

ELLORA'S CAVE TABOO

THE
DUNGEON
Gourmet

NARA
MALONE

The Dungeon Gourmet

Nara Malone

The Marquis de Bond blogs about cooking and kinky sex. While it may be easy to blog about sensual domination, applying it in real life has challenges. Recipes for love don't follow plans. New ingredients show up unannounced, other ingredients turn stubborn and refuse to be what they are.

Sarai's free-spirited submission drives Bond crazy but captures his heart. Sarai doubts the survivability of a relationship forged in fantasy. To prove her wrong, Bond invites the one man capable of stealing her away to join their sex play.

Now all three will discover if two dominant men are a recipe for love...or war.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

The Dungeon Gourmet

ISBN 9781419927928

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Dungeon Gourmet Copyright © 2010 Nara Malone

Edited by Grace Bradley

Cover art by Dar Albert

Electronic book publication April 2010

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

THE DUNGEON GOURMET

Nara Malone

Dedication

To all the dungeon dwellers at MDS who made me welcome, encouraged my erotic blogging, answered my questions and supplied French lessons.

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Chevy: General Motors LLC

Corvette: General Motors LLC

French Country Ale St. Amand: Vanberg & DeWulf Co., Inc.

iPhone: Apple, Inc.

Popsicle: Lipton Investments, Inc.

Velcro: Velcro Industries B.V. LLC

Chapter One

A blonde hostess, dressed in black corset and stockings, invited Bond to follow her. At one time the soft rustle of silk, the whiff of perfume and the wiggle of bottom would have lifted his desire like mercury in a column. Now his only thought was to wrap up this meeting and escape. He'd closed the sale he was in town to make and was almost to the Beltway when a text message came through—an urgent plea for five minutes of his time. A friend he couldn't refuse. Another delay he couldn't avoid.

Who would have thought that he'd be looking forward to a weekend of sipping iced tea and listening to crickets? Well, there would be other amusements, a sweetly curved amusement. He found himself craving an evening breeze laced with honeysuckle and the sound of Sarai's bare feet padding across the front porch to join him.

The hostess seated him in a booth. Fine black leather gleamed in the soft light. "Welcome to Club Krush. I'm Katie. We have Ginger to entertain you. Lady Krush will join you shortly."

Bond looked across the rows of empty tables and sparkling glassware. A redhead took her first seductive swing around the dance pole. Music throbbed. Katie brought his drink. He sipped and smiled, recognizing St. Amand ale. Krush must be buttering him up for something big.

A crash, followed by a nerve-severing scream, sent what should have been his next swallow sloshing over his white shirt.

* * * * *

Sarai tucked the phone between her ear and her shoulder and lifted thick hair off her neck, letting a hint of breeze cool the perspiration there.

"Don't worry," Bond told her. "It is only a minor delay. I will be there tomorrow, for sure. In the meantime, it's an afternoon in the dungeon for you. You can't keep neglecting your courses."

A siren's whoop made her wince and hold the phone away. She waited until it dropped off enough to be heard. "Is that an ambulance siren I hear? Are you sure everything is okay?"

"Don't worry...the ambulance, she leaves now, and I'm not on there. Everything is fine."

Sarai didn't believe him. His French accent thickened when he was stressed. She could almost see his long fingers raking dark hair back from his face as he talked, knew silver sparks danced in his blue eyes.

Arguing was useless. She returned to the only subject he would discuss. "I can't write that paper in an afternoon. My brain is desert dry and so is the topic."

"Let's see if we can't moisten it."

Her mouth went dry as well.

Bond's voice rumbled with warning. "And I will check, so don't think about sneaking off. The dungeon inspires your best work."

Sarai glanced out the open window. The river wound like a silver ribbon below the hill. When Bond was overseas, she'd sit and watch sunlight play in gold veins over the surface, think of how the water flowed out to the ocean, touched the shores on the other side of the world. In the same way, his spirit and personality had the power to reach across the distance, touch her secret self and make her crave the simple joy of pleasing him. She wasn't going to win this.

She tossed her beach towel on the kitchen table and kicked off rubber flip-flops. She tried reason. "Getting away from the desk for a while will spur my creativity."

"You have been spurring your creativity for three weeks. It's my turn."

She flopped in the chair and plucked at the fringed edge of her cutoffs. He was so sexy when he was unshakable. She pressed her thighs together to block desire, purring in response to Bond's determination.

Bond's tone softened. "You are afraid, afraid you will fail. Yet, you always make the dean's list. You work today. Stay logged into the dungeon and I'll slip in for chat when work allows."

She poked out her bottom lip.

"Don't pout."

It irritated her that he guessed her response. She crossed her legs and felt the tug of damp panties against tender lips, caught the scent of her desire. Peaches. Bond said she reminded him of sun-warmed peaches. If she was a peach, that Gallic growl in his voice was the sun that warmed her.

"I don't," she grumbled.

"Your education is neglected, pet. This will be corrected. Today. I am clear?"

"Crystal."

"I emailed instructions. It will help with the inspiration."

"Yes, Sir."

A low, almost animal wail startled her. "Nooo. Nooo."

"What's that, Jacques?" She used his first name, their signal something serious needed discussion. "Is a man sobbing?"

The sound receded, a door slammed, quiet returned. Bond cleared his throat. "It is nothing serious. Don't worry."

"It's usually serious when guys cry."

"This one is...how do you say...a drama queen. Be good. We'll talk later."

The Dungeon Gourmet Blog...spicing up your love life.

August: Le Marquis De Bond's Toasted Peach Ice Cream

This is the secret.

Timing.

Yes, imperfect timing can still yield good results. But in my dungeon, only superb will do. And for this result, timing is the hub, the heart of the scene or recipe.

We begin with the ingredients. The peach. No spring green for this dish. The firm, tart flesh of the early summer varieties won't do. Only the voluptuous, August peach—matured to perfection—serves us.

Now, perfect peaches—like fine wine (and certain other delicacies)—need time to grow into the full richness of flavor. The cold cellar, and containment in good oak stocks...er...barrels, can develop the multilayered bouquet. For the peach, the heat and time suspended in the summer sun brings her to perfection.

Anyway, this is the test: Hold the peach loosely in your palm. Notice the weight. The good peach should have some weight, a heft in your hand. She should fill your fingers. Now, exert a light tension with the pads of your fingers on the skin, a tugging apart, fingers and thumb pulling in opposite directions, just so. If she's ready, the skin will part to reveal glistening, succulent flesh. Ah, my mouth waters.

Breathe deep.

You will know.

The scent of a perfect, pluckable peach is like no other. The sweetness of her will make your teeth ache to sink in.

Her juice will flood your fingers.

Se mettre au jus, mes amis. Mmm. Enter the juice.

Put your tongue back in your mouth and go pluck some peaches. We will continue.

~Bond

Chapter Two

Bond slipped the phone in his pocket and rejoined Krush in the kitchen. Kitchens usually made him feel at home, his standard cure for the loneliness of travel was to find a kitchen and cook. The tidy lines of stainless steel appliances and tiled worktops didn't soothe tonight. The armor of dominance and control he wore like a familiar suit felt moth-eaten. Tonight his passions looked like what they were, an illusion, a curtain he drew between him and mortality. But mortality had a way of punching through illusions, reminding that it, after all, was the final lord and master.

"I owe you, Bond," Krush said when he slipped off his suit jacket. Katie lunged for it when he started to hand it to Krush. "Yes you do, Karen," he said, using Krush's first name instead of her Domme title, something that earned him a second look from both Katie and the blubbering Ginger. Krush looked as pale and rattled as he felt. He tried to lighten her mood with teasing.

"You have no idea. You owe big hours." He left her to puzzle over his comment, unfastening a shirt cuff and rolling the sleeve with quick precision, stepping over the pile of broken glass Ginger pretended to be sweeping. He needed to survey the status of the kitchen.

"I owe you big time," Krush corrected, "the expression is big time." She stalked after him, tossing sleek hair as she did. Her hair was styled in a Cleopatra bob. Bond preferred softer cuts, but he knew her patrons adored Krush's carefully crafted image. Pale skin, contrasting night-black hair and makeup that emphasized her piercing gaze and full lips.

Bond shrugged off her instruction, his nose cataloguing the array of dishes in various stages of preparation, the state of each. His mind ticked off where and when his particular twists on each dish needed to be employed.

It was not just that Krush needed him. He needed to work. Maybe work could finish the job Sarai had started, keep him anchored in the moment and push the past

hour out of mind. He lifted a lid, tasted the steam rising from the pot and reached automatically for the spice rack beside the stove.

The escape was short-lived.

"I don't know how you can all just go on, business as usual, like nothing happened," Ginger wailed, his falsetto scraping like a knife blade over Bond's already raw nerves.

Krush either didn't choose to acknowledge the drama, or more pressing priorities pushed Ginger's theatrics to the edge of her awareness. She peered over Bond's shoulder, gazing into the steam, lips pressed in a thin line, eyes narrowed, as if something lurked in the vapor that might answer the question they all tiptoed around. Why? Because if there was a reason, if there was some failure they could point to, something Mimi could have done better, then they could all go back to pretending that they could avoid what happened to her. He wanted to shake Krush, snap her out of it. The best antidote to fear was anger. He was a master at unleashing hers.

Bond threw up his hands. "You want my help. This is fine. I will fill in for Mimi. I will not play nursemaid for your *garçon de pantie*." He stabbed a finger in Ginger's direction. "Keep him out of my way." Krush always referred to her toy boys in the feminine and it irritated her that he wouldn't.

His lip curled and his tone curdled when he told Ginger, "This is not how to serve your Mistress, making scenes, playing baby. She has enough to carry without carrying you."

Krush's whipped-puppy look vanished. He glanced at his watch. Krush had allowed him to take control for exactly forty-six minutes. A record.

"I appreciate the help, Bond. I need it. As for Ginger, she's mine. I will tell her how to behave. I expect you to treat mine with the same considerations I would show to one of your playthings."

Ginger smirked at him through smeared makeup and crocodile tears. A mistake, because Krush saw.

"Leave this," she said, waving her hands at the mess Ginger had spent twenty minutes not sweeping up. "Go finish the website updates I gave you earlier."

Not a fool, Ginger scurried away, his ponytail bouncing, glittery streamers on his dance costume fluttering in his wake.

"So much talent for such an annoying package," Bond grumbled when the double doors swung shut behind Ginger's exaggerated hip sway.

"I rely on Ginger for a great deal, so I'd appreciate it if you'd refrain from picking on her."

"Picking?" Bond had just rolled up his second sleeve, thought better of it and started rolling it back down. Ginger needed the reprimand he'd given. He'd been taking advantage of Krush's scattered emotions.

"I'm sorry, Jacques. This situation has me feeling cornered. Forgive me?" Apparently, Krush remembered that she was relying on him for a lot too.

A quick swallow, the reflexive clench of hands to fists, followed by slowly unclenching them and smoothing her skirt, told him she was still badly rattled.

Had she ducked behind her usual shield, pretended to flirt and flutter lashes, or had she groveled, he would have put on his jacket and kept going. She reached out to him. Her hands were warm and firm on his, the gaze steady and honest. He couldn't think of a time Krush had admitted a weakness to him.

Katie had coaxed the traumatized kitchen assistant back to the business of making salads. She still had Bond's coat draped over her arm and was looking from Krush to him. His answering sigh made Katie giggle and wrung a rare smile from Krush.

"What?" he growled.

Krush patted his cheek. "You are so French."

"Even your sigh has an accent," Katie said, dropping her eyes and her voice. "So sexy, Master Bond."

He ignored Katie's flirting, caught Krush's hand when she moved back and held it trapped against his cheek, his gaze as direct as hers had been. It didn't pierce her secrets. She looked away and withdrew her hand. Whatever her original reason for calling him here, the afternoon's drama had to take priority. He'd pursue that issue later.

"I will stay, Karen. I owe that to Mimi. But you keep Ginger away from me."

Krush grabbed the broom Ginger had left against a counter and started cleaning up the mess. Bond watched her for a moment. He couldn't shake the feeling of doom clinging to his thoughts in the same way the humid air clung to his skin.

He lifted another lid from a pot and sniffed bland soup, wincing. No matter. He was here for one night. Whatever Krush was hiding, could stay her secret. This cooking, this was a tragedy. Mentally, he amended the thought, apologizing to Mimi for his lapse in loyalty. He couldn't remember even one of the instructions she'd gasped at him. He vividly remembered thin work-reddened hands clutching his beer-stained shirt while he held her. He'd rocked her and murmured comforts in French, like that could help stave off the convulsions that came in waves. He couldn't fathom why she would be trying to recite her recipes to him while she fought to cling to life. It smacked too much of the desperation of last words. What would he have to say if he thought it might be the last thing he said? Did he really have any more of a life than Mimi? He grabbed a bottle of rosemary and wished for a bottle of bourbon.

* * * * *

Sarai could never stand outside the door to their playroom without Bond's words running through her mind, accented just the way Bond said them, so sharp and clear that she more heard than thought them.

"Time to come into the darkness. Time to cross the threshold. Time to be *L'esclave du désir*, desire's slave."

Hanging to the left of the door was a small shelf with clothes hooks below it. Sarai propped her backpack against the wall and set the frozen water bottle on top of the shelf, rivulets of moisture dripped down the sides, forming a dark ring on the wood.

She hesitated at the next step. Would the day ever come when she could do this without pause? It broke all the rules little girls learned—keep your clothes on, cross your legs. What she and Bond did, on the other side of the door, broke rules no one thought to teach. She reached behind, pulled the ties on her bikini top loose and draped it over a hook. Next, she unsnapped her cutoffs, taking her time with the zipper, letting her body fall into the slow rhythm rituals demanded. It helped center and steady her. She wriggled her bottom to get the shorts past her hips, felt rough denim drag against her firm thighs and calves—firmness built on hard work, the tasks required to run a small farm on her own. She stepped out of the shorts and followed them with a black silk thong—her clothes neatly arranged on three hooks, her thoughts a complex tangle of “shoulds” and “shouldn’ts”.

Retrieving the backpack and bottle, she put a hand to the glass doorknob, felt the cool, faceted crystal points press against her damp palm. The door swung open on silent hinges.

An identical shelf was mounted on the wall inside the room. This one held the only items she was allowed to wear beyond the threshold. Sarai put her things down again, as she had outside, and shut the door on her world. She slid the brass bolt on the door home—not to lock anyone out or in. The bolt symbolized locking away the everyday world with all its problems. She made herself a willing prisoner in Bond’s world, slave of his desires. And, her own.

Following the ritual laid out for her, she gathered her long tresses and tied them with a bit of black lace, the way she might tie back the heavy folds of a curtain to reveal the view beyond the window. When she looked past her hazel eyes, into the dark-pupiled windows of her soul, she saw only a blank slate, her future waiting for her to

choose a path. But that wasn't her task today. Today her task was to complete a project started, lay another brick in the foundation she could build her future on.

Collecting the required items from the hooks, Sarai knelt and placed each one in the order required on the scarred wood floor. How much did he remember of that first day he'd guided her through these steps? Head bowed, she lifted the collar in her hands, but it was Bond's hands she saw, him kneeling behind her, a gentle smile, eyes glowing, arms coming round her. Her mind replayed the image of the first time they'd gone through this ritual together. He held the collar in front of her like a sacred object. She found the courage to touch, run her fingers over silver studs and stiff black leather still warm from Bond's grasp. Sturdy buckles and clasps radiated power and permanence, made her acutely aware of the gravity of choices she made. She'd dropped her hands back to her lap, bowed her head, and watched from under her lashes as his hands guided black leather around her neck.

With a click and clatter, buckles and clasps slid home and the full weight of her choice settled around her neck. Heat settled low in her belly, a hot, liquid craving that throbbed with painful intensity. A silent, incomprehensible part of herself craved the power of wearing his collar, of looking into his eyes and promising to be all he desired, the desires he knew about and the ones only she could help him discover.

Now she fastened the collar in place, then rested, her palms on her knees, breathing in a slow, rhythmic pattern until her mind settled, and until the craving to reach between her legs to dispel the growing tension there eased to a manageable level.

Four more leather bands, identical to the collar design, but smaller, came next. One for each wrist and ankle. With each additional symbol of submission, her body's reaction intensified. A fine tremor in her hands made fastening buckles awkward. Her skin warmed, hummed with a need to feel the sweet friction of a man's body against hers.

Several lengths of chain remained dangling on the hooks, gleaming in the soft light that filtered through curtained windows. She looped the chain around her fingers and

chilled metal branded her palms with memories—the gleam in Bond’s eyes when he watched her undress for him, the growing erection under dark trousers, the shiver it gave her to present herself naked while he remained clothed.

