone’s seemed worth it.”

Toni coasted to a stop along a shady stretch, took her water bottle off the bike and drank. "I don't have the long legs you guys have, makes more peddling for me." Toni looked winded and flushed. Celeste took a long pull from her water bottle.

"How long have you and Marissa been together?"

"Five years. I left Pierce for her." She snorted. "And here I am lecturing you to not hurt him." She was slowly catching her breath.

"Are there problems?" Celeste knew she shouldn't ask, but ... "Marissa is getting jealous. Mostly of Pierce. Nothing he and I are doing is different, but something's going on in her mind." She swung back on her bike and began to pedal, Celeste beside her. She pondered the situation.

"Five years, and she's suddenly growing insecure?"

"Yeah, she's picking me up at work, says she doesn't want me out there alone."

Puts up a fight if I do an out of town shoot. She's getting critical of everything I do." Toni was troubled, that was obvious.

"Do you keep track of what she's doing?" Toni looked over at her in surprise.

"I trust her implicitly. Why would I do that? And why are you so curious?"

Celeste wasn't sure why she was so curious.

"Just the nature of the beast, I guess. Questions are my stock in trade."

"And what exactly is that?"

Celeste shifted for a climb, feeling the gears slip and catch. "I'm a detective. We actually met while I was on stake-out." Toni's peal of laughter rung out.

"In Rose City, it was the cop and the stripper. Now it's the cop and the porn star! Boy, you ladies of law enforcement are a randy bunch!"

"Yeah, I was in the academy with Addie Weaver. And her stripper is a friend of Pierce's." She wondered about that gorgeous man they'd run into last month. Maybe she should call Addie and check on him.

"Pierce knows him? Is it Rafe? Raphael Wolfe?" She was laughing again.

"That boy is the male equivalent of Helen of Troy! I can see that he'd be the downfall of any woman. I hope that cop knows how lucky she is ... I saw him dance before he retired. Damn!" Toni panted as she muscled her way up the hill, this time, Celeste was straining with her.

"I have to say, he was probably the most awe-inspiring creature I've ever seen.

"He said he's in college now. Studying psychology." Toni reached down and changed gears. Up ahead, they could see Pierce and Marissa waiting on the crest of the hill. Toni was frowning slightly.

"Rafe will be an awesome counselor. Been there, done that, and his heart is boundless. A truly good person. If you ask her, your friend will probably say he was worth it." They stopped talking as they finished the last few yards, Pierce had his glasses off, blue eyes were smiling at the two women as they drew closer.

Toni reached out a hand to touch Celeste lightly on the arm.

"If in the unlikely event Pierce ever suggests a threesome ... give me a call.

She smiled at Celeste and touched her tongue lightly to her upper lip, catching a bead of sweat. Celeste felt even warmer at the invitation, her eyes met Pierce's. Somehow, she didn't think he'd go for that idea. That made her smile.

* * * *

She took another shower at his house, not wanting to put clean clothes on while she was still sweaty.

As before, Pierce interrupted her shower. Knowing that she was sore, he went down on her, bringing her to sharp, delicious climax with the water cascading over her face and breasts. When it was his turn, she explored him slowly and thoroughly, feeling how silky and slippery his foreskin was, and how his sensitivity differed at the glans and frenulum. Then and there, she decided that circumcision was highly overrated.

On her knees, she guided his cock between her breasts, laughing as he bumped into her chin while she tried to catch him in her mouth. He laughed, and she kept him laughing as she brought him to climax using hands, mouth and any other body part she could think of to use. She discovered that he liked her to pull his balls tight against the base of his cock when she was working his glans with her mouth and tongue. Her laughter had vibrated into his cock, and before she expected it, Pierce had gripped her head, thrusting while the two of them laughed out of control. Celeste almost choked as he came in her mouth.

He laughed more when she looked up at him ruefully, semen trickling down her chin, water running into her eyes.

"Thanks for the heads up, buster!" He laughed some more, and pulled her up into a hug.

They dried off, this time Celeste decided to let her hair dry naturally. She dressed quickly, sitting on his bed combing her hair when he came in, clad only in a yellow towel.

"When can I see you again?" There was that insecure look again. They'd just had an awesome weekend, yet he still wasn't certain she'd want to go out with him. She bit her lip, considering. The nice thing about her promotion to detective was that she kept fairly regular hours now.

"I'll be working in Marina all week, maybe we could meet for lunch?" He nodded.

"I have noon calls on Monday and Wednesday, but I'm free Tuesday, don't have call till five. Same on Thursday.

"Tuesday then? About one?" He nodded. "Meet me at the Thai place, we can go from there.

He pushed her legs apart and knelt on the floor between them. "Thank you."

This was a wonderful weekend." She ran her fingers through his silvery hair. It made such an odd contrast to his youthful face. She bent over and kissed his nose. He closed his eyes and smiled.

"What were you and Toni talking about? Marissa was in a foul mood when she caught up to me." She let her fingers wander over his face.

"She was just giving me the heads up that I'd better do right by you, or I'd have to deal with her." He snorted. "Well, not in so many words. But she reminded both of us that while she cares for you, what she does with you at work is just that. Work.

He nodded. "Are you okay with that?" She frowned slightly.

"We've been seeing each other for what ... a month? Six weeks?" He nodded.

"Like I said earlier, I've gotta wrap my brain around it. It won't always be easy, but I like you an awful lot. You touch something in my heart, Pierce. So I certainly owe it to both of us to try.

He pulled a deep breath. "Just do me one favor, Celeste."

"I know. Don't rent any of your movies." He smiled a small smile and nodded.

"I sort of like the stuff I'm doing now, it's still adult, but there's a quality there that isn't in the old stuff. It takes some skill and imagination. But still"

"Maybe sometime when we're together?" He hesitated. She reached out and ran a finger over his mouth, smiling as he lightly bit her finger.

"Maybe."

"Part of me doesn't like it. Another part gets very ..." she leaned down and whispered in his ear "... very turned on."

She shivered as he licked and sucked her finger, it was unexpectedly sensual.

"Pierce, let's do something next weekend. Maybe take a trip up the coast."

He pulled back, letting her finger go with a kiss. "Are you sure?"

She nodded. "I'll make reservations. Can you meet me at my place Friday evening? Then we can get an early start on Saturday, enjoy the drive. There's a place in Ferndale I'd love to visit."

It was exactly the right thing; she could see it in his face, his eyes. She ran her thumb over his bottom lip, and then leaned in for a quick kiss. Work was work. What had been between the two of them had been miles apart from the movies.

"I think I can accept your job Pierce, and I want to be in your life."

"But"

"Rules."

He sat back on his heels, a smile playing around his lips. "And those would be?"

She took a breath, looking around the bright, airy bedroom. The house was magnificent, and to her surprise, he owned the entire thing, and rented out the upper floors.

"No sex off set with your peers. That means greenroom, showers, whatever."

He flushed slightly. She must have read the interview about the model that'd gotten him off before they'd even made it to the set. She'd had skills, and he'd been willing. At least he had been then. Monogamy? He could do that.

"I have no problem with that." She nodded. "Anything else?"

"That's the main one. I'm sure we'll come across others as we go." Something occurred to her. "If we meet my friends or co-workers, how do you want me to introduce you? As an actor? Adult entertainer?"

"Hopefully, retired, or student." He smiled wistfully.

"Pierce, that's one more thing. I don't think you really want to retire. If you don't, please don't do something dramatic on my behalf. You won't be happy."

He looked at her in surprise, all he'd wanted for years was to quit, to get out of the business ... or at least he thought that's what he wanted. Automatically, his mind went to Trevor's movie offer. And then he thought of the lawsuit dangling over his head. Like it or not, his career wasn't going away any time soon.

He looked at her curiously. "What else was Toni saying to you? At the end?"

Celeste smiled wickedly.

"She said that if we were interested in a threesome, to give her a call." He laughed out loud at that.

"As if! Besides, I don't want to be the one to drive the nail into the coffin of her

relationship. She needs to handle Marissa carefully right now.” Celeste reached down under his arms, standing and urging him up at the same time. “Those two are unraveling, but I don’t think either of them knows what’s wrong.” He wrapped her in a deep hug, not wanting her to leave just yet.

“So Dr. Wilder, what do you think the problem is?” He held on to her for moment longer and let her go.

“My guess is Marissa is seeing someone else, and she’s seeing her own guilt in Toni.”

Wow. She hadn’t thought of that one. She tilted her head back and he gave her a light kiss. “I could keep you here all the rest of the day and night, but you probably wouldn’t thank me for it.” She slipped back and let him go.

“Call me tomorrow? I’ll be home around seven, but I’ll be up till eleven or so.”

He nodded.

“I’ll finish shooting about six, but it takes awhile to get wrapped up. I’ll call you sometime after eight, probably. And I’ll see you Tuesday, if we miss by phone.

Still in his towel, he walked her to the door. She’d parked her car in the driveway that was reserved for his house. One more hug, a deep, searching kiss, and she turned to leave.

“Oh ... Pierce ...?”

“Mmmm?” He was leaning in the doorway, looking raffish and sexy.

She reached out and snapped the towel from his hips.

“You really need to get dressed. The day’s almost gone!” He grabbed the towel from her hand and gave her a ferocious glare as she laughed.

“And you really need to go home!” She trotted down the steps, turning to kiss her fingertip and wave at him. His smile as he closed the door stayed with her all the way home.

Chapter Seven

Monday

The Dom clasped her hair and held her tightly to his groin, forcing his cock into her mouth, holding it till she was gagging. Suddenly, he pushed her back, letting her surface for air. Saliva and pre-cum dribbled from her lips, silver threads traveled to the head of his cock. She gagged, choked and looked to him for direction with beseeching eyes. Pierce glanced offset at Linda, wondering when she'd cut the scene. The girl wasn't doing so well with this. She was brave, but suffering, and determined not to use her safe word. The director nodded and indicated for him to continue as she watched the monitors. Complex rope-work bound the sub. Tears ran freely down her face as he continued the brutal deep-throating. Finally, Linda had enough and cut the scene.

Immediately he sat the girl down and got her water, wiping her face.

"Babe, you need to use your word if it gets to be too much, all right? You need to take charge of yourself." He frowned grimly at her. She smiled and shook her head, the girl was a true sub and was well and truly in her happy place.

"Listen Sheila, the director there, now she's the one calling the shots for real, not me. If you get overwhelmed, you need to say your word." He stroked her cheek gently. "Promise me."

"I'm okay, really." She wasn't.

"Sheila, promise me you'll say your word. If you don't, and I think you're in trouble, I'll stop the shoot."

That would piss Linda off to no end, but he didn't see the point in fucking up the girl. He got up and went over to the director.

"Listen, Lin, I know you've got this shot storyboarded and all, but maybe we can do some stuff without bindings ... Brain Fuck ..." The director was looking at him with half her attention.

"This is good stuff, Pierce, I'm sticking to the outline."

"Linda, this girl's a true sub, she'll do anything I say without props or ropes."

"We've been talking about doing this for awhile." She was on her feet, moving to the refreshment table.

"Doing a shoot like that will take some planning, Pierce. And the right girl."

"Don't you think it would be cool to find a really feisty girl? You can do some rough stuff, no rope or anything, and do the mental thing to subdue her?" That was pretty much what he'd been talking about.

"Lin, this girl is in trouble, and she won't use her word. It's got me edgy."

She smiled and patted his shoulder.

"It looks really hot, Pierce. The rougher you are with her, the more she gives you those goo-goo eyes. She trusts you implicitly, so show her a little trust, as well. She's a

tough cookie, let her do her job. You do yours.”

Pierce stood and watched her walk away, anger brimming to the surface. He breathed deeply, tamping it down. He’d learned the breathing thing at yoga classes a few years back. He should go back, his flexibility was suffering, as he’d discovered this weekend. God! That last time in the shower, the laughter and the play ...

Pierce pulled an apple from the fruit bowl and bit into it, savoring the fruit. He rolled his shoulders, twisted from the waist and hips. It had been awhile since he’d had real sex. He glanced at his watch, they were almost finished here. Clean up, hit the road and he’d call Celeste to say goodnight. He laughed when his dick perked up at the thought of Celeste and that honey velvet voice of hers.

He turned back to his sub, letting his pent-up anger and lust spill from his eyes.

They wanted tough? With barely repressed violence, he threw the apple into the wall behind him, noting with satisfaction the flicker of ecstatic fear in Sheila’s eyes.

* * * *

Sheila looked like hell when he finished, she’d sweated off her make-up, mascara ran down her face. He’d paused during the shot to wipe it away, that would probably make the final cut. Her ass was pink, her little breasts were rosy and carried the imprint of rope. Red candle wax dribbled and flaked over her shaved cunt. She looked so happy, that Pierce knew Linda had been right. He was the one who’d been reading this scenario as something other than it was.

Nevertheless, Pierce walked Sheila to the locker room, sitting her on the wooden bench against the wall.

“So, no cameras, no directors here Sheila. What the fuck were you doing?”

“I was working. What were you doing?”

He crossed his arms and glared at her, annoyed that she looked so peaceful there with her hair straggling around her shoulders.

“Okay, I admit, I was trying to prove something. Me and my girls, we used to sneak your stuff from my brother’s closet and watch late at night. Then when you started on Fetish ... well, it tapped into something down inside of me.

“Don’t tell me, you found your inner submissive.” He leaned back against the cool tile wall, waiting for her to have her say.

“Look Pierce, I got paid a whole hell of a lot more for that shoot than you did, and basically, all I did was hang around and enjoy the ride. I figured I should at least give all I could. I was just doing my job.

“There’s a reason the actresses make more money, Sheila.” They’re the ones that take the punishment. Besides, she didn’t know how much Fetish was actually paying him. They stood, staring at one another for an uncomfortable moment.

“I’m not a sub, Pierce. My wardrobe at home has a lot of leather.”

“But no collars.”

She shook her head.

“So what in hell was this shoot all about?”

She sighed and stretched, looking a bit more at ease. “Like I said, I watched your Dom stuff and it awakened something in me. It had always been there, but I’d never had a name for it.”

“So you’re a Domme. How’d you end up being the sub in a shoot with me?”

She gave a shy smile, and shrugged her shoulders. “You’re so damn good! I kept hearing from people that you swore it’s just an act, that you don’t live the lifestyle. Wanted to see for myself. Maybe live out a little fantasy. So when Fetish offered me a shoot, I requested you.”

“I’m not a Dom. It’s a role.

She shook her head, a little smile playing on her face. “What’s your star sign? I’ll bet you’re Pisces.” He was. “Two fish swimming in different directions. One upstream, one downstream. You think you aren’t dominant, but you were going crazy on set, weren’t you? You couldn’t control me.” He thought for a moment, and then nodded. “I gotta tell you, letting you dominate me was a challenge for me as well, it really went against the grain. You nearly had me a couple times there, especially the clothespins. I wanted to fight when you started putting those on.” She rose, heading for the shower. “My guy always tells me the sub has the power, he was certainly right. I took control by not resisting, and it made you crazy.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah, sort of an interesting development, isn’t it? Gives you something to think about.” She turned the water on, then turned to him, hands on her hips. “You can deny what you are all you want, but it doesn’t change things. You’re good at it because you aren’t acting.”

Pierce shook his head in denial.

“You’d better scoot on out of here now. We’re offset, and I want my privacy.”

“Jealous boyfriend?”

She laughed. “No, he’s got as big a crush on you as I do! I’ve heard you have girlfriend, though. And that she’s a cop. And South American. No sense in risking my neck, is there?”

He laughed, Celeste would probably have something to say about him hanging around while Sheila took her shower.

“You’re right, Sheila, she’d have my balls.” He tossed a wave at her, leaving the room. Pierce paused for a moment, listening as the water started. He frowned and tilted his head. Over the sound of running water, he could hear crying. He scrubbed at his face and turned away. Submitting had touched something deep in her core. Something painful.

She’d known her safe word.

He thought back to the conversation he’d had with Toni earlier in the day, she’d unburdened herself about Marissa. He’d stayed quiet, allowing her to talk, keeping his opinion to himself.

Toni was smart, and while she loved Mari deeply, his little ex had enough survival instinct to know when enough was enough.

He never worried about Toni not using her safe word.

* * * *

The inside of the bar was just as Pierce liked, loud music, louder voices, and rough crowd just waiting for trouble. He didn’t look for trouble deliberately, but when it came, he let it come. He’d never been much of a fighter, he’d never been able to afford to miss work for a fat lip or broken nose, but Pierce still got a contact high from places like this.

“That chick tonight was a fucking piece of work.” Jesse settled at the table next to Pierce, beer in hand. It’d been a while since he’d been out with the crew. It was always smart to stay on their good side. “I thought she was gonna keep going down on you till she barfed!” She nearly had. A little gagging was okay, a lot ... no. Linda joined them, along with Ian, who set the lights.

“What did you think of her, Pierce?”

Linda kicked back in her chair, at home in the rough environment. “The guys are gonna love her, but the women ... your fans ... they aren’t gonna be so happy. It was rough. The producers are gonna love it, though.

“I’m not happy, Linda. She acts like a fucking masochist. Then, later, she tells me she’s really a Domme. Just doing this to prove that she could.” He shook his head. “You talk to Sammy and make sure I never get paired with her again. I don’t care how hot she is.” He sat back and kicked back a long drink.

“Stop being a fucking diva, Pierce. You’re the Dom, it’s your job to take charge and keep her out of trouble.” He set his glass down.

“Okay. Yeah. So next time, I shoot with her, I’ll stop the scene every fucking time I think she’s in trouble, since she’s playing a little power game with me. Goddamn.” He still heard her crying in the bathroom. And what was that shit about him being a Dom? He knew damn well that he was easy-going to a fault, and a pushover to boot. Just ask his ex-wives.

