



Perfect  Timing

*Three*  
MINUTE MAN  
KIM DARE

#### Book four in the Perfect Timing Series

Three minutes doesn't give Ian much time to prove he's the dominant that Susan had given up on ever finding, but it's amazing what the right man can do in three minutes! Ian had plans for the submissive he'd seen playing casual games with other dominant men in the local leather bars, but she disappeared off the kinky scene before he had a chance to claim her. When he finds her working in a speed dating club, he's determined not to let her slip through his fingers again.

Susan made a conscious decision to give up on the lifestyle. She's not going to change her mind just because some dominant strolls into her life and starts snapping his fingers. The fact that Ian calls to the very part of her that she's been trying to repress for the last eighteen months isn't important. She's not going back on her decision. Unfortunately for Susan, she's never been able to resist a bet - not when there's more than money at stake.

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Three Minute Man

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**Warning:** This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

## **Perfect Timing**

THREE MINUTE MAN

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Kim Dare

## **Dedication**

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To those who run away—and to those that find their way back home.

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## **Chapter One**

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"Gorgeous!"

"If you're talking about another damn car rather than a woman, I'm officially disowning you."

Ian Georgeson stood stock still on the edge of the crowded car park, not paying the least attention to his younger brother's threats. The view through the window into the club held him completely transfixed. The rows of shiny sports cars behind him suddenly became far less interesting than they had been a moment before.

"Ian, you listening or what...?" Billy trailed off.

Ian didn't look around. He was sure his brother had caught sight of the same woman he was admiring through the glass.

"Sweet," Billy whispered.

"Find your own, kiddo."

"She's not yours yet."

"The important word in that sentence is yet," Ian told him. He could so easily slip an imaginary collar around her neck and make the picture she presented entirely perfect. She smiled at someone just out of his sight.

A shot of jealousy raced through him at the simple fact she should smile that way at anyone but him. Ian raised an eyebrow at himself. It had been a long time since any woman had inspired that sort of instantly possessive reaction in him. In fact, it had been almost exactly eighteen months—which was precisely the last time he saw a submissive who looked damn near identical to this woman, in a kink club on the other side of town.

Billy said something off to his left.

"What?"

"I said," Billy repeated with a long suffering sigh. "No, please don't worry about me. Of course I don't mind you dropping your younger brother to chase after some waitress...etc, etc."

"Glad to hear it," Ian said.

Billy shouted after him, something about which pub they were supposed to be meeting their friends and watching the match in. Ian couldn't care less about rugby right then. He was already pushing open the door and walking into the club.

The woman he'd seen through the window stood by the bar on the other side of the room. As Ian strode across to her, he took the opportunity to study her more closely. She was tall—tall enough that he wouldn't get a crick in his neck every time he kissed her. That was rare enough for a man of his height to find in a lover. It also matched with his memory of the sub he'd seen playing on a St. Andrew's cross all those months ago.

She turned and he caught a glimpse of her face.

He could always tell. He didn't know if it was something in the eyes, or the expression, but Ian had proved it to himself time and time again over the years—he could always spot a natural submissive. Even if he wasn't damn near sure she was the woman he'd spotted in the leather bar all those months ago, he wouldn't have hesitated to mark the woman standing by the bar down as a true sub.

Closer to her, he turned his attention to checking for any sign of ownership. There wasn't a single piece of jewellery visible on her body. No pretty gold necklace that could act as a subtle collar, no ring, no bracelet, not even an earring in sight.

Long blond hair fell in loose waves over her shoulders, without so much as a hair clip to decorate it. The little, black, figure hugging dress was complimented by nothing more than simple black stilettos. The outfit was so simple, it was tantalisingly easy to imagine that she'd considered more intimate items of

clothing just as unnecessary. Ian smiled to himself, wondering if he would have the chance to find out at some point.

"Perfect balance!" she declared as he reached her side. She lifted a folder and placed a mock kiss against the cover.

The younger waitress on the other side of the bar giggled.

"Finally! Thank you, Lord! They've finally coaxed enough women through the door. For once I won't have to sit through a dozen different versions of..."

Seeming to sense his presence, she looked over her shoulder. "Can I help you, sir?"

The honorific fell from her lips as if it was just any other word. As if she put a great deal of effort into making it sound as if she thought it was just any other word.

An experienced submissive then—she knew what that word could mean in the right context. It must be a special brand of torture for a woman who had offered that token of respect to someone who deserved it, to have to apply it to every idiot who walked through the door. The last of his doubts vanished. So this was where that sub he'd had his eye on had disappeared to...

She looked him up and down before lifting her eyes politely back to his. Her expression didn't change, but her posture altered. She knew what he was too. She recognised a dominant man, a master, when she saw one.

"Miss?" He held out a hand.

"Susan Fisher," she filled in, putting her hand in his. After the briefest possible moment, she tried to take it back.

Ian closed his fingers around her hand, not gripping hard enough to hurt, but firmly enough that she had little choice but to leave her hand in his or cause a scene by struggling to break contact.

He heard her breath catch in her throat. She closed her eyes for a moment and swallowed. Ian studied her carefully. Her instinct to submission was right there, just a scratch below the surface. It had obviously been far too long since she played.



"Susan, is there a problem?"

Ian glanced over his shoulder and saw an older man approaching them. Employer. He spared him one more glance, a very swift up and down inspection. The kind of boss who liked to get to know his female members of staff very well indeed, if Ian was any judge.

"No problem, at all," Ian said. "Miss Fisher was just explaining that she would be happy to sit in with me to balance out the numbers."

Her fingers twitched in his grip, but her practiced smile didn't falter.

"Excellent," her boss cooed.

Ian waited until she met his eyes before he allowed her to retrieve her hand.

Susan's boss lingered at her side. She had no choice other than to play nicely while he watched, but Ian could see the anger she barely kept in check. Susan Fisher was royally furious with him.

"If you'll fill in the form, sir," she said, coolly. "I'll see to it that an extra table is set up in the other room."

She handed him a piece of paper.

Ian's lips twitched into a smile as she strode off, far faster than anyone should be able to walk in heels that high. When she'd moved out of sight, he turned his attention to the piece of paper in his hand. Speed dating? He held back a sigh. There really was no gain without pain.

He filled in the form and handed it to the waitress behind the bar. She was still studying him with blatant curiosity. That was good. No doubt the staff would have noticed if other dominant men were coming to the club with an eye to collaring Susan.

"Have you ever heard the expression—'all's fair'?" he asked her.

"And is it love or war you'll get from Miss Fisher, sir?" she asked, a soft Irish lilt tinting each word.

He raised an eyebrow. "Perhaps both if I'm very lucky."

She giggled and turned away to take his form through a door at the back of the club.

A few minutes later, a pair of wide double doors swung open, inviting the participants to enter into a smaller, more intimate lounge off the main bar. Twelve tables had been set up around the room. A waiter approached Ian and led him to the left hand side of the room where twelve men were soon standing in an uncomfortably ragged group, sizing each other up and casting surreptitious glances at the women on the other side of the room.

A fair number of their glances were returned, but that was where the similarities between the men and women ended. If the ladies hadn't all known each other when they arrived at the club, they seemed to have quickly made friends with each other.

Ian leaned against the bar running down the men's half of the room, ignoring all the other women in favour of watching Susan. She kept a little distance between herself and the other speed daters. She didn't look across at the men once. Arms folded across his chest, Ian tapped his fingers against his biceps.

The simple fact that he'd been so quick to recognise a woman he'd barely caught a glimpse of after so many months was more than a little annoying. Still, if it gave him the opportunity to exorcise the memory of those big blue eyes from his mind, it could only be a good thing.

A little bit of shared play time and he was sure the world would slip back into its usual focus and he would be able to stop comparing the other subs he had played with over the last few months to some stupid fantasy submissive his brief glimpses of Susan Fisher had morphed into.

Someone tugged on Ian's shirt sleeve.

The waitress from behind the bar offered him a bowl of numbered badges.

"If you're wanting to speak to Miss Fisher last, you'll be taking number twelve, sir. She always sits in seat one."

He took number twelve and resigned himself to waiting until it was his turn to speak to Susan. It would be better than having to leave her table when a bell rang, like some schoolboy being sent off to his next lesson.

Half an hour later, Ian was quite convinced that he should have sat at her table first, and left with her once they'd each taken their turns to speak for their three minutes. He'd never realised what women would tell absolute strangers if they were under pressure to speak about themselves for a set length of time.

He really didn't need to know that number three, also hastily introduced as Janice, had suffered through a very long and painful divorce after she walked in on her husband with her hairdresser. Nor had he particularly wished to learn, thanks to date number seven, that a woman's fertility started to rapidly decline once she reached a certain age.

He did his best to be polite, and to be discreet when his attention wandered away from the woman he was supposed to be talking to and he glanced at Susan's table. It wasn't easy not to give into the temptation to just sit and stare at her until it was his turn to speak to her. Either she was a bloody amazing actress, or she was enjoying something about those three minute dates far more than anyone in their right mind could.

Seeing her smiling at all the other men attending the event didn't make it any easier for Ian to go through the motions with his own dates. If the monotony of rushed, tragic stories hadn't been broken up by a rather distinguished looking older woman telling him that she found these events a deliciously tacky way of picking up toy boys, Ian was sure he would have fallen into a dire depression by the time the bell finally rang and allowed him to make his way to table number one.

Susan Fisher did not look pleased to see him.

Ian didn't hold his hand out to be shaken. He doubted she would fall into that trap twice. "Ian Georgeson," he said, taking his seat.

She looked him up and down. "I wouldn't have taken you for a three minute man."

He lifted an eyebrow.

"Rumour has it that the men attracted to this sort of dating are used to everything being over quickly for a reason," she said.

Ian smiled across the table. War it was going to be then, for now, at least. "You'd be amazed what the right man could do for you in three minutes."

"Few things amaze me." Her tone of voice made it very clear he wasn't one of the few.

Ian said nothing, wondering if she would feel obliged to fill the silence, and if the pressure would induce her to be as honest as the other women had been.

She let the silence hang for all of thirty seconds before she gave in.

"I won't waste either of our time by telling you all that—Hi, I'm Susan. I'm twenty-nine years old. I work in the customer service sector and I enjoy—rubbish."

He folded his arms, leant back in his chair and waited to see what she would tell him instead.

Susan pushed her hair back over her shoulder—the first fidgety indication that she wasn't as comfortable under his scrutiny as she'd like him to think she was. "I don't do that anymore."

"Do what?"

She sighed. "Don't play stupid. I don't know if you saw me in a club or what, but we both know exactly what I'm talking about."

"The fact that you're a submissive? Yes, I know. Unless I'm very much mistaken, you're a very talented one."

"Well, that is exactly what you are—mistaken. I don't do that anymore." Susan seemed very determined on that last statement.

Ian studied her carefully. She met his eyes without hesitation, as if she knew what hesitating to meet his gaze would imply.

"What you do, or do not, choose to do doesn't change who you are," he pointed out.

"You're wrong."

"An alcoholic is always an alcoholic," Ian said. "He never stops wanting a drink."

Anger, real anger and not simple annoyance with someone who was acting like a jackass and winding her up, flared in her eyes. Her grip tightened on her drink, her fingers curled around the stem of the wine glass until her nails dug into her palm.

"You can no more give up your appetite for submission than I can give up my desire for dominance," he said, wondering if she would throw her drink in his face before the end of the date. It looked like a glass of white wine. At least it wouldn't stain...

"Alcoholics go for years without a drink," his date informed him, her voice dropping to a whisper, as if she wasn't sure who she was trying to convince.

"That's true. And they have my sincere admiration for doing so. But don't take the comparison to far, Susie. It's not the same thing. Their addiction is intrinsically harmful."

He watched her expression very carefully as he said the last words. No flicker of pain crossed her face. She was still mad as hell with him, but nothing in her manner or her expression betrayed that she'd discovered how harmful submission could be when practiced with the wrong dominant.

"Why did you give it up?" he asked. His tone of voice reflected more than casual curiosity. Ian mentally cursed himself for betraying just how often he'd asked himself that question when he failed to catch sight of her in any of the local clubs since that one night.

She shrugged, studying the liquid in her glass. "What difference does it make?"

"I want you to submit to me."

"No."

No apology, no excuse. He'd asked, she said no. She met his eye as if daring him to have a problem with that.

"I didn't ask you to submit to me. I merely informed you that I want you to," Ian corrected.

Susan tilted her head on the side and considered him for several long seconds. "You think you're good, don't you?"

"I am good."

Her lips twitched into a smaller, but much more genuine smile at the sheer arrogance of the response. Then she shook her head. "You have no place in this sort of club. You can't play this sort of game. Men like you, women like me. We can't play little three minute games like regular people. It doesn't work like that."

Ian nodded. "You're certainly worth more than three minutes of anyone's time."

"*Everyone* is worth more than three minutes of another person's time."

"No," he said, equally firmly. "They're not. I find very few people worth even that long when it comes to working out if you want more than a conversation with them. I could have told you I wasn't interested in any other woman in this room before anyone sat at one of these silly little tables."

Their time was ticking down, but the moment seemed too big to rush her through it. Her breaths came quicker. She met his eyes again, no hint of a submissive lowering of her lashes. But at the same time she swallowed rapidly, her throat working hard to keep her emotions in check. Interesting...

A bell dinged, telling them the first three minutes was over and it was time for the other person to rush out their life story.

"Do you want to know what I would do with you if I had more than three minutes, Susan?" Ian asked softly, encouraging her to lean in and listen to the quiet words.

Susan Fisher did her best not to squirm under the dominant's gaze, knowing he'd see it as a sign of weakness. Without being party to all the facts, he'd think she was flirting with him or submitting to him or heaven could only guess what else.

If he knew all the facts then...

Susan kept her fake 'of course I love speed dating, who wouldn't!' smile pinned to her lips.

"It's your three minutes, Mr. Georgeson, you can say whatever you want." Behind the artificial smile she prayed he was bluffing. If he was any good at talking dirty she might come right there at the table. Although how much of that would be down to what he said and how much down to the little pocket vibe she'd slipped inside her knickers before her shift started might be open for debate.

The tiny little vibrator lay snugly inside her underwear, pressing against her clit, whirling away on its lowest setting. Over the last four months, it had proved itself to be the only thing that could keep her smiling through the increasingly disturbing chat up lines that inevitably flew across the table as the evening progressed.

Her fingertips caressed the little remote control attached to her key ring, wondering if she could risk a few seconds on a middle setting. It would be stupid and reckless given the man sitting opposite her and the feelings his dominance called up inside her. Unfortunately, Susan was well aware that she had never found a way to combine submission and sensible behaviour into the same mindset.

Ian's attention dropped to her hand. She stopped fingering the tiny bit of plastic, snatching her fingertip away from the speed control, as if there was some way he could somehow guess what she was doing. The dominant lifted his gaze back to her eyes without seeming to be any the wiser to what the little pink heart shaped piece of technology could do, to what it was doing to her clit at that moment.

"If I had more than three minutes," he said softly. "I would put a collar around your neck and mark you out as mine. I would be the only man who would ever touch you. For the rest of your life you'd belong to just one man—to me."

"Pretty words," Susan said with a shrug. Shifting in her chair, she crossed her legs, increasing the pressure on her clit and the twirling little motor between her legs. "In my experience, those sorts of forevers last until a man zips his fly up.

Don't make me idle promises, Mr. Georgeson. I have no interest in them, and I don't need a man to pat me on the head and promise to respect me in the morning in order to enjoy my sex life."

"What do you need, Susie?"

Susan looked him up and down. Dominance. The real thing—not silly little boys playing games they're copying off some stupid website run by a man who wouldn't know what to do with a real submissive if she knelt at his feet and begged to belong to him. "I don't need anything from you, Mr. Georgeson. And it's Susan or Miss Fisher, not Susie."

His lips twitched into a smile, as if he knew how much of a lie those words felt like on her tongue right then. "Why did you stop playing?"

"I got bored."

"Liar."

Susan shrugged. "You can call me what you like. It's the truth. I hit a plateau. I got bored playing at the level I was at, and I have no interest in being some bastard's twenty-four-seven slave." She shrugged again, unable to stop the nervous little gesture slipping through her self control. "So I don't do that anymore."

"Afraid of how far you'd go if you started again?"

"No." She'd always gone exactly how far she wanted to go and no further. There was no reason at all why that would change just because Ian was playing the dom.

He studied her for several seconds. "If you don't want promises of time, then the simple truth. I'd put a collar around your neck. I'd put you on your knees. If this were a different sort of club, you'd be there already. That dress would be gone, whatever you're wearing underneath it would be gone. You'd kneel at my feet, naked in front of all these strangers and you wouldn't even remember they were there once the scene started."

Susan's breaths came quicker. She leant forward in her seat, eager to hear the words. In spite of all her protests, in spite of all the promises she made to



herself when she walked away from that lifestyle, she still found herself wondering if giving up the games she'd enjoyed so much had been a mistake.

As she listened, completely helpless, the dominant pulled her fantasies right out of her soul and lay them out for his inspection on the table between them. His words slipped into her mind, and the facts that she reminded herself of whenever she thought about going back to those clubs sounded far less like facts and more like vague opinions—unimportant opinions.

"Close your eyes."

Her eyes dropped closed before her brain even had time to process the order. In the back of her mind, something screamed at her that she didn't do this anymore, she didn't do as she was told and enjoy every minute of it. But it was too late. Her eyes were shut and she might as well have agreed to wear a blindfold for all the choice she had over remaining blind until he offered her permission to see.

"Tell me what you'd hope for, Susie. Tell your master how you wish to serve him."

Susan licked her lips, flicking her tongue out over the slight stickiness of her lip gloss. She could practically taste him in her mouth, feel the leather caress her bare skin. The world around her changed until it was hard to remember that the bonds she imagined feeling around her wrists and ankles were imaginary. Susan parted her lips as her brain whirled trying to find an honest answer that would please the dominant.

*Ding.*

Susan jerked back in her seat. Her eyes snapped open. She met Ian's expectant gaze. Dragging a deep breath into her lungs she looked away, sure that far too much truth shone in her eyes right then.

Quickly clearing her throat, Susan scrambled to pull herself back together. Then she remembered that he was still waiting on her answer.

"What I'd hope for is irrelevant. I'd still know that I'd end up disappointed—just like I always did towards the end. It's always the same when you play those

games. The same kind of people wielding the same kind of whips. Nothing changes. There's nothing new—nothing I would do anyway. I'm not throwing myself into that world, only to go home tired and frustrated all over again."

He smiled at her across the table, for all the world as if she had just got down on her knees and begged to belong to him. "I think we'll call that response—saved by the bell."

Susan bit her tongue, unable to think of a response that didn't revolve around a whole string of swear words.

He chuckled. "You really think that anything you can say could convince me you intended to give me the same answer before the three minutes ended?"

Susan stood up as she realised what he'd said was true. "The three minutes has ended."

He nodded his dismissal to her and, as easily as that, she knew she was trapped. If she went it was because he gave the order. If she stayed it was because she wanted to linger at his side. Susan stood there, looking down at him trying to decide which was the lesser of the two evils.

"Don't act like I've given you any right to command me, Mr. Georgeson. You're just making yourself look like a novice."

"Which we both know I'm not," he replied.

Susan had already spun on her heel and taken several strides by the time she'd processed what he said. No, he wasn't a novice. If his manner didn't tell her that, her reactions screamed it loud and clear.

Even while she walked away from him, it still took all her effort not to let her breaths become pants. Her nipples were still pebbled painfully tight behind the line of her bra. The mini vibrator was just the icing on the cake—the moisture gathering in her knickers was mostly down to Ian.

She'd never admit it to him, but Susan knew deep down that she reacted to him the way she had reacted to those first men she'd ever met in the clubs, the first people who introduced her to the scene. Somehow, he'd made it feel new for a few minutes, made it feel worth it.

To Susan's intense relief, her knees didn't buckle as she took each step. She reached the bar on the far side of the room without doing anything that would betray any of her secrets.

The waitress held out her hand. Susan blinked at the outstretched palm.

"Your form, Miss Fisher."

Form... Susan blinked and pulled herself together. The speed dating form. She'd left it on the desk. "Don't bother with—"

The white piece of paper appeared as if by magic on the dark surface of the bar. The heat of a large, strong body standing close behind her, seeped through Susan's dress.

"Thank you," she forced herself to say, biting back the instinct to call him sir, to turn and look up at him as if the sun rose and set with him when it blatantly bloody well didn't.

"You're more than welcome, Susie." He seemed to stand there forever, tempting her with his very presence, before he finally moved away, leaving the form on the bar next to her.

The waitress took one look at her expression and went down the other end of the bar to retrieve the response forms from some of the other daters.

Susan sighed. Pushing her hair back out of her way, she looked over the neatly printed piece of paper. She'd filled in a hell of a lot of them over the time she'd worked as a hostess in the bar. It was easy to fall back into her well established habit of ticking the not interested box all the way down the line.

Number twelve. Ian. Susan's pen hovered over the box marked not interested. The ball point tip strayed towards the interested box. Nothing bad would happen if she ticked it, she told herself. If he ticked the same box, they would both be sent home with an envelope containing each other's e-mail addresses.

They'd just arrange to meet up some time. They'd have some fun together and... And at the end of the night, she would go home and wonder why she'd bothered—just like she always had, just like she always would.

Susan closed her eyes for a second, furious at herself for hesitating, for wondering if it was worth taking the chance that this time things would be different. Opening her eyes, she hurriedly ticked a box and pushed the piece of paper across the bar.

The moment she'd completed her obligations to the speed dating, she retreated to the one place she knew she would be free from the dominant's presence—the female employees' bathroom. Susan locked herself in a stall and sat on the closed down lid of the toilet.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Repeat as necessary. There was nothing to panic about. She just needed to get a grip on herself. She'd worked in the bar for months without any trouble. She could go back out and finish the shift. She just needed to stop herself getting all worked up over nothing.

Susan opened her eyes and stared at the graffiti on the inside of the stall door. In the back of her mind, the sensible bit of her personality made a note that someone should be sent in to clean that up. Rumours already ran around the club as fast as streakers at a football match, they didn't need any extra help.

Taking a few minutes to tune back into sanity after listening to strangers rush to tell her their life stories in three minutes was one thing. Anyone would need that. Hiding in the bathroom like a scared little girl was quite another. Even a submissive had her pride.

Squaring her shoulders and telling herself to stop acting like a fool, Susan walked back out into the club, chin tilted up and every emotion firmly back under her own control.