She turned away from the door to face a room as scantily clad as she. Naked was a theme with Bond. Naked girl. Naked room. Only the essentials allowed. Nothing to distract. Nothing to hide behind. The closet contained Bond’s “tools”. The room held the simplest of desks, more a table with a single small drawer. The chair in front was a standard-issue oak desk chair, four legs and ladder back. She’d learned from Bond that simplicity in design could lend itself to a variety of creative uses. The only other object in the room was a tall metal coat rack, the sort you saw in some motels—a shelf at the top, a bar for hangers to go over. Its steel legs were bolted to the floor in the center of the room. Looking at that rack stirred memories that had her toes curling against the hardwood floor. Bond didn’t use that rack for hanging clothes.

She took her time emptying her backpack, arranging the laptop and books, draping a towel over the chair seat. With everything prepared there was nothing left but to carry out the last instructions. She looped a short length of chain around each front chair leg and attached it to the hasp on her ankle band with a brass lock. The usual war erupted in her head—you don’t have to do this, shouldn’t do this. He will never know if you just write the paper without all these trappings.

A part of herself she was only just getting to know—the part Bond uncovered—argued back. This was more than a sex game to her, to Bond. It was a journey into herself with tasks set that demanded she stretch herself and examine both what she’d been taught to think and what she concluded from experience. Bond’s games poked into her shadows, exposed her fears and inhibitions.

She shut out the critical voice and returned to the task she’d been given. Suspended in the frozen water bottle was a zip-top baggie, inside the baggie a key that fit the brass locks on her chains.

Her fingers cupped the tall plastic cylinder. It was slippery with moisture and her insides clenched against the memory of holding Bond's cock, slick and warm from her body, guiding it back where she needed him. Here in the intimate fantasy he created for them, she felt as if his mind was making love to hers. In some ways this felt more intimate than her marriage had been. The thought intruded. She didn't want to think of those times she'd laid skin-to-skin with her husband, sighing at the right times while her mind wandered off, spinning fantasies that helped push her over the edge into a minimal orgasm.

She pressed cold fingers over her labia. A chilled fingertip against her clit zapped her with electric pleasure, making the bud swell and crave more. She positioned the frozen bottle on the chair seat between her thighs. It would ensure she kept her legs apart, open, a symbol that all of her was to remain open to Bond.

She was as slick and wet on the inside as the bottle was on the outside. Her clit throbbed, tempting her fingers to nestle closer, to strum pleasure from taunted nerves.

Self-control was another part of the game. If she waited, if she followed all instructions and time limits, the result made the tiny little orgasm she could give herself now, compared to what would come at Bond's command later, seem like comparing the flicker on the end of a birthday candle to the roaring blaze of a bonfire.

She adjusted the bottle so that it sat just a finger's width from her pussy. Chill radiated outward, a frosty breath to tease the naked lips she kept shaved smooth for him. She'd resisted shaving that thatch of curls in the beginning, but in that too, she'd given way to discover moments such as this, her whole body awake and aware, centered on the frosty waft over sensitive lips. Her pussy wept, begging for attention.

Self-control could only last so long. Before hers gave out, she completed the preparations. The last item to go in place was a length of chain threaded through the ring in front of her collar and locked to each of her wristbands. It was long enough to allow her to reach the keyboard on the laptop, long enough to reach the top of the

quart-sized water bottle, but not long enough to reach lower. It wouldn't allow arousal to tempt fingers into her heated pussy.

The last lock was in place. She was bound for the duration. Her only escape lay in the desk drawer—a spare key in a sealed envelope. Bond would know if she used it and he knew that she hated failing. Nothing but an emergency would move her to touch that key or the cutters in the drawer, also provided as an emergency backup. They were sharp enough to slice through the leather like paper.

She powered up the laptop. A chain slid across her breast, bumped her nipple with the movement. The nub drew tight, a tugging sensation that sent prickly heat running through both breasts. She held her breath while a new surge of craving crawled through her. The need to press her legs together, fight her craving and resist sensations, was a reflex that brought her thighs together around the icy bottle, clamped tight until the cold burn forced her to relax and loosen her grip. Chill branded her inner thighs like a kiss, fed the heat inside. Sparks fanned to flame in the tight tunnel clenching around a phantom memory of Bond's cock—driving deep and hard to ease her agony.

The ice inside the bottle gleamed with a thin sheen of sweat. How long until it melted enough to free her? One hour? Two?

Chapter Three

The Dungeon Gourmet Blog...spicing up your love life.

August: Le Marquis de Bond's Toasted Peach Ice Cream

In the dungeon, vanilla is a dirty word. Beneath us. Boring.

Attention. Attention determines boring. If you truly pay attention, you discover secrets. Secrets that fascinate.

Vanilla teaches us about secrets. I ask you: how could this exotic scent, this spice dressed in leather, brimming with little dark seeds, be unworthy of our taste?

The imitation, perhaps, is dull. Or, the manufactured—sold in a bottle is not for us.

But opening this little one, parting her seam, scraping those dark secrets from inside—ah, the scent of her. Yes. She is worthy. She is what we are about. Yes? Take the vanilla, probe her secrets, and reveal the dark fantasy she is.

~Bond

* * * * *

Bond surveyed the kitchen from its helm, the hub where he could turn and sample the scent and sight of the four corners—stove, ovens, grill, prep counter. Vegetables scattered in colorful piles added tang to air already scented with bubbling sauces and pastries baking. The arrival of the dinner crew produced two capable prep workers to assist. There was something soul satisfying about people who did what they were asked to do. Even with the exact same ingredients, with a dish prepared exactly the same way,

there were variations in weather and ingredient quality that produced different results. With attention to details, with a responsive staff, control could be maintained, results perfected. When the rest of life went crazy, he could count on two places where he could produce satisfying results—in the kitchen and in the dungeon. With dinner preparations under control and proceeding smoothly, Bond had time for a quick break and a check-in with Sarai, who should be reaching a nice simmer in their play dungeon.

He sidled soundlessly past Krush's office door where she and Ginger huddled together at the computer keyboard. He left them to it, having no desire to let them suck away the little bit of free time he'd stolen for himself.

He cornered Katie at the bar, nabbed another St. Amand's, asked about finding a private space and followed her to what she optimistically called a break room. It was more a walk-in closet with a couple of round cafe tables and half a dozen chairs squeezed inside.

"No one really uses this place," she said.

Good. That suited his purposes.

She moved a chair around the side of the table, sat down beside him and sent him a flirty smile. That didn't suit his purposes. She crossed her legs, folded her hands in her lap and started to fill him in on the latest news at Club Krush.

"Had you heard about Mimi's cookbook getting published? Did you know she'd landed a cooking show on a cable channel to run on Saturday mornings?"

She didn't pause for an answer or look up to get a visual response like a nod or shake of head. Chatter must be Katie's coping mechanism. Bond let her prattle.

"I think the stress of the everyday crises that popped up in the kitchen, plus the other two projects, was too much. I always wondered how she finds time to sleep. I guess she doesn't."

This was Katie's take. Mimi did too much. If Katie didn't make that mistake, she wouldn't wind up thrashing on the kitchen floor like Mimi.

"Don't worry about Mimi." Bond patted Katie's knee. "Mimi is tough. She'll be out of that hospital before we close up tonight."

It was a lie of course, but he could think of nothing else to say. Remembering the gray cast to Mimi's skin, the blue tinge to her lips under the clear oxygen mask, made his stomach queasy. Katie, warm and vibrant under his hand, helped steady him.

"You didn't see her collapse, Master Bond, the way her eyes rolled back in her head. I thought she was dying right there in front of me."

"I've seen people faint before. It's scary how the eyes roll back, but they recover and go on. It's probably nothing more than exhaustion."

"I asked Lady Krush who I should call. I thought she'd have family to sit with her, hold her hand. But there's no one. It's so sad."

It was. He needed to get away from the subject of Mimi. Judging by the dashed efforts he'd seen in the kitchen, her cooking did nothing to add quality to the customer experience at Club Krush. Could be her illness was behind today's shortcomings. But none of that had to do with him. He promised himself to keep his opinions to himself and not get caught up in offering advice to Krush on making improvements.

Katie had gone quiet, head down, hands folded in her lap. Bond withdrew his hand from her knee, mentally cursing himself for letting it linger too long, giving Katie the wrong impression.

Her tongue did a quick little glide over her lips and an audible swallow followed.

Mon Dieu. She was working up to something and he didn't have to stretch his brain to figure out what. The postures were submissive and he was a dominant. Not wanting to get tangled up in the drawn-out process of politely rejecting her, he threw the first roadblock he could think of in her path.

"Tell me the story on Krush and Ginger."

Katie shot him an assessing look before lowering her gaze as she believed he expected. "You don't like Ginger." She wasn't accusing, simply stating what she saw. "Is it Ginger, or do you dislike Krush's panty boys on principle?"

Bond sipped his ale to hide a smile, then said, "What principles? My reputation must be slipping."

Katie giggled, a flirtatious, trying-too-hard laugh that put his guard back up.

"As for Ginger," he said. "What is there to like?"

"He has that effect on everyone at first. When he started working here I hated everything about him."

"But not now?"

She lifted one shoulder in a half shrug. "He grows on you."

"If Ginger is an acquired taste, I don't have any interest in that acquisition. I don't care for all the drama."

"Ginger has been more annoying than usual since he stopped the hormone therapy."

"Hormones? For a sex change?"

"Yes. He was in love with this girl, Lucy, and she prefers women so he thought if he..." Katie's eyes were back on his face.

Bond just stared.

"I know it sounds nuts..." Color crept up her neck. "Okay, that's a bad word choice."

"Crazy?" Bond offered with a smile.

"Crazy is better. It sounds crazy, but Ginger likes playing the femme role and he is a romantic. Grand gestures in the name of love. That's Ginger. He's got such a short attention span, I think he would have given the idea up before he got through all the stages of the process, but he caught Lucy with another woman, which naturally led to him trying to hurry the process."

Bond was tempted to ask why Lucy would be involved with Ginger when she preferred women, but decided he didn't want to sit through a long history of Lucy's life and held his tongue.

"And then a week later they eloped."

"Ginger and Lucy eloped?"

"No, Lucy and her new girlfriend. That's when Lady Krush stepped in. Ginger was such a wreck."

"I just don't see this picture. Ginger and Krush. He's not for Krush."

"*Au contraire*, Master Bond, they are great together. He's got a multitude of talents and she helps him stay on course rather than flitting back and forth and never finishing anything."

"No, no. I see why Ginger needs Krush. Krush doesn't need that neediness."

"Oh, he isn't all need. His playful side has turned her giggly at times."

"Krush?"

"I know. Hard to imagine, isn't it? Especially with the current situation."

"Current situation?"

Katie dropped her gaze, pushed back from the table and straightened a garter. "Look at me blabbing the afternoon away. I have to get back to work." She wiggled and jiggled herself between the chairs and out the door before Bond could set his glass on the table.

Odd. But it freed him to check on Sarai. He'd sort out what was up with Krush later. He fished his iPhone from his pocket and was happy to see it find an open wireless connection he could use.

Chapter Four

Sarai was caught between two windows, two worlds and the two women she was. One window, the one above her desk, carried in the scents of summer—mowed grass, honeysuckle and the peaches that blushed and bobbed in the sun-drenched orchard. The other window, the one on her desk, was black as night, the darkness broken only by sporadic bursts of white text popping up on the screen.

Sarah Williams—the real-life woman—wanted to put aside her assignment, throw on cutoffs and a bikini top, rush down the hill, grab the rope and swing into the river. Laughter punctuated by Tarzan yells and cannonball splashes rode a breeze through her open window. She recognized voices of friends.

The virtual-life woman—Bond's Sarai—served her sentence in the home edition of a dungeon and the cyber chat that kept her connected to Bond when he traveled. The website was owned by a friend of Bond's and served as a marketing tool to attract customers to her club. Bond's blog was on site as well, but in a members-only area Sarai didn't have access to.

The chat was as stark as the study Bond had redecorated for their play—no graphic decoration, no avatars, nothing but black screens and white text. Evidently, Lady Krush shared Bond's minimalist philosophy.

"This room is the second threshold to our world," Bond had explained on her first visit. "Only people accepting of our fetishes visit this space. Here there is nothing to distract you from who you are."

"Who am I?" she'd asked. "I'm not sure I know anymore."

"You are growing into who you need to be. Who you've always wished you dared to be."

She hadn't understood then how true those words rang. Wasn't she already an adult with an identity in place? She had no prior knowledge of the BDSM lifestyle when she met Bond. She knew very little about it now. Bond tapped into a side of herself so secret that she never had the courage to explore it until Bond's powers of persuasion and patience had lured her into herself.

"You come naked to our world," he'd said. "There is nothing hidden or covered up. There is no part of you, my pet, that isn't beautiful to me. There is nothing you can't tell me, no fantasy you can't share. Understand?"

She had. Understanding and believing were two different things. She could think of several secrets Bond might not find beautiful. One fantasy in particular, she was sure would not please him. She kept those to herself. She might not believe everything he did, but she enjoyed his erotic fantasies. Most days she enjoyed his erotic fantasies. They were better with a cyber Bond she could tease and torment. They were best with a live, touchable man, touching and teasing her back. This solo sentence was the most difficult task he'd set for her.

She'd left the air-conditioning off to speed the melting ice. Moisture beaded the plastic. She picked it up and pressed it between her breasts with a sigh. Droplets splashed on her stomach. She rubbed the chilled plastic back and forth over her breasts. Chill spread through her skin, bringing up goose bumps, contracting her nipples so tight it felt like teeth had closed around them. She held the bottle against each in turn, to cool the fire there, but cold had a burn of its own. Moisture dribbled over her nipples, trickled along the undersides of her breasts. A memory flared in her mind—lying on her back in bed with her hands handcuffed to the headboard, Bond straddling her, squeezing her oiled breasts, pressing them tight together, while his cock slid back and forth between them. Her mouth watered, remembering how she'd managed to give the head a swipe or two with her tongue and then watching him come, head tipped back when he growled his pleasure, cream spilling warm and thick between her breasts.

She shifted in her chair, craving him inside her with an intensity she'd never experienced. She slid the bottle down over her belly and pressed it tight against her weeping pussy. She curled over, resting her forehead on the desk, taking one deep breath and then another. Blessed cold seeped into fevered flesh. She kept the bottle clamped in place until the cold became unbearable.

She could do this. She could regain her self-control. She needed to think of something else, drag her mind out of her body and into something that could keep sensation from driving her insane. There weren't many options open to her. She was locked into Bond's game now. And there she would be staying until Bond let her go for the day or she finished her paper.

She was enrolled in a long-distance degree program and while she did manage to get great grades, she often filed the limit of the extensions allowed because she procrastinated on finishing assignments. She had another five papers to knock out in the three weeks before her final extension expired. She did appreciate his attempt to make study more appealing by including goals in the erotic power games they played. He'd outdone himself this time.

If she chatted with someone, she might get enough of a mental grip to start to work on the paper. Friday afternoons in August weren't a popular time for hanging around cyber-dungeons. Only two other names joined Sarai's on the screen.

A young man's roar, a woman's high-pitched squeal and a splash that could have emptied the river had Sarai grinding her teeth. She should have shut the window before she locked herself in.

LadyKrush@Sarai: Here on your own again, girl?

Perfect. When Krush wasn't hitting on her, she was hitting on Bond. Sarai rubbed at tension between her eyes. The essay outline looked more interesting by the minute. She ignored the message and started jotting ideas on paper.

LadyKrush@Sarai: Don't you want to belong to someone who has time to spend with you?

Krush loved stirring things up. A storm hung in the air like a moist blanket. Not a summer storm blooming beyond the sunlit window, but a darker storm gathering in the dungeon shadows.

Sarai@LadyKrush: He'll be along. Being here makes me feel close to him. So, this is like spending time with him. In a way.

That sounded lame even to her.

LadyKrush@Sarai: Is that what he tells you?

Krush was definitely up to no good. Sarai didn't care. Her eyes burned from staring at the dark screen. Her brain was empty of any thought, save cool river water wrapping around her. The sooner she patched together an outline and got on with writing, the sooner she'd be free. Only five pages on the value of corporate bureaucracies stood between her and the river. If she finished before the ice melted, she'd earn the right to use the key in the envelope. She groaned and pushed her thick red hair back from her face, held it off her neck with one hand while she typed with the free one.

Sarai@LadyKrush: His job demands travel. He uses every trick he can devise to reach across the distance and touch me.

They were private messaging each other—messages with an “@” between the usernames didn’t show up in the main chat window. The other name on the user list, Ginger, didn’t show a recent time stamp for a message. Sarai had assumed Ginger was chatting with Krush privately too. The last time stamp was before Sarai signed into the dungeon. Hmm. Bond liked to play dungeon hide-and-seek, often signing in with some other name so she had to chat with all visitors to the chat to find him.