Ian sat and watched the action like it was a tennis match.

“Linda, I talked to her about her safe word. After the shoot, I talked to her again. She has no concept at all, and to top it off, she thinks the more punishment she takes the more it impresses me. Please ... please tell me she didn’t write on her resume that she wanted to work with me.”

“Yeah, dude, she did. I saw it. She’s your biggest fan!”

Ian snorted at Jesse’s comment. “She’s a true believer, Pierce. She’ll do anything you tell her to do.”

“Except use her safe word. That was her little power game. How can I trust her when she’s busy trying to beat me at my own game?”

“You’ll be working with her again, have no doubts about that, Pierce. The chemistry between you two was explosive, especially there at the end. You really found your groove again.”

“I was pissed and angry. This isn’t exactly method acting, Lin. I could have hurt her.”

“You didn’t, and she was a happy camper afterwards. Get over it, Pierce.”

“She cried.”

“It was cathartic. She needed to unload something.”

Pierce didn’t agree, but kept his mouth shut. She’d forced herself to submit to him. It hadn’t been an exchange of power and trust. What he’d heard sounded like grief. She’d betrayed her true nature.

Linda was fiddling with an unlit cigarette. California had banned smoking in most public places.

“You need to smoke?” Linda nodded. “I’ll walk out with you, gotta hit the road

anyway.” In truth, his skin was crawling with nerves, and he didn’t want her outside alone.

Pierce looped his leather jacket over his arm and hefted his helmet, then followed Linda from the bar. Between the frustration of the shoot, and the anticipation of talking with Celeste, he was ready to call the night.

Linda propped herself against the brick wall outside the bar and lit up. Fog was rolling in, creating a misty landscape. Pierce’s Harley was parked under a light, the brightly polished chrome winking through the mist.

“So Pierce, are you serious about doing a straight brain fuck project?” He propped himself against the wall next to her.

“Yeah, I am. I’ve been talking to a lot of people who are deep into the scene. I know I can’t get away without the sex, but I’d like to try it without the props and binding. Just me and the sub.”

“Anyone in mind?”

“I’m thinking maybe a Domme. Someone not used to being subdued. Someone who’ll be a bit of a challenge.” She took a deep drag and thought.

“I have some ideas, Pierce, I do like the concept. Are you ready for some negative reviews?”

“Hell, fire away. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Once this shoot with Sheila goes online, I’ll be on the hot seat with the ladies. This sort of thing will help redeem me.”

She snorted, and then stubbed the cigarette out under her boot. Big guy still didn’t realize that with his female fans, the rougher the better. He and his sub had tapped into something tonight that had put her hair on end. He’d probably win awards for this one. She couldn’t wait to get back to the studio and look at the outtakes.

“You willing to do rough? You’ll have to do the domination with muscle, if you aren’t using ropes.” He nodded. The true goal was to dominate without force. She still wasn’t seeing it. But they were going in the right direction.

“Okay, I’ll take it to Sammy tomorrow. Do you have call?”

“Five o clock.” She nodded sharply. Tapped another cigarette out of the pack.

“I’ll talk to you tomorrow then. Maybe four-thirty?” He grinned and winked.

Leaned in to kiss her cheek. “Bring me some story concepts that we can start to develop. Maybe a list of actresses you’d like to work with. I’m thinking someone really different, a big girl. Maybe Alison Barnes? She’s close to six feet, works mostly as a Domme in girl on girl stuff.” Sammy liked to put Pierce with petite women to play up his size. Alison would be a nice change. A scene with her would play out like a cage match. His smile sparked, and she knew he was catching her vision. He wouldn’t be picking Allie up, she weighed a good one hundred seventy. She was an Amazon Queen, a goddess in leather. This could be really special.

“Thanks, Lin.” He gave her a quick hug, and she waved him away, watching him cross into the parking lot. He was a good guy, but clearly discontent. Sammy would be more than willing to let Pierce call some of the shots, just to keep him onboard.

The wind caught her lighter, snuffing the flame away. Linda ducked her head to light her cigarette, twisting away from the wind. When she looked up, Pierce was already gone.

Well that was fast. She frowned when she saw that his bike was still there. She

scanned the lot but didn't see him. Hell, he'd probably gone to take a piss. She avoided the bathrooms in the dive too.

She stubbed out the partially smoked fag and slid it back in the packet. Her doctor had told her to cut back.

Linda barely noticed the van rolling from the parking lot.

Chapter Eight

“His bike’s still here.”

An hour later, Linda was back outside, Ian and Jesse at her side. The fog had almost blanketed the lot, but she could still see Pierce’s Harley sitting there, the chrome winking dully. “Unless maybe it isn’t his?”

Jesse frowned and started out into the lot. “It’s his.” He looked around, worried that he’d see Pierce on the ground somewhere. As he moved, his foot caught up on something ... Pierce’s leather jacket. His black helmet was on the ground several feet from the bike.

“Hey Linda, I’m thinking there’s a problem ...” He came upright, jacket and helmet in hand. Ian and Linda moved up to take a closer look. Linda glanced around the dimly lit pavement, her eyes catching an ominous gleam on the ground. Blood, shining black under the lights of the parking lot.

“Hey guys, let’s step away from the bike.” As she moved the men backwards, she had her cell phone out dialing 911.

In thirty minutes, the police arrived and began stringing crime scene tape around the Harley. Ten minutes before that, the TV news had arrived, and were setting up a feed, just in time for the late news.

* * * *

Marissa sat up in bed, lights low, sound on the television turned down as she read the day’s paper. Toni was on her side, settling into sleep. It always amazed Marissa that Toni could sleep through the television, lights, and telephone conversations.

They’d fought earlier, about Pierce, but now Marissa kept returning to what Toni had said to Celeste yesterday, about the movies being work. Mari frowned, staring absently at the screen, seeing the parking lot of a bar in the Mission district. Police lights were flashing, small clusters of people gathered. Something caught her eye, a gleaming Harley Davidson in the background of the shot, and people that she recognized ...

“Toni ...” she reached over, rousing the woman out of her sleep. “Toni, don’t you know them?” Toni sat up, rubbing her eyes, slipping on her glasses.

“That’s Linda ... and some of the Fetish crew ...” she frowned. “They’re at Salvos’, they go there sometimes after an evening shoot, it’s kind of a rough place.” She sat up and cranked the volume. They were talking about a possible assault or kidnapping ... “Mari ... I think that’s Pierce’s bike!” Both women sat up at that; blindly, Toni reached for Marissa’s hand. Without preamble, a picture of Pierce came on the screen, a black and white publicity shot from Fetish. He posed rakishly, wearing black leather pants, black wife beater, burly arms crossed and a wicked smile on his face. Marissa leaned forward trying to catch the gist of the newscast when she became aware of Toni keening softly, rocking back and forth on the bed.

“Shhh ... sweeting, he’s not dead, they think he was kidnapped.” Toni was still reacting, breathing hard and whimpering. *She loves him.* Marissa felt her heart drop to her

stomach. She wrapped her arms around the smaller woman, trying to follow the newscast.

"Baby, they found blood, but just a little. They think someone attacked him and pushed him into a van. He's not dead, it'll be okay ..." they rocked together. Suddenly, Toni was off the bed, pulling on clothes willy-nilly.

"I've got to go down there, Mari ... I have to!" Marissa followed, dressing more slowly, knowing that she'd better just allow the other woman to go instead of talking her out of it. In moments, they were downstairs in the car, driving across the city as fast as Marissa could manage.

* * * *

Trevor was in a bar, somewhere ... he looked around, remembered where he was, remembered he'd been fifty-eight days clean and sober. A bottle of beer sat in front of him, untouched. He'd had his shot, his chance to return to the game, but it hadn't paid off. Pierce had agreed to read the script, but Trevor already knew it was a lost cause.

"Shit. Double shit." He reached out and grabbed the bottle, glancing at the elevated TV as he did so. Pierce was on the screen.

"Hey ... Hey, turn that up!" The bartender glared, but pointed the remote. Trevor listened for a few moments, cursed and overturned his stool as he ran from the bar. He ran back in, dropped a five on the counter, and dashed back out. Once again, Pierce had saved Trevor from himself. Unfortunately, it was through misfortune.

Hands shaking, he took a moment, trying to gather his thoughts. His car was filthy, food wrappers scattered everywhere, and God knows what was hiding in the back seat. One of these days, the cops would nail him for open container or something. If he looked hard enough, he'd probably find some blow back there.

He slid the key into the ignition and started the engine, listening to the tired motor strain to turn over. Shaking hands automatically patted his jacket for a cigarette, Trevor remembered that he'd quit at the same time he'd started the twelve step. Instead, he felt the stiff outline of a business card. The woman who'd wanted to meet Pierce. They had met, and if he knew that purring sound in Pierce's voice, they'd gotten very friendly over the past few weeks.

In the restaurant, he had noted the gun under her jacket, and her demeanor had screamed, "cop." He pulled out the card and flipped it over. Det. Celeste Morales. She'd want to know. Pierce needed her to know.

He dialed the number, got voicemail, and realized he'd dialed her work number. Trevor re-dialed, this time her cell number. He glanced at the clock on his dash, it was eleven twenty-five. Late. Too late.

"Pierce?" Her voice was sleepy, slightly irritated.

"Uh, yeah ... Detective Morales. You gave me your card to give to Pierce the awhile back ..." He heard silence on the line. "Anyhow, turn on your news, the San Francisco news is running it ... they say that Pierce was kidnapped.

There was a sharp intake of breath on the line. There was movement in the background. She was dressing as they spoke.

"Where'd it happen?"

"Salvo's. It's a bar in the Mission District. They say someone hit him or something, then shoved him into a car. They don't know why." He gave her the address.

“Okay, I’m on my way down there, I can’t work the case, but at least I can get information. See what’s going on.” He heard movement now, a door closing. A car starting.

“What’s your name again?”

“Trevor Harris.

Trevor, if you don’t hear from me by morning, call me back. I’ll be in the Marina all day tomorrow, but I’ll try to get networked into the investigation.” She hung up, and Trevor sat for a moment longer, finally pulling out of the dive he’d almost lost himself in, driving six blocks to the other dive where a crowd had gathered, grieving for their lost friend.

* * * *

The trip into the city had been fast, but nerve-wracking. What in hell had happened? She’d been a little angry that he hadn’t called, but at the same time, he worked late, and she wasn’t his mother. Her gut churned, and Celeste’s heart beat faster than usual. When she pulled into the parking lot of the bar, it nearly stopped.

They’d taped off the parking lot, blue lights of police cars competed with halogen lamps that lit the scene as techs gathered evidence. Clusters of people stood about, fans, friends, and the curious. No sooner had she stepped out of the car then Toni came at her full speed, grabbing her jacket.

“I wanted to call you ... I didn’t have your number ...” she was in tears, beside herself. Marissa was standing with a group of people she assumed were co-workers of Pierce’s. Celeste walked Toni back to her friends, nodded at Trevor. One by one she met crewmembers, fellow performers, Pierce’s friends and neighbors. A painfully thin older woman, straight, graying hair to her ass, a cigarette dangling from her lips. That was Linda, one of his directors. The last person to have seen him. A neighbor was there, several fans ... and more fans were gathering by the score. She took a deep breath and looked at the techs working the scene around the Harley. She sicked a likely looking plain-clothes detective.

She pulled out her badge as she approached, nodding briskly.

“Are you the lead on this?” He shook his head, nodded to a tall, thin man; his dark hair slicked back, pale skin proclaiming him a permanent graveyard worker. She couldn’t work that way, but some people thrived on it.

“Hey ...” Celeste displayed her badge. “They tell me you’re the lead.” He nodded, squinting at her shield. “I’m a friend of the victim, wondered if there’s anything you can share on the situation, and anything I can help with.” He nodded, looking at the growing number of watchers.

“He’s some sort of celebrity?”

She nodded. “He does adult film. He’s got a cult following here in the city. It’s going to be a big deal as his fans start catching the news. Detective....

“Vietti. Carlo Vietti.” She nodded.

“I’m Detective Celeste Morales. Novato PD. I’ve been working a case for the Feds here in the City for a couple months. That’s how I met Mr. Wilder.

“He’s a porn star?”

She smiled and nodded. “He mostly does fetish film now, that’s why the crowd over there is so dark looking.

“Fuck.” He crossed his arms and looked thoughtfully at the crowd. “There was

another kidnapping, an hour or so before this one. A woman was grabbed outside a club. She's a well-known Domme around here. That scene had the same kind of crowd. What sort of fetish does he do?" Her heart was sinking as she answered.

"BDSM. Rough sex. He's a Dom." He shot her a look.

"Who are the folks over there?" She glanced over.

"The tiny brunette is his ex-wife, the blonde is her girlfriend. The skinny fellow that looks like a tweaker is his former manager and friend. Super thin woman is the director he worked with tonight, the others are co-workers." He nodded, taking notes.

"Anything you want to add? Anything you've noticed?" She sighed and thought for a moment.

"I haven't known him long, but the past few weeks, he's been watchful, like maybe he sensed something. I felt it too, sort of hinky. He mentioned some difficult people at a sexuality workshop he did a few months back, at the Mayfield Theatre. They did a fetish film festival there." She was feeding him as much as she could, impatient to hear what had come from the initial check of the area.

When he finished taking notes, he looked up. "OK, here's what we know.

Surveillance video shows him hanging with the director lady while she was having a smoke. Her story is the same. She said she looked down to light a cigarette, and then he was gone.

Vietti looked around the area, surveying, getting the feel of the place. "Video shows him start towards his bike, a couple dark figures take him down real quick. Blow to the head, it looked like, and then they shoved him into a van. There's blood, not a lot, but it supports the blow. There was also a syringe on the ground. It could simply be the usual parking lot garbage, but it'll go to the lab to be analyzed.

"How was the Domme taken?" He fished out a cigarette and hung it between his lips, unlit. "Older mini-van, different from the one this guy was loaded into. She was overpowered, pushed into the van. There's a team interviewing her friends now. I'll make sure and have them ask about the workshop. Maybe they intersect there." Celeste nodded, glancing at the growing crowd. "Tell his people he was taken alive, and they probably mean to keep him that way. Tell them he's probably not hurt too bad." She nodded. "Also, maybe you could get a list of all those folks, we're gonna have to do a lot of interviewing to see what our two victims have in common. Let them know about the workshop, the other kidnapping. See if anyone can give us some leads.

She walked away, leaving Vietti to wonder what a classy woman like her was doing with a sleaze bag porn star. He sighed, and found a uniform to go take names.

* * * *

The small group of Pierce's friends and co-workers gathered in the now vacant bar.

Celeste passed around a sheet of paper the bartender had scrounged up for her; everyone left their name and number for Vietti. The case would probably fall into someone else's hand quickly, but the more data they could gather, the better.

"So, it looks like he was hit, and then maybe drugged. He was taken away in van.

Linda blinked. "How in hell did I miss that? I just looked down for a minute!"

Linda looked angry and guilty simultaneously. Celeste felt for her.

"It only took a second, and the van would've blocked your view. It wasn't a hugely

professional operation, but they were swift and efficient. Anyhow. Here are the questions we need to consider. What did Pierce have in common with the missing Domme? Were any of you at the workshop he gave a couple weeks back? If so, did anybody there stand out? Does he have any enemies? Relationship problems? Also, we always need to look at possible issues such as drugs, gambling, and so forth.

"I went to that workshop." Marissa stepped forward, Toni looked at her in surprise.

"It was an interesting topic!" she said defensively. "Anyhow, there was a Domme, she gave him a bit of a hard time, since he's an actor, doesn't live the lifestyle. And there was an older lady, a doctor or professor ... she got really ugly, didn't come for the topic at all, just wanted to hassle him for doing porn. He acted like maybe they'd been through this before.

"Good, okay Marissa, the police will want a description of both women, and anyone else that might have stood out." She paused for a moment. "Were they taping the workshop?"

Marissa frowned as she tried to remember. "You know, they might have been, I did see some people in the audience with digi-cams. They had a sign in sheet, that will have names and email addresses. They might come up with a recording, maybe that will help..." Marissa was pale and growing whiter by the second. Something else was going on with Toni's significant other.

"Anything else?" It was quiet for a few moments. Celeste glanced back at Marissa.

The blonde wouldn't meet her eyes. She'd have to talk with her again. In private.

"No drug use. Me and Pierce kinda tangled on that a few weeks ago. I sorta forgot myself ..." Trevor looked ashamed.

"He was uncomfortable the past couple weeks, he insisted on walking the women to their cars." Jesse spoke, Ian nodded in agreement.

"And he was worried about some of the fans, he was worried they were going to start giving him problems. He's been getting some pretty intense mail through the studio." That from the make-up girl. She'd seen the news and had driven downtown from San Mateo.

"What about you, Celeste? What have you noticed?" She leaned back against the bar, pondering the Toni's question.

"He knew when we met that I was a cop, so he's observant. When we were in North Beach a few weeks back, he had some fans approach, a really odd little couple. The girl had bruises all over her arms, he told her not to let her Dom mark her like that. That seemed to float through her brain." There were a few chuckles and heads nodding.

"He just had a sub like that. He was pissed 'cause she wouldn't use her safe word.

Jesse and Ian elbowed each other.

Celeste made a note. "He was a little edgy, a friend bumped into him and he almost jumped out of his skin. Afterwards, I had the distinct feeling that we were being watched, he seemed to sense it as well." She didn't add anymore, the ideas that were beginning to circulate in her brain weren't for sharing. She had thought there was a stalker after Rafael, but perhaps Pierce had been the target after all. She tried to recall the appearance of the two men that they'd seen. She remembered breasts on one, bold tattoos on the calves of both. A man and a woman?