Ian was still there. She could still feel that electric charge in the atmosphere that only a true dominant could bring into a room. As she made her rounds through the various areas of the club, checking that everything was running smoothly, she felt him watching her every step of the way.

His gaze moved over her in a slow, leisurely assessment. She couldn't help but be aware of the way he studied her body and her movements, the way he appeared to judge her interactions with every person she spoke to. Her body

didn't seem to be willing to listen to the sarcastic little comments she kept in the front of her mind.

Her skin prickled, singing out its pleasure with his attention. Every cell in her body hummed with anticipation as she waited for him to approach her once more, as she waited to see if her determination not to submit would hold. As the evening went on, she became less and less sure that she would remember that the word 'no' existed, let alone that she was supposed to say it, that she was supposed to *want* to say it.

He didn't approach.

By the time her shift was over and she was free to leave the bar, Susan was filled with the same frustration and disappointment she'd felt every time she left a leather bar. Waving a friendly farewell to the security man at the door, pretending tonight was just any other night and she didn't feel like an empty shell, Susan walked across the car park.

A few yards from her car, she hesitated. Someone was there. Someone was watching her. Susan slipped each of her keys between her the fingers of her right hand, turning the innocent bits of metal into a spiky little knuckle duster.

"There's no need for that. 'No' will certainly be an effective safe word until we have time to arrange something more formal."

The fear drained out of her to be replaced by anger. "Why are you lurking around my car?"

"To see what I can do to make myself more interesting—or you more truthful." Ian held up an envelope containing the list of women interested in meeting him again.

"And you're modest as well!" Susan strode past him, towards her car. He made no move to halt her progress. "I ticked the box that said I wasn't interested in you because I'm not interested in you."

As she moved closer to her car, Susan looked over her shoulder, trying to track his progress and rush away from him at the same time. Her ability to multi-

task on uneven tarmac let her down. Her heel hit a pothole. She stumbled as the ground disappeared from underneath her.

Before she could reach out and try to break her fall, a strong pair of arms wrapped around her, holding her up and keeping her safe. Susan closed her eyes. It would be so easy for him to push her down on the bonnet of her car and spread her out on the cold metal surface. She knew deep down that she wouldn't push him away, she wouldn't say no to anything he wanted from her right then.

It would be so easy for him to carry her along with the momentum of the evening, to make her forget why this was a bad idea. Susan closed her eyes and waited for the perfect combination of dominance and submission to pick her up and take away all the pressure to keep sensible thoughts in her head.

It wouldn't be her fault if that happened. She was only human, and every human had to be allowed one little slip. And for a little while, it would feel so good, so perfect to just give in and go with it. And if she felt sick inside afterwards, so what. She'd survived that sensation often enough to be sure she would survive it again without too much trouble.

"Watch your step, Susie."

Susan blinked open her eyes. Ian still held her tight against him. His erection pressed against her body. He wanted exactly the same things she did. She would bet her life on that.

Tilting her head back, Susan looked him straight in the eye, trying to make the words he'd said fit in with all the things she was so sure about. "What?"

"Watch your step," Ian repeated, as he took a step away from her. The heat from his body disappeared. A shiver ran through her. She hesitated, not quite able to switch her brain back on and work out what the hell had gone wrong.

Ian took her politely by arm and walked her the last few paces to her car. He took her keys out of her hand, opened the door, and guided her inside the small space.

"Drive carefully, Susie."



## **Chapter Two**

\* \* \* \*

The atmosphere in the bar changed. It was suddenly far harder to breathe. Closing her eyes for a moment, Susan held back a sigh.

No. Not again. Why couldn't the bloody man leave her alone? She straightened her spine as her shoulders tensed. Tilting her chin up, Susan gave everything she had to not looking submissive, to not looking exhausted.

If the dominant saw any trace of tiredness in her, she was sure he would guess its cause. Hearing the alarm go off, only to realise that she hadn't slept at all was bad enough. Spending all night squirming under her sheets, unable to find relief or peace of mind was infuriating. But looking into Ian's eyes and knowing that he knew all of that would be so much worse.

Desperately trying to keep her expression blank, she turned and looked up at him.

He was dressed much as he had been the previous night. Nothing special. Black trousers, black shirt. Black everything topped with a black leather jacket. There was nothing special about him, full stop, Susan reminded herself. He was good looking, but he wasn't especially handsome. He was tall, yes. Well built, certainly. No one could deny that Ian was broad shouldered and strong, but there were other men in the bar who were better looking, better built.

Except they weren't true dominants and Ian was, and in some stupid little way, that made everything else irrelevant. Susan held back another sigh. Alpha males were a real bitch when they got inside your head. And they were a bugger to shake off if one caught your scent too.

The waitress approached on the other side of the bar. She smiled at Ian. He smiled back. Polite to someone whose job it was to serve him. Susan had learnt to pay attention to that sort of cue. Watch how the man treats people working to serve him and you'll see how he treats his submissive.



Susan mentally cursed herself and pushed that line of thought out of her head as quickly as it had snuck in. So he could be nice to waitresses. So what? It didn't change the fact she'd be an idiot to go back to all that nonsense after staying clear of it for so long. Perhaps last night she could have told herself that it wasn't her fault for getting caught up in the moment. Not tonight. There would be no more excuses. She didn't do that anymore.

Susan turned her back on Ian and handed a set of forms to the waitress. "Thank you. These can be taken through now."

Ian stepped up behind her. Warmth radiated off his body. It was all too easy to imagine laying under that heat as his body covered her, to imagine how it would feel to lay there with leather wrapped around her limbs, not able to reach for him, but feeling his presence with every cell in her body. All the fantasies she'd tried to keep at bay through her sleepless night tugged at the edges of her consciousness, pleading to be heard, to be fulfilled.

Susan turned her back on everything that stupid little part of her mind wanted and spun around to face Ian once more.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Georgeson, there are no places left in the speed dating, tonight," she said firmly. She'd practiced that tone of voice in front of the mirror for a long time in the months after she stopped playing those disappointing games. It had taken a lot of work to remove every trace of lingering submission from her voice and her manner, but in that moment, it was worth all the effort she'd put into teaching herself how to stop being submissive.

"I didn't ask about the speed dating."

Susan hesitated, thrown off her stride. "Is there something else you want?"

He leaned closer to her. His lips hovered an inch away from her ear. "You, Susie. I want you, naked, collared and on your knees. Right now."

Susan swallowed down the rush of arousal, forcing her knees to stay strong when they begged her for permission to follow his order.

Ian brushed his lips against her earlobe.

A shiver ran down her spine. Air rushed into her lungs as she gasped. Her eyes dropped closed and a picture rushed to fill the darkness behind her eyelids. It was all just as he set it out for her. She saw herself naked, kneeling there in the middle of the room with Ian looming above her, a whip in his hand and an order on his lips. Susan helplessly leant forward to brush a kiss against her dominant's free hand as her master offered his skin to her to be worshipped.

"Good girl."

Her fantasy didn't move his lips in time with the words. The dream shattered. Susan blinked her eyes open, looking at Ian, looking at the room around them as she tried to drag up memories of reality and push the fantasy aside.

Ian stared down at her. His eyes held no secrets. He'd broken the dream on purpose. He'd pulled her out of her fantasy just as it was getting interesting because he was the dominant and that's what he'd decided to do.

He seemed to wait for an answer to a question. She stared blankly at him until it had to be very obvious she had no idea what the question was.

"You want that too," he answered for her.

Susan shook her head and stepped back from him. "I'm working." She analysed the statement. It lacked a certain something. "And even if I wasn't working, I don't do that anymore," she added.

"You mean you don't let that side of you out to play in the real world. But that doesn't mean you don't really submit, does it, sweetheart? Inside your head, every day, you do submit, don't you, Susie? It never really stops, does it?"

Susan shook her head. "Don't talk about me as if you know me." She stepped past him and hurried away, determined not to let him see how true his statement was. It wasn't fair that he should somehow be able to see that there were days, like today, when it was almost impossible to keep up a persona that felt more like a lie every time she opened her mouth.

She had to keep it together. She had to spend three minutes listening to speed daters—three minutes talking to strangers and making sense as she

fulfilled her obligations as the hostess of the bar and made up the numbers in the dating game.

At least, he wasn't going to be one of the men she had to sit across the table from. That was a mercy. The spaces were booked, the numbers of men and women matched. She would be safe while she was in the lounge out of his presence, out of his sight.

A minute later, Ian Georgeson walked into the back room of the club as if he owned it. Damn. Susan's fingers clenched into a fist. She ached to send someone over to him and have him thrown out, but at the same time, she knew that any such move would only inform the dominant she was paying too much attention to his presence. It would let him think her world was starting to revolve around him in a very dangerous way.

There was nothing she could do but wait until the speed dating started. He would find himself without a seat at any of the tables and he would have to leave. Until then, all she could do was try to ignore him as best she could. Turning her back on the men she was about to date, she faced the bar that ran down the ladies side of the room.

There was no formal line drawn down the centre of the space, but everyone respected the divide between the sexes. No one mingled until after they'd spent six minutes in each person's company. It was one of those unwritten rules that everyone in the world obeyed without really thinking about it, one of the certainties a woman could build her life around.

Ian walked across the room and stopped right next to her, as if it never occurred to him that such social rules could apply to dominants as well as to the vanilla segments of the population, as well as submissives. He looked perfectly confident about his right to be there. When she caught a glimpse of the piece of paper in his hand, she guessed why.

Susan looked him up and down, determined to appear completely unimpressed. "Buying a date is generally considered pitiful."

"And that's what you think I did?"

"How else would you get in here at the last moment?" she snapped. She looked pointedly at the advance booking slip. "You bought another man's place off him."

"Yes."

"Why?" she demanded, as if she didn't already know.

Ian smiled. "Bribery isn't such a big sin to get what I want."

"You're not getting what you want." The words were supposed to be calm and dismissive, but they came out sounding embarrassingly rushed and uncertain, as if she wanted him to agree with the statement, because that would somehow make it true.

Ian merely shook his head, dismissing that as a possibility. "Are you a betting woman, Susie?"

"No."

"Liar."

Her eyes snapped up to meet his gaze. It was a lie. Susan knew only too well that in her former life she had never proved herself able to resist the lure of a gamble when there was more than money at stake. With the desire to give in to her submissive side rushing through her veins, there wasn't enough self control left in her to resist this temptation too. "What sort of bet?"

Ian leaned in close, whispering the words in her ear like a lover's secret. "I'll bet that I can make you come during the first three minutes you sit opposite me at the table."

Susan jerked away from him, pressing her back against the bar. "What?"

He repeated the basic idea in that same secretive tone of voice.

No. It was the obvious answer. It was the only sane answer. Nothing else needed to be known about the bet in order for her to realise she'd have to be a fool to take part in any such game.

"And if you win?" Susan mentally cursed herself as the words slipped past every bit of common sense and whispered themselves into the world.

"You're mine to do with as I please."

That was a bad thing. Susan repeated that important bit of information to herself several times, trying to convince both her conscious brain and her instinctive desire to submit that it was true. Some part of her still couldn't resist examining the idea further. "For how long?"

"Three hours."

"No!" He was crazy if he thought she was turning herself over to a stranger for that long. Damn near every scene she'd ever done in one of the kink clubs had been over in less than half that time.

"What's the point in betting if you're not going to wager something worth winning?" he asked, a smile touching his lips as if he knew what was in her head, as if something about the situation amused him.

"And what if I win?" she said.

"Then I'll do whatever you want," he said, with a shrug, as if it didn't really matter because there was no chance in hell that a submissive would ever win a bet against a dominant.

"I just want you to leave me alone," she blurted out.

"Then I'll have no choice but to do what you want."

Susan considered the idea from all angles. Ian looked down at her, so smug, so damn sure that he would win and not have to pay the forfeit himself.

"All I have to do is not come while you sit opposite me at the table?" she checked.

"That's right."

She looked him straight in the eye. He looked sincere, but right then, that just made him look like a good liar.

"What's the catch?"

"There isn't one. If I can't make you come in three minutes, I'll leave you in peace for as long as you want."

It was probably the only chance she would get to shake him off, Susan told herself. That's why she was doing this. To shake him off. Right...

She attempted to speak, cleared her throat and tried again. "You have a deal, Mr. Georgeson."

Ian smiled. "Good girl." He handed her a set of car keys. "These are your safe word. If you drop them at any point, the game stops—no harm, no foul, and no need for anyone to pay off the forfeit."

He turned and walked away. Before she had a chance to say anything in response, he was back on the side of the room occupied by all the other men who were waiting for the dating to start.

Susan looked at the two sets of keys in her hand. Her little pink remote control beckoned to her. Could it really hurt to play her usual game, just for a little while? It wasn't as if she would be cheating. If anything it would make it easier for Ian to win.

She had to remind herself that she didn't want Ian to win several times, before the silent words sounded the least bit accurate. Susan glanced at the keys again and let out a silent little sigh.

Best take temptation out of her way before she ended up doing something stupid. Susan called the waitress over and left her own keys behind the bar. The waitress put them in a little glass jar on a high shelf. The little pink remote showed through the curved surface of the glass, praising her for making the sensible decision.

Turning away from the reassuring sight, Susan nodded to herself. There was no way he could make her come just by talking to her. There was no way he could win. She slipped her finger through the ring holding Ian's car keys together and smiled at the prospect of wiping that smug grin off his face as she took her seat at table one.

Ian, sitting at table twelve, was firmly in her line of sight. She made a point of not looking towards him, as if he wasn't even a blip on her radar, as if the fact that he was the only true dominant in the room didn't make him stand up head and shoulders above every other man present.

Her first prospective date arrived. A bell rang. Susan fixed a smile onto her face and listened as the man sitting on the other side of the table began to tell her about his job in the financial services industry. He had a monotonous tone of voice and an apparently inexhaustible interest in staring at her cleavage.

Susan jerked in her seat as her little vibrator sprang to life between her legs. Twisting her neck she looked over her shoulder and spotted the little glass jar on the shelf behind the bar. She could still see the glint of metal and the blur of pink plastic inside the tumbler. Her keys were still there.

The little vibe increased to a higher speed setting. Susan clamped her thighs tight together, as if that would make any difference. She had used the tiny vibrator a lot since she started working there. She took a deep breath and tried to consider the possibilities in a sensible way. Maybe it short circuited. Maybe it was just time to retire that particular girls' best friend and invest in a new one.

The speed momentarily increased another notch. Susan tried to remember how many settings there were on it. She'd only ever kept it on the lowest one, with a couple of seconds on the next one up when she was faced with a particularly unappealing prospect across the table. A higher setting would have been too big a risk.

Susan bit her lip. At this rate she would...

Her gaze snapped up and darted across the room, seeking out the very man she'd been so determined to ignore. Ian smiled back at her. He knew! No. Susan took another deep breath and tried to think clearly. He couldn't know. That wasn't possible. And even if he did know how she passed her time while dating, he didn't possess a psychic connection to her sex toy. He couldn't make it do what it was doing just by being aware of its existence.

He wasn't a remote control.

Ian lifted his hand and casually rubbed the back of his neck as he smiled at his date. A small key chain dangled from his finger tips. A little bit of plastic hung from the key ring. It wasn't pink, but it was heart shaped, and in that moment Susan was left in no doubt, it was a remote control.

Somehow he knew. Somehow he had acquired a remote control that worked on the same frequency.

Susan closed her eyes as he kicked the vibrations up another notch again.

"Are you feeling okay?"

"What?" She opened her eyes and fixed her attention on the man opposite her. "I'm sorry, what did you say?"

"I asked if you were feeling okay?"

"F-fine thank you," she said, stumbling as the vibrator dropped down to a lower speed only to rev up again against her clit. She squirmed in her seat, unable to resist the temptation to shift her weight and press herself forward onto the vibrator even though she knew it would only make it harder for her to stay in control.

"It's your turn," her date hinted.

Susan blinked at him. Her turn? She pulled a few brain cells together. Her turn. It was her turn to spend three minutes talking about herself—Damn!

She'd spent so long sitting in on those dates that it should have been easy to fall into the routine, to recite the same words she'd been repeating since she started to work at the club. Forget easy, it was damn near impossible. Ian played the remote like a virtuoso. It peaked and dipped, buzzed and rippled against her until her breaths turned in to pants and her vision blurred.

He took her to the edge a dozen times before he took the seat opposite her.

"You bastard," she whispered, her voice rough with frustration, with longing to submit to him and damn the consequences.

Ian smiled. "What's the point in playing if you don't play to win?"

Susan bit her lip as the vibe on her clit hit a high note. She shuddered and grabbed the table edge, no longer really caring if someone saw her acting crazy. Ian's keys bit into her palm as she clamped her fist around them.

"How did you know?" she managed to ask.

"About your interest in nano technology?" he asked. "Only two things could make you work so hard not to squirm in your seat the way you did while you



were talking to the other men last week and I doubted itching powder would put that smile on your face."

He put his right hand on the table, his finger ran over the controls on the remote. Susan bit back a gasp.

"And I've been in a club when two couples realised that their remote controls had been operating the wrong toy for the entire evening. Their reactions were very interesting when they realised all these little heart shaped remotes work on the same frequency. A useful manufacturing flaw, wouldn't you agree?"

His eyes met hers. His three minutes would be up soon. He'd have to make her come any moment if he intended to win, and Susan was well aware that dominants weren't men who were willing to lose on purpose.

Ian put his finger over the dial again, making his intention obvious. If he pushed the speed up that way she wouldn't be able to stop herself from coming right there and then. It wouldn't have been the first time she'd come in the middle of a room, surrounded by strangers, but this was different.

Susan put her hand over his. "Don't."

Ian raised an eyebrow at her. He looked to her hand. "You have a safe word."

Susan swallowed. He hadn't increased the speed to full throttle, he hadn't reduced it either. It made it so damn hard to think!

"I don't want to say my safe word," she whispered.

Ian pulled his hand out from under hers. Darting forward to the edge of her seat, Susan grabbed his wrist. "You win. I'm not saying my safe word. Just— you win. I'll pay the forfeit on the bet. Three hours, whatever you want. We both know you can make me come. You don't have to prove it. But when you're done playing games I'll still have to work here."

Ian looked into her eyes. She didn't look down. He pressed a button on the remote.

Susan closed her eyes, shoulders sagging in obvious relief. "Thank you."

He removed his fingertip from the off button. His date took a deep breath.

"Are you working tomorrow night?" he asked.

"Until midnight," she whispered. Her voice had been beautiful before, right then, suffused with equal measures of pleasure and frustration, it was magnificent.

"Midnight tomorrow night through to three am Friday then," he decided.

Susan nodded her understanding. "Where?"

"I'll pick you up here." He could see in her eyes that she was fighting to be practical, to keep it together and deal with mundane matters so she wouldn't have to examine the more interesting ideas that he was sure were rushing around inside her head.

"Do I need to bring anything with me?" she asked, as if some part of her was still pretending that their next date would be nothing more than two friends meeting up to chat and while away a few hours together.

His lips twitched into a smile. "Come as you are. I'll have you in what suits my tastes soon enough."

Even that little mention of the submission she'd promised him made her swallow rapidly, but she nodded her understanding.

The bell rang signalling they were half way through their date. Three minutes left. "Your turn," he said.

"What do you want me to say?" she asked. The bell seemed to have brought her back to something like reality—or perhaps it had simply cued her back into her normal vanilla flavoured act. The words were deferential, but there was barely a trace of submission in her voice as she asked the question. It would have been a fascinating transformation to watch if it hadn't been so frustrating. Just when he was making progress...

"You have three minutes to tell me what your limits are, set a safe word and ask any questions you need me to answer before the three hour scene starts," he informed her.

"Are you clean?" she asked briskly.

"Yes."

"You have the paperwork to prove it?"

"Yes."

Susan nodded. "I'll go bare back for oral, but condoms for everything else." She studied him carefully, searching his face for a reaction to the limit.

"That's reasonable," Ian nodded. It was also reassuring. She knew how to negotiate. She knew what she was doing. He'd been starting to wonder if the scenes he had glimpsed in the clubs had given him a false understanding of her experience—the last thing he wanted was to find out he was playing a game with a woman who didn't know what she was getting herself into. Being called a bastard was one thing, acting like a complete one was a different thing.

"No permanent marks," she said. "And no temporary marks that can't be easily hidden."

"Accepted."

"No third parties—of either gender."

"Agreed."

She hesitated then, studying him suspiciously across the dating table.

Ian smiled back at his new submissive. "You'll find me very tolerant of any limit that doesn't interfere with my plans for you. If you object to something that scuppers those plans, then perhaps we'll have more to discuss."

"Are you going to tell me what those plans are?"

"Where would be the fun in that?"

Susan shifted in her seat. His guess had been right. She liked giving herself up to not knowing what was going to happen next. If he could read her half as well as he hoped, he would put money on that being her favourite bit of submission.

A certain type of control freak for whom being out of control was the ultimate high. Ian nodded to himself. Yes, Susan was just the type of submissive who would thrive on that sort of scene once she learnt to trust the man she offered her submission to.

Her hair fell over her shoulder as she once more squirmed in her chair. She pushed it back out of the way. There was no flirtation in the move. It still made Ian want to reach out and wind her hair around his hand. It still made him want to bind her wrists behind her back, so he would be the only one who could reach out and push her hair out of her face—if he chose to do so.

"What else?" he asked.

"At the end of the three hours, I'm to be returned here?" Susan asked.

"Unless you elect another location you want me to take you to in the meantime," he said.

"Here," she said firmly.

Ian nodded, but he didn't withdraw her option to select another location in the future. He already had the feeling that he wouldn't want to give Susan back to herself at the end of that time. Three hours had seemed like plenty of time to work though the chemistry that sizzled between them, when he was sitting in his house working out his plans. Sitting opposite her at that ridiculous little table, it seemed far more likely it would be impossible to want to take her *anywhere* until he knew exactly when she would be returning to her master's side.

He mentally rolled his eyes at himself. He was getting soppy in his old age. Three hours would be fine. It might have taken him eighteen months to find her after the little disappearing act she'd pulled on him, but that didn't mean it would take equally as long for either of them to play out the rest of the game.

He looked pointedly at the keys in her hand as he realised that she had come to the end of her list of limits and was waiting for him to respond. "Your safe word?" he prompted.

"Red."

"If you say that, everything stops. At that point, you can request to be brought back here or taken wherever else you wish."

She nodded. The hand that pushed her hair back from her shoulder trailed along her neck.

"Yes," he told her.

"What?"

Ian nodded to her hand and the absentminded line it was tracing around her throat. "Yes, I'll get a collar for you."

Susan swallowed.

"Black leather," he specified.