Sarai@Ginger_TV: Knock. Knock. Anyone home?

While she waited for a response from Krush or Ginger, she tried to think of good things bureaucracies accomplished. Good refused to flow from her pen. The words traffic gridlock, cultural homogenization, nuclear weapons, global warming flowed onto the page instead. She crumpled the paper. Maybe it would be better to start from a different angle.

LadyKrush: ****Sits at the bar next to Sarai, pours her a mint julep.**** A peace offering, little girl.

Sarai was suspicious. Krush hadn’t used a private message for the last post. In this old-style CGI chatroom, the message would remain for anyone to see. Maybe she was aiming to make Bond jealous. That was impossible. She was about to tell Krush so. Then it hit her. If she could come up with five good things to say about Krush’s manipulative games, she could draw some parallels to corporate power games and knock out her paper. She decided to string things along in a teasing, play-hard-to-get way and see where it led.

Sarai: ****Rubbing my stinging eyes and sneezing. Blowing nose on napkin.**** Lovely perfume, Lady. ****Drawing a smiley face in the moisture on the glass, before lifting it for a long cool sip.**** Delicious. Thanks.

Ginger_TV@Sarai: Brat. Why do you bait her?

Sarai smiled and straightened, leaning toward the screen with interest.

Sarai@Ginger_TV: I thought that was you, Master. Gilligan's Island – nice disguise.

Ginger_TV@Sarai: LOL

Sarai thrived on multi-tasking. The more mind-numbing the task, the more tasks she needed to do at one time in order to get anything done at all. Sparring with Krush and chatting with Bond in disguise set the wheels in motion. She fleshed out ideas for her paper in between typing comments.

The aching need between her legs and the throb in her nipples remained. The air in the room felt like a living thing, sliding over her skin, but she finally managed to step outside the torment and make progress toward her goal.

Krush was one of the better dungeon writers. She didn't just leap at a sub with whip and chains. She liked to set a mood. And she painted a pleasant scene for Sarai now, ignoring Sarai's attempts to annoy.

LadyKrush: ****It's cool and dark in the dungeon bar. Refreshing tired eyes and tired body on a sweltering day. Soft jazz plays in the background. Ginger sits alone with her drink and her sorrow. Krush has been bored out of her mind, but just when she is about to give up a bright little plaything pops in to amuse her.**** Relax, little girl. Let the music unwind you. Let the dark work its magic.

Sarai fanned herself with the sheet of paper she'd been scribbling on. Krush's words wove a soothing spell and it was funny how that dark monitor screen lent itself to painting mood images in her mind, the way dream images painted themselves on the

backs of her eyelids when she closed them at night. She pulled the top on the water bottle and sipped the cold water from melting ice, but she tasted fine Kentucky bourbon, mint tingled in her nose and frost brushed her bottom lip.

LadyKrush: **Sliding from my barstool I move behind you, lifting a heavy curtain of curls from the back of your neck, draping them over your shoulder. My fingers find the tight spots, one by one they warm and soften for me.**

Sarai rubbed at her own neck where the kinks set in from hunching at the keyboard all week.

Ginger_TV@Sarai: She's good. Tell me how you know I'm your Master.

Sarai@Ginger_TV: Laughing. You aren't as sly as you think you are, Master. Your thing for redheads was a clue.

LadyKrush: **My hands slide down to knead your shoulders.** Tell me what's on your mind, little girl.

Damn. She could feel those fingers, hear that voice honey-sweet in her ear. When she imagined Krush in the flesh she saw a slender brunette in a short red dress. She'd never played with a woman, hadn't thought about it, but she'd learned from Bond there were pleasures to discover in being open to possibilities. She was going down and she tried to fight it.

Sarai: I'm not a little girl.

LadyKrush: Aren't you? Isn't that why you come here? You can put down your responsibilities for a while and be taken care of, hand the decision-making to someone else?

Sarai grabbed her pen and scribbled parental figure, corporate family. She chewed on the end and considered what Krush said. While she hated to admit it, there was a kernel of truth. At times, she juggled so many responsibilities and decisions that choosing paper or plastic at the grocery store seemed too much effort. And while she kept a boundary between her life as Sarah and her life as Sarai, the fantasy she escaped to freed her from responsibilities. A blinking private message from Krush drew Sarai out of her ponderings.

LadyKrush@Sarai: Do you love Him?

Sarai@LadyKrush: This isn't the best day to ask me that.

LadyKrush@Sarai: I'm waiting for a real answer, girl.

Krush was all bluff. They both knew Sarai answered to no one but Bond and even that wasn't your typical do-whatever-he-says-no-questions-asked arrangement. Yet, there was a part of Sarai that lit up when faced with an order, when faced with a certain style and a certain voice. A sharp dominant, and Krush was sharp, would spot that.

Sarai@LadyKrush: The dungeon isn't the kind of place you go looking for love.

LadyKrush@Sarai: Maybe not. Sometimes you find what you didn't know you were looking for. Sometimes it hides in the last place you'd look.

Sarai@LadyKrush: Is there something specific you're trying to tell me, Lady?

Sarai made more notes—corporate culture=group cultures, expectations, peer control (belonging?).

Krush left off the private message and sent a new one to the public screen.

LadyKrush: **Leaning in close, my warm breath whispers down the back of your neck, heats and softens you, carries away the tension.**

Sarai's hands froze above the keys. That was more intimate than she wanted to be. She tried to shake off her creeping dread. This was just words on a screen, not something she was actually doing. Not real.

Ginger_TV@Sarai: Nice. So sexy. Lean back against her and see what happens.

Sarai frowned. Bond knew she wasn't into public scenes, that she wasn't into being shared with other dominants. Krush distracted her with another private message.

LadyKrush@Sarai: I've been asking around about Bond. Your best interests at heart, of course.

Sarai's heart beat faster. What was she up to?

Sarai@LadyKrush: Of course, Lady.

LadyKrush@Sarai: Seems he was quite the dungeon Romeo for a while. All the girls dropped to their knees when he entered a room. He played the field, usually with several at a time.

Sarai glanced around, grabbed the water bottle again. She swallowed and shivered, cold sliding down her spine as well as her throat. She knew these things. He played with lots of girls. She knew the reason for his dungeon hide-and-seek game was to avoid the swarm of messages that arrowed his way every time he turned up in the dungeon using the name Bond. She'd told him she understood—a master could have

who he wanted, when he wanted. However, she'd rather not hear about the others if that was okay with him. It was a phone conversation, and she remembered that he'd started to answer, paused—a pause that lasted a year—and then changed the subject. She should stop Krush from telling her the details now. But she didn't.

She remembered Ginger's request and typed about leaning against Krush. She tried to make it sensual and detailed, but the details that really had her attention were the ones from Krush. And wasn't that Krush's plan all along?

LadyKrush@Sarai: Two girls in particular rose to his favor. Nola—lots of hot and heavy phone sex for those two. Brianne—pretended to be way more experienced than she was. Did he mention she negotiated to meet him?

What moments before had been unbearable craving for Bond turned to a heart-numbing chill. Sarai thought she might get sick. She should log off. She just kept going through the motions of the scene like a robot. Ginger had joined them at the bar. Her fingers played at the buttons on Sarai's blouse.

Sarai@LadyKrush: We don't discuss his personal business.

LadyKrush@Sarai: He broke it off, Sarai. Unexpectedly, with no real explanation, he dropped them both. They both pointed out it was about two months after you showed up in the dungeon.

That made her so happy Sarai let Ginger lift her breasts from her bra, smiled up at her, even licked her lips in invitation to a kiss. One moment it felt like her heart had dropped to her feet and the next it felt like it floated right up out of her body. Not that Bond dropping the others meant anything special. She hadn't gone to him looking for love. She wouldn't let her thoughts go there now.

LadyKrush@Sarai: I have my methods of coaxing out information, Sarai. If he were playing with someone else, I would know. So, I'm curious, what happened to the great Master Bond? Did he fall in love? And while it might appear that his slave whispers with every guy or girl to pop in, a closer inspection revealed that when they ask about her interests she talks about flowers, photography and her dog. Just so you know, Sarai, when they say interests, they mean things like bondage, nipple torture, mind control, anal sex, GS. Do you love him?

Sarai was busy trying to think of a way to politely remove Krush's hands from her breasts and get Ginger's tongue out of her ear. Things were getting out of control and more public than she wanted to be if someone should happen along.

Sarai: What's with you and this love obsession all of the sudden?

Sarai@LadyKrush: Oops. I meant to send that privately.

Ginger_TV@Sarai: So, in general, you don't mind when Master plays dress-up. You like?

Sarai@Ginger_TV: I really hadn't thought about it. When have you played dress-up? Why bring it up now?

Ginger_TV@Sarai: Because he's here.

Who? Sarai looked up at the user list. Bond had signed in as himself and the time stamp indicated he'd been there long enough to scroll back through all the public messages. That storm she felt brewing earlier had arrived.

Sarai@Ginger_TV: Crap. You said you were my Master.

Ginger_TV@Sarai: No, you said I was him. I just played along.

Sarai@LadyKrush: You knew. You knew Bond slips in here under other names and you used Ginger to set me up.

LadyKrush@Sarai: *Smile*

It would be okay. She rubbed her damp palms on her thighs. Bond wasn't the jealous sort. Not that she'd ever tested that belief.

MasterBond: **Master Bond enters the room. Nods at Ginger. He takes Lady Krush's hand, presses his lips to her fingers.**

LadyKrush: **Lady sits, pats the stool beside her.** Sit here beside me, Bond, while the girls entertain us.

Sarai@MasterBond: Happy to see you, Master.

MasterBond: **Sits beside Lady, leans an elbow on the bar, steals a sip of Lady's drink.**

Sarai could see him, big as a bear, dark hair gleaming in the low light, the touches of silver at the temple, stern blue eyes. She could picture firm lips fitting over Krush's lipstick on the glass. It felt like watching him kiss her. She wanted to throw up.

MasterBond: If I may, Lady, I think Sarai has something entertaining to share with us.

Sarai@MasterBond: Master, please, this is not how it looks. Ginger made me think she was you.

LadyKrush: **Nods. Waits.**

MasterBond: Sarai, tell us what you're wearing.

Sarai's throat burned. She drained the last of the water from the bottle. The fat cylinder of ice in the center thunked against the bottom of the bottle when she slammed it down. He was ignoring her private messages. He let Krush plant herself between them. Not a good sign.

Sarai: Jeans and sneakers.

It was a joke. The first time she'd been in a chat with him, he'd started with, "Tell me what you're wearing." Greenling that she was, she had told him what she was honestly wearing. What amused him then, didn't amuse now.

MasterBond: "Sarai, you will kneel in the Lady's presence and you Will tell us what you are wearing. What you were instructed to wear real time. DO IT NOW!"

Ginger_TV@Sarai: He's pissed.

Sarai@Ginger_TV: Sometimes he sounds severe. It's his dungeon persona. He's acting.

MasterBond: Sarai, I'm waiting.

Ginger_TV@Sarai: I don't think he's playing.

Sarai: **Kneeling at Master Bond's feet.**

Her hands hung suspended above the keys. She could not type this.

MasterBond: Now, Sarai.

Sarai: I'm naked.

MasterBond: The rest of it.

Sarai@MasterBond: Master, please. Is something wrong?

She bit her lip. Blinked hard. Staring at the screen so long left her eyes feeling gritty, as if they had sand in them. Why was he so cold and distant? Why wouldn't he answer her private messages? This was something private, intimate. She didn't want to share the way he dressed her to play in chats with him. She sighed and surrendered.

Sarai: I'm naked, collared, chained to a chair.

MasterBond: Keep going.

She leaned back in her chair. Hugged herself. She couldn't.

MasterBond@Sarai: Do you need release, girl?

Sarai@MasterBond: Yes, Sir.

Sir wasn't something he required of her. It wasn't something she'd ever said to another man, even much older ones, in her whole life. Yet sometimes, when they hit a certain place in a power game, it fell from her tongue. It came as naturally as Master had come to her, in her own time, without him demanding it.

MasterBond@Sarai: Think of me in you, girl. That is where I want you to feel me now. Describe yourself to them. Tell them about your ice bottle and how you've been using it. Tell how it makes you mine when I play with you this way, how you have no trouble recognizing me then. Show them how thoroughly I own you.

MasterBond: Now, Sarai. Tell us the rest.

Her willfulness melted under Bond's probing, under the intense heat in her breasts, under the cold tongue of air wedged between the ice bottle and her pussy. She needed

to please him, turn him from frosty commands on the screen to warm growls in her ear. So she described all he asked and told more, about rubbing her body with the dripping bottle, being tempted by the idea she could make herself come by sliding it back and forth over her pussy.

LadyKrush@Sarai: Really? You're really dressed that way?

Sarai@LadyKrush: He likes his virtual play mixed with a lot of reality.

MasterBond: And why are you dressed this way, Sarai?

Sarai: Because I was having trouble finishing an assignment and you wanted to inspire me.

MasterBond: What else did I do to inspire you?

Ginger_TV@Sarai: That's hot, girl. Does he always play with you this way? Do you always do what he says for real?

Sarai@Ginger_TV: He'd know if I didn't.

MasterBond: This is getting tedious, Sarai. What else?

Ginger_TV@Sarai: You are in so much trouble. Grin. Wish it was me.

Sarai didn't grin back. Trouble wasn't fun with Bond. When he wasn't happy, neither was she. Her fingers flew over the keys.

Sarai: You took away my permission, Master.

LadyKrush: **Lady leans to Master Bond's ear, rests a hand on his thigh.** Her permission?

MasterBond: She's not allowed to masturbate.

LadyKrush: Really, Bond. You let the girl run wild. She's stubborn, insolent, and you allow her to make up these silly little code words. You should make her speak plainly.

Sarai: ****Staring at the hand on Master Bond's thigh. She's thinking she'd like very much to speak plainly.****

LadyKrush: That's exactly what I mean. See how she inserts those rude little comments in the scene. No properly trained sub would dare.

MasterBond: You think I should punish her?

Sarai leaned closer to the monitor. What was he up to? The minute Krush had started lecturing him, Sarai knew his annoyance would be shifted away from her to the Domme.

LadyKrush: She's way out of line.

MasterBond: Well then, since she is so squeamish about masturbation...

LadyKrush: Bond, you wouldn't. You'll reward her insolence.

MasterBond: Name the number of times you think it will take to teach you your lesson, Sarai.

It was a trick. She wasn't sure what to say.

MasterBond@Sarai: Careful with the answer, girl.

He was using her to put Krush in her place somehow. Only Sarai couldn't figure out his goal. She didn't know what to say. What was he doing?

MasterBond: Sarai, answer Me. NOW. You'll soon have no permission for a month.

She suspected a trap, but she was so annoyed with Lady Krush that she couldn't resist the urge to flaunt her freedoms.

Sarai: Ten times, Master.

MasterBond: Wrong answer. Leave us.

She was perfectly ready to leave, had been since she arrived. And she wasn't going to do any polite bowing or scraping as she went either. She had her cursor poised over the exit button when his final message popped up.

MasterBond@Sarai: Remove everything. Plant your bare ass by the phone. *Attendez-moi!*

Chapter Five

The Dungeon Gourmet Blog...spicing up your love life.

August: Le Marquis De Bond's Toasted Peach Ice Cream III

Contrasts. Contrasts bring out the exotic.

So, we add toasted almond slices to the mix. Three flavors meld—the female peach, the male almond and the exotic spice of the Tahitian vanilla bean. Unity. Perfection. Your tongue squirms, anticipating the result.

Heat is our catalyst. Heat softens and brings essential oils to the surface. It draws out the unique qualities locked in each element.

Ah, the almonds, a lovely sight, that creamy white flesh, begging to be toasted. Cup slices in each hand, just enough. You will know by the feel, your hands tell you how much. Spread them over the sheet, the cooking sheet. I know what you think, what you want to spread and where. Minds out of the gutter, mes amis.

We need no oils or greasing. Heat draws their oil. Stir as needed. Give them a quarter hour, maybe less. This is the male flavor. It takes no time to rise up.

The female, we leave her tied up overnight, I think. Too trusting. She needs time for lessons to soak in. More on that later.

~Bond

* * * * *

She was stripped bare. Sarai hated the feeling. With a collar or simply his shirt, she felt he touched her in some way. Each day when he was away, he gave her an instruction, something she could do or some item to wear, to hold him close and her loneliness at bay.

She curled up on the couch, knees to her chest, listening to the mantle clock tick through the minutes. The phone on the coffee table sat silent. She tried to figure out what she had done. What should have been a lazy summer afternoon of teasing and play in the dungeon had turned into an arctic expedition. Why had he gone so cold and distant? She had one of his white dress shirts rolled under her head for a pillow and used a cuff to dab at a tear.

