



PEGGY HUNTER

Who Wants to Be The
Millionaire's
MISTRESS

Who Wants To Be The Millionaire's Mistress?
by Peggy Hunter

Whiskey Creek Press

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Dedication

For Jo Jo.

Don't know what I did to deserve your friendship but I am forever grateful.

Love you madly ... you wild and crazy woman!

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Chapter 1

"Good evening and welcome to Who Wants to Be the Millionaire's Mistress? I'm Bob Hoover, your host for the hottest new reality game show on TV. Now let's bring out our sexy millionaire, Maxwell Barton."

Max plastered a smile on his face as he walked onto the set. He stopped briefly and waved to the applauding audience before he made his way to the stool beside the host.

Hoover waited for the applause to die down before he turned to Max. "This is it," he said in a deep only-for-TV voice. "The night we've all been waiting for."

Max smiled back. The guy was a total fake. Up close, his face looked like wax and Max figured his dark brown hair wouldn't move even if a tornado hit the studio. Why Hoover was so loved by the fans of the show was beyond his comprehension.

Max averted his gaze in an effort not to laugh out loud. "That's right, Bob," he said smoothly. "I pick my mistress tonight."

The audience applauded again and Hoover waited for his cue before he flashed his brilliant white teeth at the camera. "Well then, we won't waste another minute. Let's meet our remaining three contestants."

Music started as Hoover read from the electronic prompter. "From Edmonton, Alberta, an exotic dancer who wants to gyrate in our millionaire's bed, Penny Hargrove."

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Max watched as the buxom blond walked onto the stage and waved to the audience. When she took her seat opposite them, Hoover continued.

"From Vancouver, British Columbia, a professional body builder who wants to whip Max into submission, Sue-Ann Whitfield."

Max smiled at the athletic blond who looked like she could break him in half with her little finger. When Sue-Ann took her seat, she snarled suggestively at Max. He shivered inwardly.

"And finally..."

Max's cock hardened in anticipation. He'd made his choice the second he'd laid eyes on her weeks ago. Too bad they had to go through weeks of eliminating several contestants before he made his choice known. He'd have dragged this woman to his bed long before now if given the chance.

But this was it, the final night. He wouldn't have to wait any longer; she'd be in his bed tonight.

"From Toronto, Ontario, a legal secretary willing to break the law to please her man, Lacey Masters."

Max's heart pounded as the petite woman with long auburn hair walked out and struggled to crawl up on the stool beside the other two contestants. Her heart-shaped face was drawn and pale. She'd had enough of the charade too.

Hang on, babe. It won't be long now.

When she finally settled on her seat, sea-green eyes impaled him. She was a feisty one, and had made it clear from the start that she had no desire to be his mistress. Every time she wasn't eliminated over the past few weeks,

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her eyes darkened a little bit more. She wanted out and that made her even more irresistible.

"Let's have a look at the dates Max went on with our three contestants this past week."

Max's eyes flew to the television monitor carefully positioned in front of him while the audience gazed up at the large screen over the set. Hardy laughter ensued when Penny Hargrove jumped up on the table at the five-star restaurant and danced for Max.

Max winced. The Riverside Café had been his favorite place to dine in Toronto. He'd never be able to go there again without picturing that woman gyrating over him.

He'd taken Sue-Ann to his favorite pub only to have her insist on opening his bottle of beer ... with her teeth. If that wasn't bad enough, she picked a fight with the burly bouncer. She won.

The audience loved it but Max winced again as he mentally crossed another favorite haunt off his list.

And then Lacey appeared on the screen. Dressed in an emerald-green outfit that matched her eyes, she gazed at him across the table at Aunt Maria's Pizzeria in downtown Toronto.

Aunt Maria's Pizzeria was more than just a pizza joint to Max. Maria Ricardo had been a parental figure to Max for several years.

His recorded voice echoed in the studio as he reached across the table and put his hand on top of hers. "Tell me," he said, "are you a screamer when you reach orgasm?"

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Lacey grabbed her water glass and tossed the contents into his face. "None of your bleep business, asshole!" she yelled before she stormed out. What Lacey had actually said couldn't be aired.

To add insult to injury, Aunt Maria walked up and cuffed the back of his head. "What did you say to the little lady?"

God. He loved it.

And so did the audience. They cheered loudly as the last video closed and the camera moved back to Hoover.

He flashed another bright smile. "Don't go 'way! When we come back, our three contestants will have their final interview with Maxell Barton."

The moment the all-clear sign flashed overhead, Hoover frowned and turned to the director. "The mole on my chin looks like a huge zit," he complained. "Is it too much to ask for a decent makeup artist?"

Max chuckled softly. What the hell was he doing here anyway? If it hadn't been for the bad press he'd received after ending his relationship with his latest girlfriend, he'd never have agreed to appear on such a stupid game show.

He turned his attention to the three women sitting a few feet away from him. His gaze fell on Lacey, who was shifting uncomfortably on her stool. If it hadn't been for her, the last few weeks would have been a complete bore.

He wanted her. He wanted her more than he'd ever wanted any woman. And, after weeks of waiting, he'd finally have her.

* * * *

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Why, oh why had she listened to the producer of the show when he told her wearing thong underwear would make her feel sexy? They were driving her absolutely bonkers.

Lacey Masters desperately wanted to pry the G-string out of her butt crack. With all eyes on her in the studio, she didn't dare push her fingers between her butt cheeks to pull it out. Instead, she squirmed uncomfortably in her seat, mentally trying to dissolve the string tightly wedged in her crack.

Lacey rocked in her seat, trying to find a comfortable position. When her elbow nudged Sue-Ann Whitfield, she turned to her fellow contestant and offered a sheepish smile. "Sorry," she said.

The burly blond stabbed her with icy blue eyes. "Piss off, princess."

Lacey broke eye contact with the Amazon. She knew that once she'd been established as the fan-favorite, she'd lost any possible friends amongst the contestants. Over the weeks, as more were eliminated, the glares grew more intense.

It wasn't that Lacey wanted to be the Millionaire's Mistress. In fact, she'd auditioned for the reality game show because even those deemed unsuitable walked away with a couple hundred dollars for their trouble. And she needed the money. Who knew she'd not only be chosen as a contestant but find herself staying on the show until the very last night?

The moment she laid eyes on Maxwell Barton, she shivered inwardly. He was everything she wanted to avoid in the past few months. Mega rich, mega sexy and mega full of self-

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importance. He expected women to drool over him, beg to be in his bed.

She hated the man on sight. He was the shining example of a mistake she'd never make again.

Ever!

Lacey gave herself a mental kick in the ass. She should have known being rude to the guy over the past few weeks would only draw attention, not just by the man himself but by the millions of viewers who tuned in every week. Too late she discovered she provided comic relief, fueling not only the fans' wishes to see her chosen but also Maxwell Barton himself.

Forget the people who watched the show week in and week out, every time Lacey told Maxwell to take a flying leap, his eyes darkened just a little more, his interest piqued. The man wasn't used to being spurned. One would think she'd have learned that by now ... men like him liked a challenge.

The intense, brooding gazes thrown her way made her body shiver with ... with...

Hell, what is it?

Fear or anticipation? Loathing or sexual excitement?

Fear and loathing. Yeah, that's it, fear and loathing.

It had to be. After everything she'd been through, how could she possibly be attracted to someone like Maxwell Barton?

Bob Hoover's deep voice infiltrated her thoughts. "We're back," he said into the camera. Then he turned to Max. "Well, we all know who the viewers want to win but your decision is the only one that matters. We've seen clips of your dates with

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the final three contestants, so there's only one step left before you choose your mistress. But before we do, let's have a look at the highlights of your dates for the past eight weeks."

Lacey sighed inwardly. God! What more could there be? As Lacey tried to focus on the montage of the previous weeks' adventures, she reminded herself that the farce was almost over. After tonight, she'd walk away, hopefully with a few dollars in her pocket.

The audience clapped loudly when the montage ended. Hoover spoke again. "Maxwell has one final question for each of our contestants." He hesitated before he added, "Just as soon as we come back." The audience moaned as the director called the clear sign.

Lacey shifted on her stool again. Could they have made more uncomfortable seats? Her mind shifted back to the underwear wedged between her butt cheeks. She had to move, damn it. She leapt off the stool and wiggled her ass in an effort to free the silk fabric hopelessly implanted there. If only she could shove her fingers in without being seen. She took a step forward, splaying her legs apart. It didn't budge. She squeezed her butt cheeks in an effort to expel the offending string. That only served to drive it deeper.

Lacey was about to scream when she looked up and caught sight of Maxwell Barton. His eyes were black as night as he gazed at her. His dark brows were knitted low as his gaze washed over her.

Oh God. Does he know?

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Discomfort shifted from her ass to his hungry stare. He was a predator. Given the chance, he'd consume her body and soul.

Lacey's body tightened, the blood in her veins sizzled. She stamped down the excitement coursing through her as she popped back onto her stool. She didn't want him. She needed him like she needed another hole in her head.

Will you never learn, Lacey?

"And we're back," Hoover announced as Lacey swallowed the lump in her throat. She had a bad feeling about this ... a very bad feeling.

"So, Max," Hoover said, "you have one last question for our remaining contestants before you make your final choice, don't you?"

"I sure do, Bob." Maxwell's rich deep voice poured over Lacey like liquid honey.

"Well, this is your opportunity," Hoover said.

Maxwell didn't hesitate as he turned his attention to the first of the three women. "Penny," he said, referring to the exotic dancer, "we're stranded on a deserted island. What one item would you need to make it special?"

Penny giggled suggestively. "That's easy," she said. "Since we all know what we'll be doing on the island, I'd bring a big box of flavored condoms."

The audience roared and Maxwell waited for it to die down before he turned his attention to the body builder. "Sue-Ann, same question."

"Lots and lots of protein to keep you energized," she replied. "You'll need it for what I have planned."

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Catcalls and whistles ensued.

Lacey braced herself.

The moment Maxwell turned his attention to her, Lacey spoke up. "I'd bring my entire family with me so I wouldn't be lonely," she said.

Maxwell frowned. "You didn't wait for the question."

Lacey's throat tightened. "Isn't it the same as what you asked the other two?"

Maxwell's lips pulled back in a slow smile. "No," he replied.

The audience clapped and cheered as Maxwell went on. "Lacey." He hesitated as his eyes impaled her, reaching into her very soul. Lacey swallowed hard. "During the commercial break, why were you bouncing around the set?"

Damn! He had noticed and was calling her out on national television. Lacey's head swam. There was only one thing she could do.

"My panties are wedged between my butt cheeks," she said as calmly as she could. "I was attempting to get them out without having to dig my fingers in there."

Lacey's eyes never left Maxwell's as the audience broke into a deafening roar. All she could hope for was that her extreme honesty would finally turn him off.

But the look in his eyes didn't give her the feeling that she'd turned him off. In fact, it seemed to turn him on.

Damn! Didn't men like Maxwell Barton want fantasy? Hadn't she made it clear there was nothing he'd find with her but misery?

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Hoover called over the cheering audience as he peered into the camera. "Don't go 'way. Our sexy millionaire will choose his mistress right after the commercial break."

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Chapter 2

Lacey flinched against the flashing camera bulbs as she and Maxwell Barton exited the studio in downtown Toronto. From the moment Maxwell made his choice known ... from the confetti and balloons falling from the studio ceiling to the hot, lusty kiss he planted on her lips when she was forced into his embrace ... everything seemed to happen in slow motion.

With the paparazzi dogging them every step of the way, Maxwell herded her toward the gleaming black limo parked just outside the studio doors. The experience was surreal, as if it was a dream ... or to be more accurate, a nightmare.

She wasn't surprised when she was chosen, she'd long since accepted the fact there was no way out. The glowers she'd gotten from the two other contestants deepened to the point that she was afraid for her life after Maxwell had chosen her. But Lacey had expected it from them; neither Sue-Ann nor Penny liked to lose.

What she hadn't expected was the media's interest. It wasn't until Lacey was Maxwell's chosen mistress that she realized just how much attention the stupid game show had garnered. No doubt, the producers were already planning the next season.

Lacey breathed a sigh of relief when Maxwell pushed her into the backseat of the limo and climbed in beside her. The chauffeur slammed the door closed. The tinted windows blocked out the reporters milling around the car.

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Relief was quickly replaced with angst when Lacey looked across the seat and saw the imposing figure of Maxwell Barton.

What the fuck am I doing here? This is crazy!

She struggled to think of something to say. "Uhm, Mr. Barton..."

"Please," he said as he loosened his tie and undid the top buttons of his shirt, "call me Max."

All right.

"Max," she began, "there's no need to follow through on this whole mistress thing. You can just drop me off a few blocks from here, preferably at a bus stop—"

"Drop you off?" Max's deep brown eyes were brilliant as he gazed at her.

"Well, yeah," she said hesitantly. "I mean, come on, this was fun while it lasted but..."

The window in front of them lowered. "Where to, Mr. Barton?"

"Ms. Masters' condo, Bruce."

"What?" Lacey leaned forward as the window rolled back up. "Hey, Bruce, the nearest bus stop is good." She flopped back against the leather seat, knowing Bruce hadn't heard her.

"I'd have thought you'd be anxious to see your luxury condo," Max said easily. "After all, it's part of the prize."

"A prize I didn't want," Lacey replied. "You knew all along I didn't want any of this."

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Max cocked his head slightly as a frown marred his handsome face. "Really? I thought it was all part of the game."

Lacey huffed as she folded her arms over her chest and looked straight ahead of her. "Trust me, it was no game."

"No," he said smoothly. "It wasn't a game. In fact, I knew you were the one from the start. The show was..." he hesitated before continuing, "a formality of sorts. We both knew how it would end."

Lacey wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. Is this guy for real? "Excuse me?" she said through clenched teeth. "Just how dense are you? I did everything I could to discourage you."

"Yeah, the viewers loved it." Max smiled. "But I knew you were playing up to me. The other girls were stumbling over themselves to impress me. You went to great lengths to push me away. You knew full well it'd lure me."

Lacey threw up her hands. "You just don't get it!" she cried. "I wasn't trying to lure you. I did everything I could to turn you off."

Max grinned ... a lazy, sexy, all-too-inviting grin. Lacey's stomach flip-flopped; her fingers itched to touch his handsome face. Her core moistened in anticipation. Lacey shook it off. She wasn't going to be drawn in again. No matter how exciting Max was, she could not, would not, let him infiltrate her life.

"Well, this is awkward," Max said smoothly. "You thought you were driving me away and all I could think about was sinking my cock into you."

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Lacey's mouth went dry as her body went rigid. She made a valiant attempt to banish all thoughts of Maxwell Barton sinewy body pressed against hers as his thick, hot penis penetrated her core.

No one would blame her for not being able to do it. After all, Max was one sexy guy, known as Toronto's sexiest millionaire. What red-blooded woman didn't imagine having sex with the guy? The fact she hadn't had sex for a few months didn't help either.

Lacey squeezed her eyes closed in an effort to force the erotic thoughts from her mind. Fool! You damn stupid fool! How could she so easily forget the last time she slept with a millionaire? How could she forget that she still had gaping wounds or how she swore she'd never go there again?

Lacey took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Well, maybe you should have done your research," she said stiffly. "If you had, you'd know I was a reluctant contestant."