Susan snatched her hand away from her neck and shook her head.

Ian raised an eyebrow. Reasonable limits were one thing, unless there was a very good reason following hot on the heels of the refusal, a collar wasn't one of the details of the scene that was up for debate.

"I don't mean no. Just that you don't need to get one," she said briskly. "I've got one at home. I can—"

"No."

She jumped at force of the snapped objection.

"You really think I'm interested in putting another man's collar on you?" Ian shook his head and cut her short when she would have objected. His tone was sharper than he'd intended, but just because he knew he had no right to feel jealous of men she had played with long before they'd even met, didn't mean the feeling could simply be wished away. "I don't care if you bought it yourself. If you wore it for another man, it's his. I'll buy a new one for you—one you won't wear for anyone else."

She nodded.

Ian heard the naked possessiveness in his voice. It seemed to grow deeper with every word that left his lips, and he didn't doubt that Susan heard it too.

In that moment, with the chemistry he felt bubbling frantically between them, it was almost impossible to believe that she would ever wear another man's collar once she'd worn his. There was part of Ian that didn't even question the instinct to demand that would be the case. As far as that part of him was concerned, the sooner they got to the point when the fact she belonged to him, properly and permanently was made official, the better.

Ian leant back in his chair and studied her very carefully, wondering exactly how she had managed to get that far under his skin in such a short time. He couldn't quite decide if he needed to get her out of his system as quickly as possible, or if he needed to welcome her into his mind and let her take up permanent residence there. He tilted his head to one side, not quite sure what to make of the woman sitting opposite him.

A flicker of some emotion he couldn't recognise passed across Susan's face.

"You will belong to me for those three hours, Susie—entirely. Don't think just because you've only agreed that I'll own you for a limited time that will make the slightest bit of difference. I don't do half measures." Or at least he had no intention of doing half measures with her—for better or worse, that was probably closer to the truth.

Susan nodded. "Three hours, whatever you want."

The bell rang signalling the end of the game. Neither of them moved.

"Tick the box."

Susan blinked at him. "Pardon?"

"Tick the box to show who you are interested in," he ordered.

She shook her head. "I have to give the form in, everyone will see it."

"Tick the box," he pushed again, not sure why it was so important, only knowing it was.

"I have to work with these people."

Ian raised an eyebrow. There was no way either of them was leaving the table until she did as he said. They might not be in the scene proper, but they'd come too far to revert to those sorts of petty games. Susan seemed to realise that too. She ground her teeth at the order, but she also picked up her pen and ticked the box. As she stood to go and hand it in, Ian plucked the piece of paper out of her grasp.

Susan frowned down at him. "What are you doing?"

"We can't have your co-workers spreading gossip about us." He folded up the form and slipped it into his jacket pocket, sure she wouldn't have any problem

brushing away her failure to hand it in that night. "A nice little memento of our new understanding," he told her.

"Three hours, Mr. Georgeson. At three am on Friday our new understanding becomes a pleasant memory, or unpleasant memory if you turn out to be a sadistic bastard, but either way it will be just a memory. I'm doing this because I lost a bet, not because I can't resist falling at your feet in instant submission."

"Do you want to make another bet, Susie?" he asked.

"No." She turned and walked away, obviously not willing to fall into the same trap twice.

Ian smiled at the rapidly retreating figure, but he didn't chase after it. Watching her squirm in her seat had been a very interesting way to pass the evening. But it now meant he had little choice but to stay where he was and hide his tenting trousers behind the table top until he brought his cock back under control. It wasn't such a hardship to wait there for a while, to simply sit and watch his soon to be submissive.

Within the first few minutes of Susan leaving the table, it was obvious that no one had noticed the bet they'd played during the speed dating. Susan seemed to relax a fraction when she realised that. Some of the tension left her shoulders. She seemed to breathe more easily, look over her shoulder less often.

She glanced across at him every once in a while, but she didn't come back to his side to ask about the bet, no matter how tempted she might be to do so. Ian ran over possible bets inside his head, just in case she changed her mind, but at the same time he couldn't bring himself to be too disappointed. There came a time when games needed to be set aside and reality had to be allowed to reassert itself, and the reality was, for reasons he wasn't quite sure of, Susan already felt like a lot more than a game.

Even after he'd thought cold thoughts for long enough to leave the table without any embarrassment, Ian forced himself to keep his distance from his submissive through the rest of the night. Susan had been right about one thing. She worked there. He'd made his point. He had achieved the result he wanted.

There was no need to make a nuisance of himself. He should respect that and give her space to do her job. That was merely common courtesy.

Even if keeping his hands off Susan was nothing to be particularly proud of, Ian was soon very pleased with himself for not bringing any of the men who hovered around her to heel like foolish little pups. That wasn't such an easy politeness to offer the world around him.

In fact, resisting that particular temptation required bloody hard work. Every time a man went up to her, Ian's fist tightened around his untouched bottle of beer. His hackles rose at the way they flirted with her.

It was soon obvious that there was no way she could continue working here once they settled on a permanent arrangement. If she wanted to continue working, that was all well and good, he could respect that. But they would have to find somewhere she wouldn't have drunks hitting on her all the time.

Susan might have learnt to deal with the annoyance, but he could see the way her shoulders tensed that she still hated being surrounded by that sort of unwelcome attention. A nice family place would make her far more comfortable, he mused as he watched her politely brush-off another drunken idiot.

By the time her shift was over and she was ready to leave, Ian had had more than enough of watching other guys swarm around her. He might have to mind his manners in the place where she worked, but she didn't work in the car park.

He followed her out of the building and across the tarmac. Remembering the knuckle duster she'd turned her keys into the night before, and not wanting to scare her with the idea a stranger might be following her. He announced his presence by pressing the remote and activating the vibrator.

Susan gave a surprised little yelp and clamped her hand over her mouth. She stood very still as he walked up behind her, gradually increasing the speed of the vibrations the closer he got to her.

"You're a real bastard, you know that, don't you?"



"A few people have mentioned it over the years. Are you just going to stand in the middle of the car park all night, or are you going to walk across to your car?"

He stood close behind her, letting her feel the heat of his body, tempting her to lean back against him and let him support her. She didn't give in. Susan swayed towards him, but she stood for herself.

As close as he was, Ian heard the deep breath she took, he heard her swallow down her arousal. She took a small step forward.

"That's right, Susie. One step at a time." He increased the speed another notch.

She half stumbled, but kept her feet.

Ian watched, thoroughly enchanted by the sheer strength of will.

She'd been hovering on edge for hours, teased to the brink again and again, and never allowed to have her pleasure. She had to be desperate and weak with the desire to achieve her climax. But she still tried to follow the order. Slowly, step by step, obviously trying not to jostle the vibrator against her clit, but not in any sort of control of the stimulation she received, she made her way to her car.

Ian took his eyes off her for the briefest possible moment. The car park was deserted. Even the security guy had left his post by the door. Susan was parked in a shadowy spot right at the far edge of the car park. She turned when she reached the car and rested her back against the cold metal work. The look she shot up at him said it all. Right then he could do whatever he wanted, but, bet or no bet, that would be all he would ever get from her.

"Well?" she prompted.

Ian stepped up close to her, until his body was pressed against hers and Susan was trapped between him and the car. She didn't even twitch a muscle.

He slipped his leg between hers. Susan made no objection, shuffling her feet shoulder width apart on the rough tarmac in acceptance of whatever he wanted from her. He pressed his thigh against her, nudging the vibrator tighter against her clit.

Susan closed her eyes, turning her head away as if it would make her very obvious pleasure less visible.

"Look at me and I'll let you come," he offered.

Susan looked up at him, meeting his gaze without any hesitation. He hit full throttle on the remote, pressed his knee between her legs so the vibrator was held tight against her clit at the perfect angle.

Planting her hands on the paintwork for leverage, Susan pressed herself against his leg, thoroughly unselfconscious. Never letting go of his gaze, she dropped her head back and groaned her pleasure into the night air as she toppled over the edge she'd clung to all night, bucking against him as her orgasm rushed through her.

Ian watched every flicker of her expression, playing with the controls to make her climax last for as long as humanly possible. It was still impossible to make it last forever. With a soft sigh, Susan closed her eyes as the final peak of ecstasy drained away, and went limp against the car. She murmured something in the back of her throat. Ian switched off the vibrations while she slowly recovered and caught her breath. Beautiful...

"And what do you want in return?" she asked him, her voice still rough with her arousal. Every breath she dragged into her lungs made her body shift against his, tempting him to give the wrong answer.

It took more self control than he'd realised he had to resist the lure. "If I was setting up a tit-for-tat, I'd have told you the terms before we started," Ian said. He stepped back and tossed the little black remote to her.

She caught it with more coordination than he'd expected. "No."

"If you mean that, you should have said so sooner—there's not a lot I can do to stop what's already happened," he told her, seriously.

Then it occurred to him that she could be trying to tell him that she'd changed her mind about paying her forfeit on the bet. He felt every muscle in his body tense at the prospect of seeing her slip through his fingers again. It couldn't happen. They were going to spend three hours together and then, in

some way he wasn't quite sure of at that point, they were going to turn that scene into something that would last longer than mere hours. It might not be sensible to want that, but as he stood in the car park, Ian was sure that any other possibility was...impossible.

Susan shook her head. "I don't run up debts."

Ian released a breath he hadn't realised he'd been holding. "Call it a down payment on your three hours," he offered.

She stepped forward, closing the gap between them until she reached out and trailed her fingers down his chest.

Ian wasn't going to pretend he wasn't as turned on as hell. It would be pointless to do so when he was sporting a very obvious erection. Susan had no doubt noticed his hard-on while she was rubbing up against him, taking her own pleasure from the feel of their bodies moving against each other.

Her fingers trailed further down his body, until she covered his fly with her hand, massaging the length of his shaft through the fabric without any hesitation. Ian leant forward, instinct demanding he press against her hand. He managed to stop himself actually humping her hand, but it was an embarrassingly close call.

Watching her all through the dates, knowing what he was doing to her from the other side of the room, that game had been a special kind of torment for him and well as her.

"One good orgasm deserves another," she said in that very special—"I'm not going to offer you a trace of submission until you bloody well prove you're worthy of receiving it" voice. "If I get you off we're even."

He studied her, trying to work her out but unable to fit her into any of the forms of submission he was familiar with.

"I'm not walking into a three hour scene with you unless we are even at the start of it," she declared. "I don't care if I suck you off or you jack yourself off, but unless we leave this car park on a level playing field, the deal is void."

Ian tucked a knuckle under her chin, tilted her head back and studied her eyes. There was no fear, no worry in her expression but she was as turned on as hell. Tone of voice was one thing, but eyes didn't lie. Susan Fisher was apparently back on the kinky scene and thriving on it.

He smiled down at her, willing to let her have her little bit of dominance before the real game started at midnight the next night if that's what she needed in order to settle herself into the lifestyle once more. "Where do you want me?" he asked.

She didn't even hesitate. "Against the car."

Ian turned them around so his back was to the side of the car and leaned casually against the metal work.

Susan looked him up and down, beautifully determined.

Without any fuss, she hitched up her skirt an inch or two, so it wouldn't get ripped underneath her knees on the rough ground, and she knelt at his feet for the first time. It was very possibly the most erotic thing he'd ever seen.

Tossing her hair over her shoulder, she didn't even look around to see if anyone was watching before she undid his belt. Right then, Ian could easily believe he was the only thing that existed in her world.

### **Chapter Three**

\* \* \* \*

Belt pushed aside, Susan deftly undid Ian's fly. Apparently undressing a dominant from that angle was like riding a bike, you never lost the knack once you developed it. The familiarity of her movements settled inside her, they told her there was nothing new about this scene, this dominant. Rather than panicking, she found herself wondering if she would still find it easy to undress a man with her teeth. She'd done that more than a few times too.

Hooking her fingers into the waist band of his boxers, Susan tugged them down along with his trousers, giving herself room to work. Everything seemed to happen around her. Even her own actions felt somewhat distant and fuzzy, as if someone else was making the decisions and she was just along for the ride.

It was nice, feeling everything she should have been worried about slip away until there was only this moment, until there was only this order. Except it hadn't been an order. She'd damn near demanded to be allowed to get down on her knees for him. A glance up made who had said what irrelevant. Ian stared down at her, and she knew without a single doubt that she wouldn't be where she was if he wasn't happy for her to be there.

Susan dropped her gaze. Their respective heights put her mouth at just the right level when she was on her knees. His erection jutted out from a dark triangle of neatly trimmed hairs, straining towards her lips. Susan wrapped her fingers around his cock and steadied the shaft as she leant in and took the tip of his erection into her mouth.

She tongued his foreskin as she pulled back and brushed her lips back and forth over the head. While the tiny bit of her conscious mind that still clung to sanity turned its attention to studying details and getting to know her lover in the most intimate way possible, another part of her brain stopped trying to think.

He felt good inside her. That was all she needed to know. Satiny skin caressed her lips. Susan couldn't help but murmur her pleasure as she took more

of his shaft into her mouth. She closed her eyes as pre-cum leaked onto her tongue and she stole her first taste of his pleasure. When she opened her eyes, she realised that Ian's hands were still resting on the car.

Good manners for a dominant—for now at least. Susan didn't expect it to last. She wasn't even sure if she wanted it to last. Part of her screamed its relief at being exactly where she was, with the type of man she was with, and she didn't want him pretending to be someone he wasn't.

No doubt, by the time he was close to his climax he would have his hand on the back of her head and be thrusting hard and fast into her mouth, just like any other dominant she'd known. Susan didn't doubt that she'd relish the tight grip he took on her either. There was nothing like being held close, like knowing that the dominant standing above her wanted her there too much to be polite about it.

Swirling her tongue against the glans, she savoured the salt on her taste buds, relishing the evidence of Ian's enjoyment. Slow licks across the head made him moan. Sucking around the shaft made him clench his hands into fists against the car's bodywork.

Glancing up at his face, Susan found Ian watching her intently, studying her expression as suction hollowed her cheeks. He didn't look away and Susan found her gaze was locked with his. She'd looked in enough mirrors during enough scenes to know how she would look, to know that there was no way he could fail to see the submission shining in her eyes.

As suddenly as she caught his gaze, Susan wrenched her eyes away, scared that the submission he saw in her eyes might show itself to be deeper than was safe or even sane.

He was just the same as all the other dominants. Fun to screw in a club, but ultimately not someone she'd want to take home with her on a regular basis. Anything else she felt, was nothing more than the swirly headed sensation of coming out of submissive-withdrawal after denying herself for so long. Ian wasn't special. He was just the guy on the scene. A convenient excuse to give in

to old bad habits. Nothing more. He was just the same as all the other dominants.

Susan swallowed around Ian's shaft. From his groan it was clear he liked her attempt to push down her nerves. The action might have felt good from his side, but it did very little to put her back in control of her emotions.

It had been too long. Susan knew she'd kept her desire to submit on too short a lead for far too many months. Now that she had given in and decided to set it free for a few hours, she shouldn't have been surprised by the fact she had to scramble around in order to keep any sort of control over the instinct to give up too much, too quickly, to the wrong person.

As her mind whirled out of control, Susan kept one hand on Ian's shaft, steadying his erection so she could pay attention to the head, kissing and sucking around it for a long time before she dipped her head back into his lap and took him deep into her mouth several times in quick succession. Her actions made more sense than any of the thoughts inside her head, Susan gave up trying to think and gave all her concentration to the simple task.

Her right hand ventured further back to caress his sacs. Ian pressed himself against her hand in silent praise of the move. She'd pleased the man she was submitting to. Susan felt her own rush of pleasure push through her body at the knowledge she'd lived without for so long. She obliged him by making the gentle caresses firmer and offering more stimulation where he obviously liked it. Rolling his testicles in her hand, she pulled them carefully away from his body.

A glance up, and she found herself caught in his gaze again.

He did know what he was doing. Susan had to grant him that. If the rush of energy and submission singing in her veins didn't tell her that, the fact that he was dominant enough not to show even a flicker of concern when a woman literally had him by the balls proved it.

She knew what she was doing too. Kneeling before a man, giving up control of some parts of her life to him while not losing control of those parts she wasn't

willing to give up. It took skill and experience and even if it didn't feel like it right then, she knew what she was doing.

They both knew what they were doing. That was a good thing. Everything was good. Everything was going to be fine. She didn't have to worry that everything was going to go to hell during the three hours she belonged to him.

Ian's breathing altered, turning shallow and fast. His hands slipped against the body work of her car. Susan dipped her head more quickly, speeding up her movements around his erection as she sensed her lover getting closer to the edge. She sucked hard around his shaft. The world regained that perfect sense of simplicity that had faltered for a moment.

A second before he came, Ian put his hand on her shoulder in silent warning. He was either used to being that polite with his submissives or he was a damn good actor. Susan was pretty sure he would have even let her move aside if she didn't want to swallow, but there was no way anything short of a direct order would have convinced her to pull away from him right then. The submissive inside her needed the connection to her dominant too much not to take everything it could get, now that it had the chance to come out and play.

Susan stayed right where she was, lips wrapped tight around Ian's shaft. As he tipped over the edge and spilled into her mouth, she took his semen on her tongue and moaned her pleasure at each drop as she swallowed him down. His eyes fell closed at the last moment. Susan dropped her own gaze as he fell still, sated and relaxed. She let him soften in her mouth for a few moments, before she finally convinced herself to pull back and let his cock slip from between her lips.

It was bad manners to leave a job unfinished. Licking away the moisture that lingered on her lips, Susan tidied Ian away, zipping up his fly and doing up his belt. Once that was done, there was no excuse to stay on her knees even a second longer.

Trying not to appear reluctant, she got back to her feet, straightened the hem of her skirt and brushed the dust off her knees. Car parks had never been



designed for a submissive's comfort. That hadn't changed in the time she'd stayed off the scene.

But, as much as she wished she could convince herself otherwise, a lot of other things seemed to have changed. The swirl of emotions coursing through her felt different, more intense than anything she remembered. No doubt it was just a good dose of novelty after all those months of not going through the same motions in a club every week, but right then, it was hard to remember that.

"If there's nothing else?" she said, eager to have some time on her own to think and regain some perspective.

She was also quietly desperate to get in her car on her own and have a few moments of privacy to play with her remote control and wipe away the arousal that had built up inside her while she was on her knees. She couldn't do that while Ian leant against the driver's side door. Even if she had taken her own pleasure in offering him her mouth, she wasn't inclined to broadcast that information.

"In a rush, Susie?" Ian asked. He reached out as a spoke and brushed her hair back from her face.

For reasons she wasn't prepared to examine too closely, she didn't push his hand away. She stood very still and let him take care of the hair falling into her eyes for her. "It's been a long day so, yes, I would quite like to go home and see the end of it," she said as his fingers tucked her hair behind her ear. The words sounded strained, even to her own ears, she could only imagine what they must sound like to Ian.

He smiled as if he could read the real reason for her desire to be rid of him right out of her mind. "You can't intend to go before you tell me if I passed?"

"Passed what?"

"This little audition you've held for me," he said.

Susan frowned, dropping her gaze to the floor where she'd knelt a moment earlier.

"If you're going to say it was nothing of the sort, at least work out if you are lying to me or both of us first."

"I told you why I did this," she said. She didn't want to enter the scene already in his debt. And maybe she wanted to test out his ability not to be psychotic too. But that was all. She wasn't auditioning him. She didn't doubt that he would prove to be just as disappointing as the other dominants she had offered herself to. He wasn't anything special.

Ian's lips twitched into a slightly different, less easy to read, smile. "I'll take that as a confirmation you're lying to both of us." He pushed himself away from the car. "Thursday, midnight. Don't be late, Susie. I'll come into the club and fetch you if you're tardy."

He walked away, without even looking over his shoulder.

Susan watched him get into a car parked a few rows of cars away—a black sports car slung so low she was sure he wouldn't be able to fold his tall frame small enough to fit in behind the wheel. Somehow he managed it without looking like a fool. Pulling out of the space, he drove up alongside her.

"I'm not leaving you standing in the middle of a deserted car park. Get in—it won't kill you to wait until you get home before you get off again."

Unless she was willing to stand there and give him a mini personal porn show while she took care of her frustration, there didn't seem to be anything to do but follow his orders. Susan got into her car, wishing that obeying his commands didn't appeal to something inside her right then. Revving the car up with more force than was strictly necessarily, she pulled out of the car park.

In moments, she was out on the main road. She checked her rear view mirror a few times as she drove away from the club, but she didn't see Ian's car following her. She drove around aimlessly for a few minutes just to be sure, before making her way home.

At a junction she caught her own gaze in the rear view mirror. She hadn't expected to see the light of submission in her eyes ever again, but the sparkle was back. For the first time in a long time, she looked alive.

\* \* \* \*

"No."

"You've never had any complaints about working late before," her boss protested.

"That was before. Tonight, it's simply not possible. I have an appointment. I cannot be late for it. Now, if you'll excuse me..."

He started talking again.

Susan gave up trying to be polite. She turned her back on her boss and walked out of the bar. If he wanted to lecture her, he'd just have to do it another time. It was one minute to midnight and she had no intention of letting Ian come into the bar to fetch her—not when she belonged to him once the clock struck twelve—not when that gave him the right to demand any obedience he wanted from her no matter who else was present.

The cold night air wrapped around her as she stepped out of the building. A shiver ran down her spine, although she doubted that was entirely down to the cold. Ian stood leaning against his car on the far side of the car park.

Susan straightened the strap of her shoulder bag and walked briskly across to his side, not about to give him the satisfaction of appearing nervous when she knew that there was no sensible reason why she should feel that way. She stopped a pace or two away from him and waited to see how he was going to play it.

No preliminaries, no small talk. Ian held out his hand. "Your bag."

She handed it to him. It wasn't as if there was much in there. She'd made sure of that when she got ready for the scene. All personal information had been carefully removed. All he would discover if he went through it, was that his temporary submissive preferred strawberry blush lipstick and had the foresight to bring along a comb to tame her hair if he mussed it up when he took hold of the long blonde strands.

Turning away from her, he put the small bag in the tiny boot of the car without even undoing the catch. Susan stood at his side, unable to do anything but wait for his next order.

"Kneel."

They were in an out of the way part of the car park. He seemed to have chosen a place where it was very unlikely anyone would see her on purpose.

Susan lowered herself to her knees, careful to keep each movement neat and symmetrical, and submissive.

Ian took a black strip of leather out of his pocket. He'd made it clear that she would be collared when they discussed her limits. He didn't ask for her opinion on the matter now. He fixed it deftly around her neck in a few brisk movements. Sliding his fingers between the leather and her throat, he checked the fit and slackened it a notch before he nodded his satisfaction with the way it lay against her skin.