It was all silly, really. A game. Imaginary. But it felt on the inside like it had happened. That storm she felt brewing in the dungeon churned in her stomach. She picked at worn cording on the couch cushion. Could a game tear them apart?

She sat up and yanked a throw from the back of the couch, suddenly too cold. She'd turned the air-conditioning up before coming down to wait in the living room and didn't want to leave her post by the phone to run up and reset the thermostat. She blamed the cold on the air-conditioning, but in truth it had more to do with the emotions and sexual frustrations that spent themselves in a bout of shivering. She curled inside the soft cover, wrapping it around her like a cocoon. If only it could give her wings, transport her from virtual lover into a real lover in Bond's arms.

Bond had been the lifeline that pulled her out of her grief. When a life too full had suddenly turned to empty, meeting Bond had given her a new place to focus her energies. He kept her mind busy. She'd returned the favor when he needed it. He couldn't throw that friendship away over a sex game. And they couldn't keep letting games take the place of real time interaction.

She didn't wait for the second ring when the phone finally stirred to life. His mood whipped across the phone wires like a Siberian express.

"You need more confidence in the dungeon, girl."

She glanced at the clock. He'd left her waiting for half an hour. She imagined he and Krush had a thing or two to say after she was gone, but not thirty minutes' worth.

"I'm sorry, Master."

"Are you? Most girls kneel to show their contrition."

She slid from the couch to her knees.

If Bond had a superpower, it would be extrasensory hearing. He heard things beyond human perception, like whether she was kneeling or sitting. "That's better. For what are you sorry?"

"For everything I did wrong."

"Nice try." His tone was polar. She winced.

"Did you have a bad day, Master?"

"Yes."

"Will you be here tonight?"

"Don't change the subject. You only make it worse when you play games."

He really was pissed. She'd never heard this clipped tone. Not directed at her anyway. Lady Krush was right about his indulgence with her. He never demanded a thing. He insisted that the things she gave him as a submissive be her own idea, her gift. "The rules are what you need them to be, Sarai." That's what he'd said. What had changed?

"I'm sorry I was rude to Lady Krush."

"No you're not."

She sighed and sat back on her heels.

"Kneel up."

She did. She pulled the phone from her ear and glared at it. How did he know and why was he acting this way?

"Are you paying attention?"

"Yes, Sir."

"You told me you didn't want to be shared with another man, Sarai. Am I right?"

Sweat popped from her pores. The thought of him inviting a stranger to play with them made her ill. "Yes, Sir."

"Then why do I go into the dungeon and find you kissing another man, letting him undress you?"

What? What man? She was mystified. Speechless.

"I'm waiting."

"I'm confused. I was playing with Ginger, who led me to think she was you, and Krush."

"Don't call him a she." She blinked. He was never jealous. He'd always encouraged her to interact with visitors to the cyber-dungeon.

"How do you know she's a guy? You know her?"

"Don't pretend ignorance, Sarai. And as for thinking he was me, haven't I always respected your limits? Is there a reason you would think I would engage in sharing you today, publicly, in complete disregard for what you want and are ready for?"

"No, Sir."

"Then I can only conclude this was your wish."

"It wasn't my wish. I had no idea Ginger was a guy. She, or he rather, and Krush set me up."

"You have no idea? Ginger TV. It said right in her ID that she was a transvestite."

"Transvestite? I thought Ginger TV meant Ginger a TV character, as in *Gilligan's Island* Ginger."

Bond spewed French, paused briefly to insist she couldn't be that naïve, and then spewed more French.

She sighed and sat back on her heels.

"Kneel up."

How did he do that?

"This isn't all my fault, you know. If you didn't have to use other names to hide from your dungeon groupies, I wouldn't have to guess which ID is you."

"What do you mean, groupies? Other women? You think I change names to hide from other women?"

"Why else?"

"You are jealous?"

"No. Now you're changing the subject."

"You get jealous? Like today with Krush."

"You want to slobber on her hand go ahead, lick wax from her ears while you're at it."

"Lick anything I want?"

That silenced her. She wanted to say yes, but she couldn't. The frost had left his voice. He sounded amused.

"I changed my name and made you find me among the dungeon chat crowd to get you talking, pet. You were always so nervous and shy. I see you are outgrowing your shyness. You've come a long way."

He was back to calling her pet. His mood was warming. So was hers. "Really? You did that for me?"

"Yes, really. You still need more confidence, assertiveness for your boundaries."

"I will do better, Master." His change in mood wrapped itself around her like a hug. The tension in her shoulders and neck eased. She relaxed her grip on the phone.

"Touch yourself for me. Sit and spread your legs, slide a finger up that wet slit. Think of my tongue."

"How do you know it's wet?" she asked, sliding down so her back rested against the couch. She slid her finger between moist folds, could almost feel the textured heat of his tongue. Pins and needles of pleasure took her breath.

"I hear your wetness, it threads through your voice. Tease your nipple with my tongue. Use the other hand now, slide a finger through, get it wet."

She moaned.

"Maybe I need two tongues. Make two tongues to lick you, Sarai."

Sarai let her head drop back against the edge of the couch, wedged the phone between her ear and the cushion. Her legs opened wider, one wet finger a tongue at her nipple, while the other licked between her legs, burrowed into her hot pussy. She whimpered.

"It feels nice?"

"Oh, yes."

"Pinch your clit. Think of my teeth."

She obeyed, her thighs clamping together around her wrist, her hips arching upward in response.

His voice was like a touch, stroking her body. The fire his bad mood had banked roared back to life. An afternoon spent in his chains had her so close to the edge that if he took her much farther she'd probably come without even touching herself, come at the sound of his voice purring in her ear, telling her to give him her pleasure.

"Lick the other nipple. I want both your nipples licked at the same time. Then pinch them tight, like two sets of teeth clamping down. And the paper is done, yes?"

Her pussy throbbed and tightened around her finger, wrapping it in slick heat. She didn't want to think about papers. She had to bite her lip to keep the pleasure in check, to draw it out. She slid moist fingertips over her breasts, heat moving from them into her nipples.

"Sarai, the paper is done?"

She let her eyelids drift shut on a sigh. "The paper's not done, but I made a good start."

"I see. Well, we're not done pleasuring you, but we've made a good start." She gathered her nipples between thumbs and forefingers, thinking of teeth and clamping down harder than she intended. But she didn't let go. She squeezed harder and felt the sensation pulse through her veins and blow at the flames licking her pussy. His voice came to her through the sound of her whimpers. "We'll finish when you send me the paper."

Meaning hit like ice water. Her eyes popped open. She sat up, pressing her thighs together to contain the need licking through her. "You wouldn't? You can't just stop."

"I intend to finish. I just haven't gotten round to it." He was mangling his imitation of her Southern drawl as badly as she mangled French.

"Come to me tonight and finish, Master. Be here with me. Please? I will make you so glad. You will think I have six tongues."

He didn't answer. Long silence stretched between them, only broken by the regular in and out of his breath. She was holding hers.

"Not tonight."

It was useless. She could stir his coals all she wished, it would not shake his will. Knowing that only intensified the burn searing her insides.

"You can't keep putting me off, Master. It's cruel."

"No crueler than what you do to yourself when you neglect your goals, pet. And there is still the matter of reinforcement for the dungeon incident."

"I thought we had that all straightened out."

"Ignorance is no excuse. If you intend to explore this lifestyle, I expect you to educate yourself on the various kinks involved. Ignorance invites others to take advantage. You screwed up today. I want you thinking about that. You have an assignment tonight."

She pulled her knees to her chest, hugged them. Wished she could come without touching. It was bad enough he was torturing her, he didn't have to be right as well.

"Really, I'm sorry, Master." A whimper wrapped itself around the words. He wasn't swayed.

"First you finish the paper. Then you sleep, naked and bound. You think about who and what you are. Questions?"

"No, Sir."

"Tomorrow I phone at 11:00. I want you on your knees, naked, ready to tell me what you are sorry for."

She chewed her lip to keep from begging him to be there in the morning, so she could apologize in person. She couldn't handle another rejection tonight.

"Clear?"

"Crystal."

His tone went sexy sweet and soft. She could almost feel the heat of his breath, the stroke of his tongue against her ear. "Sweet dreams, pet."

She couldn't manage to keep the sullen pout from sounding in her reply. "You too, Master."

He hung up and the room felt emptier.

* * * * *

Bond held Mimi's bony hand in his, watched the barely perceptible rise and fall of the white sheet pulled up under her chin. Her breath rattled in and out with the same tinny sound as a lid on a pot coming down from a boil. Liquid dripped from a plastic IV bag, down a long tube that disappeared under her cotton blanket. Another tube, a catheter, snaked out from under the blanket at her hip, carrying whiskey-colored liquid to the bag dangling below the bedrail.

He would have come to the hospital with her, but she'd been so frantic about the dinner preparations, he'd thought to calm her by staying at the club until the kitchen closed. And, perhaps, to put off the discomfort and awkwardness of seeing the exotic

Mimi of his youth reduced to a frail human in an institutional gown. Putting off had cost him the chance to tell her things he suddenly realized he needed to say.

A heart monitor traced a ragged pattern across the screen. He knew what a normal pattern should look like, knew that wasn't it.

Curtains stirred and parted. Krush moved in to stand beside him. She still wore the little black dress and stiletto heels she'd worn at the club. He started to get up, but she shook her head and put a hand on his shoulder.

"They say to me, it's a stroke, severe brain damage," he told her.

"I called the hospital to check early this evening, and they were doing tests, but she was better. I spoke with her. She thought she'd be coming home in the morning." Krush paused, breathing deep, as if the explanation left her winded. She put a hand to the onyx butterfly pendant between her breasts, drew another calming breath and continued. "I thought there was time. If I'd known things were so bad I would have told you, closed for the evening."

"Apparently, there was another crisis, only an hour ago. This left her unconscious." Bond nodded at the monitor. "She has a heart condition?"

"Failing heart. Failing kidneys. Diabetes. And a do-not-resuscitate order."

Bond rubbed his free hand over his face, pinched the bridge of his nose and reached for the memory of a younger, vibrant Mimi, of France, and being introduced to Mimi's American pet, Karen, now Lady Krush. They had each stepped from the world of vanilla sex and into Mimi's arms, exploring the many flavors of love. While he and Karen had never been lovers, the relationship with Mimi created a friendship and both had remained close to their mentor. How had the years slipped away from them?

Krush rubbed his back lightly and they stayed like that, each lost in their own thoughts until a nurse came to shoo them out.

Ginger was in the waiting room, face scrubbed of makeup, in black jeans and t-shirt, his hair tied neatly at his nape rather than the saucy ponytail of earlier. Karen went to him.

"They've taken Mimi up to a room and will call down when she is settled. I'd appreciate it, Allen, if you would wait here, let me know when they call. I need to get some air."

Allen stood, squeezed both of Krush's hands. And then murmured something Bond couldn't make out. It won a weak smile from Krush. Maybe Katie was right about the boy growing on him. Bond's opinion of him inched up a notch.

Bond followed Karen out the emergency room doors, trading the artificial chill for moist heat of a summer night. They moved along the sidewalk to a bench close enough for Allen to find them, but out of the way of the Friday night traffic at the pedestrian entrance to the ER.

Krush sat and Bond leaned against a lamppost. He peered up at the sky but couldn't make out any stars through the thick haze of smog and reflected light. A cricket chirping under a nearby shrub made the silence between them more strained. Bond searched his mind for some topic that could take their minds off Mimi. Karen beat him to it.

"I'm sorry about that scene earlier with Sarai. I was nosing in where I didn't belong."

"No matter," he said. And it didn't matter now. What had once seemed big was forced into perspective by a real problem.

"I worry about her. It's obvious how naïve she is, how sheltered she's been. It's not like you to take advantage."

At first, he could only stare.

"Take advantage? I protect her."

"You keep her isolated. She knows you as the magic man who teaches her all the wonders of edge play, unwraps a side of her she doesn't dare share with anyone else. You are worshipped as hero."

"She is isolated, yes, but not so helpless as you paint her. You don't know her."

"She has been yours at least a year, but you've never brought her to the club. Have you introduced her to anyone?"

"That's not your business."

A blue sedan pulled up in front of the emergency room door in a squeal of tires and screech of brakes. A man leapt from the driver's side and ran to the passenger door. He took a child wrapped in a blanket from the female passenger and they both hurried inside. Bond shoved his hands deeper in his pockets, a chill slid down his spine despite the summer heat. He hated hospitals. Karen's sisterly tone pulled his attention back to the discussion.

"You've fallen in love. It's skewed your judgment."

That stalled him. Where did she get these ideas?

"First, I don't expect you to understand. With Sarai, I'm not playing the traditional dominant role. It's...where is the word? It's a taming. Her isolation was self-imposed. I try to bring her from her shell at the same time I guide the exploration of her submissive side. I can't demand her progress any more than I can demand a wild thing to trust me. I earn her trust as she grows to learn my desires and me. The bond we share, the loyalty evoked, the drive to please me is unlike anything I've known. But more important, none of this is your business."

"No, but I'm a friend. I say as a friend, what happens to her if something happens to you? Do you understand how exposed and vulnerable she is in this transformation?" Again Karen fingered the butterfly pendant. "She needs the security of community as a safety net while she finds her wings. You're always hopping one plane to the next, one country to the next. Wasn't one of your company salesmen kidnapped last year?"

"I will be fine. Nothing will happen to me." But seeing Mimi, a grand rose turned to pale wrinkled petals, made mortality real. Its icy fingers squeezed like a band around his chest.

"Of course. But a community of friends, who will understand and support the woman she is discovering, is a gift she deserves from you."

"I bring her to the dungeon. In the virtual world, she has some control over situations, she can be a submissive in her unique style. The club scene would overwhelm her. Too much knowledge at this point would send her running. The journey within, seeking the challenges that dig into her shadows and help her grow, this she needs. This I guide her through."

"Virtual is not enough, Jacques. She needs to be accepted in a real world. People like herself. People who push back when she pushes too far."

"You might wish for the trained collared pet. I choose the wildling. The club scene would change what she is, what is unique about her. It would be like collaring a wolf and training it to walk on a leash."

"Then socialize in another way, interaction with a few hand-picked friends you invite over."

All of Karen's suggestions required time and careful supervision on his part. He was slammed with commitments and sales conferences on through the fall. Despite progress, Sarai was not ready for more without a dominant at her side. It occurred to him that Karen was pushing to land that role. But he wanted to be there when those first steps were taken. It had to wait. In the winter things slowed down. In the winter there'd be time to do this right, do it himself.

"She's not ready."

"Why? Because it would give her choices other than you? She would learn possibilities you might not want her to learn. That's what you fear. You love her and it's made you afraid to share. Love warps your judgment, steals your self-control."

He could feel rage rise and bubble in him, like water coming to boil. How dare she? He didn't trust himself to speak. He whirled to stalk away and saw Allen approaching, head down, feet dragging.

Bond didn't need to hear the words to know that Mimi's time had run out.

Chapter Six

Corporations are a virtuality, that is, they exist, somewhere on the scale between the real and the virtual. If you've ever tried to get past a robotic phone system to solve a problem, you know it's not possible to have a conversation with one. Like vampires, they are made from human parts, but have superhuman powers. They are born and they die, but you can't shoot one. Once they have their teeth in your life, it's hard to tear free.

Sarai chewed her lip and considered the closing of her paper. Maybe it was the ghost of Bond's tongue between her legs, but the parallels that had started with Krush in the dungeon had expanded. Her relationship with Bond was a virtuality, moving between their real-world contact and the virtual world that kept them linked when he traveled. Pretend with real impact. How dangerous were the games they played? How real did she want it?

Corporate bureaucracies feed on unquestioning service. Like hungry demons, they can seduce us, own us, and suck us dry. Or like good parents, they can shelter, protect, give us safe space and resources to grow. Either can addict. Good or bad they have their beginnings in our longings and their existence in what we allow them to become.

She sat back again, blinking at what she'd written. Uneasy. At least the paper was done. She attached it in an email and sent it off to her professor before she lost her nerve and deleted it. This wasn't the glowing, cheer-for-the-team piece she was supposed to turn in. Her GPA would suffer. She hesitated over the idea of sending it to Bond. He would know she was talking about more than corporate power games. She closed her eyes and hit send, because she needed something real, needed his reaction.

A response came quickly, appearing in her mailbox before she had time to click the logout button on the mailbox screen. Too fast to be a real-time response. It had to be an auto-respond message he'd prepared in advance.

She gritted her teeth, tempted to close the mailbox without reading his message. All she needed was another reason to question the reality of this thing between them.