"What makes you think I didn't do my research?" Max asked. "I did. In fact, I had my people check you out thoroughly."

Lacey's eyes flew to him. "What?"

Max grinned, a sultry, sexy grin that lit his rich brown eyes. "I'm a rich man, Lacey," he said. "I had to be sure you weren't after my money."

"If you were afraid to be taken, why the heck would you appear on a show like Who Wants to Be the Millionaire's Mistress? You had to know all the contestants were after your money."

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"I had my reasons," Max said vaguely. "And yeah, each and every contestant thought they'd win a piece of me." He hesitated before he added, "Except you. You didn't have an agenda."

Lacey snorted softly. "You clearly didn't do your research."

Max chuckled. "Are you referring to the fact you're homeless?"

Lacey gasped but before she could reply, Max went on.

"Having a luxury condo to use for a year should mean a lot to you since you have nowhere to live."

Lacey fixed her eyes ahead of her. She had no intention of admitting it was a definite bonus.

"Or are you referring to the affair you had with Zachary Billings and how he fired you when you demanded he leave his wife?"

Lacey stomach clenched as cold fingers circled her heart. When she turned to face him, Max quickly went on. "Was that about money? I don't think it was."

Lacey's body went stone cold. He knows? She gasped and sputtered. "You don't know—"

"Nor do I care," Max cut in. "Billings' loss is my gain."

"But—"

Max's face clouded ominously as he cut her off again. "I already said I don't care."

Lacey bristled. Who the hell did he think he was anyway? How dare he shove what she had with Zachary Billings aside as if it hadn't mattered?

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She'd loved Zachary with all her heart ... with every ounce of her being. If Max thought he'd had a thorough investigation done, he was sorely mistaken.

"There's a lot more to it than you know," Lacey said. "In fact—"

"We're here," Max said, cutting her off yet again.

Lacey bit back the scream curling in her throat. Her heart pounded as her blood heated. "Stop cutting me off!" she cried.

Max raised a lazy eyebrow. "That temper wasn't just for the good of the show, was it?"

Lacey's mind reeled. How was she supposed to reply to that? Her temper was what got her into the situation she was in to begin with. Her temper was why she not only lost the love of her life but her job and subsequently, her apartment, her car, her dog and just about everything else she owned.

But she wasn't about to admit all that to Maxwell Barton. Best to keep her big mouth shut for a change.

When she didn't reply, a slow smile crept across his lips, making her shiver again. "We can talk about the issues with your former employer some other time. I want to show you the condo. I think you'll be impressed."

When the window in front of them rolled down, Max looked at the chauffeur. "What is it, Bruce?"

"The paparazzi, Mr. Barton. They're as thick here as they were at the studio."

"Thanks for the warning," Max said before the window rolled back up. He turned to Lacey and took a deep breath.

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"Right. Just so you know, we're not saying a word to the reporters. Just follow my lead."

Before Lacy could reply, Bruce opened the back door. Max grabbed her hand and led her out of the limo. He held her close as flashbulbs blinded her. She kept her head bowed and blindly walked with him, feeling safe in his warm embrace.

"Ms. Masters, how does it feel to be Maxwell Barton's latest kept woman?"

"Are you going to have sex tonight?"

"Is Maxwell your dream man?"

Bruce led the way to the waiting elevator in the lobby of Hotel Gregoire. She had no idea where she was being led but instinct told her to trust Max. She felt tremendous relief when they stepped inside the elevator.

As the doors slid closed, a reporter asked, "Ms. Masters, how do you think Zachary Billings will feel knowing you're having sex with his nemesis?"

Nemesis? What the hell?

Lacey's blood chilled as her hands shot out to keep the elevator door from closing. Firm hands closed over her shoulders and pulled her back.

"Now isn't the time, Lacey," Max said softly into her ear. He held her against him as the doors slid closed.

* * * *

Max snickered as he slid the keycard into the condo lock and pushed the door open. If Lacey thought she could run away, she was sadly mistaken. She was in this sham as deep

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as he was and he sure as hell wasn't going to let her escape now.

Besides, since he was forced into the situation, there was no reason not to enjoy it. Ms. Masters was a sweet little creature and it seemed fitting to have her as his personal prize after enduring weeks on the fucking game show.

Max grinned at Lacey's soft gasp when he flicked the lights on in the condo. Of course she'd be suitably impressed; it was the most luxurious condo available in Toronto and, since she was homeless, he suspected anything short of a box in an alley would impress her.

The game show producers offered a condo on the upper east side of the city. Max took one look and nixed it. It wasn't suitable for someone as beautiful as Lacey Masters. He found his own hideaway for the woman he intended to own, body and soul. Only the best for...

Max chuckled again. The very idea made him feel like a Neanderthal and yet, he'd won ownership of Lacey fair and square.

...his mistress.

He watched as Lacey walked around the well appointed living room. Delicate fingers absently grazed the supple brown suede sofa as she gazed at the gigantic entertainment center encased in the handmade oak armoire. She didn't stop to examine the assorted electronics. Instead, she turned her attention to the well equipped bar and the kitchen tucked behind it.

"This is a lot more than I'm used to," she said nervously.

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Max stood back, enjoying the fact she was out of her element. After she peered into the kitchen, she made her way to a closed door. She looked at him questioningly.

"Go ahead."

Lacey pushed the door open and gasped again when she took in the fully appointed bathroom. She looked back at him. "A whirlpool tub? Looks big enough to hold five people."

"We just need room for two," he quipped.

Lacey's blue eyes darkened. "Yes, well..." Her voice trailed off.

Max moved to the sofa and lazily threw himself onto it. All right, he'd played along long enough. He nodded to the door beside the bathroom. "That's the bedroom," he said. "Go in and freshen up. There's a robe hanging on the door. Put it on when you're ready and come back."

Lacey frowned. "Excuse me?"

Max rolled his eyes. He'd also had enough of her innocent stares. "You know damn well what I mean. Take your clothes off and put the robe on."

Lacey's eyes rounded, her hand flew to her chest. "You expect me to—"

"Of course," Max replied impatiently. "What did you think would happen?"

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Chapter 3

Max winced as the woman kneeled between his legs and wrapped her long fingers around his engorged cock. He drew a deep breath when he felt her tongue touch the tip before her mouth closed over it. He sank his fingers into her hair as he peered down at her.

"Harder," he said through clenched teeth. "Suck me harder."

She obliged, pumping her hand over his long shaft as her lips tightened over him.

Max threw his head back and squeezed his eyes closed. "Yeah, babe," he said. "That's it."

He loved the soft slurping sounds she made as she continued to suck him. Her lips smacked each time she pulled them off his swollen cock. She let out a long breath just before she opened her mouth to take him in again.

When Max couldn't take it anymore, his fingers wrapped around her arms and pulled her up. She gazed at him, her eyes glazed with desire. She smiled as she braced her knees on either side of him on the sofa and slowly, methodically lowered herself over him. She hesitated at the cusp ... just when his cock would have opened her.

Max groaned impatiently. After the events of the day, he wasn't in the mood to be teased. He grabbed her hips and pulled her down over him with force.

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She cried out when he rammed into her. His cock slid into her soft sheath, filling her completely, taking everything she had and demanding more.

Max was relentless. He needed all of her and would not allow anything less. She howled when he pushed her to the brink. When she would have pulled away, he gripped her hips and pulled her down over him harder. She wouldn't escape. Not today.

The orgasm, when it came, ripped through her with tremendous force. He held her against him until she collapsed over him. Only then did he allow the torrent of desire he'd been holding onto for many weeks to finally flow.

With that, his body collapsed into the sweet realm of satisfaction. He'd sleep tonight for the first time in weeks ... for the first time since he'd laid eyes on Lacey Masters.

His eyelids felt heavy as relief coursed through his body. She moved off his lap and rested on the sofa beside him.

"I'm hungry," she said. "Wanna order a pizza?"

Max's eyes opened reluctantly. Fuck. "Uhm," he hesitated, searching for a way to tell her gently. "Look, Mary—"

"I know," she interjected. "You want me to leave."

Max blinked. "I'm sorry..."

"Don't be," she said as she picked up the clothes she'd discarded on the living room floor. "It's always been about the sex and that's the way I like it."

Mary was the one woman he knew wasn't looking for a relationship or money. The daughter of a shipping magnet, she'd been burned a few times too. Sex with Mary was always explosive but she didn't want anything more than he did.

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"Well, you can stay the night if you want to," Max said. He might want her again after he'd had a nap.

Mary shook her head. "I don't think so," she said. "Things are different now."

Max frowned. "How?"

She chuckled. "I watch TV, Max. I know you're nuts about her."

"And yet I'm here with you," Max pointed out.

Mary nodded lightly. "Yeah. She must have tossed you out. When you fucked me, you were thinking of her."

Had he been that transparent? It wasn't his style to let a woman know he was thinking of someone else when he was screwing them. "I'm sorry."

Mary smiled as she stepped into her bright red panties and pulled them up. "No prob. What we had was fun, but it's over. I'm okay with it." She smiled as she stepped into her skirt and pulled it up to her waist. "Call a taxi for me, will ya?"

When Max picked up the phone, Mary pulled her bra and blouse on. She walked out the door without a backward glance. She left Max sitting on the couch, his cock hanging between his legs, his mind on Lacey.

Who knew Lacey would take issue with his insistence that she get naked? After all, hadn't he earned the right to have her in his bed after choosing her for his mistress?

He knew she had a fiery temper but wasn't prepared for the explosion she'd unleashed the moment he'd made his demand. If he intended to get her into his bed, it seemed he'd have to take a different approach.

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And so, finding himself alone after walking out ... or rather, running out ... of Lacey's condo, he went to the pub closest to his home. Mary was there and one thing quickly led to another. He regretted that he hadn't held out long enough to devour Lacey but, considering how badly he'd failed tonight, it could be some time before he'd manage to talk her into his bed. And Max had needs.

Mary certainly helped scratch the itch that had dogged him for weeks. But it wouldn't be long before his hunger grew again. Just the thought of Lacey Masters made his cock tighten with need.

He'd have her. One way or another, she would live up to her end of being his mistress.

* * * *

"You should see this place," Lacey said into the portable phone as she languished on the king-size bed. "It's the penthouse suite on top of Hotel Gregoire. I'm on the twenty-seventh floor."

"I'm still trying to figure out why you tossed Maxwell Barton out," Rachael Meadows replied.

"He was too sure of himself," Lacey replied, knowing her best friend would understand. "I'm sick of pushy millionaires thinking they own me."

"Well, come on," Rachael replied. "This one's a far cry from the fuck up you had with Zack. At least he's not married."

Zack? It was oddly disturbing that her best friend, and former co-worker, referred to him as Zack. Only those close to him were allowed to call him that.

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Lacey's heart ached remembering her last day at Billings Enterprises. After a year-long affair, she'd grown weary of Zack's unkept promises and demanded he make a choice once and for all. Either his wife or her.

Zack assured her that she was his chosen one. But then, out of the blue, Bonnie Billings, his wife of twenty-six years, walked into the office and gave Lacey a reality check.

"You aren't the first and you won't be the last," the fifty-year-old woman told her. "Don't be foolish enough to think you'll ever change him. He'll never leave me."

Lacey then discovered she was one of a long line of women Zack had had an affair with. All of whom ended up the same as Lacey ... unemployed and, as far as the corporate world was concerned, damaged goods. Short of leaving her beloved city, Lacey knew finding another job in Toronto would be no easy task.

So when her former boss insisted that only those close to him call him Zack, why had Rachel done so just now? Was there something her best friend was keeping from her?

No, of course not. Lacey gave herself a mental shake. Rachael would never do such a thing. The fact she'd referred to him by his shortened name had to be a mistake.

"Yes," Lacey replied sadly. "If only I knew then what I know now."

"All's not lost," Rachael said cheerfully. "I know how you felt about staying with me after you couldn't afford your apartment. Even when Maxwell dumps you, you'll still have the use of the penthouse suite for a year and the money you won. I heard Barton actually bought the place just for you."

Apparently he didn't like the condo the producers of the show offered."

Even when Maxwell dumps you.

Lacey winced. When, not if. Even Rachael knew.

"Yes," Lacey said, "it is good to know I won't have to mooch off anyone before I get back on my feet."

"You weren't mooching. I loved having you here."

A soft tap sounded on the door. "I have to go, Rach," she said. "Someone's at the door. I'll call you tomorrow, okay?"

"You better," her friend said.

Lacey hung up and padded through the massive apartment. She pressed her hand against the door. "Who is it?"

"Room service."

Lacey frowned. "I didn't order room service."

"Breakfast, ma'am, compliments of the hotel."

As if on cue, Lacey's stomach growled. She realized she hadn't eaten anything since lunch the day before.

She opened the door and allowed the stoic man, dressed in a black and white uniform, to wheel the cart inside the room.

Suddenly flashbulbs exploded in her face. Lacey reeled and covered her eyes in an effort to shield her face.

Oh my God!

The room quickly filled with paparazzi. "Ms. Masters, was sex with Maxwell Barton everything you thought it would be?"

Lacey blinked. The man who'd wheeled the cart into the suite had quickly disappeared, leaving her to face the reporters on her own.

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"Lacey," another reporter asked as cameras continued to flash in her face, "on a scale from one to ten, how would you rate Maxwell Barton as a lover?"

Lacey laughed inwardly. Why was the press so certain she'd slept with her millionaire so damn fast? Was it a sign of the times? If it was, she'd been left behind.

"Is he here?" someone yelled over the clamor.

Lacey shook her head. "No, Maxwell's not here. In fact, he was the perfect gentleman last night."

The room went completely silent. All cameras were holstered and Lacey could swear she could hear their disappointment hit the luxuriously carpeted floor with a thud. This was not the scoop they were hoping for.

Someone asked the question no one else wanted to. "Were you disappointed?"

"Not at all," Lacey replied easily.

"It's a well known fact you had a torrid affair with the CEO of Billings Enterprises. How does Barton rate as a lover compared to Billings?"

Lacey felt the wind whoosh from her lungs. Her mind scrambled for something, anything to say. "My relationship with Mr. Barton is completely different," she said.

"So you admit you did have an affair with Zachary Billings."

Lacey winced. What had she walked into? "Yes."

"So, Maxwell Barton wasn't as good for you as Billings was?"

"No!" Lacey cried. "That's not how it was at all. In fact, Max made the choice to leave," she said quickly.

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"Why?" The question came from several reporters at the same time.

"Because I asked him to."

A reporter in the back, one she couldn't see, asked, "Is Maxwell Barton gay?"

Lacey bristled. "Of course he's not gay. Just because he couldn't make love to me—"

"He couldn't make love? Is he impotent?"

Oh shit! "I didn't mean he couldn't, I meant he respected my wishes."

No one in the room cared and Lacey sighed heavily. The paparazzi were there for only one thing. They wanted dirt on Maxwell Barton and no matter what she said now, they would certainly twist it.

Having gotten what they'd come for, the reporters quickly filed out of the penthouse suite. When the door slammed shut, Lacey blinked in disbelief.

Not good, this is not good at all!

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Chapter 4

Lacey Masters Spends Night Millionaire-less. Barton Gay?

Max didn't read beyond the headline before he balled the morning paper in his hands and flung it across his office.

