

# **The Hand of the Master**

## **Madeleine Oh**

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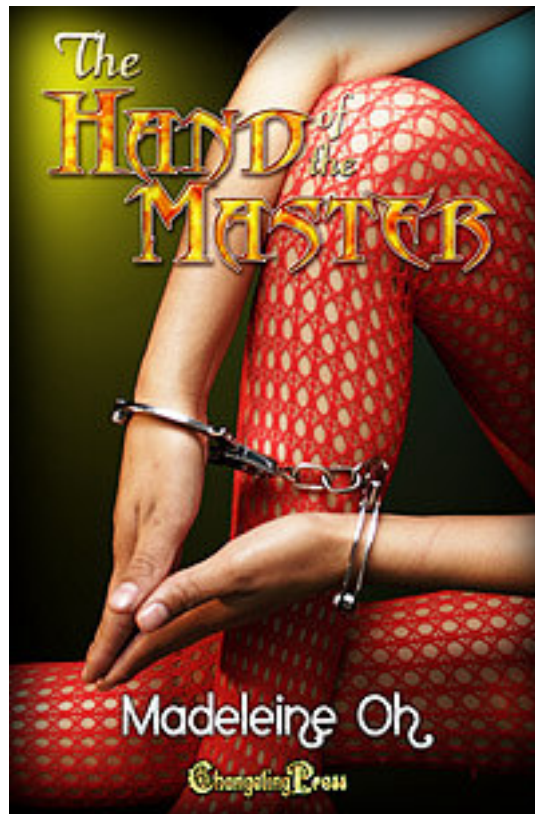
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Recently widowed, Helen Crewe needs a fresh start. A job in the south of France cataloging a private library seems like the perfect change of venue. Once she settles into the luxurious living quarters at Les Santons, she's sure she'll be able to leave the past behind her. Until she awakens in the night to familiar sounds -- a bondage scene being played out in the garden beneath her window between Luc de Prioux and his personal secretary, Branko. In the dark, memories come flooding back.

The library Luc inherited with his grandfather's estate contains dozens of priceless treasures -- rare volumes of beautiful engraved erotica. But none are more priceless than Helen herself. Luc knows what he wants, and he's just the dominant Helen needs in her life. As long as she's willing to share...

Helen's stay at Les Santons promises to be everything she needs. Until a break-in at the estate makes her wonder what she's gotten into...

## Chapter 1

“Honey, do you really think it’s a wise move?”

Looking up at the blue sky, Helen Crewe answered her absent mother-in-law’s cautious question with a resounding *Yes!* She’d left unemployment and the gray and bitter cold winds of an Ohio March for a job in the south of France. Not a bad exchange.

Collecting her baggage and trundling it over to the car rental office with the sun on the back of her neck only reinforced the feeling of being on holiday. Okay, she wasn’t. She was here to work and, judging by the salary she was being paid, to work darn hard, but as the sun warmed through her jacket and she listened to the French voices around her, some of the tightness and cold inside her eased. Coming here had been a very good move.

Her rental car was waiting, six months paid for in advance by her new employer. That she’d expected. She had not expected the desk clerk: über good looking and liable to stop traffic and cause accidents when he smiled. That smile was worth the flight over. As his wide mouth curled up, the corners of his eyes crinkled, and a dimple appeared off center in his chin, but it was the eyes that all but did her in. Dark as midnight, they lit up as he asked, “Madame, how may I help you?”

Helen was tempted to think of helpful ways that would get them both arrested. Spending his days behind a counter, renting out cars to tourists seemed a terrible squandering of his talents.

Whoa! Time to get her mind back onto collision waivers, third party liabilities and the need for a warning triangle in case she ever crossed the border into Italy. But try as she might to be businesslike, Helen smiled back at him -- anything else would be downright unfriendly -- and was caught by the obvious interest in his very sexy eyes. No counter clerk smiled like that in Ohio.

Pushing the form toward her to sign, the clerk’s fingers brushed the back of her hand. No accident that, not going by the little smile and the gentle flutter of his long eyelashes. No man had any right to lashes like that, or eyes as dark as sin and with intriguing depths that implied long hours lying in bed in post-coital comfort.

Right! She was here to rent a car, not get hit on. Mind you, it was a nice boost to her ego. Not that a twenty-something was her idea of an ideal partner. He was so young, almost sweet, until she considered the blatant suggestion in his face. Maybe he wasn't so young. And maybe a hot and heavy interlude with a Monsieur Right Now would mark her new beginning.

Maybe later...

Helen took the pen, signed, x-ed and initialed, and took back her license. "The keys?"

"*Certainement*, Madame Crewe." He added a lovely Gallic roll to the "r." "Permit me to show you to your car."

Every customer ahead of her had been handed keys and shown the door. She alone merited preferential treatment. Not that she'd complain. She had a great view of his tight butt as he bent to demonstrate the headlights and the windshield washer. She could have figured out how to open the trunk and the glove compartment but what the heck. His dark hair and tan looked great against the sporty little red Fiat.

"You are here on holiday, Madame?" he asked, his voice smooth and rich like warm chocolate.

With a six-month rental? He was definitely fishing. "No, I'm working. I'm taking a new job."

"Here, in Nice?"

"In Eze."

That hitched his thick brows up several millimeters.

"Eze." He made it sound like a whisper in the night. "Eze sur Mer or Eze Village?"

"Eze Village." Her directions had been very clear not to make that mistake. "I'm cataloging a private library." Now why the heck had she let that out? No harm really.

"Ah!" He gestured with his long-fingered hands. "You are a librarian." No one had ever made it sound like a sexy profession before.

"I am. And looking forward to spring sunshine."

"Oh, Madame Crewe, you will have sunshine in abundance but you must not spend all your time up in Eze. You must visit us here in Nice. The *Promenade des Anglais* was built for you."

Seemed picky to point out she was American. He was young, very good-looking, and his absurd flirtation was stirring a warmth that had been dormant inside her far too long. "I intend to,

and see Cannes and Antibes.” And while she was at it, explore Monaco and Italy and go up into the hills.

“Then, *ma chère madame*, you must call me when you do. I insist.” With a rather theatrical flourish, he produced a business card. “It would be my pleasure to show you our beautiful city of Nice.”

And provide other pleasures, no doubt. “Thank you.” Helen took the card and settled herself in the driver’s seat. As he held the door, he managed to brush her arm. Slowly.

He closed the door and rested his elbow on the car as he leant in and pointed out the clock and the fuel gauge indicator. Enough was enough! Helen thanked him and closed the window with a little wave and headed for the exit.

As she waited for a gap in the traffic, she glanced at his card. *Pierre Pommier*. Peter Appletree. Sounded like a name from a French translation exercise. If she ever felt in need of French exercise, she knew who to call. But she also knew, deep inside, Pierre for all his youth and enthusiasm, would be a disappointment. She needed more than vigor and ardor in a lover. In the twelve years of her marriage, Edwin had taught her exactly how much more she needed.

She nipped out in a gap in the traffic. Better concentrate on the road and forget the pros and cons of sexy Pierre as a bed partner. She’d have a mosey on down his much vaunted *Promenade de Anglais*, then follow her new employer, Luc de Prioux’s, directions to Eze and Les Santons.

\* \* \*

“She’ll be here soon. The plane landed a half hour ago.”

Luc smiled at his secretary. Branko was so transparent at times, but a fine secretary, and the man earned his salary many times over. “I hope she’ll be the addition to the household we anticipate.”

“She will. Lawson checked her background thoroughly.”

And the American detective charged thoroughly for the effort, as well, but it was more than worth his price. Luc did not want a woman in his household who was not sympathetic to his tastes.

Helen Crewe was coming to catalogue the vast accumulation of books at Les Santons. Because of the nature of many of the volumes, he needed a librarian sympathetically disposed toward *le vice anglais*. Curious that the most suitable of the applicants had been American. The

employment agency had filed a good report on her training and experience. The private detective confirmed she'd been active in her local BDSM community until her recent widowhood. All that remained was to meet the estimable Mrs. Crewe. Luc only hoped she didn't have a loud voice and talk incessantly like the Americans disgorged from the cruise ships in Villefranche who invaded Eze in droves.

\* \* \*

Helen felt like singing. The drive was glorious, the sky clear blue overhead and the sea aquamarine as she followed the *Promenade des Anglais*. Once she turned inland, the N7 climbed, left the town behind and became the *Moyenne Corniche*. Sharp corners followed hairpin bends. Only when the road leveled off did she realize just how high she'd climbed. Sun sparkled on the distant sea on her right and the mountains rose almost sheer to her left.

This was the place to bury her grief and start anew. Despite all the cautions of family and friends, she'd done right to take this -- admittedly unusual and temporary -- position. At first, she'd shared some of her mother-in-law's reservations, but as a widow with no children and not much money after settling Edwin's medical and funeral bills, Helen needed to go back to work, and this position had pretty much fallen in her lap.

She passed the sign marking the boundaries of Eze. Another mile or two -- she really should start thinking in kilometers -- and she'd be there. Past the car park and take the next right. The road descended to a pair of ornate wrought iron gates set in vast stone pillars. She'd arrived at Les Santons.

What next?

\* \* \*

The magnificent sunset was a fitting end to a day that had just about blown Helen's socks off. If first impressions were accurate, she'd landed on her feet in gilded slippers. The tour of the estate -- the only word for a property that comprised six different buildings -- went beyond impressive to astounding. Her designated office in the main house was as large as the spacious dining room in the house she'd just sold. Her living quarters were a beautifully furnished apartment over the private gym and it was from her balcony overlooking the gardens and the sea that she watched the sunset before crossing the courtyard back to the main house for dinner.

She'd all but staggered back two hours later. Four generous courses plus half a liter of wine on top of jet lag almost had her keeled over. Meeting her employer for the first time had

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done nothing to steady her. Luc de Prioux was handsome, charming, far, far too young for her, and hotter than August in Death Valley. She'd thought the secretary, Branko Odic, pretty up there on the bed-worthiness scale but their mutual employer led the pack.

Okay, she had far too much common sense to take off her panties for an employer. Any employer. Even one with dark blue eyes that all but matched the restraints Edwin used to tie her down on the bed, and a slow, sexy smile that crinkled the corners, and a wide, sensual mouth made to satisfy women's dreams. And she wasn't about to dwell on the strong, long-fingered hands and a handshake that clearly showed Luc de Prioux might be young, but damn well knew his place in the world.

It wasn't just the blatant sensuality of the man and his dark curls and tanned skin. It was the dominant air about him that struck chords in her heart and...

Yeah! Right! Better get her mind out of the clouds.

It wasn't easy. Everything about her new employer, from the broad shoulders under his silk shirt to his tanned wrists just visible below his cuffs, the firm chin, strong neck, upright stance and the assurance of his voice that, utterly ignoring the sexy French accent, screamed "Dominant." She had to fight the instinct not to respond submissively, resist the urge to kneel at his feet, to call him "Sir," or whatever the French equivalent was. She had managed dinner without making an utter fool of herself. All she had to do now was keep her dignity for six months.

Tomorrow she'd start work and be too busy indexing old tomes to nourish lustful thoughts. Apart from the three meals a day they would apparently share.

Maybe she'd skip a few meals.

Meanwhile, Helen showered in her almost decadently luxurious bathroom, experimented with the bidet and decided that yes, it really was a handy fixture for a widow in need. After virtuously flossing and brushing her teeth, she sank into the smooth linen sheets under the goose down comforter and was asleep in minutes.

A noise outside awoke her. It was still dark and a silver streak of moonlight lit the wall opposite the foot of her bed. Another sound. Oddly familiar but she couldn't quite place it. Maybe she'd dreamt it.

It came again: the crack of a whip in the air. Either she was dreaming or...



Helen got out of bed. The room was a little chilly in the night. Her robe was still packed, so she padded barefoot and naked across her room to open the window and peer between the slats of the shutters.

She all but gasped as she stared intently, blinked to assure herself she wasn't dreaming before she unlatched the shutters and opened one a few inches to see better. The courtyard garden below her window was lit by moonlight, but it wasn't the scent of early jasmine, the sound of some night bird, or the antique ornamental urns that drew her attention. To the right, a pergola stretched from the house to the edge of the courtyard, and lashed between two of the uprights was a man. Naked to the waist, his skin pale in the moonlight, arms and legs spread-eagled, he looked helpless, vulnerable and magnificent. The night air chilled Helen's shoulders to the point of goosebumps. He had to be cold... Or maybe not.

Her heart did a little flip as the sound repeated. A second man wielded a single tail whip, cracking it in the air and hitting the stone paving with a sharp sound that brought back a flood of memories. Edwin had owned such a whip. They'd bought it together at a fetish fair. He'd never used it on her -- she'd been too chicken -- but just the sound of it was enough to start her creaming.

The second man, dressed in a flowing white shirt, dark breeches and almost clichéd high boots, paced back and forth, circling his victim and cracking the whip at intervals. A wave of envy had Helen wishing she were the one strung up and helpless and the whip wielder were her lover...

All reticence gone, Helen opened the shutters wide and leaned forward, breasts over the windowsill, as she watched the scene unfold. She couldn't make out either face. Was it Luc and Branko? Branko lived out, or so she'd understood. Was this her employer and a lover? Luc has not struck her as gay, but right this minute, she didn't give a rat's ass about her employer's sexual orientation. She was too busy concentrating on how he wielded that single-tail. It had to be Luc de Prioux. He was too self-possessed, had too much presence to be anything but dominant.

And the man who played with that yard of braided leather was expert. He moved with calm assurance and confidence that could only come from hours of practice. As she watched, almost mesmerized by the sounds in the night and the erotic tableau below, she noticed that he worked to a clear and predictable rhythm, circling his victim, cracking the whip at intervals.

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Three times in the air or hitting the paving stones and every fourth time the whip landed on the submissive's back.

Mouth dry, breathing shallow, Helen watched, her muscles flinching instinctively as the cruel tail hit flesh. With each crack, her arousal built, anticipation set a river running between her legs. Her nipples hardened. Her mind slipped into submissive mode and her whole being longed to change places with the nameless man, to be the submissive, stripped and helpless. To wait for the whip, or the flogger, or the crop, waiting for and dreading each harsh caress. To feel need build and peak until her lover permitted her release, or forced her to wait beyond endurance for her climax.

The sub screamed. Was that strike harder than the others, or had he reached his limits?

The Dom paused, let the whip dangle from his hand, and stepped closer, caressing the naked back with his free hand. She couldn't hear his words but she sensed he spoke to his sub as he leaned close. Promising more and harder? Encouraging him? Complimenting his stoicism or mocking his weakness? It was the delicious uncertainty of it all that piqued her imagination and thrilled her body.

Another slash of the whip. Another scream. This time the unknown dominant dropped the whip and stepped back.

As the submissive turned his head, Helen caught a glimpse of his blindfold. She could almost smell the intoxicating aroma of good leather, feel the tightness around her head and the brush of the silk lining against her eyelids in the dark.

Was the tormentor leaving him there, to hang in delicious pain and wonderful uncertainty?

Not exactly. He stepped away, yes, but sat down on a stone bench, crossing one leg across his thigh, watching. Waiting.

It was too much, too utterly arousing and too wonderful. Her body sang with need. She ached and throbbed between her legs. She had no one to forbid her release, to withhold her orgasm, to refuse her the satisfaction her body craved.

She hopped back in bed, legs spread in the moonlight, her hand rubbing her pussy, her fingers opening herself up. It took very little. She was so ready, so primed. A stroke or two, a few sexy thoughts, her eyes shut to replay the scene outside her window. A little pressure to the side of her clit, a tap on the hard nub, and she came in a wild rush of sensation and joy. She

couldn't hold back her cries of satisfaction, forgetting the open window and the two outside. The wonderful rush of pleasure took over her reason. As the ripples of her orgasm faded, she sagged on the crumpled sheets, her body weak and sweaty, but her mind clear and relaxed.

As the night air cooled her skin, Helen summoned the energy to get up and close the window.

The courtyard below was empty. No one moved in the night. Had she imagined the scene? Dreamt it?

Slipping back into bed, she curled up, her limbs relaxed and her mind content. Dream or reality, she didn't much care. Plenty of time to worry about it in the morning.

## Chapter 2

“Ah, Madame Crewe. *Bonjour, vous-avez bien dormi?*”

Helen gave Branko a nod, and agreed yes, she’d slept well. Like a well-satisfied woman in fact. Pity it had all been courtesy of self-service. As she poured herself coffee and debated the choice of croissant or brioche with her cheese, she couldn’t help picturing Branko, with his dark hair and broad shoulders flinching under the whip.

Had it been him?

That question was going to go unanswered. For now. Maybe there’d be another tableau played out tonight. Hell, she could get used to this very easily.

Better get used to getting down to work.

“Is the collection in the library? Will I be working there?” Stupid question. Of course not. Or why give her that impressive office?

“The collection is boxed up and will be brought to your office. I will show you where it is to be shelved.”

Not in the library? She nodded and took her time with her coffee. Branko appeared a trifle irritated that she indulged in a second cup, but she’d crossed the Atlantic for this and was entitled to another cup of the most fragrant coffee she’d ever tasted.

She did resist the temptation of a second croissant. After all, she was going to be here six months, plenty of time for all the baked goods she could down and wear permanently if she wasn’t careful. Putting her cup -- real bone china she noticed -- on her saucer, she looked at Branko.

Quashing the almost incessant speculation as to his participation or otherwise in the little scene last night, she asked, “Okay then. Where do I start?”

With a yellowed record book and six dusty boxes.

“There are more,” Branko told her, “but Monsieur thought this would be enough to start. The catalogue was started before the war but never finished.” He indicated the leather-bound

book. “Let me know if you need anything. The computer is there.” A curt nod toward the antique mahogany desk and he was gone.

Right helpful sort he wasn’t. But maybe he was still sore from last night.

The computer was still in the box, along with the program she’d suggested they use to catalogue. Obviously Branko didn’t see setting it up as part of his job description. Fair enough. Plugging everything in and loading the software pretty much took her to lunch time. Faced with assuaging mid-day hunger pangs and opening the first case that as good as called to her, she took up the box cutter.

After taking out a couple of books, she made a mental note to ask for white gloves. Some of these books were so old that just touching them sent a thrill through her librarian’s heart. Damn good thing she hadn’t brought her coffee in. She wouldn’t risk drinking here. Not with texts like these around.

She opened a dark leather-bound book, noting the faded edge gilding on the thin pages. There was no publication date for the “Limited Private Edition” but it was the illustrations that really caught her interest. Helen chuckled at the thought of a lone engraver, or perhaps a team of them, laboring over their copper or steel plates, then tinting by hand. They must have gone home after a hard day’s work with raging erections.

She looked at the faded colors of “Marital Discipline” and the exposed, plump buttocks of the woman tipped over the back of a chair while a lusty young man with rolled-up shirtsleeves (the husband, one presumed) laid into her with a switch. Then there was Naughty Arabella, who wore considerably less, her back and ass exposed, as she knelt at the foot of an ornate, brass bedstead, her hands tied over her head as a man whipped her with a many-tressed flogger.

The next illustration really caught Helen’s attention. A tall man in breeches and thigh-high leather boots, a hood disguising his face. He was bare-chested and from his hand dangled a single-tail. “Are you ready for your punishment?” seemed an appropriate caption but it barely registered. The lone figure standing on a flagstone terrace in front of chains hanging from an overhead pergola had her mesmerized. Was this the inspiration for the scene she watched last night?

Coincidence. Had to be. This book had been sealed in a box and the tape she’d cut had been old and brittle.

Coincidence or not, it had her aroused as she licked her lips at the tall, commanding figure. Without thinking twice, her hand was up her skirt and into her panties. Wet panties she noticed, but given the throb in her clit that didn't surprise her. Slowly she rubbed her clit with her own juices, rocking her hips as she quickened the rhythm.

Pleasure built, slowly at first, then peaking as she put more pressure on her clit. Helen closed her eyes, to block out everything but her rising climax.

"Madame Crewe?"

Her eyes flashed open and she looked toward the half-open door.

"Madame Crewe?" the voice repeated. Branko, she realized.

"Hello?"

The door opened and he stood there, leaning on his elbow, an odd look in his eyes. Blood rushed to her face. "Yes?" she managed through a very tight throat. Her hand was still up her skirt but to move would only draw attention to her interrupted self-service. He couldn't actually see anything at that angle. Could he?

"Monsieur asked me to come and check. You are missing lunch."

She was also missing a nice climax. "I should have mentioned. I prefer to work through. If I need anything, I'll nip down to the kitchen and get a cup of coffee from Madame Louise." She nodded at the empty mug, safely across the room on the window ledge. "I did earlier. She was very helpful."

"May I ask you not bring food near the volumes --"

"Of course not." She was interrupting, but too damn bad. "I wouldn't dream of it."

He gave an odd little bow. "I will convey your wishes to Monsieur." He closed the door behind him.

Helen listened as Branko's footsteps receded and resumed what he'd so rudely interrupted. Didn't take long. She was so primed that a few minutes brought her back up and a little more pressure sent her over the peak and left her limp but satisfied in the swivel chair.

As she slowly surfaced, doubts set in. How long had Branko been at the door? Had he been watching? If so, how long?

Crap! She stood up, smoothing her skirt and straightening her blouse. So what if he had? It wasn't illegal, was it? But she was going to give her hands a good wash before handling any more antique erotica tomes.

\* \* \*

“Masturbating? You’re certain?” Luc asked.

His secretary nodded. “She was making quiet but unmistakable sounds of pleasure, her right hand was out of sight under her desk, and she blushed rather becomingly when she realized I was there.”

“And she was looking at the collection of Posslieu engravings?”

“Yes, sir, she was.” Luc creased his brows as he sipped his after lunch coffee. “How soon should we include her?” Branko asked.

“Not yet,” Luc replied. “I want her eager and ready. What other boxes does she still have to unpack?”

