



G. G. Royale

Loose Id

The
Lovely Kittengirls
of
New Orleans

*The Lovely Kittengirls
of Mew Orleans*

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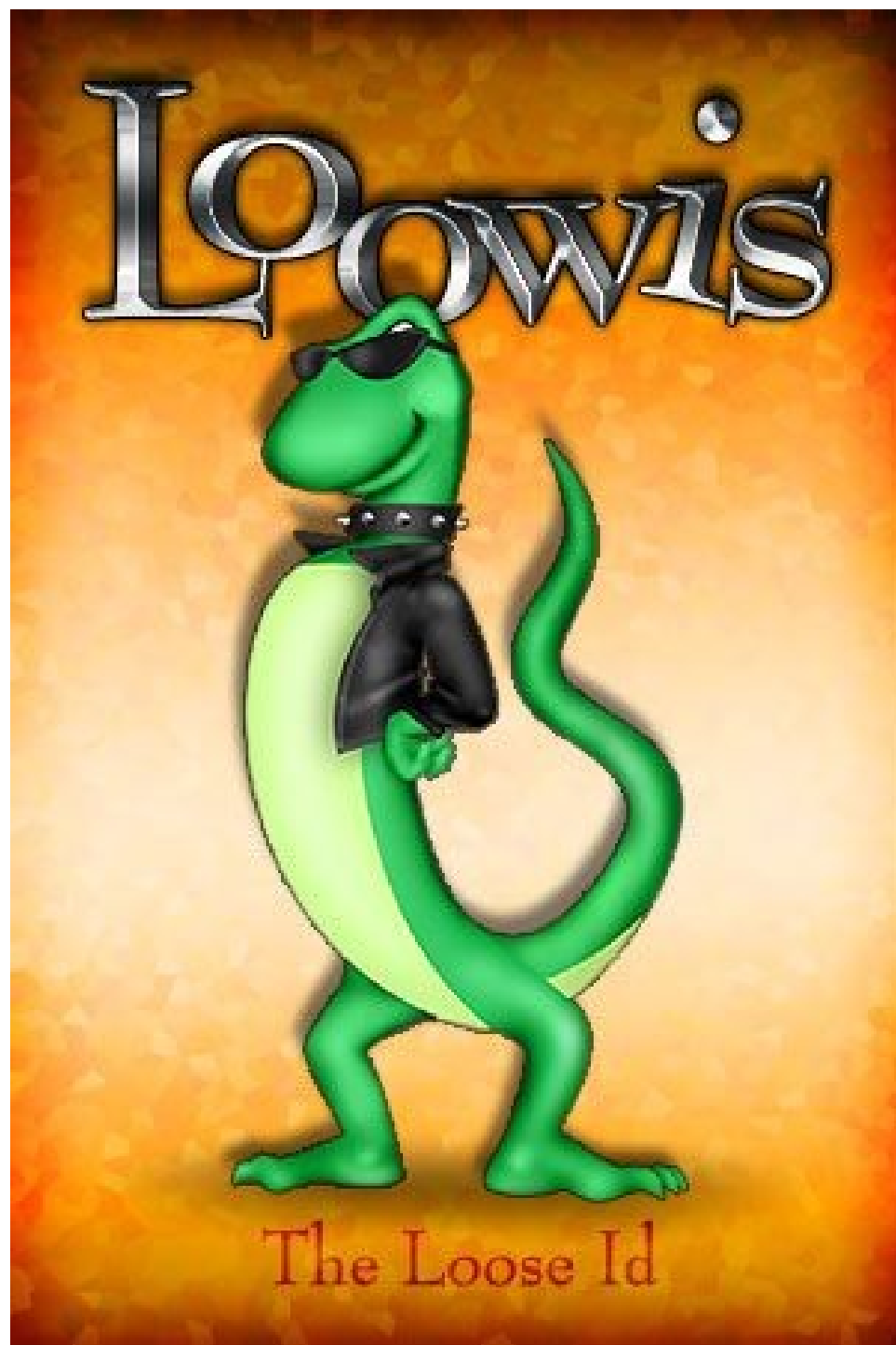
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Chapter One

A bead of sweat dribbled between Margot's bare breasts. It tickled fiercely, but she could do nothing about it. Master Grant had fastened her wrists to the arms of the St. Andrew's cross. She couldn't even move her head to blow the droplet along. He had secured that with a harness attached to the two uprights of the cross.

Early August in New Orleans, and this event *had* to take place in an un-air-conditioned “art space” in the Ninth Ward. Giant box fans whirled all around the expansive warehouse, but they only managed to push around the already heated air.

She looked across the room to where a few other subs—collared, cuffed, and tethered to ceiling supports—sat, legs spread, on huge blocks of ice. They wore hoods and nothing else, and cocktail-holding patrons circled them as they would statues in a museum. From this distance, Margot thought the girls lucky, but she knew, up close, the ice on her pussy wouldn't feel that great for very long. Probably they'd have sore legs in the morning from trying to perch in a squat over the ice rather than letting it directly touch her skin.