Celeste was weary. Too tired to make the drive home, but she didn't want to find

motel. Coffee would do the trick, for a while, at least. She rubbed her eyes and looked over her notes. She'd make copies and turn the originals over to the detective who caught the case in the morning. Hell, she'd have to stay over just to make it to work on time. Fortunately, she always kept spare clothes in the trunk of her car.

The small crowd was dispersing, with the exception of Linda, Toni and Marissa.

Trevor hovered by the door. He looked stressed beyond belief. Maybe too stressed? Celeste knew he'd been giving Pierce a hard time about the film he'd been pitching.

"Celeste, if you'd like, you can stay the night with us, you look way too tired to drive tonight." She smiled wearily at Toni.

"Nah, there are a couple motels near my assignment, I can roll out of bed and walk in. But thanks.

"Will you let us know ...?" She looked over at Linda. Guilt radiated from her expression.

"Vietti's talking to me as a courtesy; hopefully the dayshift will do the same.

Where can I find you tomorrow afternoon? Linda wrote the location of Fetish headquarters on a napkin, as well as her own phone numbers. Last moment, Celeste remembered something else Pierce had mentioned.

"Linda, do you know anything about the contract that Pierce is trying to get out of?"

Linda shook her head.

"All I know is it's with Pacific West studios. They're pretty big. You can probably talk to Sammy about it. He's the CEO of Fetish, and more up on the business end of things. I know Pierce was worried about it, though." Celeste added that to her growing list of notes. Would a place like that try strong-arm tactics?

Celeste headed out the door of the now closed bar and passed the information on to Vietti, spending the next hour updating him on everything the group had discussed. By the time she made it to her car, the crowd of fans had dissipated, and she drove very carefully to the first hotel she could find. And then she slept, worry for Pierce haunting her dreams.

Chapter Nine

“You can’t talk, can you?” Tessa heard a grunt, the sound of a person struggling with a gag. She could smell him, nice cologne, mingled with clean man. It had been dark when they brought him in, but there’d been enough light for her to watch as they secured him onto the cross shaped table. Kinky. If she herself wasn’t strapped down, it might be interesting. She could think of lots of things to do to a hunky man on a bondage apparatus. He was sounding increasingly frustrated, not being able to communicate.

“Okay, tell you what, one sound for yes, two for no.” He grunted once. “Do you have any idea what’s going on?” No. “Can you see anything?” No. She could see him out of her peripheral vision, a large man in well-worn leather motorcycle pants and a black wife-beater. A nice linen jacket lay on the floor, rumpled and torn. Expensive clothing. He was familiar. The coastal chill had settled in; he was going to have a cold night.

“I was grabbed outside of Spinner’s down in Mission. Is that what happened to you? Silence. You don’t remember? He was making a sound, a sound that worried her very much. Like he needed to vomit from behind the gag. She craned her head to look.

“Hey! Hey! This guy’s in trouble here!” No answer. “Dammitall! He’s vomiting and you’ve got him gagged! *Get your fucking pansy asses down here and take care of him!*” Shit. She could hear miserable, sick sounds, and no response at hand. She pulled in a breath and yelled again. “He’s choking! Help!” She heard feet on a metal stairwell, then running on concrete. The man was flat on his back, even without the gag he’d be in trouble. “Freakin’ amateurs!” She growled. “Get him on his side or he’ll drown on his own vomit!” Two male voices, raised slightly in panic. She couldn’t understand the language. It wasn’t Spanish, nor was it Asian. Russian? They’d tied him, but neither had a knife to cut the bindings. Once they released the gag, he rolled his head to the side and spewed, judging by the angry curses, his aim had been true. “Good for you, big guy.” She didn’t dare speak her praise too loud.

Tessa lay, heart racing, trying to figure out the situation. She was bound, but able to see and speak. He’d apparently been drugged and maybe beaten. They’d blindfolded and gagged him; bound him hard. Not a lot of imagination going on here for a role-play, but he was obviously the one being punished. That assured her a little. Their malice was directed at the man. She felt guilty for her relief, but there it was.

“Leave the gag off, but keep him blind. Make sure he can move his head, if he needs to.” A woman’s voice, from a hollow distance. More movement out of the corner of her eye. A body passed, the table she was on swiveled slightly; turned out her table was a gurney. This new position made her more able to assess the man, and their space.

“Hey!” She yelled again, putting all the authority she possessed into her voice. “I gotta piss. Right now.

“Take her to the bathroom, but watch her.” The distant voice again. Something soft slipped over her face. She was uncuffed and assisted to her feet. As she shuffled to the

bathroom, Tessa raised her hand, rubbing a sore spot on her head. They'd beamed her good. The man forced her pants down and pushed her onto a toilet, and she let it go, not really caring about modesty. They yanked up her skin-tight leathers, and to her relief, left the fly unfastened. She'd put on a pound or two ... or ten. After lying for so long, she felt bloated and swollen. Back on the gurney, re-bound, she found herself in a better position to view the other captive.

"What about him, he's probably got to go as well. And we both need water." No answer. Someone held a bottle to her mouth, allowed tepid water spilled over her chin and down her neck. She snarled. The bottle was snatched away. They left without checking the man for dehydration or taking him to the bathroom. Sorry fucks.

"Are you okay?" More of that harsh breathing. "Are you awake?"

"Yeah. Sick. My head ..." his voice was strained and gravely, but had an accent that set it apart.

"Hang in there. I'm Tessa. I'll do my best to get us out of this.

Pierce chuckled. "Thanks." He wished his hands were loose. His head was pounding and he desperately needed water.

"I'm Pierce. I think they drugged me. Can't feel much." He could feel the pounding in his head. The rest of him was numb.

"Well, you're on a nice little bondage apparatus. I'm on a gurney. From what I could see when they brought me in, it looks like they plan to film.

"Shit. What did you see?"

"More bondage props, several light stands. Camera equipment.. Shit like that.

Pierce let out a long breath. Trevor's gig. The one with the budget. With a budget, and professional crew. A script and rehearsals. Most beginners worked with a hand held cameras and the most rudimentary lighting and sound, often in a cheap motel room somewhere. This felt like a big space with expensive equipment.

"Someone's been trying to hire me for a job, I kept turning it down. Guess they didn't want to take no for an answer.

"I'm not an actor. I'm a Domme. I have a following on the club circuit, but I'm not famous. Why would they want me?"

"Well, I'm not into the lifestyle, but I play a fairly convincing Dom on film.

He was losing it. Sliding back into the black. Pierce took a breath and let go.

"You're an actor? Playing a Dom?" Her mind raced ... a small film festival a few weeks back. That Scottish porn actor. "Pierce? Pierce Wilder?" No answer. She craned her neck, trying to see him in the darkness. His face was white against the dark mask over his eyes. They'd kidnapped a Domme, and an actor who was gaining fame as a Dom. There was a vital ingredient missing.

"Hey Pierce, they don't have a sub yet." She lay back, wishing she could roll onto her side. This sucked big time. Oh well, when it was over, she'd probably be a better Domme for it. One should always walk on the other side.

* * * *

Celeste could feel ripples of shock as she sat in the Thai restaurant. The owners knew Pierce, as did many customers. His picture, as well as a photo of Tessa Strong was constantly running on the news. He'd made the front page of the paper. Celeste's cell phone

chirped; as she answered, Trevor appeared at her table, a cardboard box cradled in his arms. She gestured him to sit.

“Morales, I’ve had a very odd request.

Celeste fought to keep her voice calm. “Good morning, Captain.” She had a pretty good idea of what the request was.

“That porn star kidnapping? Well, PDSF is requesting your assistance on the case ... seems you’re familiar with the victim? And his friends?”

She felt her face flaming, while Trevor fidgeted at the table.

“I know the man. We’ve been dating. I went to the scene last night and his friends just asked me if I could get any information. I was able to answer some questions for the lead investigator. I wasn’t interfering, sir.” He snorted loudly on the line.

“Of course you were. How busy are you?”

Like he didn’t know? She was sitting here on her ass, all her other cases handed off.

“I’m only on the Waila case at the moment, sir.” She’d been impudent to one of the feds handling this case and gotten herself assigned to it full time. Doing nothing.

“Okay. Vietti’s a good guy, a friend of mine. He requested your services for a few days, primarily to dig up background that might link the victims. By the way, this hasn’t hit the press yet, but there’s been a third kidnapping, some Latin woman. A sub by all accounts. Domestic by day, sex slave by night. He’ll cue you in. You finish your shift today, and then report to Vietti immediately. I’ll handle the paperwork from here.

“Yes, sir.” She hung up, completely flummoxed. Why in hell was he being so easy on this? Normally, he’d be yelling to high heaven. He and Vietti must really go back. She looked over at Trevor, who was trying hard to ignore the conversation, and the obvious raised voice on the other end of the line.

“Trevor, it seems I’m on loan to Vietti to work on Pierce’s case.” He jumped up and whoo-hooed, then settled again. Dropped his face in his hands. The mood swings from hell. Some drug abuse did permanent damage to the chemicals in the brain. Trevor would no doubt always struggle with mood swings.

Celeste gestured the waitress over and ordered him a Thai tea. “I don’t know much else yet, but I do know a third kidnapping has been linked to the case, a woman. Cap says she’s known as a sub. I don’t know that much about the BDSM community, so this just weirds me out.

“Pierce isn’t part of that community, really. He’s got a knack for it, at least on camera. I’m sure we can get the information we need to piece this together. Motive, right?”

She grinned at him. “We? Whadda ya mean ‘we’, white man?”

He flushed. “I just mean I don’t think you’re going to figure this out without help from his friends.” She nodded. She’d be dipping into the talent pool of her own friends as well.

Trevor hefted a cardboard box onto the table, carefully removing bags of photos, papers and other memorabilia. A man’s life in a paper box. A photo fluttered to the table, Celeste picked it up. Squinted. It was a very young, very athletic looking Pierce, arm around another man’s shoulder. Trevor, who’d also been a hottie. They had to be teens here, the longish, styled hair and gym shorts were from the early eighties. Trevor scooted his chair around the table and took Celeste on a tour of Pierce’s life.

* * * *

He'd come in and out of consciousness during the night. They'd finally loosened his bonds. On numb feet, with numb hands, he'd been led to the toilets. The only reason he hadn't peed himself was that he was dehydrated from vomiting. They'd even let him wash his hands and face. He managed to suck down some water before they grabbed him and pulled him upright. For the brief moment that his blindfold was off, Pierce had seen himself in the mirror, bruised and bloody. His eyes were bloodshot, glassy from whatever they'd used to drug him. His tongue was white and fuzzy. This past month, he'd let his hair grow a bit, it was rumpled and cock-eyed looking.

Pierce rotated his wrists, frowning at the bloody abrasions left by the rough hemp ropes. He was still wearing his motorcycle leathers, so his bare feet were numb, but in pretty good shape. On impulse, he lashed out at one of the men guarding him, resulting in a gratifying blow to his ribs. The man collapsed into himself even as Pierce kicked hard at the other goons' knee. That one went down as well, but before Pierce could react, the first rewarded him with a cattle prod to the back. A fucking cattle prod! They'd had to drag him back into the big room. Though stunned, he was able to see the high roof and skylights, which were dark now. He also saw a glassed in booth up high. It was dimly lit. He'd allowed his head to loll to the side, looking from under the blindfold at light stands and cameras. Tessa was right. They were all set to begin filming. Fuck.

Now his head hurt even worse. Tears leaked from the corners of his eyes, soaking into the fabric stretched over his face. He lay on his back, his blindfold had loosened during the skirmish, and he could see quite a bit. He twisted his head, working it up. In the darkness above, a red light glowed, dim and steady. They were already filming secretly. There was something else going on here. Pierce was beginning to think he was wrong about it being an amateur shoot. There'd be no real quality to surveillance footage.

He closed his eyes and tried to sleep. His lips were parched and cracked, in spite of the water he'd snatched, and his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. The weakness and headache were no longer from whatever they'd drugged him with, but the beginnings of dehydration. He frowned, trying to remember how long the body could go without water. Not long, that was for sure. Three or four days? His stomach rumbled with hunger, but it was nothing compared to the thirst. He breathed deeply, forcing himself to rest, using his strong will to carry him through the discomfort of the wood at his back and the ropes at his arms and legs. In the darkness, Pierce began to plan. There was someone at the other end of that red eye, and he wanted to let them know that he knew they were there. When he couldn't sleep, he stared into that evil red eye.

When the morning light began to leak through the skylights, a sobbing woman was carried into the warehouse. She was clearly confused and terribly frightened. They secured her to a padded gurney to his left, Tessa was to the right. Pierce couldn't see the new prisoner from the angle at which he was secured. To his surprise, her captors were women, both vaguely familiar. It seemed the men who'd been caretaking were now gone. Now that he was subdued, they no longer needed the muscle.

"Hello, are you all right?" Tessa's whisky voice reached out to the new arrival.

The woman was still sobbing.

"Tessa, I don't think she speaks English.

The woman cursed. "*Hola, habla Espanol?*"

"Si." She was sobbing still, but communicating.

"Pierce, I don't know Spanish that well." Tessa tried again. "Habla English?"

"Si. A little." Her sobs began to cease. "I'm afraid!" Tessa tried to sound soothing.

"Can you tell us what happened?"

"I was at the bus stop on Geary ... I need to go to work ..." she wailed. "Senora will fire me!" She trailed off into Spanish again.

"Miss, can you tell me your name? I'm Tessa, and Pierce is next to you." She sniffed. "Lupe. Lupe Gutierrez. They came and pulled me into a big van and brought me here!" She began sobbing again. Pierce spoke soothingly.

"Lupe, now it's time to settle down. We need to be calm so we can think about what's happened.

Tessa blinked at the mesmerizing quality of his voice. She'd seen him at the film festival, watched one of his shorts and then sat in on the workshop he'd given. This was his "Dom" voice. He was very compelling in person, even while tied and helpless.

"Senor Pierce ... Pierce Wilder?" She suddenly sounded breathless and excited.

Tessa could hear her struggle. "Master Wilder, are we in a movie together? Is this part of a movie?" Damn, she was flat out excited. Tessa rolled her eyes.

"No, Lupe, this isn't a movie, and I think we're in a spot of trouble, so we need to think this through.

"Master Wilder, I saw you at the Film Festival, I went to your talk! You are so You are so perfect, Master!" She was off and running in Spanish again.

"Tessa, were you there as well?"

"Yes, Pierce, I was. A lot of people were there.

"Fuck.

"Gotta agree with you there, Big Guy. How're you doing, buy the way?"

"Thirsty. Drug hangover is the worst thing. Pretty much numb all over." From where she lay, Tessa could see they'd re-tied him at intervals all over his body, from head to foot. His heavy leather boots were on the floor under the wooden device. He should be numb. It had been way too long. Damn! If they'd left his boots on, they'd have offered some protection. From where she lay, Tessa could see the ropes were tied much too tight. His bare feet had an ominous blue tinge.

"Didn't I make it clear in my workshop that I'm not really a Dom, and that there are professionals on set that do the tying and binding?" He'd been clear, but fans always wanted to believe that Nimoy was really a Vulcan.

She shifted on the padded surface of the gurney, trying to see his face. He was damn handsome man, even with his overnight beard and bruise discolored skin. His lips were parched. They'd given her water, but not him. Tessa had a very bad feeling in her stomach about this whole scenario.

"What do you think's going on, Pierce?" He heaved a big sigh. Truthfully, he didn't know.

"At first, I thought it was the job offer I'd turned down. Then I thought maybe it was a fan, or someone wanting to make their own film." He heaved another deep breath, exhaling through his nose. Tessa thought maybe it was how he was controlling his

discomfort ... no ... say it. His pain. She was uncomfortable, he was in pain.

“Can you think of why someone would do this to you, Tessa?”

“Well ... I have a following. I do sessions. But no enemies that I know of. You seem to be the logical target.

“What day is it? Do you think it’s Tuesday?” He’d been in and out of consciousness, but she hadn’t.

“Yeah, it’s Tuesday.” He had a slight smile on his face.

“I’m standing up a date today.” He tilted his head her direction. “She’s a cop.

Tessa squeezed her eyes closed. She prayed that there was evidence. She prayed there were clues. She prayed that his date would be concerned rather than pissed.

“Does she know you well? Will she be worried when you don’t show?” He didn’t answer. Guess that was the big question. He looked her way again.

“We were making plans to go away this weekend. I think she’ll be worried.”

* * * *

“Hey Addie, its Celeste ... Celeste Morales.” Celeste was in her car, ready to pull into traffic. “How’s PI life treating you?”

She’d gone online and located Addie’s new business number, as well as getting the dirt on her old classmate’s recent adventures. Rain was drizzling down, making travel slick and treacherous.

“Celeste! Listen, I want to thank you for what you and your friend did for Raphael last month. That was really nice of you.

“I take it he made it home safely?” There was a long silence on the other end.

“The cab driver dumped him as soon as you were out of sight. From there, the guys that were following him picked him up again. Raphael ended up in a leather bar in Mission. Thankfully, the bar owner saw that he was in bad shape, she made sure he was safe till I came and got him.

“God, I’m sorry, Addie. We should have ridden with him.” He’d been a victim waiting to happen. She had a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach at the idea of what those two had meant to do to him.

“It worked out, Celeste, and he’s smart, in the end, he found shelter and took care of himself. He’s good at that. And I took care of his stalkers.” Addie’s voice was suddenly steely and grim. Celeste slipped the car into park and decided not to talk and drive.