“Several boxes of paperback novels. When she finishes those, I’ll bring up some older books and I’ll be sure to include the sex toys and accouterments.”

“Perfect. Let us give her a little more time.” Luc paused long enough to down the remainder of his coffee. “Have you discussed days off with her yet?” Branko shook his head. “Then do so. Remind her she has weekends off, and be sure to mention that I will be gone this evening but you’ll be here to dine with her.” Luc smiled at Branko’s raised eyebrow. “I suspect, my friend, that she will decline to join you out of womanly mortification and embarrassment. With luck, Branko, you’ll have the evening off, but please observe if she leaves and for how long.”

“You think she has an assignation?” Branko looked almost shocked.

“Unlikely. She knows no one here, but I rely on your contacts in the village to tell you where she goes and what she does.”

It wasn’t that simple and Luc damn well knew it, but Branko wasn’t one to refuse. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Tell her I’ll be back late tomorrow,” Luc replied, pushing back his chair as he stood. “For now, I think I must see how my librarian is progressing in her task.”

\* \* \*

“Is there anything you require, Madame Crewe?”

Helen looked up at the voice she recognized and the deep blue eyes that caressed her as Luc de Prioux walked into the room. She was sure he could smell her arousal. She could. She had to control herself better.

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“Is there anything you need?” he repeated with a smile.

A vibrator that worked on French current? That she’d take care of herself. Somehow. “Yes, there is. Some of these volumes are so old, they should be handled with gloves. Do you have any?”

A dark curl dropped over his forehead as he shook his head. “Branko should have ordered them. Maybe I should punish him for the omission.”

That casual comment was nothing of the sort. It was planned, she was certain, with the intention of watching her reaction. Which she managed to control. Well, almost. “I’m sure they can be bought easily. Just white cotton gloves, thin ones, are all I need.”

“Branko will take care of it,” he replied. “Nothing else you need?”

“No, the computer’s up and running, and I found the repair supplies. I’ll try to get through these boxes today. If you’ll have another batch sent up for tomorrow?”

“No need to hurry. It often takes a few days before jet lag wears off. Why not finish the current box and stop?” He turned to go then swiveled his body back. “I’ll be leaving in an hour or so. Branko will keep you company at dinner and do you always prefer to skip lunch?”

That was a lot to process in one go. Maybe she did need to quit early. “Lunch? Not always, but if I’m busy working I hate to break off.”

“No problem,” he replied. “Whatever you need, Madame Louise is at your disposal.”

Before she could tell him she was quite capable of making herself a sandwich, he was gone, leaving behind a fading trace of his very subtle but sexy aftershave.

\* \* \*

“Well?” Luc asked, on the phone early the next morning. “What did she do?”

Branko closed the door to prevent the conversation carrying. “She worked late, then drove down to the village to eat. Had an omelet and frites at *La Toison d’Or* and came back. I should mention before she left, she walked all over the terrace, looked out over the sea, appeared to be admiring the view but every few minutes her attention strayed back to the pergola. She even stood underneath it, looking up. Searching for eyebolts or hooks I imagine.”

“Wonderful. I don’t think we shall be disappointed in our Madame Crewe. Did she sleep well last night?”

“As far as I can tell, her light was out by the time I left.” Staying in the house and awake all night to watch was more than he’d do -- even for Luc.



“Fair enough. She is working through which boxes today?”

“Three of assorted old books, and I placed the new box of toys in the last one.”

“She won’t suspect it was added for her edification, will she?”

“I left the tape on the top untouched and opened the bottom. The books I removed, I’ll add to one of the other cases.”

“Good. Now, tell her I will be returning early evening and plan to dine with her and discuss her progress. Be sure to add that you are leaving.”

“I will.” Branko hung up. So their mutual employer wanted a *tête-à-tête* with the intriguing Widow Crewe. Luc didn’t waste time.

\* \* \*

Having the house to herself was a treat. Branko was away doing something or other. It was Madame Louise’s afternoon off and Luc wasn’t due back until dinner time.

Helen was tempted to skive off and try once again to find some sort of evidence that she hadn’t dreamed that scene below her windows, but since tomorrow was Saturday, and she had weekends free, she’d get what she could done today. After all, one never knew what waited in the sealed boxes. So far today she’d found three copies of *The Works of Aristotle* in English, two in pretty good condition. The other only needed a little acid-free paper to repair the cover.

After an afternoon unpacking and cataloging a paperback collection of novels from the fifties and sixties, she reached to the bottom and found a polished box. It was jammed in so tightly, she had to cut the sides of the carton.

Dusted off, the box was heavy and covered in black enamel and about the size of an old-fashioned Bible box. Although what a Bible box would be doing packed with erotic novels was a bit beyond her.

The brass latch was tight and needed a little wiggling to open. The lid was lined with black satin, and as Helen opened it she stared. A lift-out tray in the top of the box had half a dozen lined compartments. For dildos. Beautiful blown glass ones in jewel colors that gleamed up from their bed of white satin.

How was she going to catalogue these? She picked up the first one, a slim shape of bright blue, with random bubbles deep in the glass. Some glassblower had fun making these.

The glass warmed in her hand. Wasn’t hard to imagine it entering her hard and cold then warming deep inside her body. Her cunt clenched at the prospect as she put that dildo back and

picked up a brilliant ruby red one with a white swirl. It was smaller, a butt plug perhaps? Why not? Fancy being penetrated by two of them. She imagined the pressure in her ass from the stubby red one with the stimulation in her cunt from the blue, or perhaps the longer, bright green one. Helen closed her eyes, imagining the friction as the dildo was worked in and out of her cunt, the two surfaces rubbing against each other through her connecting tissue.

She'd be unable to keep working if she didn't get her mind back on her job.

What else was in this fascinating box? A little lid in the top tray opened to reveal two pairs of tit clamps. These she had never learned to like. Restraints, definitely, the kiss of a flogger and the smell of leather oh, yes, but not nasty little clamps pinching her nipples. No way. She closed the lid on that compartment and lifted up the tray.

Wow! In the bottom of the box were two floggers, one with narrow leather thongs, and the other a bundle of soft fur tresses. One to bite and sting, the other to tease and caress. Her cunt ran and her body rippled with longing. It had been so long since she'd felt the sting of a flogger wielded by Edwin's expert hand.

Damn! She was not getting maudlin. She'd had a darn good life with lots of kinky sex, which was more than many women got to enjoy. Of course if that little scene was anything to go by, people were as kinky here as anywhere in Ohio. Just for old times' sake and to look for a maker's mark, she took the two floggers out and spread them on her work desk, stroking the tresses and smiling as she noticed the handle of the furry one doubled as a dildo. Some sort of dual purpose pony gear perhaps?

One of Luc's ancestors really knew his sex toys.

Was there a single-tail there, like the one wielded two nights ago? She looked in the bottom of the box. No single-tail, but something else that really thrilled her: a set of restraints in soft, red calfskin lined with matching silk. They were impossible to resist, and she wrapped one around her left wrist. No Velcro, as she was used to. These closed with shiny brass buckles. Not so easy for a quick release, but there was something about being buckled up tight that really appealed.

Except these were museum pieces intended for cataloging and archiving, not sex play.

Or were they? The box wasn't that old, no discoloration in the satin and not a trace of mustiness, and there had only been the slightest dust to remove when she found it. How long had

it been there? It was nowhere near as old as the books, of that she was sure. Had the boxes been opened and repacked, despite what Luc said?

Who knew? And was it really her worry? She was paid to catalogue and repair. Nothing in this box needed repairing. With a shrug, she repacked everything. Well, almost everything. She couldn't resist leaving out the pair of gorgeous leather restraints. Having them on her desk wouldn't distract her that much, just bring back some fantastic memories.

And probably leave her horny as hell but that she could take care of. Smoothing out the soft leather, she left them at the edge of her desk and reached for another carton of books.

She was considering a visit to the kitchen for coffee when she sensed someone was watching her. If it was that damn Branko sneaking up on her, he was going to be disappointed this time and she'd be unembarrassed and poised.

Helen turned, swiveling the chair. Luc stood in the doorway, smiling.

God! No employer had the right to be so sexy. A smile like his should be illegal, but it was also wonderful when aimed right at her.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Crewe."

"Hi." Seemed a rather meager response to his warm, and decidedly enticing, French accent. "Branko said you'd be back late." As if it made any difference and what business was it of hers if her employer chose to walk into his own house earlier than expected?

He gave a very Gallic shrug. "My business was over and I wanted to review your progress."

That was easy and safe enough.

Or was it? His gaze pretty much fixated on the leather manacles, as did hers. He reached over her shoulder, not touching, but his arm came close enough for her to feel the warmth of his skin. He picked up the first restraint, running his long fingers over the red leather.

"Ah," he said, as the corner of his wide mouth twitched. "You found them."

Obviously! And what was she to make of that comment? Did he know about the other contents of that box? "Yes," she replied, forcing her voice to stay level. "An interesting collection. I wasn't sure how they should be catalogued."

His laugh came like warm honey across her skin. All that was needed was for him to lick it off...

## The Hand of the Master

Whoa! Not a chance! She was not getting involved that way with him. Even if he did have eyes that promised wild pleasure and...

She gulped as he ran the silk lining over his hands. His fingers were long and slender, and curled over the soft leather as if caressing it. And darn him, he was watching her. Gauging her reaction. At least she remembered to close her mouth.

"You wonder how to catalogue them?" he asked, and smiled. "I'm not sure one can. How would you describe the contents of my box?"

His box? He'd put it there? "Assorted sex toys," she replied, pleased she managed it without panting or gasping.

"Yes," he replied. "The perfect description."

Pretty basic and hardly that impressive. "An interesting collection. Has it been in your family long?" Sheesh! Where had that come from?

Wherever it came from, it made him happy, if the glint in his eyes was anything to go by. "Not long, Mrs. Crewe." He was still running it through his fingers. There was something almost mesmerizing about the red leather against his skin. "And these are especially fine. Made in an atelier in Milan." He took her hand in his and wrapped the manacle around her wrist. "See how well it fits. The glove leather is like a second skin."

Yes, she did see, and feel. Was it the softness of the leather or the warm caress of silk lining that had her catching her breath? Could be his voice in her ear and the touch of his fingers against her skin. Or maybe she was just desperate for it.

Or him! So much for not getting involved with her employer. No man looked at a woman with that look in his eyes if all he was interested in was progress of the catalogue. No, that was...

"What do you think, Madame Crewe?"

That she was getting horny and he was eminently fuckable. "Excellent workmanship. Italians have always been renowned for the quality of their leather work." She sounded like a tourist brochure.

Amused him though. "Indeed they have. Now tell me..." as he spoke he tightened the buckle, securing the leather to her wrist, "...how does that feel?"

"Wonderful." It was out without thinking and couldn't be unsaid.

"You enjoy the caress of a restraint, Madame Crewe?"

He was heating her up, but still addressed her formally. The French really were different. “I used to.”

“Ah!” One syllable carried so much understanding. “When your husband was alive?”

She nodded. God, it had been so long.

“Forgive me. I intrude where I have no right.” He unbuckled the manacle and unwound it from her wrist. “My apologies. But the leather looked so fitting against your skin.” He turned, taking both the manacles with him. “Again forgive me. I will see you at dinner.”

He might have gone but his presence remained. Did all men here wear super sexy aftershave? His left behind a faint wisp of bergamot. Forget his choice of perfume. What was she to make of that little episode? She closed her eyes, remembering the touch of his fingers on her skin and the pressure of silk and soft leather. Darn. She was reading far too much into one casual conversation.

And if she wasn’t?

Then she had some decisions to make.

And the rest of the box to catalogue. She was pretty sure there wasn’t a Dewey Decimal Code for assorted sex toys. She’d better invent one. Fast.

She’d have been a lot less composed if she’d glimpsed the grin on her employer’s face as he walked through the library and back to his own suite. But she’d certainly have been less conflicted. Luc de Prioux had no doubt where he wanted to lead the sedate but very desirable Madame Crewe. He looked forward to seeing her lose all restraint under his direction.

She was intrigued, aroused and, he judged, very ripe to be dominated once again.

## Chapter 3

Work done for the day, Helen tidied up and headed across to her apartment, seriously considering skipping dinner.

“Madame Crewe,” Luc called, as she emerged from the side door. “Please, join me for a pastis.”

Well, damn, why not? The sun was shining on the sea way down below them, the sky was blue, and he was damn good looking. What woman in her right mind turned down all that? Especially when she was thirsty.

She took the chair he indicated, watching as he poured an inch or so of the clear, greenish liquor into a glass, and handed it to her, pushing the jug of chilled water in her direction. No ice in the glass but several cubes floated in the water and it was cold enough to leave condensation all over the side of the jug. She poured water, watching as the liquor turned cloudy and was very much aware of his scrutiny. No buttons undone on her blouse. No buttons in fact. Was she really that fascinating?

Certainly upped her ego a few notches to find she was so mesmerizing. She raised her glass. “Good health.”

“*Sante*,” he replied, his wide mouth curling in a definitely intriguing smile. Inhaling the odd aniseed and licorice smell, she sipped. Twice.

Yes, coming here was a darn good move. What were the odds of sipping pastis on a sun-drenched terrace back in Ohio? Or having a man look at her like that. Back home she was Edwin Crewe’s widow; here she was Madame Crewe and apparently worth the trouble.

“All is well?” Luc asked.

Apart from being indescribably horny. “Yes. Fine. I’m enjoying cataloguing your library.”

“I hoped you would. It’s not every librarian has the inclination to handle such a collection.”

You could say that again. “Is it all yours?”

He shook his head. "My great-grandfather started it. Most of the older books were his. He packed them up during the war so the Boches wouldn't get them. They didn't but they got him instead." He paused. "They shot him."

Not for hiding erotica, she guessed, but she let Luc go on.

"His collection sat hidden until my grandmother died, a few years back. My sister, Lise, and her family moved into the family chateau. During repairs to the cellars, we found his collection, together with about five hundred bottles of wine, walled up in a hidden cellar. Lise, my cousins and I divided the wine but I claimed the books. Most of them were quite shocked by them." He paused to sip from his half-empty glass. "I was not, as you are not, Madame Crewe. So, when our father died and I inherited Les Santons, I brought them all here, adding my own collections. It took me some time to find the right person to put it all together."

That was understandable. "I'm glad you found me."

"So, my dear Madame Crewe, am I." He set his glass on the tabletop.

She continued to sip from hers.

"Ah, well." He stood. "If you will excuse me, I have things to do, but Madame Crewe, will you have dinner with me? At eight? I would be honored."

She'd been expecting to eat with him anyway. "With pleasure. Eight o'clock then."

As he walked into the house, she decided he had a very nice ass. And she needed a cold shower. Sexy, yes, bedworthy, most certainly, but was nurturing lustful thoughts of her employer on her second evening the way to go? Maybe. She took her time finishing her aperitif before making her way up to her apartment.

Unaware every step was watched by a smiling Luc de Prioux.

\* \* \*

At five minutes to eight Helen crossed the courtyard, headed for the house, and saw Luc leaning against his car, keys in hand.

"*Bon soir*," he said, opening the passenger door.

This was not what she'd had in mind. "We're going out to dinner?"

"But of course. Madame Louise has the evening off. I do not cook and I would not presume to add that to your duties."

Smart man. Cooking had never been her forte.

"Where are we going?" she asked as he started the ignition.

“Up on the *Grande Corniche*. To show you the finest views of the *Cote d’Azur*. There’s a head scarf in the glove compartment if you want one.”

It was purple silk with a pattern of fig leaves and butterflies. “Yours?”

“My sister’s. She hates to get windblown.”

Sister, yes he’d mentioned one earlier. Of course it could easily be one he kept for any stray woman he happened to pick up.

Five minutes after she’d fastened the scarf, she agreed, she needed it. Once out of the iron gates, he crossed the main road and turned onto a steep road that headed up the mountains. Steep very soon became too steep and twisting. Between the engine and the wind in her ears, she gave up on conversation but soon understood what he meant about views. They seemed to be driving along the crest of the entire range of mountains. The sea was a distant glitter as the sun set and the sky a vast blue dome above.

“This is an incredible road.”

He smiled, keeping his eyes ahead. Good thing too as a car approached far too fast and he slowed and pulled close to the edge. “It was built for Napoleon,” Luc replied, as he continued along the road. “To ease the movement of troops for the Italian Campaign. It was originally a mule track.”

Still looked like a mule track, but she kept that to herself. He drove some distance, then pulled up in front of a building that belonged on a calendar or a TV ad for the rustic good life.

Inside, *L’Auberge Grande Corniche* was even better: all polished floors and paneling with brass lamps and linen tablecloths. The patron greeted Luc by name. After an introduction which Helen fumbled in her rotten French, they were led to a table on the terrace, secluded from the other diners by a wall of ivy but wide open on two sides to the view. “It’s incredible!”

Luc smiled. Only it went a good bit further than his wide mouth. He was as good as ogling. Why not? “I’m glad you like it. I hope you like the dinner as much. Marcel has a good cook.”

Luc de Prioux was a master of the understatement. An hour and a half and four courses later, they watched the moon rise as they sipped their digestifs. Seemed only inevitable, his knee would brush her leg under the table and his hand rested on hers in the most wondrously blatant manner.



Blame, if she was going to assign blame at all, it on the wine, the meal and the glorious sensation of being above the rest of the world, but she leaned forward and asked, “Is this a business dinner or seduction?”

He raised an eyebrow, just the one, and shrugged. “I make seduction my business. Especially when I find a woman aroused by red leather and restraints.”

She’d be a liar to deny that. “So?”

“So...” He pulled the syllable out as he held her attention. “I’m in a quandary.”

That made two of them.

“Should I implore Marcel for one of his rooms upstairs, or take you back to Les Santons? I think the latter. When you beg for release or cry out in your climax, we won’t be overheard.”

That was stating it clearly enough. He took another sip of his Cognac and waited.

It was over to her now. She wasn’t stupid. But she was horny and in dire need. “I agree, Les Santons.”

The ride down seemed at breakneck speed with death-defying bends and sheer drops, or was she just fighting a raging desire? She wouldn’t try to count the months, weeks and days since she’d had a good hard fuck. She’d turned down more than one offer since Edwin’s death. Why accept now?

A glance at the man to her left answered that. He was sexy, bedworthy and unquestionably dominant and that brought up the question that had niggled the past couple of days.

“The evening I arrived, was that you wielding the single-tail?”

“Ah!” He did have a way of dragging out single syllables. “You saw us?”

“Yes.” At least he admitted to being one of them.

“We hoped you would enjoy it.”

“I’d rather be a participant than a spectator.”

“I thought so.”

He went quiet. The twisting road might be part of it, but he hadn’t answered her question and she wanted to know. Or did she? Would he be any less sexy if he’d been the one suspended from the pergola? Her throat tightened at the idea. Not just her throat. Her cunt clenched, then ran with arousal. She was so used to thinking of the male being dominant, when she knew that

wasn't necessarily the case. Maybe Luc was submissive? Many powerful aggressive men were when the clothes came off. She'd seen that countless times among their kinky circle.

She didn't think so in Luc's case.

"We should be home in ten minutes," he said, breaking into her thoughts. "I want you to go to your room, strip naked and wait for me, sitting in the wingchair by the door. Take the scarf with you. I might need to gag you if you get too loud."

Definitely no doubt about his inclination. "What do I call you?" She hoped he wasn't one of the 'Sir' or 'My Lord' doms. Always struck her as pretentious and silly. "Luc," he replied. He slowed at the junction in the village. "Do you want a safe word?"

"I always used one before."

"What did you use?"

"My name, my full name. Helen Madison Crewe."

"Very good," he replied, as he turned into the iron gates and pulled up in front of her door. "I won't be long. Be ready for me."

Ready? She'd laugh if she weren't so on edge. She was so ready her panties were soaking. Damn! She wondered as she dashed into the house if she had time for a quick shower. Why? She'd showered earlier in the evening and heck, it didn't really hurt to let him know how much she needed him.

She made do with a quick wash, pulled her hair off her face and settled herself in the chair as instructed. Not sure what he wanted her to do with the silk scarf, she left it folded on the table and hoped he wouldn't need it. She hated being gagged. But if he insisted... That prospect sent her mind into a glorious downward spiral that notched her libido even higher and sent her clit throbbing.

How long was he going to make her wait?

She knew that answer -- just as long as he wanted. He was the boss, in every single way. She closed her eyes and let her thoughts dwell on the contents of that dark box. Would he bring it with him? Other toys? Or would he dominate by his voice and his commands alone?

The downstairs door opened and footsteps mounted the uncarpeted stairs.

## Chapter 4

Hearing the door open behind her, Helen held her breath as she waited. He didn't say a word. He was there though; his cologne gave him away. Was he waiting for her to speak? What did he want her to do? Kneel at his feet? No, his directions had been clear enough: naked and seated in the chair. She'd wait. She exhaled, rested her hands on her naked thighs and took another deep breath. She'd no doubt need the oxygen before he was through with her.

The red leather manacles landed on her lap. "Put them on your wrists."

Would have been a lot easier with Velcro. Her left one she managed, but fastening the right challenged her. The silk kept slipping as she tried to tighten the buckle. "Luc, I can't fix this one," she said, holding up her wrist to show him. "It keeps shifting."

"Then I must," he replied, walking around the chair to face her.

Grief alive! She remembered to close her mouth but not before giving him a great view of her tonsils.

He was dressed like a tormentor from *The Story of O* -- skintight leggings with an open crotch to display his cock and balls. She couldn't help staring. His cock wasn't just hard and ready, it was downright beautiful. Not that thick, but long and straight, the smooth head emerging from his paler foreskin. Helen licked her lips, then looked up at his face.

He raised one eyebrow at her and said, "Hold out your hand." It was shaking so much she extended her whole arm. He smiled. "Afraid?"