Margot sighed, hoping the level of noise in the room concealed her expression of boredom from Master Grant. He stood a few feet away, talking to some other partygoers. He talked with his hands, managing to keep the one holding his drink steady. The one holding the flogger flailed about as he gestured. Margot had better ideas for that whip, but she couldn't voice them. Or maybe she should, and he would put it to use? He had disappointed her again, and she had decided she would no longer scene with him. He seemed to enjoy the process of positioning her, gave her plenty of attention then, but he forgot her, leaving her needy, strapped up, while he schmoozed and drank and did everything but dominate. If he didn't get her off soon, she would scream every safe word she knew until all the Doms in the place ran to her rescue.

Or maybe she wouldn't have to. Another Dom had walked up and motioned toward her. Master Grant nodded, and the newcomer approached the cross.

“I have been given permission to use you. Your safe word is 'cream pie,’” he told her.

What? That's actually two words.

“And you will call me 'Master.’”

Duh.

From the pocket of his black trousers, he pulled out a set of nipple clamps joined by a weighted chain. He approached, grinning, one clamp in each hand. Margot widened her eyes in the appropriate response for a sub dreading what would happen, but she didn't feel it. She'd gone through all this before, and this master obviously had nothing new to offer.

Same old song and dance.

The cold metal met her tits, and *that* brought a little response from her body. She writhed as they pinched.

“I'm very good at what I do,” Master assured her, taking a small leather paddle from his back pocket. This man came fully equipped, and at least he seemed to feel confident. He circled around the St. Andrew's cross and then appeared in Margot's sights again. “Very good,” he repeated and moved in to take her mouth in an aggressive kiss. Margot gave in; he expected it of her, and she'd long ago grown familiar with the ins and outs of the game. She wished she could melt into it, give herself up as she used to do when she'd first found submission.

As he kissed her, he ran the paddle up and down the outside of her thigh, a hint at what he had planned. Then he stepped away, a finger of one hand lingering on the chain between the nipple clamps, and swatted her thigh hard. Margot gasped, then smiled. He had talent with the paddle: not too hard, good snap in the wrist. She tried to move her body closer to him, but her restraints prevented it.

The new Dom smacked her again, this time a little higher up her leg.

“I want to face you the other direction and then give you a good spanking. Master Grant said you haven't behaved appropriately tonight.”

How would he know? He's barely looked at me.

“Have you been bad?” Master asked.

Margot inwardly rolled her eyes. She hated this line of questioning. “Yes, Master. I have been a very naughty girl.” Not the first time she'd ever spoken those words and probably not the

last. Slowly the new Dom undid her head, wrist, and ankle restraints. Margot relished the few moments she had to stretch her arms and neck before he maneuvered her around to face the cross. He removed the nipple clamps, then fastened her wrists and ankles to the cross but left her head free. Her front now pressed against the hard wood of the cross.

“This way, you can watch if you want to,” Master explained. He ran the paddle across her ass, tickling her slightly with its surface, teasing her.

Margot didn't want to watch; she liked the surprise. Instead she let the side of her head rest against one of the uprights and waited.

“Three swats, I think, and then we can move on. We must do this to establish that I now have control over you. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master.”

Master reached one hand around to tease an already sore nipple while the other rested the paddle against Margot's ass.

“Well then, sub, let's get started.”

Thwack!

One. He let the paddle linger, featherlight, against her skin. Margot sighed, only this time boredom didn't cause it. This, she could deal with.

The master pinched her nipple again and raised the paddle from her rear. Another smack, this one as precise and invigorating as the first. *Two.* He definitely knew how to spank.

The new, nameless master had worked her close to release. Margot wanted nothing more than for him to take her, here on the cross in front of everybody. Did he have the balls to do it?

“Who's in control?” he asked.

“You are, Master.” Margot panted. He swatted her a third time, and she rubbed her pussy against the padded cross, trying to find some satisfaction, but she needed someone or something in her to make it work.

“You there!” the master called out.

Margot tried to crane her head around to see whom he called, but she couldn't get a good look.

“Come here,” the master said. He pulled a man into Margot's line of sight. One of the beefcake sub cocktail waiters. He wore a collar and cuffs, leather pants, and a white towel folded over one arm. So Master didn't have the balls and wanted to use someone who couldn't say no.

Margot felt a little disappointed, but the waiter looked hot and big, and he would most likely do her right, on the off chance he liked girls and not boys. She hadn't seen him around before, so he had probably just started working the movable party scene. *Who knows?* Maybe he wasn't even into all this and just needed the extra money the gig paid.

“What is your name, sub?” Master asked.

“Five, Sir.”

The event organizers had assigned the waiters numbers to further degrade and add to the sense of subhumanness.

“Well, Five, I want you to fuck this sub from behind.” Master placed his paddle back in his rear pocket, then ran a finger between Margot's ass cheeks. He dipped in farther. She felt his fingers against her pussy, probing, stroking. She tried to grind down against it, but he withdrew it too quickly. “She is ready for you, Five. Will you take her as I have asked?”

“Of course, Sir.”

Margot watched over her shoulder as Five set down his bar towel on the cement floor and undid the fly of his leather pants. From his pocket, he withdrew a foil-wrapped condom. With a few quick strokes—eyes on Margot—he made himself hard and slipped on the condom. Then he stepped up behind her.

Margot could feel his heat against her back. His chin rested on her shoulder as he positioned himself.