“Celeste, I hear Pierce is in trouble. Raphael’s really upset.

Celeste swallowed the lump in her throat. Her eyes burned with tears.

“Uh, yeah. Funny thing is, I hooked up with the lead detective on the case, he requested my assistance, and my captain agreed. I’m on my way to meet Detective Vietti right now.

“How can we help?”

She mentally cheered. Addie was good. Rose City PD had committed a major error letting her go due to a half-baked scandal. But like all bureaucracies, it was probably manned with its share of idiots.

“Right now, I’m not sure. I’ve got a lot of interviewing to do, but my guess is that this links back to a workshop on sex that Pierce did a couple months back. I want to see if the other two victims were there.

“There’s a third victim? That hasn’t come out yet.

“She’s a sub. So, a lifestyle Domme, a porn star-Dom, and a lifestyle sub. Two women and one man. I can’t quite make a picture yet. I don’t think it’s a crazy fan thing.

“Let me run it past Raphael. He’s staying in the city, and he has a few contacts there that might be helpful. Maybe we can meet?”

The two women made arrangements to hook up for dinner and rung off. Just running over the scenario, Celeste got that uneasy feeling in the pit of her stomach. In truth, that feeling hadn’t gone away since the night before. She pulled into traffic and headed downtown to meet Vietti.

* * * *

Was it noon yet? Had anyone noticed that he was missing? Pierce had lived alone for so long, didn’t really have anyone who’d realize he was missing. He breathed deeply and tried to remember Monday night. It wasn’t that late, maybe nine or so. They’d been at the bar, he wanted to get home early, give Celeste a call. He’d walked out to the parking lot, leather jacket over his arm, the chrome on his Harley shone in the misty evening. Then nothing till he woke in the warehouse last night, sick and disoriented. Not even 24 hours yet. Not even long enough to file a missing persons report.

If his bike was where he left it, the guys would notice and wonder. That bike was his baby. His phone was in his heavy leather jacket ... maybe that had been left behind as well. He was supposed to meet Trevor; he’d finally caved and agreed to take a copy of the script. Trevor’d been slowly wearing him down, plus, his own curiosity about the movie had grabbed him.

Someone would notice. He’d miss call tonight. Someone would notice. Celeste would worry. To his surprise, the sky outside was growing dim. It was long past noon; Pierce was missing time.

* * * *

They sat at his desk together, sharing his computer screen. The cases had been caught by three different detectives, but had been easily linked. Following Marissa’s suggestion, the day shift had located footage of the workshop; both of the other victims had attended.

The Domme had been combative, but had shown respect when Pierce answered her questions. Lupe had hung at the edge of the crowd, watching him worshipfully. She was a timid looking little woman, dressed in street clothes. Tessa Strong had been in vinyl gear, corset, gauntlets and high boots. She was middle-aged, but still attractive with wavy dark hair and heavy, vintage style make-up. Very Betty Page, with a touch of Lauren Bacall.

Celeste caught the occasional glimpse of Marissa, seated in the center of the room, notepad on her lap as she followed the lecture and Q&A period. She was seated next to an attractive woman that appeared to be the same height, cropped blonde hair, and hip, masculine clothing. They seemed to know one another, but weren’t overly familiar. The vibe was weird between the two. Celeste frowned and made a note. From the angle, they looked like they were together, the body language was familiar, but slightly uncomfortable.

In the next row up sat a woman in her late middle years, shifting and bobbing in her seat in a state of agitation. That would be the antagonistic professor. Shortly after Celeste located her on the film, the woman was on her feet, commenting that as a mere porn actor,

Pierce was clearly unqualified to be conducting workshops in human sexuality. Pierce smoothly deflected the comment, but even on the tape, Celeste could see the woman marshalling her forces.

Several younger women surrounded her. Their expressions varied from interest, to downright hostility. At one point, when the Professor began an off topic rant, Tessa stood up and told her to stick to the subject or leave. Even Lupe looked angry, as did several other participants. Following another interruption, Lupe shouted at the Professor, something in Spanish that the other woman clearly understood.

"Well, our three victims all had altercations with this woman." Vietti nodded. "Professor Delilah Raines, Ph.D. She teaches at a small liberal arts university north of here. I think tomorrow you should go visit the good doctor. She's looking like a good source of information, if not our best suspect." Celeste nodded and copied down the address of the college. They went online and found her office hours. Classes were not yet back in session after the holiday break, but she was working on campus during enrollment.

"What about the women with her?"

Vietti did several screen captures and sent them to the printer. "Take these with you. I'm sure she can give you names. If not, we'll have to identify them another way. It might take some footwork." She nodded and went to the printer, plucking the shots from the tray.

"Any other ideas?" He looked at her with interest. Vietti had a full caseload, while Celeste had dedicated time on this case.

"Pierce is the touchstone of this case. Find him, and we'll find the others. If it was this professor or her protégées, they'll have left us a trail a mile wide. I think we need to locate the vehicles, and barring that, try to figure out where they would take the three.

"We'll also need to check out his place, see if he's received any threatening letters, emails, that sort of thing." Celeste nodded in agreement. They'd probably sent someone to his place already, but she could double check.

"Lab's working on the surveillance tape, trying to pull faces off the abductors, and hopefully a plate number from the van. It's gonna take time, though." She nodded, knowing that already. Their best leads would take time to process, time that the victims might not have.

"I'll be meeting with a source tonight. He might give us a lead into the underground sex world, but I really don't think that's gonna be our link. I think this woman in our link." Celeste tapped the photo of Professor Raines. "I look forward to meeting her." She smiled grimly. Vietti looked at her face, wondering again.

"What's between you and Wilder?" It was never a good idea to investigate a case too close to home. She obviously had a personal stake in this one.

"We've been seeing one another for a short time." She looked at him steadily. "We're intimate, but my feelings aren't so involved that I can't work this in professional manner." It was a lie, and they both knew it, but Vietti decided not to probe further. She'd helped him cover more ground on this case than he'd imagined possible. Having an "in" with a sub-culture was always helpful. This case could grow cold really fast, and he didn't want the press blowing it into sensationalism. He'd keep her in the background, doing the footwork.

They spent the rest of the meeting outlining her duties for the next day, while Vietti

returned to his open cases. He also had to give his captain some meat to feed the vultures. Seemed the porn star made good news. He was on the cover of every Bay Area newspaper, on the news, and the topic of discussion on the street. If he didn't have fame before, he certainly did now. Hopefully, he'd live to benefit from his fifteen minutes.

* * * *

Years in the film business had taught Pierce that much of the industry was about hurrying to make call, then waiting while the crew and director got their shit together. Nevertheless, he never missed call, and was rarely, if ever late. The sun through the skylights had long passed dusk, and the captors had yet to approach their prey. Pierce's stomach cramped in its emptiness, but worse, his mouth was parched for water. Hunger, he could cope with, but not thirst. Both women had been escorted to the toilet and given water, the last he'd had were the few sips he'd stolen when they'd taken him to the toilet last night ... or was it this morning? He lay back, closed his eyes and let his brain work the problem.

Pierce had never fancied himself brilliant. He'd never been more than a passable student in school. He'd done all right in college classes, but only because he'd gained the adult discipline to focus. So he pondered this problem, how to escape, but more importantly, why it had occurred in the first place.

He thought about Shelia, how she'd yanked his chain while she was bound and hanging helplessly from the ceiling.

The non-English speaking men had disappeared, in their place, a pair of rough, plain looking young women had tended to the needs of Tessa and Lupe, giving them a breakfast of fruit and donuts, plus water. They'd elaborately ignored Pierce, as though he were a piece of dung under their shoe. Tessa had been infuriated.

"If you're going to hold someone, you are responsible for their well-being." The women had left the room, Tessa shouting after them, "If you don't take care of him, you're just being abusive, damn it!" She took her responsibilities as a Domme seriously. Pierce let their faces drift through his mind, certain he'd seen them somewhere. The world was full of predators, and unfortunately, he often came into contact with the worst. But even the sleaziest producer, the most deviant fan didn't try to abuse in this fashion. This was personal, and the odd thing was that Pierce couldn't think of anyone who could hate him this much. Maybe his first ex-wife, but she'd died of a cocaine overdose in the late eighties.

"Tessa?" His voice was hoarse. "Did you see those women at the workshop you went to?" She was silent for a moment. "I think I did ... but I was pretty focused on giving you a hard time, though." She sounded guilty.

"I saw them, with a couple others, they looked like man-haters." Lupe had gotten better control of her English as she'd calmed and realized the gravity of the situation. "They were with the Professor woman.

Oh god, that creature. She always seemed to pop up when he did an appearance or workshop.

"Dr. Delilah Raines. Professor of Women's Studies ... I don't know what school she teaches at." He sighed heavily. Since he'd begun doing these workshops, he tried to keep the topic off of his career and focus on sexual health and safety. It had been Sammy's idea, the idea that Fetish was giving back to the community, somehow. It hadn't been a bad publicity move, but Pierce had been determined to make some good of the opportunity.

Since his viewers were probably copying what they saw, he focused on how to prepare properly for the particular act that he was discussing, whether it was anal sex, bondage or discipline. The mechanics could sometimes be really unsexy, but he didn't want anybody copying him and injuring themselves or their partner.

He'd honestly begun to think Dr. Raines was obsessing on him, showing up with her posse of grad students in tow at every discussion. She viewed him as the personification of the evils of the porn industry, that great exploiter of women.

The topic at his last workshop had been *Brain Fuck, or How to Dominate Without Physical Restraint or Force*. She'd been livid that he'd dared to discuss a psychological topic without the educational background to support himself. Hell, Pierce didn't need a degree to tell him he could talk his way into a sub's brain. He'd done it often enough.

"I think I remember her, wavy grey hair, saggy boobs ... like a flower child that wilted?" Tessa had a way with words. "She was in the middle of a group of angry young feminist types. Think she's behind this?"

"Of course she is," Lupe spit out. "She hates Master Wilder

"Pierce, please, just Pierce

Lupe continued. "She was foul and viscous to Master Pierce. Stupid lesbian hippie bitch!" Pierce raised a brow at Lupe's ferocity. It was nice to know he had a supporter at his back.

"I was a bit of a trouble maker as well. I'm sorry." He craned his neck to look at Tessa.

"Why are you sorry? You're a true Domme, and I certainly can learn from you. I didn't take offence at your comments.

It was true, he hadn't and Tessa felt a reluctant tug of admiration ... maybe even liking for the man. In all the time they'd been trapped here together, he'd been beaten, denied food, water and toileting. He had to be in pain from the bindings that held him in place. Yet he hadn't complained, not an angry word had crossed his lips. He was thinking. Always thinking.

"Tessa, I don't think they mean any harm to you or Lupe. You'll probably walk away from this all right." Not true, both women had seen faces well enough to describe their captors, but Pierce didn't want them worried any more than they were.

"What about you?" He was quiet for a long time.

"They see me as the symbol of evil, I'm their enemy. I don't think they intend to let me live. And I think they plan to document my death.

He didn't want to tell them that they were being filmed even now. He'd been thinking about the brain fuck. They were being manipulated here, but to an end. They were waiting for him to break, to rage and threaten. They would wait until he was desperate with thirst and hunger, and then provide him with a tiny opportunity. An opportunity that would come at a cost to the women. It was a stretch, but he couldn't think of anything else.

* * * *

Celeste grabbed her cell phone.

"Detective Morales." To her own ears, she sounded clipped and stern. In truth, she was tired. The meeting with Addie and Raphael had given her a peek into a world she didn't want to know about. Raphael indeed had some contacts. Major criminal underworld

contacts. As a teen, Raphael had been lured into prostitution ... a crime lord had fallen for him, and bought him from his pimp. Rafe had been so afraid of the man, he'd propositioned a vice-cop and gotten himself arrested rather than go with the john. The john who was reputed to run most of the vice in the City. Oh yeah, they were great friends now. Raphael had grinned wryly when he said that, knowing that his *friend* could very well eat him alive.

So Celeste was heading back to her house in Petaluma, mulling over her upcoming day when the phone rang.

"Celeste, this is Toni." The woman sounded like a child. "I ... just wanted to see if you had any more information ... on Pierce?" She sounded shattered.

"Well, Toni, there was a third kidnapping, a sub.

"I saw that. This isn't good, is it?" No, it wasn't good, not at all.

"Toni, a good thing has happened, though, my department arranged for me to work with Detective Vietti on the case, and until we get Pierce back, that's all I'll be working on." Well, at least for the next week. She was on a deadline in more ways than one.

"Oh, Celeste, thank you so much." She heard Toni pass the information on to Marissa. "We're working up some leads, tomorrow I'll be talking to some people that might actually know something. I'll need to talk to you and Marissa some more.

Marissa, in particular. Celeste had a funny feeling about Marissa being at the workshop, given the problems she and Toni were having.

"I'm on an early call tomorrow. Can you come to the studio offices?" Celeste agreed and they set a time. Toni handed the phone off to Marissa. Celeste arranged to meet her in the evening while Toni was filming.

That night, when she lay in her own bed, in her own home, she couldn't help wondering how Pierce was, and if he was afraid. She wondered if he had faith that she'd find him. She lay back, looking at the faint lights playing through her window as a car turned into her street. It had been twenty-four hours since he'd been pulled into that van. Twenty-four hours of being subjected to the will of others. She turned onto her side and punched her pillow, the skirt of her nightgown pushing up against her hips. She still felt him, thrusting between her legs, kissing her as though she were precious to him. Not your typical romantic hero. Not by a far measure. But the more she discovered about the man, the more she wanted him back. She sighed deeply, and it hurt to exhale.

* * * *

"Wake up!"

Pierce jerked against the bindings, coming back to the moment. He looked up into the ugly face above him and blinked. She wasn't really ugly, it was her expression and voice that made her that way.

"I really hope you're taking me to the head." He mumbled, without much hope.

Humiliation seemed to be part of the program here, and they'd love to see him crap his pants. He was bound with a combination of rough hemp rope and leather bindings, he waited patiently as another woman worked at loosening him. The ugly woman was cradling the cattle prod. He could see Tessa watching him grimly. When they rolled him off the device, his legs were useless, and he slipped to the floor.

"Fuck." Tessa hissed the profanity even as Lupe gasped. He lay there on the dirty, cold concrete waiting for the circulation to start in his legs again, not disappointed when the

needle sharp pain announced that he was still alive. His feet were bare, and Pierce winced when he saw the ugly blue-black color they had turned. He'd be lucky if he didn't lose toes out of this. He glanced up at the dimly lit observation booth. Whoever was managing the show was no doubt watching even now, as he floundered about on the floor. Pierce fought back the anger, allowed the acceptance to flow through his body. Acceptance would allow him to see other avenues of escape.

When he had recovered enough, he hauled himself to his feet; the second woman steadied him as they steered him toward the bathroom. The ladies room. He grinned inwardly, no urinals here. He'd be able to sit. He'd been wanting to sit on a toilet for some time now.

They allowed him no privacy, keeping the door wide open as he dropped his pants and lowered himself. He didn't care. Hell, modesty was a thing of the past. He didn't really care if they were filming as he shit. He grinned evilly. It didn't smell like perfume, and the women were hard-pressed to ignore the odor. He flushed and rose, fastening his leathers, relieved that he still had his thumb ring. He slipped it off and dropped into a pocket that buttoned closed. Already, it was growing loose on his thumb. Pierce felt stronger, though in pain, and balked as they pushed him toward the door.

"Didn't your mother ever teach you to wash your hands?" He shot them a disgusted look, and they relented. He soaped his hands in the sink, and then splashed his face, wincing as he looked in the mirror. Worse than the last time. He ducked, doused his head and sucked up as much water as possible before they stopped him. Death by dehydration was not appealing, and he'd been feeling the cramping in his gut for hours now. The dizziness he was feeling was not from the drugs anymore.

As they returned him to the other room, Pierce looked around as much as he could, trying to evaluate his situation. He was rapidly growing too weak to run or fight. The women were tied up, his hands were too numb to deal with their bindings. The building was probably locked, and there was a damn scary she-wolf holding a cattle prod very close to his ass. He sighed in resignation.

Chapter Ten

Wednesday

He didn't need to pee anymore. Somehow, he knew that should make him worried.

They'd left the three alone all day Tuesday, now it was Wednesday morning. They'd taken Tessa and Lupe to the bathrooms, given them food and water and time to exercise, but he was still laying strapped to the apparatus. Last time he peed, it had been dark and ominous looking. Now he didn't need to pee at all. His lips were dry, his mouth sticky. When he woke, it was only for brief moments before he drifted. Tessa was angry, yelling again. Good God, the woman had a voice, when she wanted to use it!

Pierce felt fumbling at the straps on his feet and legs, they fell limp and useless to either side of the cross. When they loosened him completely, it took a long time before the circulation started. Even longer before he could stand. A tall woman with short blonde hair stood before him, frowning.

"I imagine you're pretty thirsty now." She had a bottle of water dangling carelessly in her hand. He nodded, not bothering to answer. She cracked the bottle, took a swallow. She then dribbled a tiny bit over his mouth ... enough to make him just a little crazy.

"I'll give you this bottle of water, *Master Wilder* ..." she said snidely "... but if I give you the water, both of the women will take five strikes with the crop." He looked down, she had a leather riding crop hanging from her wrist. The end of the crop was fairly harmless, a soft leather fold. But the crop itself was made of hard leather woven over a rigid plastic core. That could do some damage.

"Do you even know how to use that thing?" Tessa's voice held an edge of worry.

The woman ignored her.