Krush asked if she loved him. Love who? That was a better question. When so much of their interaction existed only in their imaginations, where did they fall on the virtuality continuum? Did they know each other at all? Then again, their interactions were emotionally intimate, like thinking secrets out loud. Maybe they knew each other better than was wise.

Bond's pull was too strong. She couldn't close the box without looking.

* * * * *

The Dungeon Gourmet Blog...spicing up your love life.

August: Le Marquis De Bond's Toasted Peach Ice Cream IV

The Custard

- * 6 eggs
- * 2-1/2 cups sugar
- * 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- * Prepared vanilla bean (seeds and hull)
- * Pinch of salt
- * 4 cups whole milk
- * 3 cups heavy cream (whipping cream...wicked grin)
- * Timing
- * Contrast
- * Heat

Take your time. It develops the anticipation. Even the eggs need time, have to be allowed to come to the room temperature.

When they are ready. You know. You press your palm around that elegant curve. Test the heat. These things they have no word to describe. You know when it feels right.

Like good whippings, whipping eggs can't be rushed. Whip them into the mix of sugar, flour, and salt. Whip well with your whisk. It's all in the wrist. Make a nice uniform color—no streaks or stripes in a proper whipping.

Now, set the dish aside. Put her in the corner for a time. Let her breathe.

In a large cauldron...er...pot is the word. Put milk and cream in the sauce pot. Low heat. We need finesse, n'est ce-pas? The ingredients are delicate.

You need to adjust heat carefully for good bonding. Without enough heat there is no solidifying. You put too much heat, push the process too fast and you risk scorching the ingredients. Once a singed taste is present, there is no covering or masking, no way to strain it and save what you have. You have to start over with fresh ingredients, a completely new mix.

Come close to the pot. Here is a trick. Hold your hand just above the smooth cream surface. Do you feel that first faint kiss of mist against your palm? This is the lover's response to you. Use this with her. Know when the first kiss of her desire rises to meet you. Let it touch your skin. Savor her. This is the place, the moment, where you add the spice.

Scatter vanilla seeds gently, stir the dark beads into light cream. The vapors rise up, carry her scent to you. Drop in the hull. Stir and breathe. She entices, yes? She is perfection.

Collect your bowl from the corner. Tip a bit of the fragrant creams into your mix. Stir. It is good to stir things up. It is the dungeon way. Keep cooking. Keep stirring. You want thickening.

Ah, I know what you think. Not that. Not thickening you.

Minds out of the gutter, mes amis. Back to work. Think of the sauce, glistening from heat, thickening, simmering. You know how it coats and clings to fingers? We need this here, coating the spoon, quivering at the edge, like liquid lace. Then she is ready.

Use your fingers. Pluck out your pod. The vanilla bean pod. Animals.

When no one is looking, lick your fingers. Savor taste and scent together. Indescribable.

More to come.

~Bond

P.S.

Pardon. She makes me forget. You have to put the hot custard in a bowl, cover, and refrigerate overnight. Go. Make custard.

* * * * *

With all the elements of her meditation in place, Sarai lay back. He'd outdone himself when he planned this particular torment. She should have followed her first instinct and never opened the auto-respond email from Bond.

A silver moon barely softened the room's indigo shadows. Outside crickets chirped, and katydids rapped in time. They seemed to say Mas-ter-Bond, Mas-ter-Bond, repeating like monks chanting. Deeper in the forest a night bird added its voice, Lick-her-well, Lick-her-well.

Sarai tried to put her mind outside in the night, but the collar at her neck, the cuffs at her wrists and ankles, bound her mind inside her body, locked her into Bond's world.

Velcro bonds. She could unfasten them when she chose. She could toss them aside and sleep without them if she wanted to. Her rules, he said. Make it as real as you need. They might as well be chains. They might as well be manacles welded in place.

Her hands had put them in place. At least they looked like her slender fingers. A scar marked the thumb that pressed fuzzy patch into looped square—a thin white line cut by a glass broken doing dishes. Her scar. His hands. They were as much Bond's as if he pulled them on over his own hands like gloves. His will controlled them.

His fingers fastened the padded collar. His voice spoke to her, the way it had in email, the tone as thick and sensual as one of his French sauces, as clear as if his lips were against her ear.

"You dream *à deux* tonight. Feel me as a duet. I could make you believe I am two. Make you know it. This you don't understand. But you know this truth. It makes you simmer inside, this thing you pretend not to want. Feel that evidence, how much you don't want. Feel it there, hot between your thighs. You get so wet, my pet. You get wet just from the sound of my voice."

Fever turned crisp, clean sheets to a rumpled, sweaty tangle as Bond's words made themselves felt. Cotton slid over her skin with every twitch and turn, relentless lover's hands. Sweat slicked her body.

"Feel both Bonds. The one who knows your body and the one who knows the secrets you hide from yourself."

Did she have secrets she didn't know?

"I want you stripped bare, a naked slave to passion, bound and vulnerable to her Master's probing. He will probe with four hands and two sets of teeth to tug and tease your secrets to your lips."

"I don't want that," she said out loud. "I don't need two. One should be enough. One is enough." The words hung hollow in the air. They felt like a lie.

A voice she didn't know whispered in her mind. It would be nice to try, like a taste test. Two tongues. Twenty fingers. Twenty sticky fingers.

She turned toward the clock. Twenty minutes. She'd been bound twenty minutes. The night stretched like a journey in front of her. She would be lost before morning. Her mind would be the first to go missing. Maybe she'd lost it before tonight.

She wanted at least one Bond — a real, touchable one — to walk through her bedroom door and spread her like a meal on white linen. She wanted him to probe her. She wanted to watch him lick his fingers, suck at each one like her taste was a rare delicacy to be savored. And she didn't care about being at his mercy, or being bound by his desires. She wanted him to sink his teeth into her.

He'd asked her why she waited for his permission. She'd wondered herself. You want most want you can't have. She'd had a lifetime of nights when her private pleasure was hers to use or not at her choice. It had never been this, a restless hunger that seared her veins, kept her tossing and turning. It never had made her so slick, anticipating the moment he whispered in her ear, "Come for me." Need sparked in her clit, a delicious prickle. The sensation of the sheet sliding against her pussy a sweet torture. Because she couldn't soothe it. Because it was forbidden.

As the night faded, she realized her craving for Bond's presence worked in the same way, burned all the hotter because she couldn't have him whenever she wanted.

With the dawn and the first sleepy chirps from the woods, she released the bonds, but it did nothing to free her. She was in total submissive mode, would sink willingly to her knees, press her face to the floor at his feet. It was an urge she'd never had. She'd done it for his pleasure a time or two. Now the pleasure would be hers as well. She removed all physical elements of her submission. It was an indicator of how deep she was that being without them was more intense than being with them.

Coffee and a hot breakfast didn't shake the spell. A long shower didn't wash it away.

She'd just lathered her hair when the phone rang. Crap. It wasn't time yet. It had stopped ringing by the time she rinsed, grabbed a towel and rushed to pick up. Frustration built in her the way thunderheads piled up ahead of a storm.

She stomped back to her room, wrapped her head in a towel and found a fresh tank top and cutoffs. The phone started again. She made it on the third ring.

"Kneel," he said in response to her first hello. She went down as if his voice folded her. "You don't sound good."

Neither did he. She tucked the phone between her shoulder and her ear, swallowed against a hot lump in her throat. Words wouldn't come. It undid her that he always knew. He knew with no more than a hello if she was happy, sad, hungry, angry, kneeling. It was what you needed when you played the edge with a lover. It left her more naked than she liked to be.

"Sit back, pet." His words were laced with weariness.

Her breath got more ragged, all the emotions bubbling at the surface. She swallowed again not trusting her voice. Still kneeling, she sat back on her heels.

"Talk to me. Tell me what you learned last night."

She poked her lower lip out like a defiant child.

"I know you. I see you make that stubborn face in my mind. Don't pout. You are so close to what you crave, little girl. Close to more than you dare to crave. Don't let it slip away."

His voice wavered on the last word. He cleared his throat.

It was too much. He pushed her too far. If she couldn't touch him today she would lose her mind. She wanted to throw down the phone and walk away from all of this. At the same time, she knew how much the games helped when life got too real. Bond sounded like he was overdosing on reality. She wanted to help. Her needs had to wait. She didn't know if she had strength to get there.

"I can't tell you, Master."

"Ah. *Se mettre au jus*, little one. *Se mettre les jus*."

"What does it mean?"

"Hmm. Come into the juice. But more than that—take yourself deeper, take the chance."

"I'm afraid." If she pleaded with him to come to her today, it would sound too clingy. She'd push him farther away.

"Desire. Use that for your shot of courage. The greater the desire, the more you will risk, the further you will push yourself. What do you desire, Sarai?"

"You. I need you here. Today."

That silence again. She hated his silences, but this one was the worst. He'd gone totally still, not even his breathing to give her a hint how he might be taking her request.

"Master? Are you okay?"

"I will be there in a couple of hours."

Just like that. No excuses. No discussion. It worried her.

"Jacques, are you okay?"

"I have been better. I will be better when I'm with you this afternoon."

A tear slid down her cheek. That was how far he'd pushed her. She was weeping with relief. Today, a few hours, and he'd be there.

"There's more, isn't there? More you want me to do?"

"There's always more."

She tipped her head back, blinked at the ceiling. She couldn't take much more.

"Where were you? Why were you late for my call?"

"You called early."

"I should have demanded more of you then? I expected you would be hanging by the phone desperate for the call."

She brushed tears with the back of her hand. Sniffed. "I was in the shower when you called."

"Well then, you should be refreshed and ready for the next assignment."

"Master, please. I've learned my lesson."

"Oh, what did you learn?"

"You really don't want me to play with other men."

He snorted. "Not it."

But it sounded like it. At least like part of it. His voice had a faint rasp as if he'd been doing too much talking and it lacked its usual energy. She didn't want to stress him further, but they needed to start talking about the real issues between them.

"I think sometimes you see yourself as more open-minded than you are."

"Is that right?"

She knew she was playing with fire. God, why couldn't she just shut up? "You were mad about Ginger. Whether you admit it or not."

"I was mad about Ginger."

"I knew it."

"I was mad because you let Ginger and Krush back you into a game you didn't want to play. I was mad because you play nice girl and forget your own limits. Sometimes you have to make waves, pet. Sometimes you have to admit something is not what you want, even if it won't please someone else. Like admitting you need me now."

"How am I supposed to know when I have a voice? You ignored me when I said I'd rather go swimming than play in the dungeon."

"You only half meant that."

She growled and seriously considered throwing the phone out the window.

"If it is a challenge that makes you grow, demands you be more than you are, then you do it. If it is something that makes you less, makes you have less respect for yourself, then you have to say no."

She recognized the truth in that. "I think I understand."

"Then it is time to reinforce the lesson, yes?"

"What was that I did last night?"

"Discovery. Reinforcing adds to your growth."

"Then, why do I have a really bad feeling about this reinforcing?"

"Growing pains. Just growing pains. You'll do fine."

* * * * *

He was packing custard in a cooler when Karen joined him. Last night the news of Mimi had buckled her. He'd helped Allen bring her home, tuck her in and had spent the night in the guestroom. After a couple hours of sleep, restlessness drove him to the kitchen where he'd prepared the ingredients he needed for the day. One look at Krush had him rethinking that plan.

"Don't look at me like that," she said. "I'm not going to fall apart again." But she looked like she would. He felt like he was stretched on a rack, demands and needs pulled him in all directions. A burning sensation rose under his breastbone and spread into his belly. It felt like he was splitting apart inside, ripping like a loaf of bread right down the middle. The only place he wanted to be was the place he never could get to. It had to stop.

She was clutching a fat brown document envelope to her chest. He assumed it had something to do with Mimi's affairs.

She noticed the direction of his gaze and offered the envelope. "This is the reason I called you yesterday."

His fingers twitched. His right hand opened and closed, but he forced himself to keep his arms at his sides. He shook his head. "I have to go."

"It won't take long, Jacques. This is important. Extremely so. To Mimi as well as myself."

“Nothing is important to Mimi now. There is nothing more important than what I have to do. If you need help with Mimi’s arrangements, I will come back in at the beginning of the week.”

Krush hugged the envelope to her chest again, flicked her eyes from him to the cooler and looked away, through her kitchen window to the lush yard beyond. She kept her face turned away while she spoke.

“Mimi made her own arrangements. She didn’t want us all weeping and wailing around her coffin. We’ll scatter her ashes together when the time comes. For today, we will honor who she was and the art she taught us.”

It was indeed what Mimi would want. He nodded, closed the cooler. Krush pulled her pink satin robe tight around her, turned to leave. “I’ll have Allen take you to your car.”

He reached to touch her hair, it fell through his fingers, fine and silky as a little girl’s.

“I’ll be back, Karen. I have limits too and I’ve reached mine.”

She turned back, kissed his cheek. He noticed moisture when she pressed her cheek to his. It was there on his tongue, to say he’d stay another day, but he swallowed the words. It felt like swallowing rocks.

She pushed away from him, patted his cheek and gave him a spiritless smile. “Go.”

He did.

Chapter Seven

How did he talk her into these things? Not that there was much discussion. Bond said, "This is what you will do for me, Sarai." He said it in that heated, growly voice that made her wish she could purr. And now here she was at the store with the shopping list he dictated. He had to have fresh produce for salad and twenty pounds of ice. She didn't want to know why he needed twenty pounds of ice.

She did ask why she had to be dressed like a hooker to shop. "Growth," he'd said. "You need more confidence."

Well, it was true that she preferred a clothing style that allowed her to blend in, go unnoticed. Judging from the stares men gave her cleavage when she walked by, and by the stares she caught directed at her rear view when she glanced back, she wasn't unnoticed.

"You have a body made for love," he'd said. "Men and women will desire you."

The idea itched like a chigger under her skin. She wasn't sure she wanted to scratch it.

She pushed her cart around the produce counters. The items she needed were grouped together. Yellow squash, zucchini, cucumbers. She detected a theme and knew he'd asked for those deliberately. She was to pay careful attention, pick only the firm, with just enough give under the fingers to detect ripeness. Not one single blemish.

She glanced around. A guy stocking the tomato section kept sneaking glances at her. Dressed like she was, standing here fondling squash would likely get her arrested.

She grabbed a couple of each vegetable and tossed them in her basket without looking at them.

The other wardrobe item he insisted on twitched and turned inside her with each movement. A small vibrating egg, inserted while he listened, his voice reminding her to

think of his fingers inside her as she walked. Once he'd planted the idea, she couldn't escape it. The remote control was tucked in the pocket of her denim miniskirt. He had her test it before she left the house, had listened to her breath catch, chuckled at her stifled moan. The toy was supposed to be turned on while she shopped, but she wasn't ready to grow that much.

She tried to treat the assignment as an intellectual exercise, concentrate on the tasks, not emotions, not sensations. She felt like she had split into three people. Sensible Sarah checked off items on the list. Sarai the woman prepared for her lover's arrival, anticipation fluttering like butterflies in her stomach. Sarai the submissive, her pussy weeping for her Master's touch, clung to the pleasure of a toy secretly fucking her with each step.

She paused at the end of every other aisle as she made her way toward the freezer section. She pretended to examine jars of mayonnaise, or study ingredients of boxes of cereal, while she gripped the cart like it was a life ring and tried to keep her head above sensation engulfing her.

She had trouble bending to get bags low in the freezer, her skirt too short to manage much without her scarlet panties showing to the world. Wet satin clung and tugged at her pussy lips when she stooped.

Cold freezer air flowed over her breasts and face when she leaned in, tightened her nipples so the arousal showed under her thin halter-top, wrapped chilly arms around her bare midriff. She blushed at a glimpse of herself reflected in the fogged door. It was August in the South, she reminded herself. It wasn't unreasonable to show some skin.

She loaded the last bag in the cart and tottered on high-heeled sandals to the checkout, the toy sliding deliciously up and down inside, Bond's voice a purr in the back of her mind. How could anyone miss her flaming red neck and face? She focused on walking as normally as possible.

At the checkout, a middle-aged woman rang up Sarai's order. Two zucchinis, two yellow squash, two cucumbers. Two ten-pound bags of ice. She gave Sarai an assessing look as she bagged the vegetables.

"I'm trying a new recipe," she explained with a half shrug. "Why is it you always get in the middle of preparation and realize you don't have everything you need?" That got her one raised eyebrow and a half smirk. Someone in line behind her snickered.

Really, people had such dirty minds. All of this was for dinner.

Heat slapped her when she pushed the cart out the door. She was slick with sweat by the time she crossed the parking lot to her truck. At least she hadn't run into anyone she knew. She wanted to hug a bag of ice to her body and she hoped she could get it home before it turned to a puddle on the floor of her truck. She should have thought to bring a cooler but it wasn't a long drive.