“You have a generous master to share you like this,” Five whispered in her ear. His dick nudged at her asshole a few times, then slipped farther along to the folds of her pussy.

“He's not my master,” Margot said quietly. “I'm on loan.”

Five laughed and finally drove home. Margot groaned as she took his hard length. It felt perfect. He reached his hands around and began caressing the tips of her nipples, not pinching them or anything, just running his palms across them.

“Pull your hands away,” Master barked at Five. “You're blocking the view. If I have to, I'll chain your hands as well. Behind your back.”

Margot glanced over at him. Master had moved to their side, so that he could see everything: her breasts crushed against the cross, Five slipping in and out from behind... Master stepped forward and ran a hand down her side, then brought it over to her clit. He pinched it.

“Don't keep me waiting,” he said. Margot nodded and rubbed herself against his hand while at the same time grinding back against Five's thrusts. She felt her climax building.

Behind her, Five grunted. She could imagine his face: eyes squeezed tight, lips pinched between his teeth as he blocked out everything around him and focused on her.

The face she pictured made her giggle, and that earned her a flick of her clit from Master.

“Stay focused,” he told her.

“Yes, Master.” She gasped. She closed her eyes finally, given over to the sensation completely. She could feel Five's rigid cock slipping in and out of her pussy, his hips slapping her ass as he drove in, over and over. Master's fingers skated over her clit. Margot's body tensed, and her breathing became ragged. Any second now. One more flick from Master.

There!

Margot came, calling out, “Yes, Master! For you,” as her body shuddered and tingled.

Behind her, Five continued to thrust. Master stepped back, keeping his hand, covered in her juices, up and away from himself like a surgeon who'd just washed.

“Away from her,” Master told him. Margot felt Five hesitate, still buried in her cunt, then pull out. She felt empty when the air hit her ass and pussy.

“Finish yourself,” Master commanded. Margot couldn't watch from her angle but imagined Five stripping off the condom and stroking himself to climax. Almost in time with her fantasy, she felt a hot drizzle of cum hit her back.

“Now clean her.”

Five used the rough surface of the bar towel between her legs, then along her back.

Master moved in again and inhaled deeply before speaking.

“Very nice, sub. I will use you again.” He withdrew a business card from his shirt pocket and reached up to tuck it between one of her cuffs and her skin.

Is he asking for a date?

“Grant,” Master said. Even when speaking to other Doms, he seemed in control. Margot liked the idea. “Let your sub down. She's exhausted.”

Master walked away, and Margot lost sight of him. Her legs shook, and she wanted nothing more than for Master Grant to free her arms. Her hands had grown numb, and the cuffs had chafed her wrists. She felt sore all over and wanted a bath and her bed.

Grant approached the cross and reached up to undo the hooks that kept her wrist cuffs fastened to the cross.

“You pleased Master Lev,” Master Grant told her as he lowered her arms to her sides, rubbing them slightly to help restore the circulation. “Good sub.”

When Master Grant had undone her ankles, she turned and surveyed the crowd. She couldn't see Master Lev anywhere, but she felt his card against her skin, damp from perspiration. She might just call him. See if he had the balls to do her in private rather than having a slave do a master's work.

* * *

Well after three a.m., Margot finally made it back to her house. She rented the old slave quarters behind a bigger main house in an old New Orleans neighborhood called the Marigny. Margot loved her neighborhood, the laid-back atmosphere, the short walk to the French Quarter, the coffee shops and bars. She couldn't ask for anything more in a home.

And her landlords, Brad and Brad, were her best friends. She checked their windows to see if they'd left any lights on, but the house sat dark. They'd come to the happening. Must have called it an early night, Margot thought. She imagined them upstairs in their big oak bed, nestled in together for the evening. She envied them and the simple joy they'd found in each other.

With a sigh, Margot unlocked the gate. She pushed her bike through. She locked the gate behind her, taking a double look to make sure no one lurked around the street. She maneuvered her bike down the side alley that ran the length of the main house. The smell of jasmine hung in the air, and the sound of the fountain in the courtyard ahead drew her on. When she got to the courtyard, she propped her bike against the fence and crossed to the back building, her house.

It stood tall and wide, but not deep, two stories with a balcony across the front, overlooking the courtyard. Glass French doors graced the entire facade, top and bottom. Margot

walked through one of these doors and dropped her backpack onto the floor. She stripped off her clothes as she moved through the house, climbed the stairs, and entered her small bathroom. She began filling the chipped, antique claw-foot tub. She poured in some oil that the “priestess” had told her possessed medicinal values particularly suited for her type of lifestyle. The old woman at the botanica might have been fooling with her, but Margot liked the smell, and it made her skin feel great, so she didn't mind paying the price.

Margot looked at herself in the mirror. She had a few red spots on her face where the harness had rubbed. Her green eyes were bloodshot, and shadows already rested beneath them. She let her long brown hair down out of its harsh bun. She didn't like hair pulling during sex, so she put it up to remove the temptation. She ran a brush through her hair a few times, then checked the rest of herself for any bruises or abrasions. Except for the marks on her face, which would probably disappear by morning, and the chafing on her wrists, she looked fine. She'd gotten away fairly easy.