"If you don't drink, you will take their strikes. Double." Great. Beaten and dehydrated.

"No! He's sick already!" Lupe, panic in her voice. "Just give him the water!"

Tessa had to agree. She wasn't crazy about being punished, but she was fairly certain they'd strike him much harder than they would herself and Lupe.

"Lupe's right. You've dehydrated him, he's got what ... a day ... two max? He needs the water.

Pierce listened in amazement. So this was the game ... some sort of psychological manipulation. All three were being punished. All three were to feel guilt.

"Where's Professor Raines?" His voice was raspy, but carried enough authority to stop the argument. The shorthaired woman gave him a look. "You were at the workshop ... all of you. You're her posse. Where is she?" The woman gathered up her self-possession again.

"I don't know who you're talking about. Now, water or punishment?"

He looked at her coldly.

“You’re just a puppet, aren’t you? No mind of your own.” He could feel cameras. The woman was just crazy enough to film him, call it research.

“Play your games by yourselves. I’m not helping you.” He leaned back on the wooden apparatus and waited, meeting her eye steadily. She glanced up at the dim booth, then back at him. He crossed his arms over his chest and waited.

“Take off your shirt and lay face down.

“Make me.

Her eyes flew wide. Even sick and weak, she couldn’t compel him physically.

Within moments, two other women joined her, one with his friend the prod. Pierce still stood his ground. He’d suddenly found the battleground of the game. This was where he’d make his stand. Nobody was going to be injured in his name. The three women exchanged glances and Pierce suddenly wished he had a leather strap to sink his teeth into. This was gonna hurt. Pierce heard Lupe scream, Tessa curse, and himself grunt as he went down, crashing to the floor, shaking from the voltage. When he woke next, he was strung out on an upright frame. He forced his head up to give them a good look.

As soon as they saw him wake up, the riding crop came down on his back. He didn’t think they drew blood, but they would as soon as the leather came off the end of the cheap whip, exposing the plastic cane. This was gonna hurt like hell. And they weren’t stopping at twenty.

Pierce bit through the ball gag they’d forced back into his mouth.

* * * *

They were tooling along the 101 in Addie’s Lexus SUV. Celeste caught the occasional glimpse of the Pacific Ocean looking gray and stormy. Just like she felt.

They were traveling later than Celeste wished, but Addie had sent her back in to change her clothes.

“You’re confronting the lioness in her den. You need to throw her off her game.

From what you know about her, what will push her buttons?”

Celeste thought back to the footage. The professor was a throwback Earth Mother sort. Exotic, ethnic clothing in batiks and cottons. Birkenstocks and undoubtedly unshaven legs.

“Professional. Sexy and feminine.

“Bingo.” Addie herself was wearing something that probably cost a month’s income. Her golden-red hair and peachy complexion were set off by the warm russet tweed of the trouser-skirted suit. Addie’s ex-husband had been a metro-sexual clothes whore, and made sure his wife dressed up to his standards. The women had spent long moments in front of Celeste’s closet, surveying her mostly functional wardrobe. Addie finally whistled and pulled out a vivid red wool suit.

Celeste hadn’t bought this for work, it was strictly for social occasions, and she’d never had a chance to wear it. It had been tailored to fit, the single-breasted jacket could be worn without a blouse, and when she slipped it on, it displayed a subtle, but significant cleavage. The form fitting skirt hit above the knee. The vibrant red set off Celeste’s warm complexion and deep colored hair.

“Never underestimate the power suit, my dear.

Celeste let her shoulder length waves fall from a side-part and applied light makeup,

with strong lips. She looked like a forties diva. From the clothing, they'd moved on to the vehicle, electing to drive Addie's Lexus rather than Celeste's Honda. When they hit the road, both women felt ready to bust balls. Figuratively, of course.

"So, Addie, give me the Reader's Digest Condensed Version.

"You want the Condensed Version of my life?" Addie laughed out loud. "Or of my relationship with Raphael?"

"How 'bout both?" Addie drummed her fingers on the steering wheel.

"Raphael was a witness under my protection. I took a bullet for him. Thank God for Kevlar.

"Read that part on the Internet.

"Okay, so we now move on to me finding out that my husband and his firm were part of a money-laundering scam, with ties to organized crime. I left him ... tumbled into what I thought would be a quickie with Raphael. Someone in my own department spied on us, leaked the photos to my husband's law firm. His bosses tried to blackmail me into dropping the case. I'd already passed it off anyway, but called their bluff. Pictures hit the press, the department hung me out to dry.

"God, Addie, I'm sorry." Celeste couldn't help but wonder what would happen to her career if word came out that she'd been sleeping with Pierce. Hell, her boss knew already. If it was gonna hit the fan, he'd have tossed it there himself. But Addie, she'd lost her career and her husband in a stunning one-two blow.

"Well, I'd made a powerful enemy in the department, she was instrumental in making my life hellish enough to resign. The good news is that Raphael and I both have major lawsuits against the RCPD. They leaked Raphael's juvenile records to the press.

"Anyhow, Raphael has just sort of hung on, and I've been really happy to have him hanging on. We aren't exclusive, but ... I don't know. What can I say?"

"You can say you're in love.

Addie winced. With Raphael? He was dessert ... the reward for the crappy turns in her life. He was fun. He was the calm in her storm and the spice in her life. But love? "How are your daughters coping?"

"They were more upset that I was dating a younger man, an ex-stripper at that, than with the fact that their Dad was a criminal! Can you imagine?"

The pain fairly radiated from her face. "But they're getting used to it. I date other men sometimes, they don't seem to notice that. I think if I wasn't dating Raphael, they'd think he was really hot.

Addie swung onto the exit that led to the university. It was a small, private campus north of Rose City. The school was tucked away in groves of redwoods and other trees, looking like a gem in a vintage setting. Very posh. Old money. They pulled into a parking space designated for visitors, and stalked out of the Lexus. Celeste was aware of the sight they made, the strong contrast in their coloring and their sheer presence. Addie stood very close to Celeste's five foot nine, their heels elevated them even higher. Posh, radiant femininity barely masking their powerful athlete's bodies. Addie was a runner and swimmer, Celeste favored martial arts. She held a black belt in Kenpo, and had lately taken up Chinese Internal styles, mostly for the mental discipline. Her temper had been running a bit high these past few years.

As they saw their reflection in the doors of the Administration building, both women were very aware of themselves as highly polished weapons, ready to be aimed at a target. They glanced at each other, smiled, and asked for directions to the office of Professor Delilah Raines.

* * * *

To her credit, Professor Raines barely blinked an eye when confronted with the two women who had invaded her office. A strawberry blonde was casually surveying her bookshelves while the other sat easily, long legs crossed, scanning one of the Professor's own books.

"May I help you?" Delilah moved past the women and took a seat behind her desk.

As expected, she was arrayed in a two-piece skirt set of hand-batiked rayon, a wood-colored velvet jacket over the top. Her loose, wavy hair was more gray than black, her face was unapologetically unadorned. She'd probably been pretty once, but lines around her lips and between her brows attested to an unhappy temperament. Celeste handed the book off to Addie, who replaced it precisely where it had come from. Addie had a so-called 'photographic memory.' Celeste loved working with her. It was sort of like having an intelligent camcorder. Addie would remember every book, every item in the office that she laid eyes on. It was no wonder that Addie had her crazy days.

"Professor Raine, my name is Addie Kendall, I'm a private investigator from Rose City. This is my associate, Celeste Morales." They'd decided to put Addie in charge of this part of the interview. Good cop. Addie presented her ID, bypassing the professor's outstretched hand. She opened her very expensive briefcase and pulled out a manila file, setting it precisely between herself and Celeste.

"We're investigating the abduction of Pierce Wilder, a resident of San Francisco.

She pulled out a glossy of Pierce, laughing, his young nephew hoisted up over his shoulders. It had been taken at Christmas, just weeks ago. Celeste watched quietly as the woman reached out and touched the photo, and then pushed it away.

"I don't know the man. I don't know why you would think I know anything." Her lips were now pursed.

"But you know of him?" Addie prodded gently. The other woman stared at her for a long moment, and then nodded tersely. "You've been known to make it a habit to attend his workshops and fan appearances?" Celeste had to stifle a smile at the appalled look on Delilah's face.

"I'm certainly not a fan of that man! The idea is repugnant!"

"So you have hard feelings towards him?" Addie was leaning back in her chair, looking relaxed.

"No ... not in a personal way ... he just ..." she broke off, looking around her office. "Why aren't you asking about the two women who were kidnapped as well? Aren't they important enough? Don't they matter?" Addie smiled coolly. She had indeed been following the case!

"Of course they matter, but my main interest is in Mr. Wilder. I was contracted to locate him and apprehend his assailants. We believe that he is the focus of this crime, the women were taken simply because they were convenient. Mr. Wilder is clearly the most important factor in this case." She quickly shifted gears.

“You’re the chair of Women’s Studies here?” Professor Raines nodded, still preoccupied with the former topic. “What disciplines does your program encompass? Psychology, of course. Literature? Film Studies?”

“Yes, yes, we are a Liberal Arts school. We have a core in psych, multi-cultural issues, and so forth. Why do you think the women were just convenient?” Addie ignored the question.

“I saw that you had books on film making. Is that offered here as well?”

“You didn’t answer my question.” She was becoming angry.

“We think Pierce was taken because someone, probably an obsessive fan, decided to make their own movie, using him as the star, so to speak. We believe that his kidnapper is unsettled enough to kill him if he doesn’t cooperate.” Celeste leaned forward and held her eye. “We’re concerned that one of Mr. Wilder’s fans might just be inclined to love him to death. So to speak.

“That’s ridiculous. What does that have to do with me?”

Addie tapped a perfectly manicured nail on the desk.

“Your pattern of behavior indicates that you have an unhealthy obsession with Mr. Wilder. Tell me, Professor Raines, how many movies of his do you own?”

“Don’t you dare insult me like this! His movies are filth! They degrade and humiliate every woman walking on the earth!” Addie simply smiled serenely.

“Video on Demand makes it so much easier for a woman to watch adult films.

Have you downloaded his films that way? Or from the Fetish website? The BDSM is really interesting, don’t you think?” She turned to Celeste. “Raphael and I have been thinking about trying a few of his moves. I completely understand why Pierce has such a huge female fan base.” Professor Raines had gone red with fury. And fear. What exactly would they find on her computer? “I think you two need to leave. Now.” She was picking up her phone. “I’m calling Security.

“When you do, Professor, be certain to advise them that Detective Celeste Morales is here, consulting on the case for PDSF.” The woman sat the phone back down.

“If I leave now, Professor Raines, I will ask you to return to San Francisco with me for questioning.

Feeling that the woman was now thoroughly out of balance, Celeste began to pull photos from the folder.

“Can you please identify the women in these photos, Professor Raines?” Delilah didn’t so much as glance at the photos.

“You are in law enforcement, and you’re both women. You must realize that studies have proven that pornography contributes to domestic violence. That it contributes to sexual crimes against women. Why ... even the actresses are victimized! Often forced to enter the industry!”

Celeste paused for a moment, looking at Delilah. “The women that I’ve spoken with this week, all actresses or directors in the adult film industry are there by choice. They are better paid than their male peers, and proud of their careers.

Professor Raines snorted in disbelief.

“Why, exactly have you chosen Mr. Wilder to be the focus of your attention?” She

glanced at Addie meaningfully. “Perhaps something about Pierce Wilder compels you ... his appearance, the dominant nature he projects in his recent work. Perhaps you are familiar with his victimization by a woman that resulted in his entering the industry as a minor.

“He entered of his own free will. He’s stated so himself. As a failed actor, in his early twenties ...” Celeste shifted some papers, finding a small batch clipped together. Trevor had given these to her. The heavy artillery.

“Of course, Pierce doctored his biography somewhat. When Pierce was fifteen, he had a fight with his parents, he was unhappy about moving to the U.S., leaving his friends behind in Glasgow.

She pulled out a faded color photo, two teenage boys goofing off. “This was taken shortly before he and his best friend ran away together, thinking they could make it in Hollywood. When they arrived in LA by bus, a woman met them in the depot, offered them a ride. She very quickly put both boys to work in films, kiddie porn, scenarios of young boys being seduced by older women, sometimes men. She set them up in an apartment, restricted their movements, kept them busy on set. Introduced them to drugs. The drugs were to help enhance their performances.” She slid a photocopy across the table. “Here are some of the missing bulletins regarding Pierce’s disappearance.

The face on the bulletin had longish, eighties styled hair, a big-toothed grin. He was listed as standing five-foot-ten, weighing one-hundred-thirty, with red hair and blue eyes. He spoke with a Scottish accent, having immigrated just two years prior.

“When he turned eighteen, the woman who was handling Pierce and his friend pressured Pierce into marrying her. That way she was able to control his money and his career. She monitored him so tightly that he was unable to contact his family for several years.

Celeste paused, and then pushed a wedding photo from a Vegas chapel across the desk. A baby-faced Pierce was standing next to his bride, who was clearly in her forties.

“She threw the friend out on the street, he wasn’t able to maintain an erection for the duration of a shoot, so he wasn’t employable. Pierce would sneak out of the apartment and make sure Trevor had food.

“Pierce’s new ‘wife’ had a significant cocaine habit. When he didn’t bring in the sort of money she thought he should, she divorced him and threw him out as well.” Celeste paused, letting Pierce’s hidden history sink in.

“Considering their rough start, the two boys did all right. Trevor located auditions, the boys went together, they both scored roles in sit-coms, and Pierce had a short running role on a soap opera. He’d grown up enough that he was poised to become a heartthrob. And then his ex-wife came back in the picture, she let the word out that Pierce had been in porn. The industry was very fearful of AIDs at that time, and his porn history poisoned his legitimate career. After that, he managed a few modeling jobs, but as they grew desperate, he was forced back into the adult film industry. He eventually embraced it as his only way to survive.

Celeste sat back, looking over at Addie’s stoic face. She hadn’t shared Pierce’s full story with her.

“His story is actually uplifting, in a way. Pierce took night classes and finished his high school diploma. He got away from drugs and the hard lifestyle he’d started. When he

was thirty, he began to take the occasional college class.

She pushed across copies of his transcripts. "It looks to me as though he's close to his bachelor's degree in sociology. With a 3.9 GPA. Not bad for a man who doesn't think he's very bright.

The professor sat, staring at the array of photos in front of her, from the cherub-faced fifteen year old, to the laughing uncle.

"It takes a certain, special sort of person to survive what he survived, and come out not only intact, but an asset to society. You may not like what he does for a living, professor, but he's made it his mission to educate people about sexuality and safety." Celeste leaned over and gathered up the photos. She pushed the photos from the workshop to the forefront.

"Now I'm curious as to why more than one source has suggested to us that you might be a person of interest in this case. I personally don't think you had anything to do with it, but these women might. Can you please identify them for us?" Both women stared intently at the professor. "We will be able to track them down, I'm certain they are all Women's Studies majors here. But in the interest of time, which is rapidly passing for Mr. Wilder, it would be best if you could identify them and give us their contact information.

Without a word, Delilah bent over each photo and jotted down a name, address and phone number. She returned the photos to Celeste, who tucked them back into the file. She then pulled out another folder, this one full of 'missing' flyers.

"I'd also appreciate it if you would post these around the campus. Perhaps some of your grad students will assist you. Pierce's friends have come together to offer a reward for information. It's extremely large now.

Celeste smiled grimly as Delilah glared at the handsome face on the flyer. Unable to help herself, she leaned forward, speaking softly, almost in a whisper.

"If I find that you have any involvement in this kidnapping, Professor, believe me, I will see you punished, and punished hard. If you think men are the only ones who victimize women, you will be shocked at how women treat other women in prison." Delilah's eyes flew to hers and she blanched.

Celeste rose smoothly and started stalked out the door, letting Addie handle the scattered papers on the desk. Addie smiled cheerfully at the older woman.

"I'm pretty sure she means it, Professor. She and Pierce had planned a trip up the coast this weekend, and somebody came and messed up her plans." She at the sight of Delilah's shocked expression. "Yup, you can tell the girls in your posse that he's taken. By one of the top detectives in Northern California.

She tilted her head at the sound of Celeste's heels clicking down the hall. "And whoever took him from her should be very, very afraid.

She sat quietly for a moment longer, letting all that sink in.

"I was in the academy with Detective Morales. The story was that her parents were murdered by a drug dealer in Columbia when she was a little girl. When we graduated, Celeste went home for a visit. While she was in Bogotá, the dealer who contracted the hit on her family was found dead. It was very mysterious.

Addie snapped the case closed and rose, smiling grimly at the woman behind the desk. "But of course, that was just a rumor." She set a business card on the professor's desk and slowly pushed it in her direction.

Dr. Raines was white as a sheet. Addie left the office without the professor looking up at her. She walked down the hall, heels clicking. She swung open the door and let it close before slipping off her shoes and returning to the professor's office, eavesdropping on the telephone call she made. Addie glanced at her watch, noting the time. They'd have to go to the office and submit a request for the Professor's phone records. No smoking gun in the short conversation, but the foundation for a case. Addie squeezed her eyes shut and prayed for cooperation. Somehow, she had the feeling that Pierce Wilder's time was limited.

Chapter Eleven

“Same offer as before, Mr. Wilder. You can have this water, but in exchange, the women take blows. This time with a flogger. Maybe this is like the one you use on set.” She twirled it around, her inexperience made him wince. It had stiff leather strips on the outside, strips of rubber on the inside. All that rubber would sting like the devil. In her hands, it could do some damage. He was on the frame again, arms stretched out and bound tight. He was mostly numb, but his back stung and burned from the riding crop. They’d used it until the leather came unfurled and the hard plastic handle cut into his skin.