"Not really." It was true. "Just anxious. It's been a while." That was certainly true.

"And with me you are a virgin."

"What?" She hadn't been called that for a very long time.

"But of course. This is your first time with me. And doesn't every man dominate differently?"

He had a point. She nodded, watching as he wound the red leather around her wrist and fastened the buckle. He took hold of the two loose tie ends and tugged. "Stand." That was easy enough. So was following him to the middle of the room. "Kneel."

## The Hand of the Master

That she managed, glad of the soft carpet as she waited, eyes pretty much glued on his cock. And waited.

“What are you thinking about?”

That was a no-brainer. “Your cock.”

“Indeed and what are you presuming to think?”

What did he expect in reply? No way of knowing. Might as well tell the truth. “I was thinking how wonderful it will feel between my lips.”

“Mmm. Shall I permit that? Perhaps. But first, there is a much needed conversation. Don’t move.”

He was back in moments, his hands full. “Look and decide,” he said as he placed a riding crop, a nasty looking cane and the red flogger on the floor in front of her. “Pick one. Choose the one you’d rather I beat you with but remember I decide how much and how many you receive. I want no complaining or whining. You are here naked because I wish to tie you up and beat you. Understand?”

Her cunt flowed as her throat went dry. “Yes.”

“Then choose. The longer you take to decide, the more time you have to wait to get fucked. Maybe I’ll make you wait all night.”

This felt so utterly right. How did he know what she needed so much? That one was easy. He was dominant and she... she was...

“Choose!” He all but yelled it.

She reached for the flogger and got her hand slapped. “Did I say pick it up? Did I tell you to touch it? Did I?”

As a well-trained sub, she lowered her head to the floor. “My apologies, Luc.”

“Nice,” he said, stroking her hair and sending tight shivers down her spine. “Very nice. I accept your apology. Now tell me, which do you choose?”

“The flogger.”

“I thought so. You’ve been thinking about it all afternoon, haven’t you?”

“Yes.” She bet it wasn’t chance she opened that box today. He had this planned. How did he know she was submissive? Did it matter? All that mattered was her thudding heart, racing pulse, soaking pussy and, most of all, Luc who loomed over her like a dream come true.

“Good. Now it’s time to feel it. Stay as you are, but raise your bottom in the air.”

Guessing what he had in mind, she lifted her ass, spreading her knees to anchor herself. She had no intention of wobbling or falling. Helen took a deep breath, willed her shoulders and back to relax and...

The flogger came down. Hard. The narrow tresses stinging lines of sharp cutting pain. He waited. Just as the sting eased a little, the flogger came down again hard enough to make her gasp. He paused a moment, then gave her three hard strokes. The last still burned as he said, "Kneel up."

Not so easy to do when your ass is sore and throbbing but she managed, guessing she had carpet marks all over her face.

He smiled down at her.

So far so good. He understood what she wanted and seemed more than happy to deliver -- if the smile quirking the corners of his mouth was anything to go by.

"Show me how much you want my cock."

Simple and clear enough. Helen nodded and, as he stepped closer, opened her mouth. He'd made her wait; now was her turn to play with him.

She gently kissed the smooth head of his cock, just a brush of skin on skin, but he jerked under her lips. "Do you want me to use my hands?" Wasn't going to be easy with the dangling tapes but...

"If you wish."

Heck, why not?

She trailed one finger very slowly up the side of his cock, circled him with her hand and worked his foreskin back and forth, revealing the rather luscious head of his cock: purplish, swollen and shiny smooth. Smiling, she bent down and licked off the sweet bead of moisture.

His breath caught at that, so she repeated. Swirling her tongue over the smooth skin, she eased her lips over the head of his cock, then, in a swift movement, swallowed him, taking him deep as her tongue circled him.

His gasp only added to her thrill.

This was so what she'd missed and longed for. She smiled around his cock as he held her head, his fingers tunneling in her hair as he kept her steady.

## The Hand of the Master

He told her to suck him and darn, she was doing just that. She moved her mouth up and down his cock, letting her tongue swirl and flutter across the head as she moved her lips up and down his warm flesh.

Hard, warm flesh and getting harder.

She reached between his legs and stroked his balls.

Now he groaned and pulled her head away. "Enough!"

"Really?" she asked, unable to keep back her smile.

"For now," he said, reaching for the trailing tapes and winding the long ends over his fist as his free hand reached for her elbow. "Stand."

She managed, very, very much aware of the dampness between her legs. Damp? It was a freaking river as her clit throbbed and her ass still stung. What next?

"Ready?" he asked.

"For what?" Not very sub-like, but she was burning with need.

"To accept, to receive, to obey."

How did he know that last word was guaranteed to stoke her need even higher? Hell, he was dominant and no doubt took that tone with a gazillion women. Not that Helen cared right now. He said it to her and they were the only two naked, or almost naked.

"I'm ready." In more damn ways than one. And she just knew he was going to make her wait.

By the glint in his dark eyes, he was more than keyed into that. "Come along."

To her surprise, he didn't head for her bed, but led her into her bathroom, had her step into the shower and tied her to the towel bar. Her hands were over her head but he let her lean against the tile. "Keep your arms up," he told her. "Be sure that leather stays dry or you'll get a wet towel across the back of your legs."

Clear enough there, and since her ass still throbbed, she'd avoid any more beatings if she could. She rested her forearms on the cool tile and waited as she heard water running behind her.

Was he getting in with her? A shared shower was a pleasure, but how much could she share strung up like this? Nothing. He wanted her passive while he toyed with her. She yelled as cold water hit the small of her back, her shoulders and the back of her legs.

He'd unhitched the handheld shower wand and was aiming it at one part after another. After the first gasp, she controlled herself, although not her shudders as spray after chilling spray

hit her skin. He stopped but she knew better than to think it was over. There was a little pause, then the nozzle came up between her legs and hit her pussy with full force. After another gasp, she leaned her face against the cold tile and shivered.

What next?

She should have guessed. Warm water, then soap as he ran his hands over her back, stroking her now thoroughly cooled off ass, parting her cheeks and running his fingers in her crack.

Was he going to bugger her?

She let out a little grunt at the thought, but instead his fingers were up her cunt, pushing and pumping. “Move your hips.”

She had no trouble obeying that order. She rocked back and forth, tilting her hips to take his fingers deeper. She wanted his cock, but this was good. For now. He pressed deeper, pushing hard, with more than one finger she was certain. But just as the first ripples of her climax started, he moved away, leaving her open and needy.

“Stand firm while I wash you off.” At least it was warm water this time. As he finished he said, “Turn around. I want to see your breasts and nipples.”

Wasn’t easy but he steadied her so she didn’t slip on the tile. She stood, hands strained over her head, breasts lifted and her body displayed to view.

He didn’t say a word, just looked her over, like a trainer examining a racehorse. He held her chin in his hand and examined her teeth. Looked in her ears, squeezed and pushed at her breasts, tugging at her nipples until they were hard and achy and finally examined her pussy. Opening her, stroking, slapping her clit with his hand and cupping her mound as his thumb penetrated her.

She shivered, part from the draught from the open window but a good bit from sheer anticipation.

“Good,” he said, almost to himself. “Here.” He wrapped a towel over her shoulders and rubbed her dry, having a particularly good time on her thighs, ass and pussy. Even having her pick up each foot as he dried it.

She expected him to untie her once he hung the towel back up. Instead, he opened the door. “Be back in a minute. Don’t go anywhere.”

Smart ass! Nice ass, too, under the tight spandex. She'd prefer him naked but the odd outfit was hot. Was the similarity to the outfits at Roissy's from *The Story of O* just a coincidence? A bit of fun drama on his part?

She wasn't about to consider it could actually be real. This might be France and he was French, but she was not being shared with all his kinky buddies. No way in hell!

"You look angry?"

His voice made her jump. "Just thinking. Wondering what happens next."

"My dear, you are about to have your curiosity satisfied." He unscrewed the top of a small jar. Transparent gel gleamed on his fingertips as he scooped up some of the contents. "Your reaction to this should be interesting," he said as he dabbed it on her nipples and she instantly gasped.

"That smarts!"

"Yes," he replied, "it does. Just what I need to keep you aware of your body. Can't you feel your breasts and nipples more than ever before?"

"Damn straight I can, but..." She let out her breath. The smarting eased slightly or at least stopped building. "What is it?"

"A special potion I had made up for you when I was in Paris."

Thoughtful of him! "Take it off. Please."

"Later." He paused. "Do you want to use your safe word?"

Did she? "No."

"No more complaints then, my dear, or I'll smear it all over your clit and leave you here to whimper."

She suspected she'd do more than whimper. Edwin had once used cream he'd bought from a sex shop and she'd about raised the roof when he tried it on her cunt and clit. That had been an experiment never to be repeated. This itched but was bearable and no doubt would ease in time. Unless he decided to re-anoint.

He seemed more interested in watching her. He'd even pulled up the clothes hamper and plonked himself down on it.

What was she supposed to do? Not beg him to take it off, that he'd made quite clear? Writhe with agony? Gasp at the stinging?



Damn! She shut her eyes, flexed her shoulders to ease the muscles that were beginning to ache and took several slow breaths.

“What would you like now?” he asked.

“To have you toss me on the bed and fuck me senseless.”

His laugh echoed off the tiles. “Not yet, I don’t think.” He stood and walked over to her and ran his hand in her slit, probing into her cunt with his fingers. “I was right,” he went on, as his thumb brushed her clit. “Aroused but not enough yet to suit me. I’ll have to work you over a little more.”

How? She knew better than ask. She settled for another flex of her shoulders.

“You’re in pain?” he asked.

“Just aching.” And wishing he’d let her down.

“Where do you ache?”

“My arms, shoulders and wrists. My ass still throbs a bit. And my tits.” She wasn’t about to forget them. Couldn’t if she tried.

“Come along then.” He untied her hands and led her into her bedroom. “Kneel.”

As she obeyed, she noticed the black wooden box she’d unpacked earlier. So, finding it wasn’t blind chance. He’d planned this. But how had he known her tastes?

He lifted the lid and leaned over it, his back to her so she couldn’t see what he held in his fist. He picked up the trailing ends of the manacles in his free hand and led her over to the bed. “Bend over the mattress,” he said, “and spread your legs.”

Was he going to beat her again? Spank her? Or...

He stroked her ass for a few moments, then started patting her gently in a steady rhythm, pausing every five or six slaps to feel her cunt. “You like this, don’t you?”

“Yes, Luc.” Like it? She loved it. Couldn’t he figure that out from the way her cunt flowed in response?

“Good. Now, keep still.” He parted her ass cheeks, stroking her crack and pressing something warm against her tight opening. His finger? Thumb? He pressed harder and she whimpered. Before the whimper faded, she had something cold up her asshole. Lubricant, lots of it. Then came more pressure and a hard shape filling and stretching her. One of the glass butt plugs no doubt.

## The Hand of the Master

He pressed her ass cheeks together. “Keep it in,” he said. “If you let it fall out, I’ll use the cane on you and I promise you, it won’t be erotic.” She sagged onto the bed, gasping with the effort to hold her muscles tight. “Do you understand?”

“Yes, Luc. I’ll hold it.” She’d done the same for Edwin scores of times, but he’d used soft, warm silicone plugs not hand blown glass. But this felt wonderful as her inner muscles accommodated the intrusion. Better not let them relax too much. A non-erotic caning had little appeal. Ever.

“Climb on the bed and lie on your back.”

The first bit was easy enough but she wasn’t so sure about the second half of his instruction. “I’m afraid the plug will come out as I roll over,” she said, looking over her shoulder at him.

“Don’t let it.”

Easy for him to say but she managed by dint of clenching her asshole until it hurt. Once on her back, Helen rested her head on the pillow and looked at him. She could pretty much guess what came next. And she was right. He took the ties attached to her manacles and fastened them to the headboard. Her arms were spread in a Y but not stretched taut. She could move a little. Well, a few inches, she realized as he stroked her arms and brushed the hair off her face.

She expected him to move, to fasten her legs perhaps, when he bent over and kissed her. Hard. His lips forced her mouth open as his tongue curled against hers. She kissed him back, unsure if it was permitted or not but damn, he was a good kisser and she needed this. Her tongue stroked his and her lips pressed back as his hand cupped the back of her head and brought her closer. She gasped as he broke the kiss. “You’re a fantastic kisser.”

He smiled. “You respond well. Let’s see what happens when I kiss somewhere else.”

He closed his lips over her nipple and sucked and licked and removed the gel. Her nipple felt better, at least that one did, except it only seemed to emphasize the itch on the remaining one.

“Better?” he asked.

“Yes, but doesn’t it feel bad in your mouth?”

He grinned. “What do you think?” And he gave her another open mouth, all tongue and tonsils kiss.

She blew through her lips when he broke the kiss. Her mouth felt as if she'd been eating red-hot cinnamon candy.

As she fluttered her tongue to cool it, he asked, "Well?"

"What is that stuff?" She caught a taste on her tongue. "Peppermint?"

He looked up from stroking her breast. "Oil of peppermint is one of the ingredients, yes."

She suspected one of the others might be chili or jalapeño pepper. Didn't stop him from licking it off her other nipple. His mouth had to be lined with asbestos. Or maybe not, given how smooth and warm his tongue was.

If she had any sense, she'd give up thinking and immerse herself in the sensation of his mouth on her nipples. Ripples of pleasure snaked from her breast to her cunt. Her hips rocked as it became next to impossible to stay still as sensation peaked. Was it really possible to climax from kissing on her breasts? Once upon a time she'd thought not. Right now she was so close, she began to moan with pleasure.

He moved right away.

Damn him! "Why stop?"

He chuckled. "Because I have much more planned. I can't permit you to come. Not yet."

Rotten, controlling bastard!

Wondrous, controlling bastard, Helen decided as he kissed the inside of her ankle. How had he moved that fast? Didn't much matter, as he lifted her leg and wrapped a red leather restraint around her ankle. "Want me helpless?"

"Of course." She was, in no time at all. Legs spread-eagled, she was open and available for whatever he had planned. "I wonder if I should render you silent too."

She looked at him. He appeared to be considering the possibility. Or was he playing her?

He shook his head. "I think not, but instead..."

He picked up the silk scarf she'd worn in the car and with infinite care trailed it over her naked and ready body. Helen shut her eyes and smiled as the gentle caress perked up every single nerve ending. It was the perfect tease.

Until he stopped.

"That was nice." Really it was a lot more than nice, but since he was now on the bed and between her legs, she let the understatement go. She just hoped he wasn't about to slather that peppermint oil concoction on her pussy.

## The Hand of the Master

He was opening her instead, pulling back her outer pussy lips to stroke her clit with his thumb, while he somehow managed to reach behind and wiggle the butt plug.

She cried out at the sensation.

“Like that?” he asked, moving it harder and giving a tug before pressing it back.

“Yes!” No point in elaborating. A Dom as skilled as he was could read her face, body, heartbeat and breathing. Hell, he could read her cunt too!

“You’re very beautiful,” he told her, both thumbs stroking her inner lips. “The color of a rosebud in summer, perfumed with sex.”

There was no doubt the French had something when it came to seduction. And torture, as he pinched her clit and made her yell.

“So sorry,” he said. “I’ll kiss it better.” And he was as good as his word.

She’d been right in thinking him a good kisser. This was incredible. He lapped her back and forth using the flat of his tongue and caressing every millimeter. When he had her sighing, he changed tactics, closing his lips over her clit and alternating sucking gently and fluttering the tip of his tongue.

Hell, if he’d do this again, he could gag and blindfold her anytime. Do anything he fancied.

Pleasure built and sensations raced through her, radiating out from her clit to stimulate nerve endings deep in her cunt and across her groin. She was groaning and rocking her hips as her climax escalated. He moved away.

Damn him!

But not for long. Slipping on a condom, he grabbed her hips and lifted them as he impaled her on his cock.

She screamed with pleasure and satisfaction as he worked into her with a driving rhythm. There was no gentleness here, just a wild male pounding her to climax. She screamed aloud, again and again, as waves of climaxes broke in a raging tide of pleasure. He came as she collapsed on the mattress, a sated, worn and spent mass of humanity. His ragged breathing as he sagged on top of her told her he was almost as worn.

She’d always loved this moment. Through the fading ripples of orgasm, she became aware of his cock softening inside of her and his male scent and weight enveloping her. Too soon he was gone, slipped out as he rolled off. Damn, and tied down, she couldn’t pull him back.

He freed her arms right away, as he dropped a kiss on her forehead. “You were magnificent,” he said, as he reached down the bed and released her ankles before getting in beside her and pulling the covers over them both.

Helen curled into him, unable to do much more than rest her head on his chest and listen to the thumping of his heart. Eyes closed, she was slipping into a satisfied sleep when he shifted, brushed the hair from her face and kissed her hard on the mouth. “Magnificent,” he said, his lips close to her face. “I must go.”

“No!” Silly but she wanted him to stay all night.

“I must,” he replied, slipping out of bed. “Sleep. It is better this way.”

She disagreed totally but was too spent to argue.

The door closed and he was gone.

## Chapter 5

Helen awoke late. Hardly surprising really. She could still feel his cock inside her and the warm delicious glow on her ass. She'd definitely found her Dom. How it was going to play out from here was anybody's guess. Would he be formal or friendly at breakfast?

Padding to the bathroom, she noticed a few more aches and strains. One shoulder was a bit stiff, but nothing that a good shower wouldn't ease. Stepping into the bathroom brought back some rather vivid memories.

What surprised her was there was no trace of the accouterments of the previous evening although she clearly remembered him leaving. Had he come back and retrieved his toys? And what about the butt plug? She vaguely remembered that slipping out as she climaxed, but a quick check showed it wasn't in the bed or on the floor.

Silly really, she'd been thrilled at what he'd done to her, would wholeheartedly welcome any repeat performances, but the thought that he'd been skulking around while she slept gave her the willies.

Not much she could do about that. She showered, dried her hair, dressed and headed to the house for breakfast.

The dining room was deserted. She hadn't expected Branko, he'd been clear enough that he had the weekend off, but Luc? He could at least have appeared, if only to acknowledge he'd been creeping around her bedroom after she conked out from his stellar efforts.

Damn him, but it was hard to be truly irked when her body remembered last night so well. She poured coffee and helped herself to a six-inch chunk of baguette and some cheese. She'd worked up an appetite.

She was almost finished, and telling herself she did not need one of the crispy croissants as dessert, when Madame Louise appeared, inquiring if Helen needed anything. At least that's what she understood. Unlike Luc and Branko, Madame Louise only spoke French. Helen assured her she had everything and the coffee was perfect. Then asked about Luc.

*"Monsieur est parti,"* she replied, *"a Paris pour le weekend."*

That was what Branko told her yesterday. Was she the only one in the house who knew he'd been here last night? Odd.

But not a matter she'd discuss with Madame Louise, if she could have made herself understood. Helen thanked the woman, drained her coffee and wondered what Luc was playing at. Playing at her, it seemed.

Damn! What now? And why disappear like that? If it weren't for the telltale tingle in her ass as she sat down, she might imagine dreaming the entire episode. But she hadn't and she damn well wasn't moping around here all weekend. She had time off, she'd make the best of it.

Two days to explore the south of France in a car paid for by her employer was a pretty good "best." She thanked Madame Louise again and told her she was going into Nice and perhaps Vence and would be back Sunday night. At Madame Louise's insistence, she accepted her offer of a couple boiled eggs and ham in a baguette, and some fruit for a picnic. And went back to her room that still smelled of sex.

Definitely had not been a dream.

Helen threw a change of clothes and her toothbrush into a bag, added makeup and essentials. She grabbed her pocketbook to check for license and plastic money, and the business card Pierre Pommier had given her fell to the carpet.

She picked up the rectangle of pale card and looked at the printed side. Why not give him a call? Not that she really was interested but perhaps she needed a total change from the unreal atmosphere up here on the edge of the cliffs.

She needed to get down to ground level, enjoy a little retail therapy and debate the pros and cons of calling Monsieur Appletree.

She paused to look for traffic at the end of the drive, and a strange wildness took her. Call it leftover hormones, the sun or just the prospect of a free weekend in Europe, she turned right. Irrked by Luc's offhandedness, she was getting out of France. She'd head for Italy. She'd heard great things about the market in Ventimiglia and could do retail therapy there as well as in Nice. Cheaper too no doubt.

She didn't quite get that far. Descending the hill into Monaco, Helen decided she'd gone far enough.

At least for now.

She parked in a vast, underground carpark by the Oceanographic Museum, deciding it would be easier than trying to find a parking space on the twisting streets, and set off strolling. After ten minutes, she was wishing she had gigantic sunglasses and a far more expensive wardrobe, but she soon got over that, basked in the sun for a while, then bought a vastly overpriced Coke in a sidewalk cafe, and sat back to enjoy the street scene.

This had Ohio beat.

She was three-quarters of the way through her drink and considering ordering another or strolling over to the peach-colored palace up on the hill, or perhaps to the casino, just to peer in the door. She wasn't about to risk her hoarded money or her about to be earned salary. But a sniff of the aura and glamour might help clear her mind of Luc.

If she really wanted to, of course.

"Madame?" a tall, blond man asked, and followed with a string of French and a downright charming smile. A bit too charming perhaps.

"Sorry. Don't speak much French."

"Ah!" He gave a very Gallic shrug. "But of course, you are American. May I join you on this beautiful morning? It is not a day to spend alone."

Actually she'd been quite happy alone, and given there were several empty tables, this could only be a pickup. But what the hell? "Of course."

She'd been wanting a distraction from Luc and here it was: all blond hair, impossible tan and the sort of clothes she'd noticed in the expensive boutiques she'd passed.

"I am François," he said, with a practiced smile.

"Helen," she replied and held out her hand.

"*Enchanté*." She wouldn't go quite that far. "You are here on holiday? To visit our beautiful Monaco."

"Not exactly. I work here." Felt good saying that.

