



When the screen fades to black, all that remains is love.

Ty Ransome. Reigning king of Hollywood, producer, actor, Look Magazine's Hottest Man Alive. He has it all—until he reads a book of short stories that touches him in places kept carefully hidden from the tabloid gossip mill. There's only one way to meet the introverted writer—invite her to Tinseltown to work on a script. The moment he sees her, he realizes why her work haunts him. There's something missing in his life, and it's her.

Gwen steps off the plane with reservations. For one thing, her darkly sexual stories are hardly movie material. Then there's Ty's reputation as a ladies' man. Yet she's won over by his charm and agrees to stay on for a week to get to know him before making her decision. And as the days go by, she discovers there's far more to Ty than a handsome face.

They eat, drink and breathe the characters in their screenplay, re-enacting scenes that delve into the BDSM realm, setting Ty free to unleash his powerful cravings and exposing Gwen's deepest needs. Needs she set free on paper...but is not sure she's ready to make a reality.

Warning: This title contains all the following Tinseltown essentials: explicit sex on a movie set, anal play in a mansion, BDSM with a hot movie star, capture fantasies while writing a screenplay, bondage in a limo, and, oh yeah, some graphic language—sorry about that.

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Rough Cut
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Rough Cut

Mari Carr

Dedication

This story is dedicated to Jayne Rylon—for stealing my title and my hero's name. I love you anyway, gal! Thanks for all the laughs.

Chapter One

Setting the stage

“You need to get up, Bambi. This isn’t the way to win a part in my movie.”

“But you haven’t let me show you how talented am I,” whined the buxom blonde Pamela Anderson wannabe.

“Oh I have no doubt you’re talented, but this isn’t the time or place. I’m waiting for—”

“The windows in this limo are tinted black. No one will see.”

Ty swatted away the woman’s hands each time she attempted to grasp his family jewels, wondering how in the hell he got into messes like this.

“That’s not the point. I’m at the airport to pick someone up and the flight has already landed.”

“So your friend can join us when he arrives. There’s plenty of me to go around.” Bambi thrust out her barely covered breasts. Those babies must have cost her a pretty penny.

“I’m picking up a woman.” He hoped that fact would deter the so-called actress.

“Man or woman. I’m not fussy. She won’t be disappointed either.”

Ty tried not to growl in frustration at the woman’s relentlessness. He’d asked the temp agency to send over a secretary and he’d expressly stated *No actresses*. Miss Bambi Starr was quickly pushing him to the brink of losing what the tabloids liked to refer to as his *infamous* Ransome temper.

“I’m going to tell you one more time to get up, Bambi.”

His words fell on deaf ears as the woman finally managed to get a hold on the zipper tab of his suit slacks. Of course, her death grip on his balls had distracted him a bit. Her head began to lower toward his lap and he hastily put his hands in her hair to push her back.

Unfortunately, at that exact moment, the door to the limousine opened and Gwen Preston was ushered in, unaware of what was happening until she sat down and his driver slammed the door behind her.

“Oh.” Gwen’s eyes widened at the racy image he and Bambi were presenting. “I’m sorry. Shit. I-I—”

She quickly turned her face away from them and Ty could see from her reflection in the window that she’d closed her eyes tightly. The loveliest blush crept up her slender neck. Jesus, an innocent woman. He’d lived in Hollywood so long he’d forgotten such a creature existed.

As Gwen’s hand crept to the door handle, he quickly reached out to grip her wrist. “Wait.”

She turned to look at him, her face a mixture of anger and surprise.

“Bambi.” He pushed the silly actress away from him and then opened his car door quickly—all with one hand. He refused to release Gwen. “I want you to go sit up front with my driver.”

When she looked as if she intended to argue, he let the reins of his temper go. “Now!” He shouted loud enough that both women in the car jumped. His yell also attracted the unwanted attention of a dozen or so people milling around the outside of the airport.

“It’s Ty Ransome,” someone screamed. He pushed Bambi out of the car and slammed the door. Bob, his driver, slid down the glass partition, no doubt realizing a mob of fans were about to descend on the car.

“Sir?” Bob asked, awaiting instructions.

“Give Bambi one minute to join you up there. If she isn’t in this car by then, leave without her.”

Bob nodded and slid the glass back up.

Ty glanced over and noticed Gwen quietly taking in everything with a scowl on her face. From her perspective he must look like the world’s most heartless bastard—getting his jollies from some bimbo before kicking her to the curb. Dammit. This was not the way he’d planned for this meeting to go. He desperately wanted—oh hell, he *needed* Gwen to work with him on the project he’d invited her to California to discuss.

“You can let go of me now,” she said tersely.

“I can explain.” He heard the front passenger door slam and the car took off with enough speed that he and Gwen were thrown back against their seats just as cameras began to flash around them. With the car in motion, he released her wrist.

“You don’t owe me any explanations. I’m a big girl, and I’m perfectly aware of what was going on. Perhaps you should ask your driver to pull over so Bambi—was that her name?”

He nodded once and struggled to regain control of his increasing ire. “Gwen—”

She ignored him. “So that Bambi and I can switch places. Clearly she wasn’t done and as I have no intention of finishing what she started, I’d hate for you to die of an acute case of blue balls.”

He took several deep breaths, hoping it would calm him down, but clearly nothing was going to make today better. It had started its downhill spiral when his personal assistant quit first thing this morning. Then his chef had inadvertently set a small fire in the kitchen because Ty’s insane ex-girlfriend had decided to sneak into the house and put his favorite pair of Gucci leather dress shoes in the oven. As a result, he’d asked his manager to change all the locks in his house to prevent the woman from enacting any other petty acts of revenge.

Then the co-producer for his current project threatened to walk over some minuscule plot point and the studio bitched about the amount of money he’d spent on the film he’d just completed. The fact they stood to make a killing on the movie didn’t matter. Greedy bastards always wanted more. Between the temp agency siccing Bambi on him and Gwen’s refusal to listen to his explanation, he felt as if his head was going to explode.

“I can only imagine how it must feel for a man with your legendary sex drive to—”

“You may want to reconsider finishing that statement,” he barked. “Not one more word, Ms. Preston. I mean it.”

“Tell your driver to drop me off at the nearest hotel. I think our negotiations have ended.”

He shook his head, unsure where his anger toward Gwen had come from, but the fact of the matter was his cock had been soft as a down pillow when Bambi had been trying to blow him. That state had changed rapidly the second Gwen entered the limo. She looked different in real person, considering he’d only ever seen her once on a television interview. She was a petite, willowy redhead with porcelain skin, unusual in sunny California. Her bright blue eyes flashed sparks of anger at him, yet despite her ire, he was assailed with an instant attraction.

He was used to beautiful women. Hell, he was surrounded by them twenty-four seven. Gwen wasn’t beautiful by Hollywood standards, yet she was certainly striking, even alluring.

“Oh no, Gwen. Our negotiations haven’t even started yet.”

“I thought that you were different, but you really are as arrogant and chauvinistic as the tabloids say. I don’t usually believe those rags, but I think they were dead-on where you’re concerned. I’m going to tell you one more time to let me out of this car, Mr. Ransome, or I swear to God, I’ll slap you with a kidnapping charge so fast it’ll make your head spin.”

He grinned at her, aware the look only fueled her anger further. They’d corresponded through email and phone calls regularly during the past few weeks and he had felt they were striking up a friendship. He regretted his harsh words, but he couldn’t shake the image of her on her knees in front of him. He’d have to make amends, because he wasn’t about to let her get away, regardless of her paltry threats.

“Gwen, I apologize for my rudeness. I can assure you I am the man from the phone calls. Today, well, my only excuse is that it has been a rather long, painful day.”

“It’s only ten a.m.”

He nodded and sighed heavily. “Nonetheless, I am sorry. How was your flight? Pleasant, I hope?”

She narrowed her eyes at his abrupt about-face and quick change of topic. “Mr. Ransome—”

“Ty,” he corrected her. She’d been calling him Ty on the phone for weeks and he loved the sound of his name spoken in her sultry voice.

She shook her head and started to refuse, but he reached over and placed a gentle finger against her lips.

“Call me Ty.”

He could tell by her erratic breathing she wasn’t as unaffected by him as she seemed. Perhaps she was also feeling the overwhelming heat that was making it difficult for him to concentrate despite the cool air-conditioning blowing over them.

“Mr. R—” He pressed his finger harder against her lips. For a moment, he considered silencing her another way—by placing his lips against hers. He could just imagine using his tongue to caress her mouth, to slowly study the contours of her warm, sweet lips.

“Say Ty, Gwen. Say it right now.”

“Ty,” she whispered.

Blown away by her capitulation and the sexy, husky nature of her voice, he shook his head, trying to regain his wits.

What the hell was he thinking? Christ, he knew what he was thinking—he had a hard-on that could drive nails into concrete and that lack of blood to the brain was driving him to say stupid shit. Dominant by nature, he was usually able to keep his darker side under wraps, especially around strangers. However, Gwen didn’t feel like a stranger. She felt like someone he’d known forever and he could tell by the flush on her face and soft panting that she wasn’t immune to his commands.

However, she *was* looking at him with suspicious eyes. Anxious to recover lost ground, he cleared his throat. “Now that we’ve gotten the issue of names out of the way, I think we should discuss a timeline for writing the script. Figure out a schedule and draft a rough outline of the story. I’ve taken the liberty of setting you up in my guest house for the duration of your stay.”

“I haven’t agreed to write anything and I’d prefer to stay in a hotel. I believe I mentioned that on the phone.”

Her voice was calmer and he was pleased to see her earlier anger had abated. Her confidence was reemerging. It was that self-assurance that led him to issue his offer. He’d seen an interview she’d done several months ago on a local cable channel. Her poise and quiet intelligence had spoken to him so deeply he’d gone out and purchased everything she’d ever written.

When he’d read a collection of short stories she’d co-authored entitled *Evening Songs*, his attention had fallen from her to her co-author on the book, Michael Haynes. It was Haynes’ story “The Darkest Night” that had sparked his serious interest and planted the seed of turning the stories into a screenplay.

For weeks, he’d attempted to find the elusive writer and had almost given up hope. Then one night, he’d met a producer friend and his wife in New York for drinks. The wife worked in the publishing business, so he’d casually mentioned Haynes. She’d told him that Michael Haynes was actually a pseudonym for Gwen Preston. Gwen had written all the stories in *Evening Songs*, including “The Darkest Night”.

“I think you’ll discover I didn’t get where I am today because I accept the word no easily. Why don’t you save both of us a lot of time and wasted energy by merely agreeing? You said yourself in our last email communication that you were fascinated by the idea of seeing one of your stories on the silver screen. I’m offering you that opportunity,” he said.

"I'm still not sure why you're offering me that chance. I've never written a screenplay. Isn't it standard Hollywood procedure for someone else to buy the rights and write the script?"

"I have experience with scriptwriting. I hope that by collaborating, you and I will bring to the screen the same emotion, the same powerful characters and stimulating plot that you incorporate so flawlessly in your fiction. I truly suspect that between the two of us we can make one of the hottest movies of the year."

What he didn't say was that he was damn tired of being one of Hollywood's action stars. It was an image he was finding harder and harder to maintain as he got older. It was time he focused on the future. He was desperate to establish himself as a serious actor and a talented producer. Gwen's story had the potential to help him break free of the macho-man image he hated.

"You still haven't told me which of my books you intend to use. I'm not sure I understand your secrecy on that point or why you insisted I meet you in person."

"I would like to make a movie using the stories in *Evening Songs*." His words jarred her more than he would have imagined and he immediately noticed her slight discomfiture when he mentioned which book he was interested in. Her face paled and her eyes drifted downward.

"Well, then you've wasted my time and yours. As you know, I wasn't the only author of that book. I only wrote two of the four stories."

Ty grinned as her cheeks lost all color. She was a horrible liar.

"You and I both know you wrote all the stories in that collection. Please don't insult me by continuing to deny it."

"Well done, Sherlock. How much did that information cost you?" she asked.

"Four martinis."

"Nice to know my privacy comes so cheap. Tell you what. Skip the hotel. Tell your driver to take me back to the airport."

"You won't even consider the idea of making these stories into a movie?"

"Three words, Mr. Ransome. Three words that should explain to you why this project will never work. 'The Darkest Night'."

He leaned back against his seat and pondered her concern. "It's a terrific story, Gwen. I'm interested in making a movie with the four vignettes combining to form the larger work. There seems to be a trend on these kinds of multiple plot movies and I think the stories in *Evening Songs* would make a marvelous film. Academy Award material. I'm afraid I'm not sure what your concerns about 'The Darkest Night' have to do with making a film adaptation of the entire book."

"It's rather hardcore for Hollywood, isn't it? I mean, how do you expect to make a movie that dabbles in sadomasochism and bondage without crossing the line into pornography?"

“It can be done. I see this movie as more of an artistic endeavor, an in-depth character study of the couples in each story. Of course, there’s no reason to worry about the how-to of the filming until we actually get the script written.”

She shrugged, worried lines forming on her brow as she glanced toward the front of the limo. Clearly she hadn’t forgotten about the Bambi incident. “I’d rather stay in a hotel while I consider your offer.”

She leaned back and crossed her arms under her breasts. He knew she meant the gesture to be standoffish and perhaps a bit protective, but he was staggered by the abundance of all-natural flesh beneath her shirt. Christ, he hated breast implants and was delighted to see that under her clothing, Gwen wasn’t carrying around anything she wasn’t born with.

“*And* as I said, that seems a waste of money. Come stay at my place, take a few days to decide, let me show you around Hollywood. If you agree to my proposal, the guest house will be yours while we work on the script. I should warn you, my schedule isn’t exactly what you call normal. My days are typically quite busy due to public appearances, meetings, work at the set. However, when we decide to start writing this script—”

“If we start writing this script—”

He grinned. “When we start, I really believe it would be better if you were close by while we’re working, so that neither of us is traveling during the wee hours to or from a hotel. With you ensconced in the guest house, we can work whenever we like.”

She sighed and turned her head to glance out at the passing scenery.

“Gwen, I know this may sound strange, but I feel as if I know you, even though our acquaintance has only been through email and phone conversations.”

She smiled and nodded. “I feel the same way but, Ty, I’m going to tell you right now, I’m not some movie star groupie and I don’t want to be surrounded by orgies or whatever other depraved things you may do in your house.”

He smiled, flashing his million-dollar dimples at her. “I’ll reschedule all my orgies until after you leave.”

She fought back a smile at his joke. “I mean it. If we’re going to work together, I insist that we keep things professional.”

He forced his head to nod in accord, even though his body was reading him the riot act for agreeing to such a thing. He had absolutely no intention of maintaining a professional distance from her. Something about her called to him and he would be damned if he denied himself a taste of her sweetness.

He decided he really did owe her a decent explanation for Bambi. He prayed his words would set her mind at ease about him as a person.

"I hired Bambi this morning as a temporary replacement for my personal assistant. Apparently she thought a blowjob would make me inclined to hire her for a role in one of my upcoming movies. I know what it must have looked like to you, but I was pushing her away when you got into the limo."

She looked over at him and he could tell by the look in her eyes that she believed him. A genuine smile crossed her face and he was amazed by the transformation as she burst into peals of laughter. He reconsidered his previous thought—she *was* beautiful.

"You poor man," she said between gasps. "You must have been terrified."

He let her have fun at his expense, relieved to see she wasn't still thinking of him as a male chauvinist pig. He soaked in the sound of her laughter and grinned.

"Well, there's some good news for you," she teased. "If we actually write this script, you have your leading lady all lined up and ready to go."

"Hell will freeze over before Bambi Starr lands a part in any movie I make."

Mention of Bambi's full name sent her into fits of laughter again. "Gee, I wonder if that's her given name."

The car pulled into the driveway of his house and her giggles ended on a sharp intake of breath.

"Oh my God," she whispered.

He was used to seeing people's expressions when they pulled up to his mansion. It was decadent in the extreme and he thought perhaps he should feel guilty for the ungodly amount of money he'd pumped into the house. Some small insecure part of him had never gotten over the feeling of growing up in a tiny one-room apartment, constantly worrying about the bills and where the next meal was coming from. He was determined he'd never let welfare checks feed him again, nor would he sleep in a cold, drafty room wishing for the slightest bit of warmth. His greatest regret in life was that his mother hadn't lived long enough for him to set her up in a mansion of her own. She'd struggled throughout his entire childhood to care for him alone and he'd never had the opportunity to reward her as he'd wanted to for her unending love and care.

"Holy shit," she murmured. "Your house is as big as a hotel."

"So now you see why I insist that you stay here. We could wander around for weeks and never run into each other."

She shook her head, still smiling. "You're right about that."

"Will you promise to give some serious thought to this project? I really do believe your book will make an amazing film."

"My agent mentioned yesterday that the publisher wants to sell the story rights to you, so it will be a movie whether I want it or not. I have to admit I was a bit miffed at the publisher's secrecy about which book you wanted to use."