Pierce let his eyes close. He didn’t fight as the women wrestled the tank top over his head and dragged his pants down. He tried to convince himself that he was saving his energy to fight, but in reality, Pierce had no energy. Two, nearly three days with only a few ounces of water to sustain him had taken its toll.

The woman brought down the flogger in an experimental lash, and he sucked in his breath as it came down on his ass.

“God, woman, haven’t you watched even one of his movies? You don’t whip with those things!” Tessa was beyond offended. “This isn’t fucking sex play, this is torture and it’s gonna be murder pretty soon.

“So, Domme. Show me how it’s done.” The woman nodded her head and indicated that they let Tessa up from the table. She rose stiffly, rubbing her wrists where the wide leather bands had chafed. The woman handed her the flogger, Tessa stroked the tails through her hands.

“This is really cheap. You risk hurting someone with a flogger like this.” She rapidly brought the flogger into motion, whirling it into figure-eights. Without warning, she lashed the tails across the leader’s face and rammed the butt into another woman’s belly. Before she could bolt, the electric prod hit her in the thigh. She went down hard. Lupe shrieked and Pierce cursed. The tall woman jerked her off the floor, and then threw her back down with the strength of anger and youth.

“Susan!”

Susan looked up, seeing their tech girl standing, cell phone in hand. She stifled curse. Patty was their weak link. The sophomore had taken the job reluctantly, only after seeing the forged consents they’d provided her. She thought it was an elaborate experiment for a doctoral thesis. The little byplay she’d just witnessed might convince her otherwise. Susan fingered the welts stinging across her cheek.

“It’s the professor. She says she’s been trying to get you for hours now. She’s pissed.” Patty’s gamine little face was worried, she elaborately tried to ignore the naked man in front of her. As she turned away, Lupe caught her eye. Sweet, gentle Lupe, who they had figured could be manipulated. Her eyes were filled with hate. Patty cringed. There was blood on the wood of the cross that they’d kept the man secured. She’d told Patty these people had volunteered because they were into pain. She’d told her they’d signed consents,

allowing them to take abuse and be filmed.

The forged consents were kept in Susan's desk at the University, in the tiny office she'd been given as an assistant to the Dean of Women's Studies. Delilah's assistant.

Patty left the warehouse, returning to her post outside, hugely relieved that her job kept her out of the warehouse, away from the anger and the stench of pain ... safe in the little trailer where the tech equipment was stored. Unlike the others, she slept onsite, occasionally monitoring the cameras and microphones. Patty didn't like being the resident tech geek, but there it was. She didn't love it, but even leaving high school, had been unable to leave behind her talents in electronics and computer tech. Patty was the only woman on the project who wasn't doing it for a thesis or academic project, but rather for the small stipend that came with the job. Patty was just an undergraduate on a shoestring scholarship. This whole thing started as a boring project, and she was now becoming alarmed and unsettled.

Looking back at the rented warehouse, Patty wondered if the project was falling apart. It was going all wrong. She'd observed the subjects on the feedback, and not one of the three was behaving as the others had expected. The man in particular. She'd felt sick and angered after seeing the downloads Susan and Nancy had shown her. She was disgusted by the women he tortured nearly as much as by the man himself. But they hadn't expected his behavior in this extreme stress situation. They hadn't expected his Zen-like calm in the face of thirst and physical abuse. They certainly hadn't expected noble behavior from the Dom. Susan was probably frustrated, that's the only reason Patty could see for her actually causing injury to the man. From what Patty could see, he'd totally blown her thesis on the project.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow Patty would find a reason to visit the school, check on the releases and do a little research into BDSM. She didn't understand why the Doms were protecting each other, when by rights they were enemies. And Lupe was so angry. Surely she realized when she signed the consent that she was agreeing to an extreme experiment.

Patty shook her head and pulled open the door to the trailer, checked her equipment, and just for the hell of it, backed up all the data to a jump drive that she had hanging on her keychain.

* * * *

"This is really turning you on, isn't it?"

Pierce rotated his hands in the cuffs, trying for a little circulation. Susan stood and watched his face as Edie circled around to the back. "Its freeing, isn't it? Having all that power over a big man like me.

Susan nodded at the woman behind his back, and consciously, Pierce relaxed into the bite of the flogger, letting the pain roll over him. Just as he instructed his subs. Oh, it hurt, it hurt like a son-of-a-bitch, but without muscles tightening, flinching, it was bearable. He couldn't help seeing the woman's eyes flick to his cock.

"Expecting something? I'm not a masochist, pain doesn't get me off. Now my girlfriend ..." he whistled. "I just have to say her name ... Celeste ..." he whispered her name, willed his arousal, and listened to her curse as his erection started.

"She's dark and beautiful, and she trusts me not to betray her." The woman's eyes were fixed on his cock. He was well aware that she'd probably seen few in her life, and his was not for the novice. Or the squeamish lesbian. He knew many, many lesbians in and out

of the industry, and in all honesty, these were the first that fit that angry feminist stereotype. Toni was bi, but Linda was a lesbian, as was Marissa. There were others, and they didn't hate him because of his masculinity. Once again, his cock was a tool; a weapon to screw with a woman's head.

"Think you can take it, Susan? I don't think you can. I think its scaring the shit out of you just looking at it." Her color was up and she turned away. He might be bound, but Pierce felt the power slowly shifting. He caught Tessa's eye, she nodded slightly in approval. Put them on the defensive, keep them confused. If it took his penis, well, that's what he'd use. He remembered that furious, helpless feeling of having Sheila under his control, defying him in her complete submission.

"So, Susan, are you doing this for yourself, or to impress someone? Or maybe you're doing it for some sort of twisted revenge.

She gave a signal and the lashes started again. Pierce breathed steadily. She now knew what it felt like; Tessa's marks were still bright across her face. The rubber stung like a million beestings on his skin. He let the pain wash over his body, and didn't break eye contact with the woman.

"At first I thought it was the Professor, but now I don't think that anymore. The look on your face is too full of hatred ..." he shivered, feeling the trickle of blood down his back. The flogger had opened one of the cuts left by the riding crop. "I remember you from the workshop ... you were sitting next to someone I know ... Marissa. You sat next to Marissa. Is my ex-wife's girlfriend cheating with you, Susan? Or maybe she won't have you, and you're trying to win her this way.

Oh, score! Her eyes went wide with fury, and she snatched the flogger from the other woman, laying stinging lashes across his face, his neck and chest. The other woman got into the act, planting the prod against his hip, just inches from his penis. The pain was blinding and he shook, spittle dribbling from his parched mouth. He went limp, hanging from the frame, nerveless.

When he could draw breath, he started again.

"Sorry to be the one to say this Susan, but Marissa actually likes me. Yes, she's jealous, but we're still friends. Do you think she'll want you after this? What do you suppose Marissa thinks of torture?"

Pierce didn't have time to wince as she struck his face, over and over. When Edie shoved the prod into his belly, he was already unconscious.

* * * *

"Patty!" She jumped as Nancy jerked the door open and flopped down in a chair near the monitors. Nancy leaned forward and viewed the unfolding drama playing out. "Look, Edie's gonna hit him with the prod again!" She released a choked sound. A laugh. Patty didn't look up from the raw footage she was editing. Nancy sounded like she was enjoying the unfolding drama a little too much.

"Here's your cell." The little phone was tossed. Patty caught it neatly in the air and clipped it to her waistband. "Susan was pissed that you came in. That altered the experiment. Big time." Nancy twisted around in the office chair. "You broke the fantasy, sort of knocked down the fourth wall, so to speak.

"Sorry." The other woman snorted at the apology. "What else was I supposed to do,

Nancy?”

No answer, so Patty returned to work. “I need to go to the campus tomorrow. I’ve got to pick up books for my new classes.

“I’ll do it. I have an appointment with my advisor anyway.

“Maybe I can ride with you then, I’ve got to visit my department, try to over enroll class. It’s amazing how hard it is to get into Renaissance Poetry!” This wasn’t a task Nancy could do for her, so after a moment, the other woman shrugged.

“Whatever. I’ll pick you up at 7:30. We can’t be gone long, though. I’m back on shift at ten.” Patty nodded.

“Is this thing going to end Friday? It seems a little off schedule.

“Well, it isn’t going as Susan expected, but she’ll still pull good data off it. It’ll support her thesis.

Only if Susan did some major tweaking to the data. And after seeing what Susan was capable of with a flogger, Patty had no doubt Susan had the guts to cheat on her doctoral thesis.

“Hey Nancy?” The other woman frowned down at the monitor displaying the man.

She grunted in response. “The man, Wilder ... he didn’t look too good. Are you guys monitoring his health?”

“He’s fine.” She spoke in a clipped tone, clearly not wishing to discuss the experiment.

“I knew you were going to withhold food, but not water. Are you sure ...?”

“I said he’s fine, Patty. He gets water when he goes to the bathroom. Now that’s enough.” She rose, clearly in a temper. “I’m doing a burger run, want anything special?”

Patty turned back to her monitor and shrugged. “Whatever. I’m not choosy.

When Nancy left, Patty scooted her chair to back to the man’s monitor. He didn’t look good at all, eyes closed, lips moving slightly. Shit! She zoomed the ceiling camera slightly, focusing on his face. Even with the pixilation, she could see that his eyes were glassy, his lips parched and bleeding. They’d beat the shit out of him! She toggled her camera control, finding Susan and Edie. They were looking at the three subjects, heads close, talking. She upped her audio levels to catch their conversation. She caught nervous laughter. Sick bitches! But under the laughter, they were upset. He’d done something that had shaken them both.

Patty returned the cameras to their normal settings. She propped her feet up on the table, biting her lip as she watched ... really watched the scene unfolding on the screen.

She unclipped her cell phone, began to dial out. Nothing. She frowned at the black face on the display, and pushed the power button. Nothing. The phone had been fully charged when she took it to Susan. She tossed it onto her little cot and turned back to the monitor. She could bide her time. She hoped the three subjects could as well.

* * * *

“Toni, please, don’t do this ... God, baby, I love you!” Pierce thought his heart was going to break as the love of his life prepared to walk out the door. This time was for real. “Come on, Toni, things have been good for us, it’ll get better!” She turned her child-like face to his, tears welling up.

“She’s waiting for me Pierce. I love you, baby, but I love her...different. I’m

sorry!”

Her hand was on the door, clearly she was having a tough time opening it. She was wearing an old, plaid flannel shirt over her tube top and shorts. Toni never had good clothing sense, she tended to wear whatever was at hand, whether it fit or not. She was leaving him while wearing his shirt! Frozen in his tracks, Pierce watched her open the door and step out into the darkness, leaving him alone. He felt his throat tighten, he knew he was going to choke to death. His eyes burned, but no tears spilled. When the sob broke, his body felt ripped apart. The second and third sobs were no easier.

“Baby, don’t ... Toni!”

He shook and shuddered until a cool hand settled on his brow.

“Don’t cry ... shhh ...” He opened his eyes to see Celeste, her dark eyes glowing with ... love? How could someone like her love him? “Just be easy, love, things will be all right, I promise.” Suddenly, Pierce was on his side in a clean, cool brook, like the ones that flowed out of the loch’s at home, crystalline water flowing over grey and brown and green.

“I want to take you home, Celeste, to Scotland ... there’s a place, so pretty ...” he closed his eyes and let his mouth fall open, letting the water spill unchecked into his parched mouth, feeling it nourish his tissues. It washed away the blood and filth that soured his body.

She was laying next to him, naked, her body puckered with Goosebumps, her hair plastered to her skull. She was pretty all wet like this, her body womanly, full of promise.

“I promise you, Pierce, things will be all right. I’m coming to help you.” She ran her fingers through his spiky, wet hair and held him tight.

* * * *

“What’s wrong with him?”

Tessa jerked, it was surely after midnight, and their captors were rarely in the warehouse this late. It was the woman who’d entered earlier. The one they’d never seen before. She hoped the tearstains weren’t still visible on her cheeks.

“He’s delirious, hallucinating. They’re dehydrating him to death. His wounds might be infecting as well.” That was Lupe. Amazing, that Lupe was the one who’d grown more grounded as time went on.

Patty stood, not believing what she was hearing, or seeing. “He needs a hospital, then, right away.” Patty moved to his side, lifting his head slightly and letting water dribble past his lips from the bottle in her hand. Just tiny amounts, she knew that she shouldn’t let him have too much to start with. It seemed to help.

“His bindings are too tight, especially on his legs. Can you loosen those?” Tess was sitting upright now, as she was cuffed only by her wrists. Lupe was sitting up too, blinking and cautious. Patty winced as she looked at his nearly black toes. He was naked and reeked of blood and urine and something much worse. Patty thought maybe this was the scent of death. She bit her lip and began to rub his legs, hoping to stimulate his circulation. His temperature was too high, given his naked skin and the cool coastal air.

“Why are they doing this?” Lupe’s voice came out on a hiss. Patty kept rubbing, her mind rolling with grief, guilt and fear.

“They told me it was a scientific experiment. For a Psychology thesis. They said you had volunteered for money, that you’d signed consent forms.

Tessa snorted. “They kidnapped us off the streets! Don’t you read? Watch the

news? This guy should have been worth at least some coverage!" Patty shook her head.

"I've been out here for a week, they wouldn't let me leave, said they needed me on site in case anything went wrong with the equipment." She moved to his other leg, hoping the color really did look better in the dim light of her headlamp.

"I'd unlock you, but Susan keeps the keys. They stranded me out here tonight. No car, no phone. I don't even have Internet access." She moved up and offered more water, glad to see that he took it willingly. "I've looked for bolt cutters, anything that I might use, but for now, you guys are up shit creek." She walked over to Tessa, offering a bottle of water. She then dug one out of her pocket for Lupe.

"I'm supposed to drive in to the campus with Nancy in the morning. I'm thinking they're getting suspicious of me and don't plan to let me go." She propped herself against Pierce's big wooden cross. She swallowed hard. "I think they don't plan to let any of us go. She looked around the dismal room, feeling the weight of the world on her very slender shoulders. "Guys, I don't know what to do!"

"First of all, what's your name?" Tessa forced herself to calm.

"I'm Patty Liu.

"Okay, Patty, where in hell are we?" That brought a chuckle from both Patty and Lupe.

"We're on University property, about ten miles from the campus." Damn.

"Do you think you can walk out? Get us help?" She saw the girl's eyes dart to the door of the warehouse.

"It's a pretty rough walk, and foggy out tonight. I could do it on a clear night." Tessa bit her lip and looked at Pierce's prone form. Could he hold out another 24 hours? She just wasn't certain.

"What do you think the likelihood is that they'll take you to the campus tomorrow?"

Patty shrugged.

"They probably won't. And if I take off on my own ... it'll give me away. They'll panic." She thought for a few moments. "I could leave a note, say I'm out running." She looked at the stupefied look on Tessa's face. "I run cross-country. It's not odd for me to go out for a couple hours." She looked around the room at the cameras. "I have to do some work first, alter the time signatures on the footage, so they won't know I stopped the recording. That way, they won't figure out I was here." She automatically turned to Pierce and gave him a little more water. "He needs help, and the faster I can get it to him, the better. I'll go to Professor D and call the police from her office.

Tessa looked up sharply. "Can you trust her? She's that old bat who was at Pierce's workshop. These girls all seem to worship the ground she walks on.

Patty snorted. The sound was odd coming from such a fragile looking young woman. "I'm not one of her girls, and I've never gone to any sex workshops. God, my mother would kill me!" After she killed her, she'd ship her off to Taiwan to stay with family who would teach her proper behavior!

"Professor D volunteered at the community center where my mom was learning English. She's cool, once you get past her women's lib stuff. She'll help me." Patty looked at the floor a moment.

"They showed me videos, from the computer. Him ... doing things to women.

She kept her head averted.

Tessa looked at the young woman before her, wondering how to explain BDSM to an innocent. Unexpectedly, it was Lupe who answered.

“Patty, Senor Wilder is an actor in movies for adults. What you saw was a film that he made for people who are excited by sex while being tied up and punished. What he does in movies is with actresses who are paid, and enjoy what he does to them.” Patty didn’t answer. Tessa spoke. “He is a very nice man, and would never hurt a woman the way these women have hurt him. The clips they showed you were very adult, and probably very out of context.” Patty nodded then, and gave him more water. “Did you know his girlfriend is a Detective? He’s been having hallucinations about her.

“I thought the movies were real. I thought he was” She trailed off, feeling foolish. Patty looked at the bottle, estimated that he’d taken at least half. She shone the light on his feet, the color was better. Still ominous, but better. He might lose toes. Hopefully not.

“I need to bind him again, but I’ll try to keep them loose. It needs to look the same as when they left him.” She busied herself, rubbing his legs again, and then his arms. She winced when she saw dried blood on his body. Under his body, as well. He was covered with bruises and welts. Patty wanted to wash him off, remove the awful stench, but she couldn’t.

The plan percolated in her mind, it all hinged on seeking help, and returning, nobody the wiser. So occupied in her thoughts was she, that she jumped and squealed when a strong hand trapped her arm. He glared, fire in his eye, until he saw that she was helping.

“Who are you?” His voice was hoarse, the accent making it difficult for her to understand. She lifted the water to his mouth.

“I’m nobody. Now just drink.” He swallowed, choked, and swallowed some more.

“I’m nobody! Who are you?”

Are you nobody, too?

Then there’s a pair of us - don’t tell!

They’d banish us, you know.

Patty grinned. So he liked Dickinson? He couldn’t be all that bad. She returned:

“How dreary to be somebody!”