"In Monaco?"

"No. In France." Really sounded very satisfying. Definite style there. "I'm a librarian."

That stumped him. "Librarian?" he said, mangling the word. "What is that?"

She dug into her direly inadequate high school French. "*Bibliothèque*." She remembered. "*Je travail au bibliothèque*." She was no doubt murdering the subjunctive or something equally heinous but he got her drift.



Very much so in fact. He beamed with comprehension. “Ah! *Une bibliothécaire*. Why indeed a challenging job.”

It was so far but not quite in the way he intended. “Yes, but I enjoy it.” Or had until Luc disappeared into the hills leaving her confused.

“Of course you do. But we must drink to the success of your library.” He signaled for the waiter.

“Honestly, I have a drink.”

She couldn’t miss the look he gave her three-quarters finished soda with its long ago melted ice cubes. “No, share an aperitif with me. I insist.” He gave the waiter an order. It didn’t sound as if he was ordering roofies in her drink as an extra bonus.

“Thank you,” she said, when the drinks arrived. Small wineglasses with a dark reddish liquid that smelled alcoholic. “*Santé*.” He held up his glass.

Helen clinked hers against his and sipped. Tasted okay, but weren’t roofies supposed to be tasteless? Damn, she was either hyper or overly cautious, she wasn’t sure which.

“Something on your mind?” François asked. “A woman like you should not worry so. You’re beautiful, young, with a weekend free and we are here in the sun.”

And he was full of bullshit. But he might be worth the trouble and would be a good antidote to her fit of pique over Luc. “I’m not worried, it’s just...” She paused at a flash of inspiration. “We have a custom where I come from in Ohio. When we share a drink with friends, we take a sip from each other’s glasses.”

That surprised the heck out of him. Stunned her, as well, actually, but he didn’t question it. “Indeed, what a delightful custom. Let us toast our friendship then.”

He passed his glass across the table, they switched and he took a generous sip from hers. Nothing funny about it then. She took a sip of his and they switched back.

Having watched closely enough to see him swallow his taste, Helen relaxed. Good. Would have been just her luck to find out his grandmother was from Toledo and he’d never heard of this odd custom.

“So delightful,” he said, as he leaned back in his chair, watching her. “I must remember that custom. What a wonderful way to celebrate a new acquaintance. Now, tell me.” His free hand strayed over to hers and she smiled. Might work out. Perhaps. “How shall we spend this glorious afternoon? Perhaps we should start with one of *la Patronne*’s omelets?”

And a nudge of the knee that she decided to return. Hell, why not? She was feeling reckless, he was bedworthy and heck hadn't she left home to remake herself?

The herb and cheese omelets were preceded by slices of warm onion tart and accompanied by a carafe of chilled wine. She declined his insistent offer of dessert and settled for an espresso. She was wondering how to tactfully pick up her half of the bill and should she do it after or before he suggested they leave for the afternoon. She still hadn't made up her mind when he tossed his coffee down in one swallow and reached for his wallet.

The expression on his face was perfectly schooled surprise. "*Mon Dieu!* My wallet. It has been stolen! I tell you, *ma chère Héléne*, it is scandalous what our thieves will do."

Wasn't it? Must have taken him ages of practice to get that shock just so. Luckily all those years way back working in a high school had taught her to keep her face deadpan. "How terrible!"

And what a dash to her ego. Her believed quick pick up was a damn gigolo. "How awful. Never mind, let me." She reached into her purse and rifled through the inner pocket. "Drat! I left my spare money locked in the trunk of my car. Think they'll mind if I nip back and get it?"

"Why... no," he replied. Obviously hadn't had this response before. "Are you sure?" He was looking rather dubious. He needed to.

"It's just parked around the corner. Let me fetch it. Do me a favor and please watch my bag. I'll be right back."

As she stood she placed the plastic shopping bag on the spare seat. Wondering how long he'd take before he peered inside, she set off at a brisk trot. Once around the corner, she hoofed it. She had to double-back on a parallel side street to head back to the carpark but she did it, and once in the car, collapsed in laughter. God! She'd shown him! He was stuck with a bill for both of them. She did regret abandoning the lunch she'd packed but didn't need it now. Pity she'd also left the magazine but she'd buy another.

She was sorely tempted to drive past the cafe, just to see if he was still sitting there, but the streets were narrow and that way he'd have her license number. Bad move.

Still, it had rather been fun after all. She didn't have much to complain about. So far this week, she'd had wild, kinky sex with her employer, bested a gigolo and, on arrival caught the notice of Monsieur Appletree. She might as well call him and round off the day.

## Chapter 6

“Well?” Branko asked as Luc walked into the Le Relais bar in the Negresco. “Did she succumb?”

“She did indeed,” Luc replied, nodding for the waiter who brought him his usual Scotch and water. “I should give you a raise.”

“What a good idea.”

“But if I did, I couldn’t afford you.”

“So?” Branko asked. “Back to the question on hand. What next with the delectable Madame Crewe?”

“She was... all I imagined. Excellent in fact.”

“And when she faced you in the morning?”

“She didn’t. I left right afterwards, leaving her sleeping the sleep of a well-satisfied woman.”

“You just walked out on her? You are one cold-hearted bastard, Luc!”

Luc shrugged and grinned. “But of course. I’m a Prioux. I’m off to Antibes in an hour. My mother has something she wants me to sort out. I leave the excellent Madame Crewe to your observation. Delay her work if you can. She is so efficient, I’m afraid she’ll be through before her time is up.”

“Why not just find her more work?”

“See what you can do and enjoy her for the next couple of days. Tell me what you think.”

Branko didn’t waste energy shaking his head. Luc was incorrigible. But was not likely to change. “I will be very attentive to her. You can rely on me.”

“I always have, Branko, haven’t I?”

He damn well had.

\* \* \*

The budget chain hotel wasn’t as picturesque as some she’d passed along the coast road, but Helen liked the price and it left more to spend on retail therapy. Room taken care of, Helen

parked near the *Promenade des Anglais* and headed for the old flower market. Pausing on a bench facing the sea, she called the number on Pierre Pommier's card.

And went right into voicemail.

It wasn't her day -- although it wasn't over yet. And it wasn't raining. She left a short voicemail (she wasn't quite up to saying she was looking for good quick sex and would he please oblige) and her call-back number.

So far so good. Time for shopping. As she was busy deciding between two tablecloths to send to her mother-in-law for her birthday, Helen's cell rang. Only one person likely to be calling. Unless it was Luc apologizing for skiving off.

It wasn't.

"Ah, Madame Crewe. I can be of service?"

"Perhaps."

"And how so?"

There was a buzz in the background. At work perhaps? Oh well. "I have the day off and I'm enjoying Nice. I thought I'd take you up on your offer to see your city with you."

Long, pregnant silence. Shit, he was probably at a family wedding with his wife. "But of course. I will be enchanted, but also I am at work." Right first time. "Perhaps this evening? But I do not get free until eight."

No problem there. She'd watch the sunset over the Mediterranean and enjoy the view.

"After eight then?" No point in sounding too desperate for it.

"Yes. Where are you?"

"I'm strolling the Flower Market in *Cours Saleya*."

"I know the perfect place to meet and so easy to find." He proceeded to give precise directions to a local fast food restaurant.

"Not exactly your typical French restaurant, is it?"

"Not at all," he agreed, "but much easier to find than where we will have dinner. I'll be there as soon as I get off. Say eight-thirty?"

And why not? "I'll be there." If he stood her up, she'd treat herself to a Big Mac, or whatever they called one over here.

He was early and looked up as she walked in, smiling as if she'd made his day. Maybe she had. Handing out car keys to tourists couldn't be that soul satisfying. She much preferred her job.

"*Bon soir, ma chère*, Madame Crewe. So good to see you. You are well?"

"Fine."

"Wonderful!" He'd shaken her hand at first and now he pulled her closer and kissed her on both cheeks. Rather nice and very French. "So, let us go!"

She wasn't given much choice but what the heck? He was clean, scrubbed even, and if his suit was one you'd never see hanging in Luc's wardrobe, he'd changed out of uniform and seemed set for a cheerful Saturday night.

Right now she was doing her best to note landmarks as he led her into the old town. One thing she was darn sure about was knowing her way back to her car.

*La Chat qui Danse* was in a narrow street, with a painted sign showing an appropriately dancing cat hanging over the door. They were greeted with cordial handshakes all around. Helen was introduced to the old woman called Madame Annette who seemed in charge, and in no time at all they were ensconced in a very cozy, discreet table in a corner by the now empty fireplace.

"You have made my evening," Pierre said, as they sat down. "If you had not called, I would have been honor-bound to spend the evening with my married sister and her three noisy *enfants*. Instead..." The pause (and the smile that went along with it) implied all sorts of hopes and aspirations.

"What did you tell her?"

"That I was having to work late as a colleague was taken ill. She will understand."

Undoubtedly. Sisters, in Helen's experience, seldom harbored illusions about their brothers. "Do you often let her down?"

He shrugged. "Not if I can help it. But to see you." His smile implied he'd had little choice.

Fair enough. And after the encounter with François, better put her metaphorical cards on the table. "Pierre. Just wanted to be clear on one point. I'll pay my own way." And only her own.

"Comment?"

"My share. We split the bill."

## The Hand of the Master

“*Mais non!*” Diners nearby looked up as he slapped the table with his hand. “Impossible. No way.”

“That’s how we do it in the States.” Some of the time anyway.

“This is France. I invited you to dinner. I did not invite you to pay.”

“Okay then.” This was obviously a dinner-for-sex exchange. Suited her. She’d offer payment in kind. He might have a cheap suit but he wasn’t a sleazy François.

There was only one handwritten menu, so he took full opportunity of leaning close as they studied the list and Helen put her limited French to the test. She needn’t have bothered. After a long-winded discussion with the *Patronne*, most of which Helen didn’t even try to follow, they had ordered.

“What are we eating?” she asked.

“A wonderful dinner,” he promised. “My aunt owns this restaurant, she is the cook. We will meet her later.”

“And the old woman who greeted us?” Another aunt perhaps? This was the real France she was seeing.

“That was Annette. She and my grandmother are lovers.”

Definitely not in Ohio anymore. “Oh!” Hell, that sounded rude. “That explains the welcome. She’s part of the family.”

“Not really. My mother hates her but enough of my boring family.” Boring? Far from it! She was as curious as the proverbial cat. “Tell me about yourself, Helen Crewe.”

To encourage her, he reached across the table and took her hand between his. Nice, cool dry hands too. And just the right sort of clasp as he leaned across the table and smiled. “What brings you to abandon your home and come halfway across the world to Nice?”

He’d get the expurgated version. “My husband died a while back. I decided I needed a total change. A new job in a new place, and I like sunshine.”

“I am glad you came and so very glad you walked up to my *guichet*.” He paused to smile and hold her eyes in his gaze. “And that you called me. I was afraid you would not.”

“I did.” She couldn’t help wondering what his batting average was for business cards handed out to prospective bed partners. Not that she really cared.

“But you remembered me and called for me.”

Sheesh, a lot of subtext there. She was saved from thinking about that by the arrival of a carafe of wine and their first course. Shrimp. Five big ones each. Complete with eyes and feelers.

“Something is wrong?”

“Not exactly. It’s just in America we don’t usually eat food that looks at us.”

His chuckle came low and sultry. “*Mon Dieu!* Allow me.” He reached across the table, snapped off the head of the closest one, peeled it, dipped it in the bright yellow mayonnaise and held the pink curl for her to taste. Helen took a bite, closing her eyes as she chewed. “It’s delicious.” She opened her eyes and met his gaze again.

“Just don’t meet its eyes,” he advised.

Good suggestion. She didn’t look at her plate as he peeled one of his own and held it out to her.

“Here. I will do them for you.” He peeled the lot, his and hers, offering alternate ones to her, dipping them in the spicy mayonnaise and using every opportunity to lean across the table to her.

They didn’t actually need to brush knees for him to peel shrimp but what the hell? He was fun, the food was good and they were in a nicely secluded nook, no doubt arranged ahead of time. He seemed set to redeem her opinion of Frenchmen. The debris of the shrimp cleared away, he refilled her wineglass. “How do you like France so far?”

Selective truths seemed in order here. “I love the sunshine. I love my job and I’m enjoying dinner.”

“There is much to enjoy.”

She bet there was. “I’m learning that.”

“And what --” he leaned across the table and took her left hand between his, “-- have you learned so far, my dear Helen?” Only he said her name the French way with all those accents, smoothing her name out on his tongue.

“That true gallantry is removing the heads off shrimp!”

Definitely a practiced laugh but not bad all the same. “For you, *ma chère Héléne...*” (“*and what I hope to get tonight,*” she added to herself) “...I would peel and decapitate shrimp all night.”

“Doubt I’ll ask that. Not all night.”

“No,” he replied, kissing the tips of her fingers. He was good at the deep emotional gaze too. She’d never actually seen a man’s eyes smolder no matter what popular fiction claimed, but his were pretty damn close.

“Ah!” He looked up as Madame Annette approached with two plates. Since Helen had no idea what he’d ordered she was curious what they were getting. Nothing else with inedible body parts still attached, she hoped.

The aroma met her halfway across the little restaurant, then the taste as she cut into a piece of chicken. “Wonderful.”

“From my uncle’s farm,” Pierre said. “He raises the best chickens in France.”

Maybe an extravagant claim but it was damn good, redolent of butter and herbs and served with seasoned rice and garnished with green beans so thin they gave new meaning to “string beans.”

The wonderful rich, caramelized apple dessert seemed just the perfect choice to round things off.

And don’t forget the thimblefuls of dark coffee that really helped counteract the effect of a shared bottle of wine. Or would have if Grandma hadn’t come out with a bottle of pale yellow liqueur and a jug of cream.

She patted Helen on the cheek, urged her to drink up, and said something to Pierre that Helen suspected was on the lines of: “A new one every week. When are you ever going to settle down?”

After goodbyes and farewell kisses from both Grandmaman and her lover, they walked down the narrow street a few paces. Pierre curled his little finger around hers, and pulled her close.

His mouth was hot and confident, and gave her a hint of the sharp taste of lemon liqueur. Wrapping his arms around her, he pulled her close and she held him to her, pressing herself against him as his tongue stroked hers. He stepped forward, backing her into a doorway. A knob or a handle pressed against her hip but it barely registered, her entire focus on his mouth and his tongue and the hand easing inside her blouse, stroking her breasts and unsnapping her bra with the ease of practice. Then his hand cupped her breast and she didn’t much care how many women he’d had before. She wanted him now. Well, not now in the doorway but as soon as



possible. She kissed him back, pressing her tongue deep in his mouth, grabbed his ass with both hands and pulled his erection against her.

Nice.

Freaking big in fact. She couldn't wait.

Seemed she wouldn't have to.

He eased his mouth off hers, but kept his hand on her breast, his fingers tweaking her nipple. "Come and see where I live."

"I thought you'd never ask."

He laughed. Right down to the hard cock pressed against her belly.

Good enough.

\* \* \*

He lived in an attic apartment, with a fantastic view of the harbor when you looked sideways out of the kitchen window. Not that she bothered to admire the harbor lights very long. Just a glimpse of them as she caught her breath after climbing five flights of stairs.

"You'd like another drink?" Pierre asked. "Something to eat? Nuts? Fruit?"

Not for at least a week. "No thanks. Not hungry. At least not for anything to eat."

And just in case he didn't quite get her colloquial English, she grabbed him by the shoulders and kissed him. Hard.

And just for good luck groped him.

"Good," he muttered. "Now!"

Why wait? She had his jacket off and his shirt out of his pants before he'd undone her skirt. He kissed her, using the opportunity to pull off her blouse and bra, then stepped back as they both tore off clothes, dropping them where they stood. In moments, he had her on her back on the bed. He leaned over her, hands on the mattress, and smiled.

"Like what you see?" Helen asked.

"Very much," he replied, wagging his erect cock to prove his point.

She grabbed for it, tightening her fingers around him. Nice. Not that long but wide and solid and circumcised. Much more what she was used to. She eased her grasp, stroked the side of his cock and smiled up at him.

## The Hand of the Master

He didn't bother to smile back, just leaned over and kissed her. Hard. Then broke the kiss to pull her up the bed, yanking down the covers until they were both stretched out on what appeared to be clean sheets.

She'd bet anything he hadn't just left work to meet her. He'd been off earlier and rushing around to get the place ready for her.

Nice to have someone make an effort.

Even nicer to have that same someone sucking on her breasts and caressing her belly until she wriggled and sighed. With him there was no constraint on her movement, so she turned on one hip and started licking his nipples as she played with his cock. Doing his part, he ruffled her hair and stroked her shoulders and back.

He had nice, slow hands but Helen was in the mood for fast and furious. She rolled him on his back and straddled his thighs, running her hands over his chest and down his belly, brushing the cluster of curls around his erection, and reaching lower to stroke his balls.

His cock quivered in response.

Nice. Very nice in fact. God! She wanted a good hot fuck right now.

She raised up a little, positioning herself to come down on his erection, when he moved, pinning her on her back, her hands held under his on either side of her face.

"Not yet," he said, kissing the side of her mouth and teasing her with little, soft kisses down her face and along the side of her neck. His kisses came stronger and harder. Helen moaned a little and arched her neck and shoulders to give him more access.

He kissed her shoulders, the hollow by her collarbones and the rift between her breasts. When he finally released her hands, she put them to good use, turning him onto his back so she leaned over and ran a line of kisses down his navel to his cock.

She paused, grinned at him and bent over and took him deep.

He cried out something in French -- sounded appreciative anyway -- and held her head. While her mouth was occupied, she played with his balls until he gave a gasp and pulled her head off.

"Wait!" It came out with a gasp. He paused only to grab a condom from a drawer in the bedside table.

"I'm not ready," she said, suddenly wanting this to last longer.

“Ah! But you will be,” he replied, turning her onto her back and spreading her legs as he settled himself between them.

Her gasp as his mouth came down on her cunt echoed off the ceiling.

God! He was fantastic! Were all Frenchmen this good with their mouths? She had six months to research that question.

And that was her last coherent thought as a wash of sensation fuddled her brain and all she knew was the building need in her clit.

She yelled in protest as he moved. Then cried out in pleasure as he drove in deep. Pressing in and out with a steadily building rhythm, until she came and he followed moments later.

“Excellent,” he said, which rather sounded as if he were grading her but it was a nice thought.

In a little while he rolled off the bed and the bathroom light went on.

Helen closed her eyes, then opened them right up. Staying the night was not in her agenda, nor, she seriously doubted, was it in his. She sat up, still a little stiff between the legs but feeling pretty good everywhere else. Except getting up and dressing seemed like a tremendous effort.

Pierre came back with a towel wrapped around his waist and two glasses of orange juice. Odd offering but honestly she couldn't think of anything nicer right now. He sat on the edge of the bed as they drank. She got the hint.

Just as well.

“That was great. Instant energy. Needed that,” she said, handing him back the glass and swinging her legs to the floor. “Better get myself dressed.”

He ran his hand down her thigh -- In appreciation? Sparking a recent memory? -- but made no suggestion she stay.

She reached for her shirt, which was the nearest garment, and looked around for bra and panties.

“Where is your car?” he asked.

“Parked on the *Promenade des Anglais*. In the big parking lot.”

“I know it.” He stood. “Too far to walk at night. I will take you there.”

## **The Hand of the Master**

He was as good as his word, even insisting on paying her parking fees and driving her right up to her car. “Perhaps,” he said, as she unlocked her car, “you will call if you have another free weekend?”

“Perhaps,” Helen replied.

A nice hot fuck, she decided as she drove back to her hotel, not bad for vanilla sex. Nicely uncomplicated. Which was not the word she’d use for her relationship with her employer.

Whom she didn’t see again until Wednesday.

## Chapter 7

Okay, maybe Luc was away on business, visiting his sister or mother, or cementing some deal. Or was it dominant mind games? If the latter, he was succeeding damn well. By Wednesday lunchtime when he sauntered in tanned, fit and relaxed, she'd been close to jumping Branko's bones.

"*Bonjour*," Luc said, taking Branko and her in with the same smile. "Just in time for lunch. And I am hungry. It's been a long drive."

She was tempted to ask where from, but it really wasn't her business. Plus, she suspected he was waiting for her to do just that.

"I'll call Madame Louise to set an extra place." As Branko got up and opened the door to the kitchen, Luc met her eyes.

"You have had a good week?" he asked.

"Yes, very good. And you?"

"Busy," he replied with a shrug, complete with hand gesture, eye roll and sigh. The latter, ridiculous as it seemed, really did sound sexy. "I have been buying books."

"Oh. Where from?"

"Private collections."

Duh! She hadn't imagined he'd raided public libraries. "Large collections?"

He nodded but broke off to greet Madame Louise, who came to set his place and check the fruit and bread baskets on the sideboard.

Luc helped himself to roast beef and salad and sat down. "Very, and much we will discard, but I think, my dear Madame Crewe, there are sufficient volumes to spark your interest."

Damn. She blushed. She was far too old for that. Had to be starting hot flashes early. "More to catalogue?"

"Yes, but also I need you to winnow through them. I don't want to shelve endless copies of *Simenon* or housekeeping books."

## The Hand of the Master

She'd always enjoyed *Simenon*, in translation, but held her peace. "You want me to finish your books first?"

He nodded. "Of course."

Seemed straightforward enough. Since he didn't have any more to say to her and she was not about to discuss their session on Friday in front of Branko, Helen headed for her office.

She was on her knees, going through the dusty contents of a box she suspected really did date from before the war. The books smelled of turpentine which was olfactorily stimulating but not much else. The glue holding some together had disintegrated, and Helen was considering consigning the damaged paperbacks to the trash when “May I have a word, Madame Crewe?” made her jump.

It was Luc, leaning on the door frame. His ironed shirt open at the neck and a smile on his perfectly shaven face and here she was on her knees, no doubt with dust and cobwebs in her hair.