“The secrecy is my fault. One of the conditions of the contract was that I would reveal the title of the book to you. Another was that you agree to co-write the screenplay or the offer will be rescinded.”

She paused and he sensed he surprised her with his words. “So if I say no?”

“The movie won’t be made.”

“I suppose your lawyer has contracts drawn up?”

His heart leapt at her question. “Absolutely.”

“Give them to me. I’ll take a look at them and then fax them to my agent. I’m not saying that’s a definite yes, but since I’ve come all this way, I guess I should at least take a peek at what’s in it for me.”

He laughed at her mercenary jest. She was a woman after his own heart. Perhaps the day hadn’t turned out so badly after all.

“Come on. Let’s get you settled in the guest house and then we can have some lunch out on the terrace. We’ll talk about the script.”

Chapter Two

Building the conflict

She felt a hand on her shoulder and opened her eyes. A scream crossed her lips at the sight of a man looming over her bed.

“Shhh.” Ty placed a hand across her mouth to quiet her. “It’s me.”

“Dammit, Ty.” She pulled his hand away and sat up. “You scared the shit out of me.”

He grinned and she felt her anger building. “How did you get in here?”

He shrugged. “It’s my guest house.”

“So?”

“So I have a key.”

“Ty. You can’t just waltz in here. While I’m staying with you, this is my room.”

“Who says?”

“I say. You’re invading my privacy.” For three days, she’d tried to accustom herself to Ty’s tendency to occupy not only his space, but hers as well. She wasn’t used to a man showering her with so much attention, so much care. He was charming and courteous, but beneath all of that, she sensed a darker, more brooding part. A part that made her feel possessed and hot and needy in ways she couldn’t begin to understand or explain to herself.

He sat on the edge of the bed and she fought to calm her racing heart at his close proximity.

“It’s my house. I can do whatever I want,” he insisted.

“Then I’m leaving. I’ll get a hotel room.”

The look in his eyes made her tremble slightly. With just one glance, he dared her to try, while letting her know in no uncertain terms she’d never succeed.

He shook his head and his eyes wandered down her body. She looked down and gasped when she realized the sheet was pooled around her waist and she was flashing him—big time. She scrambled to pull the sheet up, only to discover Ty was sitting on it.

“Move,” she demanded.

“You’re very beautiful, Gwen. You shouldn’t hide that.”

“Are you drunk?”

“No.” He laughed before leaning closer, and she fought to catch her breath. “You sleep nude. I like that.”

She continued tugging at the covers until he gave in and stood. She pulled the sheet over her breasts, fighting to retain her anger. Ty had a way of getting under her skin in ways she couldn't understand.

"Promise you won't come in again without knocking."

"No." He claimed the chair by her bed. "I missed you."

"What?"

"I missed you at dinner. I wanted to talk to you."

He'd been out all afternoon and evening at some charity benefit. She'd eaten dinner alone. "Talk to me about what?"

He'd proceeded to tell her about his evening and she hadn't slept in the nude since that night. Since then, Ty had gotten into the habit of coming into her room during the darkest hours of night and they'd fallen into a strange nighttime routine. He'd sit in the chair by her bed and they'd talk for hours before he'd retire back to the main house and his own room.

Gwen rolled over and punched the pillow, trying to find a comfortable sleep position and wondering what the hell she'd gotten herself into. Moving into the guest house of *Look* magazine's Hottest Man Alive was not one of the brightest things she'd ever done. For one thing, Ty was filthy rich. He had a butler, two maids, a chef, a chauffeur, a personal assistant and at least a dozen other people in his entourage, doing God only knew what. The constant swirl of people surrounding him made her head spin, and she wondered how Ty could stand it.

She'd read the contract and given her verbal agreement to co-write the movie script for *Evening Songs*. She was leaving the legal hassles up to the lawyers, agents, and her publisher to sort out. She would be returning to New York tomorrow for two weeks so that she could tie up loose ends at home and pack up enough clothing for a two-month stay, which is how long Ty estimated it would take them to write the script given his busy schedule. As an author, she had the luxury of uprooting herself from her New York apartment since she could do her writing anywhere. Have laptop, will travel.

She'd been in town eight restful, perfect days, hanging out by his pool, sight-seeing, eating in fancy restaurants. He was an amazingly attentive host when his schedule permitted, though he hadn't lied about the fact that his day-to-day routine was hectic, to say the least. Most nights she read or wrote in the charming guest house while he walked the red carpets and attended more meetings than the president.

Around one a.m., Ty slipped into her room. "How come you're sleeping in pajamas?"

She grinned at his question, no longer alarmed by his sudden appearances in her room. "Gee, I wonder if it has anything to do with these late-night visits."

"I think I should set the record straight and let you know that I most definitely was *not* offended by your nudity. Quite the opposite actually."

"My pajamas are staying on," she answered. "I hope when it comes time to start writing our script, you will bear in mind that I'm a morning person. I can't think at night. Every book I've written was put down on the pages between the hours of six a.m. and noon. After that, I'm cooked."

Ty sat heavily in the padded armchair by her bed and leaned his head back. She could see the dark circles under his eyes even in the dim moonlight. "I'll try to remember that, but I gotta warn you, my body's clock is the complete opposite of yours. I don't begin to fully function until early afternoon."

"Must have something to do with these late hours you insist on keeping. How was your movie premiere?"

"Predictable," he replied through a yawn.

"How was your starlet?" He'd taken Jasmine Court, the hottest female property in Hollywood, for a stroll on the red carpet tonight. Gwen struggled to push back the nagging jealousy she'd felt when he'd told her who he was going out with. Regardless of her insistence that things remain platonic between them, her body seemed to constantly cry out for him. She wasn't sure she'd ever felt so sexually attracted to a man before. Of course, she consoled herself with the realization that every woman in America was lusting after him as well. At least, in that regard, she was normal.

"She's a lesbian," he said quietly.

"Really?" She constantly struggled to figure out when he was kidding and when he wasn't. Most of his comments were delivered so deadpan, she despaired of ever understanding his dry sense of humor.

"I owed her manager a favor and he decided to collect. I managed to do my part for this twisted Hollywood society and kept up the appearance of their golden girl's straight image for another night."

"I suppose I'll get to read all about your torrid love affair tomorrow in the tabloids."

"Oh yeah and then next week, when her manager finds another hot stud to pretend to be in love with her, I'll be jealous and heartbroken and every dark mood I have for months afterwards will be attributed to our nasty breakup. Christ, I'm sick of this shit."

She studied him as he lounged in the chair. Typically, their nighttime banter was playful, teasing in nature.

Tonight, his head was thrown back against the headrest, his eyes were closed and his hands were clenched together tightly against his chest. Despite the weariness she could see in every part of his body, he seemed tense, even a bit angry.

"So why not retire?"

He chuckled, though the sound held no mirth and he opened his eyes to look at her. "I'm only forty."

She smiled. "And you have enough money to live in comfort 'til you're two hundred and forty. So why keep doing it? Why keep up this ridiculous pace?"

He shrugged and she knew by his gaze he wasn't going to answer her question.

"How old are you?" he asked.

She recognized his question for what it was. After only a week together, she was well-aware of his tendency to change the subject if he didn't like the current one.

"Thirty-four."

"How come you never got married?"

She rolled onto her back and stared at the ceiling. His gaze had become too intense, too serious, and she'd felt for a moment as if she could drown in the depths of his deep blue eyes.

"I'm not sure," she said, once she'd regained her wits. "I suppose you've noticed that, unlike you, I'm a bit of an introvert. I'm one of those lucky few who found success as an author fairly young, but writing isn't one of those careers that leads to meeting a lot of people. I spend a great deal of time in my house alone with my laptop."

"You don't date at all?"

"Oh sure. I've dated plenty, but I've noticed since I turned thirty that the pool of available men has dwindled and unfortunately, most of what's left is the duds who've been thrown back."

"Gee thanks." She giggled at his response.

"Present company excluded, of course." She looked over at him.

He rubbed his eyes and she felt her heart stirring at his vulnerability. For all his money and fame, she saw a tired, weary man, and before she could think about it, she reached out toward him with her hand. "Come here."

He glanced up in surprise, then took her hand. She tugged until he rose, directing him toward her with a pull. "Crawl in."

She scooted over and watched as he lay down beside her.

"You're inviting me to your bed?"

"To sleep," she clarified. "I have a feeling you're too tired to make the trek back across the lawn to your own bed or to be much use for anything else." He grinned at her taunt, no doubt willing to prove her words false, but she put up her hand. "Just the same, stay on your side of the bed, Hollywood."

He smiled tiredly at the nickname and his eyes drifted shut slowly. "Good night, gorgeous," he whispered, seconds before she heard his breath steady and deepen with sleep.

He truly had been exhausted. She ran her hand lightly over his brow, pushing back his chestnut hair and staring at his handsome face. It was no wonder every woman in the world had a crush on the man. With his chiseled jaw and strong cheekbones, he was destined to be a heartthrob. His blue eyes tipped with long, thick lashes could turn women to jelly with a single glance.

And yet, she sensed there was so much more to him than his classic good looks. In the past week, she'd discovered his intelligence, his humor, his undeniable drive to constantly succeed. More than that, she felt drawn inexplicably to the core of strength that seemed to flow from his soul, pulling her toward him in ways she couldn't understand.

She felt an irrefutable need to give herself to this man in ways she'd only ever dreamed of alone in the dark of night, in ways she knew were twisted and wrong. Yet, he seemed to call to the most secret desires of her heart. She closed her eyes, desperate to block out the emotions, the needs he provoked. She shuttered her heart securely against him, willing away the shattered, scarred truth with all of her might.

No, she told herself harshly.

No.

"Now this is the way I like to wake up," a deep voice said beside her.

Gwen opened her eyes, briefly surprised to find her face only inches away from Ty's. She blinked a few times to make sure she wasn't dreaming, then their nighttime conversation drifted back through her consciousness.

"You were supposed to stay on your own side." Her voice was gruff with sleep. As she came fully awake, she became aware of his hand lightly rubbing a bare bit of skin at her waist, beneath her T-shirt.

"So sue me." He leaned so close to her the only air she could feel was that of his soft breath on her cheek. His hand stopped caressing her waist and instead gripped it, pulling her even closer to him.

"I don't think this is a good idea," she whispered, despite the fact her hands were resting, unresisting, on his chest. She'd placed them there to push him away, but instead the traitorous things were exploring the rock-hard definitions of his pecs.

"I think a kiss in the morning is always a good idea."

"Just a kiss?" She cursed her sudden breathlessness.

"Just a kiss, Gwen." She was shocked by her disappointment until he added, "for now."

His lips brushed hers and her body shuddered at the impact. His mouth wasn't gentle, it wasn't easy. He took her lips with a roughness that proclaimed his possession. He took everything she offered with her lips and tongue and demanded more. His hands drifted up to her face, engulfing her cheeks in his firm grip, turning her head exactly the way he wanted it. His teeth nipped at her lower lip and she thought for a moment she heard him growl before his tongue plunged into her mouth, tangling with hers. She'd never been kissed like this in her life and the feeling was heady. It made her dizzy, giddy, reckless and she suddenly realized she wanted more. Hell, she wanted all.

She reached up and held his face to hers, twisting her fingers in his hair. He mimicked the action with her own long tresses and she was amazed by her reaction to his rough touch. Each time he pulled her hair, the sensation of pain flowed pleasurably down her body, causing her hips to flex, searching for relief. Her body felt as if he'd set it aflame and she found her reactions shockingly animalistic.

“Harder. Pull harder,” she begged and he responded in turn. His lips trailed along her face, his rough beard scratching her sensitive skin until he reached her ear. He bit her earlobe, pulling her hair at the same time and she cried out, her hips gyrating wildly.

His hard body came over hers as he took control of her wrists, dragging them above her head and holding them firmly in place with one of his hands. She sensed he knew what his actions were doing to her as he pressed his covered cock firmly between her legs, letting her feel the proof of the desire they shared. She wanted to scream at him to take off his pants and give her what she needed, but instinctively she knew he would refuse her.

“Shhh.” He tightened his grip on her wrists while planting soft, sweet kisses on her face. “Calm down, gorgeous.”

She was panting, frustrated, and she foolishly felt as if she were on the verge of tears.

He leaned back at the sound of her soft cry, the look on his face a perfect mixture of shock, awe and naked, red-hot desire.

He smiled as she struggled to regain composure, her body screaming for relief.

“I can see there will be no such thing as innocent kisses with you,” he said.

She blinked rapidly, determined he shouldn’t see the tears threatening to fall. Christ, she was a fool.

“I-I, shit.” She struggled to free her hands. He released her and she pushed him away. He moved over easily and she realized she wouldn’t have been able to budge him if he hadn’t permitted it. She walked away from the bed, pressing her back against the wall for support.

“This is not, I mean, I don’t—” She was gasping for air and her voice and her body betrayed her, shaking uncontrollably.

He sat up slowly and she knew he was deliberately keeping his movements unhurried lest he frighten her. “Gwen, you didn’t do anything wrong.”

She wanted to laugh at the understatement of his words. He’d pulled her hair, held her down and she’d responded like a bitch in heat. He didn’t think that was wrong, weird?

“I told you before, Ty. I want us to keep our relationship professional. Sex muddies the water. You know that.”

“No, I don’t think I do. Gwen, there’s nothing wrong with admitting that we’re attracted to each other sexually. Shit, I can’t think of anything I want more than to tie your lovely body to that bed and bury myself between those hot thighs of yours.”

“Stop it! Stop saying stuff like that. It isn’t going to happen. Ever.”

He scowled at her words and rose from the bed, crossing to where she stood, trembling. “Well, I think you and I are about to have our first disagreement.”

He leaned toward her as she pressed her body flat against the wall. He caged her in, grasping her hands by the wrists once again and pressing them against the flat surface, just above her head. “You and I

are most certainly going to have sex, Gwen. Hard, hot, incredibly intense sex and you're going to love every minute of it."

"You smug, conceited—"

"Pull your pants down," he said as he loosened his grip.

She wanted to deny him, wanted to drive her fists against his chest and tell him to get the hell away from her, but his deep voice, his demanding words spoke to the loneliest part of her soul and she felt as if she'd been sunk neck-deep in quicksand.

"Pull them down now," he repeated, his voice commanding. Clearly he expected her to comply. This was so wrong. God dammit, it was wrong. And yet her body felt alive for the first time ever.

She reached for the waistband of her pajama bottoms and she slowly shimmied the soft cotton over her hips. The material fell to her ankles and she stepped out of it, never taking her gaze off his determined face.

"Good girl," he murmured and she raised her hand to slap him for his condescending comment. He caught her wrist and pressed it against the wall. "You don't want to do that."

She closed her eyes in surrender and he released her hand.

His dominant actions, his powerful words, were truly soothing her weary soul, despite the fact her head was demanding she run away from him. Ty Ransome was the one man who could be her complete and utter downfall, yet rather than escape, she found herself relishing every touch, every word he offered. How many times had she dreamed of a moment just like this? How many nights had she lain alone in her bed praying for a man to take over for her? Take all her fears and worries and insecurities and simply claim her.

He reached over to the desk by her bed and pulled out the chair, dragging it to where they stood. Then he gripped her thigh firmly, lifting it. "Place your foot on the chair."

She did as he said, gasping when he gripped her knee and spread her legs farther apart. "Stay there and don't take your leg down," he ordered.

She obeyed, slightly embarrassed by the fact she was so wet her juices were practically running down her leg.

"What a pretty pussy you have." He brushed a finger through the curls surrounding her clit.

"I don't want you to touch me and I *don't* like the way you're talking to me." She gasped for the breath to tell her lie.

He laughed at her comment and she saw red.

"Liar, liar, pants on fire," he taunted. "Or should I say pussy on fire? There's a pool of juices here that tell me you love the way I'm talking to you."

She cursed her body's betrayal and lowered her leg. "I want you to leave. I want you to get out of this guest house."

He studied her face as she spoke, and she could feel the unbearable heat in her cheeks. No doubt she was blushing as red as a beet. One of the curses of being a natural redhead.

“Put your foot back on the chair,” he demanded, his voice soft, but firm.

“Are you listening to me?” She was aware how shrill and panicked her voice sounded. She was a modern woman. She wasn’t supposed to be turned on by his demands, encouraging his caveman behavior.

“I’m listening to your body, not your words. I’m not going to punish you for disobeying me, Gwen, but if your foot isn’t on that chair in five seconds, I can assure you, you won’t like the result.”

Fear and curiosity warred inside her. Fear of loving what he was about to do. Curiosity over what his punishment would be.

Shit. Her thinking was screwed up. She should be afraid of the damn punishment, not curious.