He knew the press well, knew they liked to put a spin on anything related to him. No doubt, Lacey had been caught off-guard and misquoted. Whatever it took to sell papers.

What Max hadn't counted on was just how much clout the stupid game show carried. He'd agreed to appear on the show because the press had raked him over the coals after his broken relationship with a well-known socialite.

Never mind the mistake he'd made breaking up with her, he made the fatal error when he pursued the mysterious Roxanna Brule. The daughter of a shipping magnet from Montreal, she had a very good reason for being mysterious. The woman was a fucking freak! Her father threw several investment deals his way while Max courted Roxanna. But nothing, not even billion-dollar deals, could persuade Max to stick with the woman.

The press quickly took the relationship to higher grounds, soon announcing they were engaged. Bad press followed when Max made his intentions clear ... he had no plans to marry anyone, and certainly not Roxanna.

The press quickly labeled him as a cold, heartless man. It wouldn't have bothered him one bit if his business hadn't suffered as a result. When a friend, who was producing a new reality game show, suggested he'd save face by being on the

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show, Max agreed. He hoped by appearing on Who Wants to Be the Millionaire's Mistress?, he'd show the public his softer side and regain public favor.

And he would have too. If it hadn't been for Lacey's ornery actions, he'd have remained in complete control. It wasn't his fault Lacey drew on his darker side, made him want her more every time he saw her.

And now the press was having way too much fun with the fact he'd left his hard-won mistress to her own devices just hours after they'd left the studio.

His mistake. One he wouldn't make again.

As of today, the press would see Lacey Masters firmly pressed against his side at every turn. From now on, he would call the shots.

Max picked up the phone and hit the button to reach his secretary. "Eleanor," he spoke briskly, "make reservations at Gigi's for noon and have Bruce deliver Ms. Masters there."

"Would you like me to reserve the private dining room?" Eleanor asked.

Max gritted his teeth. Of course he wanted the private dining room. When had he ever taken a woman to Gigi's and not had the private dining room?

Max stamped down his annoyance. Eleanor was being her usual efficient self. Max had a volatile temper and she'd learned the hard way to make no mistakes.

"Yes," he said tightly. He hesitated before he added, "Thank you, El."

Max knew he didn't thank his secretary nearly enough. Many wondered how she'd managed to put up with him for

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the past few years. He had to admit, he sometimes wondered too.

The one thing Max had learned over the years was a woman's thought process would always be a mystery to him. Eleanor had her reasons for staying and Max had no inclination to figure them out. Every day he walked into his office and found her stationed behind her desk was a blessing as far as he was concerned.

Why try to figure out his secretary when he had bigger fish to fry? Or, to be more exact, a lovely woman to get into his bed.

He and Lacey had gotten off on the wrong foot. Perhaps he even deserved the latest press release. But he had no intention of letting it happen again. The world, and Lacey, would soon know just how relentless he was when it came to conquering a woman.

* * * *

Lacey's body had been sizzling with dread and, she was loath to admit, excitement, from the moment Bruce came to collect her. The stoic chauffeur insisted she wear something befitting the swank downtown restaurant. He waited patiently while Lacey rifled through the clothes she'd won as part of the prize from the game show.

Having no idea what to wear, she relied on Bruce's discerning eye. He'd nixed three conservative outfits before she finally donned a crimson, tight-fitting dress with a low-cut neckline. Lacey hated the clingy dress but Bruce's nod of

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approval said it all; she had found suitable attire for lunch with Maxwell Barton.

Now she sat in the dimly lit private dining room at the exclusive downtown Toronto restaurant. She'd never dined at Gigi's before, the exclusive Italian menu being far too rich for her blood. But she had heard stories of the private dining room and just what happened here. Lacey was never one to buy into rumors so she ignored the stories of rich men and their conquests conducting illicit affairs within the confines of the room.

Still, the fact the room was equipped with an ornate satin-covered daybed made the stories very hard to ignore. If the rumors were indeed true ... heck, even if they weren't ... it seemed Maxwell Barton intended to have more than a quick lunch.

Lacey was in the middle of wondering how she felt about that when the door suddenly swung open. Her breath caught in her throat as Max's deep brown eyes landed on her. He said nothing as he turned and nodded to the maitre d'. The doors closed behind him as he slowly walked to the table. When he sat down, his dark gaze fell on her again. He looked cool and confident in his designer suit as he leaned forward and placed his arms on the table.

"I expect you found your accommodations to your liking," he said.

It wasn't a question and Lacey wasn't sure what to make of his polite tone. "Yes," she replied. "The condo is very nice."

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"Good." He said the word but his mind seemed elsewhere, as if there was something more ... something she'd certainly find out sooner or later.

Lacey searched for something to say. "So, Mr. Barton..."

Dark eyes locked with hers, causing shock waves to course through her.

"I mean, Maxwell."

His eyes darkened even more. He cocked his head to one side in annoyance.

Lacey sighed heavily. "I guess you'll have to refresh my memory."

"Max," he barked impatiently.

Lacey swallowed a lump in her throat as she attempted to hide her nervousness. "Right. Max," she said slowly. "How has your day been?"

Max took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Do you really want to know?"

No! She'd be lying if she said she did. And yet she hoped she could pull it off. "Of course."

Max picked up the menu in front of him and opened it. "Well," he said as his eyes washed over the menu, "you can imagine my surprise when I picked up the morning paper and discovered my prowess has come into question."

Lacey winced. "I can explain—"

She winced when the menu hit the table with a loud slap. Max stared at her across the table, clearly making every attempt to keep his temper in check. "I'm sure you can," he said. "But I don't give a sweet shit what you have to say about it."

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"But—"

Max cut her off again. "Let me make things crystal clear for you," he said through clenched teeth. "From here on, we are a couple in every sense of the word. Where I go, you go."

"I didn't sign on for that," Lacey said, bristling at his tone.

"I don't care what you think you signed on for," he said. "Everyone in this city thinks you're my mistress. And you are in every sense of the word. From here on, you will smile for the camera and act like we're madly in love."

Lacey lifted her chin in defiance. She wasn't about to make the same mistake she made with Zack. She would not be owned by any man. "And if I don't?"

Max smiled and leaned back in his chair. "If you don't, you're out on your pretty little ass. We both know your name is mud in this town." He offered a coy smile. "Maybe Billings will offer you a hand up if you walk away from me."

Lacey cringed. Zachary was a non-issue. She'd never consider going back to him even if he wanted her. But she loved living in Toronto and hoped she'd eventually recover from having made a huge mistake by loving Zachary Billings.

Lacey chewed her bottom lip as she considered her circumstances. "What do you want from me?"

Max grinned. The bastard knew he'd won. "Well, first, we'll have lunch," he said in an all-too satisfied tone. "After that, who knows?" He shrugged. "You just might discover that I can indeed get it up."

Lacey's breath caught in her throat, her heart pounded. "I am so sorry. You need to know that I was duped."

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Max picked up his menu and focused on it, showing no interest in what she was saying. "Were you?" he finally asked.

"Yes. And I can explain," she said nervously. "Some guy tricked me into thinking room service was at the door."

Max's eyes trained on her then. "Did you order room service?"

"Well, no. But he said it was complimentary." When his eyes fell back to the menu, she went on. "And when they all came into my condo, questions about my affair with Zachary came up. They caught me off-guard. I know I made a mistake but I was overwhelmed."

Max closed the menu and placed it on the table before he looked at her again. Lacey's eyes fell to his chest as he inhaled deeply and let the breath out slowly.

Is he trying to restrain his anger? Is he trying to keep himself from throttling me?

"You didn't make a mistake," he finally said. "I did. I never should have left you to your own devices. It won't happen again."

Before Lacey could reply, Max pressed a button on the side of the table to summon the waiter. "I hope you don't mind if I order for both of us."

That's it? The matter is closed?

Lacey knew she should be relieved yet she felt her blood come to a slow boil. She never thought it was possible that anyone could be more arrogant than Zachary Billings.

She was wrong. Very wrong.

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Maxwell Barton was, by far, the most arrogant man she'd ever met. The sooner she got him out of her life the better ... even if it meant she'd never find another job in Toronto.

When the waiter took their order and quickly disappeared again, Lacey found herself staring at her fingers. Her gaze nervously shot to the daybed nearby and then back to her hands.

"You're wondering, aren't you?" Maxwell asked.

Lacey lifted her gaze to his. Her heart lurched when she saw the look of desire on his face as he examined her closely. She tried to control her thundering heart before she replied, "What do you suppose I'm wondering about?"

His smile widened, causing crinkles to form around his eyes. "You're wondering if I intend to fuck you on that couch."

Lacey's heart clenched as if a fist curled around it. Her mouth went dry as her body began to shake. Damn it! Why couldn't she be as cool and collected as Rachael? She quickly licked her parched lips and opened her mouth in an effort to reply but no words came forth. Her muddled mind hadn't given her an inkling of how to respond.

Maxwell laughed softly, a gentle, deep-throated chuckle that drifted over her in sweet, sensuous plumes. He shook his head lightly. "Don't worry, Lacey," he said. "I don't fuck women in restaurants, even when it is considered acceptable."

Lacey suddenly found her voice. "So why did you bring me here?"

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He laughed again. "I happen to like the food." He cocked his head to one side, examining her face, her expression. "I suppose Billings made good use of the daybed when he brought you here."

"I've never been here before," she said. She didn't add that Zack preferred his office, specifically her bent over his desk, driving into her from behind.

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Chapter 5

Max grinned as the limo spirited them through the city. Lacey hadn't been able to string two coherent words together since he announced he wouldn't make love to her on the daybed in the private dining room. He could have ordered shredded cardboard for lunch and she'd have eaten it.

He knew she wasn't thrilled with the situation. In fact, he'd seen her lovely blue eyes turn cold as ice, yet knew he'd won. Lacey Masters might have spark in her soul but she was smart enough to know she was out of her element.

Max snickered inwardly. Zachary Billings might have towed the line for Lacey as far as he could ... at least until his wife told him to give her up ... but Ms. Masters was in for a big surprise if she thought she could run roughshod over him.

Max had to admit, he felt a bit sorry for Zack. They'd gone through college together and remained close friends for a few years after. But Max lost all respect for Zack when he married for money. Lacey's misadventure as Zack's mistress made her the latest in a long line of lovers his former friend had taken. Zack's marriage was as cold as the ice in Antarctica, and his finding solace in the arms of willing women was no surprise to anyone.

Max glanced across the plush leather seat. He expected Zack would have struggled with the decision to give up Lacey. Beautiful and intelligent, soft yet sassy, Lacey would make a wonderful lover.

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Lacey squeezed herself against the car door. She looked tiny, fragile even, and so damn delectable. He longed to run his fingers through her long auburn hair, to touch her body, hold her against him and cup her breasts. His cock hardened as he imagined driving it into her pussy.

Max opened the bar in front of him and splashed whiskey into two glasses. When he held one out to Lacey, she gazed at him reluctantly. "You might need a bracer," Max said.

When she took the glass from his hand, her fingers brushed his. Max quelled the urge to wrap his hand around her fingers if only to feel their warmth.

"Thank you," she murmured before she turned her attention away from him.

Heat sizzled through his body. He wanted to pull her against him and kiss those full red lips. Lacey was the first woman he'd ever wanted who hadn't come to him willingly. It frustrated him, set him on edge.

Down, boy, the time will come soon enough.

Max cocked his head to one side as he regarded her. "Will you tell me something?"

Lacey's eyes reluctantly turned back to him. "I don't know," she said. "I guess it depends on the question."

Fair enough. "Why did you sign up for the game show?"

Lacey's clear blue eyes clouded before she looked away. Max waited while she considered the question. He heard her take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Her eyes focused on the glass in her hand. "I had nothing left to lose," she said softly.

Max frowned. "How so?"

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Lacey's chin jutted upward. "When Zachary dumped me, I lost everything. Not just my job but eventually my home too. With that, went my dignity. I was forced to ask friends for a place to sleep." She hesitated before she added, "The hardest thing was giving up Harry."

Max's brows knitted together. "Harry?"

Max watched as she tipped the glass of whiskey to her lips and took a tiny sip. Her hand shook as she pulled the glass away from her mouth and settled it over her lap. "My dog. When I had to give up my home, I tried to find someone to take him. But Harry is a thirteen-year-old Irish Setter. He's set in his ways and not everyone has room for a large dog."

"So what became of him?"

"I had to take him to a shelter. He's up for adoption. But he's an old dog so..." Her voice trailed off. She didn't need to explain further. The odds of an old dog being adopted weren't great.

He wanted to reach over, take her in his arms and tell her she'd never want for anything as long as she stayed with him.

Lacey continued. "Anyway, when my friend dared me to audition for Who Wants to be the Millionaire's Mistress?, I figured I might as well. It wasn't like anyone in the corporate world had any respect for me after my affair with Zachary hit the newspapers. Besides, even if I got dumped from the show early in the game, I'd have walked away with a bit of money."

Max suddenly understood. "You really didn't want me to pick you."

Lacey's head whipped around to look at him. "Hell no!" she said. "After Zachary, why would I want to be your mistress? I

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might have made a mistake once but I'm not stupid enough to do it again."

Anger made Max's blood boil. She compared him to the likes of Zachary Billings?

"I don't think I should have to point out that I'm not a married man," Max said tightly.

"No," Lacey replied angrily. "But everybody knows you're a user, a womanizer."

Everybody knows. Do they really? Max pondered that as the car slowed and made a right turn. They were near their destination.

He glanced at Lacey only to find her eyes continued to blaze with anger. She tipped her glass to her lips and tossed the rest of the whiskey back. As she swallowed the fiery liquid, she winced and placed the empty glass on the bar in front of her. She really was a pretty little thing. He loved the fire he saw in her eyes. He suspected it would take some time before he tired of her, maybe even a couple months.

When the limo slowed to a stop, Max said, "We're here."

Lacey's face flushed as she stared at him. "I hope you don't expect me to have sex with you tonight."

Max chuckled. Is she kidding? "You should've thought about that before you made comments to the press about my prowess."

* * * *

Lacey gasped when Bruce opened the limousine door and she gazed up at the mansion towering above. "You live here?" she asked, her voice a mere squeak.

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When Max stepped out of the limo, he stood beside Lacey and peered up. "Yeah," he said glibly. "I expect you're impressed."

Lacey snorted. "Why wouldn't I be? This place is amazing."

Max's looked at her, his eyes dark and unreadable. "Yeah, they always are," he murmured.

Lacey's face flushed with shame. Of course the women Max brought to his mansion were as impressed as she was. And he was probably very used to each and every one of them wanting a piece of him, a piece of his grand lifestyle. He had no reason to think she was any different. Why else would a woman sign up for a cheesy game show?

"I inherited this monstrosity from my great-uncle," Max said as he followed her gaze over the towering building. "I wanted to make my own mark," he said, almost under his breath, "but my uncle insisted I live here while I do it."

Was it distaste she heard in his voice? She glanced at him as his gaze locked on the cold gray stone. His eyes were distant, his stance stoic. Was he unhappy living in such a grand home?

Lacey wasn't sure why she cared. A man like Maxwell Barton had no idea what it was like to struggle. What little she'd heard of him, she knew he'd grown up in an affluent family and began making money the minute he graduated from university. So what if the press was having a field day with him lately? He probably deserved every last scathing word mentioned in the papers.