Not the best circumstances to be on her knees in front of him. Helen stood, brushing her jeans. “Of course, Monsieur de Prioux.”

“Luc,” he replied, walking into the room. “Please.”

“Then I’d better be Helen.” Fucking should put you on first name terms, after all.

“Ah! H      .” Like Pierre, he added accents to it and drew it out. Sounded much sexier than the way her mother used to say it. “You have a minute?”

“I can make one, or fifteen if you want. Have a seat.” She nodded to the spare one she’d nicked from the library and pulled out the desk chair for herself.

He propped himself on the corner of her desk and smiled down at her. She should have expected something like that.

“Luc?” she asked, mostly to break the silence. “When are you expecting the new acquisitions?”

“Some tomorrow, the others in a day or so. I bought from several sources. They’ll arrive in different shipments but that’s not why I came.”

She wasn't up to asking why he was here. He was her employer and it was his house after all.

“Tell me,” he went on, resting his long fingers on his left knee. “Did you enjoy our encounter?”

Took a few seconds to get his drift. She smiled. "I did. You are expert."

He inclined his head. "Thank you and you, my dear Helen, were superb."

"Thanks." Compliments exchanged. What now?

"If I were to tell you to strip naked and lay yourself across your desk, would you obey?"

Even gulping didn't ease her instantly dry throat. Her heart raced and her pulse thundered in her ears as she lowered her head. "If you wish."

He moved off the desk so he stood, knees touching hers, took her chin in his hand and lifted her head. "I thought so, my dear Helen. I thought so. You'd like me to tie you up, beat you and fuck you. You'll kneel at my feet and open your beautiful mouth for me to fuck it, won't you?"

"Yes," she replied, meeting his gaze since he kept her head immobile.

He kissed her, both hands holding her head as his mouth came down on hers and his tongue pressed deep. She moaned, couldn't help it, and reached up to hold his shoulders, blood thumping in her ears as every fiber of her being responded to his dominance. "Now?" he asked, as he broke the kiss.

"If you agree to shut the door first."

He raised a dark eyebrow. "Indeed? What if I insist it remain open and call Branko and Madame Louise in to watch your submission?"

"I'd draw the line there. I don't do public sex. Of any sort."

"I see." He didn't sound disappointed. "Perhaps that's something we should work on."

"No." Helen shook her head to emphasize her stance. "I'll do just about anything you ask -- with a couple of exceptions -- but not in public."

"Come," he said, holding out his hand. "Let us take a walk."

She was in the middle of working, but wasn't about to say no to him. The work wasn't going anywhere. "Okay."

They walked to a point in the gardens the farthest from the house. They stood on a narrow triangle of land, bordered on one side by a high wall and on the other by a lower wall and a precipitous drop to the coast road several hundred yards below. Luc sat on the wall and patted the stone beside him.

## The Hand of the Master

Helen sat and realized the drop wasn't as precipitous as she'd thought. It was steep, but not sheer. She could see the remains of a narrow path zig-zagging down among the rocks and scraggy plants. "Is that really a path?" she asked.

He looked down, placing a hand on her shoulder. "It was. There were many, but most have grown over long ago. In ages past the fishermen hauled their boats up to protect them from pirates."

"Up these cliffs?" Seemed incredible but you could hardly make it up.

"Yes. Their boats were their livelihood. Without them they'd have starved."

"When was this?"

He shrugged. "Tenth, eleventh century."

"I see." She really didn't but was thankful she lived in the twenty-first century, pollution, global warming, politics and all. "Was your family here then?"

"No. My great-grandfather bought the house just after the First World War. He made a lot of money selling boots and belts to the army and bought this place. The story goes he married, went to live in Paris and came back at intervals to make sure his wife remained pregnant."

Charming sounding man. "He had a large family?"

"My grandfather was the eldest of twelve. Four didn't survive infancy and his mother didn't survive the twelfth *accouchement*. But enough about them. I didn't bring you here to discuss my ancestors and their ways. I want to explain a little."

*About what?* "Okay."

"It wasn't just chance that you got this job. I needed someone to catalogue my collection, but wanted to be sure I had a person who wouldn't be offended by the content. So, after Branko selected a short list from the applicants, we had five very suitable ones. He initiated background checks."

"What?"

"We used discreet services in the U.S., here in France, and one in London. We wanted to be sure that applicants did indeed have the experience they claimed."

Should she be pissed or not? Unable to decide, she listened on.

"It was between you and a young woman in Lyon. The others didn't live up to their résumés. I must admit, Helen, your photo intrigued me. Your experience appealed to me as well,



and hearing you were a widow, but had been very active in your local kink community, I decided to hire you.”

“And if I’d turned out to be unlike my photo, or frigid or downright uncooperative?”

“I would not have intruded. But you led me to believe you were satisfied.”

In every sense. Wasn’t much point in griping, even if the investigation by some sleazy private detective did rankle. “It’s not the way most employers go about hiring.”

“True, but this is a rather specialized job and our mutual needs are not those of most people.”

He was right there. “So you picked me.”

“That angers you?”

She thought she’d controlled her voice. Obviously not. Or could he read her that well? “Part of me would like to think I was selected because of my credentials.”

He grinned. “You were.”

Right. “Why tell me this? Why not let me think that our clicking like that was just a happy coincidence?”

“That would have been dishonest.” He sounded quite scandalized. “And also disrespectful.”

In which case, why not tell her before they had sex? Not that she was complaining about the sex. “So you’ve told me. Now what?”

“I hope we will continue to explore ways we can please one another.”

Seemed reasonable enough. “Fine with me.”

“What are your absolute limits? Besides public sex?”

Helen shut her eyes a moment, remembering limits she’d explored and passed with Edwin. But Luc wasn’t a husband of several years. This was a relationship that would be over in a few months. “Anything that causes permanent injury. No knives. No electricity. And absolutely no potty games. Don’t do golden showers or diaper games or any of that stuff. Ever.”

“Canes? Whips? Floggers?”

“I don’t like canes.”

He nodded. “Bondage you enjoy.”

Brother, did she! “Yes.”

“Blindfolds, gags?”

“When I know you better and when I decide.”

“Agreed. One thing more. Would you include Branko in our games?”

“I said no public sex and that means no one watching.”

“Not to watch. To join. He would like that. Would you?”

Branko, with his dark skin and hairy arms. And velvet eyes and luscious smile. “I believe so. Let me think about it.”

“Good. Any questions?”

“That night on the terrace. The night I arrived. Was it you wielding the whip?”

“That, my dear Helen, I will tell you, if and when Branko is included in our ménage.”

“Okay.” She might never know, but it wouldn’t kill her.

“The new books,” she asked, as they walked back to the house. “Did you get them at auction?”

“Some, in Paris. Others from a friend who looks out for things for me, but the bulk I found in an estate sale in Lacoste.”

“Lacoste? Where de Sade lived?”

He smiled. “Yes. It happens to be Madame Louise’s home and when she mentioned the sale, I was curious. I think our chances of finding a signed first edition, or an original manuscript are slight, but I saw some interesting plates in some of the books. A local engraver, I believe. I’d like to learn more about him.”

Erotic books from the home of the wicked Marquis. “I can’t wait to go through them.” The odds there’d be a terrific find were slight, but still...

“Back to the reason I asked you out here to talk, away from the worthy Madame Louise’s ever sharp ears. Are you willing to have Branko and myself at the same time?”

He hadn’t given her long to think about it. But did she have to? Damn, yes, it had always been a fantasy -- to have two men at once -- but crossing from fantasy to reality was a major leap. Helen looked out across the brilliant blue sea. A lone gull wheeled quite close before it dived fast toward the sea so far below.

“Madame Crewe? Helen?”

He was waiting. She could easily tell him she needed more time to think about it. But she’d left caution and hesitation at home. What the hell? She was here, the sun was hot on her

skin and she intended to grab life and opportunity with both hands. “Yes,” she replied. “But in a few days. I’d like to get to know you both a little bit better first.”

“Splendid. Branko will be delighted. And yes, a few days is more than reasonable.” He put his hand on her shoulder and kissed her cheek. Just a brush of his lips, but she felt it deep in her pussy. “You have made two men very, very happy. Now,” he went on, stepping back an arm’s length, “my dear Helen, you must decide if you want Branko’s cock in your mouth while I fuck you, or vice versa.”

And without another word, he turned and continued toward the house. She was sorely tempted to call him back and demand he do something about the throbbing ache in her cunt.

\* \* \*

Helen didn’t get much more work done that day. Didn’t even try. Just spent a good hour wandering the gardens and watching the sun and the boats on the Mediterranean way beneath her. Finally, deciding Luc could hardly make a fuss at her skiving off -- not after what she’d just agreed to, she got her purse from her room and walked down the drive and into the old village. She climbed the winding streets and found a table in the shade and spent the better part of the afternoon solving Sudoku puzzles and thinking about what she’d committed herself to. How long did he think a “few” days was? Did it really matter? She’d agreed, hadn’t she? She made three mistakes in the same Sudoku before she tore out the page and crumpled it. And ordered a *croque monsieur*. Would save her having to face the pair of them at dinner.

\* \* \*

“She left, you know. Walking. Most likely into the village,” Branko said, looking up from his desk.

“Well and good. She deserves an afternoon off,” Luc said. “She agreed.”

It was easy to make Branko happy. He grinned. Wide enough to risk splitting his mouth if he made it much wider. “Marvelous!” He clenched both fists and shook his arms in a wave of triumph. “What did you do to persuade her?”

“Just asked her if she would be willing. She is.”

“Just like that?”

“One condition. Nothing unreasonable. She wants a few days to get to know you better. I suggest you offer to take her out to lunch or dinner tomorrow. Let her know the inner Branko,”

Luc added. “And by the way,” he said, as he turned to leave. “Do check on the delivery of the books I bought.”

## Chapter 8

Helen sat in the garden of *La Toison d'Or* most of the afternoon. Idle, yes. Unproductive, most definitely, but she needed the space to absorb what she'd agreed to, and why it excited her so much. That last one was easy really. It had always been a secret fantasy. The one and only time she'd shared it with Edwin, he'd been hurt and shocked, asking why she was unhappy with him. Her guilt and his obvious resentment had shoveled that fantasy into the depths. Now Luc had resurrected it, and she was hot to trot.

"Hello, there. You're looking mighty lonely!"

Helen looked up into the eyes of a woman. Or rather a woman who was part of a loud group. Gave meaning to Branko's snide comments about tourists off cruise ships.

"Hello. I'm fine, thank you." She gave a nod and looked back down at her puzzle. It wasn't enough to put this woman off.

"You're American too! Well, I do declare, now you just can't sit there by yourself, honey."

Helen could, and quite happily, but she did draw the line at telling a woman older than her mother-in-law to fuck off. "Thank you for the offer, but I'm fine." She wished she had a thick book to pick up. Somehow Sudoku didn't have the same putting-off qualities.

"Oh now, Buck, you come tell this young lady she just has to join us."

"What's the matter, Eleanor?" "Buck" might have been an appropriate nickname forty years ago, but now "Bubba" seemed more fitting.

"I'm telling this girl she's just gotta join us. Can't have her sitting there alone. It's not friendly."

That last was almost an accusation. Helen glared at the woman. Didn't do the least bit of good. Now the wretched woman's whine was joined by a good third of the party.

No, dammit, Helen was not joining them. She did not want to hear about their visit to Villefranche, the bus trip to Monte Carlo and their afternoon disturbing the off-season peace of Eze.

“No more nonsense.” Eleanor was sounding more and more like a pissed off schoolteacher. “You just join us, y’hear?”

“Might as well,” Buck added. “Eleanor likes to get her own way.” He almost sounded as if it was an asset in a human being.

“I see,” Helen replied, gathering up her book, pen and purse and picking up the bill for her food and cups of coffee. She hated to be driven away but she was not staying to be harassed by this creature.

She stood, stifled the impulse to punch Eleanor in the face and obliterate her gleam of triumph, walked around the table and headed for the open door of the cafe.

“You’re not walking out on us!” Wrinkled Eleanor protested. “We were just being neighborly. Well, the nerve of...”

“Ah, Helen!” From the entrance, a voice interrupted the woman’s spiel.

It was hard for anyone to ignore the command in that voice. Branko filled the rustic arch that led onto the street, and even Eleanor went quiet for at least three seconds.

Helen was sorely tempted to hug him, but restrained herself. “Hello.”

Branko crossed the paving stones and held out his hand. “It’s time to go.”

Given her other options, Helen let Branko grab her hand and pretty much march her out into the narrow street. Eleanor and company muttered something as she left but she was too busy keeping up with Branko to care.

“Hang on a minute,” she said, once they were around the corner.

“You want to go back?”

“To that lot? No thanks, but I should pay my bill.” She liked the cafe and planned to go back there. Another day.

He let out a sound, like a cross between a growl and a *tsk* and took out his cell phone. Apparently he had the *Toison d’Or* on speed dial. A quick conversation in French and he snapped the phone shut. “All taken care of,” he said. “You can pay later. They know you live at Les Santons.”

Fair enough, she’d settle up next time.

He grabbed her hand again. “Come along.”

“Along where? Did Luc send you to find me?”

“Of course.” So, he was the boss’s policeman, was he?

And no doubt... “He told you what he’d asked me?”

“And that you agreed, yes.” His grin was enough to melt candles. “I’m glad, for Luc’s sake. You’ve made him very happy.”

“What about you? I doubt it will be an onerous duty.”

He had a damn sexy laugh too. Then his smile faded and he looked almost worried. “There are things Luc did not tell you and you need to know.”

“Such as?”

“Come with me. I’m not talking about them here.”

Fair enough. They were in a small square in front of what looked like a church. “Where then?” His highhandedness was beginning to jar.

His only reply was a jerk of his head as he crossed the small square and descended a flight of narrow stone steps to a street below. He opened a gate into a tiny courtyard filled with tubs of lavender and herbs and pots of geraniums. Two green plastic garden chairs stood near a moss-covered fountain. He indicated for her to take one of the chairs and then sat himself.

As she sat she brushed against an enormous rosemary bush and the sweet resinous scent filled the air. She disturbed a few bees too. They buzzed around before settling back to the task of collecting honey.

It was a delightful spot but... “Isn’t this someone’s house?”

“Yes,” he replied. “Mine.”

Not the reply she’d anticipated, but he didn’t live on the property like she did, and he had to live somewhere. She looked around more carefully, trying to learn something about him from his surroundings. He liked his privacy -- the gate was tall and solid wood and the wall too tall to see over. He was sensual -- witness the abundance of scents in the tiny area -- and not particularly patient, if the look on his face was anything to go by. “So, we’ve a quiet, secluded place. What now?”

“Want a drink?”

He was obviously trying to keep her off-kilter. And succeeding nicely. “Water would be fine.”

He brought out two chilled bottles of Pellegrino and two glasses. No ice, but she was beginning to expect that. He poured hers first, then filled his own glass. “So, you’ve agreed to have sex with both of us.”

Nothing like blunt. She was damn lucky she hadn't snorted water down her nose. "Yes, I did, under agreed conditions. I told him I wanted to know a little more about you."

"What do you want to know? Ask."

She took a sip of water. Even without ice it was nicely cold. "My first evening here." He had to know what she was talking about. "Did you or Luc wield the whip?"

"He didn't tell you?"

"No, he avoided the question." She caught Branko's eyes. He wasn't skirting the issue.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to know exactly who I'm dealing with." She needed to know who stood where in the spanking order.

Looked as though he was considering skipping to the next question. She wasn't going to let him. He took a sip of water. "I did. Luc likes to play both dominant and submissive. Me, I do not care to submit." He turned those dark gray eyes on her. "What about you?"

Took all she had not to leave her seat and kneel at his feet. Talk about a compelling voice and dominant air. "I've always been a sexual submissive." Better emphasize the sexual bit. She wasn't submitting any other place. "Once Edwin had me beat him with the flogger. Said he wanted me to realize how much hard work it was."

"You didn't enjoy it?"

She shook her head. "Not a bit, and my shoulder ached like nobody's business the next morning."

He smiled. A nice one really. "I suppose it must be easier to lie there and take it."

"Depends who is doing the giving."

"But Luc satisfied you?"

Sheesh, she was not here to talk about her night with Luc, or was she? "We meshed well."

"He is an astounding man."

She was beginning to think they both were and that sprung another question. And since they were being blunt and open here... "Are you and Luc bisexual?"

He looked as astonished as she felt for having asked it. "No. Luc just likes to get beaten once in a while. He chose that time and place to attract your attention."

She'd figured that much out for herself. "It worked!"



Again that wicked smile. “Good.”

“So, no sex between you two then?” Might as well know for sure.

He sipped from his glass, looked up and gave her a knowing half smile. “We both like to fuck women. Submissive women for preference. They are not easy to find. Remember that. Luc prizes you highly.”

“And I thought I was hired for my superior professional skills.”

“Didn’t he tell you how many applicants we had?”

“And the selection criteria.”

“Yes.” He gave her another straight eyeball to eyeball look. “So, he chose you. You’re here, and we both intend to have you.”

Deep breath time. Not that it helped her racing pulse. “I see.” Definitely not the sort of job she’d have found at home. Lord! If her mother-in-law had overheard this conversation...

“You are amused?” He sounded a little put out.

“No, excited.” True enough and this was no time or place to explain the intricacies of her relationship with Edwin’s mother. Helen reached for her glass. The contents were warm. Time to leave. “I ought to get back and do some work today.”

“Luc has gone to Antibes. To see his mother.”

Was that really of interest or concern to her? “Doesn’t matter. If you’d just show me the way back down, avoiding the *Toison d’Or* if humanly possible.”

He chuckled at that. “I’ll show you.” He did better than that, walking down with her until they reached the edge of the old town and the main road was in sight.

They shook hands. “I look forward to seeing you naked, Madame Crewe,” Branko said, and walked away before she came up with a suitable comeback.

Who cared? She’d be seeing him naked too.

\* \* \*

By Friday, Luc still hadn’t returned. Helen was a good way through cataloguing the current collection but made no further discoveries of interesting sex toys. That pretty much confirmed her suspicion they’d been planted for her delectation. Not that she’d complain, but right now she was feeling pissed off at him. Why make lavish promises of a wild and wicked threesome then disappear?

## The Hand of the Master

Even Branko had been painfully polite and professional after their less than restrained conversation in his scented courtyard.

She was dealing with two dominants here. No doubt they planned on keeping her dangling until she was desperate. She could take care of that with a call to Pierre, or the new vibrator she found in Nice but on reflection, no. Vanilla sex just didn't have the same appeal right now and she wasn't in the mood for self-service. Damn Luc and Branko for raising her expectations.

In the middle of all her mutterings, Madame Louise appeared in the doorway. “Madame Crewe...” she began and then Helen lost her but she did get that she wanted Helen to come with her.

Wishing Branko was available to cope with whatever it was, Helen followed her and found a delivery van and a stack of boxes. Luc's new books.

Amazing how little it took to adjust her attitude. Even though understanding about one word in thirty-seven, Helen directed them to deposit the boxes in the library. There wasn't enough space in her office for them, but she so looked forward to delving through volumes from the hometown of the wicked Marquis himself.

An hour later, Madame Louise left for the day. Branko seemed to be gone and Luc, well, he was presumably still with his mother. So she shut down her computer and tidied up. On her way out, she decided to indulge in a sneak peek at the new acquisitions and, hefting the smallest of the boxes under her arm, locked her office and the house behind her, set the alarm system and went up to her apartment.

She'd barely stepped inside and deposited the box on the table when her cell rang. Digging it out of her bag, she noticed it was Luc. "Hello."

“*Bon soir, ma chère Héléne,*” he said before, thankfully, switching to English. “Listen. Listen well. You are to shower then dress in the contents of the box on your bed, and only what is in the box. Meet me at the gates. I will be there in two hours. Don’t you dare be late. Branko would love the excuse to punish you.” He hung up without waiting for her reply.

No reason to. He already had her consent, didn't he?

A shiny yellow box sat on her bed. Someone nipping in and out of her room was getting on her nerves but what the hell? She took off the lid and among the paler yellow tissue was a dress. Not a cheap one either. It was luscious, dark green silk knit. With a tight bodice and a full

skirt and thankfully, a built in bra. There was nothing else in the box except a pair of matching patent sling back sandals. She'd be going out minus panties, something she'd often done at Edwin's command but at least she wouldn't have pointy nipples showing through the dress.

Two hours. Time enough for a little effort on her part. And a try out of some of the toiletries and beauty products she'd treated herself to during her shopping spree in Nice.

One hour and fifty-five minutes later, exfoliated, shaved and coifed, nails freshly manicured and well spritzed with perfume, Helen stood by the gates, clutching her purse in her hand and only too aware of the draft up her skirt.

A man walked up to her, speaking fast French. He was vaguely familiar but she concentrated on trying to follow what he was saying. She got repeated mentions of "*Ma tante, Madame Girond.*"

"*Madame Louise Girond?*" Helen asked and the man nodded, along with another rush of French. "*Pas la. Elle est parti.*" Or was it "*partie?*" Didn't matter, he got her drift.

With another jabber and a "*Merci, madame,*" he left.

Helen watched him walk up toward the new apartments. Was that where he lived? Where Madame Louise lived? Hardly a matter to worry about right now. When Luc would arrive was far more pressing a concern. She was waiting for sex. Felt delightful to be so brazen. And if they came through with their implied promises, she'd come home a happy woman. If they didn't, she might just bring out Madame Louise's carving knife.

Not really. Not when she pictured Luc's lovely cock. She was curious about Branko's. How did his measure up to Luc's? She'd soon know.

A sweep of tires on gravel and a car whirled around the corner and pulled up just feet from her. Luc wasn't driving his red sports car but a gleaming silver, vintage model. Branko got out and held the door for her. As she got in, she understood why he'd brought this car. It had a wide bench seat in the front and she was securely sandwiched between them. Just to get her in the mood no doubt.