When she climbed into the driver's seat and turned the key, her day got worse. Instead of the whine and rumble she should hear, she got an ominous click, click, click. She dropped her head to the steering wheel. "Why today? Why now?" Liquid gathered in the bottom of the ice bags. No time for whining. She grabbed a hammer from under the driver's seat and hopped out.

She was wrestling with the hood latch when a familiar voice sent a new wave of heat to flood her face.

"Sarah?"

Bobby, in his sleek white Chevy truck, pulled into the space just behind her and leaned out the window. Heat rolled from his engine and swirled around her legs. Heat rolled in her internal engine when he fixed those big blue eyes on her. A lock of dark hair tumbled across his forehead. Of all the people to catch her out like this.

"Trouble?" he asked. The word hung in the humid air. More by the minute, she thought. But he was talking about the truck and she was gaping at him like a zombie.

"Um..." Right, he asked about trouble. "No trouble."

He looked down at the hammer in her hand.

"I'm not going to hurt it. I just need to give the starter a little tap, get her going."

He popped his truck door and flowed out—all muscles and hot looks, oozing sex. She sighed and he took the hammer from her.

"You'd have to stand on the bumper to reach the starter. In those shoes, you're gonna hurt something."

He lifted the hood of her old truck, the hinges groaned. She could feel their pain. Watching those muscles flex made her want to groan too. But he was a friend and they didn't think of each other in that way. Okay, sometimes she thought about him that way. Okay, she'd thought about him quite often in that way. But she would never act on it. So, she looked at the engine instead of him.

Bobby pointed to the heavy crust of white powder built up around her battery cables. "That could be part of the problem right there."

She sat on her bumper, deflated. "So much for getting the ice home before it melts." The hot metal felt like a radiator through her denim miniskirt.

"I'll give you a lift home. When you get your groceries put away, we can come back for the truck." He wiped at the sweat on his forehead with the back of his arm. "Maybe we can do that this evening when it's cooler." Sweat trickled down his neck. Her tongue tingled with the thought of sliding over his slick skin.

This was all Bond's fault, right down to keeping her so aroused that she was ready to drag a good friend into the back of his truck and ride him for as long as he lasted. She licked her lips, tasted salt and tried to drag her mind away from Bobby and onto the task of finding a way out.

He didn't wait for an answer. He shut the hood and opened the passenger door, grabbing the ice. "You having a party?"

"No. No party."

She grabbed the grocery bag and followed. No way did she want him to see her vegetables. She thanked him when he held the door and helped her in. She hugged the bag to her chest as if it were a long-lost child. He propped the dripping bags inside on the floor, his arm brushing her legs. His skin was hot enough to burn.

He hopped in the driver's seat, revved the engine and they were off. He turned the air-conditioning on high. They both needed to cool off. The way his eyes kept sliding to her bare thigh, she didn't think that was going to happen. Obviously, he sometimes thought about her in that way. He was a friend and sex would screw that up. She had a lover, sex with Bobby would absolutely screw that up.

And since the first half of the day had gone so splendidly, there was really no reason she should have been surprised to see Bond's black Corvette sitting in the drive when Bobby pulled in. He was early.

Bobby made a low whistle and looked at her. "Company?"

"A friend." Bond was not someone she could refer to as a boyfriend. She couldn't say lover. She hoped Bobby would figure the details out on his own. She tried to slide out of the truck, grab the ice and go, but Bobby was too quick. He was around the front of the truck before she'd gone five steps. "Here, let me help. It's melting all over you and you can hardly walk as it is."

She let him take the ice and the vegetables. Priorities had changed. Embarrassment took a back seat to the current disaster in the making. She did not want Bond and Bobby alone for two seconds. She leaned against the fender to yank her shoes off and raced up the walk after Bobby, hoping to get there before Bond could say too much. Or better yet, before Bond could say anything. Or before Bobby lost her the little ground she'd gained with Bond this morning. She kicked her pace up a notch.

* * * * *

The Dungeon Gourmet Blog...spicing up your love life.

August: Le Marquis De Bond's Toasted Peach Ice Cream V

Now, back to the peaches. Choose six. The plumper, the better. We need to halve them. I like to part them right along the natural seam. Insert the blade. Trace that indentation, following it around. The juice, she should seep through your fingers. Pluck the pits. A good peach should have a rosy, rippled core where the pit nested. A perfect peach should drool.

When you have all six prepared, press the face of each into a saucer of brown sugar. Then, place each face up on the cooking sheet. Look at them, open, dripping. So fragrant, yes? It makes your tongue twitch.

Put them in the broiler. This is the secret here— the intense heat brings up the juice, the sweetness, and the sugar caramelizes. Keep an eye, because they are quick to turn at this stage. You can't leave them too long or they go up in a flame.

Now, get your good knife. Chop. Nice and hot and gooey. Gooey is always a good sign, yes?

The custard from last night goes into the freezer bowl. Add ice and salt to the outer bowl. I like the old way, where you control the process with your measures of ice and salt. Cooking needs interaction. You need to use tools that let you adjust, touch, experiment. Each time you create, it is new. No uniformity for us. No repeatable results. Each time should be a new adventure.

Adjust the amounts for temperature, humidity, for the hardness of ice and the taste that suits your mood. Then plug in the churn.

Now you have decisions. Long, slow churn? Or double churn?

~Bond

* * * * *

He was working in the kitchen, by the window, when the truck pulled up. Bond didn't miss much. So, he didn't miss noticing how long the boy's looks lingered on his woman. He didn't miss the fluttery, nervous quality in the way Sarai moved. Nor did he miss the friction that came along with repressed desire.

He watched them from the window, the way the boy seemed to control the situation, the way Sarai raced after him. There was no missing the spark of chemistry between them. Well, Sarai would miss it. Flirting had to hit her over the head before she recognized it. But Bond saw and a little flame of jealousy licked at his heart. Not that there was anything to be jealous of. Youth, dark good looks, muscle—all highly overrated. Bond could demolish the pup. The question was, would he?

The boy came through the door, biceps bulging as he hefted the bags of ice onto the kitchen table. Sarai skidded through behind him and peered around the puppy, looking deliciously fretful and protective. That was when Bond knew he'd have to be polite, nice even. He sighed heavily.

Bond folded his arms across his chest and leaned a hip against the sink. He decided to let her do the talking. If she screwed things up with the guy, she couldn't blame him.

"Mast—I mean Bon—um, Jacques. I wasn't expecting you so soon."

He nodded at the young man. "Muscle boys like you, they make her forget my name." Okay, so that wasn't polite. It wasn't entirely rude. He couldn't resist.

The boy lifted a shoulder. "She makes me forget mine." His gaze locked on Bond's.

Sarai's mouth opened. She looked from him to her friend and back to him, then closed her mouth. Good strategy, it forced him to change his.

"We're making some ice cream. Maybe you'd like to stay, join us." He gave a look, a look that said I'm asking you more than I say, a look that flicked to Sarai and back to the boy. Not a boy really, early thirties, Bond guessed, same age as Sarai.

"Uh no, he can't." Sarai jumped in front of him, as if she could save him from Bond's corrupting influence. "Bobby has to go. We have to go back for my truck. It broke down."

Bobby put his hands on her shoulders, eased her back next to him. Bond noticed the gentle bump of hip against hers and one eyebrow rose. A challenge?

"No rush, Sarah. I can hang out for a bit."

Her eyes pleaded with Bond not to take things further. It was too late. The challenge issued demanded an answer.

"Wonderful, you can help with the churning."

Sarai looked like a panicked animal in search of an escape. Her gaze settled on the back door and Bond leapt to grab her hand.

"You missed me?" He tugged her away from Bobby into the curve of his arm. He felt her small body press to his and he wanted to lay her on the table and skim ice over her naked skin, watch her heat turn it to glistening rivulets. He gave himself a mental shake to dispel the image.

She rose on tiptoe to plant a kiss on his cheek, next to his ear. "Please don't make trouble," she whispered. "He's a friend." An important friend, judging from the anxiety lacing her words. Her emotions played in her voice like notes on a scale and he could tell her mood from the slightest rise and fall in pitch.

"Moi?" he murmured through a kiss to her cheek. He tried to smooth her hair with his hands. His watch caught in the curls. Perfect. It gave him an idea.

"The humidity has turned your hair to a jungle. Bring your brush and we fix this." She didn't obey instantly. She searched his face, trying to figure out what he was up to. She looked at Bobby as if she might glean an answer there.

His tone was soft, reassuring and assertive at once, "He's right." He added a laugh to put her at ease. "Find a brush big enough it can't get lost in there."

The boy had potential. And Sarai's submissive soul couldn't resist the will of two determined stares at once. Her submissive posture took over, a softening, a gentle fluidness replacing the nervous flutter of before. It lifted his mood that she gave him

one last searching look before bowing her head. She was stepping into the mood, trusting him with the task of worrying and deciding. She went.

"She wants this," Bond said, speaking in French to himself. "She may not admit it to herself, but she would love to take us both, have two at once."

"You don't strike me as the sharing type," Bobby answered.

Bond put a bag of ice in the sink. He went still at the reply, hands resting on top of the plastic sack. The cold nipped his fingertips, penetrated his surprise. What were the odds an American, a farm boy from the look, would know French?

Bobby's smirk suggested he enjoyed putting Bond off balance. "My mother was French Canadian."

It would be easy to shift the meaning of the comment that led down this path, make it seem like he was talking about something else. Bond never took the easy way.

"If I decide to do this, I do it to drive her out of her mind with pleasure. If that means tolerating your presence..." he shrugged. "And you?"

"I want her."

"How long have you known her?"

Bobby pulled out a chair, sat down, at ease, as if the place were a second home. "From junior high. She was dating my best friend."

"Her husband?"

"Yeah."

He could hear the notes of emotion in the boy's voice too.

"Were you with them in the accident?"

"No, but I volunteered with the rescue squad. I was on call that night."

And Bond surmised he would have been there for his friend during the ten years it took him to die from the damage the car accident had done. He would have been by Sarai's side in the time she lost her baby. While she struggled back to health. And through the long years of caring for an invalid.

"So when he died, why does she take up with me, a stranger from the internet instead of you, someone she knows and cares for?"

Bobby shrugged. "Maybe that's what she thinks she wants. A stranger. Someone she doesn't care so much for."

Ouch, the boy had teeth. "If you mean to put a wedge between us, it won't happen."

"I saw how she lights up for you. How she's changed for you. If it weren't doing her so much good, I would be a wedge. If it stops doing good, I will. Count on it."

"She cares for me. You count on that. I could say go and that would close the door on you. I won't. Not yet. I need to see if this is something she craves. Today is for her pleasure and we both commit to that, yes?"

Bond turned from the oven and put out his hand.

"Okay. For her. For now." They shook on it.

Bond knew people. He could trust this one not to hurt her. As for Bond's interests, he could manage a kid. First step, make your enemy your friend.

"I may wind up liking you, vanilla boy. You have Dom potential. I could teach you things."

Bobby laughed. "Thanks. I'll think about it."

"You understand what D/s is? You don't approve?"

"I haven't given it much thought."

Bond tore open the ice bag. "Prepare to discover yourself, *mon ami*. This journey disguises itself as kinky sex, but it's a journey within."

Sarai returned and Bond turned his attention back to preparing the churn. "I need to get this started before the ice melts away, pet. Kneel between Bobby's knees and let him brush out the tangles."

She blushed, a sweet pink. "I can do it."

Bobby moved up behind her and reached around to capture the hand holding the brush. The front of his body brushed the back of hers. Her eyes widened. Pink deepened to red.

“Come here, Sarah. I don’t bite.”

She let Bobby lead her, but her stare fixed and narrowed at Bond. A you-better-get-me-out-of-this stare.

Bond smiled at her, his simmering, I’m-going-to-fuck-your-brains-out smile. Her fingers opened and Bobby claimed the brush. Desire stirred his cock, the first tug and swelling. He hadn’t anticipated how much controlling her through another’s hands could stir him.

She’d done away with her shoes, curling bare feet under her bottom when she knelt. Those wild locks of hers had set about escaping the bondage of pins and hair clips, as free-spirited as the woman they sprang from. Bobby worked the pins free while doing a good bit of staring down into her cleavage. Her nipples were two pronounced points under the thin cotton top. Sarai kept looking at Bond, forlorn and confused.

Bond finished with the ice and salt. He watched Bobby and thought about Mimi. Life could slip by so fast. He thought of Sarai’s paper and how she craved something real and solid from their interactions. It might be a good idea to give up his place in New York, move closer to her. He thought some more as he filled the mix bucket. What he wanted from life had been changing for some time now, what he’d been doing with it hadn’t.

He started the churn, setting the bucket on a rug in front of the sink to muffle the noise and absorb the sweat running down the sides. He pulled out the tray of peaches he’d left in the warm oven. Perfect timing. Peaches glistened, oozing juice. But hold them off too long, keep them waiting and flavor gets lost. How could he juggle his work with all the travel, manage job and submissive without putting her off too long, keeping her waiting? One man only stretched so far.

Bobbie brushed Sarai's beautiful hair, while Bond chopped peaches. This choice couldn't be undone if he made it. His blade slashing through, his mind growling. Idiot. Sharing, bah. He'd never shared his own with another, though he hadn't refused invitations to join other dominants in tormenting their playthings. Sensually tormenting.

Sarai herself had said no sharing. But he knew it for what it was. She didn't believe he could handle it. Well, he could. He wouldn't be giving up control as much as delegating control.

A challenge to him, but couldn't he do it? Hadn't he learned from the best?

Chapter Eight

She tried to stay still, let her mind go, enjoy the gentle tug of the brush through her long hair, and the way Bobby stopped and carefully worked each tangle free rather than ripping through it. It was just the way Bond brushed her hair. It made her uneasy to think she could have this without Bond. It made her fidget when her mind tried to slip into where they were headed with this. She clamped her teeth together like that could keep thoughts out, as if that could stop this slide into trouble.

Stroke, stroke, pause. Fingertips separated strands of hair, heat moved from them into her scalp as they slid gently toward her neck. Then he'd lay the palm of his hand over the top of her head to stop the pulling while he drew the brush through a thick section. Bristles grazed her skin. Sometimes his hand brushed her bare shoulder or back.

The kitchen was warm and smelled of toasted peaches. She would never forget this smell, this moment. Bond hacked peaches on the cutting board. Heat shimmered in the air from the oven, from the summer afternoon, from sex screaming to get out. All that heat was beating the faint puffs of cool air from her ancient air conditioner into the ground.

Bobby leaned over her and a drop of sweat fell from him onto her chest, slid down between her breasts. His hands went still in her hair.

She hauled her awareness from him to Bond, his knife a bright flash, separating peaches with the speed and precision of one of those television chefs. A familiar red cooler sat on the counter. He always brought treats he made when he visited. His sales job kept him on the road and cooking was how he chose to unwind and get to know people.

He called to her, "Come, pet, wash your hands and scoop these peaches into the mix for me while I put the ice away."

The chest freezer was on the back porch by the door. Bond was back just as she lifted the first handfuls of dripping peaches into the mix. Bobby grabbed the wooden spoon from the table to stir. Their heads touched as they concentrated on their tasks and that spot, a tiny circle of connection, generated electric charges that sizzled through all her nerve endings.

She could not have this reaction to him. Not here. Not now. Bond missed nothing. He suspected her reaction to Bobby and she'd done a lousy job, so far, of turning this around. Reaction wasn't love. She hoped Bond understood that.

They could still stop this, send Bobby home with no damage done, just harmless flirting that she could explain away later. If they continued, she'd wreck a friendship and what she had with Bond. He was not the type — no matter what he said — who could share.

The dustup over Ginger and his ice-like reaction came to mind. She pulled back from her task. Her mind grappled for some excuse to escape the kitchen.

"Could you finish this, Bobby? I just remembered something I have to take care of." She backed right into Bond, who hooked an arm around her waist, his muscular forearm catching her just under her rib cage. Hot skin connected with bare tummy.

"What something?"

She pulled up the only response she could think of, one guaranteed to make men stop asking questions. "A female thing."

"Bah, you lie to me. Don't insult us."

Bobby wasn't even pretending to mix the ice cream ingredients. He put down the spoon, folded his arms across his chest and leaned a shoulder against the refrigerator.

"You don't know," she stammered. "It's just come up."

“But I do know. I know my woman. I know female things. I know your female things. I probably know female things you don’t know. And I know you are afraid to take male things you want, yes?”

She was pressed against Bond’s bearlike frame. It was like being hugged by a radiator. His other arm embraced an ice bucket, pressed it against her side. Caught between fire and ice. She wanted to tip the bucket up, spill ice over their bodies. Cool him down.