How public, like a frog

To tell your name the livelong day

To an admiring bog!”

Pierce actually broke a smile. For the first time in days, he felt like maybe he wasn’t going to die.

“You’re the eye in the sky?” She looked confused, and he rolled his eyes up toward the camera. She flushed and nodded. “The camera’s always been my best friend.” He murmured, his eyes drifting downward. “Thank you, I can feel my feet.” She gave him the rest of the bottle then glanced at her watch. There was a lot to do before she ran.

Chapter Twelve

Patty broke out of the woods on the very back edge of the campus, chest heaving, lungs burning. She checked her watch, it was early still. Before eight. The professor should be arriving soon, and the women probably wouldn't show up at the warehouse for another couple hours. She had a lot to do, but at the moment, she couldn't move.

Legs shaking, she moved forward slowly, toward Founder's Hall, where some of the staff offices were located. She coughed and spat. Never before had she thought that her running might save a life. Her own life. With that thought in mind, she decided to get to the hall; if the Professor wasn't there, she'd at least call 911. Hopefully they'd believe her.

She was grateful to enter the building through the rear. The broad flights of stairs up at the front entrance would have been beyond her. She moved down the quiet hallways, wishing other students were around, that she could simply wander in on the crowds and flow to her classroom, comfortable in her anonymity.

That man knew Dickinson! Before she left, he confided that he liked Robert Burns best, as any Scotsman should. She'd laughed when he recited a broadly accented poem about a bug on a woman's bonnet. Between the odd language of the poem, and his deliberately broad accent, she hadn't understood much, but what she did catch was clever. And though hoarse, his voice was beautiful. He'd smiled at her through his bloody and battered face.

Patty heard footsteps and froze, realizing she was near Susan's tiny office. She clapped her hand over her mouth to still her breathing as she realized it was Susan walking quickly down the hall to her office. She had to pass the open door to reach Professor D.

Patty pressed her back against the wall, partially hidden by a column when she heard Susan's door close, and then lock from the inside. She bit her lip and peeked around the corner, and then quickly walked past the closed door. Down the hall, up a short flight of stairs and to the hall which housed the faculty offices.

At some point she became aware of fluttering papers on the walls. It was early for students to be posting, but many were on campus preparing for classes. She slowed, and came to a stop. Patty plucked the neon colored flyer from the wall. She looked back, they were scattered all through the hallways. A handsome, healthy Pierce Wilder smiled from the flyer. *Missing. Endangered. Reward Offered.* A phone number. A website. This is why they didn't want her on campus. This was her death warrant.

She carefully folded the paper and tucked it into her pocket. Patty took a deep breath and started for the professor's office. No more than three feet away from the glass doors, she faltered, remembering that Professor Delilah had phoned her, looking for Susan. Why would the professor know to call her number to find Susan? Heart racing, she pulled out the dead cell phone. She'd been wrong about the man, was she wrong about Professor D? Would the woman who helped her mom and Grammie learn English do something so heinous? She shook her head, calling herself a hundred sorts of fool and swung open the door.

* * * *

“Patty! What are you doing here so early? Aren’t you helping Susan with her project?” Patty flushed. She slid into the chair opposite the Professor’s desk and looked around the room, seeing all the collected objects of a lifetime. The woman had traveled the world, met with so many, helped so many. She slid the paper out of her pocket and laid it flat on the table.

“Do you know about this man?”

Delilah’s breath caught. She reached out and pulled the paper over, using only the tip of a finger. She tapped the paper, then rose, closing and locking the door behind Patty. She returned to her seat and sat down, looking very old.

“I’ve spent years crusading against this man and what he represents. I made it my main purpose in life to display him to the world as a monster ... an abomination. But ... after all that, he’s only a man.” Her fingertip traced a circle on the paper. “I’m afraid that my hatred for him was contagious and very blind. I’m so afraid that this is my fault.

She lay the paper down and raised her fingers to her face, rubbing her temples.

“After the detective came here asking me about him, all I could think was that I’d caused this horrible thing to happen, and I don’t really even know him. He has people that love him. Did you know that his ex-wife is so worried about him that she can’t work? And that his family has flown in from Canada, even some from Scotland?” She tapped the flyer. “They left me twenty copies. I made more and posted them all over. God. What have I done? Not just to him and those women, but if it’s one of my girls

“I know where they are. Professor ... Susan’s thesis project! I know where they are!”

Delilah’s face went white. Hands shaking, she clasped the phone, quickly dialing number.

“Yes ... this is Professor Delilah Raines.” Her voice warbled. “I need you to listen ...” she handed the phone off to Patty, who looked at it as if it would bite.

“Hello?”

“Hello, this is Detective Celeste Morales. To whom am I speaking?” Past her velvety accent, Patty could hear the hollow sound of fatigue. Fear.

“Detective Morales, I’m Patty, Patty Liu. I know where Pierce Wilder is. He needs help.” For the first time, she broke, tears coming, sobs breaking hard. “He’s hurt and sick and they’re going to kill him if they know I left ... the women, too!”

In reality, she’d run to save herself, only praying that she might help them as well.

Such a selfish woman! No, a selfish girl. Someone like her was just a girl.

“Where are you Patty?” She looked at the Professor.

“I came to Professor Raine. She’s a family friend. She called you.” Patty sniffed, wiping her nose on a tissue Delilah offered. “They told me it was an experiment, for school. But I found out they are hurting them, and they kidnapped them ... they wouldn’t let me leave, so I ran.

“Okay, Patty. I’m coming out there. I’ll be there very soon. A friend of mine will come, too. I’ll come to the Professor’s office, and we’ll talk, and we’ll take care of all three of them. All right?”

Patty agreed.

She and the Professor sat unmoving in the office for the next hour, waiting for

Celeste to come.

* * * *

This time they came in Addie's pick-up truck, the blue one that looked like a piece of crap, but had something miraculous under the hood. The interior was nicely tricked out behind smoked glass. This was her surveillance truck. It was not shabby enough to cause alarm, but ordinary and plain. Celeste bent down and plucked an opened condom wrapper off the floor.

"Did you have a good time?"

"Shit!" Addie flushed just a little. She plucked it away and tucked it into litterbag.

"How did you manage in here?" Celeste looked around, saw a heel scuff on the headliner. "God, Addie, I don't know whether to be disgusted or jealous!"

"Be jealous! It was awesome!" She shot Celeste a salacious look. "I'll loan it to you after your guy is up and around. Just don't go digging into my toy box." She nodded at the box that Celeste was straddling. Celeste lifted the lid and rolled her eyes. "How much of that is legal? And why is it just sitting on the floor?" Addie grinned.

"I plead the Fifth on the first question. And would you rather me store it in the bed of the truck?"

Celeste rolled her eyes. She checked her own weapons. She thought for a moment, and then lifted the toy box lid, fishing out several pairs of flex cuffs. Just in case.

"So, based on what the girl said, there are three kidnappers likely to be on site. We need to smuggle Patty back in and wait for back-up, she thinks they'll kill the prisoners if they think she's run.

"Why, exactly, are we waiting for back-up?" Addie's voice dripped with innocence. Celeste grimaced.

"Procedure, my dear. Has it been so long?"

Addie blew a raspberry. It had been less than a year, but Addie sometimes had ... moments. Even as a highly decorated detective, she'd tended to buck the system.

"What if it looks like he's in trouble?"

Celeste pondered the question. The girl said he was sick, but didn't say what was wrong.

"So put this together for me, Detective Morales. Did the girl shed any light on who did this, and why?"

Celeste frowned. She'd been at her house when the call came. She'd been lagging after a late night of interviews. Marissa had been most enlightening.

"Toni, you know, Pierce's ex?" Addie nodded, glancing at her friend. "Well, her girlfriend Marissa had a very brief affair with a woman named Susan. Professor Raine's assistant. Marissa ended the affair very quickly, but the two women maintained a friendly relationship.

"Was Susan the one with her at the workshop?" Celeste nodded.

"Marissa believes that Susan might have an unhealthy interest in Pierce, partly triggered by the Professor's personal vendetta against him, but also by Marissa's jealousy of him and Toni. She didn't know for sure if it was Susan, but was suspicious enough to tell me all her dirt.

Having Patty drop Susan's name on the phone had tied it all together. A sick

obsession masked in a phony doctoral thesis. Susan had probably gotten a hefty grant for her little project as well.

“Addie, do you think we can get into the trailer Patty told me about?” Addie shrugged, passing cars like nobody’s business.

“I don’t know, we’ll have to talk to the girl. See what she thinks.” She downshifted and sailed up a hill.

“So what if backup doesn’t come in a timely fashion?”

“God, Addie, let up! They’ll come. It just has to go through the proper channels!”

“And what shift does the lead detective work? He’s fucking two hours away, and he’s probably at home, sound asleep!” Celeste grimaced and pulled out her cell phone, calling her temporary boss.

* * * *

In work gear, the women were no less intimidating than in couture. Patty blinked at the two tall women that filled the room with their presence. One, the redhead, was wearing dark green fatigue pants and a turtleneck sweater, vest layered over the top. Patty didn’t want to think about what was in all those pockets. Addie was wearing fingerless gloves, and lace-up boots. The sort of boots that she could run and dodge in, but would leave an ugly impact if she kicked someone. Shitkickers. Steel toes, all the way.

The brunette was a bit taller. She was in black cargo pants and a turtleneck. The high-neck knit shirt seemed to be the choice of fashion conscious killer babes. She had a service revolver strapped into a shoulder holster and a loose jacket over the top of that. Her gloves were tucked into a pocket and she had dark glasses dangling from a lanyard around her neck. Patty supposed she’d left her sniper rifle and Uzi out in the car. She just looked like the sort. Her hair was pulled tightly back, and a billed cap was stuffed into yet another pocket.

“So, Patty, do you think the two of us can infiltrate the grounds, and get into that trailer you’re in?” Celeste had her hip propped on the desk. She was also wearing those military style boots, laced up almost to the calves, her pants tucked into them. She caught Patty looking at them speculatively.

“They’re functional, Patty, they work well on lots of surfaces, and tucking them in keeps the ticks off my skin. That’s the major reason we’re all covered. We’ll have hats on as well.

Addie held her straight face and nodded. “Personally, I just like the way it looks. But now that you mention ticks...” She gave an exaggerated shudder.

“I can only hide one in the trailer. Maybe one inside, one outside?” Celeste nodded.

“Can you bring the cameras in close enough for me to evaluate their health? We have back-up requested, but it’s routing through San Francisco. My boss is about an hour away, plus whatever time it’ll take to get to the warehouse.” No doubt, her back up were kicking their heels, waiting to be briefed. That’d take time as well.

“I can do a tight close-up, with color and sound. That’s how I figured out he was in trouble in the first place. They’ve been withholding water and food from him since Monday night.” Celeste squeezed her eyes shut. It was now Friday morning

“They’ve were beating him most of yesterday. They told him he could drink, but if he did, they’d beat the women. If he didn’t, they’d give him their blows instead. Sick

cookies. I'm sorry, Professor D, but they're really disturbed." Patty glanced at the professor. She looked wilted and crushed. She wondered if they'd need to have an ambulance come for her.

"Anything else we need to know?"

Patty nodded at Celeste. "They've bound him so tightly that I think his toes are getting gangrene. Maybe his fingertips as well. When I gave him water last night, I undid the straps and rubbed his arms and legs. They've let him loose maybe once every twenty-four hours. They've been abusing him pretty steadily for a couple days now. He's hurt. They give him choices; if he drinks, the women get beat. If he refuses, they beat him. He's protecting the others. I think Susan wants them all dead.

She looked at Celeste sadly. "Are you his girlfriend?" Celeste paused, and then nodded. "He dreamed about you, talked to you in his sleep. He knows you're coming.

Celeste heaved a deep breath, rubbed her eyes to fight back the tears that suddenly overwhelmed her. Her adrenaline charged elation had fled, leaving behind nothing but sick, debilitating fear. She couldn't lose him.

"What other symptoms of dehydration does he have?" She pulled herself together, focused on business.

Patty shot them off. She knew enough about dehydration through running.

"Dizziness, he's not urinating anymore. Fevered skin, sunken eyes, now he's delirious. It's really bad. But I got about eight ounces of water down him over an hour. Maybe more. He woke and talked to me ... recited poetry." She smiled. "Robert Burns and Emily Dickinson. Silly guy was trying to take care of me, too.

Celeste's face stayed grim, but her eyes smiled. "We need to hit the road, girls. We don't want the women missing you. She stood and looked from the Professor to Patty. "I want you to know that I think it's unforgivable that we have to take Patty back. It puts her back in danger. But in order to give our back-up time to come, they need to see her face." "I owe it to them, Detective. If I hadn't been so damn naïve

Celeste cut the girl off. Hell, everyone in the world made mistakes. Her parents had learned that the hard way. Permanently. Even at her young age, she known her father's vendetta would get him killed. But she hadn't expected to lose her mother as well. And going back to Bogotá? She'd nearly gotten herself killed. It was sheer, dumb luck that she'd managed to escape from the middle of a fire-fight between two rival drug gangs. Someone else had done the job she hadn't had the spine to complete.

They peered out the door, making sure the hall was clear of any but the most innocuous students. Susan's office light was still on. That was good. They'd beat her to the warehouse. Hell, maybe they should just arrest her ... Celeste shuffled the women back to the office and called Security. By the time they came, Addie had already popped the door and found the office empty. Maybe things were worse than they realized. The three took off for Addie's truck at a run.

Chapter Thirteen

The drive had been a boondoggers dream, thumping on and off road, through trenches of mud and over downed trees. Addie's glee in her truck was apparent. Well, until another empty condom wrapper fell into sight ... this one from the sun visor. She shrugged and tossed it out the window while Celeste laughed. Patty was blissfully unaware of the weapons stored under her feet. She had glimpsed some promising cases stowed behind the seat, she'd asked Addie if they were sniper rifles. Celeste shook her head; the tiny little woman had a healthy interest in their tech.

They were within a mile of the warehouse when Addie pulled the truck off-road, hiding it deeply in the woods. The mud camouflaged it well, and she was able to move it closer to the clearing that sheltered the warehouse. Addie cut the engine about a half mile away, not wanting to be too far, but also aware of how sound carried in the hills.

As planned, Patty stretched and began running, finding one of the deer trails she favored, one that would bring her out on the far side of the warehouse. Addie and Celeste geared up and crept in, watching the warehouse with field glasses. There were two vehicles near the warehouse, and if she tilted her head just right, Celeste could see the trailer that housed the technical equipment. She checked her watch ... it was ten AM.

Within moments, Patty came into view, running swiftly, but raggedly, coming to halt in the clearing. She stopped with hands on her hips, lean runner's legs glossy with sweat. She leaned forward from the waist, rotating a bit before settling onto a patch of grass and beginning stretches. Her head tilted up, she laughed, and then a woman moved into view. She tossed Patty a bottle of water.

"Don't drink it, baby!" Addie was muttering under her breath. They watched as Patty cracked the lid and held the bottle to her mouth briefly, then spat the contents. Normal runner's behavior. She ran the water over her thick black hair and down her back. She screwed the lid back on and resumed stretches. After a few moments, she made her way to the trailer.

The women crept through the foliage down toward the trailer. Celeste slipped in the ear bud that Addie had pulled from her toy box. She'd give her right hand for tech like this at work! They nodded at one another, and then split up, Celeste heading for the trailer, Addie began to move around the warehouse, checking for entrances and windows.

* * * *

Patty listened carefully while she showered, standing on her toes to see out the window. She knew they were out there, but couldn't see or hear either of the women. Weird, since she could hear the comings and goings of the other women just fine. She turned off the shower and towed down, dressing in cargo shorts and running shoes. Frankly, she was shot to hell, ten miles out, then one in. That wasn't what had her worn down, though. It was the tension, the fear. She'd smelled something in the bottle, saw Nancy's frown when she upended the bottle over her hair and neck. Thankfully, whatever

the drug was hadn't gone in through the skin. Now, she was sitting, sprawled as much as a petite sized woman could sprawl, and evaluated her workspace.

They'd been here. She was able to map their journey through the night's footage on the computer. Thankfully, she'd been pretty slick with the time signature, looping video of the sleeping captives during the hour she'd spent with them. The jump drive was safely in Addie's truck, locked in some obscure cubby. She'd have smiled about that wild ride; weapon's rattling and condom wrappers falling, if not for the fear. Maybe someday she'd be able to laugh again.

Maybe someday she'd have sex in a pick-up truck.

* * * *

"Hey ... you just gonna let him lay there and die?" Tessa bellowed at the women in the room. They were all there at the same time. She was panicking. Pierce's breath was coming out in a wheeze, and she swore he'd seized at some point in the night.

"Please, please ... he is so sick ... he is good man! Don't let him die!" Lupe's voice was tight with fear.

Please, God ... not right in front of us ... Tessa was afraid if he died, they would quickly follow. The women ignored them. She couldn't quite hear what they were saying, but it was about Patty. And a trip to the campus. And keeping her in the dark, while she watched the whole fucking thing from the tech trailer. Tessa's hair came up on the back of her neck ... had the girl been caught? Had she returned? "Hey! Hey!" She decided it was time to become the squeaky wheel. "You fucking bitches! You want to be murderers? You want to know the fucking shit those women will do to you in prison?" She broke, gathering her breath, ready to launch into her next rampage.

"You're a bunch of dumb bimbos if you think you're gonna walk away from this! You left a trail a mile wide, and the big guy there is dating a detective. You're gonna do time for sure, but if he dies, you'll have a needle in your vein!"

* * * *

"Lord, does she always go off like that?" Celeste wanted to hold her fingers to her ears. "That woman can swear!"