Luc gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. "Perfect! I knew she'd be ready. He was hoping you'd be late, so I'd let him punish you," he said with a nod toward Branko.

"Nice car," she said, deciding to ignore that comment. "How many do you own?"

"It's my mother's. I borrowed it. Branko likes the front seat."

"And you don't?"

## The Hand of the Master

He laughed. “Here.” He handed her the end of a seat belt. “Check her.” Back to Branko this time. “If she hasn’t followed my directions, you can spank her.”

She squealed, no way could she have stopped it, as Branko’s hand came up her skirt, stroked the top of her thigh and brushed up to her waist.

“She’s naked underneath.”

“I could have told you that,” Helen said.

“He enjoyed it,” Luc replied. “Let him have his fun.”

“It’s a bit late to stop him now!” He’d already rearranged her skirt over her knees and was buckling her in.

“You couldn’t have stopped him anyway, my dear,” Luc replied, as he released the brake and sped off toward Monaco along the *Moyenne Corniche*.

## Chapter 9

“What do you have in that handbag of yours?” Luc asked, after a few minutes.

“My key, lipstick, powder, tissues and fifty euros.” He hadn’t said anything about not bringing a purse.

“Why fifty euros?” Branko asked. “We’ll take care of everything.”

“My mother always told me never to go out with a man without the taxi fare home in case I needed it.”

“Prepared for any eventuality are you, my dear Helen?” Luc asked.

“Just prepared to get home. I don’t think anything Mother had in mind quite covers the two of you.”

Branko put his hand on her leg. “Don’t worry, we won’t hurt or harm you. We’ll just fuck you silly.”

“I was hoping you’d fuck me nicely.”

Luc shook his head. “This, Branko, is an American submissive. Enjoy her as we’ll not find her like again soon.”

“I imagine you’ll enjoy it too, Luc,” Helen said.

“*Mon Dieu!* Of course I will.” They were now heading down the hill into Monaco. “Helen was here last weekend,” he said to Branko. “We’ll show her somewhere she didn’t go then.”

Just as well, although she wouldn’t have minded running into François the rat, flanked by Luc and Branko.

He pulled up in front of a yellow stucco house. Branko held the door for her as Luc handed the car keys to an old man seated on a stone bench by the wide, dark green door.

This wasn’t a hotel or restaurant. There was no sign, only the number 126 on the front of the house. Luc opened the door and went in. She and Branko followed. It looked like a slightly shabby private house. The striped wallpaper was peeling high near the ceiling but the furniture and the gilt clock on the mantelpiece looked like antiques.

## The Hand of the Master

A tall, gray-haired woman came out of a room on the right. Luc introduced her as Madame Anna. She greeted Luc in French, Helen by name in English and Branko in a language Helen didn't recognize and led them into a dining room.

Two tables were already occupied, one by a group of six men, bankers or investors by the look of them, and the other by an elderly couple. The round table by a window overlooking a small courtyard was obviously reserved for them.

"What is this place?" Helen asked, after they'd been left to study the handwritten menus.

"It's called *Cent-vingt-six*," Luc replied. "It's a club my grandfather founded. He visited a gentleman's club in London and decided he wanted his own. The house was his mother's. She was Monegasque. When she died, he inherited it. There have been times my father was tempted to sell the place, especially in the eighties when property prices ballooned, but he kept it and my sister and I plan to do the same. In grandfather's youth only his friends were allowed in, but these days we include a judicious number of business people, like the batch over there --" he nodded toward the six men, " -- who are happy to pay a ludicrous sum to be allowed in. As a result, Claire and I as good as enjoy the place for free. We let the rapacious bankers and traders subsidize us."

"Is it just a restaurant?"

"There's a bar and a small ballroom we rent out for special events. The English club here in Monaco uses the place one Sunday a month for a tea, for example. Upstairs are bedrooms. I have a suite reserved for us for later."

"Here?"

"But yes. Branko may not fuck you in your room. Only I may do that. But here..." He looked across the table at her. "Here we will both have our wicked way with you. So what do you want to eat? Branko often chooses the *Tarte Niçoise* to start."

Having the two of them compete certainly livened things up. When Branko filled up her wineglass three seconds ahead of Luc, Luc offered her one of his scallops and mopped a morsel of bread in the delicious sauce and insisted she try it. Branko countered by giving her most of his orange tart and suggesting a *Cointreau* as *digestif* since she liked oranges so.

Luc made the final decision of the meal, by announcing they would have coffee and *Cointreau* on the balcony upstairs. "A little more private," he said.

Since the group of bankers were long gone and the other couple totally engrossed with each other, this was hardly what you'd call public but all three went upstairs, to a wide sitting room, furnished much like the rooms downstairs. The paint here was new and the gold striped satin curtains looked as if they'd been hung yesterday. At the far end of the room, French windows opened onto a balcony that overlooked the street.

Branko won the "get a seat for Helen" race, but Luc bested him when it came to pouring the *Cointreau* and insisting she try one of the wafer crisp cookies Madame Anna carried in on the coffee tray.

Once they were alone, Luc said, "We will be undisturbed. The other two diners won't stay the night and Anna and the cook will leave as soon as they clean up. No one but us will ever know what happens here tonight."

"Just one thing remains to be settled," Branko added. "Whose cock do you want to suck first?"

"I get to choose?" She rather liked the idea. They both nodded. "Okay then. We'll have a contest. You both give me a kiss and I'll make my pick."

"And the loser gets to spank you," Luc added.

"Hand only, no belts, floggers or cane."

"Agreed." They spoke almost simultaneously and seemed ready to jump out of their chairs and oblige.

She made a point of finishing her coffee first. The *Cointreau* too. Might as well control the action while she could. She had a very strong hunch once these two got going, they'd carry her along on the tide of their own lust and need.

"Okay." She put her glass down on the little iron table and turned to Branko. "You go first."

She sensed Luc's irritation as Branko stood. She'd no doubt pay for that later, but for now it just might spur him on to better efforts. Not that she had much time to ponder that prospect. Branko stood, pretty much lifted her out of her seat and pinned her against the wall with his hips, a knee between her thighs.

She leaned back against the still warm stucco and smiled at him.

He looked down at her, nudged her legs wider apart so she as good as rode astride his thigh and pressed her shoulders back. His mouth came down on hers, hard, determined and damn

well practiced. It wasn't a kiss as much as an exercise in oral dominance. As she opened her lips, his tongue came deep, pressing, stroking, caressing and all in all taking over. She was breathing in sync with him, her heart pounding, her pulse racing as his hand left her shoulder and cupped her breast, squeezing hard. Her gasp was lost in his mouth as he moved to her other breast. He was inside the armhole of her dress and they were skin on skin. Helen sagged into his embrace as sensation roared, overtaking her thoughts as he caressed and stroked. He pinched her nipple gently.

Her whimper echoed in her head as he lifted his mouth. "Good enough?"

Took a few moments to get her mind back in working order enough to nod. He'd stepped back. She was leaning against the wall and wondering if her legs still worked. He had one hand on her waist and another on her shoulder. No doubt aware she needed his support, at least for a few minutes.

"My turn now." Luc sounded downright peeved. He as good as pushed Branko aside and stood an arm's length from her. "You want me to do better than that?"

She was on dangerous ground here, but the devil in her couldn't hold back. "Can you?"

He didn't waste time or words replying, just grabbed her and threw her over his shoulder, ignoring her shriek of surprise, and walked into the sitting room. He tossed her over the back of a satin-covered sofa, so her head was on the seat, shifting her so her hips balanced on the (thankfully upholstered) back, pulled her skirt up so it covered her face and took her hips in his hands. Before she had time to brush the fabric off her face, his mouth was on her pussy.

He'd been fantastic before but now... Dear saints and virgins! He kissed, lapped, teased and stroked with his lips and tongue. At her muffled warning she was about to come, he thrust a finger in her cunt and stroked. Upwards. It only took a minute and she was screaming as a wild climax broke. She reared up before sagging against the sofa, legs still shaking, chest heaving as Luc pulled her skirt down and stood her on her rather wobbly feet.

"Who wins?"

"You," she managed between gasps. "But," she looked at Branko, "you were damn good too. It was close." Not really, but might as well be tactful since she'd just given him carte blanche to spank her.

"Better wait a minute or two," Luc said. "She needs to get over that before you heat her bottom up."



Helen wasn't too sure she would ever get completely over it but welcomed a little respite. Had knowing Branko was watching made it so intense? She didn't have time to worry about that now. Better just take it as it came, and by the look on Branko's face as he rolled up his right sleeve, it was going to come with purpose and force.

Her cunt clenched at the prospect.

"I have an idea," Branko said to Luc. "I warm her up, then since her red bottom is my effort, I fuck her cunt. You do her mouth. I want to feel her warmed up skin under my hands."

"I thought I got to choose," Helen said.

"We did agree," Luc said to Branko, speaking over her head, "but I think she should suck you too, by way of thanking you for her spanking."

"Sounds fine. Maybe you would like to try out her asshole for size."

"She's nice and tight."

"Must try it sometime." Branko looked straight at Helen. "Ready for your chastisement?"

Her throat was tight from excitement and the waves of shame and embarrassment at them talking about her as if she were part of the furniture. She nodded.

"I asked you a question, my dear. I want a clear answer. Are you ready to have a good and thorough over the knee spanking?"

"Yes."

"I want a better answer than that. Say 'Yes, Branko, I am ready to present my bare bottom for chastisement'."

She took a deep breath as the pulse throbbed in her ears and her cunt ran like a river between her legs.

"Answer him!" Luc shouted. "He asked you a question!"

Her mind cleared as she looked at the two men, waiting and no doubt hard as rods for her. Branko had been earlier anyway and she bet Luc was. She lowered her eyes. "Yes, Branko. I am ready to lay myself over your knee and have a spanking on my naked bottom."

He shook his head. "Couldn't get the words right, could you? Never mind." He took one of the gilt side chairs and carried it to the middle of the room and sat down, feet firm on the carpet and knees a little apart. "Over here," he said, patting his knee. "You don't want to keep me waiting."

“No, you don’t,” Luc added. “Trust me, you’d better get yourself over that knee. Pronto.” He took a second chair and set it a little to Branko’s right, picking a perfect vantage point.

Could she do this? Yes.

Throat tight, heart thumping, she took careful steps to stand on Branko’s right side. Before she had time to lay herself over his knee, Luc tipped her over. “Want her skirt lifted?” he asked.

“Why not?” Branko said. “Might as well start on her skin. No point in wasting time through the dress.”

Aside from the fact that a gentle warm-up through your dress did help build up endurance. Obviously that wasn’t what they had in mind. Luc swept her skirt up and over her head, blocking out some of the light as she lay there, blood rushing to her head as Branko stroked her naked ass.

“Very nice,” he said. “Beautiful and pale, ready for warming up. Your skin will show every single mark.” His warm hand stroked each cheek, smoothed the tops of her thighs and the soft sensitive underside of her ass cheeks.

Helen relaxed, enjoying his caress, absorbing the pleasurable sensations, only too aware they were fleeting. When would he start? And how? Would he warm her up, or start with hard slaps? At least bare-handed, he’d not go on too long. He’d start feeling it himself and, hopefully, stop.

“Ready?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied, the sound a bit muffled by the yards of skirt around her head.

“What did she say?” he asked Luc.

“Does it matter? Ready or not, she’s getting spanked.”

Branko’s reply was a gentle slap on her right cheek, followed by another on her left. She felt them, but as a warm glow, no more. Thankful he was warming her up first, she lay passive and limp under his continued slaps, until he paused and, to her surprise, kissed each ass cheek.

“She’s nicely warm,” he said. “Come and have a look.”

“I can see from here,” Luc replied. “I told you she colors up nicely but she’s only pink. How about a really hard slap to leave a good hand print?”

It came and it was hard, the sting resonating through her entire ass as the smart spread and ached.

“You’re right,” Branko said. “She goes a very nice color.”

Next came a volley of hard slaps, fast and random but covering her entire ass with a constant sting and burn. She was wriggling and letting out the odd yell, until he stopped. Suddenly. No slow down, no easing off, just an absence of new pain and the steady throb that now transferred to her clit.

Her groan seemed to come from the same, vastly aroused clit.

Someone said, “That’s enough.” She couldn’t tell who. Blood pounding in her ears rather messed up her hearing.

Branko picked up her shoulders and helped her to stand, steadying her as she wasn’t too secure on her legs. Sensation roared through her body, spreading out from her engorged clit to seep down her legs, up to her boobs and most places in between. Hell, her nipples ached and he hadn’t even touched them.

“Where did you learn to spank like that?” she asked once she got her voice back.

Branko gave her a little kiss on her ear. “I’ve had lots of practice and Luc has high standards.”

“Indeed I do.”

Luc had overheard. Helen turned and gasped. He was naked and very, very ready. Seemed watching was as arousing as receiving. Duh! She’d learned that her first night here. Sheesh!

Luc looked wonderful. So gorgeous that she licked her lips. His cock tweaked in response. So she repeated the gesture. Very slowly this time.

“Coquette!” Luc said, not sounding the least displeased. “Why are you still dressed?”

“No one took my clothes off.”

“No problem,” Branko replied, easing his hold on her shoulders, whisking up her skirt and yanking the garment over her head. Her shoes had dropped off during the spanking so she was naked.

“What about Branko?” He was still fully clothed. Well, almost. He’d taken off his tie and jacket.

“He won’t take long. Not with you naked, warmed up and willing at arm’s length.” Luc took her from Branko, swept her up in his arms and carried her over to the bed.

Nice bed, too, all gilt with satin and lace hangings. Not that any of it mattered, while held skin to skin by Luc, his hard cock brushing her still-tingling ass.

“Don’t put me on my back.”

He paused. Barely. “Oh no? Maybe you need a little more punishment.”

“Don’t think so. What I need is two naked cocks.”

As he chuckled, his cock brushed her again. Nice. But she wanted a lot more. And if she didn’t get it soon...

He laid her on the bed, on her stomach, and sat beside her stroking her much belabored ass. “Very nice,” he said as his hand brought up the glow and the sensation. “Still so sensitive. I have to think.”

“About what?”

“Branko wanted you on your back, so he could kneel astride your shoulders while he fucked your mouth, but I suspect that will be too much for you.”

She didn’t “suspect.” She damn well knew. “Then he shouldn’t have laid into me with such gusto.”

“Gusto?” That was Branko. Now in her line of vision and gloriously naked. “What is gusto?”

“Enthusiasm, eagerness,” Luc replied. His English was really incredible.

“Ah!” Branko had the nerve to laugh. “Was it too much for you, *mon chou*?”

That might rhyme but she was not about to be anyone’s “cabbage.” Then she glimpsed his cock and gave them both a good view of her tonsils. “Good grief!”

“You like it?” He sounded really smug and she couldn’t blame him.

“It is... incredible.” No two words about it. Unlike Luc, Branko was circumcised and the thick, rounded head stood out at the end of his enormous cock. “But, remember, I get to choose.”

“You chose the winner,” Luc pointed out. “You expect to choose which one of us goes in where, too?”

“I don’t see why not. It was part of the deal. I’m the one on the receiving end after all.”

“Well, then?” Branko asked.

“Well, I’d like Luc to fuck me while I suck Branko.”

“Think you can swallow him?” Luc asked.

Had she upset him by not wanting to give him the blow job? Oh dear. Better go carefully here. Men got so touchy about their nice dangly bits.

"I'll have a go, but first, let me remind myself how wonderful you taste." She reached for him, shifted on her belly and kissed the end of his cock. Circled him with her lips, then swallowed a couple of inches while swirling her tongue over the smooth head and savoring the sweet drop of moisture gathering at the tiny opening.

His fingers tunneled in her hair as he held her head. Other hands stroked her back and smoothed over her still warm ass. Nice hands they were, strong and confident, stroking her crack and easing between her thighs to explore her cunt.

"She's wet," Branko said.

Luc's cock jerked as he laughed. "How could she not be? She's submissive; she responds to discipline. She was made to be spanked and to enjoy the lash and the belt."

Her face burned. Silly to feel embarrassed right now. She was submissive and damn proud of it. How many women could, or would, do what she was doing now?

Just to show them both what she could do, she deep-throated Luc, and had the satisfaction of hearing him cry out as he braced his thighs against the mattress to steady himself. "Enough. At least for now," he said as he withdrew.

Branko didn't. He kept his fingers inside her, moving in a circular motion for several minutes until Luc said, "Give it a break, Branko. You can't monopolize her cunt. It's mine tonight."

"What are we waiting for?" Branko asked, giving her a gentle pat on the rump that stirred up her much sensitized nerve endings.

"We're going to have to do this with me on all fours," Helen said. "No way in creation am I lying on my butt."

"No problem."

She couldn't help grinning at Luc. He'd no doubt hang from the chandeliers if she asked. He was in such need. Come to that, so were she and Branko.

The pair of them scurried around, pulling the comforter off the bed and folding it to make a pad.

"Comfortable?" Branko asked, as she positioned herself.

"Need more under your knees?" Luc asked.

It was nice to have two men, two gorgeous, hunky, dominant men, competing to accommodate her. Of course they weren't exactly disinterested players. And if they didn't get going pretty soon, like right now, she'd be close to desperate.

"Come here," she said to Branko. "I want to suck your cock."

He was on his knees in front of her before the words were out of her mouth. She scooted toward him and smiled. He was enormous, but she'd accommodated Edwin every which way. She'd leave Branko happy.

She kissed the tip of his cock, carefully measuring his girth with her lips, and slowly took him in. A little. He had the tact and courtesy to let her set the pace. Just as well, he was huge and choking would rather spoil the moment.

So no choking, but she did let out a gasp, albeit a muffled one. Luc was behind and rubbing his cock along her crack. Preparatory to giving her a good poke there?

At the thought her cunt ran and she gulped down a few more inches of Branko. Much to Branko's delight, if his groan was anything to go by.

This was unbelievable. Forget all she said about wanting each one of them everywhere. She wanted it all and right now. She pulled her mouth off Branko and smiled up at him. Didn't want him feeling deprived or anything. "Fuck my cunt, Luc! Please!"

As he obliged, she took Branko's cock back into her mouth. Two cocks broaching her at once was the ultimate turn-on. Helen gasped, maybe even cried out but it was pretty much muffled by the immense, hard flesh against her tongue.

Luc entered her slowly, surely and thoroughly. The head of his cock pressed against her cervix and she pushed back to feel even more. Branko shifted to stay in place and when she rocked forward again, more of his cock came into her mouth.

Absolutely fucking fantastic!

They let her set the rhythm. Smart men! Once she got going, they moved with her as she rocked back and forth, taking each one deep in turn. She was damn glad Edwin had taught her how to breathe with her mouth as good as blocked.

She had no idea how long they fucked in glorious tandem. The wild part of her brain took over, driving her body to persist and take more and more as her mind as good as blacked out under the onslaught of sensation. She was drowning in pleasure as her mind and body raced toward orgasm. She was aware of her own building climax as Branko came, grabbing her head

and shoving himself in deeper. Her own pleasure ballooned and her climax broke. Several climaxes in fact, wave upon wave of incredible sensation as Luc drove himself home with an immense groan.

Her knees wobbled and her thighs shook. She was being held up by their cocks. As they both withdrew, Helen folded into a little heap in the very rumpled comforter.

“We have exhausted her,” Branko said.

“Only temporarily.”

If Luc expected an encore any time soon, he was looking at the wrong woman. She was spent and darn it, they had to be.

Although Branko still had strength to carry her to the bed.

“Rest, Helen,” Luc said, kissing her. Or was it Branko?

The mattress shifted as Branko sat beside her stroking her hair. “*Magnifique*,” he said. “*Incroyable!*”

“You two are,” she replied, aware of Luc climbing in beside her.

Branko moved, off to the bathroom she supposed, and minutes later he was back, on the other side.

She was the filling of a nice man sandwich, only they’d been doing the filling. Feeling wild, elated, and wanton to her very fiber, Helen closed her eyes, snug and comfortable between two lovely male bodies.

## Chapter 10

Helen awoke to morning sun filtering through the shutters and a cool spot in the bed beside her. She reached out. Definitely empty although she still had... Branko, to judge by the dark hair on his shoulders.

"Luc's getting coffee," he said. "We'd better get up if we don't want it cold. You use this bathroom. I'll take the one across the corridor."

She sat up. She was naked but after what they'd shared last night, a bit of bare skin was nothing. She looked around for her dress and hoped her shoes were somewhere in sight.

She'd rather liked those sandals.

"There's a box for you in the bathroom," Branko said, as he walked across the room, giving her a good view of his nice ass. "Luc left it there."

He had. It held jeans, tee-shirt and underwear (both made of silk), even a pair of red leather sneakers. The bathroom was stocked with expensive toiletries and a hair dryer obviously invented by some German rocket scientist.

Remembering Branko's comment about coffee getting cold, Helen showered and dressed quickly, rather regretting not having time to luxuriate. There was a vast whirlpool tub that she'd have loved to have experimented with last night. Mind you, eight shower jets from various angles wasn't bad for a morning wake-up.

Washed, scented and dressed, Helen made her way downstairs. Following male voices, she found them in a large kitchen overlooking the courtyard with a lot more than "coffee." Luc had either nipped out early to a baker or had fresh brioche delivered. She was in the mood for a leisurely meal, perhaps a second cup of coffee sitting in the sun by the open window.

Luc had other ideas. "We must go," he said. "Branko will take you back to Les Santons," he told Helen.

So, Luc was staying behind. Why? Not her business. Damn. Hanging around a couple of hours and chatting over coffee and brioche would have been nice but... No point in making an issue over it, and grumbling after the night they'd just shared seemed plain churlish. After all,



he'd provided her with day clothes so she didn't look too debauched if she met Madame Louise on the front drive. "Staying for long?"