Bond shifted, set the bucket on the counter, and his cold hand came between her legs, dipping under the short skirt, fingers wedging with bull’s-eye accuracy between plump pussy lips, sliding the satin over her clit. Still, she could feel the cold move from his fingers through the cloth. She thought of that ice bottle yesterday. The long night in bondage. She couldn’t pull away, she needed those fingers. He pressed two between her folds and his thumb slid down, squeezing her flesh, making it press up in a wave against the satin panties. Bobby’s eyes burned into her where Bond’s fingers displayed her.

Whatever she’d been pretending Bobby might think this relationship was, there would be no mistaking the nature now. He’d know — a choirboy would know — this was BDSM. How could she make him understand why she needed this? She didn’t understand herself.

“We can’t,” she said. Neither paid attention.

Bond’s other hand dipped down, poked about in the folds of her denim skirt where it was pressed like a drawn drape above her hips. His fingers found the little zipper pocket where she had tucked the vibrator remote. He tossed the matchbook-sized box to Bobbie.

“Flip that switch, vanilla boy.”

Bobby grinned and did.

She knew it was coming, knew what it felt like, but she was always shocked when the sensations hit her. There were just too many things going on for her to have any defense. She slid down Bond's body to her knees. He stepped in front of her.

"Do you have a female thing, Sarai?" He used his winter voice. She couldn't look at him. She shook her head.

"Answer me properly."

"No, Sir."

"Did you follow all my instructions when I sent you shopping?"

She sighed.

"I thought as much. Let me guess...you didn't turn the vibrator on."

She did look up at him then. "No, Sir."

"That is fine. You know I always leave it to your choice. You can always accept consequences instead of carrying out instructions."

She looked back down at the floor, another sigh. "Yes, Sir." The vibrator hummed with maddening intensity. She clenched her hands to fists. Squeezed her legs tight together. Her face was flaming and she couldn't look at Bobby.

She could hear both men breathing fast over the vibrator's hum. A craving to give in and have both at once hummed in her bones. In her teeth. Bond's shirt was unbuttoned, his nipples as hard as hers.

She tried to find something to focus on besides the rising pleasure in her. Arousal tightened her grip on the toy, increased the intensity and rising pressure.

"Don't you dare come," Bond warned.

She pressed fists to the tops of her thighs and nodded, acknowledging the command, bit her lip, hoping she could obey. Just when she thought she'd lose it, he waved a hand at Bobby. The vibration stopped and left her in panting agony. She could squeeze her muscles together, take herself over, she tried, she was so close. She folded in on herself, pressed her face to her knees.

"Can't quite get there, can you?" he asked.

She closed her eyes. He was too good at this. "No, Master," she whispered.

"I will allow you to choose your consequence."

She didn't even care what the consequence was. She just wanted to get through it and back into his good graces.

"You can go another day with no release..."

Her eyes flew open. Suddenly she cared. She straightened, kneeled up. "Or?"

He laughed. "Or I will share you with your friend here."

She looked at Bobby, desire as naked and hungry as her own stamped on his face. And then to Bond, cool, aloof, like it didn't matter a bit what she chose. But it did matter. It always would. She was afraid of what would happen to them if she picked Bobby and afraid what it would do to their friendship if she rejected him. Caught between male pride and male pride, how was she to win?

Bobby looked out for her and protected her as if she were fragile, kept her going when she didn't have strength. Bond pushed her, demanded she be strong and stand up for herself. He made her be who she had to be to get through the life she had. How could she choose? There was a third option. One she'd never used. He wouldn't expect her to choose it now.

"I choose the thing my Master most desires."

He scowled. She ducked her head before he could see the smile that twitched at the corner of her lips. He would never choose Bobby and she'd be off the hook.

He saw her bluff and raised it. "Well then, you give me much to think about." He put his fingers in her hair, stroking, lifting locks and letting them fall to brush her shoulders, fanning them out so they fell in a curtain over her breasts. While he played with her hair he talked to Bobby.

"This is how it works. She has limits, things she says she will never do, places she doesn't wish to go. And sharing is one. But in our time together she changes, she grows,

and so limits can change. Lately she has shown signs this limit has changed. You understand these things?"

"I think so, yes."

"I have to decide if it is truly changed, or if she is reaching to please me. A weakness of hers, she likes to please too much."

"Yes, she does."

"Not long ago she said to me, 'I'm not afraid of the needles anymore, Master. I want to wear nipple rings for you.' But when the time comes, she is cold sweat and tremors, shivering so hard it scares me. I tear open the alcohol packet and she goes white at the scent."

"She went white? How could you tell?"

Smart-ass. Bobby always teased her about her fair skin. But she didn't doubt Bond's assessment. Nausea stirred as the memory of that gleaming needle flashed like quicksilver in her mind.

"This is my point. When she can get whiter you have a problem."

"Yes, you do."

Bond reached behind her neck, pulled the bow at the neck of her halter-top loose and it fell to reveal her ring-less nipples. "She thinks I like the hard play and she wants to be my desire. That is not my desire."

Sarai shot Bobby a sideways glance, his attention was on her breasts and nothing else, but he responded. "You could explain to her, what you really want."

Bond chuckled. "Where would be the challenge, the fun in that?"

Bobby looked from her breasts to Bond and the two men grinned at each other. Oh brother. All she needed was some sort of bonding between the two of them.

"Show her then?"

Bond shook his head. "We test her. You understand?"

"If it's not good for her it wouldn't be for me. I understand."

"You have shared before?"

"No."

"A limit?"

Bobby looked back at her breasts and then into her eyes. "Like you said, limits can change."

"Take off your clothes, pet."

It wasn't like she had all that much left on, much they hadn't seen, but there was something about the idea of being completely naked while the men remained fully dressed that made her hands tremble and painted her insides red hot.

They watched with eyes that wouldn't miss a thing, wouldn't miss the way her breath quickened, or the way she had to fumble with the remaining bow at her back that held the top under her breasts. She chose to stand and wriggle out of the panties next, feeling the skirt gave her a little cover. There was no missing glistening threads of her desire as she slid the panties down her legs. She stepped out and reached for the skirt button but Bond stopped her.

"The toy first."

Their eyes met, his all challenge, hers defiant. She could do this. She reached under the skirt and drew the little plastic egg from inside, held it in her palm, offering it to Bond. He cupped his hand under hers, breathed. His eyes closed, appreciation softening his features. His tongue snuck out to lick at her fingertips.

"A good girl licks it clean for her Master." His eyes challenged. Her stomach quaked. She didn't know if she could do that. Not that she hadn't before, for him—but not with someone watching. Not with Bobby watching. Heat crept like a sunburn across her shoulders.

It was Bobby's face, the mask completely gone, a primal, starved-wolf look taking over, that made her strong, gave her the courage. She picked it up by the wire, pretended it was a cherry on a stem, tipped her head back, opened her mouth, gave it a

teasing lick, then popped the whole thing in her mouth, sucked it clean and pulled it out to drop in Bond's hand.

His grin went through her like sunshine, lifting her heart. "Well done, pet." He kissed her, licking her lips, probing her mouth to lick up the taste of her.

"Let's clear that table," he said to Bobby when he pulled back.

"Now the skirt," he said to her. She unfastened the snap at the waistband, drew down the brass zipper, gave her bottom a wiggle and it fell to the floor.

Bobby stopped on his way between the table and the counter, his gaze traveling to her shaved mound.

"It's a licking pussy, is it not?" Bond purred. Even his purrs sounded more like growls in that broad bear's chest of his.

"Yes," Bobby said. He swept the rest of the peaches up in his hands, tossed them in the churn, and javelined the spoon across the kitchen to land in the sink. He swiped the table with a sponge and looked at her as if she was dinner and he hadn't eaten for a few years. He patted the table.

She froze. Her feet wouldn't move. He was forbidden, Tony's friend. Cold guilt settled in her belly. Her feet felt like they weighed a hundred pounds.

He patted the table again. The action rocked her. She'd always been able to evade a confrontation, sidle around his interest. Today he didn't back down.

"This is going to happen," Bobby said. "It has been waiting years to happen. It can happen now, with him. It can happen later. It will happen."

Bond cleared his throat. "I pick now."

Bobby laughed and held out his hand to her. "You're outvoted." His sparkling eyes turned serious. "Don't fight me."

She put a trembling hand in his, shivering despite the heat. He pulled her close, scooped her up. His arms strong, his voice steady, "We both need to let go of his ghost."

Bond would have made her go to the table on her own steam. He might have stoked the fire to help her along. Bobby put her there.

“Lay back,” Bond demanded, his tone wintry. “Feet at the edge, knees wide.” He gave Bobby an approving nod, and that reassured her that he was in scene mode and not upset with her.

He pulled a chair around and gestured for Bobby to sit between her legs. “*Bon appétit, mon ami*. Don’t let her come. Drive her out of her mind, but no orgasm.”

“Sarai, reach down between your thighs, hold your pussy lips apart for him.” Bond stood above her. He had his evil Master smile. “Don’t let go. And don’t you dare come.”

Bobby’s breath, humid puffs against her sex, was enough to make her come. The way he hooked his arms around her bent legs and hauled her in close until her heels bumped her bottom made her want to shove herself into his mouth and sob with pleasure.

That tongue. That tongue. There was just no way not—

He stopped. He looked at her, a wicked-boy smile. Oh, he was a fast learner. Pressure beat where his tongue had been. Juice seeped, inviting him to dip back in.

Bond leaned over her, reached between her legs and said, softly, “You’re not going to make it, are you?” She shook her head.

“You can control it. Orgasms are fragile, a virtuality, they exist somewhere between the mind and the body that serves the mind’s desire.”

She could only stare. Not now, she thought. Not a lesson now.

“I have something to help you. Something to make your head clear.” His hand moved between her thighs. Bobbie’s lips pursed. He looked from Bond’s hand to her and back. She couldn’t see what he had.

Something hard, cold, slipped inside her. The shock brought her up, her head banging into his. “Easy,” he murmured and pressed another ice chip inside.

"You can't," she panted. Cold seared her hot passage, made her squeeze it, made her drip and contract.

"Keep those hands where I put them," Bond said. "Keep those lips spread like a good girl." She bit her lip, whimpering, feeling a cool trickle of ice melting and seeping out. So close.

"Pain is a virtuality," Bond whispered. "It has its beginning in what you believe it will be and its existence in what you allow it to become. Feel it like teeth or feel it like a tongue. You choose."

Bobby took a cube from Bond's palm, looked at it like it was the first time he'd seen an ice cube. He rubbed her pussy lips with it.

"Look," he said, "it melts when I touch you. You're that hot." He held it over her clit, circled her with it. The burn licked through her with a thousand tongues and she dropped back, unable to stop the orgasm that clamped down with a frosty bite.

Going. Going. Gone.

Bond saw it coming and his hand was there, cradling her head against his chest as she sobbed her way through it, the first peak, into the second and then a third, before Bobby stopped.

"Such a bad girl," Bond said. He dabbed her tears with a dish towel.

"Yes, she is."

"We'll have to keep at this until she gets it right."

"Good idea." Bobby's fingers slid inside her and she shuddered. "Look. She's melted all the ice."

"I'll get some more." Bond put a little bowl of ice cubes on the table. "Wait, I have an idea."

Sarai moaned and would have rolled away, but Bobby had hold of her and didn't look interested in letting her go.

"I will show you a trick, vanilla boy, something perfect for sex on a hot day. Open your mouth, Sarai. Get your pants off, boy."

Bobby was naked in the time it took her to open her mouth. Bond stopped the churn, lifted the cover. "She's a little soft yet, but will do." Bond scooped out a bit of ice cream and restarted the machine.

Sarai opened her mouth like a baby bird when Bond offered a spoonful. The flavors that hit her tongue made her want to weep.

Bobby figured out exactly where he was meant to be and his cock followed the scoop. And just like that, awkwardness and taboos forgotten, they crossed the last barrier. He was inside her physically and, more than that, emotionally. Later. Later she would think about that.

His hands were in her hair, his head tipped back, and his body shuddered when she swirled a tongue full of ice cream over his thick cock. She tasted his male flavor mixed with sweet peach.

Bond planted himself between her thighs and unzipped. His fat cock nuzzled her sex, the pressure making her whimper against Bobby's. He groaned under the sensation. They were taking her up again.

Bond sank into her an inch at a time as she opened to him. Bobby pumped at her mouth while Bond thrust in and out of her pussy.

She felt so brazen with her thighs parted and her mouth filled, naked between two men on a table. Ice cream drizzled down her chin. She didn't care. She wanted them deeper and harder. They slowed down, as if they had discussed it, as if she were a conquest they'd mapped strategy over.

They found a rhythm together, slowly gliding cocks back and forth between sensitive lips, hands, four hands, twenty fingers, at her breasts, at her pussy. Two sets of teeth. Throaty chuckles just before they clamped down and made her squirm and twist as if she were on a spit over glowing coals. She would come apart, be consumed in the fire.

"Touch yourself for us, pet." He caught her wrist, pressed her fingers to her swollen lips. Both men went still, waiting for her obedience. She could not masturbate with them watching. It had taken a long time before she could do it on the phone with Bond listening.

She tried to pull her hand away. She squeezed her muscles around Bond's cock, to tease him back to play. She flicked her tongue at the sensitive spot on the underside of Bobby's cock.

Bobby's fingers twisted in her hair. "Take your pleasure," he said. "Take something for yourself."

Bond moved her fingers over her sex. "Pleasure yourself for me," Bond said. "Make yourself come all over my cock." Her muscles clenched at the words. He felt the response, a warmth glowed in his eyes as he used her finger to circle her clit. "Do it, my pet. Do it now."

This penetrated beyond sex, filled more than a sex ache. She had always imagined what it might be like, to find her pleasure with a man inside, to be free to touch just where touch was needed. Her fingers moved and so did something else, a shield that guarded the numb places, secret places. Her own fingers dug up the secrets with him watching, made her come in long orgasms that rose and fell in so many peaks she thought they would never stop. She sobbed that she couldn't stop.

Then they filled her, pouring into her like two fountains she thought might never stop. They filled her and drained her. There was nothing left of her. Nothing left that could think. She was all sensation. She couldn't summon strength to open her eyes. She shivered when a warm cloth bathed her. She was afraid they'd push her back over the edge again. She put her hands out to fend off the arms that wrapped around her and lifted her, carried her up the stairs.

Shhh. The word whispered through her hair and over the top of her head. A soft bed materialized underneath her, two male bodies pressed close on either side of her. This was heaven.

* * * * *

At one time the sheer expanse of emptiness beyond the boundaries of America's cities had given Bond the jitters. He preferred the bustle of cities. He was learning to enjoy some of the freedoms rural life allowed, like sitting on the back porch late on a summer afternoon in his boxers, eating ice cream fresh from the churn, embracing solitude.

He had discovered the papers Krush had tried to push into his hands that morning. Allen must have slipped them in the trunk when he helped Bond transfer his things.

It was hard to imagine how a mere twenty-four hours could contrive to turn every aspect of his life in a new direction. Apparently, Mimi had an agreement drawn up to sell her partnership in Club Krush to him, for the grand sum of one hundred dollars. Mimi's aim had been retirement. While she had intended to keep on with the cookbook and television show on her own, the papers included clauses that would bind Bond to fulfilling those obligations for her, should at some point she become unable to do so. Of course the other parties to the contract would have to approve him.

So, Mimi had felt death creeping up on her. It was the only conclusion he could draw. He looked to the river below, feeling the pull and the rush of time. Had Mimi been satisfied with the life she'd lived? He couldn't say he had if he left the world tomorrow. He'd been saving too much of it for later.

If that weren't incentive enough, there would be a legal mess for Krush to sort out and a lengthy hunt for any possible heirs. The contract came to him pre-signed by Mimi, and pre-notarized that same day by Allen Young, which he gathered was Ginger's legal name. All Bond had to do was sign using the given date, attach a check dated the same and all would be settled.

The Club was no bargain. It came with debt and a need for change if it was to survive. Krush's acceptance of Mimi's plan suggested she needed Bond's help and knew it.

He knew it could change everything, even more so than his decision to let Bobby join them earlier.

He'd left the pair sleeping, Sarai hugging his pillow, Bobby snuggled against her with his face buried in her hair. He didn't worry. In his bones, he knew she'd choose him over Bobby. That was how it stood for now. He wouldn't ask her to choose. She needed both.

But, him on the road and Bobby here to try to cure her of these dark desires she wanted to explore—that could present a problem.

A partnership in the club meant a job within commuting distance. A whole new set of challenges. He knew the virtual aspects of their relationship frustrated Sarai. What he didn't know was how she might feel about having him around daily. Was either of them ready for that?