She removed her makeup, climbed into the tub, and turned off the water. She kept her hair out of the water by draping it over the edge of the tub. She tried to float in the shallow tub, to feel weightless as the fatigue of the evening caught up with her. She definitely wouldn't scene with Master Grant, but Master Lev... She had stowed his card in the pocket of her backpack when she changed to leave the show. He had potential. Though whether it was for anything long-term, she couldn't say. And where had he come from? She'd never seen him around the shows before.

She could never find anything long-term, she had to admit. Not since college, when all this seemed so fresh and new, had one Dom really satisfied her. Her first. He would always have a special place in her heart, but even at the time his advanced age precluded any lasting relationship. They had parted on good terms when she'd dropped out of school and moved back to New Orleans. Nearly half a decade had passed since then, five years of bouncing from one Dom to the next and back again; she worried she'd worn out all the Doms in the city. It certainly felt that way. When she'd first started, everything seemed new and interesting. There was a novelty about it that brought her the thrill she needed; vanilla sex had never felt right, and this *had* done it for her. She blamed it on her Catholic-school upbringing in the sheltered, rural Terrebonne Parish. She'd never rebelled in school—not really—and then it all sort of exploded out of her in college. She still needed it, but even the domination and control she could find here no longer seemed enough. Every Dom, at least down here, seemed to be holding back.

Though Margot doubted her recent string of Doms, she didn't doubt this lifestyle suited her. Someone out there would have to fulfill her. She'd considered moving to a city with a more established scene, one with fewer dilettantes and part-timers. But she couldn't bring herself to leave Brad and Brad and her friends and the French Quarter.

Though Margot had grown tired of the scene, she hated something else even more. She hated coming home to an empty house, having to take care of herself after a trying night. She wanted someone to check her wounds and make her tea. Someone with whom she could talk and debrief about the scene.

Margot stood in her tub, the water dripping off her toned body. She definitely would skip the gym tomorrow before work. She grabbed the one towel she owned from its hook on the wall and dried her top half before stepping onto the old rag rug gracing her bathroom floor. She'd salvaged the rug from an estate sale her parents had orchestrated through their auction house in Houma. The rug would have ended up in the trash, but Margot loved its tattered edges, its obvious history.

She should definitely make the forty-five-minute drive into Terrebonne Parish to see them sometime soon. Maybe go out to the fish camp with her dad for a week or two.

She dried her bare legs and hung her towel back up. Brushing her teeth, Margot wondered how long it would take her to fall asleep. She exited the bathroom, leaving the door open and the light on, and crossed the room to her bed.

Brad and Brad had thought it strange she didn't own a TV, so they had bought her a small one for her last birthday and even ran a line for cable from the main house. Margot threw herself down onto her bed, really nothing more than a futon mattress on the floor and a nest of old quilts, crumpled sheets, and pillows. No one ever saw this room, so Margot went for comfort and security rather than poshness. She arranged the blankets and pillows in a nest around her, then dug around for the remote to the TV. Adrenaline kept her mind moving, though her body felt exhausted. She hoped a little TV would distract her enough to nod off.

She flipped randomly through the channels, waiting for something to catch her eye.

Something did.

What the hell is this? Margot had to stifle a giggle. On the screen, a cat sat on a table in front of an audience. A judge petted it and felt it, then made it play with a toy. A voice-over commented on the muscle tone, the coat, the attentiveness, and the playfulness of the cat.

The audience appeared engrossed, clapping politely when the judge nodded and stepped away from the cat. The apparent owner picked the cat up, bowing slightly, and another owner approached with a different cat. Cages and cages of cats lined tables behind the judge. All the focus was on the cat: the audience, the judge, the owner, the camera... Margot thought back to Master Grant and his inattentiveness to her during the scene earlier in the evening. He would make a terrible cat handler.

The camera cut to an interview with an owner. The owner petted and fondled the cat continuously while she spoke, never letting it get distracted by the other cats around it or the camera or the strange people. Even while doing something else, the owner clearly had her mind first and foremost on the cat. Margot wondered what it would feel like to have all the attention on her instead of other partygoers or other subs. Everyone paid attention to that cat; the audience seemed rapt. No one schmoozed or drank or eyed other animals in the room.

She continued to watch the cat show until, at some point, she fell asleep.

Chapter Two

Margot opened her eyes and stretched. She raised her head and looked around. Through the bars of her cage, she could see hundreds of people milling around. They were here to see her, she knew, and she reveled in that. People kept streaming past her cage and looking in, wiggling a finger to get her attention, oohing and aahing. They all thought her gorgeous. Rightly so. Her owner had brushed and preened her to perfection.

Margot batted at her toy mouse, lounged on her leopard-print cushion, and waited.

Ah, there stood her handler. Margot pawed the cage to get his attention. He approached the cage, but for some reason, she couldn't see his face clearly. It seemed like shadow covered it completely, moving when he moved.

Margot meowed in question as her owner opened her cage. She stood and arched her back in a wonderful stretch, trying to guide his fingers to the perfect spot along her spine. She dug her claws into the cushion and kneaded as he scratched her right where she wanted. Margot knew she would show next, and that made her happy.

"There's my girl," she heard. It seemed as if it came from many miles away, but Margot knew it was her owner who spoke to her.