Susan swallowed and took a deep breath. Part of her wanted to believe that she was simply double checking his pronouncement that it was a good fit for her. But another part of her simply sighed its acceptance. She'd made her decision, made her commitment to the scene. All she had to do now was relax and let go. As easily as the leather moved around her neck each time she swallowed, Susan's world began to condense back down to simply needing to obey one order at a time.

It was something like the way she felt when she knelt before him the previous night, but this time it was better. This time there was no need for excuses, no need to hold back. She'd made a promise when she took on the bet. She wasn't about to welch on it. For the next three hours, no one could tell her she wasn't supposed to submit to the best of her ability, not even herself.

Ian took a leather blindfold from his other pocket. She just had time to recognise it for what it was and realise what was about to happen before it was slipped it over her face. Susan's eyes darted in every direction, straining to catch some glimmer of light around the edge of the material, but she found none. The

leather was moulded into the shape of a face and padded on the inside. No trace of the outside world got through to her.

"Stand."

The darkness was disorientating. Susan tried to call back old habits to the forefront of her mind. The trick, she knew, was to plant your feet and not try to adjust your balance. Trust that the world around you would stay on the flat and you were okay. She rose gracefully back to her feet, standing patiently before her new master, waiting for his next order.

For several seconds, he made her wait in the darkness, with nothing more than the cold air brushing against her skin and teasing her senses.

When the words came, there was no explanation for the delay. "Hands behind your back."

Susan put did as she was told without comment. She heard Ian step forward and stand closer behind her. Something wrapped around both her wrists, effectively binding them in place. A click of metal on metal, a slight tug on her collar and Susan realised that whatever cuffed her wrists together was now connected to her collar by a metal link chain running down her spine.

If she kept her wrists high up in the middle of her back there was no pressure applied to the collar, dropping her hands too low, pulled the leather against her neck, making it uncomfortable. Her hands would stay where her master wanted them, or she would be the one made uncomfortable by her disobedience. Simple and effective. Susan took a deep breath and let it out very slowly as she let her mind sink a little deeper into her submission.

She jumped when an arm settled itself around her shoulders. For several seconds, she waited to see if the move would have earned her a punishment, but Ian said nothing as he walked her forward and around to the passenger side of the car. Susan scuffed her high heels along the floor, mapping out how level the surface was as she took each step so she wouldn't make a fool of herself by toppling flat on her face.

Ian left her to stand idle for a few moments. Again no explanation was offered for the delay. Susan found herself wondering why one would be. She didn't need to know anything except what was required of her. Everything else was her master's problem now.

Her master opened the car door and helped her inside. Graceful wasn't an option. High heels, a low seat and complete lack of visual coordination taken into account, Susan was merely relieved she got in there without hitting her head on the roof or falling out onto the floor at Ian's feet.

The moment she was in, Ian leant into the car too, crowding into her personal space. Susan held her breath as she pressed her back against the seat and tried her best to make herself smaller so it would be easier for her dominant to find the room to do as he pleased with her. Ian did up her seat belt and checked it fitted securely around her body. Leaving her trapped there, he closed the door.

Sealed off from the outside world, Susan strained to hear any trace of her master. A minute later, the door opened and she heard him folding himself into the other side of the car and putting his own belt on. A rattle of keys, and the engine started.

Ian drove off without a word to her.

It was impossible to keep track of the turns. Within minutes she was completely lost. Ian could be taking her anywhere. Susan took a deep breath and pushed down her nerves, but she was soon aware that she couldn't keep track of time either. It could have been minutes since she joined him in the car park, it could have been far longer.

No matter how much she wanted to just let go and fall into the same peaceful state of mind she'd enjoyed in the clubs, she couldn't do it. She wasn't in a club. There weren't any other people around. No one was keeping an eye on a makeshift dungeon. It was just her and Ian and, for the first time, Susan realised that she had never really been at the mercy of one man before.

They stopped, presumably at a set of traffic lights. She caught the sound of other cars starting up to her right. Ian put his hand on her leg. Susan jumped at the unexpected contact and silently cursed herself for doing so.

His hand slid up her thigh. It didn't creep or sidle, he touched her with the absolute confidence of someone who has every right to touch her however he pleased. Susan licked her lips, unable to hide her nerves or her arousal as his hand moved higher, pushing up her skirt as it went.

"Did you bring your friend?" Ian asked, sliding his fingers higher still, until he caressed her through the thin lace of her knickers. Susan instinctively pushed against his fingers, unable to help herself. He chuckled. "No vibrator, and you're still wet and ready? I wonder what could possibly be causing that, Susie?"

His fingers slid against her, quickly seeking out her clit and rubbing against it through the damp material. Susan gasped. The soft, pleasure filled, little noise, sounded impossibly loud in the silence of the car. She spread her legs a little further apart in both acceptance and encouragement of his touch.

Ian's fingers disappeared as suddenly as they'd arrived against her skin. Susan bit back a whimper at the loss. Her dress was still hitched up, inviting him to be distracted, but Ian seemed to forget about her as he drove on.

At the next stop, she was ready and eager for him to resume his explorations, but he completely ignored her presence in his car. Susan's teeth nibbled at her bottom lip, wondering if that meant something more than Ian wanting to make his position in control of the situation completely clear.

At the stop after that, his fingers sought out her clit without any preliminaries. Slipping his hand between her legs, Ian pushed the gusset of her knickers aside. She was slick with anticipation. His fingers slid against her and trailed the moisture back up to her clit. Susan caught her breath, wishing she could believe it was just his touch that quickly took her to the brink.

A few quick circles would be all it took to tip her over the edge, but she knew it was more than just a deft touch that had her aching for more. It was the cuffs, the collar, the blindfold. It was finally being allowed to give up the pretence of

abandoning her desire for submission. She didn't just want to come, she wanted to come for her master.

A whimper escaped from between her tightly closed lips. She knew it wasn't going to happen. She knew there wasn't a hope in hell that Ian would let her come that easily, not when he had the power to make her wait, make her beg for her release at the end of the three hours. But even knowing all that, she couldn't stop the crazy hope that he would somehow let it happen.

She wasn't in control of her world, he was, and she couldn't know anything for sure. There wasn't anything stopping Ian letting her come if he wanted to. There wasn't anything stopping him doing anything at all.

As his fingers made neat little circles against the sensitive little bud of nerve endings, it seemed to Susan that he held the whole world in the palm of his hand, and her along with it. At the final moment, Ian took his fingers away without giving her that last little touch she needed. Susan made no comment.

"Open your mouth."

Susan did as she was told. Ian slipped his fingers past her lips. If he thought tasting herself on his fingers was going to make her blush, he was destined to be disappointed. Susan swirled her tongue around his fingers, licking them clean, just as she had done in a hundred other scenes in the past.

"Good girl."

That got to her in the way no order never could. The simple praise arrived at her ears and by the time it reached her brain it had morphed into something very different. It sounded more like—*your master is pleased with you, all is well with the world*. Susan squirmed in her seat as he took his fingers away. She leant forward, straining against the seat belt as far as she could before she finally had no choice but to let the fingers slip from between her lips.

She stayed pressed forward against the restriction of the belt for several seconds before she managed to convince herself that Ian wasn't going to give his fingers back to her.



Ian drove off again. Susan dropped her head back to lean against the head rest as she slumped back against the seat. The change in posture eased the strain in her arms for a few moments, but it did little to settle her swirling thoughts.

Time passed, Susan had no real idea how much. She was too trapped inside the same loop of half formed thoughts to really care. Ian stopped the car. Susan waited expectantly, to discover what would happen next. She heard the click as a seatbelt was undone. Then came the sound of the driver's door being opened and closed.

The moment was over too quickly for her to catch any sort of clue as to what sort of area they were parked in. For all she knew the scene they were about to take part in could be set up in a quiet out of the way house where no one would hear her scream—no matter how hard she came. Or she could just as easily be about to take the stage in the middle of a huge leather bar where hundreds of people would watch whatever was going to happen next.

Susan waited in the darkness behind her blindfold, for Ian to come around her side of the car and help her out. Minutes passed. The air in the car turned cooler, sending a chill through her. As much as Susan strained to hear any sign of life outside the car, she couldn't make out any indication of the world around her.

It didn't sound as if they were still in the city. That meant they must have driven for well over half an hour, but it didn't narrow their destination down a great deal.

Arousal at all the different tantalising possibilities started to fade away as other, less palatable thoughts rushed to the front of her mind. Susan was soon cursing herself for her stupidity. Why hadn't she thought to add no blindfolds to her limits? For that matter, why hadn't she demanded to know where the scene would take place?

Because limits aren't something to cry wolf over and submissives don't make demands. The response rose up inside her as instinctively as breathing. Susan bit

her lip. Old habits died hard. She wouldn't have admitted it out loud, but inside her head she knew it was true. They died hard and once you let them come back to life they thrived so quickly it was hard to believe there was a time when the desire for that sort of life had ever been suppressed.

Susan nibbled harder at her bottom lip. If she'd had any sort of sense, she would have thought very carefully about how ideas formed in clubs fitted into scenes played out in private.

The car door sprung open without any warning. Susan jerked in her seat and looked up as if she would somehow be able to see who opened the door. The blindfold didn't magically disappear. She couldn't see. The person opening the door could have been anyone.

Somebody reached into the car. Susan tensed up, desperately trying to latch onto some non-visual clue so she could work out if it was Ian. She thought she made out the subtle, spicy scent of his aftershave, but she couldn't be sure.

If they were outside the city there was no way they would be back in time for their three hour deadline. If he wasn't respecting that limit, why should she assume he'd respect the one about not inviting other people to join in the fun?

Susan hesitated. If she asked if it was Ian and it was, he would think she was an idiot unable to play the game without freaking out at the slightest test of her submission, he'd think she wasn't really submitting to him, wasn't really handing over any sort of control to him. She bit her lip, closing her eyes tight behind the blindfold as someone reached across her.

Someone touched her cheek. "Susie?"

The tension rushed out of her as easily as she recognised the voice. "Ian." The whispered word escaped before she could stop it.

"Who else would it be?"

Well, since he'd left her in the car on her own for who knew how long, it could have been anyone who walked past where they were parked and saw a woman tied up in the front seat. Susan bit back the accusation and said nothing.

"Susie?"

Fingers unbuckled the strap crossing the back of her head. The blindfold dropped away.

Susan blinked, bowing her head to avoid the blinding light that flooded into the car. "What?" As her eyes adjusted to the brightness, she looked around her. They were inside some sort of warehouse.

The big roller garage doors were closed. They were alone, sealed safely away from prying eyes, locked away from the rest of the world. She looked back to Ian.

"I don't know what sort of men you're used to dealing with, but if you think I'd leave you somewhere anyone else could find you, you spent a lot of time playing about with fools."

Susan dropped her gaze, wondering exactly who the fool in this scenario really was. Ian tucked his fingers under her chin and tilted her face back so she was left in no doubt that he wanted her to look up at him. Susan did as her master wanted.

"I wonder if you have any idea what you're doing after all." He shook his head as he guided her out of the car and onto her feet. "Looks like you've still got a lot to learn about dominants who know what they're doing, Susie."

She parted her lips to speak, not sure if she should apologise or deny it or what. He shut the car door and turned away before she had a chance to say anything at all.

"In here."

Susan carefully negotiated her way across the large expanse of bare floor and down a short passage way that led into another high, echoing room.

Several cars occupied different work stations around the room. Some were lifted high in the air, others were on the ground, still others lay in several pieces, spread all around the room. Susan looked around, trying to take it all in. She'd come up with so many possible scenes in her mind during another long, sleepless night, but this sort of space hadn't featured in any of them.

"Come here." The order sounded loud in the bare space. It echoed slightly before it faded from the air.

Susan walked across to her master. When he walked back further into the room, she followed him, high heels clicking on the floor with each step. When he stopped, she did the same, never taking her eyes off her dominant's feet.

"Kneel." The order was spoken firmly, but slightly more gently than the previous one, as if he realised there was no reason for him to shout. She would do as he said if he whispered.

Susan lowered her gaze to the floor as she knelt a step away from her master's feet, old lessons quickly coming to mind to set her at ease and balance out her confusion.

Ian touched her chin and tilted her head back until she got the hint and looked up at him, stopping her gaze just short of actual eye contact. "You keep your eyes on me. How can you see what your master wants you to do if you aren't paying attention?"

Susan forced herself to lift her eyes and look him straight in the eye. Ian left her holding his gaze for several seconds before he nodded his approval and smiled down at her. He touched his fingers to her cheek—another mark of approval, something else that only made her want to please her master more.

Ian walked around behind her, out of her line of sight. A moment later, Susan heard a rattle of metal on metal, like heavy chains being dragged through a pulley. Ian's footsteps signalled his approach. Susan felt something being clipped to the back of her collar.

She looked above her. She'd been so entirely focused on her master, so sure a submissive should keep her eyes lowered when in the presence of a dominant, she'd missed a lot of important details about the room. Such as the car hanging in the air above her.

Instinct demanded that she scramble to her feet and rush out from under the solid chunk of metal above her. She swallowed down the desire. Ian walked around in front of her once more. He was tall and didn't have to duck—from the

gap above his head, the car had to be hanging securely at least eight feet off the floor.

Her brain knew that she was safe, but the car still loomed above her. Part of her still couldn't shake off the feeling she had to crawl or be crushed. Right then the only question was if the car above her or the submission inside her was a bigger threat.

Ian studied his new submissive very carefully. She hadn't mentioned anything about being scared of small spaces, but kneeling for a stranger with a ton of sports car hanging over their head was probably enough to make anyone nervous. In spite of her obvious concerns about the car above her, Susan looked up and met his eye, just as he told her to, and she held her gaze even though he could see that every second was a struggle.

He allowed her another nod of praise. She soaked it up like...Ian touched her cheek very gently...like a submissive who had been starved of a master's affections for far too long. Her uncertainty over the scene seemed to bubble away inside her, more and more ferociously the deeper she slipped into her submission, as if she couldn't decide if she wanted to give in to temptation and give up control, or if she wanted to fight it all the way.

Turning his back on her, Ian walked across to the far side of the room.

"You may stand and move about if you wish."

It wasn't as generous a permission as it sounded. The chain on the collar wouldn't let her get too far, and there wasn't much she could do with her hands still cuffed behind her back. Still, it provided a few moments for her to clear her mind, for her to take a breath and get her bearings, such as they may be in the unfamiliar space.

The chain attached to her collar rattled as she rose to her feet. Her stilettos clicked on the concrete floor as she stood up, but he didn't hear her take another step in any direction. She didn't say anything either. In the silence of the room, Ian could almost hear the wheels go around and around inside her head as she

took in her surroundings and her position in them, as she fought to keep on thinking rather than just yield to the momentum of the scene.

There was no other sound in the garage—not even the ticking of a clock. He'd gone through the whole place stopping them and putting the hands on every dial to midnight so she wouldn't have any idea how much time had passed and how much time he had left with her. One less thing for her to think about, one more hint that her instinct to give her submission to him and to trust him to worry about such things was the right one.

Ian took a bottle of water out of the little fridge in the corner of the garage and turned his attention back to Susan. Leaning against the work bench, he took his time studying her as she finally decided that he'd meant it when he'd given her permission to move as far as the chain would permit. She took a few steps forward, testing out the limits of her bondage in each direction. Every so often she would look up at the car dangling above her head as if checking that it was still there, that it was still secure.

Ian opened the bottle and took a drink of water. She really was stunning. And right then, she seemed entirely unaware of his scrutiny. Whether by accident or design, she didn't look his way once. Ian forced himself to wait her out, to make her take the first move towards him. Once she admitted to herself that she wanted him just as much as he desired her, everything would run much more smoothly. Once she opened herself up to seeing the possibilities for them, not just during the next three hours but for countless more hours after that, they could really have some fun.

Knowing all that didn't make it any easier to wait. It almost took more self control than he knew he had to stand there and do nothing. Seconds turned to minutes and Ian was acutely aware of each and every one of them as they ate into the time he had to spend with Susan. The click of her high heels seemed to count out the moments far better than any of the clocks could have.

As suddenly as she had begun pacing under the car, Susan stopped. Ian held his breath. For several long moments, his new submissive stood very still under

the centre of the car. Then, very slowly she turned towards him and met his gaze across the room. As if in a daydream, she walked across to him until the chain stopped her short with a jerk. She stalled, rocking back on those ridiculously high stilettos, jerked rudely out of whatever place her mind had drifted into as she settled into her submission.

Taking a step back to regain some slack in the chain, she lowered herself carefully down to her knees. She was as close as she could get to her master now, and she was patiently waiting for him to come back to her. It was neatly done, not one word needed to be said. It was all communicated very eloquently in her movements. Even if she obviously hadn't played for keeps before, she knew how to press a dominant's buttons, she knew how to make him an offer it was damn near impossible to refuse.

Ian let her wait with the weight of the chain pulling on her collar for another full minute before he walked across to her. He saw her take a deep relieved breath when his feet came within her lowered field of vision and she knew she had gained her master's attention.

Without asking if she was thirsty he put the bottle to her lips and tipped it back so a little of the frigid water trickled down her throat.

Swallowing rapidly, Susan made an uncertain noise in the back of her throat. Ian kept pouring the water past her lips, careful not to make it impossible to keep up with the flow, but making sure she had to swallow constantly, making sure she needed to give her full attention to the simple task. She didn't turn her head away or make any further protest. She accepted what her master gave her.

"Good girl." He put his hand on the back of her head and supported her neck at the awkward angle demanded by the water bottle until he was satisfied she'd drunk enough. He took the container away and set it aside, without asking her to make any decisions about if she was still thirsty or not.

"Stand."

Susan got to her feet. They were barely started and she was already unsteady. It was the final proof he needed to convince himself he'd been right to

adopt a careful approach with her. Still there was such a thing as going too carefully, too slowly. He only had three hours to make his case to her, to remind her what she'd been missing over the last months and to ensure that she realised he was a better master than any of the men she had played with in the clubs.

Ian walked around her, studying her from every angle. "This will have to go," he decided, running a finger tip along the seam down the side of her dress.

Susan nodded. Whether it was by planning or if it was a simple chance of wardrobe, the little black dress she'd chosen for that particular shift in the bar was strapless. Ian undid the tiny hook in the centre of her back and drew down the zipper. It slipped easily down her body, to pool around her feet.

A shiver ran down her spine as her skin was exposed. The room wasn't warm, but he doubted that explained why her nipples were pebbled into such tiny little buds for him. He cupped her right breast in the palm of his hand, caressing the nipple and warming it between his fingers. The nub only grew stiffer under the heat of his touch.

He pinched at the sensitive little peak of nerve endings, letting his short thumb nail catch at her nipple.

Susan gasped. Arching her back, she pushed her breast into his hand, demanding more of the same, declaring with her every movement that he was right to think there was a masochist tucked away inside Susan, just waiting to be let out.

"Cold, Susie?" he asked.

She shivered again as he whispered the words into her ear, but shook her head in answer to his question.

"Do you like that?" He moved behind her to cup her other breast the same way with his left hand, giving her gentle touches to balance out that pinch.

Susan nodded enthusiastically.

"Good girl. It's important you are honest with your master. Do you remember your safe word, Susie?"



She nodded.

"Good, because we're going to have some fun now. I think you're going to get cold standing here without your dress. So, I'm going to warm you up. Would you like that?" He ran his hand over her backside, so she could be left in no doubt just where he was going to begin to warm her skin.

Re-exploring her submission seemed to have stolen her words from her, or maybe just robbed her of a desire to speak. A tentative nod was his only answer.

Ian stepped away from her without any warning. Susan swayed against the empty air, seemingly searching for the heat of his body, for both the roughness and the gentleness of his caress. Out of her line of sight, Ian smiled at the simple instinctive honesty of her movements. They were finally starting to get somewhere. Susan finally appeared to be willing to give herself the chance to start enjoying the scene.

She looked over her shoulder at him, he saw the trust in her eyes, the willingness to do whatever he wanted, the willingness to put herself in his hands and trust him to ensure that whatever would happen next wasn't anything that would truly harm her.

Ian smiled and turned her back to face forward. The chain attached to her collar painted a very pretty picture, but it was impractical—nothing more than a convenient tether to use when he was either unable or unwilling to be closer to his submissive. Now that she was ready to accept him doing something more interesting than watch over her from the other side of the room, it would have to change.

He uncuffed her hands from behind her back.

Susan looked over her shoulder again. Seeing what he was doing she tried to pull the cuffs out of his grip. "What are you doing? You can't stop now!" Any hint of trust was gone as quickly as it had come. Naked betrayal flashed in her eyes.

Ian released his right hand's hold on the wrist restraints and brought his hand down smartly on her bottom.

Susan yelled. It was barely more than a tap and certainly nothing that could hurt her, but she was so caught up in what she'd imagine might happen next, she seemed to be taken off guard by it. "What the—!"

Another spank on her other buttock yielded a pleasure filled little gasp. No shocked little protest accompanied it. There was no attempt to pull away. Instead, a light shone brighter in her eyes. As much as he loved that sight, they had other things to deal with first.

"It's not your place to tell your master what he may or may not do with you," Ian asked. "Is it?"

## **Chapter Four**

\* \* \* \*

Susan swallowed, she parted her lips several times, but ultimately said nothing. Ian watched different emotions flicker through her eyes one by one. He waited patiently until the panic died away and confusion took its place.

"Is uncuffing you beyond your limits?" Ian asked, as he turned her around and made her meet his eyes properly.

"No, sir," she whispered.

He rested his hands, one on each of her shoulders, steadying her and letting her feel a connection to her master without overloading her with too much intimacy, too many sensations all at once. "Do you want to say your safe word?"

"No, sir." She sounded very sure about that.

"Then you will do as you are told." No ifs, ands or buts about it. Lying about that wouldn't be fair on anyone in the long run. If she didn't trust him now, he was sure they would both have cause to regret that in the future.

"Yes, sir."

She looked so disappointed. Ian found himself unable to resist the temptation to touch her cheek to soften the correction, but he still turned her around and began unbuckling her cuffs anyway. With the drive and the time he'd given her to get used to her surroundings, they had been together for a little over an hour. It was too long to jerk her out of bondage without due care.

He noticed Susan bite back a wince as he moved her arms. Guiding her hands back in front of her body, he encouraged her to roll her shoulders and stretch out muscles that had been held in one position for too long, until the blood started to flow freely through them. Not one word of complaint, barely a hiss of pain. Given how long she had been off the scene, Ian was quietly impressed.