The jingling of keys drew Lacey from her thoughts. Max peered down at her, keys in hand. "Shall we go in?"

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Suddenly, the reality of the situation hit Lacey like a ton of bricks. "I guess so," she said, her voice wavering.

Max grinned, no doubt sensing her hesitation. He took her hand and led her up the steps to the massive oak front door. "Don't worry, Lacey, I won't eat you," he said as he pushed the key into the lock and swung the door open. His eyes darkened as he casually added, "At least, not unless you beg."

The moment his fingers curled around her hand, her body sizzled, her pussy soaked with anticipation. The words he uttered so casually echoed through her brain as he led her inside.

Not unless you beg.

She loathed to admit how his touch affected her. She closed her eyes and imagined Max's face buried between her open legs, lapping, sucking, devouring. When his tongue hit just the right spot...

"I'm glad you're impressed with the place," Max said.

Lacey realized her fantasy had crossed into real life, knowing her gasp had been misread. "Uhm, yeah," she said feebly, glad Max hadn't realized what she'd really been thinking.

He led her into a grand sitting room. Several hand-painted portraits adorned the walls but the huge fireplace with a solid marble mantel dominated the area. The room was tastefully decorated in manly earth tones and ornate antiques, no doubt created to reflect the current owner.

Max led her to an antique settee strategically placed in front of the fireplace.

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"Sit." It wasn't a request. She imagined, if she'd been in her right mind, if her body wasn't on full sensual alert, if her pussy wasn't quite so moist, she might have told him off.

Instead she sat and watched him move around the hearth. She examined his ass when he bent over to put wood into the fireplace. She giggled nervously at his muttered oaths when he attempted to light the fire and nothing happened and gasped inwardly when the fire finally lit and he turned to look at her. His eyes were dark and even more mysterious than she'd ever seen them before. She knew she should be afraid of him, she knew she should leap from the settee and run.

Now, Lacey. Go now!

But Lacey's eyes locked with his as he approached her and any thought of fleeing instantly left her mind. When his fingers curled around her hands and pulled her up, she knew her fate was sealed. She would not be able to deny Max what he wanted and knew what he wanted was her body.

Max's eyes narrowed as he pulled her close to him. When she felt his rock-hard body pressed against her, Lacey closed her eyes to ward off the sheer pleasure his touch evoked.

"Look at me," Max said.

In spite of her best efforts, Lacey's eyes squeezed tighter. "I can't," she replied, her voice a mere whisper.

She shivered when his hands slid over her back, down her side and then up again. His hands cupped her breasts, gently kneading until her nipples peaked. "You want me as much as I want you," he said. "Open your eyes and look at me."

Lacey gave in ... but not completely. She managed to open her eyes but would not look beyond his chest. And oh, what a

fantastic chest it is! She quelled the urge to rip his shirt open and splay her hands over him.

"There," she said in a gamely manner, "my eyes are open."

Max chuckled. "Coward." His hands left her breasts and circled her waist. "If you won't play the game properly," he said softly, "then I'll have to enforce the rules."

Lacey was suddenly hurled back. She gasped audibly when she landed against the soft cushions on the settee. She grappled to regain her breath as Max knelt between her knees. "I can't play by the rules if I don't know what they are," she said.

Max's hands were already sliding over her thighs, pushing her dress up to her waist. "I have to admit that I'm not very good at explaining things," he replied, his voice deep, his eyes focused on her thighs. "I'm better at showing."

Lacey knew she'd lost a battle, one she wasn't certain she'd wanted to win in the first place. Max's hands slipped up and pulled her panties off. He threw them over his shoulder and placed his hands on her knees, slowly pushing them wider apart. His eyes blazed as he gazed at her mound. "Ask me," he said, his voice thick with need.

Lacey knew what he wanted but could not give in to him. "No," she replied.

Max gazed up at her then, making her heart stop with his piercing dark gaze. "You want me."

"No," Lacey said softly. "I don't want you. I didn't want you when we were on the game show and I don't want you now."

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Max sat back on his haunches but his hands remained on her knees. "Liar," he said smoothly. "You want me to taste you."

Lacey was about to tell him how wrong he was when his hand cupped her mound. Words failed when she felt the warmth of his hand envelop her.

"Sweet Lacey," he said, his voice low and guttural, "don't fight me. Let me touch you."

Lacey felt mesmerized by his soft words and even more so by his gentle touch. In spite of what her mind told her, her body relaxed and her knees stopped fighting his pressure. She heard a soft chuckle as Max leaned toward her, his hand still cupping her mound. His mouth closed over her lips in a deep sensuous kiss. His tongue collided with hers, drawing her in, inviting her into an erotic dance. Lacey couldn't help herself; he was too powerful to deny.

And then, he slowly pressed two fingers between the lips of her pussy. She gasped when one finger slid over her slit while the other sought the tiny nub above.

Lacey pressed her head against the back of the settee when Max's finger found the mark. He stroked her relentlessly while his other finger teased her slit.

Lacey tried very hard to remind herself that Maxwell Barton was no different than Zachary Billings. Yet, Zack had never touched her this way. He'd never considered her needs before his own.

Lacey wanted to give herself up to Max's touch. Yet, in her heart, she knew she didn't want this; she didn't want to give in to another millionaire and his ruthless whims.

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But oh, Max's scorching touch drew on her dark side, the side she never wanted to see again.

Lacey knew she was nothing to him, an unimportant person who would soon be cast aside just as she had been before. She knew it should matter to her, she knew she should care. But at this moment, all she wanted was for Max to drive his fingers inside her. Never mind that there would be hell to pay later.

Forgive me! I just want this man!

What was wrong with giving in to her needs just this once? Nothing. Nothing!

Lacey's hands landed on his solid chest. She reached under his suit jacket and pushed it over his shoulders before her fingers fumbled with the buttons of his crisp white shirt. She needed to touch his chest; she needed to feel his heartbeat under her palms.

Max suddenly pulled away. His eyes held hers as he undid the buttons of his shirt and cast it aside. Lacey sighed as she gazed at his chest ... so strong, so virile. She smiled up at him and held out her hands.

But Max took another step back. Lacey's eyes widened as he undid the fly of his pants and pushed them, and his briefs, over his hips. His movements were swift, almost methodical, as he cast them aside and braced his legs wide apart. Her eyes washed over him, starting at his chiseled face, over his sinewy chest, to his hair-smattered abdomen and then lower, to the throbbing rod. Lacey shivered with both desire and fear as her eyes took in the sheer bulk and length of Max's penis.

"Do you approve?" Max asked.

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Lacey wasn't sure how to respond. She'd never seen a penis so big. It scared her a little yet excited her as well. "To tell you the truth, I'm not sure."

Max fell back on his knees between her thighs. "Maybe you need a little more assurance," he said as his fingers slid over her slit again.

Lacey gasped as her head fell back against the back of the sofa. "Yes," she said, sighing. "You might be right about that."

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Chapter 6

Max smiled as Lacey's hips bucked against his fingers. Yeah, she wanted him ... maybe even as much as he wanted her. The pungent scent of her moist pussy filled his senses as he gave in to her demand and pressed a finger into her moist core. She was hot and ready for him.

He silently wished he could replace his finger with his cock. It had been on full alert and ready to fuck her for months now. The moment he led her into his house, his cock was thick and ready, wanting to finally sink into Lacey's luscious pussy.

And now, here he was, finger fucking her. After months of wanting her, the moment seemed almost surreal. His cock was none too pleased with the current situation and Max knew he had to do something to turn the situation around.

He leaned up and pushed his free hand behind her neck. He pulled her to him while his finger continued to pound in her pussy. When she leaned toward him, his mouth locked over hers. She kissed him lustily, freely giving back what he offered. She moaned when he pulled his finger out of her.

Max pulled his mouth from hers. "Don't worry, Lacey, I've got something you'll like a lot more," he said against her lips as his hands braced her knees and pushed them wider apart. "Once you get a taste of me, Zach Billings will be a distant memory."

Lacey's body stilled, almost as if she'd been flash-frozen. She peered up at him, her eyes blinking. "What did you say?"

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Max grinned as he leaned over her. Alright, she didn't like what he'd just said. But she'd soon forgive him because she was about to be fucked by the best. Zachary Billings would be a long-lost memory after she felt his cock dive into her depths.

A faint whisper of guilt pricked his conscience. Lacey was one of those forever girls and a part of him hated to disappoint her. He wanted her now, at this moment, but there was nothing saying he'd ever want her again.

Ah hell, now wasn't the time to tell her. His need was too great. Max grabbed his cock and slowly rubbed the hard tip against her moist pussy. He frowned as Lacey's body stiffened. She lay still; his throbbing cock didn't seem to have the same effect on her as it did for every woman he'd ever fucked.

"What's the matter, babe?" he asked. "Don't you want me to fuck you?"

Max knew it was a ridiculous question. He'd never known a woman to turn him down. Still, considering Lacey's sudden reluctance, it seemed like the polite thing to ask.

Cool hands pressed against his shoulders. "Get off me."

Max almost laughed. Surely he hadn't heard her correctly. But when her hands continued to push his shoulders, Max reluctantly moved back. He rested on his haunches as he watched Lacey rise from the sofa and push her dress over her hips. Her face was flushed as she stepped away from him.

"What's your problem?" Max asked.

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"My problem?" Lacey's face burned as she stared down at him. Her hands thumped against her chest in anger. "What's my problem?"

Max looked into her burning blue eyes. The woman is pissed off. Why? "Yeah," he replied, "that's what I asked."

She shook her head slowly. "You throw Zachary in my face when we're being intimate and then wonder why I'm turned off? Can you be that stupid?"

So that was it. All right, he could backtrack. He rose and stood over her, gazing down into her blazing eyes. This was the woman who'd resisted him every week on the game show. This was the woman he wanted to conquer. This was a mere glitch, one he'd overcome quickly.

Max placed his hands on his hips as he planted his feet wide on the floor. Her eyes immediately cast downward and stroked his erect cock.

He chuckled inwardly. She may not like him personally, but she was certainly interested in what he'd brought to the bargaining table.

"Hey," he said, amused by her lustful gaze, "up here."

It seemed to take every ounce of Lacey's strength to pull her eyes off his cock and finally focus on his face. "What?" she asked, clearly shaken and off-track.

She gave herself a mental shake, and Max saw her eyes darken as she remembered why she was so angry. She took another step back and peered up at him as though he was a monster. "You bastard," she said between clenched teeth. "Zachary's your rival. Is that why you were so determined to have me as your mistress?"

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Max guffawed. "Yeah, right," he said sarcastically. "Zack and I might have a rocky history but I've never been desperate enough to pick up his cast-offs."

Lacey sputtered as she reeled backward. "Cast-off? You think I'm his cast-off?"

The sting of Lacey's hand didn't register at first. His hand went to his numb cheek, astonished she'd actually slapped him ... without cameras to catch the moment. Lacey turned on her heel and marched out the door.

It wasn't until she pulled the door closed that the sting of her slap finally registered in his brain. He slowly lowered himself to the sofa, his fingers gently massaging his cheek.

Max looked up when he heard his chauffeur clear his throat. "What?" he asked irritably.

"Ms. Masters is walking down the driveway," Bruce stoically supplied. "I believe she's determined to hitchhike home."

"That's ridiculous," Max replied as he continued to rub his cheek. He'd never been slapped by a woman before and felt dazed. "Drive her home."

"I offered," Bruce replied. "She refused."

"It's not safe for her to hitch back to the condo."

"I couldn't agree more," Bruce said, "but Ms. Masters said she'd take her chances."

Max sprung from the sofa. "Get the car," he said. "I'll make damn sure she doesn't take chances."

"Very good, sir," Bruce said. He raised his fist to cover his mouth and coughed lightly. Max knew there was something the man wanted to say.

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"What?" Max asked irritably.

Bruce's eyes cast downward. "Might I suggest you put your pants on before you come out to the car?"

Max grimaced. "I wouldn't have forgotten." He turned to retrieve his briefs and pants.

There was no mistaking Bruce's amusement when he replied. "I'm sure that's true, sir."

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Chapter 7

Asshole! Shithead! Stupid, dumb-ass jerk!

As Lacey pushed passed the gates of Max's estate and walked onto the deserted street, she struggled to come up with more words that would suit Maxwell Barton.

None would come to mind but that was just fine. She needed to focus on finding a way home just now. She could take the time to come up with more names when she was safely home.

Home.

The word stuck in her mind. Home. A place she could shut out the world, where she could talk to herself and dance naked to reggae music. A place that included her beloved dog, Harry.

She didn't have a real home anymore. Zachary had seen to that.

Lacey bit back tears as she walked along the concrete sidewalk. Considering how she'd walked away from Max, she couldn't return to the condo either. After all, Max had purchased it for his new mistress.

Lacey's heart skipped a beat when a car slowed and pulled onto the curb. She ignored it and kept walking, keeping her eyes trained on the sidewalk ahead of her.

She heard the car door slam shut and the footfalls of someone pursuing her.

"Ms. Masters!"

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When Lacey chanced a glance back, the flash of a camera exploded in her face.

"I have nothing to say!" she cried as she broke into a run. The high heels she wore did not bode well for running but she made the attempt anyway.

"I just have a few questions," the reporter said as he closed the distance between them. "The public has the right to know what's going on between you and your millionaire."

The words vibrated in Lacey's head. She stopped and peered back at the breathless reporter. "What do you have the right to know?" Lacey demanded.

The young reporter bent forward, trying to catch his breath. He struggled to hold a tape recorder out in front of him. "Your relationship with Maxwell Barton has gained national attention. You signed a contract to appear on Who Wants to Be the Millionaire's Mistress? so the public has the right to know what's going on."

"I may have signed a contract to be on the show but I never signed on to be chased by reporters every step of the way," Lacey countered. "All of you have been nothing short of rude. You've invaded my life and made me miserable."

The reporter's mouth split into a wry smile. "What the fuck did you expect?"

Fuck? There was a word she hadn't used in her repertoire yet. Fuckhead. Maxwell Barton is a fuckhead! And not just that, but he was just about every combination that involved that word.

But the reporter didn't need to know that.

"I have nothing to say," she said.

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"I don't believe that," the reporter said as he took a step toward her. "In fact, I think you have a lot to say. Why did you run from Barton's house just now? What did he do?"

"What do you want to hear?" Lacey yelled angrily. "Do you want me to tell you that Maxwell Barton is a depraved sex addict who asked me to do unspeakable things?"

The reporter's eyes brightened. "Did he?"

Lacey mind reeled. That's what they wanted. She was gearing up to reply when the sleek black limo pulled up on the side of the road near her. She knew instantly Max had come to retrieve her and felt a moment of relief.

But relief quickly turned to anger when the door opened and Max reached out to pull her unceremoniously into the backseat with him. Lacey was vaguely aware of the reporter taking more pictures as she fell onto his lap.

"What the hell are you doing?" Lacey howled.

Max placed his hand over her mouth. "Shut the fuck up," he growled.

As Bruce maneuvered the car from the curb and sped away, Lacey glared at him. "Take your hands off me!"

Max relinquished his grip, his eyes watching her with amusement as Lacey teetered on his lap precariously and then fell onto the floor at his feet. She winced as her butt hit the floor and glared up at him.