"I'll be back tomorrow, the day after at most. Need to run an errand for my mother."

The same mother who lived in Antibes? Helen couldn't help wonder if "mother" was a euphemism for "Fuck another willing woman." Heck, she hadn't sworn fidelity, no reason to expect him to.

"Madame Louise will be there and Branko will return after lunch. If you need anything call him."

Nice thought but she wasn't about to use Branko as her personal shopper. "I'll be fine. I've plenty of work and I want to have a good look through those new boxes."

\* \* \*

When she insisted there was no need to take her all the way down the drive, Branko dropped her by the now wide open gates and Helen walked down the incline to the house. The kitchen door was ajar, and Madame Louise should be there.

Knowing that meant coffee in the kitchen, Helen went in the kitchen door. No sign of Madame Louise. Not that unusual. She was no doubt busy somewhere in the house. The empty coffee pot was a bit odd but maybe she'd been told no one would be in for breakfast.

Knowing where everything was kept, Helen took care of the coffee and, armed with a mug, went down the long hallway, headed for her office.

She didn't get there.

The chaos greeted her the minute she approached the open library doors. It looked as though every single new carton had been ripped open and the contents strewn all over the place. She stood stock still and stared. The intruders had done a thorough job. They'd even broken the door to her office and trashed that.

Remembering warnings to leave a break-in site in case the thieves remained, Helen ran out of the room and across the front hall to the front door. Much faster exit than back via the kitchen.

Now what? She grabbed her cell phone and speed dialed Branko. "I need help."

"What is the matter, Helen?"

She told him.

"*Mon Dieu!* Have you called the police?"

“No.” That would no doubt be her next call, except what number to call? She bet 911 didn’t work over here.

“I will call them and return right away. Stay where you are.”

Short and to the point. What now? Better not touch anything else. Although her fingerprints were already over everywhere in that part of the house. She sat on one of the stone benches that flanked the front door, sipped the last bit of coffee she hadn’t spilled in her shock and wondered how long it would take for the police to arrive.

Not long at all, and no sign yet of Branko.

He must have warned them she spoke little or no French. A young officer from the second car spoke to her in pretty good English. Helen told him what she knew, agreed to stay outside and watched as they all trooped in the front door, all but one of the drivers, who stayed propped on the hood of his car. No doubt told to watch that she didn’t run away. She just hoped she wasn’t their prime suspect.

Christ almighty! She had been here first, and touched things but only in the kitchen. Still Luc and Branko were her alibi. In the fifteen, twenty minutes or so from being dropped off to her calling Branko, there was no way she could have wreaked that havoc.

As if she could have, given time enough. The sight of all those trashed and broken books made her want to cry. Who knew what gems had been waiting to be found? Okay, an original manuscript by de Sade was unlikely, but Luc had a good eye and she bet there were several fine books of plates and illustrations, now hideously damaged by a bunch of vandals.

“Madame?” It was the lone English-speaking cop, with an older one.

“Yes?”

“*Capitaine* Rolle has a question. Was it you spilled liquid on the floor by the doorway?”

“Yes.” She held up her now empty mug. “Coffee. I must have spilled it when I went in. It was a shock to see the state of the room.”

He translated that and the *capitaine* nodded and said something. “What time was that?” interpreter cop asked.

She glanced at her watch. Not yet eleven? How long had she been sitting out here? “About two minutes before I called Monsieur de Prioux’s secretary. I think he called you immediately.”

“Why did you not call the police yourself?”

“I had no idea what number to call. I’ve only been here a couple of weeks. I knew Branko, the secretary, would know what to do.”

“Next time, Madame,” he said after another exchange with the *capitaine*, “you should call 17 or 112. That will summon help right away.”

If she could make herself understood. But that she kept to herself. It was hitting her how isolated she was, and maybe her mother-in-law had been right, that she was foolish to come all this way on her own.

With a roar, a silver open-top car came down the drive and parked beside the two cop cars. Branko! Ridiculous to feel such relief at the sight of his long legs emerging from the car but damn it, she did.

“Are you all right, Helen?” he asked, holding her by her shoulder. “Not hurt?”

“No, shaken but I’m fine. The place is a hideous mess though.”

“I’ll see what’s going on.”

He shook hands with *le capitaine* and the other one. After more fast French, Branko went into the house with them. Damn! She was not spending all morning sitting out here and besides, she needed to pee. Shock and coffee did things to your innards.

After involved negotiations, propelled mostly by Branko, they agreed to let her through to the bathroom, though the kitchen was off limits, as that had been the apparent route of entry. It was closed off, like the library, with blue and white tape.

It was late afternoon by the time they left, leaving strict orders not to enter any of the taped off areas.

“Hungry?” Branko asked, once they were alone.

“I don’t know.” Silly answer but she was too confused to think about food.

He apparently wasn’t. “I am, and you should be. The police officers took off in shifts for lunch. We couldn’t. Come, I’ll feed you.” After locking the house, he took her hand.

They walked up to the old village and the little house with the sunlit courtyard. He poured her wine, and offered her garlicky crackers and a can of pâté. “You must eat, or the wine will go to your head.”

It already had. “So, just concerned for my well-being? Not out to seduce me?”

He smiled. “Are you willing? You had best spend the night here. Who knows if they might come back?”

“And Luc didn’t say anything about not fucking me in your house, did he?”

“So you are willing?”

After last night she expected to be sated but blame it on the stress of the day, being so far from home or just the proximity of a man she knew could satisfy her, Helen dispensed with words, drained her glass and reached her hand across the table. “Let’s finish the bottle later.”

Branko threw back his head and laughed. Hell, it was more like a whoop of triumph as he came around the table and as good as lifted her out of her chair. He smashed his mouth on hers, forcing her lips apart -- not that it took much forcing -- and kissing deep, his tongue fierce against hers.

“I’ve been wanting to fuck you since the first moment I saw you,” he said, as he paused between kisses. “You are going to remember this for a long, long time.”

He didn’t give her a chance to reply, argue or even smile, just mashed his mouth back down and kissed.

When he finally came up for air, he lifted her off her feet and laid her on the table. “Stay there,” he said. “Don’t move.” He brushed his finger over her lips. “They feel as if they’ve been thoroughly kissed.”

“I think they have.”

“And soon you’ll get thoroughly fucked.”

“Can’t wait.”

“Maybe I’ll make you. Give you a much needed lesson in patience.”

“You’d have to wait too, wouldn’t you?” And by the front of his pants, he was as eager as she was.

He set his hands on either side of her shoulders and bent over her. “Don’t you dare move.”

“Okay.” She was reasonably comfortable, given it was a kitchen table. He moved around, picking up glasses and the bottle of wine. Good move. No point in risking spilling it when they got boisterous.

Branko was back, minus his shirt. He stood at the end of the table, pushing her knees open with his hips. “Ready to get fucked?”

“Yes!” Very ready. Took all she had not to rock her hips but she kept still. It was part of the game.

“I see.” Slowly, he unbuckled his belt, pulling it through the loops and holding it with both hands to snap it. The sound had her cunt creaming. A second snap of the leather elicited a groan. “You like that, don’t you?”

“You bet!”

“What is it you like? The sound, the anticipation, the thought of the pain, or the pain itself?”

Sheesh. He expected her to produce coherent thoughts at this point in the proceedings? “The best is the anticipation. Wondering when it will come, if it will and how much and how hard. And afterwards...”

“The burn, the warmth, the sting?”

“All of them.”

“I will be sure to remember that.” He laid the belt on the table and proceeded to unzip, stepping back to take his pants off and toss them on a chair. Shorts, socks and shoes followed.

He really was a good-looking man, and boy, was he ready! If anything, his cock was bigger than last night. Impossible. It was truly a sight to please a woman in need. And she was needy. “How come you’re naked and I’m still dressed?”

“Because, woman, I do things in my own time. Your job is to wait, submit and obey.”

A wild rush of anticipation raced through her. She’d obey him, she’d happily submit, but she needed to be fucked. And he damn well knew it. He was grinning as he came back between her knees. “You will be naked very, very soon,” he promised. He picked up her left foot and ran his fingernail down her instep.

She jerked.

“Didn’t I tell you not to move?”

“Yes, but I wasn’t expecting that.”

“You’ll never know quite what to expect. Let’s try this again and this time you will keep still.” He picked up her right foot and repeated. Helen gritted her teeth and kept still, hoping he didn’t try tickling.

He didn’t. Instead he reached for her belt, unsnapped and unzipped her jeans. He slipped his hand inside and under her panties to stroke her belly and cup her pussy. A finger slid into her cunt. “Nicely ready for me. You do like to be fucked, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“One day,” he went on, “I will take you upstairs, tie you to the bed and make you wait for hours. But not right now.” He broke off to yank down her jeans and panties in one go. “Lift your hips.” She obeyed and lowered them again, feeling the table smooth and cool against her skin.

Her jeans dropped to the floor, as he took hold of her knees and pulled her toward him. Her ass was on the edge of the table and her legs dangled. He stroked her bush, then opened her and pushed several fingers into her.

“My cock’s going there,” he told her. “I’m going to fuck you until you scream. You’ll enjoy it, won’t you?”

As he spoke, he curled his fingers and brushed her G-spot. How the hell did he find it so easily? Didn’t matter. Helen groaned at the sheer pleasure of his pressure.

“I asked you a question, Helen.”

“Yes, I will enjoy it. I want your cock in me.”

“You’ll get it soon, my dear. Very soon.” He pulled out, leaving her empty. “Best get you completely naked first.”

Didn’t take long. A few buttons, a snap on her bra. She was ready, as good as panting for it. Hell, she smelled her own arousal which meant he could too.

“Keep still.”

The pointed end of his belt touched between her breasts then snaked down her chest and belly. Helen shut her eyes, to block out everything but the smell of leather and the slow, teasing caress.

“Have you ever had your cunt beaten?”

Now he asked? “Not often, but Edwin had a little flogger with soft tresses he used there.”

“I see.”

She wasn’t sure she did. What next? He was back between her legs, placing her feet flat on the table, exposing her completely. From the corner of her eye, she glimpsed him wrapping the belt around his hand. “No.”

“Yes,” he replied, “it will heighten your sensation.” With one hand, he opened her pussy lips before flicking her clit with the leather end of the belt.

He was right, the sensation was incredible, halfway between hurt and pleasure. He kept up a slow, easy rhythm until she groaned and begged him to never stop. As if he’d been waiting for that, he paused, then slapped her clit hard so she screamed.

As the sting eased and wild heat spread through her, Branko grabbed her hips, ramming himself in. He was immense, stretching and filling her all the way in deep, bringing another cry to her lips.

“Ready?”

She called out in reply and he started pumping. Each hard thrust made her groan until all she heard were her cries and his gasps and grunts, as her body responded to his wild fucking.

She forgot his prohibition on moving. Her arms flailed, grabbing the table edge to steady herself as her head and shoulders tossed with the frenzy of uncontrolled arousal. She was aware of screaming, several times, as she climaxed repeatedly. Through her wild haze of ecstasy and satiation, he continued pounding deep until he came with a shout. Under his weight, she was a shaking, limp mass of humanity as he finally withdrew.

“Satisfied?” he asked as he bent to kiss her lips.

“Sated,” she replied.

“Good,” he said, helping her to sit up. “I intended you to be. Next time, I’ll show you I can kiss just as well as Luc.”

She didn’t doubt it.

He brought her a toweling robe from upstairs. “Wear this,” he said, as he held it for her. “You’re not wearing any clothes until we go back to the house tomorrow.”

“You want me to stay the night?”

“Do you really want to sleep up there, alone, knowing the robbers might come back?”

No, come to think of it. “So I stay here?”

“You stay here. And if you’re really good, I’ll fuck you again. Might even mark you with my belt.”

“You know, Branko, much as I really appreciate the offer, I think between the two of you I’ve had enough to last me several days. I need to be able to walk tomorrow.”

He kissed her. “I could always carry you over my shoulder.”

Right! All the way back up to Les Santons. She didn’t think so.

“Here.” Branko handed her a refilled glass of wine, and pushed the plate of crackers and a bowl of olives toward her.

She took a wrinkled black olive and slowly chewed, glad to see he was getting out a frying pan and what looked like salad. She was hungry.

“Thanks for the offer to stay.” Although she’d no doubt have been fine up in her apartment. “Do the cops think they’ll come back?”

He shrugged. How the hell did Frenchmen make it look so freaking sexy? “Who’s to say? To all appearances they were looking for something.”

“Like what? Some valuable first edition? If so, why trash them all?”

Another shrug as he reached into the fridge for eggs and butter. “Let the *flics* worry about that. Luc will be back in the morning. He can deal with them.”

True, but the whole thing was weird, to put it lightly.

“Forget it, for now. We need to eat.” He set the pan on the stove. “Omelet?” he asked, cracking eggs into a small bowl.

He was a good cook. A definite advantage in a man, but Helen was too busy thinking to really enjoy it. “What could have been in those boxes? And did they find it?”

“Are all Americans this persistent?” He smiled, but sounded downright irked.

“You bet. Once we get hold of something we’re like a dog with a bone.”

He shook his head as he stood to clear the table. “Give it up, Helen. The police are in charge. They can cope. You’d best worry about repairing and sorting things once they finish.”

She would but... “Did someone tell Madame Louise? I’d hate for her to walk into all that mess.” A shock the woman didn’t need at her age. Odd that she hadn’t been there though.

That got his attention. “You are right. She should have been in today. Why did she not come?” Odd indeed. “I must call her. Let me show you upstairs.”

He pretty much bundled her up the narrow stairs to a lovely space under the eaves: a large double bed and a vast bathroom under the pitched ceiling. “Why don’t you shower first?” he said. “I’ll be up later. Watch the TV if you want.”

Once showered, Helen realized how tired she was. Wild sex and crime rather took it out of a woman. She tried watching TV, but couldn’t find an English language channel and gave up trying to follow a French game show. Branko was still talking on the phone downstairs. He’d be up soon, she guessed. Leaving the robe on a chair, she climbed into bed. If he fancied a bit of sex, vanilla or otherwise, he was going to have to wake her first.



## Chapter 11

Helen woke to hammering on the door. Branko was snoring quietly beside her and someone downstairs was getting really antsy.

“Hey, Branko. Someone’s at the door.” He muttered and rolled over.

Great! What now? Tickle him awake? Try the cold water and washcloth trick her brother used when they were kids? Whoever was out there wasn’t going away. Not by the sound of things.

Branko’s phone trilled on the bedside table and his arm reached out. He flipped it open, without opening his eyes, and held it to his ear. “*Allo!*” a pause and “*Comment?*” He sat up and listened.

Helen didn’t even try to follow the exchange. He snapped his phone shut. “It’s Luc. I must go. Something has happened.”

Quite a good bit, actually. She sat up. “Where are my clothes?”

“Over there.” He indicated a chair against the wall. He must have brought them up last night. “Stay here.”

He got out of bed, giving her a perfect view of his ass as he grabbed a pair of jeans from a heap on another chair, zipped and snapped them up and went downstairs, barefoot.

Didn’t take Helen long to pull her clothes on. She was missing one sock, so she put on her sneakers without them and followed him down to the kitchen. If something was going on, she damn well wanted to know.

Halfway downstairs she paused, watched and listened. She understood one word in twenty but caught enough to get they were both agitated. Branko stood on one side of the table, Luc the other. Luc spoke, Branko as good as yelled back and slapped the table for emphasis.

She was missing something. “Morning, Luc,” she said, coming down the rest of the flight.

That got their undivided attention. “Helen? You were here?” Luc asked.

“Did you expect her to sleep there, alone, after what happened?” Branko shot back.

Luc looked as though he thought she should have. Damn! She was not up to dealing with male egos and petty jealousy. At least not before coffee. “What’s the matter?” Aside, of course, from her having spent the night in the, apparently, wrong bed.

“Madame Louise is in hospital,” Branko replied, before Luc had a chance.

“What happened?”

“Sit down,” Luc said, holding out one of the two chairs.

She sat. “It’s that bad?” She looked from one to the other, trying to get a clue. “She’s hurt?”

“Very.” Luc glanced at Branko. “Get dressed and then go up to the house. I’ll follow with Helen.”

Branko looked like he was going to object, but went upstairs, and a minute later she heard water running.

“What happened to Madame Louise?”

“The police aren’t sure, or aren’t telling. Her neighbors found her late yesterday. Worried that she hadn’t seen her all day, one went to check and found her unconscious. According to Madame Dulee, the neighbor’s wife, she was bloody as if she’d been beaten.”

“How awful! I wondered why she didn’t turn up yesterday but to be honest, with everything else that was going on, I didn’t think about it again.”

“Understandable. The police want to talk to you and Branko again. I’ve just come from there.”

“Already?” They did start work early over here. She glanced at the kitchen clock. “Good God! It’s ten o’clock!”

“Yes. Slept late after a wild night?”

“Two consecutive wild nights,” she reminded him. “Plus, it wasn’t exactly a restful day what with the cops and finding the house trashed. And yes, I came back here with Branko. Didn’t want to be alone was part of it.”

“And the other part?”

“He’s sexy. Like you.”

He frowned. “Now is not the time to rank us. Just be careful, he can take the dominant role to excess at times and you’re strong, but still a woman.”

“You noticed?”

He raised his eyebrows at that. "Indeed I did, still do for that matter, but for now, we'd best see what the police want. A simple robbery or vandalism of old books they might brush off but the vicious attack on an old woman who works for me, that is too much of a coincidence to ignore."

"You think there's a connection?"

"They certainly do." He opened the door. "Come on."

\* \* \*

They certainly did. After Luc drove her to the police station down by the coast, Helen found herself, with the aid of an interpreter, repeating her account of yesterday to *Capitaine* Rolle and one of his cohorts.

"So, Madame," the captain said, "you still cannot tell us if anything is missing."

"I haven't been in the house to look." They knew that. They'd draped the place with police tape.

"There is no way to tell?"

"Not just like that. I have the shipping lists that came with the boxes. Assuming they weren't taken. Some listed titles and all had the numbers of books. I could go through those. It might take ages."

"We don't have ages, Madame. Could you do it in a day?"

"I could try."

"Please do. I will send Placette with you to help. But first, where were you Wednesday night that you heard nothing?"

How many times had they gone over this? "I was out. I had dinner in Monaco and stayed the night."

"Ah yes, at a certain private club with your employer and his secretary?" He really made it sound debauched. "Monsieur de Prioux mentioned that, but you just have each other to corroborate your whereabouts. It is difficult."

She'd need to be thicker than two short planks not to miss that implication. "There were other people eating there, and the staff. They can confirm we were there."

"I'm sure they will." What exactly did that mean?

"How is Madame Louise?" Might as well ask a question for a change.

"Her condition is grave. She is an old woman and she was badly abused."

## The Hand of the Master

“That’s awful. I wondered why she hadn’t come yesterday but was rather glad she hadn’t. She’d have been stressed being kept out of her kitchen and with all the goings on, but to think she was lying in her house hurt all that time.”

“Why do you say she was there all day?” The captain as much as snapped it at her.

The interpreter was more tactful. “Did someone tell you that?”

“No. Luc said the neighbors found her after they hadn’t seen her all day, so I guessed she’d been lying hurt all that time. Was the attack later?” While Branko was screwing her brains out on the kitchen table?

“We are investigating that, Madame. Did you see anyone else near the house that morning, during the night, any time?”

Trying to trip her up, were they? “I’d just got back myself, went straight to the house to grab a cup of coffee.”

“That you spilled over the crime scene. Go on.”

“Madame Louise left before me that night. She doesn’t stay if no one’s in for dinner but... Damn, there was someone. Just as I was leaving.”

“Indeed?”

“A man.”

“What sort of man? Where?”

“As I was leaving. He asked if that house was Les Santons and if Madame Girond worked there. I said she did but she’d left for the day. He thanked me and walked off. Luc arrived moments later and I thought no more of it.”

He pondered that a while and muttered to his assistant. “You can describe this man. You would recognize him?”

“I think so. Average height, brown hair, a stringy mustache, jeans and a shabby sort of zip-up jacket.”

That had them conferring again.

“Well, Madame, that is all for now. We will ask you to identify him later. And for now, we need a list of what’s missing. Placette will take you up to the house.”

\* \* \*

Placette turned out to be the young cop who spoke a little English and drove like only a cop would. But he got her back to Les Santons and was prepared to roll up his sleeves and help tidy up the mess.

Stepping over the white and blue tape, he shook his head. “It is... bad,” he said, after obviously searching in vain for a better word in English.

“Yes,” Helen agreed, following his lead in ignoring the police tape. She picked up a book that lay at her feet, a leather-bound volume, minus its front cover and with the etched frontispiece half torn out. She’d need weeks to repair everything. “I’ve got the shipping lists in my office.” Thankfully, they were still in the inbox. Missed when they tipped out her drawers.

It wasn’t an easy job. In many cases books were categorized as “ten paperbacks” or “five assorted hardcovers” but the older and rarer books were listed by title. Every single box had been opened and dumped. She supposed she should be thankful that they hadn’t been tossed across the room.

By the time the light was failing, they’d gone through everything and ascertained that nothing of value was missing. As they worked, she’d set aside the books needing repairs.

Placette called his captain and after a swift back and forth, in which *non* seemed to feature prominently, he snapped his phone shut. “The captain wishes you to come and look at photos. To identify the man you saw.”

She could hardly refuse. “All right. Did Madame Louise name him?”

“She is not... awake yet.”

“She’s unconscious?” That sounded really bad. “I’ll come, of course. Mind if I wash and change first?” Aside from being dusty from handling old books, she was still in the clothes she’d worn back from Monaco.

That stumped him for a minute, but he agreed. “Be quick, the *capitaine* is waiting.”

“Won’t take long.” A few minutes free of scrutiny would be nice too and she worried about Luc. Was he still getting grilled? Of Branko there’d been no sign. Maybe she’d worn him out. Or maybe it was his day off. She was taking a week off once this was all sorted out.