He looked down at her and met her eyes. She looked up at him, watching her master just as he had told her to at the start of the scene.

That deserved a reward. Ian bowed his head and brought their mouths together. Susan immediately parted her own lips, inviting him to deepen the kiss as she leaned against his body and trusted him support her.

He let their lips linger together as he slipped his tongue into her mouth to taste her properly. As she cautiously returned the kiss, seemingly unsure what a kiss without bondage might mean, he deftly fastened the cuffs back around her wrists, securing them in front of her.

By the time he broke the kiss, Susan's lips were beautiful swollen, her lipstick nicely smudged. She stared up at him, eyes full of confusion, before looking to her wrists as if she had been so focused on that kiss and trying to interpret his intent, she hadn't even noticed what his hands were doing.

"You didn't think I was just going to let you go, did you, Susie?" he asked.

She blinked at him. He didn't need to hear her answer. He could imagine how panicked a person might feel if they came back into the kinky fold after so long only to find her chance of any fun might be snatched away from her at the last moment.

His submissive was in no condition to assess what was a threat to end the game and what was an indication her master wanted to move it to the next level. She shouldn't have to worry about that. It was her master's place to take care of such decisions. All he had to do now, was convince her that he was worthy of being trusted to do that.

Ian slipped his fingers through her hair, pushing it back from her face. As he stared at her, he was aware that his need to gain her trust was deeper than it should have been with a veritable stranger. It wasn't the kind of need a man could walk away from. In that moment, he was sure that as soon as he had gained her trust, the need would morph seamlessly into keeping her trust, into proving he deserved her trust.

One more kiss to reassure his submissive that everything was fine and her master wasn't angry at her—even if she had practically accused him of not knowing what to do with her once he had her in his bondage. Then, Ian snapped

himself out of his spiralling thoughts. There would be time to think later. Right then, there was a deadline to take into account.

Using the link between her cuffs, he lifted Susan's hands over her head. Guiding them back down behind her neck, he clipped them onto the chain he'd attached to her collar. The catch clicked open and closed. As easily as that, the collar separated from the chain, leaving the metal links connected to the cuffs instead.

A moment later, Susan stood alone under the half built car, as the bulky bits of metal loomed above her. Ian gave her one last glance, before he turned his attention to a thick length of chain that hung down by the side of the car.

The wonderful thing about the heavy block and tackle pulleys used to hoist engines out of cars was the noise they made. Ian was damn near in love with that sound. He pulled the length of chain down through the system. For every inch he lifted Susan's hands above her head, a hundred bits of metal rattled together in a deafening noise that echoed through the garage.

Susan tilted her head back and watched, seemingly fascinated, as the chain pulled her hands up higher above her head an inch at a time. Ian kept dragging the heavy chain through the pulley until the cuffs held Susan's hands high above her head, until her fingers come close to touching those bits of the car that were already in place. Through the entire process, she watched the chains disappear through the hole still left in the chassis as if it was all part of some huge magic trick.

"Kick your shoes off," Ian ordered. In the intense silence left behind after the chains fell still, his words sounded harsh, even to his own ears.

She looked across at him for several long seconds. Then she looked down at her shoes. They barely touched the floor. Without the high heels, she would have to stand on tiptoe in order to keep her hands where the chains demanded they stay. Obviously realising that, she still kicked them off and put her bare toes on the cold concrete.

Ian closed the gap between them. With each step that brought them closer together, he studied every line of her body. Stretched out between the chain and the floor, she was magnificent. The only thing that spoilt the picture was the fact that there was a tiny scrap of material still between them. Her knickers didn't hide a great deal from him, but right then it was still far too much. He wanted her naked. He needed her naked.

As he stopped close in front of her, Ian hooked his fingers under the thin, black fabric. In his experience, a woman only found having her underwear ripped off erotic, if the man doing the ripping had bought the underwear himself and intended to provide her with new lingerie to wear home. Ian made a mental note to take his new lover shopping at some point in the near future. The tearing of fabric always sounded beautiful when accompanied with a submissive's surprised little gasps. It took far more control than it should have not to shred them as he slid them over her hips.

A few swift movements and the scrap of lace was down her legs and tossed aside.

Ian smiled to himself. Nothing felt quite as good as having his lover completely exposed and entirely at his mercy. He walked around Susan, running his hands over her body as he chose, taking his chance to study every inch of her as leisurely as he pleased. She soaked up every touch, leaning into his palm as far as her bondage allowed.

Her eyes dropped closed. He couldn't tell if that was because she was still fighting her submission, or if it was because she was finally giving in to it. Ian only knew that she was right on the edge. She would only need a nudge to fall, one way or the other.

Her breaths came in gasps, her breasts rising and falling rapidly as she sought for air. Stretched out from the cuffs around her wrists to her toe hold on the ground, she was perfect. All she had to do was let go of her worries and it would all be perfect.

Ian slipped his hand between her legs and cupped her in the palm of his hand. Susan froze, holding her breath. For a long minute he just let her feel his hand resting there, let her feel the warmth of his fingers pressed intimately against her skin.

Her eyes blinked open, she looked up and met his eyes. Ian twitched his fingers and she gasped. The moment her eyes fell closed, he stopped the gentle movements of his fingers. It didn't take long for her to get the idea. She didn't let her lids drop down again. She held his gaze as he started to stroke her once more.

Her teeth bit into her bottom lip, but she made no comment as he circled her clit with his thumb, rubbing the swollen little bundle of nerve endings again and again. Occasional gasps of breath were her only contribution to the proceedings.

Ian held her gaze and waited.

"Please, sir?" It was such an uncertain little whisper.

Ian stroked her cheek with his other hand in gentle reassurance. Leaning forward, he touched his lips to hers in praise.

"Good girl," he whispered.

Susan swallowed.

"Just let your master take care of you now. I'll see that you get everything you need, won't I?"

She met his gaze for a second, as if she really was deciding everything right there and then in that one moment. Ian stared back into her eyes, hiding nothing from her.

"Yes, sir."

Trailing his left hand back into her hair, he slid his fingers through the mussed up strands and held her head still as he kissed her lips once more.

"Good," he told her again.

Susan nodded, but he doubted even she knew exactly what she was agreeing with right then, the gesture could have applied to nothing as easily as it might have related to everything.

He stroked the fingers of his right hand along the line of her slit, tracing the moisture forward to slick his attentions to her clit. A whimper escaped from between Susan's lips. She hesitated, lifting her gaze to meet his eyes, as if trying to assess his response.

"That's right. No one will hear you but your master. Let me hear you, sweetheart." Ian smiled. He saw the relief and her understanding flash in her eyes as she realised silence wasn't expected of her.

"Yes, sir."

They were the last words she spoke. From that point on, it was all moans and whimpers. Every sound she made dropped straight to Ian's cock. It was all he could do to keep himself from responding in kind and groan as his jeans seemed to shrink around him and threaten to strangle his shaft before he got to have the least bit of fun with it.

He slid his fingers along her slit once more, pressing up with the tips so they teased her entrance. Susan gasped. She shifted her stance, trying to pull against her restraints so his fingers would slide inside her properly.

Ian finally let two fingers slip into her. Twisting the digits slightly, he crooked his fingers to let the tips rub against her g-spot. Susan groaned her pleasure as he found the perfect little spot inside her. She seemed to give up and stop trying to control her reactions to him.

Rocking her hips, she did her best to use her limited range of movement to ride his fingers, grinding her clit against his hand as she squirmed around his fingers. Ian stilled his own movements and watched her work herself closer and closer to her orgasm against his hand. He took in every detail until there was no doubt she was right on the edge and ready to slide into bliss at the least provocation.

He took his hand away.

"What—?" she blinked up at him, confusion and frustration swirling in her eyes as she tried to understand what was going on.



Her hips rocked, pushing her against the empty air, as if her body couldn't quite believe that he had really removed any chance she had of working herself to completion.

"I told you I'd make sure you get what you need, didn't I, sweetheart?"

Susan nodded.

Ian pressed a kiss against her temple as the figurative voice hovering over one of his shoulders ordered him to let her come, to tell her that she had done enough, that no deeper journey into submission was required. The voice hopping up and down on the other shoulder demanded that he keep pushing, keep going until she would have what she really craved, that just enough wasn't good enough. She deserved to have the most made of her first foray into submission after such a long time.

He had no idea which voice belonged to an angel and which to a demon. Susan blinked her eyes and focused in on him. He saw the pleasure and the submission shining in them, and as easily as that, it was clear which voice was on the side of the angels.

"And I will. But you have to be patient for me." And she had to submit—for both of them.

Susan bit her lip and he was sure she was holding back a string of curses as well as a frustrated whimper. Still, decision made, he wouldn't be doing either of them any favours if he went back on his word now.

"You're warming up nicely for me. But I think we can do even better than that, can't we, Susie?"

Susan nodded. He was pretty sure she would have nodded to anything he said right then. She was in that part of her psyche now. All the decisions really were up to him. He was her master and she was his. Ian tipped her head back and covered her mouth with his.

Her lips parted as if she didn't even have to make a decision, it was all instinct. There was no pretence about anything, but at the same time, he could still feel that tiniest little bit of hesitation still lingering inside her. He could do

anything he wanted with her. Now, all he needed to do was make sure she would know he would do the right thing with her.

Taking his hands away from her body, Ian left her half-suspended there while he walked across to a tool chest on the other side of the room. It wasn't where he usually kept his toys, but as he stared down at the collection of whips and gags, clamps and plugs, he had no doubt that this particular selection were going to live in that drawer of the tool chest from then on.

Clubs were fun, and play rooms were very nice, but he wanted Susan Fisher right there, in the space where he worked every day. That was where she belonged now, with her master.

For what felt like a lifetime, he stared down into the tangle of toys. Yes, this was exactly where he wanted Susan. In that moment, it was hard to remember a time when he hadn't wanted this one woman to be firmly under his protection, where he could keep her safe, keep her his.

The need to possess her in every way there was surged through him, the need to protect was so entwined with it that no part of him was able to pretend that it was just a bet, just a way to put a woman he'd glimpsed in a kink club out of his mind once and for all.

Reaching into the drawer of the tool chest, Ian picked up a black leather paddle. He stroked his palm over the surface and nodded to himself. Decision made...

Susan watched Ian walk back across the room towards her. He held a flat black paddle in his hand. The moment she caught sight of it, she couldn't tear her eyes away.

It was just a paddle. Nothing to be scared of. She'd been paddled dozens of times before, by a dozen different men. A paddling was nothing to worry about. She still felt her throat go dry as she watched Ian's hand stroke across the leather surface.

His fingertips caressed it like a lover, as if he could make the paddle gasp and moan the way he'd coaxed those same noises out of her a few moments before.

He stopped a few feet from her, his fingers stroking the outside edge of the paddle. Susan followed his every movement, caught between remembering the way those fingers had played against her skin and imagining how that paddle would feel when he applied it to her backside.

"Look up, Susie."

Susan slowly dragged her eyes from the paddle up the buttons on Ian's shirt until she met his eyes.

"Do you like the paddle, sweetheart?"

She nodded.

"Words," he corrected.

"Yes, sir. I like the paddle."

"Good girl."

He lifted the implement. Susan glanced at it, before quickly looking back to her master's eyes.

Tipping it forward he held it just in front of her lips.

"Kiss."

He nodded his approval as she touched her lips to the leather, welcoming it.

As she looked up and met his eyes once more, his lips twisted into a slight smile, as if he really saw how much she welcomed the prospect. Then the smile was gone. Ian walked around behind her, out of her line of sight.

Susan closed her eyes. She took a deep breath. He wasn't a dominant who would baby his submissive with a gentle pat on the bottom. It would be a proper paddling. She had no doubt about that. It would be a true test to see if she was as good at this as she thought she was. And maybe it would be a punishment for the hoops she'd made him jump through back at the bar too.

Ian kept her hanging there, waiting for the paddle to fall against her skin for what felt like forever. She took another deep breath. The chain above her rattled as she tried to get a more comfortable footing on the cold concrete floor. The noise made her catch her breath again. She hadn't realised just how much she'd missed the rattle of chains until she'd heard them again.

Susan looked up at the cuffs and the metal and the car above her. She wanted so badly to turn around and see Ian. He was still there. He had to be, if for no other reason than she would have heard his footsteps walking away from her if he'd left her there on her own in the middle of the cold, echoing space.

He had to be there, but it didn't matter what logic said right then. She was past the point where logic was important. Only submission existed right then, and the submissive inside her wanted nothing more than to see her master.

A touch to her backside made her jump. She tried to look over her shoulder.

"No, Susie. Stay where you're put."

"Yes, sir."

Ian ran his hand over both her buttocks. Susan wasn't sure if his earlier taps on her bottom had left his hand print in their wake. They hadn't felt hard enough, but at the same time, it seemed impossible that nothing Ian had done with her that night hadn't left its evidence on her skin.

His hand disappeared. A moment later, leather rubbed over her backside. Ian moved the flat surface over her skin in neat little circles. Susan shifted as far as her bondage would allow as the gentle touches made her more and more desperate to feel the paddle fall against her skin the way it was intended to.

"Please, sir?" she whispered, wondering if he was waiting for her to ask for what she wanted.

"When you're ready, sweetheart, not before."

Susan frowned slightly, trying to work out what she wasn't doing to display her readiness.

"You don't have to do anything at all. Your master will decide when you're ready. All you have to do is exist."

Susan nodded. "Yes, sir." Exist. She could do that. Knowing that the decision wasn't hers, somehow let all her concern regarding the matter slip away. Her master would decide when the spanking started, and no doubt he would decide when it would stop, and he would decide the details of everything that would happen in between. It all made life very simple. She just had to relax—to exist.

The paddle resumed its delicate little dance over her bottom. It was a gentle touch, but it seemed to warm her backside without needing to call for support from its harsher comrades. The gentle caresses called all her blood to the surface of the skin setting her backside tingling.

Please. Please. She managed to keep the words inside her head, but she couldn't stop it reverberating around inside her brain, until it was the only word that existed in her world.

The paddle left her skin. It took all her strength to keep back a protest. It was worth the struggle. Her silence on the subject induced her lover to bring the paddle down on her right buttock. It wasn't hard, barely more than a tap, but after waiting for it for so long, it took her breath away.

The paddled returned to her skin before she had any chance to catch her breath. It moved over her backside again, dancing in slow, lazy circles over the spot it had struck. All Susan could do was absorb every sensation the paddle offered her.

"One, sir," she offered, once she had caught her breath. "Thank you, sir." The words came out soft and gentle, almost reverential.

"No need for that, sweetheart. Your master will know when you've had enough."

"Yes, sir," she whispered back.

The paddle left her skin. Air brushed against her left buttock as the paddle fell on that cheek, spreading the heat that had infused the other cheek across to make everything nice and symmetrical.

As Ian painted more tender spirals on the flushed skin, Susan felt her eyes drop closed. Nothing was required of her right then, not numbers, not thanks. All she had to do was exist.

She blinked her eyes open and tried to focus on the world around her, but it all seemed very distant, very dreamlike, as if nothing outside her and her master really existed.

Susan's eyes dropped closed once more. The garage around them disappeared from her mind. She stood in an empty space, surrounded by nothing but blackness.

The paddle connected with her backside again, and again, alternating cheeks, caressing between each contact so it soothed far more than it struck. The combination was enough to make her light headed, drunk on the perfect mix of adrenaline and endorphins. The sound of leather meeting skin filled the world. Fire flooded through her skin and sank into her bones, making her moan and sway within her restraints.

Each time she was sure she would go insane if Ian didn't give her more, he upped the ante, the spanks came down harder, the rests he gave her between them became shorter. The world receded a little more, until she stopped trying to hold onto it, until she stopped trying to understand it, or even thinking of it as something that needed to be understood.

She had no idea how much time passed before she felt the palm of Ian's hand stroking her. It caressed her very gently, as if testing to see how evenly the paddle had heated her arse. For the first time since she left a kink club eighteen months ago, she felt a sort of peace settle inside her.

His hand disappeared. The paddle returned and began to fall against her skin once more. She felt the pain and the pleasure fight inside her as the gentle spanks were laid one over another. A spike of adrenaline screamed there was no way she could ever be sure she was right to trust the man holding the paddle to stop if the pain took over and the pleasure vanished.

Then, that worry faded away too and she felt herself slip deeper into her submission than she could ever remember. Knowing there was no one there to stop the scene if it moved past anything that was safe shouldn't have helped, but Susan felt everything that wasn't pure pleasure drift away and become unimportant.

The paddle disappeared. Ian's hand stroked over her skin once more.

She gasped, pushing back against the palm.

"Does that feel good, Susie?"

She nodded.

"Words, sweetheart."

"Yes, sir," she managed to whisper. "Feels good."

"Good girl."

The hand stroked over the heated skin again. "You have no idea how beautiful you look like this, do you, Susie?"

She frowned, wondering if he really expected her to understand whole words and sentences right then.

"Nothing is so beautiful as a submissive who trusts her master," he whispered to her.

"Don't stop, sir?" she whispered.

His hand slid up to her waist and encouraged her to turn around to face him. She shook her head, but with her bare toe hold on the floor, there was little she could do to stop him turning her around. He slid one hand into her hair and guided her to look up at him.

His other hand stroked its way back around to her bottom.

She had to bite her lip to hold back a whimper as he gently squeezed the muscle in his hand. When she dragged her eyes back open, Ian was studying her very carefully.

"I've done more than this before, sir," she offered.

"Then he was a fool."

Susan blinked at him, trying to understanding the meaning behind the words, when she was barely able to fathom what the actual words were. Dropping her gaze, she saw where Ian had tucked the handle of the paddle into his belt, freeing both his hands to touch her.

As she watched, the hand that had been stroking the spanked skin retrieved the paddle from its resting place. Ian held the leather an inch from her lips once more.

Susan stared at it for a long time, wondering what words would make him change his mind. A glance up proved to her without any sort of doubt. Nothing she could say would make him alter his verdict about anything at all. The decision had been made.

Dipping her head, Susan brushed her lips across the flat surface of the implement, thanking it for the pleasure it had given her.

"Good girl," Ian told her.

He stroked his hand through her hair again. His fingers tugged slightly at the long, blonde strands and she knew her master wanted her to look up and meet his eyes, but she wasn't strong enough to obey the command right then. Too much seemed to rest on it.

Ian made a soft, soothing noise in the back of his throat, as if he was gentling down a nervous colt who might try to bolt at any second. Susan glanced up, but it was still impossible for her to hold his gaze the way he wanted her to. She managed it for a few seconds, but she soon had to look down to the floor.

Suddenly uncertain about everything, she wasn't sure if the buzz running through her veins was thundering inside him too. Maybe it didn't feel new and fresh to him. Maybe she was even more a fool than she suspected. Maybe...

Ian took half a step forward, bringing their bodies together. His clothes still separated them, denying her the pleasure of feeling her master's skin against hers, but his jeans didn't entirely disguise the line of his erection. He was turned on, that was something. Right then, it was just about enough to soothe the panic that threatened to take hold inside her.

Ian wanted her. Maybe only for sex, but still—her master wanted her and, in that moment as she struggled to lift her gaze and meet his eyes, that was everything.

When he took a step away from her, she needed all her self control not to protest. She had to bite her bottom lip to keep the words back, but she managed to accept her master's decision without comment.



He moved several more steps away from her before he turned his back on her and walked back to the toy box. She couldn't see what he was doing while his body blocked her view of the tool cabinet. All she could do was wait. It didn't even seem important to wonder.

Either he would show her the next toy he wanted her to play with or he wouldn't. She didn't know, and she didn't need to know. Shifting her stance slightly, Susan tried to take some of the pressure off her toes. Her feet were starting to cramp, the strain from that swirled in with the sensations already flooding her mind and she couldn't work out if it was pleasure or pain or something else entirely. The chains rattled as she tried to acquire a better footing and failed.

Ian turned back to her. He walked across the room, bringing them closer together with every step. His hands were empty. No more toys.

Susan closed her eyes for a moment, as she realised that play time was truly over. The scene was probably over too. She tried to push her mind into something that seemed like sanity, but no part of her wanted to cooperate with that plan.

If this was the only chance she was going to give herself to enjoy submitting to a master, she wanted to make the most of it, to drag it out until the last possible second.

Before she could convince herself to make the least attempt to pull herself out of her submission, she saw Ian reach for his fly. Some of the panic inside her drained away. The scene wasn't over. Her master still wanted her.

Susan watched each metal tooth give way and reveal another inch of skin. He was going commando. He dipped his hand into his back pocket and pulled out a condom, as he stepped in close to her. She held her breath, watching his hands, memorising everything about them as they pushed his clothes out of the way and sheathed himself in latex.

"Tell your master what you want," he ordered.

"You," she whispered. She felt so raw inside, so desperate, she couldn't even scrape up a sir to go with the word.

Apparently, the honorific wasn't needed. Ian stepped closer. Sliding his hands around her, he smoothed his palms down to her backside. Her skin caught fire as he cupped her buttocks in his hands and picked her up off the floor. It couldn't have been more than a few minutes since she last felt something more than air against her spanked skin, but the slight roughness of his hands was enough to make her let out a whimpering moan.

As he lifted her against his body, Susan wrapped her legs around his waist, trying both to support herself and to pull him closer at the same time. The move brought her to the same height as him, brought their lips within kissing distance.

Trying to steady herself, Susan reached out to wrap her arms around her master's neck. Her cuffs tugged at the chain. There wasn't enough leeway to allow her to reach out to Ian properly. She whimpered her frustration at not being able to hold onto her master, at not being able to catch him in her grip and never let him go.

She dropped her gaze to Ian's lips. An inch would have brought their mouths together but, even without chains to stop her, she couldn't lean forward and take the chance. It wasn't her place to make that decision. She couldn't even bring herself to make the request.

One of Ian's hands tangled into her hair. His grip tightened until Susan could feel his touch through every strand. For a moment she thought he'd read the desire in her eyes, and was about to make it clear that she would be kissed as and when her master chose, not before. Then he leant forward that extra inch and brought their lips together as he held her still to be slowly and thoroughly kissed.

The other hand stayed on her heated arse, palming the sensitised skin as he held her close to him, keeping her safe and supported. Each finger's touch shot through her like a fire cracker—heat pulsed under his palm sending bursts of

light exploding behind her eyes. She wriggled against his hand, pressing herself against his body, ignoring the risks of falling in favour of finding pleasure.