Her thoughts were in such a jumble she didn’t realize he was lifting her leg for her until her foot hit the seat of the chair. Then he bent down and retrieved her pajama pants. Grasping her hands, he pulled them behind her back, quickly and efficiently using her pants to tie her hands. Her heart raced with excitement and desire when she realized she was bound tightly enough that escape was impossible. “We’re definitely going to have to work on your inability to follow simple commands.”

Her pussy clenched at his words and she leaned her head against the wall, closing her eyes tightly, praying it would help her shut out the overwhelming needs coursing through her. Why did she like—no, *love* the way he was talking to her?

“Open your eyes, Gwen. Look at me.”

She slowly dragged her eyes open and he smiled at her so sweetly, so kindly, she felt her heart begin to ache at the beauty of it.

His fingers lightly grazed her clit and she sucked in a breath, while keeping her gaze locked firmly on his.

“So responsive, so beautiful.” His fingers delved through her mons before swirling around playfully in her juices. “God, you have no idea how hot you feel. Your cunt is burning my hand.”

She trembled at the dirty compliment, moving her hips toward his questing fingers, trying to bring him inside.

“Hold still,” he barked and she felt a fresh gush of moisture escape at the rough sound of his voice.

“Jesus,” he muttered as if awestruck. “You’re too perfect for words.”

He pushed one finger inside of her and she fought to remain motionless, fought against every fiber of her body that was demanding she thrust toward him. “Please,” she whimpered when it appeared he was satisfied with tormenting her with one finger.

“Tell me,” he said. “Tell me exactly what you want.”

“Please, Ty.” The words fell from her lips without thought. “I want your fingers inside me. More than one.”

He pulled out at her request and thrust in with two. "Like that?" he asked. "I'm afraid you're going to have to be more specific if you hope to get what you want, what you need."

"Another finger," she whispered. "Please."

He complied with her pleading, but it still wasn't enough.

"Harder," she added, realizing he was serious about making her ask for what she wanted. "Push inside me harder, faster."

At her words, he gave in to the strength he'd obviously been holding back as her legs threatened to give way under the glorious assault of his hand. His fingers fucked her roughly, pounding inside her in the way she often did for herself. No one had ever dared to take her so strongly. She felt the scream building in her throat just before it reached her lips.

"Come for me." The speed and power of his thrusts increased even more, and she succumbed to his words, his fingers. Her vision went black and she felt as if she were on the verge of fainting.

Ty must have thought the same thing as he reached out with his free hand to steady her against the wall. She shuddered uncontrollably for several moments, the aftershocks of her orgasm shaking her body. His lips lightly caressed her cheek and she felt his tongue dab at the stream of tears he found there. Was she crying? She hadn't realized.

"Shhh." He removed his hand from her quivering body despite her anguished cry. He reached around her to untie her arms, then bent down and picked her up, turning and placing her gently on the bed. He crawled in beside her and enveloped her in his large embrace. She felt more tears gathering in her eyes, but she was too weak to attempt to stem the flow. She felt overwhelmed, confused.

"Why are you crying?"

She shrugged. How could she tell him? How could she explain? He'd just brought her deepest, darkest desires to light and she struggled with the unexpected exposure. "I just let you tie me up and take me against the wall. I shouldn't have done that."

He leaned up on his elbow and looked down at her. "Shouldn't have done what? You enjoy a rough touch, Gwen. So what?"

"I don't want to talk about this," she said quickly, desperate to shut down the topic of her need for pain in sex.

Ty narrowed his eyes and she knew he was displeased with her comment. "Fine," he said at last and she breathed a sigh of relief. "But this isn't over, Gwen."

She knew the second he spoke the words, he was right. She didn't have a doubt, she would let him do much, much more to her. No matter how forbidden, how wrong.

He kissed her gently as she fought against the fresh onslaught of tears building in her chest. "It's okay, Gwen. Your secret is safe with me."

She wondered about his words and then she considered her response to them. God help her if she was right about his intentions, because she had no doubt he wouldn't rest until he'd uncovered and physically exploited every damn imperfection in her character. Until he'd dragged every cursed, unspeakable desire to the forefront.

And then what? He was an actor. Hell, he was fucking Ty Ransome, the movie star every man wanted to be like and every woman wanted to sleep with. How would he feel when he learned just how dark and deep her needs ran? How would he react when he discovered pain wasn't just her fantasy, but a need? What would he say when he realized bondage wasn't a sex game for her, but a necessity?

For years, she'd managed to suppress the dark and dirty secret because she knew society wouldn't approve, wouldn't understand. The whole reason she'd created Michael Haynes was so she could write the story of her heart, so she could put her surreptitious longings on the pages of "The Darkest Night". Just as he'd discovered her pen name, Ty had pulled off the veil she'd been hiding beneath. She shivered at the thought and felt his arms tighten around her. He would open up the vault she'd kept securely locked inside her soul. She'd protected her secrets for a lifetime, but Ty had the power to uncover and exploit all of it. God help her, she'd be a willing victim, if the past few minutes were any indication of his power over her.

"Trust me," he whispered.

Trust. If only she could.

Chapter Three

Getting into character

“I don’t understand why you’re wasting your time on this film, Ty,” Bernie Rather said on the other end of the line. The man was one of the top agents in Hollywood, but that was only because he played by Tinsel Town rules. It was his consistency that kept him afloat, not his creativity. Ty was amazed the man had managed to walk down the aisle four times, as marriage certainly held a level of risk he’d never seen Bernie take on a professional level. Of course—considering the fact he’d ended up in divorce court four times—perhaps it was best Bernie stuck to the tried and true on the business front.

“We’ve been through this a thousand times, Bernie. I want to do something different, something of substance. I’m getting too damn old for the action hero shit.”

“The only problem with you is pride. Break down and start using the stunt double and you could keep doing action movies until you’re eighty. Look at Harrison Ford, Bruce Willis.”

Depression overwhelmed Ty at the thought of chasing bad character actors through various cities while the special effects people blew up everything in sight. There was no way he could continue to play those roles until he retired.

“No thanks. I’m ready to try a more serious role and *Evening Songs* is the perfect story. Oscar material for sure.” He didn’t dare admit to Bernie that his desire to make the film was two-fold. While he hoped it would break him out of his stereotypical roles, he also wanted to see the stories told and shared with a broader audience because they spoke to his heart.

“You realize it will be both of our asses if this thing flops. Your star power will only take you so far, Ty. Add in your rather volatile public persona and you’re a ticking time bomb facing complete annihilation.”

He sighed and closed his eyes. He’d heard that line a thousand times from Bernie and he knew exactly how much was riding on this project and his plans for the future and his career.

“I know that. It won’t fail.” He delivered the line with as much conviction as he could muster, praying his agent couldn’t hear the underlying anxiety in his voice. Gwen had signed the contracts. She was now legally bound to work on the screenplay with him, but he’d failed to tell her exactly how much was riding on this movie. He needed her talent, her writing skills, far more than he’d let on. He was betting the entire future of his career on her ability to tell a great story.

“Talk to you later,” he heard Bernie say as he closed the cell and put the phone in his pocket.

He paced the floor, glancing out the window every few moments, waiting for Bob to return from the airport with Gwen. He'd wanted to pick her up personally, but his morning meeting had run long, lasting well into the afternoon. He'd only arrived home half an hour earlier.

He stifled a yawn and grimaced. He was exhausted from tossing and turning all night. Hell, every night since she'd left. The past two weeks had moved in slow motion, and every time he replayed her reaction to his kisses, his touches, he felt like the memories had been burned onto his brain and soul.

She was perfect for him and that concept obliterated all of his common sense. He'd never met a woman like her. He'd never let himself *imagine* a woman like her existed. It was as if he'd written his ideal character, described her, shaped and molded her and Gwen had fallen into the part—his ultimate leading lady.

He was a dominant in every aspect of his life, but in the bedroom, those tendencies seemed to be amplified to outlandish proportions. His entire life was spent in the limelight, so he'd learned how to temper his needs, his desires. He could just imagine the field day the tabloids would have printing the news of his sexual escapades. In his world, long-term committed relationships didn't happen, and there was no way he would open himself up for the ugly gossip that would surround him if he dared to venture into the type of sexual relationship he truly wanted.

"Fuck." He couldn't even think the words in his own mind. BDSM. He wanted a slave in the bedroom, a woman he could command and control. He wanted to place a collar around Gwen's neck and chain her to his bed forever. He wanted to take care of her, give her anything and everything she'd ever dreamed of.

No doubt he could keep an entire army of psychiatrists busy with his psyche if he was so inclined, but he'd come to realize that his need for dominance was simply an innate part of his personality. He was who he was and since meeting Gwen he knew the years of hiding, of restraining that need for ultimate control, were over.

Until now, preserving his career, his reputation, had always come before those desires. One week in Gwen's presence had changed that. Never once in all of his forty years had he met a woman he wanted to utterly possess. Whether the idea of controlling her in the bedroom was right or wrong, it continued to gnaw at his conscience while eating away at his willpower. He knew he should resist her—for the success of the screenplay, if nothing else—but he also knew he never would, never could.

He now understood the reason he'd been drawn to her story, "The Darkest Night". Clearly she had similar desires. Every move she had made the morning she left proved it. She was a born submissive. She would obey his commands. She would place herself completely in his hands and she would be marvelous.

Problem was, she didn't seem to realize or understand her needs. At all. In fact, he sensed that, like him, she'd spent a lifetime denying that part of herself. He'd spent the past two weeks considering whether

or not he should explore the relationship with her, take tentative steps in the direction he believed they'd both like to go.

If only he wasn't feeling so much damn stress about the screenplay. What if he pushed her too far? The ways he wanted to take her were too extreme and he'd never forgive himself if he hurt her by pushing her into something she wasn't ready for. Worse yet, what if he'd read her wrong? What if he revealed his true nature and it scared her, drove her away? He knew she craved his rough touch, but what would she think when she realized that the charming, playboy Ty Ransome had a *really* dark side?

Who knew? Perhaps she would be the one woman who could handle his needs. Perhaps she would be the one who would accept him for himself, rather than the image on the screen and—dear God, please—perhaps she would be the one to stick around for a lifetime or so.

Tires on the driveway pulled him from his thoughts and he opened the front door as she emerged from the back of the limo and looked at him. He could see she was surprised to find him standing there.

"Hey, Hollywood," she said as she climbed the steps.

He reached out his hand and she accepted it. He didn't release her until he'd pulled her straight into his arms. He lowered his lips to hers before she could resist and kissed her long and hard. She struggled for only a moment before opening her mouth to his questing tongue.

When at last he allowed her to pull away, he grinned at her annoyed expression.

"Dammit," she whispered. "I can see you haven't repented the error of your ways."

"Sweetheart, the only mistake I could make with you would be to walk away."

"Ty, this isn't how—"

"Come inside. I've had the cook prepare us a nice lunch. I thought we'd eat out by the pool."

"I really want to talk about—"

"After lunch, I thought we could take a swim," he said. She narrowed her eyes at his continual interruptions. He knew she would continue to resist him, but he wouldn't allow her to run from him. She was about to find herself under a full-scale Ty attack. He'd battened down his hatches and was ready to see her white flag waving surrender against the horizon. Failure wasn't an option he was ready to face.

After lunch and a pleasant conversation, Gwen leaned back in the poolside lounge feeling more relaxed than she would have expected. Ty's welcoming kiss, the special lunch, the way he was looking at her, proved he had no intention of backing off. She would be here for two months, working with him day after day, and she realized there was no way she'd be able to fight off her attraction to him.

"That's a serious look." He glanced over at her from his own lounge.

"You aren't even going to try to keep your hands off of me, are you?"

He gave her a wicked smile. "Nope."

Just sitting anywhere near the man caused such a soul-melting heat to course through her that she felt as if she were being consumed by flames.

“Will you at least try to understand where I’m coming from about the professionalism?”

“Nope.” He grinned as he spoke and she felt herself falling under his spell. No wonder the guy was a box-office sensation. No woman alive could resist him when he smiled like that. Her bedroom toys had been overworked since her return to New York, but regardless of how many times she’d tried to sate her overwhelming needs, nothing had come even close to relieving her weary body as he had with just his fingers.

“I want you.” He forced her gaze to meet his. “I’m not going to lie, not going to pretend that I don’t.”

“But I don’t want you.” The prevarication hovered between them like a foul odor.

“Don’t lie to me, Gwen. Ever.”

She tried to stifle the shudder that passed through her at the tone of his voice and she attempted to clear away the sensations swamping her until she couldn’t form a coherent thought. She wasn’t sure how he was able to affect her so strongly, but she found herself drawn to him like a bee to honey.

He was controlling their personal play, and he had been from the start. The idea of him taking control of her so thoroughly should have jarred her sense of self-preservation, had her running for the hills, but instead she relished his power.

This is wrong.

The words weaved their way back into her conscience as fear and unease swamped her, washing away all other emotions. She’d spent the past two weeks attempting to regain her wits, to remember why she had to fight against Ty’s advances. If he knew what she truly wanted from him, he’d turn away from her with disgust. It had happened before and she wasn’t strong enough to suffer the rejection again. She tried to alleviate the tension with humor.

“Listen, Hollywood, you’re just gonna have to accept the fact that I’m not interested in pursuing a relationship with you. I think perhaps we should focus our energy on the screenplay. That is why I’m here. The only reason I’m here.”

A scowl crossed his face as he rose and walked to her side. She struggled to raise her gaze to his. His eyes seemed to see right through her and she knew he’d read the fear, the lies, the confusion in her face as easily as he read his cue cards on the set.

“You’re right.”

She glanced up, shocked by his quick capitulation. “The screenplay should be our top priority, and with that thought in mind, I’ve made some arrangements for our writing.” He gestured toward the house. “Come with me.”

She followed him in silence, through the living room and up a grand staircase, her mind whirling the entire time as he led her into the largest, most ornate bedroom she’d ever seen.

"I don't understand," she said hoarsely, clearing her throat, hoping to dislodge the lump that had formed there.

"We'll write in here, Gwen." He crossed the room to a large desk. She was shocked to realize her laptop was set up on the surface. Another glance around the room confirmed that her suitcases were there as well.

"Is this a guest room?" she asked. "I thought I'd be staying in the guest house again."

He shook his head. "This is my room. You'll be staying here."

"No." She backed away a step. "I most definitely will not."

"You said yourself that you're here to work on the screenplay."

"And how in the hell will me staying in your bedroom accomplish that?"

He flashed her a charming grin that she immediately distrusted. "The stories in *Evening Songs* revolve around four couples in their bedrooms at night. The first story is a young married couple on their honeymoon and the second deals with the couple struggling to make a baby. 'The Darkest Night' shows a couple who embrace BDSM, and the final story is about the last night an elderly couple spend together before the wife dies in her sleep."

"I wrote the damn stories. I hardly need a synopsis."

His smile never dimmed. "What better place to write the screenplay of a movie that takes place exclusively in a bedroom than in the bedroom?"

"That doesn't explain why my luggage is here. If you want to write here, fine. I don't have a problem with that." Her body chastised her mind for those words. There was no way she could sit at this desk writing day after day with Ty and the world's most inviting, king-sized, canopied bed only a few feet away. "But I hardly think I need my clothing in here."

"I've cleared my schedule for a week."

"Cleared it? I thought you were going to continue to work on your other projects while we wrote. I've made arrangements to be here for two months, not a week."

He shrugged off her comment and took a step closer to her, as she struggled not to step back, not to give him the satisfaction of knowing how much he unnerved her. "Oh, we won't finish in that time. I doubt we'll get more than the outline sketched and some research completed, but I want us to have time to put our thoughts on paper and to get a few things established between us. While we're working on this screenplay, we're going to write, eat and sleep in here. Let's call it our honeymoon phase."

"What?"

"We're going to become your characters. Play out the parts of each couple, get inside their heads and see what makes them tick."

"You're crazy," she whispered. "We can't do that."

“Why not? You’re a writer, Gwen. You can’t tell me you don’t do detailed characters sketches prior to writing. I’ve read your books. Your characters jump off the page as if they are living, breathing entities. I’m an actor and a director. I attempt to do the same thing every time I take on a new role. I try to become the person I’m portraying. This could be an interesting experiment. Combining your writing skills with my acting ones to create these people. Think about it.”

She was spellbound by the enthusiasm, the energy that seemed to radiate from every part of him. When she’d written the stories in *Evening Songs*, she had become incredibly attached to the fictional couples. They’d begun to feel like her family, her friends, and she’d missed them dearly when the book was finished. The idea of bringing them back to life, of stepping into their skins with Ty, was more appealing than she could have imagined. “I’m not an actress.”

“You won’t be acting. These characters are you. You created them. They live inside you.”

“The sex—”

“They have sex. We’re going to have sex. You’re only kidding yourself if you think we aren’t going to give in to this thing between us, Gwen. I’ve felt it since the first moment I laid eyes on you and I know it’s been the same for you. We’re adults and neither of us is in a relationship. What is there to hold us back?”