Soon she felt his full hands on her, one along her back, one underneath her as he lifted her out of the cage. He held her against his chest, supporting her, stroking her. Margot purred, the vibration of her own body sparking a simmering need deep within. She nuzzled his shoulder with her head, enjoying the rough feel of his woven shirt under the thin fur of her forehead. Then she noticed the toy sticking out of his shirt pocket. Sparkling ribbons affixed to a stick. She twisted her body to get a good swipe at it.

Her owner tsk-tsked and held her more tightly. "Bad kitty," he said.

Margot stilled.

"It's time," he said, his voice still distant and deep. He carried her through the crowd, his grip on her tight to prevent Margot's temptation to investigate all the amazing smells and sights in the giant room. They arrived at another set of cages, and her handler placed Margot carefully inside one. He removed a comb from his pants pocket and quickly ran it through her sleek fur.

"Good luck," he said, closing the cage door.

Margot stretched again and looked around. This cage proved less richly attired than her own, and the cats in the cages to her right and left sat much too close. She hissed at one that looked askance at her, and then rested her head on her paws to watch the goings-on at the table in front. There, a man handled each cat, talking about her and showing her off to the crowd.

Soon enough, her turn came. The man opened her cage and took her out.

He laid her out on the show table, and suddenly, as in the way of dreams—for this was a dream, wasn't it?—Margot was herself: human again, naked, and perched on top of the table. She gazed out at the crowd. Heat filled her. Everyone watched her, and she loved being the center of attention.

She glanced at the judge and realized now he wore leather pants and nothing else and held a riding crop instead of a cat toy. Still, he spoke about her as he would a cat. Margot giggled inwardly but didn't let it show. She liked the idea of being a cat: sleek, athletic, smooth.

"Here's a beautiful specimen. Now remember, as with any entry, we are looking for several things. Condition, beauty, personality, and show presence. And boy, she sure has all of this, doesn't she?"

The judge ran his hand down her thigh, over her knee, and down her calf. Margot sighed at the contact. He turned her on the table to face the audience and ever so gently pulled her legs apart so the audience had a full view of her.

The heat within Margot intensified. Would the audience approve? She could feel the blush in her cheeks bloom down across her chest. She desperately wanted them to like her most of all.

"First, let's look at condition. Limbs are well toned; obviously her owner takes care of her. Her skin is creamy and unmarred, perfect for her breed, but with a nice blush to show us she is excited. Her breasts are high and firm, and her pussy... Well, it looks just beautiful, doesn't it?"

Margot relished the praise.

“And let's move on to beauty, then, shall we?” The judge used the tip of his riding crop to tilt Margot's chin up. “Symmetry of features is perfect, eyes are clear and alert, and her coat is long and shiny. Again, an excellent example of the breed.”

The judge then guided Margot to lie down on the table. Her insides quivered. What would he do to her? She thought of all kinds of naughty things the audience would enjoy.

“Now, let's explore the most subjective categories: personality and playfulness.” The judge grinned, ear to ear, looking more like the Cheshire cat, though Margot played the cat in her dream. “So far, she has been pretty demure. I wonder if we can get her to show off a little for us.”

The judge set down his riding crop on a side table and took up something else. A cat-o'-nine-tails. Margot sucked in her breath as she watched him. That *would* be good. She always liked a little pain with her exposure. He approached her, running his fingers through the strands of the short whip.

He brought it down gently across her stomach, then her thighs. Margot quivered and sighed.

“She likes this, evidently,” the handler said. “Let's try something else.”

He turned away again and came back with a vibrator, huge and black. He switched it on, and the humming of it seemed to fill the entire auditorium. No one in the audience spoke or breathed or made any sound. The judge stalked to the table.

“She won't need lube, will she?” he said. He brushed the vibrator against her thighs. Margot instinctively spread her legs. The judge ran it through her folds first, slickening it with her freely flowing juices. She moaned as the vibrations hit her clitoris.

Then, quickly and smoothly, the judge insinuated the vibrator into her wet cunt. He slipped it in and out, and Margot felt the tension gathering at her core. The vibrator affected every part of her, as if a thousand vibrators surrounded her rather than just the one vibrator inside her. Her body sang in response, and ringing filled her ears. She arched up off the table, seeking the vibrator, wanting it to fill her.

“Come, my pretty kitty,” the judge whispered in her ear. “Come!”

* * *

Margot woke drenched in sweat. The television was still on, showing a program about humpback whales singing to their mates. She turned onto her back and stared at the ceiling, her heart beating heavily. She'd never come so hard in a dream before. Already the details began to grow hazy, but she remembered the judge at a table and the audience, and all the attention on her...

She ran her hands over her eyes to wipe away the sleep, then brushed her hair from her sticky face. She felt herself between her legs. Wet. Oh God, so wet. She nearly blushed, despite the fact that no one could see it.

The dream would not leave Margot; though she couldn't replay it like a movie, glimpses of things and the *feelings* of it stayed with her. She rose from her bed and crossed to the bathroom. She looked at the wall clock as she passed. It read 1:00 p.m. She had plenty of time to get ready.

Definitely start with a cold shower, Margot thought. Only, once she got in the shower, the dream still had her hot. She couldn't just soap herself and be done with it. She found her fingers lingering over the already swollen lips of her sex, her already engorged clit.