She didn't say a word as she gathered herself and crawled up onto the plush leather seat. She quelled the urge to rub her lower back. As painful as the fall was, she wasn't about to let him know.

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As she settled in the seat, pressed as close as she could to the far door, she grinned. "I expect you think you threw me off kilter," she said as nonchalantly as the pain would allow. She put one arm over the back of the seat as she attempted to cross her legs. The move caused excruciating pain in her lower back but she pushed her leg to obey the mental order anyway.

Max frowned. "Are you okay?"

Lacey leveled her gaze on him, hoping the pain didn't show on her face. "Of course I'm okay."

Max's frown deepened, his eyes watching her face closely, as if examining her very soul. "Are you?"

Lacey shivered under his scrutiny and averted her gaze, focusing on the passing scenery out the window. Max would know the truth if he looked into her eyes. "Yes, I'm sure," she replied. "Please let it go."

After a long pause, Max exhaled a long breath. "All right." Another pause and then his voice softened. "Look at me, Lacey."

Lacey steeled herself against the sound of his smooth, velvety voice. Against her will, Lacey's nipples pebbled and her core moistened. She took a deep breath and slowly turned to look at him.

Dear God. He was so incredibly sexy, not to mention quite comfortable and confident as he rested easily in the plush seat, staring at her with intent eyes.

When she would have looked away, Max leaned forward and touched her chin, making it impossible for her to ignore

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him. He smiled slowly; his eyes twinkled lightly. "You're holding your breath," he said softly. "Breathe, girl."

Lacey felt her face flush as she released the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. She struggled to hold his gaze.

Max cocked his head to one side, his eyes narrowing as he continued to examine her closely. "Why, Lacey?"

"Why what?" Lacey wasn't sure if the voice she heard was her own.

"Why did you run away from me?" Max asked. "Do you have any idea just how much I desire you?"

The hand that cupped her chin slowly moved to her throat, a feather-soft touch that made her body quiver. Lacey swallowed hard, trying to keep the heat he created in her from affecting her mind. "You were hurtful," she said simply, amazed she could string together even those many words.

Max's eyes followed his fingers as they caressed the skin just above her breasts. "For mentioning Billings." It wasn't a question. He knew where he'd gone wrong.

"Yes," Lacey replied, closing her eyes as she savored his gentle touch.

"Lacey," Max said, his voice a velvety whisper, "I'm sorry. I don't want to hurt you and I promise from now on, I will make every effort to spare you any unnecessary anxiety."

Lacey wanted to believe him. But instinct told her to be careful. She averted her gaze and nodded lightly. "Okay."

"I can tell that you don't trust me," Max said. "Just give me a chance to prove that you can."

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Before Lacey could ask how he intended to prove it, he wrapped his arms around her. As his fingers settled on her lower back and pulled her to him, Lacey cried out in agony. Her body shivered and quaked, fighting against the earth-shattering pain that racked her body.

She was vaguely aware of an oath and Max telling his chauffeur to head to the nearest hospital before she blacked out.

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Chapter 8

Maxwell Barton: Depraved Sex Addict!

After the recent declaration by Lacey Masters, Bob Hoover, host of the hot new reality game show, Who Wants to be the Millionaire's Mistress?, declared his disgust. "I'm stunned," said Hoover. "Barton seemed like an upstanding guy. Who knew he was a pervert?" Hoover went on to say, "I just want my fans to know the upcoming season of Who Wants To Be The Millionaire's Mistress? will have a more suitable millionaire."

Fuck! So much for his efforts to gain the public's favor. Max crumpled the newspaper and threw it across his office. He placed his elbows on his desk and covered his face with his hands as he continued to fume.

The reporters were one thing; they were always looking for a way to trash him, but what about Hoover? That scum-sucking lowlife prick didn't take long to jump ship as soon as Max was made out to be a monster. No doubt Hoover was concerned only for his blasted show.

It seemed he was destined to be forever panned by the papers. Sighing heavily, Max leaned back in his chair and stared up at the ceiling. So what had he endured the weeks on the game show for anyway? It was supposed to help his public persona and, in turn, his career. All he'd managed so far was bad press. Add to that, hours he'd spent the night before with Lacey in the ER. Thankfully the back pain was only muscular and, with pain meds, would soon abate.

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Deep in thought, Max was startled when his secretary buzzed him. "What?" Max said angrily when he picked up the phone.

"Ms. Masters is on line three."

Max's voice instantly softened. "Thank you."

Lacey. His heart thumped in his chest, his cock hardened. He couldn't wait to see her again. Sweet Lacey.

"Did you see the morning paper?" Lacey asked anxiously when he flicked the button on his phone.

Max hesitated, his fingers flexed on the phone receiver. "Shouldn't you ask how I am first?"

Lacey let out a long breath. "I'm afraid to."

Max chuckled softly. "I'm not angry," he said. "None of this is your fault. Are you taking the medication they gave you in the ER last night?"

"Yes. I'm feeling better. You aren't angry?"

"Not at you."

Lacey sniffed, he knew she was crying. "Oh, Max, you have no idea how relieved I am to hear that. I didn't intend—"

"It's all right, Lacey," Max said, hoping he'd managed to assure her. "I'll be there around six tonight. We'll have dinner and talk about it then."

"Okay," she replied softly.

Convinced he had soothed Lacey's anxiety, Max said goodbye and turned back to his work. It suddenly occurred to him that she was the reason everything he'd gone through was worthwhile. All the bad press, being dogged by reporters and yes, even losing some key accounts, was fair trade for having Lacey Masters in his bed. He'd been genuinely

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concerned for her last night. It was something he'd never felt before.

Max checked his watch. It was almost ten in the morning. He had several fires to put out over the next few hours, a lot of clients to talk into sticking with him in spite of what the papers said. If he didn't get his mind on work, and soon, he'd never get finished before six.

"Mr. Billings on line two." Eleanor hesitated. "Do you want to take the call?"

Max grinned. Why the fuck not?

He hit the second line button.

"Hey, you depraved sex addict!"

"What do you want, Zack?" The guy wasn't going to get to him, not now, not ever.

"Heard from Manner House this morning," Billings said. "They asked if I'd take over their account. Guess a bunch of monks would rather not have a depraved sex addict handle their financial affairs."

Right, apparently the monks completely missed the news of what Zack had done to Lacey.

Max's fist clenched. "Is that right?" he said, trying very hard to keep his tone light.

"From what I've heard, you're on the verge of losing a lot more investors. But don't worry. I'll be here to catch them all." The joy in his former friend's voice set his blood boiling. Zack was a cheat, not just in his personal life but in business too.

"Good to hear it."

"What are friends for?"

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Max clenched his teeth. Yeah, right. "Thanks for the update."

Just as Max would have hung up, Billings went on again. "What about Lacey, huh?"

Max's jaw set, his teeth ground. "What about Lacey?"

"Well, come on," Billings said. "Is she a good fuck or what? If it hadn't been for my wife, I'd still have her legs wide open on my desk. She's some kinda pussy."

Red flashed in front of Max's eyes. He knew Zack was trying to goad him and, damn it, he was fucking close. If he ever met the man in person, he'd gladly rip Billings limb from limb.

Max swallowed the lump of fiery anger in his throat. "Your loss is my gain, Zack. Nice talking to you."

Max hit the end call button before he slammed the phone down in fury. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly, trying to calm himself.

Lacey was a done deal. She'd never go back to Billings no matter what happened between them. But he'd be damned if he'd lose business to the rat.

Max picked up the phone and buzzed his secretary. "Get Manner House on the phone," he barked. "Tell them I'm on my way over to have a meeting with them."

* * * *

Lacey's eyes watched as the candle burned to its very end, flickered and slowly went out. A tiny puff of smoke formed a tear-shaped cloud that slowly rose and disappeared in the darkness of the room.

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Max said he be there at six that evening. He hadn't shown up. And at ten, he still hadn't come.

All evening, Lacey battled with herself. Why had she thought Max was any different? Why had she allowed herself to be fooled by his charm? A fool was forever hopeful things would change, that things would be better this time. And Lacey knew, when it came to men, she was nothing less than the biggest fool ever born.

She slid off the satin sheets and picked up her favorite cotton robe, the one item she'd packed to take with her to the condo. Tattered, yes, but at least she could count on it to be there. She pulled it over the red silk teddy she'd purchased that afternoon and padded through the living room to the small kitchen. She peered into the freezer and smiled.

Haagen-Dazs chocolate peanut butter ice cream. Pay dirt!

She tore the lid off, found a spoon and scooped a large amount out. She held it under her nose for a moment before opening her mouth and shoving it in. The cool sensation of the frozen delight cooled her overheated senses even before she tasted the delectable combination of chocolate and peanut butter. She scooped another spoonful to savor as she made her way to the living room.

If only men were as dependable as ice cream. If only they would offer sweet delight, sheer sensory ecstasy complete with a promise that when she ran out, there was always more at the local grocery store.

Lacey had just flopped onto the sofa, intent on consuming every last bit of ice cream, when a soft knock sounded on the door. She frowned and peered at the door pensively.

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"Who is it?"

"Room service, ma'am."

Lacey snorted. She wasn't about to fall for that again. "I didn't order room service."

"Mr. Barton did."

"He's not here," she replied simply.

"He will be soon," came the muffled reply.

"Then leave it by the door and he can bring it in when he arrives." Lacey was proud of herself for having thought of that. If Max hadn't showed up by now, he wasn't going to. She wasn't about to let the paparazzi in to take pictures of her again ... pictures of her complete humiliation after Max's rejection.

"All right, Miss."

Lacey held her breath for a moment, hoping the man had done as she asked. When she heard nothing more, she looked down at the tub of ice cream still in her hand. It had already started to melt and, much to her surprise, no longer appealed to her. She padded back to the kitchen and dumped the tub and spoon in the sink before going to the bedroom. What she really needed was some sleep. Maybe tomorrow would be a better day.

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Chapter 9

Lacey woke from a restless sleep when she felt a feather-like touch on her cheek. She knew Max was there even before she opened her eyes as his manly scent enveloped her. When he leaned down and placed a soft kiss on her lips, she reached up and flattened her hand against his rock-hard chest.

His lips traveled to her neck, gently tasting her skin. "Sweet Lacey." His breath felt warm against her neck as he whispered, "I need you."

Lacey tipped her head back, allowing Max further exploration. "Do you?" she murmured.

"Uh huh," he replied as he pulled the bed cover off her and slid his hands over her silky nightgown. He cupped her breasts and gently massaged her nipples.

Lacey gasped under the gentle pressure. "And what exactly do you need?" she asked softly.

Max slowly moved to nuzzle her ear. "I need to bury my cock inside your sweet, tight pussy."

Oh yes! Yes! She needed that too. Her body writhed with the promise of fulfillment, with the need to feel his rock-hard cock inside her. She wanted to wrap herself around him and never let him go. "Then what are you waiting for?" she asked.

Max chuckled as he stepped back from the bed and quickly began to undress. "You have no idea how much I need this after the day I've had," he said absently as he pulled at the buttons on his shirt.

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Lacey's body cooled as she gazed up at him. She wasn't sure she wanted to hear more yet ... "Did you have a bad day?"

Max snorted as he cast his shirt aside and went to work on his pants. "Took all day to wrangle back some business that Billings, that fuckhead, snatched away from me after the bad press in the papers..."

Oh, she knew she shouldn't have asked! Lacey sat up on the bed and pulled the bed cover up to her chin.

"...started with one of my biggest clients and, when I got them back, decided to go after the others."

"This is why you weren't here at six like you said you would be?"

Max snorted again as he kicked his pants off and pushed down his briefs. "Yeah," he said. "Business before pleasure." When his cock sprang forward, Lacey averted her gaze. "Mind you, now that Billings is screwed again, I don't mind doing some screwing myself."

Lacey leapt off the bed as Max crawled onto it. She turned on the bedside lamp and glared down at him. "You son of a bitch," she cried.

Max frowned. "What?"

"I waited all evening for you. If you weren't going to be here on time, you should have at least called."

Max rolled his eyes and lay on his side, propping his head up with his hand. "You're my mistress, Lacey, not my wife."

Cold anger curled inside Lacey's stomach. "So, as your mistress, I don't deserve your consideration?" She glanced at the bedside clock. "You said you'd be here by six and it's just

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after midnight. But, as your mistress, I'm supposed to sit around and wait for you to fuck me at your convenience?"

Max sighed heavily. "Oh come on, Lacey, I'm here now, aren't I? Don't get your knickers in a twist." His eyes narrowed as they raked over her body. "And, I must say, those are very nice knickers."

Lacey became painfully aware of the silk teddy she was wearing. She knew the red lace over the bodice showed her dark nipples and, with her legs spread apart in the stance she had taken combined with the angle at which Max lay on the bed, there was no mistaking the fact the teddy was crotchless.

Lacey lunged forward and grabbed a pillow from the bed. "Asshole!" She pummeled Max with it several times before he grabbed the pillow and pulled it out of her hands. Her anger was set to full boil when she saw him laughing. She felt as though she was about to explode.

"What's so damn funny?"

Max tossed the pillow aside, trying to find his voice through his laughter. "You are," he said. "I love that temper of yours."

Lacey threw up her hands in frustration. "You just don't get it, do you?" When Max continued to laugh and didn't reply, Lacey turned away from him. "That's it!" she cried. "I don't care what the press has to say from now on. In fact, I hope they make mincemeat out of you because you deserve it. I'm out of here!"

What felt like bands of steel wrapped around her seconds before she got to the door. "Let me go!"

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Max picked her up and flung her onto the bed. "You aren't going anywhere," he said. The humor was absent from his eyes now as he stared down at her.

Lacey grappled on the bed, trying to escape from the other side when Max leaned over her. She pushed at his chest, trying to free herself but knowing there was no way out.

Max grabbed her arms and pinned her hands over her head as his eyes connected with hers. "I may not be the man of your dreams, the kind who will sweep you off your feet," he said between clenched teeth, "but make no mistake, you belong to me."

"Let me go!"

Max pushed his knees between her legs. He released her arms and sat up over her. "Is that what you want, Lacey? Do you really want me to let you go?"

As Lacey looked up at him, his dark eyes intense, his chest heaving and oh, his long, thick cock hovering just above her wet pussy, she couldn't say the words she knew she should. If she told him she wanted to be set free, he'd do just that. But she didn't want to be set free, in fact, she wanted him to possess her body and soul. The fact he'd never love her didn't matter, at least, not at this moment.

When she didn't reply, Max's hands cupped her face and then slowly, methodically, slid down. His fingers kneaded her nipples for a moment before they continued, drawing over her stomach and then to her thighs.

"Bend your knees and spread them wide," he said softly as his fingers grazed her thighs. "I want to see your pussy."

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Lacey did as he demanded, holding her thighs wide open for him. His eyes darkened as he gazed at her moist core. He hummed softly as his fingers slowly slid up to the crest.

He dipped his head between her legs as his fingers slid over her slit. "I love the smell of your pussy," he said as he nuzzled her mound, "almost as much as I love the taste."