She considered his words, his invitation to join him in his bed to share her characters and her body with him. She was overwhelmed by how much she wanted what he was proposing. Surely she could do this. It was just sex, right? She would simply have to make sure they didn’t cross over the boundary between normal sex and—

She sighed. She would have to guard her fantasies carefully. There was no way she could let Ty see what dark desires lived inside her.

She looked up at him and grinned at his charming smile. Damn movie star would definitely rock her world in bed, which would be a welcome change from her toys. She was sick of having sex alone.

“Well?” he asked.

“When do we start?”

Chapter Four

Vignette One: The Honeymoon

"I think we should start at the beginning," Ty suggested once he'd secured her agreement. She nodded and walked toward the desk. She was about to sit down to boot up her computer when he halted her. "Oh no, Gwen. We can hardly write until we've laid the groundwork."

"Groundwork?" Her heart skipped a beat as she knew exactly what *groundwork* he intended to lay.

"Can you honestly tell me you'd be able to sit at that desk and write when your cunt is dripping wet with need?"

She sucked in a breath and started to deny his words, but he placed a gentle finger against her lips. "Don't lie," he said firmly and her words died in her throat. "Your nipples are rock hard and poking through that sheer blouse, tormenting me." He leaned closer. "Your breathing is labored and I can practically hear your heart pounding from here. There's no need to be nervous. We have all night."

"It's still daytime." She winced at the foolishness of her comment.

"You were the one who wanted to fly all night after the wedding to get here. I've been very patient, Gwen, but I'm only human and a man only has one honeymoon."

He was already assuming the role from her story, but he was definitely taking liberties with the lines and character.

"The bride's name is Becca," she said, correcting him in regards to the part she was supposedly playing.

He shook his head. "You and I will always be Ty and Gwen. Make no mistake of that." He took a step back and smiled. "Take off your blouse. I haven't seen those gorgeous tits of yours yet."

She sucked in a nervous breath. In "The Honeymoon", her character was a virgin who had saved herself for marriage. Gwen was no virgin, no innocent in the bedroom, and regardless of Ty's talent as an actor, she knew he wouldn't be able to pull off the role of a bumbling, nervous groom. Hell, given the way he was staring at her like a tiger stalking his prey, she got the feeling this honeymoon and the one in her book would be as similar as chocolate and mud.

With shaking hands, she began to undo the buttons of her blouse as he watched. His eyes grew dark with arousal and for a moment, she was struck again by the feeling of being watched by a very large, virile and hungry beast. He remained motionless as she slipped the silky material off her shoulders. She felt naked, despite the cover provided by her lacy bra.

“You’re beautiful,” he whispered.

“I want to see you too,” she said breathlessly, but he merely grinned and shook his head.

“Not yet. Slip off your skirt.”

She unfastened the button at the waist and slid down the zipper. She was about to push the entire skirt down when he stopped her.

“Wait,” he said. “Turn around. Slide it down nice and slow and look over your shoulder at me as you do so.”

Suddenly she could see the advantages of sleeping with a director. She complied with his request, for the first time in her life feeling sexy, hot, desirable. She kept her eyes on him as she shimmied the material over her hips. She’d worn a thong underneath and even the small part of her mind that denied wanting this had to admit she’d worn it for him. She saw him suck in a deep breath as her ass was bared to his eyes, only the thin string of the panties covering her.

“The thong, Gwen. Take it and your bra off. I want you naked. Now.”

She started to turn around to face him, but he shook his head. She peeled the panties off torturously slow, delighted by the tenting at the front of his pants. She’d done that. She’d made him want her. The feeling was heady, exciting.

She stepped out of the thong, then reached to unfasten her bra. She was startled when she felt him step closer. He put his arms around her and as she pulled the lacy garment away, he was there to envelop her breasts in his large, strong palms from behind her.

She marveled at the sensitivity of his hot breath against her neck and his rough hands against her delicate flesh. “Are you a virgin, wife?”

Her breathing raced and she struggled to speak. All she could do was shake her head in response.

“No,” he said. “Are you sure?”

She was confused by his question. Was she supposed to lie? He’d warned her not to. It was obvious that regardless of his suggestion that they reenact the stories of her book, tonight was not playacting and they were not the young, bumbling couple from “The Honeymoon”.

“I’m sure,” she whispered.

“Have you ever been tied up in bed?”

She jerked a bit, but his hands on her breasts, gently massaging the pliant flesh, held her firmly in place.

She shook her head.

“Bend over.”

For a moment, her mind revolted against her body’s screaming demands that she do anything and everything this man said. When she failed to move, he released her breasts and pushed her shoulders forward and down.

“Grasp your ankles and stay like that. Don’t move unless I give you permission.”

She did as he asked, her thoughts whirling. She was in serious danger of hyperventilating. Her breathing was harsh, ragged and he must have sensed her intense anxiety. “Calm down, Gwen. Relax. I won’t hurt you.”

She wanted to snarl at his reassurance. Pain was the least of her worries. She needed him to hurry the hell up. He chuckled at her reaction and she wondered if he could read her mind.

His hands slowly rubbed over her ass, lightly gripping her hips and pulling her against his clad erection.

Why is he still dressed?

She wanted to yell at him to correct that oversight, but she knew the complaint would fall on deaf ears. He was truly the director of this scene.

She was shocked when after one nudge of his cock against her ass, he stepped back. He replaced his hips with his hands as he dragged them through the slit down to her pussy. She could feel the moisture pooled there, knew she was practically dripping, knew she’d never been wetter.

“Spread your legs apart, but keep your hands around your ankles.”

She struggled to obey, but apparently he wasn’t happy with her attempt. “Farther apart,” he demanded. “I won’t let you fall.”

His tone sent a fresh flood of juice between her thighs and she realized the error of his thinking. How could she tell him she was falling, falling so deeply into this scene, into his words, that she feared she’d never find her way out again?

He steadied her with his hands upon her waist and she closed her eyes against the sensations of being completely naked before this man, baring all her assets to his hungry gaze.

His fingers returned to her pussy and he used her juices to toy with her clit, his touches too light, too torturously soft. She struggled to push against him, but in her current position, her movements were restricted, difficult.

“Please.” The cry was a familiar one whenever she was in his presence.

He responded to her plea not with words, but actions. His fingers left her clit completely and she groaned.

“No,” he said. “Your orgasms belong to me and you haven’t earned one yet. You haven’t finished answering my question.”

Question? He asked a question?

“Are you a virgin?”

“No,” she whispered. This wasn’t her book, these weren’t her characters. It may be a honeymoon of his making, but she couldn’t pretend to be anything other than who she was. Besides, she wanted this night to be about her, not some make-believe character from her damn book.

“Are you sure?” His fingers traveled to the opening of her body. Suddenly and without warning, he slammed three digits inside her hot, needy flesh.

She cried out, gratitude mingling with the stars that flew through her. She tried to push against him, her body and mind screaming for him to move, to pound inside her, but he held his fingers motionless for several moments.

“You’ve had a man’s fingers in your cunt before?”

She nodded, but her silence seemed to annoy him. “Say it, Gwen.”

“Yes,” she hissed. “I’ve had a man’s fingers there before.”

“And a man’s cock?”

“Yes.”

“A dildo, a vibrator?”

“Yes.” She remembered her poor, battered toys as they lay in her unopened suitcase. She’d given them a workout during her two weeks away from Hollywood. Ty’s name was the one word she’d cried out night after night.

His hands left her as quickly as they’d entered her and she fought back tears of frustration. They moved away from her pussy and back. She sucked in a breath when she realized his destination.

This time when he pushed into her body again, it was slower, one finger in her ass.

“Have you had a man’s finger in your ass before tonight?”

She nodded, but he waited for her words. “Yes.”

She knew what his next question would be and the thought of what he was asking, what he would do, left her lightheaded.

“What about a cock?”

“No,” she whispered.

“So you are a virgin. You lied to me. You’ve never been tied up and you’ve never been fucked in the ass. Have you ever been spanked?”

He seemed intent on bringing every deep, dark sexual secret to light and for a moment, she felt a spurt of angry rebellion bubble up inside her. Did he intend to lay out his past sexual exploits for her examination?

“Not well,” she spat out, and she was surprised when he laughed. He leaned down to help her stand, turning her in his arms and embracing her tightly.

“Jesus, you are a treasure.” His murmured compliment relaxed her, and as quickly as her anger came, it left. His words, his actions, everything spoke to her, and she found it hard to keep the emotional distance she needed to maintain. What foolish part of her had believed she could have a physical relationship with the man and remain aloof? He was intent on conquering her, and although the battle had yet to begin—she sensed this interlude had been little more than a skirmish—she was already weak.

“Go lie down on the bed. On your back, spread eagle.” He released her. “You’re going to offer me that innocence, Gwen, and I’m going to accept it.”

She stepped away from him on unsteady feet, her mind trying to acclimate to the idea that he would tie her up, spank her, fuck her ass. Did she want that?

She stifled a small giggle at the insane question. Did she *want* it? Holy hell, her only concern was that he wouldn’t do it quickly enough. He was intent on dragging this play out when all she wanted was hard, fast, rough sex for as long as they both shall live.

As she lay on the bed, she sucked in a breath.

As long as they both shall live.

Where did that idea come from? This wasn’t a true honeymoon. It was business with a bit of pleasure thrown in for good measure. She was here for two months. Two months to work on a screenplay and perhaps enjoy some hot bed play with the handsome, sexy Ty Ransome. That was it. That was all.

Dear God, please let that be all.

Ty watched Gwen crawl onto his bed and position herself as he’d directed. He marveled at the fact his cock seemed to grow even larger at the image of her laid out before him like a banquet feast. He honestly couldn’t believe any more blood could fit into his already aching, filled-to-bursting appendage. Christ. He was two seconds away from blowing and he hadn’t even taken off one stitch of clothing. His little author was a veritable sex kitten and she had no idea of her effect on him. She watched him through hooded eyelids and for a moment he was overwhelmed with the desire to know exactly what she was thinking.

He knew she was approaching sex with him as a temporary thing. He’d seen her consider his proposition and he knew the moment she’d decided to give in to their mutual attraction. Convincing her to stick around for the long run was going to be his real challenge. Well, that and dragging her repressed desires into the limelight. She seemed slightly appalled by her hot buttons. She obviously liked pain and the thought of bondage, but he watched her constantly try to hide those facts, deny their existence.

During their phone calls and conversations, he’d discovered she was a woman who was used to being in charge of every aspect of her life and her career, but surely she must be tired of always making every decision, calling all the shots. By taking away her decisions in the bedroom, he suspected he could remove some of the lingering loneliness and stress reflecting in her eyes.

He walked to the end of the bed and looked at her. She constantly surprised him. Rather than squirm uncomfortably under his scrutiny, she seemed to flourish with his appreciative looks. “You truly are lovely, Gwen.”

She smiled.

“I’m going to tie you up.” He reached down to reveal the straps he’d attached to the bed earlier. He’d concealed them and he could see a brief wariness in her eyes. “Pick a safe word. One word. If at any time

during our sex play you become uncomfortable or frightened, say it and I'll stop what I'm doing. But Gwen, I must warn you. If you say the word, I won't just pause, I'll stop completely, so be very certain."

She considered for a moment and he knew before she spoke her word he wasn't going to like it. A mischievous, all-too-pleased look crossed her face as she said, "Bambi. My safe word is Bambi."

He stifled a groan and a grin of his own. She was a demon and an angel. "You're never going to let me live that down, are you?"

"Never," she teased.

Her smile grew brighter and he decided to exact his own small bit of revenge against the impish woman. He gripped her ankle firmly and pulled it toward the strap. He was shocked when she jerked her leg back, out of his grip.

She shook her head as she rose to her knees. "You didn't think I was going to make it that easy, did you?"

He narrowed his eyes. She wanted to fight him? Clearly she didn't understand how this game worked. "Gwen." She giggled at his harsh tone and continued to move away from him toward the head of the bed.

"Catch me."

His breath caught in his throat, the image of capturing and conquering her a heady, exciting premise. Jesus, she wanted to be chased and he knew there was nothing on earth he wanted more than to subdue her, force her to his will.

"If I have to chase you, I won't take it easy on you," he warned. She shuddered at his words and her body flushed with anticipation. "Lie down, Gwen, and submit to me." He silently prayed she would deny him.

"No."

At the sound of her single word, he pounced. He jumped onto the bed as she skittered off. She hadn't been kidding when she dared him. She flew across the room, clearly trying to escape. He raced after her and caught her as she struggled to open the door to his bedroom. He trapped her arms at her sides, engulfing them in his own. He had to be careful to avoid her kicking legs. He felt her heart pounding as he locked his hands together under her breasts, pulling her against him.

"Your safe word?" He wanted to be sure, wanting to know that this game was just that—a game—and that she was a willing participant. She slammed her heel down on his foot hard and for a moment, he lost his grip. She wiggled loose.

"No word," she shouted.

She truly wanted this. It was all the confirmation he needed. She ran toward the patio, but didn't make it two steps before he caught her by the hair. She screamed as he took her down to the floor. He knew she didn't mind the roughness, but he refused to forget her fragility, refused to seriously hurt her. She lay trapped on her stomach as he used his entire body to subdue her.

“Do you give up?” he asked roughly in her ear. “Will you submit?”

“Never.” Her breathlessness betrayed her excitement.

He caught her wrists in one hand, pulling them behind her, holding them firmly at the small of her back. He moved down her thighs and roughly shoved her legs apart. She tried to kick out, but her mobility was limited by her position. He prodded the opening to her body, amazed by the juices flowing from her cunt. He shoved in two fingers, shocked when her orgasm flooded his hand with her arousal while squeezing his fingers in a death grip of tensing, pulsating muscles.

Fuck. She was coming. She was climaxing from their game. This chase fantasy must have been one she’d dreamed of for a very long time. What other naughty little dreams did she have swirling about in that delicious mind of hers?

While she was mindless, lost in the throes of her orgasm, he grasped the upper hand. He stood and lifted her off the floor, carrying her to the bed. She didn’t fight him as her body shook in the aftermath of her pleasure. Placing her in the middle of the large mattress, he attached her wrists together above her head with a strap, but he left her legs unbound.

If he didn’t get inside her body soon, he felt as if he would explode into a million pieces. He rose from the bed and watched as she regained her wits. She pulled to check the tightness of the straps holding her captive to his bed and her gaze flew to his.

“You won’t break those restraints.” He slowly undressed, thrilled to see her watching him as if spellbound, subdued, submitting. He removed his shirt and pushed down his pants and boxers in one smooth move, her eyes following his every action.

“Like what you see?” he teased when her tongue darted out to moisten her lips.

Her eyes flew back to his face. “Yes,” she whispered. “Very much. Please hurry, Ty.”

He fought to regain control of the moment. Damn her. She’d taken his ideas of domination and submission and blown them out of the water. He’d lived his entire life with the dream of controlling a woman in the bedroom, and in one afternoon, Gwen had taken his preconceived notions of how this should work and twisted them into something new, something glorious. Life with this woman would never be boring and as that thought crossed his mind, he realized that he would accept nothing short of a lifetime with her.

This really was their honeymoon.

He reached into the drawer of his nightstand and pulled out a condom. Donning it, he crawled over her body, thrilled when she wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him to her.

He placed his cock at the opening to her body and slid slowly into heaven. “I won’t be easy,” he murmured against her cheek. “I want you too badly to go slow.”

“I know my safe word,” she said, but he knew without a doubt she wouldn’t use it.

Pulling back, he slammed into her with all the force, all the power, all the desires she'd brought to a boil in his body over the course of the last hour. Over and over, he shoved into her, making demands it seemed only she could fulfill. She came twice around his cock, but he refused to give way, refused to stop.

When at last he felt he had to come or die, he gave in to his release as she cried out and joined him again. He hovered over her, and as he climaxed, he was inundated by the realization that every dream in his life had just been fulfilled in her. A lifetime spent hiding behind the guise of a character of his own making simply drifted away, leaving him naked, uncovered, revealed. Gwen looked at him, her eyes sparkling with the same amazement he felt and he knew the truth. He'd just found home.

He collapsed on top of her, aware his weight was crushing her, but powerless to move. He buried his face in her neck, afraid to let her see the tears hovering in his eyes. He breathed in her fresh, flowery scent and savored the softness of her skin. After several moments—once he'd composed himself—he shifted to the side and released the straps at her wrists, dragging her arms down and lightly massaging her shoulders.

She turned her face to his and he leaned forward to kiss her. Caressed her lips with his.

"Quite a honeymoon," she said after they broke away. The light in the room had gone dim as afternoon had given way to evening and he wondered how long they'd lain there simply kissing.

"Quite a honeymoon," he agreed with a contented grin.

Chapter Five

Vignette Two: It's Time

The week of their “honeymoon” passed far too quickly for Ty and he returned to the demands of his job, resentful at being forced away from Gwen’s sweet body. Acting had been his life, his singular joy for over two decades, but as he watched the actors on the set recite their lines like they had mouths full of peanut butter, he wondered why the hell he bothered. He was guest-directing one of the hottest shows on television as a favor to a friend. One of the show’s gimmicks was inviting a different person in the business to direct each week.