Susan reached out above her. The extra height from her perch wrapped around Ian's hips, let her grip the metalwork supporting the car suspended above her head. She fumbled at it, desperately seeking for some purchase to push herself against Ian's body. Finally she succeeded in wrapping her fingers around it.

For a few seconds, her master let her support most of her own weight, pulling herself a few inches further up his body. He broke the kiss as suddenly as he'd offered it. Staring into her eyes, demanding that she return his gaze, he guided her to slide back down his body at just the right angle. As she carefully lowered herself, he guided his cock inside her inch by glorious inch.

Susan gasped. She dropped her head back as her grip on the support above her tightened.

"Please," she whispered, not even sure what she was begging for—just sure that her master was the only one who could provide it.

"That's right, Susie. Move for your master."

She tried to do as Ian commanded, tried to follow his rhythm and push herself into some sort of movement that would compliment it.

Ian left one hand supporting her. His other hand joined her smaller fists on the metal strut above them. Susan looked up and watched it hold onto the bar between her two hands. His hold gave them both that little bit of leverage they needed to really move with each other, to move against each other.

Technique, control, everything forgotten, all Susan could do was try her best to thrust their bodies together, mindlessly seeking release until she spiralled down over the edge. In another lifetime, when she'd played in clubs, she'd learnt to control her body perfectly. Back then, it wouldn't have occurred to her to come without permission. There in the garage, waiting for anything was impossible.

She tossed back her head. She was pretty sure she screamed, but the sound was muffled by the pleasure that coursed through her and seemed to come from miles away.

As pleasure drained out of her mind, every muscle in her body demanded permission to go limp with satisfaction. Somehow, she managed to hold it all together for her master. Ian pushed into her slit again and again, rocking his hips as he supported her against his body. Susan hung on with her last ounce of energy until he jerked and reached his own climax, burying himself inside her in a series of hard, perfect thrusts that threatened to send her into another spiral of pleasure.

With a final gasp, Ian went very still. His head dropped forward to rest against her shoulder. A shudder ran through his body, but somehow he still managed to keep them both upright. Somehow he kept her supported as he pulled himself together. He seemed to be waiting for something, perhaps until he was confident of his own control and co-ordination, before he finally let her go and allowed her to slide down his body.

Susan's toes took a tentative hold on the floor as he finally set her down on the rough concrete. Her feet screamed their protest at being pushed back into the same uncomfortable position, standing on tiptoe without a good high heel to help her. Light headed, she dragged deep lungfuls of air into her body and scrambled to pull her mind into some semblance of order.

Her master unclipped her cuffs from the chain above her head and let her lower her hands. Muscles protested at a suddenly unfamiliar freedom to move. Her whole body ached. The sheer overload of sensations and emotions was too much to take in. Right then, her only thought was to sink down onto the floor and collapse into a sated heap at his feet until her master was ready to take her back to the club.

Ian seemed far more focused on the external world than she was, more intent on action. Before she knew what he was doing, he'd lowered the chain

down and clipped it to her collar again. Her hands were permitted to rest comfortably in front of her, but they weren't freed from the cuffs.

Lifting her gaze, Susan looked hazily around, wondering what was going on. The scene was surely over now. She might not want it to be, but she didn't doubt that it was. There was no way so much pleasure could have been contained in less than three hours.

She turned around and saw Ian walk away from her. She stepped forward but the chain stopped her short. She couldn't follow him. That was wrong. She wanted to be close to her master.

No. Susan shook her head, trying to clear the fog. She didn't really want to be close to her master—that was the submission, the sex game talking. That was over now, she had to pull herself together. Ian wasn't her master. He was someone she did a scene with as the result of a bet, someone she had sex with—nothing more. The words sounded like lies inside her head.

He dispensed with the condom and tidied himself away. Turning back to her, he leaned against the work bench and ran his eyes over her body. He looked so composed, so sure of everything.

Susan dropped her gaze to the floor at his feet, embarrassingly aware of how much of a mess she must look with her hair mussed by his hands, her makeup smeared and her body still shaking with the aftershocks of her orgasm.

He walked back across to her. All she could do was watch him approach and wait for an order.

He put a bottle of water to her lips, just as he had earlier. "Drink."

She swallowed it down, greedy for anything to ease the heat inside her. Ian gave her as much as he decided she should have and walked away again, finishing the rest of the contents himself.

A computer was idling in the far corner of the room. As he tossed the water bottle in the waste bin next to it, something on the screen seemed to catch Ian's eye and he stopped to investigate it.

Her master apparently lost all interest in her at that point. Susan watched him frown at the numbers of the screen and type in a few key strokes. She bit her lip, wondering how long he would stay there fiddling with his computer while she waited.

Not able to stand any longer, she knelt down on the hard concrete. He'd given her a bit more chain this time, she found she was able to sit on the floor without straining her neck. The cold concrete felt wonderful on her heated buttocks for the first few seconds. Then the soothing, cooling balm turned frigidly uncomfortable. Susan turned until she half lay on the floor on her side. The floor was still cold, but she was too tired to truly care. The chain rattled above her as she tried to make herself as comfortable as possible.

Ian didn't turn around.

There didn't seem to be anything to do but wait, to steal a little more time when she wasn't required to do anything more than that. One glance across to her master and waiting didn't seem like such an impossible hardship. Susan rested her cheek on her arm and closed her eyes.

## **Chapter Five**

\* \* \* \*

Ian listened very carefully, straining his hearing as he tried to make out any sounds in the almost silent room. No rattle of chain floated across to him, no muted sound of a bare footstep against the concrete caught his attention. He still forced himself to wait another full minute before he risked a glance over his shoulder. The moment he caught sight of Susan, he turned to face the room head on, all thought of discretion abandoned.

Beautiful...

He'd known that the scene had taken a lot out of her, that she had to be exhausted from the emotions the return to submission would have stirred up inside her, if not from the paddling itself. He hadn't realised she would trust him enough to lie down on the cold floor under the car and fall asleep while she patiently waited for her master to come back to her.

Doing his best to keep his footsteps silent, he made his way across the room to her side. Crouching down next to Susan, he stroked her hair back out of her eyes. She stirred a little, lifting her head to press it against his palm, like a kitten arching under its master's hand.

He smiled slightly and encouraged the move, trailing his fingers through her hair again as he sat down on the floor next to her. Susan turned her face into his palm, encouraging his caresses. A frown grew between her neatly shaped eyebrows. Susan blinked her eyes open and looked up at him.

She met his eyes for a moment. All he caught was a confused, uncertain little expression before she looked back down. Shifting on the cold floor, she tried to sit up. Perhaps at some point in her past, she had been used to moving around in hand cuffs. At that moment, the coordination required seemed to be beyond her. Ian helped her to sit up. As blush crept to her cheek, as if she thought she needed to be embarrassed about needing her master's help.

Ian watched her eyes darted from one point on the floor to another as she desperately tried to put her thoughts back together and work out what she was supposed to do next. Unless he was very much mistaken, she wasn't used to dozing off during those moments her master allowed her to rest. The whole idea seemed to have raised a panic inside her.

He ran his thumb across the line of heightened colour on her cheek, wondering if he was right about exactly what Susan's previous experience with other masters entailed.

Shifting his position, he moved back onto his feet and into a crouch. Susan reached out to him and put her hand on the inside of his thigh in offering. She glanced up at him as she slid her hand up towards his crotch.

Ian shook his head, not about to let her push the scene back into what she was familiar with as easily as that.

Susan hesitated again, the frown deepened. As he watched, she seemed to withdraw from him. It was almost like watching someone scramble to rebuild their defences after a hurricane had blown through their village and destroyed every vestige of protection they were familiar with. The barriers were down. Not so much as one stone rested upon another.

"You said you'd take me back to the bar at the end of the scene," Susan reminded him.

Ian couldn't help but hear the effort she had to put into not calling him sir right then. But even if it wasn't easy, she managed to avoid the honorific. The first brick in the wall she was desperately trying to construct around her soul fell neatly into place.

Reaching behind her neck, Ian unclipped the chain from Susan's collar. She flinched as he ran his fingers along the leather when he brought his hand around to the front of her neck.

She might have expected him to take back her collar, but it obviously hadn't occurred to her that he would pick her up and carry her across the room. Any relief she might have felt at being able to keep the strip of leather a little while



longer, seemed to be wiped away by her surprise at being lifted so easily from the floor.

With her hands still cuffed in front of her, Susan couldn't even hold on to him properly. All she could do was trust him not to drop her. Ian held her safe against him as he walked across the room.

She didn't say anything during the short journey. Ian smiled slightly to himself, half sure that was because she was afraid she would somehow spoil his concentration and cause him to drop her if she said the wrong thing. Obviously, the trust issue still needed a little bit of work...

A battered old armchair stood in the corner of the room. Ian sat down, settling his lover comfortably on his lap. The moment he couldn't accidentally send her crashing to the floor, Susan returned her attention to what seemed to be the one fact she was determined to hold on to.

"You said you would take me back to the bar at the end of the scene."

"I said I would take you wherever you want to go," Ian corrected.

Her mouth was open, ready to tell him that she wanted to go back to the bar. He stroked his hand over her backside. The only sound that left her lips was a gasp.

"Sore?" he asked.

The truth was obvious, but Susan still shook her head and tried to deny it. "I'm fine."

The way she'd curled into his body when he set her down on his lap meant that her weight rested on her hip rather than squarely on her bottom. Her left buttock was tilted up. His hand came down upon it—not hard, but not quite an approving little pat on the rump either. Susan scrabbled at his shirt, squirming away from the unexpectedly sharp contact.

"Lies aren't acceptable."

Susan blinked up at him, caught between the scene and the real world and seemingly not knowing what to do about that. "I..."

Ian lifted an eyebrow.

"Just a little bit sore, sir," she offered.

Ian stroked his hand over the maligned skin. "Good girl. That's much better, sweetheart. Your master can't look after you and see that you're safe if you lie to him, can he?"

She cautiously signalled her agreement.

"You have to tell me what feels good, what feels bad. That's important. I'm a dominant, not a psychic, sweetheart." He stroked his palm over the spot where his hand had fallen.

Susan nodded again, accepting his words, even as they made her fidget uncomfortably on his lap. "Shouldn't we be going, sir?" she blurted out.

"No."

She looked up at him and for the first time she he woke her from her doze, she met his eye and held it properly. A full minute passed. He had no idea what she was looking for in his expression, but he let her look her fill. There was no way she could see a lie where one didn't exist.

"We've got plenty of time left," he told her.

Susan bit her lip. "Do you want to do something then, sir?"

"We are doing something."

Susan looked from his neatly clothed body to her bare skin and back again. She studied the picture they presented very carefully as if she really thought they might have somehow started another scene when she wasn't paying attention.

"You have no idea what the word aftercare means, do you?"

She looked up at him blankly, as if she really didn't have a clue.

A lock of hair had fallen across her face, hiding her right eye. Ian pushed it back out of the way. "One day you are going to tell me just what you did when you were playing games on the circuit," he told her. "Because whoever you were playing with didn't have a clue what they were doing. Did you really think I would just drag you out of a scene, drop you in the car park and drive away?"

She didn't answer, but she didn't need to. The facts of the matter were written in her confused expression. That was exactly what she'd expected her master to do.

Ian stroked her cheek. "That's not the way it works, Susie. Not with someone who knows what they're doing, anyway. You need time to come down from a scene, time to get your footing, don't you?"

"Time to check your e-mails," she muttered. Even as the words left her lips, Ian could see that she regretted letting them through. She tensed as if she expected his hand to fall against her backside again.

He pressed a kiss to the top of her head instead, smiling against her hair at the most clear sign so far that the submissive inside her wanted to trust her new master, even if her conscious mind only wanted to run away and hide from that very instinct.

She risked a glance up at him, seeming more confused than ever by his response.

"I thought you took that very well," Ian whispered to her.

"A test?" she realised.

"Yes, something like that."

Susan hesitated, as if she wasn't sure if she wanted to know the answer, but she had to ask anyway. "Did I pass, sir?" She might have intended the words to come out casually, but they were soft and submissive, more a request for reassurance than any words he had ever heard.

"Yes."

For several long seconds, Ian watched her try to work it out. Then she appeared to set the whole subject aside.

"Are you going to ask?" he prompted.

Susan shook her head. "It's not important."

Ian had no intention of agreeing with that. "Submission is important."

She shifted on his lap, apparently finding his conversation far more uncomfortable than sitting on her sore backside.

"Submissives are important," he added.

Susan still didn't make any attempt at a reply.

"You acted like a true submissive today," Ian went on. "Masochists only submit to get the pain they crave."

"A pain slut," she whispered. "I am familiar with the term."

Ian nodded. "A masochist would have thrown a temper tantrum—she'd had her paddling and got off on it, being left tied up wouldn't offer her anything. A real submissive on the other hand doesn't just submit until they get what they want. They react the same way if they want to come or if they've already come so often that another orgasm would be more a punishment than a reward. That sort of instinct to submit can't be taught."

Ian held back a sigh. He was turning into a bloody dictionary. The worse thing was, that there wasn't anything more useful he could say. There wasn't a thing he could do to help her right then. All he could do was wait to see where Susan's submission took her.

Ian stroked his fingers through her hair. Even if he knew his words would have little effect on her final decision, he couldn't help but offer them anyway. "You're an excellent submissive," he whispered to her.

Susan closed her eyes, as if relishing the praise. Then she shook her head. "I don't do this anymore," she whispered. She opened her eyes and looked him straight in the eye. "I don't do this anymore."

There was no doubt who she was trying to convince right then, and it sure as hell wasn't him.

"And a lot of the men on the scene would disagree with the submissive bit of the label, let alone the rest," she announced. The words were crisp, they almost held the same tone she had adopted in the bar.

Ian held back a sigh. Too far, too fast. The idea that she could be brought to trust him enough to offer him her submission freely after spending just three hours under his protection had been insanely optimistic to start with, just because he wanted her to take a leap of faith, that didn't mean she was going to

do it. A dominant didn't always get what he wanted, no matter what some of the men who liked to play around with the label liked to think.

He stroked his fingers through her hair once more. He was quickly becoming addicted to doing that.

"Three days," he said.

"What?" Susan frowned.

"In three days, I could prove that everything some idiot said to you in a leather club was wrong."

"Three hours," she corrected. "We said three hours."

It was like a mantra. Three hours. Back to the bar. Three hours. Back to the bar. It made it sound as if the time they spent together was an interlude that existed outside reality. She didn't do this in the real world. It was just a game she would play for three hours before he took her back to the bar.

Ian stared down at her. He'd never felt less like he was playing a game.

"Three days," he said again.

Susan shook her head. A lock of hair fell forward into her face once more. She lifted her hands to push it away, but Ian's hand was there first. She swallowed rapidly as if trying to keep her nerves in check.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you, sweetheart?" he asked. "Three days without any decisions to make. Three days of only needing to do as your master says. Three days when you don't have to lie or pretend or act out a part that makes you feel sick inside." He whispered the words softly in her ear like a promise.

It wasn't fair to ask her to make any sort of decision right then. She was too raw, too close to the edge. No submissive could have had a chance of making a logical decision right then. Whatever answer she gave would have to be born of pure instinct, pure want. But it wouldn't have been fair to help her go back to living a lie either. If she wasn't strong enough to admit what she wanted at any other time, he'd have had to be a sadist to let that moment pass and not take advantage of it.

"Three days of feeling the leather against your skin, feeling your master watching over you."

She took a shaky breath. Ian watched her try to convince herself that she didn't want anything he offered. He had to force himself not to hold his own breath as he waited for her verdict. If he held his breath, he wouldn't be able to offer her anything more than he already had, and it was too important an opportunity to waste.

"You looked beautiful under that car. You'd spend a lot of time under there over the next three days—chained up just as you were today. I'd give you enough chain to walk around and stretch your legs, enough to kneel or curl up on a nice soft cushion we could put under there. If you're very good I might even give you a little remote controlled toy to keep you amused."

Susan glanced up at him.

Ian chuckled. "Don't get too carried away, sweetheart. I'm not that indulgent a master—you won't be the one holding the remote. I'd enjoy sitting on the other side of the room, finishing up my paperwork while you squirm under the car, waiting until I am ready to play with you properly. Would you like that, Susie? Would you like to work late with me?"

She nodded, but Ian would bet the entire garage that she wasn't aware that she did so.

"Three days," he said again.

Susan shook her head. "Stop saying that."

"Why?"

"Because in the real world, it's not that simple, is it?" she said.

"Few things worth having are very simple. You can handle complicated for three days. You're stronger than you think."

"Strong enough to give this up," she said.

*Scared enough to give this up.* Ian kept that particular observation to himself.

His fingers stroked through her hair. He let her sit curled up on his lap for a long time and think about the possibilities of those days before he finally broke the silence.

"You need to make a decision, Susie. Where do you want me to take you when our three hours are up?"

"You said you'd take me back to the bar," she reminded him.

"I said I'd take you wherever you decided you wanted to go at the end of the scene. If you're going to belong to me for three more days, you can tell me when you want to be dropped off at three a.m. on Monday morning. You just need to decide how long you want the scene to last for."

Susan looked up at him and he knew she was ready to run, ready to ask him to take her back to the bar. He met her gaze without hesitation, wanting her to know he wasn't hiding anything from her, that the invitation wasn't a trick. Susan looked back down. Her lips parted, but they closed again without any words leaving her mouth. It took three more attempts before she managed to give her answer.

"Three days," she agreed.

Ian nodded his understanding, as if it had never occurred to him that she might give a different answer. "Three days," he echoed. As much as he wanted to keep his expression blank and pretend that as a master he was above being worried about such things, he couldn't stop a smile twisting his lips as relief rushed through him.

She was his for three days. There was a hell of a lot they could get done in that length of time.

He took a deep breath and let it out very slowly. He hadn't realised just how worried he was that she would give a different answer until he felt the tension drain out of his bones. Three days...

Three days. Three days. Three days!

"No!"

"Susie?"

Susan looked up and met Ian's eyes. The same two words echoed around again, louder and louder each time they replayed themselves inside her brain. Three days. Three days was...impossible. She closed her eyes and shook her head. Impossible.

"Sweetheart?" he prompted again.

"I've changed my mind. I—"

Ian's finger covered her lips, stopping her short. Susan looked up and met his eyes.

"You've given me your answer. I've accepted it."

"Then you'll just have to accept I've changed my mind too," she told him, panic swirling inside her and making her snap when she really didn't mean to.

"No."

The fact that he was so calm and certain about it all just made it worse. Susan tried to push herself up off his lap. A second later, she stood naked before him, staring down at her master as he leant back in his chair, not a care in the world. She hadn't actually thought past the bit where she tried to get off his lap. It hadn't even occurred to her that he would let her go.

Folding her arms across her chest she stared down at the dominant. Ian stared back at her, completely composed, as if everything was working out just as he expected.

Unable to remain still, Susan ran her hands through her hair as best she could with her wrists still bound. Her whole body was riddled with tension. She dropped her hand down to rub at the back of her neck.

As soon as her fingers touched leather, she snatched her hand away. She was still collared, she still belonged to him. "Are the three hours over yet?" she asked.

"No."

Her eyes narrowed. "You could at least pretend to look at your watch before you lie to me." She clipped the sentence short before any silly titles could attach themselves to the end. She wasn't feeling the least bit respectful right then. She



was thoroughly pissed off—more with herself for giving a ludicrous answer than with him if she was honest about it, but still.

"If I was lying I'm sure I'd make a point of looking at my wrist every two seconds—most people do overact if they are trying to con someone. Since it's the truth, I don't feel any particular need to make a show out of stating it."

Susan shook her head, not so much at his words as at the idea that this was actually happening, that she could have ever been so stupid to agree to this mess. "You said you'd take me back to the bar."

"At the end of the three days, I'll take you wherever you want to go," Ian said, and he nodded as if he was agreeing with her.

"To the bar."

"Yes. In three days."

"Stop saying that. Three days is," she shook her head. "It's not going to happen. I have a job. I have a life. That's why this never works for more than a few hours in the real world. I can't just drop everything and kneel at your feet whenever you click your fingers."

Each word came louder than the last, until she was shouting down at him. Her heart raced faster and faster as she felt panic boil inside her.

"I didn't ask you to," Ian pointed out, his tone of voice still infuriatingly mild.

"You said—" Susan accused.

"That I want you to belong to me for three days," Ian repeated. He rose to his feet and closed the gap between them. Susan had a whole room full of empty space between her and the closest wall, but she held her ground as he approached, determined not to scurry away like a frightened little rabbit.

"And I said no," she reminded him, tilting her head back to look him straight in the eye. She'd said no first of all, that had to count for something. If he wasn't going to let her change her mind once she gave her answer, surely it counted for everything.

"You said yes. You agreed to three days. If that's changed, you still have your safe word. If you say that word, you can go back to the bar right now. Make your choice, Susie. Is that what you really want?"

She closed her eyes, hiding from the choice as much as she hid from him.

"Belong to me," Ian whispered. He dipped his head so the words brushed across her ear like a lover's plea rather than a master's demand. "Let me make the choices for you, let me show you what a good master would really expect of you while you belonged to him."

Susan shook her head.

"Let me show you what it feels like to really belong to someone, Susie, because if you never try it, you'll never know. If you never try it, you'll go through your whole life thinking that submission is cold and harsh and something that can only ever be given to strangers in the play rooms and clubs. You'll go through your whole life thinking it's less than it is, and I can't think of a worse fate for any submissive to have to live through."

She opened her eyes, but seeing the man standing before her didn't make it any easier for her to give the sensible answer. "You don't know me," Susan whispered, far more for her own benefit than for his.

"I know you well enough to know that you're someone who regrets the opportunities you don't take far more than you've ever regretted the mistakes you've made."

"Bastard," she whispered. Her eyes dropped closed for full a minute before she looked up and glared straight into his eyes, hating him for being right.

"What's your answer, Susie? How long are you going to belong to me for?"

There was only one answer that felt possible right then. "Three days," she bit out. "Sir."

The honorific came out in exactly the same tone of voice as the word bastard. Ian smiled. Reaching out, he brushed her hair out of her eyes and off her face, but that was the only way he touched her. Susan hesitated as she

realised he wasn't going to pounce on her the moment she said she belonged to him.

She'd made her decision. It might have been the wrong one, but it still should have made everything very simple.

"Your clothes are still under the car. Collect them and bring them in here," he said after a while.

Susan continued to stare up at him for several long seconds. "And if I don't?"

"Then you'll be the one who ends up blushing when all the mechanics find them under the car when they come into work tomorrow morning," Ian told her.

Susan hesitated.

"Did you really think I'd threaten to turn you over my knee because you won't do as you're told?" Ian said, amusement twisting his lips into a small smile.