The screen door banged open. Bobby came out in nothing but his shorts. He had a glass of tea in one hand, a bowl of ice cream in the other. Clearly, he was a regular visitor to Sarai's kitchen.

Bobby settled on the top porch step, his back against the railing. "Why the glum face, old man?"

"Jacques."

"Okay. So what gives, Jacques? You're too conceited to be worried about me as a threat."

Bond chuckled. "You know she will be happy if we are civil to each other. You and I, we team up, we just might manage to hang on to her for both of us."

"United we stand, divided she gets sick of us?"

"I knew you were bright."

Bobby scooped a bite of ice cream, considered, swallowed. "I thought you had some sales job, traveling or something. If you're always gone, we don't have to get along."

Bond tossed his paperwork onto the seat of the porch swing and stretched his legs in front of him. "I'm considering another option."

"Why do I detect a major hang-up with that option?" Bobby took another bite. His eyes drooped a little. Bond recognized gustatory ecstasy when he saw it. A few good dinners and he'd have the boy eating out of his hand.

"I've earned a lot of security in the current job. This other venture is risky and comes with people attached who may be miserable work partners."

That's the explanation he gave. How the relationship might change worried him. Would he and Sarai hold up if he were around all the time? Had she chosen him over Bobby for the mystery? What happens when the mystery wears off?

"Can you take a leave of absence from the current job, give it a try before committing?"

Bond pursed his lips. "Not a bad suggestion. Why be so helpful?"

Bobby sipped tea, looked out toward the river. "She never would have let me this close without you to push her. I don't know why you did it."

"I believe in meeting challenges head-on. But mostly, I wanted to give her you. Understand?"

"I wouldn't have been that generous, if it were going the other way."

"I think you would. I think her needs are just as important to you as me. It's why I invited you. It's a rare thing—a man who can look past his primal nature and share for a woman's sake. She deserves rare."

Bobby looked back at him, a long, assessing stare. Then he nodded. He reached out his hand and they shook, the clasp firm, warm.

"For her then," he said. "For now." A repeat of their earlier pledge.

"For her," Bond echoed.

Chapter Nine

Sarai watched Bobby leaving from the kitchen window. When he was gone, Bond scrubbed his face with his hands, tipped his head back. He looked so tired. He hadn't stayed in bed with them long. Some pain gnawed at him, drove him off by himself. She wondered how to pry it out of him.

She leaned against the window frame, tapping a finger against her lip while she considered. He was most open after an intense sexual encounter. The one just behind them might have served had they been alone right after.

So, she'd just have to stir the embers and shake the steel fingers of his self-control again. She knew just how she would.

She slipped out of the house by the front door, walking barefoot in the cool grass. Lightning bugs blinked, the sun low enough now to make them visible. A bat darted back and forth across the darkening sky. The automatic porch light had come on by the time she rounded the corner of the house. Bond leapt to his feet when her elbow brushed the lilac bush and greenery rippled.

He looked so big standing there, the light casting him in silhouette, just enough light with the setting sun for him to see her and what she wore. She had one of his dress shirts on, concealing her secret for the moment.

"Sarai? Why are you roaming the yard? I thought you were in bed."

"I was looking for my courage."

"Courage?" He sat, patted his knee. "Come sit. You don't need courage for me."

She took a step back. His face puckered to a frown.

"When you said I could ask anything, Master, share any desire and you would consider it, did you mean it?"

“You have something more demanding than where we went today?”

She nodded. It was as much his desire as hers, something he’d explained the rules to once, months ago, when she’d asked the purpose of a specific item in the toy closet. Neither of them had mentioned it again. But she knew in all the ways a woman knows her lover, this desire took him to the edge, was something he craved and feared. What she didn’t think he guessed, because his own turmoil helped hide her reaction, was that it did the same for her.

He gave her a look that scorched skin. “Tell me.”

She showed him instead, opening the shirt, letting the soft fabric slide down her arms and pool at her feet.

“The purple panties,” he breathed.

“I get a head start. You count to a hundred before you come after me.”

“No.”

She was backing away, and whirled to run as he rose to follow. He was stronger. She was quicker. He was tired. And troubled. The shadows clinging to him hadn’t been lost on her. It gave her more time than she might ordinarily have lasted, before his longer legs ate away all her advantages.

She veered off before he caught her, putting the nearest object between them. His arousal as obvious in his boxers as the female counterpart soaking the object of his attention—those purple lace panties.

They circled the clothesline now, him edging left, her to the right. Whatever had happened yesterday had packed a punch. He wouldn’t discuss. He might be French but he had the British stiff-upper-lip thing down cold. Sarai knew because she’d walked that same path. What she did now was like pouring whiskey on a banked fire.

“Come here,” he said, his voice a bear’s growl. She’d never seen him so intense. It was like waving a red flag for a bull. He would tear his eyes away briefly to look at her face, but his gaze traveled back to the panties. He licked his lips. So, she mused, nothing

fired his blood like the purple panty game. She'd guessed right. She wished she'd found her courage sooner. Her excitement mirrored his.

She tossed her head and hissed back, "Make me."

He lunged. She dove one direction, corrected and went the other. He lost balance and had to grab the line for support. A length broke away in his hand when he pulled himself upright, but he stayed on his feet. He drew the white cord through his fingers and grinned at her.

Her clit throbbed and her knees nearly buckled. She tried to think, but blood pounded in her ears, desire made her dizzy.

"Come here," he ordered.

It felt so good to lift her chin, smile a wicked smile, and tell him, "No."

When she wore the purple panties she didn't submit. They were an invitation to rougher play, a demand that if he wanted something, he'd have to take it. She would do what she could – within bounds of safety for both – to stop him.

She veered toward the back yard, thinking to get back in the house through the back door before he caught her.

The purple panty game had one other rule, he'd fuck her wherever he caught her. The little detour outside was meant to arouse him. He would like catching her there. She had no intention of getting caught outside.

He wasn't as tired as she thought. A sudden burst of speed and a lunge brought her down before she'd gone three feet. They were under the clothesline.

His weight knocked the breath from her. His hands twisted in her hair. Her body arched under him and desire licked like wildfire between her legs. She pulled his hair and bit his nipple. She loved the rubbery feel of his nipple tightening between her teeth. When his big hand sent a stinging slap across her bottom, she couldn't help a giggle.

He growled something in French that made her shiver with fear and anticipation. He hauled her up to her feet and pressed her back to the metal pole. He rigged the line

so that her wrists were bound over a sturdy length of line that ran between the two poles and stepped back. She could walk between the poles, hands stretched so high that she was on her toes at either end. She watched him, panting, trying to figure out what he'd do next.

"What now, Master?"

He grinned, showing enough teeth that it worried her. He answered in lengthy French.

So that was how he'd play it. Her as his bound captive, not even shared language between them. No pleading for mercy. No talking her way out. No explanations from him. He had a hungry-beast look that made her wonder if he could recall any English.

She grinned back, showed her teeth, letting him know she'd use them.

He walked away, selected a switch from a bush near the porch. She watched him strip the leaves from the length in an easy motion that spoke of practice. Fear nipped at her mind, but her pussy purred at the sight. Hot liquid welled between tingling lips, craving burned like nothing the nights of willing submission had produced. She squirmed and struggled and still couldn't break free. Sorry and not sorry at once.

She moved to the center of the line as Bond approached, rose on her toes, tried to pull her wrists close enough to her teeth to chew her way free.

His switch cut through the air with a singing sound and snapped smartly against the back of her left thigh.

She swung around, wishing she could soothe what felt like a line drawn with fire. "Fuck! Don't do that so hard."

His eyes glowed, promising he would do the first, and not the second.

The switch nipped again, sharp as a bee sting, heat spreading through her skin, like that heat between her legs. She danced away from the switch. His eyes danced, following her jiggling breasts.

He reached inside his boxers, hand stroking up and down. Her mouth went dry with longing. She tipped her head back and moaned.

The switch licked out again, this time it caught her breast and she cried out, yanking at the line, trying to cover her breasts, draw her arms down over them. It was useless. He was working her backward toward a pole where the lines stretched her higher, made more of her accessible.

He eased the tip of the switch up and down one thigh, making her whimper like a puppy. He teased between her legs. He was speaking French, his voice taking a taunting tone, like he said kinky things. His gaze on her face, searching for signs she understood. She wanted him to let that side go, talk dirty, play rough. The tightening need for fucking spread so that even her inner thighs ached from it.

He drew the switch away and her hips followed, craving what touch she could get. He smiled, snapped his wrist and the tip licked her pussy, the sensation tolerable through the lace panties. He followed it with several more and she let the sensation take her. Opened her legs to it. Flick. Flick. Flick. Like a serpent's tongue.

Keening need rose in her throat. He grabbed her by the hair and she bit his shoulder when he pulled her close, rubbing his erection against her belly. He grunted and smacked her ass hard. When she bit him again, he ripped off the panties and stuffed them in her mouth.

He'd been playing, teasing to that point. The panties were more than a gag. They were her safety net. If it got too rough, she could end this by spitting them out. The taste and scent of her arousal filled her brain like a drugged mist.

She moved up and down the length of her line, watching him watch her. Did her eyes gleam like his? Could he see arousal flush her face? He looked wild, primal. Magnificent.

While she watched, he grabbed his boxers with both hands, ripped them apart. The sound of tearing cloth excited her as much as a lover's moan. She closed her eyes and

savored. Then opened them to watch the bob of his erection when he approached. She shivered.

She struggled when he grabbed her, gave all the resistance she could. It fueled them both, but in the end there was nowhere to go but onto his fat cock, feel it slam home when he yanked her legs from under her and settled them around his hips.

He bounced her up and she slammed hard against his hips again. She didn't know what her expression communicated. It made him growl. The motion caught her by surprise, made her think of riding horseback while straddling a cock. He bounced her again and again, his arms and hips controlling the launch and landing so that her shoulders never caught the force, but she took the full impact between her legs where he wanted it. She wrapped her legs round his back and she ground herself deep.

He backed her up until her back rested against cold iron, the full length of the metal pole. Her pussy felt the length of his cock buried in her. He guided her hands to hold the T-bar. He eased back slightly and wrapped his arms around her back to protect it from what came next.

Then he started to fuck her, ravage her with his cock, while he snarled and cursed in French. She gathered his misery up and gave it back to him as her pleasure, in moans, cries.

She spit out the cloth and he froze until she urged with her hips and said. "Don't stop. Don't ever stop."

He started fucking again, the sound and scent primitive. She taunted him. "Fuck me hard. Make me feel it. Make me know you've been there."

His cock slammed her and she screamed at him to do it again, and again, and again, and again. She took every thrust, until his cock jerked out and he shot cream over her belly, dragging her against him, and rubbing it between their bodies when he was spent, moaning French into her hair.

When she twisted to kiss his face, she tasted the salt of tears. His and hers.

* * * * *

The Dungeon Gourmet Blog...spicing up your love life.

August: Le Marquis De Bond's Toasted Peach Ice Cream

Le Finis

Presentation.

How you serve the dish is as important to the taste as the spice. Contrast. Think contrast. Something warm makes the cool flavor stand out. Some like hot pie as a backdrop. Wicked grin.

The dish, she should be warm, allow the cold scoop to dribble and pool on her heat. Or maybe pop a scoop in her mouth, and insert your Popsicle stick.

Find the flavor to suit your mood. Velvet and cool—a gentle glide. Coarse and hot—a jolt. Some tongues crave one flavor, some the other. Some are greedy and want all the flavors.

Variety and creativity take each to ecstasy.

This is mind-in-the-gutter time, *mes amis*. Be creative. For the serving, where and how, it is every man for himself. Each to his own taste. As it should be. Give it your special twist.

Until next time, *mes amis*. Go play in your food. Consume her. Eat with your fingers.

~Bond

* * * * *

They talked in bed, feeding each other ice cream from the bowl they shared. Sweet cream dissolved and cooled her raw throat. She sucked at a sweet bit of peach before she swallowed.

He'd talked himself out about the past and the friend he'd lost. She'd agreed he'd have to give Krush's club a try, if only because cooking was his passion. And she'd warned how easy it would be to fall back into the same trap of being too busy for what meant most.

He turned the conversation back toward her and Bobby. His fingers brushed her cheek. She opened her mouth and he filled it with cold, sweet sin. His way of controlling the conversation. She swallowed and decided to let him have his way.

"We give him space," Bond explained when she looked up at him.

She waved away the next spoonful he aimed at her and slid down onto her back. "I knew we should have left him out of this."

"Why the sad face, little one? He will be back. He surprised himself and needs time to absorb his glimpse of a new path. He will go think."

"I don't want to hurt him, Jacques. He's been a good friend."

"Sarai, my pet, I would never harm. You know me. What happened was needed by both of you. The feelings are there and this is a safe way to explore, yes? No one clinging or expecting too much. You just escaped your cage, my pet. You need time to run free."

Run free from Bond too? Or was he worried she might cage him? It wasn't a question she had courage to ask.

She turned onto her side again, facing him, running her fingers through his chest hairs while she spoke. She liked pulling a coiled hair straight and then watching it snap back when she let go.

"You read my paper."

His lips pursed. He stroked her cheek with his knuckles. "I thought about it all through the drive here."

"Do you think this thing between us is real? Do we know the real us?"

His fingertip traced the bridge of her nose. "I think you made the case for us being stronger than real, pet. In virtual we felt safe to share things people don't ordinarily share. Things have passed between us that make us more indestructible than the average pair. It is why we can make experiences, like today with Bobby, work. It is our...what do you call...superpower. Yes?"

She laughed, tugged another hair and watched it snap back. "So how did you turn so generous all of the sudden? I could have sworn you were jealous over the Ginger thing. Then you turn around and share me for real after blowing up over her."

"Jealous? *Moi?*"

She looked up and straight into his eyes. "If not jealousy, then what?"

He shrugged. "It's not jealousy. Ginger in his tutu and pigtails was not for you. He is Krush's fantasy, not yours."

"Hmmm. So you think maybe Ginger is more threat than Bobby?"

He frowned. "Of course not. There is no green monster in my eyes, brat."

She laughed and pressed her face to his chest, breathed that male scent that was Bond, that made her dizzy. "You shouldn't be worried about him," she murmured, "Bobby is way more threat than Ginger. Big muscles. Big truck. Big..."

She grabbed a chest hair between her teeth. She could tell by the way his fingers had tightened at the back of her neck that his mind was on the men, the others. He had a green-eyed monster, on a leash, but it was there. Why did that feel so satisfying? She yanked the hair out.

"Ow. Fuck. Brat!" His hand slapped her bottom. She tried to escape, giggling, when he grabbed an ankle and yanked her back to him.

"I'm sorry, Master. Truly I am."

"Yes, I see that," he growled. "No matter. I will make you sorry."

"No. No." Her giggles evaporated. "I'll be good. I'll make it up to you."

One eyebrow arched. "Go on."

She relaxed, tried giving him what she hoped was a droopy-eyed sexy look, and said in French, "I will pet your Popsicle, Master." At least that's what she hoped she said.

"You want me to lick your knees? My pleasure, pet." He dove under the covers and she tried to break away, seriously struggling.

"No. No. No. Anything but that. Please? I know I didn't say knees, you beast."

He resurfaced. "You call me a beast?"

"A green-eyed beast."

"You will suffer."

She tried not to smile at that. Really tried, but the corners of her lips twitched.

He threw back the covers and hauled her out of bed. He had the front half of her tucked under one arm, her belly pressed against his back, and the other arm locked under her knees. She was curled around him when he stomped through the bathroom door. She was too afraid he'd drop her to resist. She tossed her head and saw them in the bathroom mirror, like a snapshot that catches you off guard and says more than you wanted to know.

His hair was tousled, his jaw dark with evening stubble and light danced in his blue eyes. He had a glow. Le Marquis de Bond was glowing with joy and love. Scarier than that, his joy was mirrored in her. Not just in her face, but a warmth she felt blooming inside. Krush had been right about them. Why were the lovers always the last to know?

He lowered her to the floor and turned his attention to concocting something bubbly and deliciously scented to bathe in.

Okay then, she loved him. He could carve another notch in his spatula. But he'd better retire his carving knife after this, because hers would be the last notch. And she didn't share.

About the Author

Whether writing a shapeshifter romance exploring the primal power of the wild feminine, or BDSM romance where love digs into a character's shadows, Nara believes romance should open the door and push lovers into a new dimension: sexually, emotionally, and sometimes physically.

Nara Malone is an award-winning novelist and poet. As a freelance journalist and writer, her feature profiles on women entrepreneurs and her romantic short stories have been published in newspapers, magazines and digital publications.

Nara welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

Also by **Nara Malone**

The Tiger's Tale



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer ebooks or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

www.ellorascave.com