He called “Cut!” and once again tried to explain to the two stars exactly what he’d already said twenty-seven fucking times today. He worked hard to control his temper because part of him suspected the actors were trying to provoke him to anger. He was well-aware that while there were several cameras pointed at the set, there was also one directed at him.

At the end of each show, the producers aired a montage of behind-the-scenes clips of the famous director working with the cast. No doubt some asshole producer had decided it would improve ratings to show that infamous Ransome temper exploding. Ty refused to accommodate them, but as the scene dragged on and on, each minute keeping him away from returning to Gwen, he found it hard to keep his growing fury in check.

“Mr. Ransome,” the director’s assistant said. The annoying woman had shadowed him for three days, offering coffee, food and advice almost every other minute.

“What?” he barked.

She widened her eyes as if afraid of him and he fought back a growl as he spotted the camera out of the corner of his eye.

“I’m sorry, Paula. What do you need?” He watched her disappointment at his calm apology and he realized she was also in on the scheme to provoke him to madness.

“There’s a woman here to see you. She insists that it’s very important.”

“Important?” he snapped, fed up with the constant interruptions. He wanted to be home in bed with Gwen, not here surrounded by this fake, talentless group of morons. “We’re in the middle of a scene. A scene that would have been finished two hours ago if these two had bothered to learn their lines.” Fuck the cameras and fuck this show. If they wanted to see Ty Ransome in a rage, he’d give them their money’s worth. Screw Bernie and his warnings to clean up his act.

A figure moved behind Paula, distracting him, and he spotted Gwen, waving nervously from the edge of the set. His anger dispersed in an instant.

"Everybody take ten," he shouted to the cast and crew. He could almost detect the sighs of annoyance as he walked away from them without giving them the money shot they were waiting for. Fuck. Was the whole crew conspiring against him?

"You're a sight for sore eyes," he said softly as he approached her. He gave her a quick buss on the cheek, unwilling to subject her to the cameras and gossip that would surround her if word of their relationship got out. He knew the tabloid onslaught would be unavoidable eventually, but he wanted to spare her that for as long as possible.

"It's time," she whispered.

"Time?"

"I'm ovulating. We need to have sex. Now."

His mind whirled at her words. Ovulating? Sex? Now? He started to question her until he remembered the second story. "It's Time" involved a young, married couple as they struggled to conceive. The sex life they'd enjoyed prior to their decision to make a baby had turned into a chore as the wife's desire for a child began to rule the bedroom. Over the course of time, the husband started to resent the feeling of being treated like nothing more than a stud used for breeding.

"Gwen, I'm sort of in the middle of something right now." Even as he spoke the words, he couldn't believe she'd actually appeared here expecting him to have sex with her in the middle of a busy set.

"You said you were committed to this, Ty. We agreed to do whatever it takes to make a baby. I need you." Her voice, though soft, was firm. He glanced around quickly to make sure no one could overhear them and misinterpret her words.

"Gwen, I—"

"We have to hurry," she said. He looked down at her body and he could see that she was certainly being honest about the *needing him* bit. Her nipples were threatening to tear the thin material of her sundress and her face was flushed.

"Dammit, this really isn't a good place or time. There are too many people. I know what you're trying to do, Gwen." He grinned, hoping to dissuade her with charm. "But let's face it, the honeymoon isn't over yet." He leaned closer to whisper in her ear. "I've yet to claim that ass of yours. Let's wait a couple of weeks before we tackle the next story."

"Now, Ty," she insisted, her voice louder, carrying. He watched several stagehands pause to look at them.

"You're making a scene," he hissed.

"It's time," she repeated.

Already at the end of his rope, he felt the last straw break. “Fine. You wanna play this fucking game here, we’ll play it.” He gripped her arm tightly and directed her toward his trailer. He couldn’t mistake her quick intake of excited breath at his aggressive handling, and his traitorous cock sprang to life instantly. Perfect, just what he needed. A bunch of cameras recording him dragging Gwen Preston to his trailer with a raging hard-on.

He pushed her quickly up the three steps, slamming the door closed behind them with more force than he intended. “God dammit, Gwen. In case you’ve failed to notice, I’m working. There are a hundred people out there all waiting for me to fuck this up. Now really isn’t a good time for this.”

She glanced down at the front of his pants and smirked. An honest-to-God smirk. “Fuck.” To hell with the cameras, to hell with keeping their relationship under wraps and to hell with her. “Turn around and bend over that table. Lift up your dress.”

If she wanted to be fucked, he’d accommodate her. He was too incensed for finesse, for grace. She wanted a stud, she’d get one. He pulled a condom out of his wallet before shoving his pants down. She watched with a satisfied smile before turning around and lifting her dress. He fought against the fresh round of arousal that attacked him when he realized she wasn’t wearing panties, her juices shining on the pale skin of her inner thighs. He took two steps forward and moved into place, thrust in without ceremony, without pause. He pounded into her with rough, hard blows, angry at first, but as they continued, every emotion raging through him fled, all except the ones that mattered. Relief, calmness, peace. Her body met his blow for blow and as she came around him, his anger, his misery poured out of him in a hot, hard, powerful release of come that he silently prayed the condom could hold.

He bent over her back, breathing raggedly as guilt suffused him. He’d used her hard and when he’d entered her, it had been with anger. Something he’d never, ever done before. He was ashamed of himself and afraid of her response. This was the reaction he’d feared right from the beginning. He knew the stress of the job made him nastier than a bear with a thorn in his paw. He’d been so afraid of hurting her and now—Jesus—now, he’d used her hard, hurt her. How could she ever forgive him?

They’d made very little progress on the writing of the screenplay and as each day passed, he felt his tension and anxiety grow. He’d yet to explain to Gwen the impact, the importance their joint project could have on his career. This week’s stint was just another example of how badly he wanted to break free of his stereotypical persona. He was tired of everyone watching and waiting for him to screw up. The success of *Evening Songs* could bring him stature, respect, elevate him to a higher level of performer. Hell, at this point, he’d just settle for being taken seriously as a professional.

“I’m sorry.” His voice was hoarse.

She pushed off the table and he unwillingly rose as his now-flaccid cock fell from her sweet body.

“Sorry?” she asked. “Why?”

"I was angry, Gwen, and too rough. I shouldn't have taken you like that. I should have waited, calmed down."

She reached up to cup his cheek in her soft hand. "I provoked you. It was my fault."

He shook his head. "I was the one who suggested we act out the stories."

She smiled and leaned up to kiss him. "I've missed you these past few days. The writing was easier when you were there to bounce ideas around with."

He nodded. "Yeah, I know. Even then, we weren't getting many words on the page."

She blushed and he grinned. Regardless of their rather heated bedroom play, he could still provoke that lovely flush on her cheeks with just a few naughty insinuations. She was a gift and he wondered how he'd ever lived without her.

"Are you sorry about starting this project? Do you think taking on the screenplay was a mistake?"

"No." He cursed himself when she jumped at his too loud, too harsh response. "No," he repeated quietly. "I'm just impatient to see it written. I'm still convinced it will be an amazing movie."

"Yeah, well, I must admit, I'm starting to believe you. In fact, I was sitting in your bedroom this afternoon, trying to concentrate on the screenplay, trying to finish that scene we'd started over the weekend, but all I could think about was how much I wanted you. No, God, not just want, but need. I needed you. The feeling grew until I didn't think I could bear it. I got out my vibrator and—"

He reached up and took her wrist in his hand roughly, and his body went hot with anger again. "You used a toy? While I was at work?"

He'd laid down some ground rules for her after their first night together. Rules he warned her would bear punishments if broken. One was she wouldn't use her toys without him. Another was that she wouldn't come without him being with her. Eventually he intended to teach her not to come without his permission, but she'd clearly spent too many years repressing her dark desires for him to impose that rule yet. She tended to come fast and hard at the slightest touch. He knew as she became accustomed to his commands, his demanding touches, she'd learn to control her responses, but for now he enjoyed sharing her pleasure at the newness of their sexual adventures.

"You've been back to work three days, Ty, and you get home so late. I—"

"Answer my question, Gwen. Did you use that vibrator? Did you come?"

She blushed again. "It didn't help," she whispered as if that excused her actions. "It just made me want you more."

He shook his head. She'd broken a rule. She hadn't truly tested him yet, but he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, that's what this was. She was daring him to assert his authority. She'd mentioned the toy. She'd wanted to confess, wanted to see how he would react. Obviously he would have to find ways to keep her more focused during the day. Keep her busy. Apparently she had too much time on her hands for naughtiness.

“Turn around. Bend over the table again.”

Her pupils dilated at his command and she quickly complied. He raised her dress to her waist once more, running his hands along the pale globes of her ass. He’d threatened to spank her if she misbehaved, but he’d never had the occasion to follow through on that threat. Until now.

Over the past week, Gwen’s need for pain had surfaced more and more in small ways. She’d come one night with no more stimulation than him pulling her hair while he taught her how to swallow him deeply in her throat. Though she’d accepted the concept of bondage during their first night together, he hadn’t continued to explore that aspect of their relationship, as he sensed her reluctance to admit what she truly wanted from him. The damn woman clearly considered certain things too dark, too wrong. He’d correct her of that mistaken assumption eventually, but right now he was going to further her education in another area.

Without any prelude, he slapped her bare bottom several times, watching the flesh go pink beneath his hand. Gwen was silent through the first few smacks, but as he built the speed and strength, he watched with wonder as she began to squirm, her body trying to anticipate the blows, trying to seek them out before they fell. She groaned loudly and he sensed this punishment might be falling short of the mark. Her ass glowed bright red and had to be sore, yet he knew she was on the verge of coming. He stopped and pulled her upright.

She cried out in anger, but he refused to be moved when she started to protest.

“Watch it, Gwen,” he said. “This was a punishment, nothing more. You took this orgasm at home, without me. One more word from you and I won’t allow you to come for a week.”

She opened her mouth to refute his claim, but he placed his fingers against her lips. “Before you threaten to disprove that comment, consider this. I will throw every one of your fucking toys away and tie you to the bed every day while I’m gone so that you can’t touch your own pussy.”

“You wouldn’t dare.” Her question was spoken with a breathless quality that alerted him to how much that idea turned her on. Holy shit. She’d enjoy intense bondage. Even though he knew he’d never truly leave her alone while she was tied up, he didn’t mind using the threat, building the scene in her mind.

“Do you really want to test that theory? You won’t come for a week. I will make sure of it.”

“But then you’d suffer too.” He could see she was afraid he’d follow through with his threat to withhold her orgasms. She was becoming a greedy lover. Lucky him.

“That’s part of being a Master, Gwen. Your instruction, your obedience comes with a price for me as well.”

“Master?”

He’d yet to initiate any conversation regarding BDSM with her, but he knew more and more that he wanted to live that lifestyle with her. He wanted her to call him Master, wanted her to serve him as his

sexual submissive. But first, he had to prove to her that her penchant for bondage and pain wasn't wicked and wrong.

He kissed her gently, not ready to tell her of all the hopes and dreams he'd pinned on her.

"Later," he said, dismissing her question. He walked toward the back of his trailer and pulled out a bag. He'd had the toys delivered earlier in the day and he'd intended to surprise her tonight at home. As always, Gwen blew his plans sky-high. As she watched, he pulled out a butt plug and vibrator. Tearing them from their packaging, he washed them off in the small bathroom sink before returning to her.

He kissed her gently on the cheek. "Last time, I promise. Turn around and bend over."

She grinned as he repeated the same command for the third time. "Since you're ovulating," he said with a small chuckle, "perhaps I should keep you close to me today."

Her ass was still red and he struggled to understand the part of him that became aroused at the sight of his woman's ass marked by his hand. He shook his head, glad that Gwen couldn't see the grin that crossed his face. It seemed they both needed to come to grips with the skeletons in their bedroom closets.

He pushed his fingers into her hot pussy and she immediately reacted, moving against him, attempting to steal more of the stimulation she needed. He laughed softly at her incredible sex drive. He pulled out and she hissed at his retreat, until he used her juices to ease his finger's path into her ass. Although he'd promised to fuck her there, he hadn't done so. He wasn't sure why he was waiting. He wanted to fuck her ass like he'd never wanted anything in life, but he wanted it to be special for her. She confessed she'd never had a man there and the idea of being her first appealed to him greatly.

Picking up the butt plug, he decided it was time to proceed down that path. Tonight he would claim this last frontier as his own. He rubbed the plug against the outer lips of her pussy, using her fluid to coat the hard toy before placing the tip at her anus. She sucked in a harsh breath as he pushed the large plug past her tight ring of muscles. Once it was lodged, he heard her heavy sigh of relief.

"How does that feel?" He was curious about her every thought as he dragged her deeper and deeper into his fantasies.

"Tight. Wonderful."

He grinned. Leaning forward, he retrieved the second toy, a small vibrator that was operated with a remote control. He pushed the tiny toy into her dripping cunt before helping her stand. She swayed a bit as she attempted to acclimate herself to toys filling her.

Reaching into his pocket, he pushed the button that would activate the vibrator. She hissed in surprise at the feeling. Keeping it on low, he watched her lovely cheeks flood with color.

"Ty," she said, but he cut off her comment.

"You're going to sit beside me on the set for the rest of the afternoon. If you are a good girl, I'll give you as many orgasms as your little body can take tonight. But if you come without permission at any time while we're here, I won't fuck you again until tomorrow night. Understand?"

It was high time he moved forward on her training. If she was questioning his authority and testing his rules, it was obvious she was ready for the next level.

She nodded in response and he could see she was already fighting against her growing arousal. The vibrator was set on low. How would she react when he pushed up the speed?

“Your orgasms belong to me now. You don’t come without my permission. Ever.”

She shuddered at his words, but he wanted to hear her accept them as true. “Do you understand, Gwen? Repeat it back to me.”

“My orgasms belong to you,” she whispered and he smiled.

Gwen sucked in a rough breath and fought against the instinct to squirm in her chair. Ty’s name suddenly took on a new meaning as she suspected it wasn’t short for Tyler as she’d originally suspected, but instead was the shortened version of Tyrant. He’d taken great pleasure in tormenting her all day with his evil little toys and she wondered how she’d managed to hold back her building orgasm. For two hours, she sat beside him as he directed the scenes, one after another.

When she’d first arrived on the set, she’d sensed his anger, his frustration. None of those emotions were present in him now. He was jovial, good-natured, laughing with the cast and crew as if she wasn’t suffering in agony just a few feet away. She fought the urge to walk over to him and slap the smug smile off his face. She was dying and he was enjoying it.

She felt the vibrator in her pussy pick up speed and she cried out. The cameraman nearest her glanced over and she tried to cover up the sound with a cough. The annoying-as-shit assistant who’d been trailing after Ty all afternoon as if he were her personal God walked over to her to see if she needed a glass of water. Gwen shook her head, uncertain if she could speak without her voice quivering. She squeezed her legs tighter together and attempted to ride out the storm yet again.

The past week with Ty had opened her eyes to a world she’d only lived in her fantasies. She was continually amazed by how in tune with her desires the man was. Every day, despite her attempts to hold back, to protect her heart, she found herself falling deeper and deeper under his spell. She was failing miserably in her attempts to hide her darker nature and she feared the day when Ty realized he’d never be able to go where she needed him to go. She was setting herself up for certain heartbreak and yet, as she sat here with her pussy and ass crammed full of his torturous toys, she knew she’d never have the strength to do as she should and walk away.

After about a million years, Ty finally called it a night, congratulating the cast and crew for their outstanding work. As he approached her, the murderous feelings she’d felt all afternoon dispersed, turning into instantaneous red-hot lust.

“Are you ready to go?” He extended a hand to help her up. She’d refused to move all day, unwilling to risk adding to the stimulation in her pussy and ass. Now she was paying the price as her legs felt stiff with the inactivity.

She nearly fell as she stood, but he deftly caught her, holding her close to his chest. She glanced up into his face as her nipples tightened against his firm chest. “You have the limo?”

His eyes narrowed as if he suspected the reason for her question. He nodded.

“Good,” she said. “It’s time.”

Chapter Six

Vignette Three: The Darkest Night

As they rushed to the limo, Ty quickly ushered her inside, as desperate for relief as she was. It had taken all the strength in his body not to drag her off the set and back to his trailer at least a dozen times today.

“Take the long way home,” he commanded his driver as he shut the door behind them.

“Take off that fucking dress.” Part of him expected her to balk at his harsh tone, but she merely reached down and whipped the filmy material over her head in one motion. All that remained beneath was a lacy scrap of material he assumed she considered a bra. The rest of her was bare to his perusal, his hands.

He pushed her back against the leather seat, coming over her. With one deft movement, he yanked the small vibrator out of her clinging cunt and pulled the butt plug from its tight hole. He wanted every part of her available to him, to his cock, to his hands.