"Newsflash, darling—you're a masochist. A spanking will only ever be a reward to you. I'm not fool enough to believe that's irrelevant just because you're a submissive too."

Susan turned and walked across the room to the suspended car. She heard her master's footsteps against the concrete and she knew he was following just a few feet behind her. She picked up her dress and her underwear. Ian kept pace with her. It took all her self-control not to look over her shoulder and seek out his approval. She had her order. She was more than capable of following it. She didn't even need to know he was there, let alone look to him for guidance, but in that moment she wanted to.

Stupid. This was why three days was insane. Barely more than three hours and she was giving way to all sorts of stupid ideas. She pushed them all aside and forced herself to think about what was really happening. Picking up her shoes, she straightened up very slowly and she turned to face her master.

Ian stared at her, arms folded across his chest, apparently waiting for her to speak first.

After a few seconds, Susan held her wrists out to him. "I might regret it, but I did give you my word. Three days. You could have just told me to go back under the car. You didn't need to find an excuse to put me back here."

"Susie," he said, apparently more than slightly amused with her. "If I wanted you tied up under the car for the rest of the night, I'd simply tell you so. If you threw a temper tantrum and refused, I could have quite easily picked you up and carried you over here. And if you really have a problem with any of that, you could have said your safe word and been put neatly back on your feet. Any questions?"

"You said I was going to be spending the night here," she pointed out.

"I had thought my flat upstairs might have been a more comfortable location, but if you have your heart set on spending the next few hours under here, I wouldn't want you to think I'm one of those masters who don't take their submissive's wishes into account..."

She glared up at him.

"Is this where you want to spend the night?" he prompted.

She looked away from him.

"It's not a mind game, sweetheart. It's a simple question. Answer your master. Would you rather spend the night here, or in my bed?"

Reaching out to her, he stroked her hair back from her face. He was right about one thing. It didn't feel like a game. It felt more real than anything she had ever known. Right then, it was hard to pretend that fact alone wasn't absolutely terrifying. Susan took a deep breath and tried to pull herself back under her own control. Her attempts felt singularly unsuccessful.

Ian stroked his fingers through her hair again.

"Your bed, sir." The words came out level and clear. For a few precious seconds, she was simply a woman who made a calm, logical decision after sensible reflection on the options laid out before her. Or at least she sounded like that woman. In that moment, it felt like she would never be that person again.

Still, it was nice to know she could still pretend to be her if and when she really needed to be.

Leaning down, Ian brushed his lips across her temple. "That wasn't so difficult, was it?"

Susan shook her head and scraped up a smile. She doubted a man like Ian could ever understand just how difficult it could be to let go and give yourself over to another human being. Ian slid his hand down to her cheek. Tilting her head back, he brushed their lips together as if sealing the deal, sealing her fate.

Part of her knew it wasn't just a kiss. It was a trap. It might as well have a flashing warning light on it, but part of her just gave up on caring. Susan tilted her head back and parted her lips in offering.

The movement felt natural, it felt right, as if there was some stupid little bit of her that wanted nothing more than to spend her whole life being kissed by him, to spend her whole life offering her lips up to be kissed as and when her master chose, happy to merely be available for his pleasure whenever he wished.

Ian deepened the kiss, but he kept it slow and gentle. He coaxed her to respond freely as the kiss morphed into another and then another. When he eventually pulled back, Susan dropped her gaze to her wrists, fully expecting them to be linked to the chain that would leave her trapped under that infernally suspended car for the rest of the night.

Her wrists were still cuffed, but the chain wasn't attached to them. She frowned slightly. There was no other reason why he should have wanted to kiss her right then if not to see the shock on her face when she looked down and found her wrists bound to the metal links.

Her master stepped back, not appearing to notice her confusion. He kept his hand resting on the small of her back as he led her out of the garage, through some sort of staff room and through another door at the back of that room.

Susan had no idea where they were going, but she went where her master directed without making any fuss about it. They would go where he wanted

them to go. For the next three days, she was effectively his to do with as he pleased.

Three days. Susan pushed down the panic. Maybe she'd been a fool to agree with it, but she would be damned before she acted like a brat about it now. If she had to indulge her submissive side with three more days under Ian's control, so be it. She'd see herself in hell before she spent three days being a *bad* submissive.

At the top of the stairs, Ian unlocked another door.

"In you go." The gentlest little pat on the bottom coaxed her into the room. As he closed the door behind him, he pointed to a door visible just around a corner on the far side of the room. "Straight through there."

Susan went where she was ordered to go, taking refuge in obedience until she felt capable of taking another shot at sanity. She stepped into a small, tiled bathroom. Directly opposite the door, a mirror was positioned over the sink. Susan stopped in front of it and studied her reflection.

No hesitation, she looked herself straight in the eye, daring her reflection to make any criticism of the mussed up hair, or the smudged make up. She looked just as she expected to look after Ian had taken to stroking his fingers through her hair, casually destroying the carefully straightened style she'd worn to work that day. There was no point worrying about that.

The mirror extended down as far as her waist. Susan took in all the details one by one, searching for something that might reflect the turmoil that raged inside her, but she looked exactly the same as she always had. The only difference that anyone might detect from a visual examination in a mirror that extended further down the wall was her reddened backside. And Susan knew that wouldn't hint at the mess inside her head.

Susan lifted her hands to touch the collar that still rested around her neck. Her clothes were still in her hands, her shoes dangled from her finger tips. There was no way to touch the collar without dropping something. A footstep on the tiled floor caught her attention, and she tore her gaze away from her self-

inspection. Ian was standing behind her, studying the same reflection that had consumed her own thoughts. Susan lowered her hands, just in case it might look as if she was hiding behind her clothes.

Stepping forward, her master placed one of his hands on her shoulder and the other on her hip. Standing right behind her, he pulled her back the half a step that separated them. Susan made the mistake of meeting his gaze in the mirror. It was impossible to look away.

Ian reached around her body and took her clothes out of her hands without ever breaking their locked gazes. He set them on the counter next to the sink, before reaching into the shower stall alongside them. Susan heard the water patter against the glass sides of the stall, but she still couldn't look away from her lover's eyes.

The edges of Ian's eyes crinkled as he smiled. Reaching around in front of her once more, he hooked his fingers around the mental links between her handcuffs and guided her to turn around.

Her master was still fully clothed. Susan hesitated for a moment, staring at the buttons on his shirt debating whether or not to offer him her assistance.

Before she'd reached a decision, Ian pulled his shirt over his head and tossed it towards a laundry hamper in the other corner of the room. Susan watched as more and more of his skin became visible for the first time. He looked good, well built, but not ripped like a model. His strength looked steadier, more natural, safer.

He was all brisk, clean movements as he stripped himself down. No fuss. No pretence. He didn't look like a man who needed someone to look after him and wait on him hand and foot. In those moments, he seemed far more like the kind of man who would quickly become irritated by anyone coddling him.

Completely confident, he didn't even look to her for a reaction when he stood naked for the first time in front of her. Catching hold of her cuffs again, he merely stepped back under the spray and took her with him as if they had been

naked around each other their whole lives, as if they showered together every night before bed, and today was no different to any other day.

Susan hissed as the water ran over her backside. Heat rushed to her cheeks as she realised that there was no way in hell her master could have failed to hear the silly little sound.

"Sore?"

"I'm—" She looked up at him and caught his eye just in time. She remembered his words from earlier. Her master couldn't take care of her if she lied to him. "It's not a problem, sir."

Ian nodded his acceptance of that. He seemed pleased with the answer, as if he thought she had made some sort of progress during the time they'd spent together.

Reaching above her head, Ian looped the short length of chain between her cuffs over a hook in on the wall in the shower stall. Susan looked up at it. She couldn't help but wonder how many other women had found themselves restrained that same way, if this was all part of some regularly scheduled scene that he liked to take all his lovers through, if she was no different from any of his other submissives in his eyes.

It was stupid that the idea of other women taking her place in the scene should matter to her then when it had never mattered before. At least she had the sense to keep the trail of thought inside her head—that was some small mercy. The last thing she needed was for her master to think she was getting soppy and sentimental about it all. She had far more sense than to invest the scene with more emotion than it warranted.

Ian picked up a bottle of shower gel from the shelf in the corner. Susan kept her gaze lowered, half to avoid meeting her master's eyes, half to watch him as he worked the gel into a lather between his palms. She continued to watch, quite mesmerised by his movements, as he reached out and ran his hands over her skin.



All at once, she stopped caring how many women had been cuffed to that hook in the wall. Its existence could only ever be considered a good thing. While the restraint stopped her leaning into Ian's touch and arching into his hands as he explored her body, she was willing to send up prayers of thanks for it, simply because it stopped her making a bigger fool of herself than she already had.

The soap dissolved from Ian's hands. The water ran clear of bubbles. He continued to run his hands over her skin. Susan took a deep breath and let her eyes drop closed.

His touch was strong and confident, but there was a gentleness in it that had a sneaky way of creeping under her skin and making her crave more. When he took his hands away, she flung her eyes open, somehow expecting him to vanish into the steam that swirled around the room if she didn't immediately beg him to stay.

He didn't meet her eyes. All his attention was on the bottle of shower gel as he poured more into his palm and worked it into another lather. "Relax," he whispered in her ear as he stroked his hands along her shoulders.

There was no way to hide her tension as he rubbed the soap into her shoulders. Every muscle was so knotted up, it felt as if she might tear her own body apart from the inside out at any moment.

All she could do was stare straight ahead at the tiles on the opposite wall and try not to care that he had to be able to tell just how much he was getting to her.

"If you over-think every single moment of the next three days, you're not going to enjoy yourself," he warned.

"I didn't agree to do this to enjoy myself," she informed him, unable to keep the words back.

"Why else?" he asked.

"Because I'm an idiot," she snapped. "Is that a good enough reason?" Susan shook her head. There was no way she could stay sane through three whole days of this.

Ian turned her around and tucked a knuckle under her chin, coaxing her to look up and meet his eyes.

"Yes," he agreed slowly, as if he had given her statement a great deal of very careful thought. "I've always considered myself a fool whenever I do exactly what I want."

"In the real world, people don't do whatever the hell they want whenever the mood strikes them," she said. In the real world, people went to work and came home. They get through one day after another without expecting anything wonderful or dramatic to happen to them.

Ian merely smiled and pressed a kiss onto the top of her head as if there was something sweet about the fact she didn't expect anything more from reality than every other sensible person on the planet.

Without making any further comment, he turned off the shower. Susan waited as patiently as she knew how, for him to reach for the cuffs and set her free. He reached for a towel instead.

There was nothing she could do but stand there while he dried her whole body. The towel was soft. His touch remained gentle. Somehow, he still managed to set her on fire.

The aching heat that lingered in the paddled skin was one thing. Susan could understand that, she could accept that as the natural way of things. But the simple caress of a towel against her skin shouldn't have been enough to make her entire body tingle from tip to toe.

Her breaths sped up as Ian moved the fabric across her skin. Her nipples pebbled into tight little peaks that begged for an extra caress. She felt herself get wet, in a way that had nothing to do with the water that had rained down inside the shower stall. Her body's demands for sleep so it could recover from the spanking began to fade. Other demands were more important. Sleep could wait.

Her master left her standing there while he dried his own body. The moment his touch left her, the need for sleep returned so quickly it was hard to keep track of what her body wanted from her, let alone her mind.

Her lids were so heavy, it was almost impossible to keep her eyes open. All she wanted to do was curl up and sleep. Lethargy had crept into all her muscles. Snuggling up next to her master and falling asleep for the next twenty years sounded so perfect, it was hard to remember that wasn't the way it worked for men like him and women like her.

A three day scene...Susan tried to think clearly about the prospect as she watched Ian rub the towel roughly against his own head to dry his hair. Sleeping probably wasn't going to be a big part of her life until the scene was over.

Ian tossed their towel towards the laundry hamper and turned his attention back to her. Taking a deep breath, Susan tilted her chin back and tried to look ready for anything he could ask of her, even if she didn't feel it. It only took her master a moment to release her hands from above her head. Susan lowered her arms to her sides.

Her master was hard again. The fact presented itself to her brain and dropped straight to her knees. She began to lower herself to the ground. There was no point waiting for the order he was bound to issue.

A hand on her arm stopped her short.

Turning back to the cabinet by the sink, he took out a new toothbrush and set it on the counter.

"The bedroom door is directly opposite. Come through when you're ready."

Susan nodded her understanding.

It had never occurred to her to wonder how such things would be arranged, but she realised then that being given a few minutes to finish what she needed to do in the bathroom in private made things a lot easier than they could have been. Still, by the time she emerged from the stolen moments of solitude, her mind was no more under her control than it had been when Ian closed the door behind him.

His back was to her when she stepped into his bedroom. She was sure she didn't make a sound, but her master turned to face her, as if he could somehow feel her presence in the room.

He nodded to the turned down bed. "In you get. Left hand side."

Susan walked around to the appropriate side of the bed and sat on the edge of the mattress.

"In," Ian repeated.

When she hesitated, he simply walked across the few feet of carpet that separated them. Picking up her ankles, he lifted them up onto the bed and tossed the covers back over her legs. Susan bit her bottom lip as her backside slid against the soft cotton sheet and the spanked skin sent a shot of aching pleasure through her.

"If I want you to be uncomfortable at some point, I'll order you to be. Otherwise, make yourself at home."

"Yes, sir." It was obviously the answer he expected. Susan watched his retreating back as he took his turn in the bathroom. When the door closed behind him, she forced herself to turn away. She was not going to sit looking at the door like some lost little puppy waiting for her master to come home from work.

She looked around the room, wondering if there were any clues about her master to be gathered from her surroundings. The first thing her eyes fell on was a large chest standing against the opposite wall, facing the bottom of the bed. It couldn't have been anything but a toy box.

The moment it caught her eye, Susan found herself unable to look away from it. It was impossible not to wonder what else he had in there, what else he intended to get out and play with that night.

As quickly as images flashed through her head, Susan felt something ease inside her. It would be a relief to get back to something like that, something she understood. The toy box held the promise of a return to normality, something she might be able to retain her sanity through. It held the possibility that Ian

would turn back into one of the men who played casual games in clubs, before the comparison between him and them became completely ludicrous.

The bathroom door swung open. Susan looked up as Ian came back into the room. She met his eyes across the room before she looked back to the toy box. He didn't follow her gaze and walk across to the toy box as she expected him to. In fact, Ian even seemed to be unaware of the trunk's existence right then.

He just walked across the room and slipped into the bed beside her as if it wasn't a scene, as if they were an old married couple who had shared a bed for years.

Turning to lie on his side facing her, he studied her for several long minutes. Susan glanced at him, then away again as she waited for him to issue some sort of order. Her sore backside wasn't enjoying sitting very still against the sheets right then, but she would be damned before she squirmed and let him know that, let him think she couldn't take whatever games he wanted to play with her.

The heat in the skin seeped through her muscles until it seemed to sink right into her bones. She took a deep controlled breath and let it out very slowly.

"Lie down."

Susan didn't even look at him as she lay back and let her head rest on the pillow.

"You're not very good at being comfortable around a master, are you, sweetheart?"

Susan turned to glare at him.

Ian offered her a small smile and held out his hand. Not sure what else he could expect her to do, she put her bound hands in his. Ian guided her to move closer to him and invade his side of the bed.

By the time he was satisfied with her position and stopped nudging her limbs into a different arrangement, she was curled up close to his side with her head resting on his shoulder.

She shifted slightly against his skin as Ian's hand stroked down her back and settled on her backside. He was still more than half hard. She waited for him to

do something, but he just switched off the light and lay there with her in the darkness.

Susan tried to ignore both her master's obvious arousal and her own. She tried to ignore the cuffs around her wrists. She even tried to ignore Ian's existence, for all she was pressed up tight against him. It was impossible.

"Do you want me to do something, sir?" she hinted.

"Sleep," he said. His voice sounded as if he was halfway there already.

Susan lifted her head off his shoulder and leant up on her elbow so she could look down at him.

"Sweetheart," Ian said, his voice sleepy and sated. "If you really meant it when you agreed to spend three days under my protection, you're going to have to learn that every minute we spend together can't be about sex."

Susan pulled away. She only made it a few inches, before Ian caught hold of the links between her cuffs and stopped her short. He pulled her back so sharply she ended up laying half on top of him.

"Does it feel like I'm telling you I have no interest in your body, Susan?" he whispered in her ear.

His erection pressed against her hip. She glanced up and met his eyes. "No, sir."

"You have work tomorrow, don't you?"

"Half day," she whispered.

"So you need to sleep."

Susan tried to shake her head.

Ian didn't pay the least bit of attention. "Sometimes it's more important that everyone gets what they need than one person gets what they want."

*I want it too.* Susan didn't say the words out loud, a fact she was incredibly grateful for. But it didn't help her deal with the fact the idea was still inside her head, it was still the truth. With the need for sleep pounding through her body, she still wanted her master more than rest.

Panic spiked inside her at the sheer unfamiliarity of the situation. "Let go of me."

"Do you remember what your safe word is?"

"Is that your answer to everything?" she demanded.

"No, but it is your answer if you really don't want something to happen between us."

"Nothing is happening between us. I was an idiot and agreed to belong to you for far longer than I have any interest in. That's it. End of story. I won't make the same mistake when the three days are over."

"Three weeks," Ian said.

"What?" Susan tried to pull away from him, but didn't manage to do more than wriggle and rub herself against his erection.

"When the three days are over, I'm going to ask you to belong to me for three weeks," Ian informed her.

Then, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, he turned them both onto their sides so he spooned snugly against her and went to sleep.

## **Chapter Six**

\* \* \* \*

Insane. Completely, bloody insane. There was no other explanation. Sensible women did not realise they were in way over their heads and go back for more. If her master was kind enough to let her leave his side for long enough to complete her half-shift in the bar then she should have had enough sense not to return to him afterwards.

Susan glanced at the overnight bag on the passenger seat next to her. It contained all the things Ian had ordered her to bring back to the garage with her. All those things and only those things. Insane...

As she stopped at a set of traffic lights, Susan took a deep breath and forced herself to relax. Her eyes dropped closed for a moment. Her mind was instantly filled with memories of the last time she'd made her way to the garage. She could practically feel Ian's hand stroking up the inside of her thigh, pushing her skirt back as he trailed his fingertips even higher.

Opening her eyes, Susan looked down at the jeans Ian had decided she should be wearing when she returned to her master's side. The sight wasn't quite enough to convince her that she couldn't feel her master's hand on her leg.

At least she knew that the sensation of still being marked out as Ian's submissive wasn't entirely caused by psychosis. The leather that had rested around her throat might have been swapped for a simple silver chain, but it was still a collar. She wasn't imagining the steadying weight of it around her neck.

Another set of traffic lights did little to sooth her nerves or convince her that she was doing the right thing by deciding to follow through with their agreement until the end of the three day scene. By the time she cleared a third set of lights, her heart was racing so fast, she was sure she was going to drive herself to distraction long before she managed to steer her way back to Ian's side.

Turning a final corner, she pulled in to the garage. The big roller doors stood open in welcome. It was barely a ten minute drive from the bar where she



worked. Her master must have driven her around and around in circles along that first journey just to confuse her—as if reality wasn't confusing enough without someone bugging about with it and making it even more complicated. Susan turned off the ignition and leant back in her seat.

She might have survived the hour she'd spent in Ian's company that morning by pretending that she was only there under sufferance and that she would leave at the first opportunity, but this afternoon obviously required a different strategy.

She'd come back. She had her chance to run for the hills and she'd come back anyway. That made it damn difficult to maintain her show of reluctance.

Taking a deep breath, Susan did her best to pull herself together and stop acting like an idiot. No doubt Ian would just think she was back because she was too proud to welch on the rest of the scene. He couldn't know what stupid thoughts were spiralling inside her head.

As she got out of the car and picked up her overnight bag, men's voices floated out from inside the building. It sounded like a good half a dozen men were laughing and joking with each other inside. Ian wasn't alone.

Susan's hand was still on the car door. She'd almost decided that she was simply going to get back behind the wheel and drive away when a man came out of the door at the back of the room. He smiled when he saw her and waved to her before he disappeared around the corner, a packet of cigarettes in his other hand making his errand clear.

The friendly wave made things clear too. She was expected. And more to the point, if she left now, Ian would know that she had come this far before she bottled it. Susan squared her shoulders and tightened her grip on her overnight bag.

It wasn't the first time she'd taken part in a public scene. It was probably exactly what she needed to remind herself that Ian was no different to the other men she'd played public scenes with in the past.

Nodding to herself, quite pleased that she suddenly seemed to have all her thoughts straightened out into a nice neat little line, Susan walked down the hallway at the back of the loading garage and into the main workshop.

A radio played in the background. Several men stood around one of the cars studying the engine as if it might jump out of the car and do something interesting at any moment. Ian was off to one side by himself, staring at one of those computer monitors that had so fascinated him during their private scene.

The men stopped talking when they saw her standing in the doorway. The sudden absence of chattering voices seemed to catch Ian's attention. He looked up from the monitor and glanced over his shoulder. He followed their line of sight until his eyes fell on her. Susan tightened her grip on her bag another notch, waiting for his reaction.

Her master smiled his welcome and beckoned her over.

Susan walked across the room. Her trainers didn't make the same click across the floor as her high heels had, but she was acutely aware that every eye in the room followed her silent journey towards her master.

Ian slipped his hand around her waist and brushed their lips together as if they were a perfectly vanilla couple. Susan hesitated, not entirely sure what was going on or what was expected of her right then.

"Good day?" Ian asked.

Susan nodded. Was there a better way to spend the day than staring at brewery invoices while trying not to let anyone around her realise that she was quietly desperate to squirm in her chair, just for the joy of feeling her paddle-sore backside rub against the seat of her trousers?

Ian's fingers stroked the hem of her shirt, where it grazed across the low slung waist of her jeans.

"Did you bring everything?"

She nodded again.

"Take a seat and wind down. We've got another hour to go here."

Susan walked across to the battered armchair where he'd sat with her in his lap, to the exact spot where he had somehow convinced her to agree to three days under his control.

Once she was sitting as he ordered her to, Ian's focus returned completely and instantly to his computers. Susan watched him for a few moments, wondering what sort of game he was playing with her now.

Gradually it became apparent, that whatever the game was, it didn't involve her master paying the least attention to her. A glance around the garage confirmed that the other men had followed his lead. She had her orders. She was to just sit there and relax until he was ready to play. Dipping her hand into her overnight bag, Susan pulled out the book he'd instructed her to bring with her.