Her lust overcame her, and Margot had to sit down in the shower as she drove the fingers of her right hand into her cunt and used the index finger of her left hand to work her clit. The vague memories of the dream, of that faraway voice of her owner, of the judge examining her in front of the audience, drove her on. With the cold water of the shower splashing down on her, she came again, nearly as hard as she had in the dream.

She sat down hard in the claw-foot tub, the water still coursing down over her. She had to take a minute to catch her breath. While she enjoyed pleasuring herself, it wasn't the same as having a man, and now the sweetness of it faded, leaving a little regret in its place.

After her shower, she grabbed her laptop and nestled in her bed. Brad and Brad were nice enough to keep their wireless network in the main house open for her, so she logged on and started researching cat shows. She looked, then, at a few pony-play sites. One of them had a link to a kitty-play adult site. Margot had thought herself pretty savvy when it came to the underground world of fetishists and BDSM, but she'd never even thought to look for kitten play. And without last night's dream, she never would have known it could turn her on.

Something started tickling her in the corner of her mind as she ran through page after page on Google image search of Japanese catgirl drawings. An idea coalesced. She considered her

developing plan a stroke of genius. Not only would she get off, but she could make a scene of it. No more getting paid by the play-party organizers; she'd do one herself, completely cat themed...

Pussies galore!

Margot giggled.

She sent a few e-mails to friends in the scene who'd want in on the project, then dressed for work. She couldn't wait to get started on her plans.

* * *

Margot locked her bike to a lamppost and went into the hotel through the parking garage. She waved at the attendant, then took the service entrance into the lobby. Soft violin music played, and her low heels clicked across the marble floor as she walked. The cool air quickly evaporated the sweat from her body.

Margot liked her job. It had taken her a couple of years to get the best shifts in the posh hotel bar, and she didn't want to do anything to blow it. She loved the atmosphere, her few regulars, meeting all the people from around the world. Plus the tips kept her pockets modestly lined most months.

She waved to the hotel manager, Mr. Argyle—always good for him to see her arriving on time—and then ducked into the lounge entrance. She crossed the room to the bar and slipped under the gate. Her barback for the evening had already started stocking beer and filling the ice troughs.

“Hey, Tina,” Margot said as she stowed her small purse behind the extra bottles of Bombay gin on the bottom shelf.

Tina pulled her head out of the beer cooler. “Hey, Margot.” She wiped her hands on a bar towel. “We should be all set. Think we'll get busy?”

In August, New Orleans tended to die down—the heat the main cause—but a huge convention of construction contractors and developers had come to town, and they'd completely booked the hotel. Margot figured they'd have a pretty solid night between the before-dinner meetings and the after-dinner hook-ups. “We'll have a great night,” she told Tina.

Tina ran to get another bucket of ice from the kitchen, and Margot went about wiping down the black granite bar top. When she finished, she straightened all the red leather club chairs, dumped and wiped ashtrays, and helped herself to a Coke. She glanced through the entrance and had a look at the fancy grandfather clock in the hotel lobby: four thirty. Tina came back with the ice, and they stood behind the bar, chatting. Margot had taken Tina along on a few of her artistic gigs, so she had no problem filling the younger woman in on all the things that had happened the night before; she left the dream out, not quite sure what to make of it yet.

Just after five, a couple of men came in and took a seat at the corner on the far side of the bar. Margot watched them casually. One was clearly among the contractors and developers. He wore khakis and a polo and had one of those huge phones attached to his belt.

The other, however, really caught Margot's attention. If he had come because of the convention, he stood firmly on the finance side of things. Margot thought the man hadn't seen a hard day of work in his life. He shaved his head clean and polished it; he wore thin, silver-rimmed glasses and impeccably tailored slacks. Someone had even starched and pressed his guayabera. His rich, burnt umber skin gleamed in the amber-tinged lighting of the bar.

"I can take their order?" Tina asked.

"Sure." Margot watched Tina cross the room. She had a game she liked to play: guess the drink. The guy in khakis Margot pegged for something fruity, vacationy—he'd want to feel like this wasn't all business. She guessed a lime daiquiri on the rocks, since this bar didn't have the mixer machines that plagued the French Quarter, or even a blender. He wouldn't call the rum; he'd just be happy with the well.

The other dude. *Hmmm*. Definitely another type altogether. He didn't look like he felt he was on vacation. She'd never seen him in the bar before, but he moved like he felt comfortable here. Definitely a local or had lived in the city awhile. He had some physical clues as to what he might drink, though. That shirt, for one—hip and classic—and those glasses hinted at a certain level of sophistication. Margot guessed he'd order a dry gin martini on the rocks, given the heat, and would probably call his gin. Hendrick's, she thought.

Tina came back from the table. "Margarita, salt, and a vodka tonic. No call on the margarita, Grey Goose vodka."

Margot gave herself three out of a possible five points in her game. Sort of close on the drinks, but not exact. She mixed the margarita first, and soon she went into autopilot. A few more conventioners entered the bar as she mixed the second drink. She looked up from her work, greeted them, and carried on.

She set the two drinks on a tray, and Tina took them out then came back to the bar, cursing under her breath.