Leaving Placette waiting in his car, she went up to her apartment. She really needed a shower, but that might be pushing her luck. Helen unlocked the door and, as she stepped into the sitting room, saw the package she’d left there two nights ago. Between dinner, sex, coming home to the chaos and more sex, she’d forgotten all about it.

## The Hand of the Master

She grabbed the package and ran back downstairs, calling out to Placette.

He met her halfway up the stairs. "What is it?"

She held out the package. "I think this might be it. What they were looking for. I brought it upstairs as it was the smallest and I wanted to have a look but between everything I forgot it."

He stared at it then at her. "Please slowly."

Second time she was more coherent.

"This is it?" he asked.

"A package that came with the other books. Maybe this is what they were looking for."

"Maybe." He put on latex gloves and took the package, looking downright dubious. "I must call."

While he called, she changed. Just getting on clean panties was a treat. A spritz of cologne did in lieu of a shower. Wasn't the same but would have to do. That and a quick wash and new lipstick and she was set to go.

By the time she got downstairs, Placette had the package sitting on the stone wall, some distance from the house. "It stays there," he said, adding something in French she didn't quite follow, but she did get "evidence."

They didn't have long to wait. A veritable convoy arrived. The *capitaine* in his car, a van that was obviously the evidence and forensic squad, or whatever they call them in France, and bringing up the rear... Luc.

Took all she had not to rush up and cling to him for support. She wasn't that feeble, was she? Hell no! She'd coped all day while he was wherever he was. Maybe getting grilled by the cops. Another, older man got out of the car behind Luc's.

"Maitre Jacques Poulain. Our lawyer," Luc explained as she shook hands.

"We need a lawyer?"

He nodded. "I think so. They are afraid Madame Louise will not recover consciousness and now believe her attack is linked to our break-in. We must arm ourselves. Who knows what will happen next?"

Nice to be able to give them a bit of good news. "I think I found what they were looking for."

"What?" Luc and Maitre Poulain said in unison.

She explained.

“How is it you did not mention this before?” Maitre Poulain wanted to know.

“Between one thing and another I forgot about it.” Hell, would the cops believe that? Poulain didn’t seem to. “I meant to open it, but didn’t have time.” After all, she hadn’t been in her room for two days. Better keep that to herself.

The lawyer returned. “They want you to go back and look at photos. I’ll come with you.”

“Who are you looking for?” Luc wanted to know.

She explained about the man from Wednesday night.

“Claude? His name was Claude?” Luc asked.

“He never said his name but he called Madame Louise *tante*.”

“*Merde!*” She knew what that meant. “It has to be him! She swore she wouldn’t let him near the house. He is no good. He deals in drugs. Wait!”

He had *Capitaine* Rolle’s attention in seconds.

More heated fast French, but the upshot was, she still needed to go with the police but to identify this “Claude” rather than wade through reams of mug shots.

“When you get back,” Luc said. “We’ll have dinner.”

“What about Branko?” she asked once the attention was off her and back on the package.

“He’s staying out of the way unless they ask for him. I’ll explain later.”

She hoped he would.

## Chapter 12

It took all of five seconds to pick Claude out from a computer screen of eight faces. But she wasn't done.

For the next hour or so she was mightily glad of Maitre Poulain's company.

Seemed Captain Rolle had a hard time believing she'd taken the package at random, and then forgotten about it. The only mitigating fact was she hadn't opened it.

Time was getting on. Helen was worn out and her stomach growling by the time they let her go. She still had to wait while the lawyer had his little chat.

"Come," he said, as he eventually emerged from the interview room. "Luc is waiting."

He called Luc from the car and, as he started driving, said, "It is best if you don't sleep in your apartment tonight. Luc is ready to take you somewhere safe."

"You think they'll come back?"

He shrugged. "Perhaps. The police have a search on for Claude Martin, but who can tell?"

"What about Madame Louise?"

"Still unconscious. When she comes to, they are thinking of citing her as an accessory."

"A bit hard on her after what they did to her."

"They think she must have given them the code for the security system. You set it when you left."

"Yes, I did."

"It's a good thing the system shows the time you set it, or you'd be suspect too."

Fucking fantastic that would be.

\* \* \*

Luc took her back to the pale yellow house in Monaco. Just the two of them.

"Where's Branko?" she asked, as they drove through the hills.

"Lying low."

That sounded ominous. "Why? Is he suspect too?"



“For this, no.” Luc shook his head. “We alibi each other. Not the strongest alibis in the world, but there’s no doubt we were all away that night, and I was remembered at the garage when I picked up my car.”

That’s right. He’d been on his way to see his mother. “Did you tell your mother what happened?”

“Good God, no! She’d have a heart attack. Maman thinks all the world is pleasant and kind. Or pretends to. I told her it was a business emergency. She understands about those. My father had them all the time.”

She let the note of cynicism pass. “So, about Branko.” Hell, she’d fucked him. It would be good to know if there was something shady about him.

“The police know him. He has a record.”

Just her luck. “What for?”

Luc chuckled. “You sound so disapproving.”

“It’s not usual in the States for private secretaries to have criminal records.” At least she didn’t think it was. She’d never encountered one before.

“You’re so prim and sexy. Makes me want to stop the car and fuck you.”

“Not right here, the road’s too narrow. We’d cause an accident and get arrested. I’ve had enough dealings with the cops for one day.” More than in her entire life so far.

“True, we must remain staid and respectable. Until I get you upstairs, that is. I did bring a flogger and I have the scarf in the glove box.”

“You’re trying to distract me.” He grinned. “Okay, back to Branko. You can’t mention he has a criminal record and then clam up.”

“His father and uncle were expert forgers and counterfeiters. They taught Branko the family business. They were good but careless and got caught. Branko got a lighter sentence as he was convicted of passing the money, not producing it. Apparently his skills weren’t, at that point, up to par. When he came out, I was his...” He paused. “Probation advisor?”

“Probation officer?” She was learning things. Who’d have even thought it?

“That’s it! Probation officer. I got to know him. Once his term was over, we got most unprofessional. After my father died, I came into money and took over the family business. I brought Branko along. My family has no idea of his past. They must never know.”

## The Hand of the Master

Since she'd not met any of his family and it seemed unlikely she would, the warning was a bit superfluous. "Why tell me?"

"You fucked him. You have trusted him. I think you should know. Besides, you asked. But with all this going on, it's best not to remind the police who he is."

Seemed fair enough. Assuming... "You don't think he had anything to do with this?"

"*Mon Dieu*, no! Branko? He might be a convicted felon, but he's not violent. What ever made you think that?"

"Well, I've never known a forger before."

"He served his sentence and paid for his crime. Now he's my friend and your lover, I think?" That last bit came with a very big question mark.

Was he? "I wondered if you two were lovers."

He gave her the strangest look. "He told you that?"

Come to think of it, no. "He said you played together."

"Played? Is that what you Americans call it?"

"Like the scene put on for my benefit that first evening? Yes."

"Playing?" he repeated. "I like that. We will play this evening. But I will also fuck you."

If she didn't fall asleep on him first. On the other hand, maybe it was just what they both needed. She was stressed out. He had to be.

\* \* \*

They had the same table overlooking the courtyard.

Sipping white wine and eating oysters, sitting across from Luc while the scent of mimosa wafted in from the open window, was a very nice way to ease the stress of the past forty-eight hours.

Felt more like three weeks.

"You look worried. Thoughtful," Luc said.

"Just thinking how much has happened in the last couple of days." The last couple of weeks for that matter. "It's been a time of new experiences."

"Good ones, I hope."

"For the most part. Could have done without today and yesterday."

He nodded. "We all could have but..." He broke off, taking his phone out of his pocket. "Forgive me, but I left it on in case *Capitaine* Rolle called." He looked at the readout.

“Is it him?”

Luc shook his head, and stepped out into the courtyard. After pacing back and forth and talking for several minutes, he snapped the phone shut and came back. He sat down, took a drink of wine and let out an exasperated *tsk*.

“What’s the matter?”

“It’s good, but it’s a damn nuisance. That was Maitre Poulain. They found Claude Martin.”

“They want me to identify him?” Just her luck.

“Not yet, at least not for now. He admits he was at the house Wednesday night. But, naturally, denies any knowledge of the break-in and expressed shock and horror at his aunt’s attack.”

“They think he did it?”

Another shrug. “Who can tell what the police think? For me, I don’t see how he can have done it alone. They’ll work him over until he squeals no doubt, but at least, we will be undisturbed tonight.”

Left in peace to finish their oysters, the chicken with truffles and a wildly decadent fruit salad saturated with Kirsch.

They had their coffee on the same balcony as last time.

Part of her wished Branko were there too, but... She set her cup in the saucer and looked at Luc. She was not about to complain at the prospect of a night with him. “This is getting to be a habit.”

“A very good habit, I think.” She wouldn’t argue with that. “We’re here, safe. The police are doing what they should do. It’s time for us to do what we both want. Kneel.”

Good thing she’d put the cup down or she’d have baptized herself with espresso. Her throat tightened, her heart raced and damn if her cunt didn’t flood at a single word.

Okay, a single word, spoken with utter authority.

She was on her knees before she realized it. Head bowed, eyes on his polished shoes and a smile on her face.

Nothing stopped a true Dom, not crime, investigations nor shocking events. And Luc was a true Dom no matter what Branko might think.

“Are you disposed to obedience tonight?” Luc asked, his voice low and sultry this time.

“I will do whatever you ask.” Hell, just saying it gave her thrills up and down her spine.

“I wonder if you truly mean that,” he mused. “Take off your top and your brassiere. No one can see, and if they could, it wouldn’t matter. Obeying me is more important than what a few passersby might think.”

Anyway, she had her back to the street. She unbuttoned her blouse and unsnapped her bra. Feeling the evening air on her breasts, Helen smiled. She’d always loved al fresco sex. She’d have to suggest it to Luc. Not now though, the stone was hard on her knees. For a fuck, she’d prefer a nice meadow or at least a blanket.

“What’s on your mind, Helen?”

He would ask that, wouldn’t he? “I’m thinking how much I’d like to fuck you in the open air. But not here, on this balcony, maybe in the garden of Les Santons.”

“You would, would you? But not while the police are hovering about. Or would you like that?”

“No.”

“I am glad to hear it. Sharing you with Branko is one thing, but I’m not letting *Capitaine* Rolle and his cohorts have a go at you.”

Neither was she. Although the arrangement between Luc and Branko still mystified her. Not that she’d worry about that right this minute. She lowered her head, knowing how much that gesture turned a Dom on. “I want to please you. Only you.”

“This would please me.”

He dropped a flogger on the ground between them. The suede tresses brushed her thigh as it fell. They were bright pink, wide and smooth. She so wanted to feel the warmth of the handle in her hand and run her fingers through the soft suede. She looked up at him. “May I touch it?”

He raised an eyebrow. “You don’t want it touching you? It’s yours you know. I bought it after our first night, knowing how much you yearned for the kiss of a *fouet* on your skin.”

“I would like that too.” She felt oddly shy. Not an emotion she was used to. “I just like to feel the tresses between my fingers.”

“I see.” He paused as if considering her request. “Pick it up. By the handle.” The handle was firm, covered with matching cloth. Better than leather if the hands got sweaty. “Give it to me.”

She handed it handle first, the way Edwin always expected.

“Here, feel it.” Luc held it on his knees, the tresses hanging down.

She didn’t wait to be asked twice. Knew better. She reached out and stroked the tresses first, then reached in with both hands and let the soft strips of suede run through her fingers. Her nipples tightened, her clit hummed and her breath caught as her mind leapt forward, knowing she’d soon feel those soft tresses across her body.

“It’s beautiful.” She lifted a cluster of tresses, brought them to her face to inhale the scent of good suede.

“Does it feel good against your face?” Luc asked.

She nodded. “Yes.”

“Can you imagine how it will feel on your naked body?”

She didn’t have to imagine. The prospect alone sent her cunt flowing even more. “Please,” she whispered.

“Of course, my dear. But first, I think, you should worship my cock.” She reached for his zip. “Not here, too hard on your knees. Come inside.” He helped her to her feet, then, in one move, whisked her over his shoulder and carried her into the bedroom.

He lowered her down his body and set her on her feet. “I’ve changed my mind,” Luc said. “You can suck me later. Now, I want to watch you strip.”

He sat on one of the upright gilt armchairs, crossed his legs and waited. Pity she didn’t have sexy music to really give him a show. She’d done that many a time for Edwin, but this was Luc and he seemed happy without. Still...

She rolled her hips and started humming the stripper song. His gorgeous laugh was the only encouragement she needed. She kicked off one shoe, then turned away from him and discarded the other. Coming back, in a slow, hip-rolling walk across the carpet, she undid the zip on her skirt. As she turned, it dropped to her feet and she stepped out of it. If she’d thought of this ahead of time, she’d have worn lacy topped thigh highs, and a silky slip. As it was, she had a pair of black panties but she took as long as possible shimmying out of them before ending up in front of him and kneeling once again.

“Nice,” he said, taking her chin in his fingers and tilting her head up, “but you will be even nicer tied to the bed.”

Her nipples ached at the prospect. The thought of being spread-eagled for him, open and exposed, sent her need into overdrive. To think she'd felt tired and weary before they came upstairs.

"Come." He took hold of her upper arms, lifted her to her feet and led her over to the foot of the bed. He tossed a pillow on the carpet and made her kneel. No spread eagling after all. He bound her hands to the brass crosspiece. She rested her forehead against the cool of a metal upright and took several slow breaths.

Would he hit hard? Suede didn't sting like leather but still packed a punch. How long? Taking a flogging prone and bound was one thing, but now she had to stay upright and reasonably still.

She pressed closer to the metal, feeling the sheets and bedclothes in the spaces between the brass rods.

How long was he going to make her wait? Would he go hard? Slow? Give her breathing space between lashes? Waiting sent her mind into a spin. She longed for him to start, to take her through the hurt to the euphoria beyond and...

"Don't you dare move," Luc said, sounding as calm as if he were asking her to hand him the newspaper. "I like the sight of you on your knees, naked, submissive, a little scared but very, very excited." As he spoke, he slipped his hand between her legs. "I was right. You want a beating, don't you?"

"Please."

"Soon. Be patient." He hung the flogger over the foot of the bed so a couple of tresses brushed her face and shoulder and he didn't say another word. She sensed him moving behind her. Rolling up his sleeves perhaps or... no. She heard a zip going. Was he undressing? Helen smiled, wishing she could watch, but decided it was best to obey. "Don't move" didn't leave any leeway for turning around and gawking.

So she waited, aware of his movements behind her. The flogger moved away. Luc slapped it against the side of the bed three times. She couldn't help but count them and braced herself for the first blow. Would he hit her shoulders, back, ass? He'd certainly appreciated a reddened ass after Branko's efforts.

It came softly between her shoulder blades, the tresses trailing down her spine in a soft caress, all the way down her ass and thighs to her feet and up again.

The sigh came from somewhere deep inside her. "That's wonderful!"

"You like that. Good." Down it came again, even more slowly this time. Snaking across her back, touching every inch of her skin, or so it seemed, kissing the soft flesh under her ass cheeks and stroking her thighs.

"Kneel wide. Spread your knees as wide as you can and stay firm."

She shifted and waited. Luc didn't disappoint. He ran the flogger up and down the inside of her thigh until she whimpered. Much more of this and she'd come just from the caress of suede.

He stopped, paused for a minute and, without warning, brought the flogger down hard across her ass. Helen gasped and grabbed at the brass rail to steady herself as he hit her repeatedly, with little pause between the lashes, and her body sung with sensation.

She was crying out, caught in the maelstrom between joy and pain, as each sting crossed and crisscrossed the last and her body, from shoulders to the backs of her knees, stung with excitement.

An extra hard one came up between her legs, caught her clit and wrung a scream from her. That triggered something deep within her and she jerked and rocked as sensation poured through her. She screamed again and again, vaguely aware of his arms around her and the near collapse of her body against the bed.

His lips brushed her neck and brought up another groan as her cunt throbbed with the last waves of her climax.

"You are magnificent," he said, untying her hands. "You come so easily. It was supposed to last longer, but never mind. Now, it's my turn."

He swept her up in his arms, laid her on her back on the cool sheets -- tweaking every nerve ending at the pressure -- and climbed on the bed. He propped a pillow under her head and knelt astride. "Now suck me!"

She needed no second asking. Lifting her head, Helen opened her mouth and swallowed him. Deep.

She loved his cock, loved the taste of him, the sensation against her tongue and the touch of the smooth head against her lips. Only this time, he took over. Supporting her head, he fucked her mouth, marking her as his. Through her submission, she sensed his control, the need to

imprint himself and his cock on her consciousness. Maybe a need to obliterate Branko, at least for these few hours.

Whatever his need or intent, she welcomed him and his male power and as he came in her mouth, her clit responded, a second wave of climaxes convulsed her, and by the time he withdrew, sated and satisfied, she really was a limp heap of womanhood.

“You are incredible,” she said, between gasps. “Luc, in spite of all the awfulness the past two days, I am so glad I’m here.”

“So am I,” he replied, adding something else but it was lost as she drifted off to sleep.



## Chapter 13

Helen awoke to sun on the ceiling and the sound of the shower, smelled Luc's scent on his cooled pillow and smiled. Could life be better than this? Waking up after sharing a bed with a man who satisfied her as totally as anyone ever had in her life?

Of course there were the problems of the break-in, Madame Louise's attack, and the cases of damaged books that would keep her busy for weeks, if not months. Lots more time for lovely fucking and, with a bit of luck, she'd have both of them again next time. On the other hand, if she stayed here too long, she'd turn into an insatiable sex fiend.

Would that be so bad?

Not really. Between them they'd keep her satisfied. Her back and ass still retained the wonderful, post flogging glow and she licked her lips remembering the taste of Luc's cock. This was the life!

And to top it off, she had the treat of a naked Luc coming into her line of vision. Naked and still a little damp and smelling of shampoo and man.

"You need to shower," Luc said, leaning over to kiss her. "I had a call from Maitre Poulain. We need to see him, then I have to take you to the police to identify Claude Martin in person."

So much for thoughts of sex and a lazy breakfast.

\* \* \*

They had time for coffee and brioche and then down to Maitre Poulain's office in an old house in Nice.

"We have some difficulties and some good news," Poulain said, as they sat in his office, a high-ceilinged room with three tall windows looking out on the street. "We are fortunate. The police believed you, Madame, and doubly fortunate you did not open that package. It contained several books, yes, but also two kilos of pure heroin."

"Oh, my God!" No wonder they tore the place apart looking for it.

"The other significant news is Madame Louise Girond died in the night."

“How terrible,” Helen said.

Poulain gave a rather callous shrug -- seemed callous to Helen anyway. “Perhaps, but she had little chance of recovering. However, faced with the charge of murder, her nephew sang for the police, and named his accomplices, including the contacts in Lacoste. They are still cleaning up there. They have two and are searching for one more. You will still need to identify Claude Martin, Madame,” he said, with a nod to Helen, “but the case is mostly solved. Would be wonderful if all crimes were resolved that easily.”

“Not so easily for poor Madame Louise. Do you think she knew what was happening?”

“Not entirely. She knew about his past and his record. He was her godson and it seems she felt responsible for him, but if Martin is to be believed, when they didn’t find the cache among the books, two of his partners went to see her. She didn’t know enough to tell them where it was despite their ill-treatment.”

“She couldn’t have known,” Helen said. “She left for the day before I took it over to my apartment.”

“And no doubt when she told them she didn’t know where it was, they thought she was lying. Sad but...”

“I will claim her body,” Luc said, “and arrange for the funeral. Tell them that.”

Poulain nodded. “Very well. There is one other matter that *Capitaine* Rolle was quite clear on. You, Madame,” he nodded to Helen again, “have neither a *permis de travail* nor a *carte de sejour*.” He looked at Luc. “You must, as her employer, take care of that. I have negotiated for you a few days’ grace, and since Madame Crewe will be needed to give evidence at the trial, they will not deport her, but you must take care of that.”

“Damn,” Luc muttered, “never thought to bother.”

“Then you must bother and see all taxes are paid.”

“I’ll see to it.” Luc smiled at her. “Don’t worry.”

\* \* \*

That was pretty much that, a fifteen-minute sojourn with *Capitaine* Rolle to identify Claude Martin. A little longer while they stopped by the hospital and Luc signed papers to have poor Madame Louise’s body taken to the French equivalent of a funeral home and then they were heading to pick up Branko and drive up to the *auberge* on the *Haute Corniche* where Luc had taken her that first evening.

“Well,” Luc said after they’d pretty much caught Branko up with the latest developments. “We must go to the funeral and you must find me a new cook.”

Branko nodded. “No problem.”

“I’ll see to your papers,” Luc told Helen. “You’re staying longer, you understand?”

“Until the trial at least.” How speedy were trials in France? “Think you can get it sorted out?”

“Of course, but I’ll see it’s permanent.”

“Yes,” Branko said. “You’re not leaving Les Santons anytime soon. It’s my turn next.”

Helen smiled at Luc and Branko. Who was she to argue with a pair of dominants?

## **Madeleine Oh**

Madeleine Oh is a woman of mystery. Some claim she is the granddaughter of an odalisque from the Bey's harem in Algiers or that her father was a direct descendant of the line of Welsh princes. Others say that her parents met whilst working for the French Resistance during WWII, and there have even been rumors that she was born on a ranch in Patagonia (an alternative version says a farm in Ohio). Perhaps all of this is pure and utter fiction. But truth or fiction, readers love her wildly imaginative erotic tales.

For excerpts and contests visit Madeleine's web site: [www.madeleineoh.com](http://www.madeleineoh.com). For news of new releases, join Madeleine's Yahoo! announcement list: [news-madeleineoh-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:news-madeleineoh-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).