She was gasping for breath, her nipples taut and tempting. Bending his head down, he sucked the barely covered nub into his mouth roughly. She cried out at his hard suckling, but didn’t complain, didn’t try to push him off. He shoved the bra down, impatiently biting at her nipples. Her hips began gyrating wildly against his thigh and he could feel her arousal soaking through the material of his dress pants.

“Goddamn you,” he said through gritted teeth. “Hold still.” She ceased movement until he returned to playing with her soft breasts, taking her hard nipples in his teeth again. Soon she began subconsciously thrusting again.

“That’s it, Gwen. You’ve disobeyed me one time too often.”

She looked at him as confusion and arousal rivaled for supremacy in her beautiful blue eyes. “You’re mine.” It was time to finally admit his intentions for them. “You belong to me, and by God, you will obey me.”

She struggled to breathe, her sexy breasts heaving with the attempt. The image was enough to drive him to utter insanity.

“It’s time for the third story,” he proclaimed. “For ‘The Darkest Night’.”

She slowly shook her head. “No, it’s too soon.”

“You know your safe word.”

“But you can’t want to, I mean, that story—”

He reached into the bag of sex toys he’d carried from his trailer, pulling out a different, new item.

She gasped when he showed her the fur-lined handcuffs. Roughly gripping her wrists, he dragged them over her head, securing them together through the handgrip above the window.

She moaned as she tested the strength of her bondage and his suspicions were answered as her eyes drifted shut with pleasure. Clearly bondage resided at the top of her list of dirty fantasies.

“You look so sexy, so defenseless. What should I do to you first?”

She shuddered in response. “You can’t want to do this. That story—” She gasped, her body and mind appearing to be waging a war against each other. She’d fought his dominance all week and each time, he’d retreated a step or two, slowing the pace, giving her time to come to grips with her needs. He refused to back down any longer. It was time she understood who she was, who he was. What they would be together.

“Why wouldn’t I want to reenact that story, Gwen?”

“Those characters,” she said quietly, “what they do. It’s not natural.”

He leaned back onto his knees, his mind whirling with her comment. “Not natural?”

“The pain, the bondage,” she added. “Doesn’t that disturb you?”

“No, it doesn’t. Not at all. I can show you how amazing pleasure and pain can be when mixed together just right. If you’ll let me.”

She shook her head. “No.”

“Why not? You’re a submissive, Gwen. Surely you know that.” He was shocked by her continued reticence. How could she fight so hard against what she so clearly wanted?

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

He reeled back at her denial. She knew. She had to know. Didn’t she? “Where the hell do you think ‘The Darkest Night’ came from? I realized it the second I learned it was you who had written it. You’re a born sub. Haven’t you ever given in to those desires? Put yourself in the hands of a true Dom, even if only for a night?”

“No. You don’t understand. This is wrong.”

“Don’t.” His voice was harsh, angry, but he didn’t care. “Don’t ever say this is wrong again. Do you understand?”

“Yes.” Her body was trembling and he suddenly wondered if he’d gone too far.

“Are you afraid of me?”

She shook her head.

“Say it, Gwen. Out loud.”

“No,” she whispered. “I’m not afraid of you.”

“Good. Now tell me you want this. Tell me you want this bondage.”

She shuddered.

“Tell me,” he repeated.

“I can’t.”

"You can. You will. Tell me you want me to fuck you. Tell me you want me to take possession of you. Because that's what I'm going to do, Gwen. You belong to me."

"No," she whispered brokenly, her voice betraying her. She wanted everything he was doing to her. He knew it. He just needed to break through her damn resistance.

"Say it." He refused to back down until he heard the words. He wasn't going to let her escape her true nature any more. "Say it."

She closed her eyes, her body trembling with need.

"God dammit, Gwen. I can't go on unless you say it." His body was aching, but he wouldn't concede, wouldn't compromise.

"Ty, please," she cried. "I need you."

Upon second glance, he realized her pent-up passion caused her to shake. She was at the precipice of entering this new reality and he wouldn't let her turn back now.

He bent toward her and kissed her passionately, intensely. He'd been wrong to try to ease her into this type of relationship, wrong with his subtle approach. Clearly she thought she could escape the truth, escape him. No doubt she thought they'd been merely playing a game. It was time to take off the mask, time to reveal his true nature.

He narrowed his eyes, waiting for the words.

"I want you to take control. Own me," she said. "I'm yours. Only yours."

He broke away and donned a condom before gripping her hips firmly. He pulled her legs apart, placing one over the back of the leather seat and the other over his shoulder. She was totally open, helpless to anything but him and his body's demands. He seated himself to the hilt in one thrust.

"You're mine, Gwen," he hissed as he pounded himself into her willing flesh. Her orgasm began almost immediately and he pulled out completely as she screamed in frustration.

"I haven't given you permission to come," he said.

Tears streamed down her cheeks and her body shook violently as she fought against the handcuffs on her wrists. He was grateful for the soft lining.

"Please," she begged. "Please let me come."

His eyes narrowed and he fought against returning to her hot body. There was one more concession, one more part of her he needed.

"Please what?"

She looked at him, confused for only a moment. He knew the second she understood his question.

She swallowed heavily and nipped at her bottom lip, her discomfort apparent. He continued to watch her, feigning a patience he didn't really possess. Unfortunately, there was a part of him that needed to hear the word desperately enough that he refused to move forward without it.

"Please, Master," she whispered.

He kissed her gently, rewarding her compliance, aware of how difficult it had been for her.

He leaned forward, placing his cock inside her again, fucking her in earnest. Over and over he pounded into her hot cunt, her screams, her demands for more fueling the wildfire raging inside him. Harder and harder he thrust, demanding that she give him everything, every part of her body. She was his. God dammit, she was his and he wouldn't allow her to withhold anything from him.

"Come." As she flew apart, he felt her drag him into the abyss with her. Two souls lost in a conflagration of white-hot stars and fiery rays as bright as the sun. Hot jets of sperm erupted and he silently wished his seed were free to flood her body, free to plant itself within her womb. The image of Gwen carrying his child invaded his mind and he realized *exactly* how much he wanted from this woman.

For several minutes, neither of them moved. Then he reached up to unlock the clasp of the cuffs. In one deft movement, he twisted her around until she sat facing him upon his lap, his cock still buried within her.

He kissed her gently before pushing her head against his shoulder. He fought back a grin at her drowsy cuddle. After every intense orgasm, she fell into a semi-comatose state, and he loved being able to leave her this satiated, this fulfilled.

"When we get home, I'm going to fill your ass with my own hard flesh. No more toys."

She pushed away from him and he wondered what she was thinking. Her smile, though sweet, didn't seem to reach her eyes.

"I'm going to take you so far into the darkest night, Gwen, you won't ever want to see the sunshine again."

She shivered in response to his promise and he drew her back toward him.

As the limo pulled up in front of Ty's mansion, he helped her put her sundress on, setting her to rights before the chauffeur opened the door. He led her into the house and up the stairs.

"Ty," she said once they'd reached his bedroom, stopping just inside the threshold of the doorway. "I was thinking I'd like to spend tonight in the guest house."

"What?" he asked, confused by her sudden about-face.

"Today's been pretty tiring, and I need a break."

"A break." He was well aware of the fact that her idea of a break was his idea of running away. "If you're feeling overwhelmed by what happened in the limo—"

"It wasn't just the limo," she interrupted. "I mean the whole day, the trailer, the set. I really need a little bit of time to myself to sort some things out."

He nodded, despite the fact he had no intention of letting her spend the evening alone. He suspected she was hoping to use the time to build up her defenses and to put off facing some pretty serious facts about herself.

“Why don’t you tell me what it is you need to think about? Maybe I could help.”

She shook her head, walking to the dresser to retrieve some of her personal items.

“What the hell are you doing?” He couldn’t contain the growl that escaped his lips and she turned to look at him, startled.

“I told you. I’m moving back down to the guest house.”

“I thought you were spending one night there. Now you’re moving out? What happened, Gwen? What happened to scare you off?”

“Nothing. I’m not scared.” Her voice increased in volume and he could hear the panic in it. “I just need a damn break. Things are moving too fast, going too far.”

“I’d say they’re not moving far enough. Which part was it, Gwen? The spanking? The handcuffs? The idea of me taking your ass? Which part has you turning into a coward?”

He meant his taunt to sting. She was a proud woman and him calling her a coward would cut deep. Hopefully it would jar her enough to talk to him.

“Maybe it’s just you. Have you considered that?”

Touché. She had some barbs of her own to toss. Pity for her, conceit and arrogance were traits he had an abundance of.

“No,” he answered smugly. “That lie never crossed my mind.”

Her hand clenched around the hairbrush she was holding and he wondered for a moment if she would throw it at him. She swallowed heavily and he worried that she truly was frightened. Then he watched her skin flush, heard her soft, panting breaths, saw her nipples tighten. Her gaze darted toward the door and he sensed her plotting her chances at escape.

“You won’t make it,” he warned.

As always, her body reacted to the dare before her mind had time to catch up. She darted around him, but he beat her to the door, slamming and locking it before she could make it to the hall. With one hand, he gripped her waist as she tried to race away from him, forcing her roughly against the wall. He held her trapped as she struggled for freedom. “You know your word.”

She fought him with the determination of a wild horse refusing to be tamed. As she struggled, her body’s signals declared her arousal, her excitement. She truly loved the chase, loved his harsh treatment.

“God dammit. Say the safe word or hold still.”

She froze and he wondered if she would call his bluff, use her safe word to cry halt. When she remained silent, he tried to understand what had happened to change her mind so suddenly. His mind could only grasp on one reason.

“‘The Darkest Night’,” he said.

“I don’t think it’s appropriate for us to recreate that story.”

He shook his head at the determination in her tone. “That makes no sense, Gwen. For one thing, our reenactments of your stories have been loose representations at best. In fact, the only story we’ve truly been delving into since you moved in here is ‘The Darkest Night’. We’ve been gradually working our way toward a BDSM relationship since the very first day.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I would never do something like that.” Her words sounded flat, and the second they passed her lips he knew she realized they were a lie.

“What did I tell you about lying to me? You want me to spell it out for you. I’ve pulled your hair, spanked your ass, handcuffed you to the limo and issued some pretty hardcore sexual demands for over a week. You’ve submitted your body, your mind, your soul to me. Why is that so hard for you to admit? To accept? You like being tied up in bed. Pain brings you pleasure. So what?”

He gripped her upper arms firmly, pushing her against the wall. As always her body reacted to his powerful actions and a groan escaped before she could restrain it.

“Why are you trying to humiliate me?” Her voice was broken, sad.

“Humiliate you? That’s not what I’m doing. Jesus, Gwen. I’d never do that. I’m just trying to make you see that there’s nothing wrong with what we do together.”

He watched tears form in her lovely blue eyes and he cursed his anger, his frustration. She was upset and he should be gentle with her, but he couldn’t contain the beast she’d unleashed from its cage with her threats to leave.

Fear gripped him—hard. She couldn’t leave. He needed her. Needed every part of her. Her mind, her body, her soul, her love.

“Look at me. Damn you, look at me!” she cried.

He took a deep breath as he studied her flushed face. Her breathing was accelerated and he could clearly detect her nipples protruding from her sundress. She was seriously aroused. The knowledge hit him like a brick and as always he felt his body answer the call. His cock thickened and hardened and he had to fight against the instilled instinct that demanded he pull down his pants and take her immediately.

Her eyes saddened when she realized he’d seen the truth. Her voice, when she finally spoke, drove splinters into his heart. “It’s not natural to like pain, but I do. The second you slammed me against this wall, my body went into overdrive. It’s not natural to want to be held down, tied up, but my pussy is soaked because your hands are gripping me so tightly. I didn’t mean to drag you into my mess, Ty. I swear to you, I didn’t. I really think it’s better for both of us if I leave now.”

“You act like you have some terrible disease. So what if you like pain and bondage with sex? I don’t see—”

“Stop,” she yelled. “Just stop. It’s not the pain or the bondage. Don’t you see? It’s everything. I should be able to control this. I’ve always been able to push it away. But with you, it’s too strong, too overpowering. I won’t make you do things that disgust you just to please me.”

“Disgust me?” His voice, like his temper, flared red-hot. “You think I’m disgusted by you? Jesus.” He shoved his hard cock roughly into the vee of her thighs. “Does this feel like disgust to you?”

He released his too-tight grip on her arms when she cried out, then moaned with desire.

“Shit.” The impulse to hit something was tearing at his insides and he had to move away from her. If he looked at her again, he’d throw her onto the bed and pound his cock into her soft, willing body until she never questioned his passion for her again.

“You’re going to have to explain why you think you disgust me, Gwen. Have I made you feel that way?”

Christ. Had he? Had all his fears come to light? He’d been too rough in the trailer, in the limo. What if he’d hurt her? Scared her?

“No, of course not.” She was leaning against the wall and in her face, he could see the defeat and despair. He watched her close down, watched her barricade herself behind her self-erected walls. He sighed. He felt like he was trapped in a dark room without a speck of light, her thoughts locked so tightly away from him.

“Then what is it? Why are you running away from this? From us?”

“I just need some time to—” He waved the rest of her words away.

“To hell with time!”

Her temper broke in the face of his fury and she pushed away from the wall and took an angry step toward him. “What’s the matter, Ty? Afraid you won’t get your precious screenplay written? I’ve signed the contract. I’ll finish the stupid thing. You don’t need to fuck me to get that.”

“Is that what you think?” he yelled. “That I’m fucking you for the story? Jesus Christ, Gwen. That’s quite a high opinion you hold of me. Maybe you and Bambi aren’t so different after all.”

“Why don’t you just admit that you need this movie? That you’ll do anything to see it made?”

“Who told you that?”

“My agent mentioned it when I returned to New York to pack my things. She’d spoken to your agent, who apparently wasn’t as thrilled by the bargain we’d struck as you were.”

“And you honestly think I’m having sex with you to ensure that you’ll stay and finish writing the script? I have a contract for that. Besides, up until this point, I haven’t seen you resisting me very hard.”

She sucked in an angry breath, but he shook his head, halting any reply she might have made.

“I’ve changed my mind. It’s not me you think so little of. It’s yourself.”

She gasped at his harsh words, but he couldn't regret them. Never once since her return to his house had she indicated she understood his need to make this movie. Never once had she asked him why it was so important.

"Do you know why I want to make this movie?"

She shook her head and he tried to not react, to soften toward the tears he saw forming in her eyes.

"Because I believe in your story. It moved me, Gwen. It changed me in ways I can't even begin to explain or understand. I want to show these characters to the world."

"I thought you wanted to make a break from the cookie-cutter heroes you portray."

"I do," he admitted. "And you've given me the perfect vehicle for that escape."

"Why didn't you tell me how much it meant to you?"

He shrugged. "For this very reason, I suppose. I didn't want you to think I was using you for the script."

"I never thought that." Her answer was soft and he could see she meant what she said. He breathed a sigh of relief until her next words.

"I'm leaving," she said.

"No, you aren't." He knew he should simply let her walk out the door, but his heart would never let her take the first step away from him.

There was something frightening her, lurking inside and keeping her at a distance. Something that their interlude in the limo had set free. He knew she was merely picking a fight, hoping to escape and he grinned. She didn't know him very well if she thought he'd let her go so easily.

They'd both been avoiding this conversation—hell, any conversation—since her return from New York. They'd been so wrapped up in the delight, the joy, of their newfound sexual relationship that they'd forgotten to talk to each other. "What happened to you, Gwen? Who hurt you?"

A small, strangled sob escaped her lips and he reached out to grasp her trembling hands. "Tell me. Tell me so we can deal with it and move on."

She shrugged, but he watched as she valiantly stemmed the tears threatening to fall. "Don't you see? It's me. There's something wrong with me."

He shook his head, but she dismissed his gesture. "I've always found my love affairs boring and sex more frustrating than fulfilling. A few years ago, I met a nice man and we started dating. He was romantic and sweet and for the first time in my life, I'd truly fallen in love. One night, I drank a bit too much champagne. Scott and I went to bed and in my tipsy state, I asked him to spank me. He was appalled, mortified, and I tried to retract my words, blame the alcohol, but he knew my request had been sincere. He tried to give me what I wanted. He loved me enough that he actually forced himself to try. It was a terrible experience for both of us, and eventually our sex life died, dragging the love right along with it."

“He was an idiot. That doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with you.” Ty was surprised to see the sad, disbelieving smile it evoked on her lips.

“I can’t ask you to—” she paused, searching for the words. “If you felt like I was— I couldn’t stand it if you—”

“Shit, Gwen. Have you listened to a word I’ve said? I want the same damn things. I want you so badly I can taste it.”

“It won’t stop with the spankings.”

“What?”

“I want more than that. So much more.”