As his fingers parted her flesh and his mouth closed over her, Lacey cried out in sheer pleasure. He sucked her clit, teasing it with his tongue, driving her to distraction. He lowered his body, settling his shoulders between her thighs. His arms pushed under her legs and circled them, placing his hands flat on her belly. The move drove his shoulders lower and pushed her thighs wider apart as his mouth continued to suck and pull at her clit.

Lacey bucked her hips against him, wanting more yet not knowing how much she could withstand. Her fingers tangled in his hair, unsure if she was attempting to pull his face away or pushing him to give her more.

Lacey wasn't sure how much more she could take. Every stroke of his tongue drew her closer to an explosive orgasm. Her mind barely registered when one hand left her abdomen and snaked back under her leg. It wasn't until she felt a gentle pressure against her moist slit that she realized what was happening. At first, his fingers circled the outer rim, warning her, telling her what was to come.

Max suddenly pulled his mouth off her clit and sat up between her legs. She gazed up at him, bewildered. His cheeks and chin glistened with her moisture as he grinned

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down at her. She tried to smile but knew her body was too needy to manage it.

Suddenly, the grin disappeared and his eyes darkened. Lacey gasped when she felt one finger press into her. First one and then two fingers. His thumb slid over her clit as his fingers pulsed inside her. His hand set a rhythm her hips quickly accepted. She rocked her hips up with each plunge of his fingers. Each stroke took her closer and closer to sweet completion.

"You like that?" Max said as his fingers drove into her faster and harder.

"Yes!" Lacey's hips undulated in an attempt to keep the pace with him.

"Good," Max said, his voice hoarse with passion. "Tell me what you want me to do next."

The words barely registered in Lacey's mind. She struggled to comprehend what he'd just said. She couldn't find the words.

Max's fingers slowed. He pushed them deeper into her, twisting them before slowly gliding out of her. "Listen to me," he said. "What do you want me to do next?"

Lacey's mind was mush, how could he expect her to say anything? She struggled to concentrate, to repeat the words he'd just said in her mind.

What did she want from him? That's the question he asked. The answer was a no-brainer.

"I want you to fuck me."

"I am fucking you," he replied as his fingers slowly slid back up her pussy.

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Lacey thrashed her head back and forth in frustration. "Damn you!" she cried. "I want you to fuck me with your cock!"

Max bent over her and pressed his mouth to hers. He kissed her passionately and then pulled away slightly. "Ah, I see," he said, looking into her eyes. "You'd rather have my cock than my two fingers."

"Yes! Yes!" Lacey wasn't sure how much more she could take. The anticipation of feeling his cock ram into her took her to another level of sensation.

Max slowly drew his fingers out of her pussy. He leaned in for another kiss as he positioned himself between her legs. "Two fingers won't satisfy you," he said. "Hmm, what to do, what to do?"

"Stop teasing me," Lacey said between clenched teeth as she raised her hips to meet him.

Max chuckled. "I'd never dream of teasing you," he replied. "I just wonder if you really want my cock. Maybe you just need another finger."

Before Lacey could reply, Max shoved three fingers inside her. She gasped as her core stretched to accept his latest assault. She cried out, knowing she could not hold out much longer.

"No," she gasped as his fingers continued to pulsate, pulling her closer and closer to an orgasm she didn't want. Not this way. "Don't make me come this way. Please!"

Max didn't say a word. He pulled his fingers from her pussy and slowly laid his body over hers. She sighed as his mouth closed over hers. Her arms circled his shoulders, pulling him

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closer to her as her legs wrapped around his hips. Relief coursed through her body as Max's rock-hard cock filled her.

He pulled his lips from hers and sighed. "Ah yes, I'm home," he whispered.

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Chapter 9

Lacey woke with a start. She knew before she even opened her eyes that she was alone in bed. She rolled to her side and saw a note on the pillow beside her. As she reached for the piece of paper, her heart ached. He'd left without saying goodbye, perhaps even without a backward glance.

Bruce is at your disposal for the day. Go shopping, buy something sexy. See you tonight. M

Lacey's blood began to boil again. "Buy something sexy? Screw you!" she hissed as she crumpled the paper and shot out of bed. She'd been tossed aside. The things Max had whispered to her the night before hadn't meant anything to him.

The words echoed in her memory. Ah yes, I'm home.

In her heart, she'd wanted him to mean it, that perhaps he saw a future with her. She pitched the paper into the wastebasket as she went to the bathroom. Just how stupid could she be? Why hadn't she learned after what had happened with Zack? And why in hell did she think Max would be different?

Lacey started the shower and stepped under the steaming spray. So you want me to go shopping, do you? She began scrubbing her body furiously. I'll go shopping all right. And you'll be fucking lucky if I'm done before you get here tonight!

Lacey stepped out of the shower, grabbed a towel and walked to the bedroom, not caring that she was dripping all

over the plush carpet. She picked up the phone and punched out a series of numbers with force. I'll show you, you prick!

The other end picked up on the second ring.

"Hey, Rach," Lacey said. "We're going shopping today."

"I've gotta work," her friend replied.

"Blow it off. I'll have Bruce pick you up in an hour."

"Bruce?"

Lacey beat down the curl of annoyance that built within her. She wasn't going to take out her frustration with Max on her best friend. She gripped the phone tighter, trying to rein herself in. "Yeah, Max's chauffeur. I'll send him to get you."

"I don't think Zack will approve. He's expecting me at work today."

A cold chill ran down Lacey's spine. Why should Rachael care what Zack thought? And, more than that, why was her best friend referring to her boss as Zack again? He'd been Mr. Billings to Lacey until she became friendly with him, and even then it was Zachary. The man allowed Lacey to call him Zack only when he was driving his cock into her. Was it possible Rachael was heading down the same path she had? Was she making the same mistakes?

Lacey frowned. "Rach, is there something you want to tell me?"

"No," her friend replied quickly.

Lacey took a deep breath. If Rachael was making the same mistake, she clearly wasn't going to admit it. "All right then," she replied. "Call in sick and prepare for some fun." Lacey hung up the phone before she silently added ... on Maxwell Barton's tab.

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* * * *

Max's body had been humming all day. Anxious to see the end of the workday, he could have sworn the clock ticked backwards. He longed to see Lacey, longed to be with her, longed to wrap his arms around her and make love to her again. When the clock finally struck five, he pushed everything he was working on aside and headed out the office door.

"Mr. Barton," Eleanor said in protest, "we still have to hammer out the Dayton deal."

Max pressed the down button for the elevator and grinned at his secretary. "Tomorrow's another day. Dayton won't mind."

He smiled at Eleanor when the elevator doors opened. "You work too hard. Shut down early and spend some time with that man of yours."

Assuming there was a man. Max had no idea. And frankly, he didn't really care. His mind was set on Lacey and the evening they were about to spend together.

Max pulled his cell phone from his pocket as the elevator carried him to the ground floor. He knew Bruce would be waiting for him so calling to check was a formality.

He dialed his chauffeur's number and waited. It rang once. The elevator door opened and Max exited, walking into the lobby. It rang a second time. Max frowned. Bruce had never let his cell phone ring more than once.

It rang a third and fourth time.

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Max was about to hang up when Bruce finally answered. "Hello?" He sounded breathless, as if he'd run several miles to catch the ringing phone.

"I'm ready to be picked up," Max said irritably. "Where are you?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry, sir. I didn't realize the time," Bruce replied, still breathless. "I'm at a bar called Pettybone's with Ms. Masters and her friend."

"Her friend?"

"I believe her name is Rachael. Ms. Masters took her along for the shopping excursion. They wanted to come here for a drink and, well, one thing led to another. I'm afraid they're a little drunk."

Max's hand went to his brow as he took a deep breath. "A little drunk?"

"Well, sir, they are quite drunk," Bruce replied. "I'm sure you can understand why I can't leave them."

"Yes." Max didn't have a clue as to why Lacey was at some bar and pissed to the gills. Still, it was best that Bruce stay with her. "I'll get there as soon as I can."

Max stepped out on the street and raised his hand to the first taxi passing by. When a car pulled up, he heard someone calling his name. He nodded to the taxi driver in a silent message that he should find another fare and turned to the person who had called him.

Zack stood on the busy sidewalk, grinning at him. "Wanna get a drink?"

Max's eyes narrowed as he looked at his former friend. "What do you want, Billings?"

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Zack splayed his hands in a surrendering gesture. "Just want to spend some time with an old friend," he said. "I've always been sorry we fell apart."

Max had no inclination to renew his friendship with the guy. Zack was, and would always be, an asshole. "Thanks," he said as he waved to another cab. "But I've got to be somewhere."

"I'm sure you do," Zack replied. "I expect you're going to Pettybone's to collect Lacey."

Max stiffened. When another taxi pulled up, he asked the driver to wait and turned to Zack. "What do you know about it?"

"Just that Lacey talked Rachael into blowing off work today to go with her."

Max had a bad feeling about Zack's statement. "Rachael is Lacey's best friend, so what's the big deal?"

Zack grinned. "I've been fucking Rachael since my wife made me give up Lacey."

Max wasn't sure he'd heard Zack right. He shook his head and stared at the man.

Zack grinned knowing he'd manage to shock Max. "Lacey's a sweet piece of ass but Rachael knows how to keep her mouth shut. Been fucking her every Monday afternoon since Lacey left."

Max's mind reeled. The first thing he thought of was punching Zack in the face and then pummeling his former friend to a pulp. But when the taxi driver blew his horn, Max opened the back door and quickly got in.

"Pettybone's."

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The driver looked over his shoulder, his brows narrowed, his eyes shocked. "Did you say Pettybone's Bar?"

"I did."

"You know where that is?"

"Do I need to know?" Max asked irritably. "Just take me there."

"I can," the driver said, "but I need cash up front."

Annoyed, Max dug into his wallet and tossed several bills at the driver. "All right, take me to Pettybone's."

The car didn't move for several more seconds as the driver counted the money. Max looked out on the street and saw that Zack had left. He sighed with relief as the driver smiled back at him. "Pettybone's it is then."

Max had a very bad feeling about all this. Just what the fuck had Lacey gotten up to today? And did she know what her best friend had been up to?

* * * *

"That's it, Bruce. If you don't drop your pants and fuck me right here and now, I'll go insane!"

Bruce gave Lacey a withering glance as Rachael braced her hands on a table and wagged her ass.

Lacey winced. "She's drunk," she said to Bruce. "She doesn't really want you to..." Her voice trailed off, unable to say the words.

Bruce nodded. "Understood, Ms. Masters. But I think it's time to take you home."

Lacey wasn't even sure what time it was. The day had been filled with shopping. It wasn't until she was ready to go

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back to her condo that Rachael announced there was a lot more partying to do. Lacey wasn't sure how it happened but Bruce was soon whisking them away to a bar in the outskirts of Toronto.

Lacey would have had a lot more fun if it wasn't for Bruce playing bouncer to every man who paid attention to her. Rachael was quickly fed up with the chauffeur's protective nature and, as drunk as she was, invited him to fuck her in the middle of the crowded bar.

Bruce ignored her and focused on Lacey. "Mr. Barton won't be happy with the turn of events," he said stoically.

Lacey grabbed her bottle of beer from the bar and tipped it to her lips. She took a long swallow. "Why should I care what Max thinks?" she asked. "It's all a sham anyway."

"Is it?" Bruce countered.

"Hey, Bruce, wanna have a go at this ass?"

Lacey winced again as Bruce's eyes darted to her friend's wagging ass and then back to her.

"Of course it's a sham," Lacey replied. "It's only a matter of time before I hit the street, tossed out on my—" She peered at Rachael's wagging butt and, suddenly the situation seemed quite funny to her. She tried not to laugh.

Bruce's gaze fell on Rachael again, his brows rose and fell but otherwise he remained stoic. "If your ass vibrates as much as your friend's does, I expect the pavement will shatter like glass."

Lacey snickered.

Bruce peered at her again before he added, "That butt is like a jackhammer."

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And then Lacey gave in to peels of laughter. Poor Rachael seemed blissfully unaware of the joke. While her maneuvers didn't attract Bruce, another patron of the bar did take notice. He sidled up to Rachael and she was soon gyrating on the dance floor with him.

Lacy watched her friend for a moment before she turned her attention back to Bruce. "She's not nearly as bad as you think," she said. "She's drunk."

"I'm sure you're right," Bruce replied. "But we need to get back to the city."

A slow song began to play and Lacey closed her eyes. It was a sad song about love lost and a broken heart. Lacey emptied the last of her beer and looked at Bruce. "Dance with me first."

Bruce frowned. "Ms. Masters, I hardly think that's appropriate."

Lacey got off the bar stool and grabbed Bruce's hand. "Dance with me and we'll go right after."

Bruce allowed her to lead the way to the dance floor and, when she turned to him, he carefully placed one hand in hers and the other on her waist. He quickly took over and Lacey followed him as he effortlessly guided their steps.

"Can I ask you something?" Lacey said as he whirled her around on the dance floor.

"You can ask."

Lacey knew he meant she might not get an answer to her question. "Has Max ever been in love?"

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Bruce's eyes focused over her head. As good a dancer as he was, she felt like she was gliding across the floor with a cement post. "Yes."

"Is that why he won't commit now?"

Bruce grinned lightly but still didn't make eye contact with her. "May I ask you a question?"

"You didn't answer mine," Lacy countered.

Bruce ignored her comment. "Why do you think Max doesn't want something with you?"

Lacey chuckled. "That's easy," she said. "What do I have to offer someone like Maxwell Barton? I'm damaged goods."

Bruce's eyes finally met hers. "Are you? Or do you just see yourself that way?"

Lacey wasn't sure how to reply and even if she did, she never got the chance.

"Can I cut in?"

Heat ran down Lacey's spine as Bruce quickly relinquished his hold. Max pulled Lacey into his arms.

"I'll see what kind of trouble Ms. Rachael has gotten into," Bruce said as he turned and left the dance floor.

Lacey couldn't meet his gaze. "Bruce called you."

"I called him," Max replied as his arms tightened around her.

"Bet he sang like a bird the moment he heard his master's voice," Lacey said grimly.

"He was concerned there'd be further exposure about our relationship."

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Lacey stiffened. "Or lack of," she said. "Since I'm supposed to be glued to you, people will wonder why I'm out on the town without you."

"Exactly," Max replied. "I'm glad you are finally starting to understand the situation."

Lacey's heart sank to her toes as anger welled inside her. She took Max by surprise when she suddenly pushed at his chest and stepped back. She glared up at him. "Is that what I am to you?" she said, her body quivering with anger. "Am I a situation you're forced to deal with?"

Max's eyes clouded as he looked down at her. "Of course not," he said through tight lips.

But when his eyes left hers and darted around the crowded dance floor, she knew he was lying.

Lacey was barely able to contain her anger. She stepped forward and thumped a hand on his rock-hard chest. "Ass! You're looking to see if anyone noticed right now, aren't you?"

When Max didn't reply, Lacey whirled away and pushed through the throng of dancers, blindly heading off the dance floor. Even though she didn't look back, she could sense Max following close behind. When she got to the bar, she grabbed her beer and raised it to her lips.

Max's hand closed over hers and pulled the bottle out of her grip. "I think you've had enough for one day," he said firmly.

"Go to hell!" Lacey spat. "I don't need to be told when I've had enough."

When Max placed the bottle out of her reach, Lacey waved to the bartender. "A beer here!"