Patty jumped and grinned as Celeste suddenly appeared behind her. "They didn't expect her. They didn't expect Lupe, either. But Lupe snarls and bites. She's very quiet, and very dangerous.

Patty typed a quick command, picking up the conversation of the women. They listened quietly. "They know." Patty's voice was unnaturally quiet. Celeste shook her head.

"They suspect. Our back up checked in, they're about forty-five minutes out still. We need to hang on.

Her accent grew stronger as her tension grew. She paced as much as she could, watching Pierce's monitor as she walked, surveying her weapons, making plans, discarding them. Her heart pounded, her stomach felt like lead. She needed to get in there. She needed to touch him, to know for herself that he'd be okay. Celeste blinked hard, willing away tears.

There was a sudden commotion in the warehouse. The women were at Pierce's side again. He was seizing. Hard. His body bucked against the restraints, and the three women worked at loosening him from the cross. Maybe they lacked the will to actually watch him

die.

Celeste's hand raised to her ear.

"Addie, he's seizing, they're distracted. We've got to go in!"

How quickly things changed! She burst out the door of the trailer, instructing Patty to lock the door and hit the floor. She met Addie at the side entrance to the warehouse.

Guns drawn, the two women cracked the door, getting a feel of the place ... it was dimly lit ... they quickly slipped in and closed the door, melting into the shadows. The women were surrounding him, uncertain what to do...Lupe was screaming, Tessa caught Celeste's eye, then opened her mouth to contribute to the noise.

Before they were aware of company, the kidnappers were faced with two very angry women with guns. When Edie lunged at Celeste with the cattle prod, she went face down onto the concrete, one kneecap broken, elbow dislocated and hands secured behind her back before the others had time to react. As she screamed in agony, Pierce's hand shot out, trapping Susan's arm in an iron grip, twisting her to an impossible position, head dangling toward the floor, her breathing constricted. Nancy turned to run and found herself facing the business end of Addie's gun. She slowly put her hands above her head. Celeste moved quickly to secure first Susan, and then Nancy.

"Ladies ... and I use that term loosely

"Addie, this is my part

"Damn ... I miss that part.

"As she was saying ... ladies. You are under arrest for kidnapping, assault, battery, attempted murder ... and I'm certain the DA will come up with many more charges. I am now about to read you your rights. You have the right to remain silent.

* * * *

Addie and Celeste were herding the women away from the captives, Addie nodded at Celeste as she finished with the Miranda. She had the women down on their faces and laced up like little piggies at butchering time. And she wasn't gentle. She then searched for the keys to the women's shackles. She found them, searched for weapons and other dangerous evidence, and then left the rest for the real cops. She quickly unshackled the two very angry women, and then joined Celeste at Pierce's side.

Blood streamed from his mouth from where he'd bitten his tongue. His face was mess. His body was bloody and battered. He was unable to rise from the wooden apparatus. Addie ran from the warehouse, met Patty who was emerging from the trailer, where she'd watched the takedown. She radioed their back-up, advising the need for an airlift for the injured man. By the time she signed off, the first vehicle could be heard crashing through the forest, much too large for the tiny access road. She rolled her eyes. So much for stealth.

* * * *

Celeste quickly undid the bindings on his lower body, cutting quickly through the rough rope with a sharp utility knife. To her surprise, his hand came up to stroke her hair.

"God, Pierce ... you look awful!" He laughed, hoarsely.

"And you look beautiful." He paused for a moment, looking over her stealth gear.

"Nice get-up. When I get home ..." he wagged a brow suggestively and she laughed. "Thankfully, the girl left the bindings loose, so I got my hand free." His hands looked well enough, but his feet ... Celeste bit her lip and looked away.

"I faked the seizure, figured that would give you the chance to get in here." He stopped speaking as she held a bottle to his lips. He rinsed and spat blood from his mouth, and then swallowed again. She knew he was lying. People don't bite their tongues when they fake. He was alive, but in trouble.

"How'd you know we were here?" He glanced up.

"Camera's always been my friend." She followed his look, directly over his head.

A tiny camera was suspended. A red light burned faintly. "She flashed the light when you got here." He stopped for a moment. "I can hear your backup coming. If they'd heard that, they'd have run, probably killed us first." Celeste caught Addie's gaze and nodded. Her friend's instinct to act immediately was correct.

Tessa and Lupe joined them. "We decided to take control of our fate. I just didn't expect such a realistic diversion from you, Pierce.

Lupe approached the table and leaned down, kissing Pierce lightly on the head.

"He saved us all, Detective. He took our punishments, though they were worse on him than they would have been on us. He kept them confused and worried long enough for Patty to get you and get back.

Pierce tried to move, and then groaned at the pain.

"Fuck. My skin is stuck to the wood." Celeste heard the police vehicles pulling up.

In a moment, Detective Vietti was striding into the room, still in his black suit. She sincerely hoped that an ambulance was out there somewhere.

"Mr. Wilder. I'd shake your hand, but I don't think that's such a good idea now.

Mistress Tessa, Senorita Lupe?" They nodded, both realizing they were very much worse for the wear. "Mr. Wilder, we have medics pulling up outside, but we're going to airlift you, and drive the women out." As he spoke they made way for a pair of paramedics who promptly took over, checking Pierce's blood pressure and temperature. They hooked up IV lines and then puzzled out how to move him off the cross without the dried blood pulling his skin away. Celeste stood back, hovering, happy to turn the case over to everyone else and breathe through the letdown. When they put Pierce on a gurney and carted him out the door, she simply stood and watched him disappear.

Addie moved to her side, rubbing her arm and introducing herself to Vietti, while new pair of medics took over Tessa and Lupe. Shortly, they were also on gurneys with IV lines. The three kidnappers were in sheriff's cars, separated and cuffed. Patty was giving her statement to a uniformed officer.

"What's going to happen to her?" Addie was very worried for the girl. She was clearly an accessory, though she'd been duped into the role.

Vietti shrugged. "It's up to the DA, and he probably won't want to prosecute the rescuer. Hell, she'll probably collect the reward!" He let out an amused huff of air. "She'll probably get immunity for her testimony. I'm not charging her today though." He looked around, his tired eyes taking in the crime scene. "I need a team in that trailer outside!"

Addie waited until the Detective left and approached the young woman.

"Patty, they probably won't press charges, all of us will put in a word for you to the DA. But if anything does happen, take this card, you call the number. That's my office, I work for an attorney. He's one of the best bottom-feeders I know. And I'm one of the best PIs out there, so you can trust us." Patty's wet eyes got even wetter and she hugged Addie

hard. “Also, I can always use someone doing tech for me, so if you need work anytime

“I really just want to go home.” She sniffed and wiped her eyes. “All these cars, and I don’t know how to get home.” Addie threw her arm around the girl’s shoulders.

“Come on, sweetie, Celeste and I will take you. If you don’t mind hiking to the truck.” Patty giggled, slightly hysterical. Addie glanced over at Celeste. She was standing by herself, head down, looking a bit shocky herself.

“Detective Morales, we have a problem!” One of the medics was hovering inside the door, wind from the chopper blades ruffling his hair. She raced out, followed by the others. The medic took her arm and led her to the chopper. “This guy ...” he glared at Pierce. “This guy won’t take his hand out of the door unless you ride along!” Pierce had his long arm loose of the bindings, holding his hand firmly in the doorway. He gave his biggest, shit-eating grin. She grinned back. She prayed his hospital stay wouldn’t last long.

Celeste turned to Addie, giving her a thumbs up, gesturing that she’d call, and then climbed into the chopper, securing herself into the jump set next to the gurney. Pierce’s loose hand came to rest on his chest. She reached out and covered it with her own. As one, they both exhaled deeply, as though taking their first real breaths since they’d last been together.

This is love, Celeste thought as Pierce lifted her hand to his lips. *I didn’t expect this.*

Chapter Fourteen

Sunday

“Darlin’, my insurance, for which I pay dearly, is paying for this private room. So, since it’s *my* private room, I’ll do as I see fit.

“Damn it, Pierce! You can’t do this!” Celeste was stretched full-length on top of him, her hand securely cuffed to the head of the bed. “How on Earth did you get handcuff in a hospital?”

Pierce grinned. “Friends in low places, Celeste. The crew was visiting earlier.

“I swear, I’ll hit the call button!”

“Mmmmm, I don’t think so.” He’d flipped up the hem of her skirt, displaying her bum to open air. He quickly had her panties off and down her legs. “Darlin’, if you reach your foot out ... yeah ... just ... there!” She’d reached out and snagged the privacy curtain with her toes. At least they’d have a modicum of privacy if someone walked in. She braced herself on the bedrail and straddled him, panties around one ankle.

“I will not be cheated out of my weekend with you! Now, we can do this cuffed, or we can do this loose.” She smiled sweetly. “Ah, I see. If I let you loose, you’re running.” His hands were wandering, one tickling down her butt cheeks, the other wandering up her belly, finding her bra, pulling it down to release her breasts from the cups. “You like this, don’t you? Being cuffed, just a little bit helpless ...” and frankly, it was doing it for him, as well. Maybe Sheila had been right. He didn’t need to live the lifestyle to embrace his inner dominant. Interestingly enough, Celeste was more than willing to cede power to him sexually. Memories of their night together had played through his mind hour after hour, keeping him diverted through the pain and humiliation of his captivity.

“Now, Celeste. I’m going to fuck you. Here and now ...” she continued to smile.

“Are you forgetting something, Pierce?” He reached down and slipped her sweater over the top of her head. Her bra braced and posed her breasts just perfectly to his view. Pierce had grumbled about the hospital issue gear, until he discovered how easily he could free himself from the trousers. Even now, his hard-on was bumping, searching its way up her bottom, caressing her crack.

“Let’s see ... almost-naked woman sitting on top of me ... check. Almost-naked man with hot woman on his lap ... check. Everything seems good to go to me.” He leaned forward and flicked his tongue over her nipple.

She leaned forward and braced her hands beside his head, giving him better access.

“I like this bed.” He’d been playing with the controls, just trying to get the right angle. He nuzzled into her bra, his tongue trailing over her warm skin. Perfect.

“Condom?” She smiled coyly. Her purse was across the room. No way would he have access to condoms since he’d come in virtually naked. The nurse had ceded to his demands for cleanliness by sponge bathing him, to his very great disgust. This morning,

they'd covered the wounds on his back and legs and allowed him into the shower, as long as he stayed seated. Pierce was still suffering residual dizziness, probably from the concussion he'd received when they first hit him. He'd also need to stay on IVs until he was hydrated. Antibiotics had staved off the early infection, and while he still had no feeling in the tips of several toes, they also were beginning to heal. She was right. He probably shouldn't be trying this.

"Condoms

She smiled as Pierce looked around in panic. "Condoms?"

She wiggled on his lap, enjoying the tease. To get to her purse, he'd have to uncuff her. Pierce looked at the triumphant smile on her face, and met it with one of his own.

"Condoms! Check!" He reached behind his head, plucking what she probably thought was a smelling salt from the wall. It was a condom. Ian was a good fellow to know.

He began wiggling, forcing her upward. "You don't mind dressing me Darlin'? Seein' as how you've got me pinned down here?"

Celeste sat for a moment, completely flummoxed. Shrugged. "What the hell ... if you wanted it that bad..." The doctor hadn't exactly said when they could start. She'd obviously have to do most of the work. She rose high on her knees, letting his cock shift upwards, heading north to his belly button. She scooted back and rolled the condom on.

"Now?"

"Now!" he growled, grasping her hips and pulling her forward, down to his face.

He reached to the bedside table and fished for the key, fumbling with her cuffs. She stopped him.

"Leave the cuffs.

Her smile told her more than words. "You are a very bad girl, Detective Morales. Letting your perp bind you with your own cuffs!" He gently slapped the bare skin of her bottom and she jumped a bit, biting her full lower lip.

She slid back, letting his cock press home. Back and forth, it took some maneuvering. She wasn't wet as normal, and he wasn't as hard. He resolved both problems, playing with her nipples, and then pulling her down for a kiss, hard at first, then sweet, gentle. They both sighed when he slid home.

Pierce wrapped his arms tightly around Celeste's body, drinking her fragrance, the feel of her body against his. His chest was tight with emotion.

"I missed you, Pierce. Every minute, every day." She was rocking, taking him easier now, just needing the contact. "My mind raced through every scenario. I was so damned frightened." He held her tight, keeping the tempo slow and steady. He hadn't wanted to fuck her to get off, he'd needed to possess her, to take her with his body and know that she was here and they were together. Safe. Hell, he didn't even care if he came. He just needed to be inside her body.

"I knew you'd come. I knew people would be looking, but Celeste, I knew it would be you. I told the others you'd come, and damn it, you did!"

She lay still, letting him hold her for a long time, just giving him comfort, taking comfort. Celeste turned her head, whispering as softly as she could.

"I love you, Pierce.

His chest heaved, and for the longest moment, he said nothing. His big hands

brought her head around to look directly in her eyes, looking for the truth. He found it.

“And I love you, Darlin.’ So very much.

* * * *

He looked down the length of his body. She was wearing a silky, loose skirt that was now hiked up over her bum. Red, high-heeled shoes. She pulled back from him, the loose waves of her hair tickled his cheeks. The cuffs rattled on the bedrails. Her accent tickled his ears. She was warm, sexy and so real. Maybe he would come after all ...

She leaned down, dragged her tongue from his chin to his lips, coaxing his mouth open. She licked his lips again, coaxing his tongue out, licking, then returning to his lips to nibble and suck. She sat upright, cupping her breast with her free hand, flicking the nipple with her thumb and he knew that this was so much what he needed, this knowledge that he was alive, not alone, and that he was going to be all right. Pierce gripped her hips, held her steady as he pushed upwards, into her very depths, watching Celeste as she fell forward, breasts bouncing as she braced herself on his chest and she came! She moaned softly, the silky walls of her channel fluttered over his shaft like a gentle hand. Celeste forced her eyes open, watching his face through the haze of her orgasm.

Pain lanced through his back, but Pierce didn’t care as he thrust again. She let out that deep, breathy moan and wrenched herself hard against him, her body somehow finding the spot he needed. She bore down hard; clasp, releasing until Pierce found himself coming, tears running into his ears. His moan was more of a sob, and Celeste rolled onto her side, her face next to his as she rocked and soothed him, wiping his eyes as he cried himself to sleep.

* * * *

When he next opened his eyes, he was alone. That wasn’t strictly true, Celeste was gone, which made him feel alone, but he wasn’t alone. He simply ignored his visitor.

Trevor’s script lay to the side of his bed. It was good. Very fucking good. He’d also read the proposal from the producers, the director and the financial backer. It would shoot in Scotland. Home. Yes, it was BDSM. Yes, it was adult, but mainstream. They might get it down to an ‘R’ rating. The BDSM wasn’t about sex, but about domination. Trust. All stuff he’d been wanting to do at Fetish. All stuff Tessa had lectured him about. Maybe they’d hire her as a consultant.

The money was good, the script was good. The actress was cast, an Italian beauty.

She was excellent. Even the director was good. Soft core, full frontal nudity. He was good with that. No actual sex acts to be performed, only simulated. That was better.

While he continued to ignore the woman sitting next to his bed, Pierce set his shaky signature to the contract, returning it to the envelope. Trevor would take a cut, a fee for signing him. He wanted to open a management company, and Pierce wished him luck. He’d already signed Sheila and Toni. Now he’d signed Pierce.

The production company was buying out his contract with Pacific West, and Sammy at Fetish was unhappy, but understanding. They’d agreed to release him from the remainder of his contract. It was done.

And the movie was legit. Pierce gazed at the envelope, then looked at Professor Raine as she sat uneasily next to his bed. She’d been there for an hour. After stuttering over an obviously rehearsed apology, she’d teared up a bit, and then sat there, waiting for him to

speak to her.

“Death of the porn star, Delilah. You just witnessed it.” She looked puzzled. He smiled and reached out for her hand, squeezing it briefly, letting her know that all was forgiven.

Epilogue

Quite some time later

Excerpt from the Forward of New York Times Bestseller *Death of a Porn Star, The Semi-authorized Biography of Pierce Wilder*, by Dr. Delilah Raines:

“I would like to thank Pierce Wilder, his wife Celeste Morales, as well as his friends and family for their contributions to this book. Their love for, and dedication to this man is heart-warming.

Semi-authorized, you ask? There are certain aspects to his life that Pierce didn't want publicly aired, not out of shame or embarrassment, but out of consideration for his family and those involved in his story. Pierce and I agreed to disagree, and through public records and interviews, I included those hidden parts of his life, painful though they might be.

Pierce Wilder is a fascinating man, the rare individual with the magnetism, the skills and the pure luck to succeed in any venue he chooses. Since the completion of this book, he appeared in the celebrated Scottish film *Leather*, putting in an award winning performance as an emotionally tormented soldier. He remains in demand in both the adult and mainstream film industry, yet prefers to dedicate his time to his wife and child, supporting her as she forges a career as a private investigator. His latest film opened to stellar reviews at Cannes Film Festival. To the amusement of the audience, Pierce fell asleep during the awards ceremony, missing the announcement of his name for the 'Best Actor' award. Pierce explained that he was merely 'resting his eyes.' He'd been on baby duty the night before.

At one time, Pierce's goal was to complete his college degree. He now teaches workshops on human sexuality at Universities across the country. Students still call him 'Master Wilder,' and he takes it in good grace. He has also gone into partnership with an old friend, establishing a talent agency that specializes in the crossover of adult film actors to the mainstream industry. Their first client was actress Toni Gray, who co-stars in the mystery series *Black Orchids*.

The End