"That dude's a real ass," she told Margot.

"What happened?"

"He swears he didn't get what he ordered, and isn't being very nice about it."

Margot thought back. "Oh God. It's my fault. I'm sorry." She began mixing the Grey Goose vodka tonic. "I don't know where my mind went. I made him a gin martini."

Margot took the correct drink out to the table and set it down in front of the black man in the corner. "I'm sorry about the mix-up. Entirely my fault, not Tina's. The martini's on the house, and here's the drink you ordered." She stopped and gave the man her best service-industry smile. "I'm Margot, if there's anything else you need."

Margot. Maxwell Billew filed that name away for later. He had come in to do business, and something as simple as a wrong drink could completely throw off his game. But maybe he'd accomplished something else tonight as well. He noticed things about this Margot, like the bruises around her wrists, evidence of cuffs of some kind, and how easily the color crept into her cheeks as he looked her over.

"I *need* another bartender," he said. He saw the good cheer slip from her face. Then he sipped the vodka tonic she'd brought. Perfectly proportioned, the right amount of everything. He eyed Margot. She seemed a lot like her drink: perfect. Glossy brown hair in tight, braided buns, crisp green eyes, clear skin.

But Maxwell stopped himself. He definitely could not go down that road. It could only lead to disaster. "On second thought, you'll do, but don't make the same mistake again."

The bartender nodded. "Sure. Sorry again. Don't take it out on Tina; I mixed the drinks."

Maxwell watched the bartender scurry back to her bar, obviously afraid she'd alienated other clients with her absence.

"It's good she took the time to correct the mistake herself," Maxwell said thoughtfully.

"Sure was. Plus, got a free drink out of it!"

"And it's all yours, Mr. George." Maxwell's business associate for the evening, Big George, hailed from the Bible Belt. He'd left his family at home and had evidently decided to indulge in every sin imaginable while out from under the watchful eye of his wife and children. First on that list was drinking. Then he wanted to eat till he became sick, he said. And the strip clubs. Maxwell wanted to indulge the man, get on his good side, and get a good deal.

Big George dealt in drywall.

Maxwell needed a lot of drywall.

"So let's get started with estimates, shall we?" Maxwell prompted. "Then we can move on to the more *entertaining* portion of our evening."

Maxwell had acquired several buildings nearly destroyed by Hurricane Katrina but salvageable. Perfect for a savvy developer to make a huge profit and help people in the process. He intended to turn those properties into mixed-income housing with on-site retail, personal services, and dining. The model of development had worked with the Cotton Mill and the American Can Company. It would be the footprint of the future of housing, and no place needed it more than New Orleans. His warehouses were a tad more modest than their predecessors, but Maxwell wanted to create intimate, neighborly buildings.

Big George seemed very enthusiastic about the deal. He took the smartphone from its waist clip and began punching in numbers. Maxwell sipped his drink thoughtfully while the other man worked. *Quite well proportioned. Yes.* He looked across the room at the bar. He met Margot's gaze. She looked away quickly. She'd obviously been staring.

Maxwell smiled.

Margot looked down quickly.

"Wasn't he a dick?" Tina asked Margot.

Oh, she caught me staring too, Margot thought. “Yeah, I guess.” Definitely forceful. Definitely controlling. *I wonder...* “I kind of got a vibe off him.”

“*That* vibe?” Tina asked.

Tina knew what she meant. The *Dom* vibe.

Margot nodded.

“That would explain it, then.”

Over the course of the night, they went through gallons of hurricane mix, kegs of Abita Amber, and plenty of Jägermeister. Conventioneers came and went. Margot tried to keep her eye on the table in the corner, but at one point an order distracted her, and when she glanced back, the man had left. After Tina cleaned the table, Margot asked if they'd left a tip.

“Five bucks,” Tina said. “Not bad for one round.”

At least they hadn't stiffed her. “Paid in cash?” Margot asked. Tina nodded. Margot sighed. If he'd used a credit card, she could have at least known his name.

No city ordinance mandated that bars in New Orleans close at a certain time. At midnight, Margot's relief arrived. Sig worked the overnight shift on Saturdays. It usually consisted of a rush a couple of hours after midnight and then an early morning of mimosas, Ramos gin fizzes, and Bloody Marys. Margot had worked the overnight shift a time or two and was happy that he enjoyed it, so she didn't have to fight for the shifts she preferred and that paid the best.

When he arrived, she grabbed her purse.

“Hey,” she said. “Meet me tomorrow at the coffee shop, okay?” Sig also worked a lot of the same shows Margot did, though he usually stood behind the bar rather than out front with a whip.

“Why?” Sig asked.

“I've got something for us to plan.”

Chapter Three

Three friends familiar with the “artistic” S&M play scene in New Orleans joined Margot at the local coffee shop on Sunday afternoon. They'd all, at some point, worked at throwing fetish street balls and warehouse masquerades. New Orleans had no shortage of amateur party planners and event organizers. Margot had brought a composition book for notes and had already outlined a general plan of attack by the time her partners in crime arrived. She wanted to have something ready to say so she didn't sound like a complete idiot. She'd also already consumed two iced mochas and ordered a third, and she couldn't get her leg to stop bouncing.