He looked at her and realized what lay at the heart of her fears. He had been wrong to try to initiate her slowly. She’d mistaken his caution for reticence, misunderstood that he wanted exactly what she did.

“You want the whip?” he asked softly. “The cane? I’d give that to you. Gladly.”

She trembled as he spoke the words. “I couldn’t ask you to do that to me. It’s too much, too abnormal.”

He laughed. “You think *you’re* abnormal? What the fuck do you think I am? What kind of man wants to hurt the woman he loves? Wants to control her every desire, her every word.” He turned around and walked away from her lovely face to stop himself from seeing the disgust she must feel at his admission. If her own desires frightened her, what would his do to her? He grabbed the bed frame to still the shaking in his hands.

She didn’t answer for such a long time, he wondered if she’d snuck out. Escaped.

“You love me?” she whispered.

He turned at her question as his words replayed in his mind. “Yeah.” There was no point in denying the truth. “Yeah, I do.” He shrugged, helpless to the emotion that had run over him like a freight train the first moment he laid eyes on her. He gave her a small smile when she continued to stare at him silently. “I think this is the part where you tell me you love me too. Might be a nice touch if you throw in something about my rock-hard abs and sexy face.” He was desperate to wipe away the sadness, the fear in her eyes while covering up the fact he was completely terrified himself.

She rolled her eyes. “God you’re a cocky bastard, Hollywood.” She laughed softly. “Don’t let this go to your head or anything, but I think I might care for you too—a little. I just don’t think I can go through the heartache again when you realize how much I need from you.”

“So what if we like our sex rougher than other people? So what if we get off on things other people find bizarre? Big deal. I’m not fucking them. I’m fucking you and I want the same things you do.”

She closed her eyes as he spoke and he could sense her fighting not to believe him, too afraid of giving her heart again. Clearly, he would have to match his words with actions. He crossed the room until he stood in front of her.

“Get on your knees.”

“What?”

“On your knees. Now!”

A wave of unbridled lust punched him in the gut like a heavyweight boxer when she dropped to the floor before him. He hastily unfastened his pants and shoved them and his boxers down in one swoop. He gripped her hair tightly, rewarded by her moan as she engulfed his engorged flesh in her mouth with one deep pass.

She swallowed his cock to the back of her throat and he pulled her hair as he forced her to move faster, deeper. She reached up to grip his thighs, her fingers digging into his legs. She hummed as she dragged her teeth along the hard flesh.

He moved out, gripping her face and forcing her to meet his gaze. “Not this way. Not this time.”

Reaching down, he helped her to her feet. Kicking off his shoes and pants, he dragged her to the bed and pushed her toward the mattress.

“Hands and knees.”

She moved into position as he reached up to loosen the straps at the head of the bed. “Give me your wrists,” he demanded. “No fighting this time.”

When she complied, he secured them together above her head, forcing her to support herself on her elbows.

He moved over to his dresser and picked out several neckties. Tonight he wanted her to understand the true meaning of bondage, of submission.

Reaching beneath her, he tied her knees together, then secured another tie around her ankles and a final one around her elbows. She was trussed up tightly, her motion limited. In this position, her ass was open, at his disposal, while the rest of her body was bound, vulnerable.

He ran his fingers along the slit between her legs and discovered she was ready to play. “So wet,” he whispered as she shivered. He knew her reaction wasn’t based on cold, but rather anticipation, exhilaration.

There was nothing wrong with what they were doing and if it took him all night, he would convince her of that.

Leaning over, he opened the nightstand drawer and pulled out a tube of lubrication. He knew she watched him, knew from the slight trembling she was aware of his intentions.

Taking his time, he worked the lubrication into her virgin ass, first with one finger, then with two. She hissed when he added the third digit, but when she began to shove back against his fingers, he knew she was ready. Tossing the lube to the floor, he rose to his knees behind her and placed his cock at her anus.

After tonight, he refused to wear a condom. Those days were over. If she wasn’t already on birth control, he’d take her to the doctor tomorrow for the shot.

Slowly, he eased his way inside her, trying to pay attention to her body's signals, searching for any proof that she didn't like this, didn't want this. When he was fully seated, he paused, the tightness of her ass clenching his cock in a painful, glorious manner.

His hips retreated almost completely before moving back inside, hard, steady, strong. She screamed and he felt the beginning of her climax.

"You don't have permission."

"So punish me," she hissed as her orgasm ripped through her. He fought back a grin at her challenge. She would never match his image of the perfect submissive and he was so very grateful for that. She was so much more than he'd ever dared to hope for. He thrust his cock into her, struggling to maintain control of his own building climax. It was all too fast. He wanted this moment to last.

She began to come again, right on the heels of her previous orgasm and he slapped her ass as he continued to pound into her. He timed his spanking with his thrusts. His punishment turned quickly into a pleasure neither of them had ever known, ever experienced. She cried as her third climax pierced through her body, taking him down for the count as well.

After he untied her, he wrapped his arms around her. Glancing out the window at the midnight sky, he realized evening songs were definitely the sweetest.

Chapter Seven

Vignette Four: Evening Songs

...As the elderly man holds his beloved wife in his arms, the sun rises and the scene fades to black.

OLD MAN

(whispering)

Forever.

Gwen finished typing the last word of the screenplay, leaning back in the desk chair and trying to covertly wipe away the damn tears gathering in her eyes. Ty's chuckle alerted her to the fact he'd caught her in action.

"Do you need a tissue?"

"No thanks, Hollywood. I'm not crying."

"Of course not, just some dust in your eye, right?" He leaned down to kiss her cheek. She tried to laugh at his jest, but a small sob escaped before she could hold it back. "Hey." He pulled back to study her face. "You really are upset. Is it the ending? Don't you like it?"

"I love it. It's perfect. Really. I'm just being silly."

"I don't think there's anything silly about getting attached to your characters. You've created them and they're a part of you."

She nodded as he attempted to console her. She didn't know how to tell him that her crying actually had very little to do with the script and everything to do with the fact that their collaboration was over. For two months, they'd shared this room, fighting over plot points and making love until the wee hours.

He'd explained in detail about his desire to tackle a more serious film, and she'd been touched by how much his craft meant to him. He was an amazingly talented actor and he would be a phenomenal producer. She'd followed him to the sets of various projects during their time together and he never failed to take her breath away. However, there was a small, insecure part of her that simply couldn't believe he was attracted to her.

Once they'd jumped the hurdle of her fears and insecurities in regard to her sexual preferences, the dam had broken and they spent night after night just talking, sharing secrets. She'd never felt as close to anyone as she did Ty.

He had a definite knack for uncovering her deepest, darkest fantasies and bringing them to life. She glanced across the room at the St. Andrew's Cross he'd erected a month ago. She'd spent countless hours bound to the structure as he brought her more pleasure than she'd ever imagined possible.

He followed where her gaze had landed.

"I think we should celebrate." He took her hand and helped her rise.

"Celebrate?"

"Take off your clothes." Her heart raced at his gruff command. Gwen was becoming accustomed to his dominance. She was thrilled when the tone of his voice dropped or he assumed what she'd come to recognize as his Master stance. He was standing with his arms crossed against his chest and his face was stern, telling her with just body language she would obey him.

She'd spent weeks fighting with herself, trying to deny that she wanted, *needed* his rough touches, and with patience and understanding, Ty had broken down every wall, every barrier she'd erected until there was nothing left except them, here together, sharing everything they had to give.

She slowly pulled her T-shirt over her head, hiding her smile when his gaze darkened. She loved that she could make him so hot and needy. She slid her bra off, letting the lacy garment fall to the floor. Before tugging off her jeans, she cupped her breasts, knowing that Ty loved watching her touch herself. She pinched her nipples until the pain of her actions forced a soft groan from her lips.

He watched silently, not moving. She unzipped her jeans and pushed the denim over her hips. She wasn't wearing any panties, per Ty's instructions. He'd tossed all her panties in the trash weeks ago. When she was totally naked, she stood in front of him, waiting for his next command.

"Go stand in front of the dressing table."

She frowned. "I thought—"

He chuckled. "I know what you thought, Gwen, but you don't decide what we do in the bedroom. I do. Go stand in front of the dressing table and face the mirror." As she passed him, he gripped her upper arm to stop her and swatted her ass five times. "Next time I expect you to obey without question."

She shivered and squeezed her legs together, no longer trying to deny how much she craved his punishments. Together, they'd explored the concepts of BDSM and for the first time in her life, she felt an inner peace. She'd slowly learned to accept that this was who she was. She was finally comfortable in her own skin and she had Ty to thank for it. The loneliness that had resided inside for most of her life was gone. The pressures of her career had also faded. She wasn't quite sure how to explain the feeling of utter freedom that permeated her being when she gave herself to him completely.

She stood before the mirror, watching as he moved closer. He hadn't taken off a single stitch of clothing. She loved these moments. Loved being his all-too-willing slave. She'd spent so many nights pondering the idea of being his submissive and in truth, she'd never felt happier. He'd brought her to orgasm with his hands, his cock, his tongue, but also with words and whips and ropes at her wrists. There

had been no desire he'd refused to satiate, and he'd never made her feel ashamed about her need for pain and bondage.

"You're so beautiful." He took his place behind her. They looked at each other through their reflections in the mirror and as she caught a glimpse of her body, her face, she felt beautiful. "I have a treat for you."

"For me?"

He nodded. "I've been saving it for just this occasion. For the day when we finished the screenplay."

Her heart lurched at his words. Since his admission that he loved her nearly two months earlier, he hadn't used those words again. Of course, she'd never offered them even once, too afraid of his rejection. What if this relationship *was* directly tied to the writing of the screenplay? Now that the script was written, was their time together over?

Ty hadn't mentioned the future beyond the end of this partnership and now that she was faced with the ending, her heart felt as if it were on the precipice of being irrevocably broken, shattered.

He pulled out the padded stool beneath the dressing table. "Sit down." She winced slightly at the burn from his previous spanking, then she watched him through the reflection in the mirror as he reached into his pocket to pull something out.

"Lift your hair," he said.

She complied as he placed something around her neck. She gasped when his hands moved and revealed the thick band of silver. "It's a c—" Her voice caught on the word, unable to say it.

"A collar," he finished for her. "And there's something else."

She couldn't take her eyes off the beautiful silver chain. There were sapphires set into the intricate design of the metal with a very small loop at the front. To most of the world it would just appear to be a simple choker necklace, but anyone familiar with BDSM would realize it was a collar. She knew perfectly well what a collar meant and her chest blossomed with hope. Surely he wouldn't give her this if he intended to end things. A collar denoted commitment and a serious relationship.

She turned on the stool when she realized he wasn't standing behind her anymore, rather he was kneeling. In his hands was the largest, most gorgeous diamond engagement ring she'd ever seen.

"Ty." The tears she'd fought back earlier returned full-force and brought friends.

"I want you to marry me, Gwen. I want you to be my wife by law and my submissive by choice. Stay here with me. Please."

She nodded, her throat too clogged with happiness to speak the word. He grinned, placing the ring on her finger and she laughed.

"Dear God, Hollywood. Couldn't you find a bigger ring?" A diamond surrounded by sapphires engulfed her finger.

He joined her laughter. "I don't want anyone to mistake the fact that you are completely, one-hundred percent spoken for." He reached up to stroke the collar at the throat and she felt the familiar racing of her heart he managed to inspire with a single touch.

"I love you." The words were new to her lips, but familiar to her heart. She'd fallen in love with him the first night he'd fallen asleep in her bed in the guest house, looking so lonely and weary. She couldn't help but care for him and she'd been a fool to hide her feelings for so long.

"I love you too." He pulled her into his arms, kissing her deeply and she reveled in the passion behind his caress. He led her over to the bed and he undressed slowly, leisurely. Their unhurried pace was a sharp contrast to the mad dash of sex they'd succumbed to every night since she'd moved into his room. It was as if the idea of forever had calmed the rough, frightened edges in each of them and the rhythm of their evening songs would never be the same again.

As he pushed her back onto the bed, he came into her, his lips kissing her gently as his cock moved deeply, slowly within her. She wrapped her legs around his waist, meeting his thrusts, trying to show him with her lips and body how very much she loved him, wanted him.

When they came together, it wasn't the usual blinding, crushing eruption, but rather a sensual melding so hot, she felt her as if her body was melting into his.

He held her as they struggled to catch their breath and she fought to recover her wits. She leaned up on her elbow and looked at his beloved, handsome face. He watched her through hooded eyelids, a smile on his lips.

"So, what do you think of my talents, Mr. Ransome?" she teased. "Good enough to get me a part in your next movie?"

He laughed as she fluffed her hair in true starlet style. "Sweetheart, you've just landed the role of my leading lady for the rest of our lives. Forever."

Her heart swelled at the thought.

Forever.

Yeah, she could do that.

Epilogue

And the Oscar goes to...

Ty squeezed Gwen's hand as they emerged from the back of the limo, blinded by the sudden flashing of a thousand cameras.

"Ready?" he asked.

She smiled, her beautiful face glowing with her pregnancy. She looked gorgeous in her custom-made Elie Saab maternity gown. The sapphire shade of the silk highlighted her red tresses and accentuated her bright blue eyes. They'd walked this red carpet several times in the past couple of years, but tonight's trip was special because for the first time, they were both in the limelight.

"Mr. Ransome, Ms. Preston," Ryan Seacrest called out. They walked toward the interviewer as the cameras continued to flash. "It must be very gratifying to have the movie you co-scripted nominated for movie of the year."

"It is," Ty said. "Very gratifying, very exciting."

"The movie is based on a collection of your short stories, isn't that correct, Ms. Preston?"

"Yes it is. The stories in *Evening Songs* have a very special place in my heart."

"Was it hard adapting your stories for the silver screen? I mean, *Evening Songs* was your first attempt at writing a screenplay, wasn't it?" Ryan asked.

"It wasn't particularly difficult," she replied, looking at Ty. "I had an excellent writing partner."

Ty raised his eyebrows. "Of course, we did have to do some rather extensive character studies."

"Yes, we did," she agreed. "Very extensive."

"Do you think you'll work on screenplays together in the future?" Ryan asked.

Ty shrugged. "If the right story came along, perhaps. We—"

"Oh Mr. Ransome, Mr. Ransome," a shrill, high-pitched voice interrupted the interview. He looked over to see Bambi Starr waving to him from the front row of the crowd of fans. "Remember me?"

He heard Gwen chuckle as he fought back a groan.

"Oh look, Hollywood, an old friend. Wanna go over and say hello?"

He tightened his grip around her waist. "Careful, Mrs. Ransome." He stressed the name she hadn't taken after their wedding, electing instead to keep Gwen Preston. He'd agreed keeping her maiden name was a smart move professionally. Besides, her nickname of Mrs. Ransome had worked its way into their bedroom adventures as had her name for him—Master.

Her eyes darkened with arousal at the sound of her married name and he wondered how they'd manage to sit through the whole damn awards ceremony.

"Seeing Bambi actually reminds me of something I've always wanted," he whispered.

"What's that?"

"You on your knees in that limo, sucking my cock."

She grinned. "I think that could be arranged."

He stopped mid-step and glanced over her shoulder, as if looking for their car. She laughed.

"Later, Hollywood. Much, much later."

About the Author

Some people fall apart on their thirtieth birthday, others on their fortieth. For Mari Carr, thirty-four was the year that took her down. After she spent the day crying and saying, “I haven’t done anything I thought I would,” her husband finally asked what was left undone. Her answer was simple—she hadn’t written a book or decorated her house. “So do it,” he said.

Six years later, the house is sparkling with fresh paint and new furniture and her computer is jammed full of stories—novels, novellas, short stories, and dead-ends. The lesson: it’s never too late to achieve a goal or two!

Librarian by day and mother of two teenagers, Mari Carr found her time for writing by squeezing it into the hours between three a.m. and daybreak when her family is asleep and the house is quiet.

To learn more about Mari Carr, please visit www.maricarr.com or join her Yahoo! group to join in the fun with other readers as well as Mari Carr: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Heat_Wave_Readers/join

Look for these titles by Mari Carr

Now Available:

Erotic Research
Tequila Truth
Learning Curves
Because of You

Sometimes what you're looking for is closer than you think.

Because of You

© 2009 Mari Carr

Jessie's life is a mess. In the eight hellish months since her husband died in a freak accident, she's been mugged, her house has been trashed, and now she's receiving frightening prank calls. She resists a friend's offer of a weekend getaway—her grief is still too fresh to consider meeting anyone new.

Then again, since it's a party for gay men, there won't be any pressure, right?

ER doctor Caleb James feels perfectly at ease among his gay brother's friends, but one look at Jessie sparks a sexual tension that's impossible to ignore. A few drinks and a few hours of conversation later, things move a lot faster than either of them expect. Jessie is left confused and Caleb aches with regret—and love for a woman who is still guarding her heart.