Ian glanced across at her and smiled his approval, but his attention was soon back on the computer. Susan picked up her book and pretended to start reading where she had left off. After a few minutes in which nothing at all happened, she stopped pretending and started actually reading.

\* \* \* \*

"Anything else, boss?"

Ian didn't even look up from the computer as he heard the mechanic's footsteps stop behind him. "No, that's fine, you can go."

"See you on Monday."

Ian raised a hand in absentminded acknowledgement. The tweaks they'd made to the engine should have yielded far better results. He sighed and closed the file, setting the statistics aside for Monday, to be studied with fresher eyes.

One task as complete as it was going to get, he turned his attention to a far more interesting prospect. Susan was thoroughly engrossed in her book. If the half an eye he'd been keeping on her had read the situation correctly, she'd stared at the first page for about twenty minutes before she read a word. Still, he was quietly pleased that she'd relaxed enough to read at all. She'd been so

tightly wound when she walked in that afternoon, he'd thought she was just going to glare at him for the full hour.

She didn't look up as he studied her, or even when the sound of the last mechanic to leave for the weekend closing the big roller doors floated through to them. One of her fingers twirled a lock of hair in between turning pages. Ian's lips twitched into a smile. It might have been far more accurate to say that she was a very good actress than a very voracious reader.

The tension in the hand holding the book open betrayed her. His submissive might have been enjoying her book a few minutes ago, but she was now well aware she was under scrutiny.

"If you expect me to treat you like part of some x-rated show and tell game, you're going to be very disappointed," he mentioned, quite casually.

Susan glanced up at him. "I didn't say anything."

"But you did expect me to tie you up regardless of who was here."

Susan shrugged and dropped her eyes back to her book. "You said you saw me in a club. Most club players are used to an audience. Should I apologise for not realising you're shy?"

Ian crossed his arms and leant back against the work bench.

His lover didn't look the least apologetic. She looked both confused and as pissed off as hell with him for not acting in a way she could make sense of. Her eyes sparkled with annoyance. It was a very good look on her. Ian's lips quirked into a smile as he decided it was probably best not to mention that fact right then. In his experience, few women liked to be informed they were beautiful when they were angry—even when it was true.

"You never doubted I would come back this afternoon, did you?" she asked.

"No."

Susan glanced up at him. Then she quickly looked away, as if staring into empty space was far more preferable than looking at her master.

"You've never struck me as a woman who breaks her word on a whim. You agreed to submit to me for three days. I expect you'll do exactly that," Ian said.

She didn't need to know about those moments during the day when he'd barely been even be able to breathe, he was praying so hard that he hadn't misplayed his hand.

Susan looked back to her book for a full minute, but he doubted she took in a single word that was written on the page.

"And now you haven't got an audience to worry about?" she asked.

"And now you haven't got an audience to worry about, sir," he corrected.

She repeated the correct form back to him without the slightest hesitation, but that wasn't the most interesting thing. Even before she reached the honorific attached to the end, he could see that she was starting to relax.

It was as if he'd taken her in his arms and told her that everything was going to be fine. He supposed in a way he had. He'd told her that their scene within a scene was starting. The game was on. She was good at scenes and games—unless he read the situation entirely wrong, that was the only thing she was used to.

He studied her across the width of concrete floor that separated them. She'd pulled her feet up onto the chair and made herself comfy over the last hour. For all the nervous energy he could sense racing through her, she also looked quite content, as if she was starting relax into her master's space and accept her place there.

It wasn't much progress in the grand scheme of things, but it was something. It was enough to let Ian feel that starting up a real scene would be creating balance between the two personalities that existed within each of them rather than retreating into playing a game because the play was the easy part for both of them.

Straightening up from his lounge against the work bench, Ian walked across to one of the cars they had been working on that day. He trailed his finger tips over the body work as he examined its potential. The bonnet still felt slightly warm from the residual heat of the engine. It would do nicely.

"Come here, Susie."

He didn't look up from the gleaming black paintwork. He didn't need to. He had no doubt Susie would do exactly as he said, right up to the point where he tried to introduce something that was like real life into the game. Ian was reasonably sure all hell would break loose several times before he convinced her that sticking around after everyone had zipped up wasn't inherently evil. But until then, she was all his. He smiled slightly to himself.

"Clothes off."

Technically, he didn't need to look up to ensure she was following that order either. But it would have been a crime to waste that view.

She didn't even hesitate before she pulled her T-shirt up over her head. Her hair had barely finished tumbling around her shoulders before she'd reached behind her back and undone the fastening on her bra. The scrap of lace landed on top of the stretchy cotton a few feet off to her right.

There was no show, no pretence. Her master wanted her to take her clothes off and that's what she was doing. Ian took a deep breath and let it out very slowly as he watched his lover reveal her body to him. Shoes kicked off. Jeans shimmied down. Her knickers followed a moment later, and she stood before him, naked but for the silver chain he'd wrapped around her neck that morning.

Glorious...

"Come here, Susie."

A glance at the floor by his feet had her kneeling before him. The black leather collar slipped back around her neck so neatly it was almost impossible to believe it hadn't lain there for years. Ian stroked the mark into place before he stepped back.

"The chain, sir." The reminder was politely spoken, a submissive reminding her master of something she was sure he would wish to do if the matter hadn't slipped his mind.

Ian touched his finger tips under her chin, encouraging her to look up and look him in the eye. "The chain stays."

She frowned up at him. Ian held her gaze, waiting her out, waiting to see if the little reminder that she would still belong to him even after the leather collar came off, bothered her enough to make a real protest.

"As you please, sir."

Her tone of voice made the actual words quite irrelevant. She might as well have said go screw yourself. It was obviously what she was thinking.

Ian grinned. "On your feet." He tossed his keys to her. "Toy box. Long leather straps. Fetch two of them."

Susan rose to her feet and followed the order without comment. When she returned she knelt on the cold concrete to hand them to him.

Ian took them, and his keys, from her hands. It didn't take a minute for him to have the straps fixed to the car exactly as he wanted them, each one running through one of the car windows and attached to the inside of the doors.

"Susie."

She rose to her feet, walked the few paces to his side and offered him her hands. Taking her left wrist, he wrapped the leather snugly around it before fastening the buckle on the back of her wrist.

He left her standing there, as he walked around the bonnet. He held out his hand for her other wrist. There wasn't enough slack for her to even think about walking around the bonnet. The only way she could reach her master was to stretch herself out over the glossy black paintwork and span the bonnet with her arms.

Ian saw the moment she realised that. She approached the challenge cautiously, unsure how to accomplish what her master wanted, but at the same time, there wasn't a single hesitation to try and do what he required of her. Ian took in every detail of her careful progress towards him. It took a full minute for her to lower herself to her stomach on the warmed metal and reach her hand out towards him. A few seconds later her right wrist was bound exactly as the left had been.

Ian took a step back to admire the view. "Perfect," he whispered to himself. Susan wasn't going anywhere.

She must have caught the whispered word, right on the edge of her hearing. She squirmed her discomfort with the compliment against the car.

"And what shall I do with you now, sweetheart?" Ian asked, as he stepped closer and ran his fingers up her spine in echo of the way he'd stroked the car itself a few minutes earlier.

A shudder ran through his lover.

"Answer me, Susie."

"The whip, sir," she suggested.

He gently stroked the strands of hair that trailed down her back out of the way so all her skin was exposed to him.

Someone had been paying attention when she looked for the straps in her master's toy box. She'd obviously taken careful note of the other toys he'd stashed away in there. Ian traced several lines across her back where the whip might fall.

"No," he mused, as if he was considering the proposition very carefully and making his decision right there and then.

Susan's right cheek was resting on the bonnet of the car, her face turned towards her master. Her eyes were closed, but Ian could still see every emotion that passed across her face. Confusion came and went. She blinked open her eyes and glanced down her body at the highly polished metalwork beneath her.

The chances of that paint finish surviving a man wielding a whip weren't good. He saw the moment she realised that.

"The crop, sir," she suggested instead.

Ian didn't need to hear any more suggestions. His final decision had been made the moment he saw her assume that a dominant would obviously care more about a car than the submissive stretched out over it.



He painted some similar lines across her backside anyway, flicking his finger at the end of each line to show where the tip of the crop might one day snap against her skin.

He'd drawn a dozen lines against her skin before he felt his annoyance begin to fade. If, as he suspected, all she had done was play out quick scenes in clubs, she couldn't be blamed for not knowing what a real master's priorities would be.

"Not while you're still sore from yesterday," he told her as he stroked his palm over the slightly heightened colour.

"I'm fine, sir," she protested.

He couldn't even call her a liar for saying it. The paddling had been relatively light. She might still be a little sensitive, but there was no doubt that she was physically ready for another session.

As much as he would have loved to indulge her right then, he was well aware that he'd already proved he knew how to deal with a masochist in those first three hours. Now it was time to show her how a good master took care of his submissive through three days.

"You're still blushing for me," he observed. The redness of the previous night had faded to a beautiful soft pink, almost as if she was embarrassed by how much pleasure she had taken from the paddling.

He took several paces back and just enjoyed the way she looked for several long minutes. She didn't like being left like that.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Susie?"

She hesitated and tried to look over her shoulder to find him, but he knew he was out of her line of sight. When she realised that too, she dropped her head forward to rest her cheek on the bonnet again.

When Ian stroked his fingers up the inside of her leg, she jumped and jerked her legs together.

"No, sweetheart."

Susan's body shifted against the car as she took a deep breath. Then she shuffled her legs further apart in acceptance. Ian let his fingers resume their journey up the inside of her leg, tracing slow lazy patterns against the soft, sensitive skin. The higher he got, the more she tensed up. Ian leant over and kissed the back of her neck. He had no doubt that the whip would have been easier for her to accept—so much less intimate than the simple touch of a master's hand.

"Do you like being touched, Susie?" he asked.

He held his breath as he waited for the answer. Very slowly, she nodded.

"Good girl."

"Like this?" he asked. Dipping his hand between her spread legs, he trailed his finger tips ever so lightly over her clit.

Susan gasped. She pressed back against his fingers. Ian merely gentled his touch even further in response, so she still got exactly what her master wanted and not a jot more.

"Susie?"

"Harder, sir," she whispered.

He pressed more firmly against the sensitive little bud of nerve endings, pulling a moan out of her.

"Did you think about me while you were at work today?" he asked.

She didn't answer.

He took his fingers away altogether.

Susan obviously got the message. She nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Did I have you squirming in your chair?"

She nodded again.

Such honesty deserved a reward. He let his nail scrape very gently over the tip of her clit. The expression of pure bliss that passed across her face damn near took his breath away. The sound that left her lips was practically a purr.

Slow and steady, he kept on pushing her a little further into her submission. Question after question, touch after touch, he kept going until she squirmed

helplessly against the car, desperately trying to find some form of relief against his fingers.

An hour and more must have passed. The more he teased her, the more he learnt about her body and the easier it was to keep her right on the edge of her orgasm.

She whimpered against the metalwork, her ragged breaths painting patterns against the shining black. His own breaths were far from steady. It took all his control not to let the hands that teased her tremble and betray his own need.

"Tell me what you want now, Susie," he whispered. "Do you want the whip?"

She shook her head.

"Crop?"

Another shake of the head.

"Paddle?"

Susan shook her head again.

"Tell me what you want then, sweetheart. You can have whatever you want—you just have to be honest with your master."

"You. Please, sir. I just want my master."

Ian took his hand away from her. Susan closed her eyes very tight and bit her lip as if she really had to struggle to hold back the instinct to protest at the loss of his touch. She'd been honest. He didn't doubt that. If she'd been trying to lie to him, she would have asked for a whip, a crop, for something she could have received from any man who did nothing more than visit a leather bar after work.

Unwilling to take his eyes off her for even a second, Ian scrabbled at his fly. Button. Zip. Denim pushed aside. He never looked away from her as he freed his erection from the tangle of clothes.

Her words hadn't been a plea for sex, a plea to come. There had been far more to them than that. The quiet desperation in her voice meant that some part of her was willing to admit that she needed this, that she needed to be under a master's protection if she was to ever have any chance of being happy.

Scrambling in his back pocket, Ian grabbed at his wallet. He fumbled in the leather until he managed to extract a condom. Money and credit cards thrown aside in his rush, he ripped open the condom packet.

The moment he was sheathed in the latex, he reached out to Susan. She arched into his touch. The frown that had marred her forehead since he'd stepped back from her disappeared. For a few seconds, Ian really felt as if her master's touch really could make everything right in her world.

He leant over her as lay spread out for him on the bonnet of the car. She squirmed underneath him, trying to push herself up against him as he covered her body with his own. She spread her legs wider in offering.

"Please."

The plea shot straight down to Ian's cock. No more teasing. Neither of them could take it right then. Ian slid into her slow and steady, burying his shaft inside her to the hilt. Susan froze underneath him.

For what felt like a life time, he couldn't move either. He rested his forehead against her temple, sure that if he moved the whole world would crumple around them, or the spell would be broken, or worse still that he would come before they even got truly started.

Slowly, carefully, he reached out and put one of his hands over her bound wrist. Her fingers were formed into a tight fist as she fought for control too. She shouldn't need to do that.

"Hush," Ian whispered in her ear. "I've got you."

And with that, he began to move—slowly at first, then more confidently. Pulling back, he rested his palms on the bonnet and supported his weight above her. Looking down between their bodies he watched as his shaft disappeared inside her. She pushed back against him as far as her bondage would allow, trying to find a rhythm that would compliment his as he thrust hard and deep with every stroke.

Looking back up, he caught sight of a moment of pure bliss in Susan's eyes as he pushed into her again. She squeezed around him, making him groan out his own pleasure.

Her lips fell open in a brief moment of silent ecstasy. She'd been so close to the edge before and he could tell that she was hovering right on the cusp of her orgasm now. One more thrust was all it took. She clenched around him as she came, demanding her master do the same.

Ian tried to ride her though it all, but as he saw the bliss in her eyes it became impossible. For once, he couldn't do anything but follow his submissive's lead. Ian came, tossing his head back and yelling out his own satisfaction into the bare, echoing room.

The whole world stopped. For several long, perfect moments there was nothing but bliss as he thrust deep inside her and finally fell still.

Susan's body shifted underneath him as she fought to catch his breath. Ian managed to hold most of his weight off her until he'd forced enough oxygen into his lungs to feel confident that he wouldn't fall flat on his face if he tried to stand up straight.

His submissive stayed where she was, apparently quite content to remain there for as long as he wanted. It took every ounce of his self control to step away from her the way he knew he had to.

When he came back to her side a few minutes later, Susan hadn't moved an inch. She lay exactly where he'd left her, as if she thought he might leave her there until he was ready to play out exactly the same game with her all over again.

He undid the restraints around her wrists and checked the skin that had been bound by the leather. A very slight blush from the friction of the straps lingered there, but it wasn't anything that would last through the night. He nodded his acceptance of the marks.

Even after she'd been freed and allowed to turn over so she sat on the bonnet rather than lay stretched out across it, Susan didn't seem too enthusiastic about moving away from the car.

Ian smiled down at her. She was all submissive and sleepy, as he picked her up and carried her over to a spot under the sports car at the other work station—the one that was still suspended way up in the air. She curled into his body and, even though her hands were free, she made no attempt to support herself, she merely trusted her master to look after her.

He set Susan down very gently on the thick quilt he'd spread out on the floor. One little clip and the collar was fastened to the chain hanging down through the half built chassis.

Susan looked from one element of the scene to another, but she made no comment, she just lay down on the quilt and closed her eyes as if she expected him to go and check up on the computers he'd already shut down for the night.

Ian lay down next to her. Susan blinked her eyes open. "What are you doing?"

She half sat up. As she moved, her hair fell forward into her face. Ian reacted more quickly than she did. He slipped his hand into her hair, twining his fingers through the long strands. As he held her hair back from her face, he guided her to lie down with him and rest her head on his shoulder.

"What are you—?"

"Resting," Ian told her.

She seemed confused by the idea.

"Sometimes masters like to rest after a scene too."

"The scene's over?" she asked, starting to sit up.

He settled his hand on her shoulder and kept her curled close against his side. "The scene is over, the three days aren't."

She hesitated before subsiding back to where he wanted her to stay.

Her head moved against his shoulder as she shook her head. "Why can't you be like everyone else?" she whispered. He was almost certain that she didn't want the words to escape, but they hung in the air regardless.

Ian stroked his hand up and down her spine as he tried to work out an answer.

"Have you ever submitted to someone you cared about?" he asked after a long silence.

"What?"

"It's a simple question. Have you ever cared about any of the men you submitted to? Have you ever fallen in love with any of the dominants you played with?"

Susan hesitated, wondering how the hell she was supposed to answer that. *No, but I'm scared I'd fall in love with you far too easily? No, you're the only one I've even thought about when I'm not actually being tied up by him*

"Sweetheart?" he prompted.

"They were my dominants, not my boyfriends. I know the difference." She did know the difference, she reminded herself, just because she sometimes found it difficult to remember the difference when she was with Ian, that didn't mean anything.

Ian gave a half laugh. "Yes, because the real world's simple like that, isn't it? All neat little boxes where everyone you meet can be filed away under pretty little labels that never overlap."

Susan closed her eyes. The world had been that simple once. Before Ian walked into the bar that night, everything had been simple. It had also been as boring as hell, but it had been safe and boring, sane and boring. There were far worse things in the world than boredom.

"I would never have pegged you as a complete sadist," she whispered into his shoulder.

Ian stared up at the car dangling above them. She got the distinct impression that he was considering the statement from all possible angles. "Does that come with a translation?"

"At the end of our three days, all this will be over. Why try to make me fall in love with you? Why make me want things that don't make sense?" And why couldn't she had been smart enough to fall for a normal, run of the mill sadist who just liked stringing his lovers up and laying a whip to them. She could cope with that sort of sadist.

"Do you know why you got bored with the club games?" Ian asked.

Susan shrugged, doubting the change of topic was going to help her get her head on straight.

"There's only so far you can go with a man you don't give a damn about, with a master you don't really trust," Ian said. "Those sorts of games are fun for a while, but they are just games. Sooner or later a woman who submits the way you do will need more than games—whether she wants to need that or not."

Ian stroked his fingers through her hair as he settled himself a little more comfortably on the blanket beneath them.

"Sooner or later a dominant will stumble across a submissive who calls to a part of him that doesn't want to let a lover go when he takes the handcuffs off—whether he wants her to or not."

Susan shook her head, trying to clear it of the submissive fog that wanted nothing more than to believe everything her master told her.

"You said it yourself—that first night in the bar. Men like me, women like you, we can't play silly little three minute games—not forever. Eventually it has to be about more than a temporary game, doesn't it?"

Susan closed her eyes.

"At the end of our three days, I'm going to ask you to belong to me for three weeks," he informed her. "And at the end of those weeks, I'm going to ask you to belong to me for three months. After that..."



Susan looked up and met his eyes. She wasn't sure what scared her more—the idea that all this would be a distant memory in a couple of days, or the idea that it really could somehow go on forever.

He stroked her cheek. "First word in the front of your head. Say it."

"Scared." She couldn't stop the word leaping out of her mouth before her brain had time to consider the wisdom of uttering it. Deep down she knew there wasn't any maybe about whether or not she would fall in love with him. She was already there. The breath caught in her throat. She wouldn't have agreed to three days if she wasn't.

Ian brushed their lips together. "Smart girl."

It was the last possible thing she'd thought he might say to her.

"Just because you're a masochist, that doesn't mean you like being hurt—at least, not in the way a man you give a damn about could hurt you. That puts whips and chains in the shade, doesn't it?"

Susan closed her eyes for moment. It was so close to the thoughts inside her own head, that she couldn't bring herself to argue with anything he said.

"Don't think a dominant would feel scared too, if he realised he was falling for his sub and there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it?"

"What?"

"It works both ways, sweetheart."

Susan opened her eyes very wide and just stared at him. Part of her wanted him to say it, but another side of her screamed that she couldn't hear him say he was falling in love with her and keep it all together. There wasn't enough space left in her head for the sort of panic attack that particular piece of news would require.

"Don't worry about any of that right now. One step at a time," he told her.

Susan nodded. One step at a time. That sounded far more sensible than anything else in her head. She latched on to that thought as she met her master's gaze once more. One step at a time. She could do that.

Looking up at her master, she saw the tension in the lines around his eyes. Whatever he'd said, it wasn't until she saw that look in his eyes that she realised that he might actually be as lost in the unexpectedness of all that had happened between them as she was.

"Three weeks doesn't sound so bad, sir," she whispered. "I think I could like belonging to you for three weeks." It wasn't much of a concession, after what he had come so close to saying, but it was all she had room in her mind for right then.

Ian smiled as if he understood. The tension in his expression disappeared. He pressed a kiss on to her temple as if he had no doubt that everything was going to be fine. "Good girl."

Susan closed her eyes and rested her head on his shoulder again. She couldn't just lie there with her master forever. She knew the world didn't work like that. But maybe she could let go of everything else and just relax with him for a minute or two.

Or maybe she could lie there and relax for three minutes. Susan smiled slightly to herself. It was amazing what could happen to a submissive if she took a chance and gave into temptation for three minutes...

## **About the Author**

\* \* \* \*

26 years old, from Wales, UK, Kim writes about kink, love and happy endings. If a story doesn't have those three things, it's not going to be written—at least not by this writer!

Apart from that, Kim likes to write a little bit of everything. Male/Male, Male/Female, menage, vampires, werewolves, ghost, time-travel—that sort of variety always keeps life interesting.

A firm believer that there is no “One True Way” for people to kink, Kim also likes to let the characters in each book pick their own ways to dominate and submit to each other. As long as they stay safe, sane and consensual—Kim's happy to let them live their lifestyle 24/7, or just open the toy box on weekends—whatever's right for them.

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\* \* \* \*

Kim loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at [www.total-e-bound.com](http://www.total-e-bound.com)

\* \* \* \*

Also by Kim Dare

Collared: Turquoise and Leather

Collared: Imperial Topaz

G-A-Y: Gaydar

G-A-Y: Gay Like You

G-A-Y: Gay Until Graduation

G-A-Y: Gay For Pay

G-A-Y: Gay Divorcee

G-A-Y: Gay Since Today

Perfect Timing: You First

Perfect Timing: Silent Night

Perfect Timing: Time To Do

Pack Discipline: The Mark of an Alpha

Christmas Spirits: The Gift

My Secret Valentine: Secret Service

Night of the Senses: Whispers

Caught in the Middle: Between Tooth and Paw

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Friction: Yes!

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