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The bartender's gaze slid to Max before he shook his head and turned away.

"Bastard!" Lacey cried as she glared at Max. "Who do you think you are anyway?"

Max's face remained solemn. "I'm the millionaire," he said, "and you are my mistress."

Lacey wanted to scream. "Yes, that's what it is as far as the public is concerned," she cried. "I wish I'd never heard of that fucking game show!"

Max looked bored; the fact she was upset didn't seem to register with him. She could have sworn he fought a yawn before he placed an arm around her and pulled her away from the bar. "I've had enough for one day," he said. "I'll take you home."

Lacey felt as if she'd been stung and backed out of his grip. She fought tears as she looked up at him. "Home?" she said. "I don't have a home. I gave it all up for a man I loved. And what do I have now?"

Max didn't look like he wanted to deal with anything right now. He looked tired and more than a little annoyed.

"Lacey..."

"Nothing," she said. "I have nothing!"

"You have me," Max replied.

Had she heard him right? Could he think she was as stupid as all that? Lacey laughed out loud. If she didn't, she knew she'd dissolve into tears. "Sure, I have you," she said sarcastically. "For tonight, maybe even tomorrow night and," she waved her hand at him, "if I'm really, really lucky, maybe even the night after that."

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Max sighed heavily. "Can we have this discussion at your condo?"

"Why?" Lacey said angrily. "So everyone won't know what a tool you are?"

"That's it!" Max said through clenched teeth. He stepped forward and grabbed Lacey. She screamed when he swung her over his shoulder and stalked to the door.

Lacey pounded on his back while patrons in the bar cheered and whistled. "Put me down!"

Max didn't reply as he pushed through the doors and flagged down a taxi. When one pulled up, he put her on the ground and opened the back door. "Get in."

She glared up at him, prepared to tell him to go to hell. She stopped the moment she saw his eyes narrow with warning. "If you don't behave yourself, you will get the spanking of your life. Got it?"

Lacey nodded numbly and crawled into the cab. After the humiliation of being carted out of the bar, she wasn't about to chance being spanked on a busy street.

Lacey blinked when Max got into the backseat beside her. "What about Rach? I can't just dump her like this."

Max snorted as the car fired to life. "You should have dumped her a long time ago," he said between gritted teeth.

"She's my best friend," Lacey said.

Max shook his head. "Trust me; she's no friend." He looked at the taxi driver and gave him directions. As it pulled out onto the street, Max turned his attention back to Lacey.

"Don't worry about her. Bruce will see that she gets home safely."

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* * * *

Max was grateful for the silence as the taxi spirited them back to the city. He needed to think, to figure out what he should do with the knowledge that Lacey's best friend had taken up with the man she'd once loved with all her heart.

Max was known as bloodthirsty when it came to business, a formidable opponent. This was something Zack had probably discovered quickly when he'd taken advantage of the bad press Max had been getting. It took Max just two days to regain all the clients Zack had drawn away and, as an added bonus, he gained a few of Zack's as well.

He should be celebrating. Instead, he was filled with ... what? Whatever the fuck it was, he didn't like the feeling. Was it angst? The feeling was alien to him.

All he knew for certain was he had knowledge of something that would hurt Lacey and it was only a matter of time before she found out. Her best friend and the man she loved. What would the news that Zack was fucking Rachael do to her?

Max's hands balled into fists on his lap. He shouldn't care what happened to Lacey. Damn! Why did he care?

As the taxi slowed for the exit that would take them to her condo, he glanced at Lacey. No wonder she was quiet, the woman was sound asleep. He noted her beautiful face, the long hair cascading over her shoulders and the rise and fall of her chest as she breathed. Something stirred inside him. For the first time in his life, he felt something for a woman. Not just lust but...

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Damn!

...something more.

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Chapter 11

Lacey woke to the smell of freshly brewed coffee. She opened her eyes to find a cup hovering just beneath her nose. She blindly reached out for it only to have it pulled away.

"Hey," she complained, "no fair."

Max's soft chuckle filled her senses. She slowly opened one eye and then the other to find him leaning over her, the steaming cup of coffee in his hand.

"What time is it?" Lacey asked as she sat up in bed.

"Almost noon," Max replied. "It's time you got up."

Lacey moaned as the night before flooded back to her. "I drank too much."

"Yeah," Max replied as he sat down on the side of the bed. "That happens sometimes."

This time when Max held the mug out, he didn't pull it away when she reached for it. She took the mug and slowly lifted it to her lips. She looked at Max through hooded eyes.

"Are you angry?"

Max smiled, nearly melting her heart. "Nope."

"I am."

Max cocked his head to one side as he looked down at her. "Are you?"

"Well, no," Lacey conceded. "But I should be. You were the perfect Neanderthal last night. I can't believe you carried me out on your shoulder."

"You asked for it."

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Lacey winced. "I did. It's just—" She hesitated, the words would not come forth.

"Just what?" Max asked.

Lacey took a sip of the coffee. It burned going down her throat, washing away the urge to tell him how she felt. She slowly peeled back the blanket that covered her and realized she was still in the clothes she'd worn the night before.

"Nothing," she said. "It's just ... nothing."

Max took the mug from her hands and placed it on the table beside the bed. His eyes darkened as he gazed down at her. "Sweet Lacey," he said. "Do you know how worried I was when Bruce told me that you were at a bar?"

"I can't imagine why you'd worry," she replied. "Bruce never left our side."

"He's a good man," Max said, "a trustworthy man. But anything could have happened."

Lacey shook her head sadly. "You mean anything that might have made you look bad. More bad press."

Max frowned. He shook his head slowly. "Lacey," he said softly, his eyes moving from her eyes to her lips, "I would never want harm to come to you, no matter what."

Lacey sighed. "I wish I could believe that." How sweet it would be to know he was sincerely concerned for her well-being.

Max leaned forward, his mouth hovering just above hers. "Believe it."

She wanted to. Oh Lord, she wanted to. If only she could. Yet, as his mouth closed over hers and he drew her into a mind-blowing kiss, Lacey knew only too well that their

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relationship was nothing more than sex. She knew she should push him away. Yet her body hummed with need, her core moistened in anticipation and ached for his touch.

And Max did not disappoint. His fingers quickly snaked under her clothes and pulled them off her body. He sat back for a moment, gazing down at her naked body. Lacey shivered under his blatant inspection, her nipples pebbled, her core soaked with moisture.

Max's eyes narrowed, as if he suddenly understood something she was not privy to. His gaze grew hungry as his lips pulled back in a slow smile. Lacey wasn't sure what to make of his gaze and didn't know if she should simply lay there and allow it. Instinct told her she should run as far from him as possible.

But her body told her something else. Stick around to see what happens next.

Max leaned over her and softly nudged a hard nipple before his mouth closed over it. She gasped as his tongue laved the nipple while his hand circled her breast. He kneaded the sensitive skin as his mouth sucked and pulled at her nipple. It was sweet torture. Lacey's mind reeled as she wrapped her arms around him in an effort to pull him closer. He denied her the privilege. He braced his hands on either side of her shoulders in an effort to keep her from pulling him against her. His mouth tore off her nipple only to turn his attention to her other breast. He lapped, he sucked, he wrapped his tongue around her nipple and pulled.

Lacey cried out as her hands slipped under his shirt and raked over his chest. When she reached lower, in the hopes

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of touching his cock, he angled away from her, staying just out of her reach. She moaned in frustration, desperate to feel his hard body and his rock-hard need.

But Max wasn't done feasting on her body. That became apparent as he tore his mouth from her breast and slowly dragged his tongue down the length of her abdomen. His hands pushed her legs apart as his lips hovered just over her moist core.

He raised his head and looked at her. "Tell me that you want me to taste you," he said as his dark eyes blazed with passion.

"I told you before that I'd never—"

Lacey gasped as his fingers stroked her moist slit.

"What was that?" he said, his eyes glistening as his fingers teased her.

Lacey shivered but tried to regroup. "I said that I'd never let you—"

A long finger slipped inside her, gently nudging, pressing, pushing as far as it would go. She gasped again. Yet the moment she opened her mouth to repeat herself, Max slid a second finger inside her, stretching her just a little more, bringing such sweet torture. She closed her eyes and bit her lower lip. She wanted to feel his mouth over her slit, wanted him to suck her clit. Her body ached for it, was begging for it.

When Max pushed a third finger inside her, she knew she'd lost the game. As his fingers pulsed inside her, his thumb pressed against her clit. Lacey gasped, unable to keep her body from bucking against his hand.

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Max leaned over her, his mouth hovering just above hers. "I'm going to taste you, Lacey."

Lacey was unable to form a single coherent word. She wanted to tell him no but his fingers continued to probe inside her, driving her to distraction.

Max dipped his head between her thighs. Lacey gasped when his mouth clamped over her slit. At first, his tongue lashed over her and then he sucked her, stretching her clit, drawing it into his hot mouth.

Wave after wave of erotic sensations coursed through Lacey. Her hands flew to his head, twined in his hair, holding him tighter against her as her hips rose to meet each touch of his mouth and fingers.

A curl of sheer ecstasy formed deep inside her and spread though her body. With each stroke of Max's tongue, each pulse of his fingers inside her, it grew. Max seemed to sense it, perhaps because her body tightened in an effort to keep the orgasm at bay, and sucked harder, stroked deeper.

He wanted her to come ... insisted on the perfection of her completion under his experienced touch. Lacey didn't have time to resent it, Max pushed too hard for that. His pace turning stronger, harder, more intense with every passing second ... until finally, Lacey could take no more.

As her body exploded in orgasm, she cried out. Lacey wrapped her legs around his back, holding her to him as tightly as she could. Her body trembled violently as tears sprang to her eyes. Max pulled out from her legs and crawled over her. He smiled as he pressed his lips to hers while she gasped for air, trying to catch her breath.

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"Hmm," he purred against her lips. "Sweet Lacey, what a pleasure it was to make you come."

Lacey laughed between gasps. "The pleasure was all mine."

She felt his chest rumble as he chuckled. She felt the length of his thick cock against her thigh. "We're aren't finished yet," he told her as his cock slid between her legs and pressed against her moist slit.

Lacey gasped as he pushed into her, plunging deep inside her. How true, she mused as her legs wrapped around his back to allow him deeper access. He had a lot more to offer and she wanted all of it.

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Chapter 12

"Thanks for dumping me!"

Lacey gripped the phone tighter between her fingers. "I didn't mean to," she said. "Max insisted."

"Yeah," her friend replied. "And everyone thought it was so fucking romantic too."

"You saw what happened?"

"Everyone saw him carting you out of the bar, Lacey. Your knight in shining armor carrying you off to his boudoir to fuck you senseless," Rachael said, her voice sarcastic. "So fucking cliché. I can't believe you'd fall for an act like that."

Oh, she'd fallen for it all right. Hook, line and sinker. Lacey's heart still fluttered at the memory.

"I didn't have a choice," Lacey replied. "I'm just sorry you were left behind. Max said Bruce would get you home safely."

"Oh, he did," Rachael said, "but that's not the point. You're supposed to be my best friend."

Lacey's throat tightened. "I am."

"Well, you have a funny way of showing it. I never would have abandoned you like that."

Was there any point in repeating that she hadn't been given a choice? Probably not.

"I'm sorry, Rach," Lacey said. "I really am."

"I put you up when you had nowhere else to go," Rachael said indignantly. "I'd have taken that scrubby dog too if I thought I could trust him not to shit on my carpet."

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Lacey's heart clenched. She missed Harry. She would never have given him up if she could have found a place that would accept him. In spite of the fact Rachael's apartment building had no problem with pets, she most certainly did. And since there was nowhere else to go, Lacey was forced to send him to a shelter for adoption.

"I know," Lacey replied. "And I sincerely appreciate how much you helped me."

"I sure didn't think so last night."

Lacey sighed. Just how much more groveling would she have to do? "I've already said I'm sorry," she said, frustration building within her.

Silence followed. Lacey began to wonder what more she could say to assure her friend.

"All right," Rachael finally said, her voice brightening. "I forgive you."

Lacey breathed a sigh of relief. After the fiasco with Zack, Rachael was the only friend she had left in Toronto. "Thank you," she said.

"Let's get together for lunch today."

Lacey quickly agreed. "Where do you want to meet? You could come here. We could order room service."

"No," Rachael replied quickly. "Come here ... to my apartment. Be here at noon."

"I have to check with Max first. He might have plans."

"To hell with Max," Rachael said angrily. "Who cares what he wants anyway? You know he'll dump you the minute he gets tired of you."

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Lacey's heart clenched. Yeah, but did she have to be reminded again? "I know but—"

"So be here at noon. I'll leave the door unlocked so you can come right in."

The line went dead before Lacey had a chance to reply. She replaced the phone on its receiver. She didn't blame Rachael for being upset with her. Given the circumstances, she'd have felt the same.

Lacey wondered if she'd ever be able to repay Rachael for the kindness her friend shown her. When everyone else in the company saw her as a pariah, Rachael stood by her.

* * * *

Maxwell Barton Gets His Woman!

For the first time in the weeks since the game show ended ... and the roller coaster ride began ... Max smiled at the caption in the paper. At least this time, though he was painted as a knuckle-dragging Neanderthal, the story showed him in a positive light.

And, better still, no one had been privy to the conversation they'd had moments before Max carried Lacey out. No doubt, the report came from a patron of the bar, the picture probably taken by a low-end digital camera or cell phone. Fuzzy at best, Max could still make out Lacey's delectable ass. His groin stirred. It had been just a few hours since he'd left her condo and yet he wanted her again.

Every time he was with her, sank his hungry cock into her, he came away wanting more, needing more.

Who Wants To Be The Millionaire's Mistress?
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How long would his need for her last? Max didn't want to love anyone. It wasn't his style. Yet, the more time he spent with Lacey, the more he thought their relationship just might be long-term. Forever had come to mind more than once.

Max winced. Is Lacey an addition? If so, he'd have to admit he had a problem and purge her from his system. And he fully intended to do just that ... sometime.

He picked up the phone and buzzed his secretary. "Cancel my appointments from noon on," he said.

"But, Mr. Barton, Ludwig and Hawthorne are coming in this afternoon. You've wanted to lure them away from Billings for years and now they're willing to talk to you."

Max hesitated. Eleanor was right; he'd been courting Ludwig and Hawthorne for years. He wanted their portfolios, he wanted to show them just how much more he could offer than Billings.

But he wanted Lacey more.

Damn! Max reeled back in his chair as realization hit him like a ton of bricks. He really was addicted to Lacey! And, if that wasn't bad enough, his need for her had taken precedence over making money. Had, that was the operative word. It ends now!

"Right, I forgot," Max said, hoping his secretary would accept the feeble excuse. "Call Ms. Masters and tell her—"

Max caught himself just in time. If he was going to purge Lacey from his system, he'd have to do it himself. Having his secretary call Lacey wasn't the way to go.

Eleanor waited for a respectable amount of time before she asked, "What should I tell her?"

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"Never mind," Max said. "I'll take care of Ms. Masters myself."

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Chapter 13

Just as the elevator opened, Lacey's cell phone rang. She stepped out onto the eleventh floor of Rachael's apartment building and rummaged through her purse for the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey." The caller didn't have to identify himself. The moment she heard his rich baritone, her body tightened, her senses peaked.