Pressure is the last thing she needs. But as it becomes apparent that her string of misfortunes trace back to her husband's death, help is what she's going to get. Caleb's help...ready or not.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Because of You:

"Husband?" he asked and she saw his eyes dart to her ring finger. She'd given up wearing her diamond engagement ring, but she couldn't seem to part from the actual white gold wedding band.

She sucked in a breath at his question. She'd carefully avoided talking about Tommy all night. She'd wanted a night to forget, a night to pretend that her life was normal and happy and that she hadn't had her heart ripped out of her chest eight months earlier.

"I'm a widow," she said and the sound of that simple word released the flow of ice cold water throughout her body once again. For a few hours, she'd been warm. Hell, between Caleb and the alcohol, she spent more than a few moments on fire and it had felt so damn good.

"I'm sorry," he said, rising and crossing the room to take her icy hands in his. She didn't realize until his touch that she was shaking. In just one evening, he'd diminished the shadow of fear that constantly hovered over her. He'd rejuvenated her, made her feel alive.

She shook her head, desperately willing away the chill, the sadness. Dammit, she didn't want to be cold anymore. She was tired of being afraid. "It's been eight months and I'm afraid I sometimes tend to talk about Tommy in the present tense, like he's still here."

"Had he been ill?" he asked and she smiled sadly. He sounded very much like a doctor.

"Freak accident. He slipped on a patch of ice and hit his head on a car door. It was late and brutally cold and he was the last person leaving work that night. It was several hours before I found him and by then—"

“You found him?” he asked, pulling her gently to a chair in the kitchen. He pushed her down before sitting next to her. He never released his grip on her hands and she knew he felt the coldness in them as he began to rub them with his own as if to warm them.

“I was concerned when he didn’t come home and didn’t answer his cell. He was an accountant and it was audit season, so he worked late occasionally, but it wasn’t like him not to call and check in. Finally, I worried myself into a frenzy and decided to drive by his office, fully prepared to give him holy hell for scaring me so.”

He nodded. “I’m sorry it was you who found him.”

She shrugged and closed her eyes. She was a master at controlling her tears, yet here with Caleb it seemed harder to do. She’d managed to push her pain deep inside her and she even found it easier of late to discuss Tommy’s death. Tonight, whether it was the alcohol or her tiredness or Caleb’s compassion, the emotions were threatening to bubble over and she refused to let that happen.

“Well, I suppose I managed to bring tonight’s fun level down. That’s me—the official ruination of all parties,” she tried to joke. She pulled her hands out of his comforting grip and went back to the counter. “Do you like cream and sugar in your coffee?”

“No, I drink it black, and, Jessie, you didn’t ruin anything. You’re going through a damn hard time right now, dealing with something no one should ever have to deal with. Don’t be so hard on yourself. I wish I could give you an easy fix, but I’m afraid nothing except time will cure this.”

She grinned over her shoulder, determined to return to the easy banter they’d enjoyed all night. “That’s quite a bedside manner you have, Dr. Caleb.” The flirtatious line felt rusty and foreign as it fell from her lips, but Caleb didn’t seem to notice.

He gave a short, brief laugh. “Oh yeah, I’m a master at bedside—” He paused mid-sentence and she was surprised when he walked over to her and placed his hands on her cheeks. “Christ, Jess. I want to kiss you so badly it hurts.”

“So kiss me,” she whispered, uncertain where the words had come from, his and hers. From the second he touched her face, she wanted him with a passion she’d thought long gone.

He leaned down and took her lips gently, sweetly, but she refused to be patronized, treated with kid gloves. She was a living, breathing woman and she wanted him. Wanted him beyond reason, beyond care.

She reached up, gripping his hair in her fingers roughly, pulling his face more firmly to her. She opened her mouth and welcomed his tongue, before pushing it out of her way to explore his lips, his teeth with her own.

He moved his hands down to her waist, his grip stronger, more certain, more controlling. She was giving him everything her broken shell of a body had left to give and she sensed he was more than ready to take her up on the offer.

His lips slid from hers, gliding along her cheek to her earlobe, down her neck. The whole time he worshipped her with his mouth, his hands roamed, finding their way beneath her T-shirt to her breasts. She groaned at the hot touch of his hands against her taut nipples and he ground his hard erection into her pussy.

“God,” she gasped, his touches, his lips, his body pushing hers rapidly into overdrive. “More,” she demanded. “Please, Caleb. More.”

He continued his sensual assault and she fought to keep up. She shoved his hands off her body for a moment so that she could pull his T-shirt over his head. The image of his bare, sculpted chest was a visual treat, but she couldn’t make herself take the time to enjoy it. She was on fire and her body was demanding that she take everything he had to give immediately. She leaned down, nipping at his small, hard nipples and he hissed with delight. His hands began working at the button and zipper of her jean shorts, shoving them and her panties over her hips, leaving her bare from the waist down.

Somewhere in the recesses of her mind, she wondered what the hell she was doing, but that thought was quickly squelched by a single touch of his fingers against her clit.

“Yes,” she whispered hoarsely. His hand delved farther and soon she found herself roughly pushing her hips toward him, forcing the two fingers he plunged inside her deeper, harder, faster. She was cresting on the edge of an orgasm within moments, but she refused to come alone. Caleb had given her so much tonight. Without realizing it, he’d offered her an escape, a refuge from the mourning, and she wanted to give him back some small part of the incredible pleasure he was building inside her.

“You,” she demanded. “I want you.”

Desire: Blend sinful with sweet. Whip to perfection. Don't forget to lick the spoon...

Pink Buttercream Frosting

© 2009 Lissa Matthews

Aidn Greer is a much-sought-after Dominant in the BDSM lifestyle with an unusual problem. He hasn't owned a submissive in more years than he cares to think about. He's bored with unchallenging women, yet mentoring other Doms and training subs has left him cold as well. He's craving something other than plain old vanilla—a taste of something sinfully sweet that, for once, he can really sink his teeth into.

Professional cake baker Bailey Harris wasted ten years bored to tears with her marriage, enduring a job she hated, and harboring a secret desire for something passionate, fulfilling and dark. Then she found it...in the world of BDSM. Exploring on her own brought the kind of mind-opening experiences that led her to declare her independence—and exposed a yearning to find the one Dom for whom she's willing to kneel. Permanently.

When Aidn and Bailey meet, it's fire and ice. Sugar and spice. And an experience that satisfies every detail of both their fantasies. Almost. While the big, beautiful sub is everything Aidn wanted, her fierce independent streak could be more of a challenge than he bargained for...

Warning: This book brings together scorching-hot counter sex, decadent pink frosting, and no-holds-barred BDSM play for a spanking good time. Be sure to bring an ice-cold drink along...

Enjoy the following excerpt for Pink Buttercream Frosting:

Bailey pasted a smile on her face as she greeted her two o'clock appointment. Just because she hated all things having to do with men and romance and love and sex thanks to Mr. Slink Away Dominant, didn't mean she couldn't be sincerely happy for the newly engaged couple seated across the table from her. Did it? No, of course not. She was, after all, a professional.

"So, what's the date of your wedding?"

"Valentine's weekend," the bride gushed, holding tightly to the arm of her very uncomfortable looking groom.

Bailey understood his pain and wanted to throw up, wanted to break her pencil and jab Barbie Bride in the eyes with the jagged ends. "Oh, isn't that just wonderful!"

"Yes! Please tell me that you have the date open for a wedding. I just don't know what I'd do if you're already booked."

"Let me check the calendar to be sure." She flipped open her day planner and made a show of checking dates. She was open for anything, everything, and most especially Barbie's wedding. "Yes, actually, I am still available and that gives us just about six months."

“Oh that is just perfect. You were recommended so highly that I just had to have you and you did such a gorgeous job with my friend’s wedding cake. I knew you’d be perfect for what I want.”

Bailey was touched, this time truly touched by the kind words. “That’s a great compliment, thank you. What is your color scheme? Red and white?”

The bride beamed. “White with red and pink accents. Perfect for Valentine’s Day, don’t you think?”

Pencil snapping. Jagged ends. Deep breath. All without her smile faltering. “Absolutely. What color pink?”

“I want a really pretty shade and not anything that would clash with the red.”

That feeling of throwing up...it was back. “No, we don’t want anything to clash. I have a variety of cake flavors, do you have a preference?”

“Chocolate. That’s what you made for Angie’s wedding and it was to die for.”

“Great. Chocolate. Buttercream frosting?” Did they see the tightness around her mouth at all or was it just something Bailey was feeling as she looked at them?

“Is that what was on Angie’s cake? I want it to taste just like hers. Can you do that? Make it taste exactly like hers?”

The plea was so earnest that Bailey fought not to laugh. “I’m pretty sure it was buttercream I used on hers and yes, I can make it taste just like that.”

“Oh, good. And I want roses all over it in pink and red.”

“All right. Let me get one of my pattern books and you can see if there’s something that fits the vision you have in your head. I’ll just be a second.”

Bailey stood, walked behind the counter and knelt down, trying to compose herself, trying to get back the professionalism she was quickly losing. She didn’t know why she was losing it, except for the fact that images of Aidn kept drifting in and out of her mind. It wasn’t marriage she was seeing though, it was a collaring, which was dumb as she’d only been with him once and he’d walked away. It was just a feeling, a gut feeling, that he was the one. It was a feeling that pissed her off.

A few deep breaths later, she stood and pasted another smile on her face. She grabbed some wedding cake books and a couple of magazines and set them on the table for Barbie and Ken to begin going through. “I have some cake samples if you’d like to try them.”

“No, that’s fine. I know what the chocolate tasted like and that’s what I want. I don’t need to taste anything else,” Barbie said absently, her eyes and fingers devouring the pages of cakes in front of her. Ken simply sat there, helpless, looking even more uncomfortable in the silence that ensued. Bailey tried to give him an encouraging and kind smile but wasn’t sure she pulled it off.

“This one!”

Bailey looked at the picture that the bride was pointing to and inwardly groaned. The cake consisted of four stacked tiers, with cascades of icing roses from the top to the bottom and gum-paste petals sprinkled along the base.

“And I want alternating red and pink roses.”

“And the scattered, loose petals?”

“Can you make them white? Or would it be better if they were a color?”

“I think either would look lovely, but it’s whatever you want. It’s your big day.”

“Yes, it is,” she squealed.

“And what do you think?” Bailey asked, turning toward the still-silent groom.

“Oh he doesn’t care. He likes whatever I like.”

Sheepishly he shrugged his shoulders and nodded his head. For some reason the gesture caused a small twinge of sadness in Bailey. Her husband had been like that. Agreeing to whatever she wanted, never having much to say about anything. His nonchalant attitude about work, social plans, life and her...it was just more than she could take for the rest of her life. Now that she’d found heat and passion in a whole different personal lifestyle, she couldn’t regret having left him and striking out on her own.

She did wish things had worked out differently with Aidn though, that it had been more than just a one afternoon deal.

After filling out some paperwork and taking a deposit, Bailey walked the happy couple out and then returned to the kitchen. She needed to bake, to play. It helped her forget, to cope through tough times.

Half a bag of powdered sugar later, along with half a pound of butter, some vanilla and cream, she was feeling pretty good. Aidn hadn’t crossed her mind but three or four hundred times. Surely, that was some sort of improvement.

Even a plaything can be pushed too far...

Doll

© 2009 Juniper Bell

Power.

Chloe Barnes thought her marriage to a wealthy politician would be the stuff of fairy tales. Instead, he took advantage of her naiveté and used her as a plaything to fulfill his twisted sexual needs. Ten years is enough. She returns to Bellhaven Island to sell the summer cottage she inherited, hoping the money will buy her freedom—and custody of her daughters.

Memories.

Fisherman Dustin McDougal never forgot the childhood crush he once had on the fairy-like Chloe. The woman she's become has a haunted look that brings his feelings back, stronger than ever...with a mature edge. Along with all his protective instincts.

Sexual healing.

Their passion blows stronger than a Maine nor'easter, awakening Chloe to the joy of true love. Yet it may not be strong enough to free her from the past...

Warning: This title contains politicians doing all sorts of nasty things and flashbacks of male domination. It also features hot sex on a boat, hot sex in an attic, hot sex on a work bench...you get the idea

Enjoy the following excerpt for Doll:

"Have you been on your boat?" she asked dreamily, as he ran his hands over her back.

"Had to fix a bearing. That engine's always making some noise or other. Sometimes I think it just wants my attention."

"I don't blame it." He found the lower edge of her sweater and snaked his hand under it. At the feel of his work-roughened palm on her skin, a shudder went through her. Immediately he stopped.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes! You're not following the rules. If I want you to stop, I'll tell you. I don't want you to stop. As a matter of fact—" She drew away from him. "Let's take off our clothes. Together. At the same time."

He looked amused. "On the count of three?"

"One..." She stepped out of her skirt. Underneath, she wore woolly leggings for warmth. "Two..." She started to pull off the leggings.

"Hang on! You're getting ahead of me." He unbuttoned his jeans, revealing boxers and a huge erection. She felt the breath leave her body.

It was a good feeling.

She put her hands to the hem of her sweater and slid it over her head. It was quickly followed by her turtleneck. She stood in front of him, wearing only her pink lace underwear, while he unbuttoned his flannel shirt. Under it, he wore a "Save the Whales" T-shirt, which she found so endearing, she laughed.

"Am I that funny-looking?" he asked with a wounded look.

"I didn't know you were a tree-hugger."

"Some of my best friends are trees." There was a twinkle in his deep blue eyes that put her completely at ease. "The rest are whales."

"I think that might be a whale in your pants."

He waggled his eyebrows lasciviously, then laughed, an infectious chuckle that made her answer with one of her own. Never before had she laughed during sex, or the buildup to sex. Never before had she even smiled. Or joked. Or teased. If they stopped right now, this would still be a groundbreaking experience for her. But she had no intention of stopping. "You're still wearing boxers and a T-shirt."

"And you've got the bra and panties. Not that I mind the view."

For a moment, she stiffened. Fearfully, she raised her eyes to his. Would she see that same calculating hunger she was used to? That greedy look that reduced her to a thing, a possession, a trinket? But no. His expression was the opposite of that. Happy appreciation shone from his eyes. His smile had a touch of the devil in it, and a promise of delicious fun.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing. A ghost. We haven't said three yet."

"If we don't do it soon, I'm going to forget how to count."

Giggling, she put her hands behind her back, on the fastening of her bra. He grabbed the bottom of his T-shirt, poised for take-off.

"Three!"

Clothes flew into the air, a flurry of underwear. Surrounded by discarded clothing, they stared at each other. Chloe felt her rib cage rise and fall with quick breaths. Without looking down, she knew her nipples were already at attention. As was his erection. It rose from a thick nest of black curls and pointed straight toward her, as if it had eyes only for her.

Suddenly, desperately, she wanted to know what he saw when he looked at her. "Do you think...do I seem like...a..." she whispered, "doll?"

"Oh, no. You're no doll."

What did he mean? Did he think she was ugly? Maybe he was used to a different type. She crossed her hands over her breasts.

"No! Don't hide." With one quick stride, he was in front of her, holding her face in his hands. "You're beautiful. Wonderful. But you're no doll. You're too alive. Too sensitive. Look, I can feel the pulse beating in your throat. I can feel your skin warming under my hands. You're a living, passionate being. How could

anyone think you were a doll?” He ran his thumbs over her cheeks with a touch that seemed to treasure the very shape of her face. When he bent his mouth to hers, the depth of his kiss brought tears to her eyes. His tongue searched her mouth, as if he wanted to track down whatever sadness remained in her and soothe it away.

She let herself sink into the comfort of that kiss for a long moment. But then she moved restlessly against him. Enough gentleness. She needed heat. Fire. Stepping back, she put her hands on his and drew them to her chest. As those warm palms encircled her breasts, she let out a long moan. Already stiff, her nipples hardened even more as he filled his hands with her flesh.

“That feels nice,” she heard herself say. In the past, she’d never said anything during sex. She’d become that mute doll Andrew had demanded. Never once had she asked for anything. “Can you lick my nipples, please?”

“No need to be polite, sweetie. I’ll do anything you ask.”

“Lick them, then. A lot. Don’t stop until I ask you to.”

“I wouldn’t think of it.” He tilted her face up one more time, and smiled into her eyes. Then he bent his head to the rosy nipples begging for attention. As soon as his mouth enclosed her right breast, her head fell back with a groan. Her nipples were used to being tweaked, fondled, squeezed, displayed in provocative lingerie, teased and tormented—but this was what she’d always longed for and never gotten. Long strokes of a loving tongue. Moist nibbling that sent electric jolts to her lower belly. A heated mouth tugging on those sensitive points, pulling moans from her.

And Dustin’s mouth didn’t stop. Not when her nipples had swelled to the size of rose hips. Not when she shuddered from the pleasure. Not when his erection jerked against her thigh. She wasn’t at the mercy of his mouth. No, that mouth was at her service. She could ask it to do whatever she wanted.

“Dustin,” she said in a whisper. “Go lower.”



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