"Max," she said breathlessly. "I'm glad you called."

"Are you?" he said. His voice had a generic tone, as if he was talking to someone he'd never met.

"Well, yes," she replied. "I was wondering when I'd hear from you. And," her voice softened, "when I'd see you."

"Not today," he said briskly. "Maybe tomorrow. Just called to tell you not to expect me."

"Oh." Lacey couldn't disguise the disappointment she felt. "Well, okay. Maybe tomorrow then."

Silence followed for a moment. "You gonna be okay?"

"Sure," she replied. "In fact, Rachael and I are getting together today. She asked me to come by her apartment for lunch."

"What?"

Lacey began to walk down the long hall to Rachael's apartment. "You heard me," she said. "Don't tell me that you have issues with me having lunch with my best friend."

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She could hear Max take a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Lacey," he said firmly, "I want you to turn around right now and leave that building."

Lacey laughed. "Why?"

"Because it's Monday." His voice was soft, almost as if he hadn't meant for her to hear. "Trust me," he said, his voice louder now.

Lacey sighed as she approached Rachael's apartment door. She wished she could trust Max, she really did. "I've gotta go."

"Damn it, Lacey, listen to me!"

She hit the end button on her cell phone and, for added measure, turned it off and tucked it into her purse. She grinned. Max needed to learn she wasn't about to take orders from him anytime soon.

Remembering Rachael said the door would be unlocked, she twisted the handle and pushed it open. The blinds were drawn and Lacey blinked in an effort to adjust her eyes to the low light. She dropped her purse on the leather sofa and gazed around. The apartment was quiet. She peered toward the kitchen. There were no signs of lunch.

Lacey frowned. Very strange. "Rach?" she called. "Are you here?"

A soft sound caught her attention, a cross between a kitten's mew and a moan ... and it seemed to come from the bedroom. Lacey's heart began to beat heavily in her chest. The blood pumped furiously through her body and she suddenly felt very warm all over.

She walked toward the closed bedroom door. "Rach?"

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Another moan, this time deeper and, Lacey didn't want to admit, familiar. Her heart told her to turn tail and run; her head told her to keep walking. When she got to the bedroom door, she slowly pushed it open.

Her throat constricted when she saw the couple in the bedroom. Zack stood naked, his eyes closed tight, his hands braced on his hips. Rachael was on her knees, her hands cupping his balls, her mouth on his cock.

"Oh yeah, babe," Zack said. "Suck it harder."

Rachael complied. Her eyes opened and lit with amusement when she focused on Lacey. She pulled her lips off Zack's cock. "You gonna fuck me now, big boy?"

"No," Zack replied as his hands buried in her hair and pushed her head back to his cock. "I'll tell you when I'm ready."

Lacey knew she'd been set up. This was Rachael's revenge for having left her at Pettybone's. She knew she should be aghast, she should be reeling. Rachael, her best friend, was sucking Zack Billing's cock like there was no tomorrow ... the man she'd loved with all her heart. And there they were ... or, there Rachael was, giving her all to please him.

So when a giggle erupted from her chest, Lacey tried to stamp it down. There was nothing funny about seeing her best friend and her former lover like this. So why wasn't she able to keep from laughing out loud?

Lacey clapped her hand over her mouth to cover the throaty chortle. The sound drew attention from both her best friend and her former boss.

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"Looks like we have company," Zack said as he eased his cock out of Rachael's mouth. He twisted to face Lacey, his cock standing straight out, gleaming with Rachael's saliva.

"I was invited for lunch," Lacey said, barely able to contain her laughter. "But I see Rachael is dining without me."

Zack's chest expanded. He nodded, indicating his ripe cock. "There's always room for one more."

Lacey laughed out loud then. She backed slowly out the bedroom door. "Thanks for the invitation," her eyes swept over his cock, "but there's nothing on the menu that interests me."

With that, she turned and ran from the apartment. She didn't wait for the elevator, instead choosing to run down the stairs. She didn't stop until she rushed out of the door of the building. She leaned against it, gasping for breath.

And still, her body shook with laughter. Perhaps because she'd always suspected Rachael had taken up with Zack after she'd been fired and maybe because she'd come to realize that she didn't need anyone to make her feel whole. Lacey wasn't sure of the cause, all she knew was that she felt good for the first time in months.

"Lacey!"

She pushed off the door and looked toward the voice. "Max?"

He walked toward her, a look of relief on his face. "I'm very annoyed you hung up on me," he said. "But I'm glad I caught you before you had lunch with Rachael."

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Lacey frowned as she pushed off the door and moved forward, closing the distance between them "What makes you think I didn't?"

Max looked so damn handsome in his tailored suit, his tie knotted loosely around his neck. His brows knitted together as his brown eyes watched her closely. "Because my office is two blocks away and I left as soon as you hung up."

Lacey's frown deepened. "Why would you do that?"

When Max didn't reply, realization settled over her. "Oh my God!" She took a step back, putting more distance between them as her mind reeled. "You knew?"

"Lacey—"

"You knew!" Her breath caught in her throat, her stomach plummeted to her toes. She looked up at Max, hoping she was wrong, that she'd see something in his face which would tell her otherwise.

When Max offered a sheepish grin, Lacey's head began to pound as the blood rushed through her brain.

"Okay, yes, I knew." The words barely registered as Lacey continued to struggle to understand. "But I didn't expect you'd find out so soon."

When he reached for her, she slapped his hand away. "Just when would you have told me?"

"I wanted to," he said. "If you recall, I said Rachael was no friend of yours."

"Yes, I recall. But I also recall asking you to tell me why." Lacey bit back a sob. "You knew and you didn't tell me."

Max stepped forward, reaching out to her. She turned away. "I can't deal with this," she said, her voice cracking.

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Lacey ran. She had no idea where she was going but knew she had to put as much distance between herself and Max as she could.

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Chapter 14

"Hey, Lacey, where's my Makeshift Breakfast Special?"

Lacey peered at the burly man sitting at the diner counter. "Oh, shut up, Bob," she said as she pushed her pencil behind her ear. "You'll get it when it's ready."

Bob growled as he looked at the older woman behind the counter. "She's back just two weeks and look how she treats me."

"It's your own damn fault," the woman said. "You've disrespected my daughter from the time she was a baby."

Lacey rounded the counter and placed her arm around her mother's shoulder. "That's true," she said. "Who filled my head with stories of monsters when I was four years old?"

Leona Masters nodded. "And who was stuck with a child who wouldn't sleep because of it?"

"I didn't fill Lacey's head with stories," Bob said indignantly. "I just told her about the time I came face to face with a Sasquatch."

Leona snorted. "The only one willing to believe you was a child with a vivid imagination. Go figure."

"I told the truth," Bob said in protest.

"Order up!" the cook called.

Lacey grinned as she reached for the plate. After years of living in Toronto, she'd gotten used to eating light breakfasts, usually cereal and maybe a bit of yogurt. It would take some time for her to get used to serving the artery-clogging breakfast people loved in her hometown. The Makeshift

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Breakfast Special was stacked high with scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, home-fried potatoes and two thick slices of fresh white bread, slathered with a copious amount of butter. As owner of the Makeshift Diner, her mother had been serving it for over twenty-five years.

Lacey put the plate in front of Bob. "Just shut up and eat," she said. He did just that, quickly tucking in to the meal in front of him, Sasquatch stories now forgotten.

When Lacey reached for the coffeepot, ready to refill mugs, Leona rested her hand on Lacey's shoulder. "Break time."

Lacey smiled at her mother and sighed. "I could use a break. It's been a busy morning."

Leona took the coffeepot and filled two mugs. She handed one to Lacey. "Friday mornings are always busier than the rest of the week, but it's slowing down now so Diane can cover while we rest our tired ole dogs for a few minutes."

Lacey looked at the heavy-set middle-aged waitress. Diane winked and nodded. "No prob. Take a load off for a little while."

Lacey followed her mother to the rear of the diner and took a seat at a table reserved for the staff. Leona spooned sugar into her mug and opened two creamers. As she poured the cream into her coffee, she looked at Lacey. "It sure is good to have you home for awhile," she said.

"Thanks. It's good to be home."

"Is it?" Leona asked skeptically. "There was a time you couldn't wait to put as much distance between you and Makeshift, Manitoba as possible."

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"I know," Lacey replied. "But things have changed a lot since I was a teenager. I wanted excitement and adventure back then. Now, I just want peace and quiet."

"Really?" Leona asked. "So coming home had nothing to do with that game show?"

Lacey trained her eyes on her mug, knowing Leona would be able to tell in a second that she was lying otherwise. "Of course not. Can we talk about something else?"

"You've been home for two weeks, Lacey. I think we've waited long enough to talk about this," her mother said. And then, with a stern voice added, "And look at me when I'm talking to you."

Feeling like a scolded child, Lacey felt her cheeks warm as she slowly raised her eyes to meet her mother's.

"I think it's time you told me what happened between you and this Maxwell Barton," she said firmly.

Lacey shrugged. "It's over. End of story."

"I think there's more to it than that," Leona said.

Lacey moaned. "Mom, please don't tell me you've been following the story in the tabloids." Every day since she left Toronto, new stories surfaced about why she left the city, the latest being that she was pregnant with twins and Max wanted no part of them.

"You know I don't read those rags," Leona replied indignantly.

"Then why do you think there's something I'm not telling you?"

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This time it was Leona who broke the eye contact between them. She lifted her mug to her lips and looked to the side.

"Don't know."

Lacey frowned. Her mother was keeping something from her. "Mom, look at me."

Leona slowly moved her eyes back to her daughter. She took a deep breath before she put her mug back on the table.

"All right," she said. "I talked to him."

Lacey's throat tightened. "Him? Who him?"

"Max."

"You called him?"

"Of course not. He called."

"When?"

"Last night, when you were out for a walk," Leona rushed on. "And I must tell you, Lacey, he's a fine young man. He misses you terribly."

Lacey's throat went dry. She took a small sip of her coffee but it might as well have been sand. "Why didn't you tell me he called?"

"I just did."

Now her mother was just being obstinate. Lacey gritted her teeth. "I mean, why didn't you tell me last night?"

"He asked me not to."

"Why?" Lacey cried.

"Because I didn't want you to run off before I got here."

Max's rich baritone wrapped around Lacey like a silk cloak. Her heart pounded as she turned to find him towering over her. Her senses filled with his scent, one she'd missed so

much since she left him on the city street outside Rachael's apartment building.

Lacey struggled to catch her breath and then find her voice. He smiled down at her, looking quite amused that she'd been caught off-guard. When Lacey finally forced her heartbeat to return to normal, elation at seeing him quickly changed to anger. "What are you doing here?" she snapped.

Max shrugged. "I've come to take you home."

"I'm home now," she countered.

"This isn't your home," Max said in a low voice. "The only reason you're here is—"

"You know what?" Leona cut in as she got up from the table. "I think the two of you should take this discussion elsewhere."

Lacey looked at her mother and rose from the table too. "There's nothing for Max and me to discuss."

Leona's eyes softened as she took Lacey's hand. "I think there is, my darling. Hear him out."

What is there to hear? She had no idea why Max had come to Makeshift but if her mother thought she should take the time to listen, then that's what she'd do. "All right," Lacey said as her mother walked away. She reached behind her to undo her apron. She pulled it over her head and tossed it on the table. "You've got five minutes," she said as she headed toward the diner's door.

"Five minutes isn't very long," Max said.

Lacey glanced back at him as he pushed the door open. He hadn't made a move to follow her; instead he remained in

the very same spot. "Then I guess you better talk fast," she said as she walked through the door.

The gravel in the parking lot crunched under her feet as she made her way toward the town park across the street.

She stopped in mid-stride when she heard a dog barking. The bark was familiar and made her heart ache.

Harry, her beloved Irish Setter. She'd gone to the shelter before she left Toronto only to find that he'd been adopted. She knew she should be happy that he'd found a loving home and had not been euthanized. But she missed him terribly and felt guilt over the fact she'd turned his life upside-down.

She planted herself on a bench and gazed across at the diner. No sign of Max. He hadn't followed her out.

Damn!

He was toying with her, didn't want her to get the upper hand. Lacey's frown deepened along with her resolve. She folded her arms over her chest in an act of defiance. If Max came all the way from Toronto just to see her, then he could damn well walk across the street to have a private discussion.

Lacey frowned again when she heard the mournful whine of a dog. Sure, it sounded like Harry but Lacey tried to shut the memory of him out of her mind. But when the dog began to yelp sorrowfully, Lacey could no longer resist.

The piteous yelps changed to excited barks as Lacey crossed the street and approached the diner's parking lot. She stopped when she saw Max leaning against his gleaming BMW, his arms folded across his chest. He smiled as he reached out and opened the car door. Lacey couldn't believe her eyes as the dog bounded out and, his tail wagging wildly,

ran to her. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she opened her arms to embrace Harry.

When he finally settled down, Lacey wiped tears and drool from her cheeks and gazed at Max. "I don't understand. Why?"

"You had every right to be angry at me. I should have told you what I knew about Rachael. I wanted to shield you from the truth."

Lacey leaned to run her hand over Harry's back. "But why did you rescue Harry and why are you here?"

Max inhaled deeply and let his breath out slowly. "Because I wanted to show you how much I care. I wanted you to see that when you're hurting, I am too."

Lacey blinked back tears as she gazed at Max. She grappled to get her mind around what he seemed to be saying.

"I never thought I'd say this to anyone but..." He slowly approached her and took her into his arms. "I'm a better man with you in my life than I am without you. The fact is, I believe I'm in love with you and I can't explore this bizarre feeling if you're hundreds of miles away."

Lacey wept as she brushed her lips over his. "I love you too, Maxwell Barton."

Max smiled, his eyes shining with love and desire. "Come back to Toronto with me, Lacey. I want you there by my side each and every day."

Lacey wanted to be with him too ... for as long as he wanted her. "I'll be your mistress for as long as you want me."

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"Mistress?" Max asked. "I don't want a mistress, Lacey. I want you to be my wife."

Lacey stepped away from him, her heart pounded in her chest. "Your wife?"

Max nodded slowly. "Yes," he said. "Will you marry me?"

Tears of joy streamed down Lacey's face as she leapt into Max's arms. "Yes. Yes!"

Harry's joyous howl drew her mother and patrons from the diner. As Max and Lacey kissed, they were vaguely aware as everyone cheered.

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About the Author

Even though *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire's Mistress?* is Peggy Hunter's tenth Torrid title, she's as thrilled now about being a Torrid author as she was when *Whiskey Creek Torrid* accepted her first book, *A Lesson In Passion*.

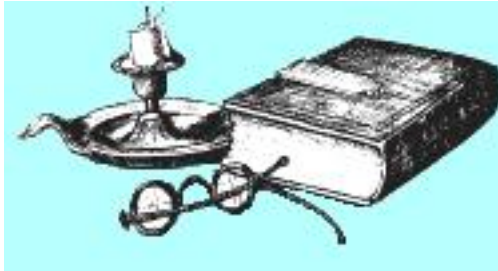
Peggy lives in midwestern Ontario with her husband (her number one hero) and twelve-year-old son (who is a lot like his father). When she's not writing, she's striving to please two dogs, several stray cats and a small flock of very spoiled sheep.

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