The group consisted of Haley, a costume designer and seamstress; Sig, the bartender Margot worked with at the hotel; and Gel, who designed sets for the New Orleans Opera and floats for Mardi Gras krewes when he didn't have a swinging couple using him as a houseboy.

Haley was another sub who often did shows with Margot; she'd worked as an ice girl at the last party. The others, while willing to don cuffs or swing whips if a performance called for it, didn't fall into the lifestyle the way Margot did, but she knew they possessed the skills she needed to execute her plan. It would, after all, take more than just Doms and subs to put on this show.

“We'll split the income four ways, if that works,” she told them.

“Sounds good,” Sig said. “But what exactly is this party? I mean, you don't strike me as the kind of person who would want to throw these out of the blue. You always seem content showing up, working, and walking away.”

Margot made a note in her composition book. Sig was right. Until this weekend, Margot had never wanted to be in charge of an event, just to reap the multiple benefits. But things had changed, and they needed to understand that to understand her drive for this project. Hopefully if it worked out, she could find herself a man who treated her like the cat owner and that judge had in her dream. Margot never felt shy around these people; they all lived in the neighborhood and

hung out together quite often. Her closest core of friends—they knew her well. She could tell them anything.

And she did.

“I had a dream,” she started.

“Oh great.” Gel rolled his eyes mockingly, but Margot could tell his friendly teasing from the biting ripostes he used when he didn't like someone.

“Stop it,” Haley said and slapped the queen's hand.

Gel held it to his chest, stroked the injured member with his other hand, and frowned at Haley.

“We're here for me, remember?” Margot said. She took a deep breath. *This is going to sound so stupid.* Margot steeled herself. These people had stood by her through good and bad for years. Through hurricanes, muggings, and bad masters. She trusted them, and while she would probably have to take some teasing, they'd help her in the end. She exhaled and explained everything: the party Friday night, the cat show on Animal Planet when she'd gotten home, her dream... Even thinking about her dream had her panties soaking again.

“Look at those cheeks,” Sig said.

Margot could feel the heat ignite on her face as she recalled the dream. “I haven't been able to shake it. Really,” she finished. “I think there's something to this.”

“So it's like pony play but cats?” Haley asked. “I've heard of it. People dress up like dogs too.”

“No dogs,” Margot said. She knew Haley had a “special friend” who liked to take her out “to the country” for occasional weekends. He'd introduced Haley to the pony-play scene. Margot had never done it, but she'd surfed enough adult-toy Web sites and read enough fetish stories to have a clear picture. “But otherwise, yes. Costumes, toys, a show. Exhibitors instead of...”

“Trainers,” Haley supplied.

Margot made another note. “Right. We'll make a night of it. Sign up participants, offer prizes for best in class, best in show, whatever.”

“Could we donate some of the proceeds to charity?” Haley asked. “Maybe the SPCA or something.”

“Okay,” Margot said, jotting that down. She reached for her latest coffee drink and took a sip. “We’ll split the proceeds five ways and give them a sixth, but they may not take it.”

“I doubt they’d look a gift horse”—Haley stopped, giggled—“cat in the mouth.”

“No more puns from you, okay?” Sig said.

“Well, I’m in,” Haley said, “so long as I get to be in the show.”

“Of course,” Margot told her. “I will be too. We should maybe recruit eight or nine more kitties.”

“I’ll talk to my sub group.” Haley also had a fairly regular Dom—whether he knew about the special friend, Margot didn’t know—and they went to the meetings of a local bondage support group together. She also had regular outings with the subs. Shopping and cosmos—that sort of thing. Margot had gone with her once to the sub group, but she’d felt a little out of place. All the others subs had happy partnerships with their masters, and Margot was still alone.

“And you can organize costumes?” Margot asked. “Collars, ears, tails, whatever...”

“Not a lot of material needed for any of that. I have scraps from Mardi Gras costumes. I’m sure I can make up a few ensembles for the show. Lots of glitter vinyl and fun fur.”

“Sig, can you work on food and drinks? Nothing big. My budget is limited. And we can’t sell booze, so it’s got to be included in the ‘donation’ at the door.”

Sig both nodded. That’s how most of these parties ran. Donation instead of ticket price, open bar within limits.

“Keg, boxed wine, maybe one signature cocktail,” Sig said. “A table of canapés and fruit to refresh the partygoers.”

Margot made notes. “And how could I forget darling Gel?” Margot turned and looked at the set designer. “It’s your help I need most of all. I’ll buy the supplies.”

She explained again, but in greater detail, the “benching cages” and their elaborate dressings with sequins, feather boas, opulent fabrics, and thick cushions. They would need cages like that for the party. One for each cat.

“This sounds like it’s going to keep me busy,” Gel told her. “They’ll need to fold up so we can move them easily.”

Margot watched as his gaze went out of focus. He'd gone into that special, artistic designing space in his head she so envied. He'd create amazing benching cages.

"And I'll find a venue," Margot said. "Do the advertising, print the flyers."

"Get the permits," Sig reminded her.

"Right."

"And when will it be, pray tell?" Gel asked, evidently coming out of his trance.

"Anybody got a calendar?"

Sig pulled out a pocket calendar. "Nothing too soon," he said.

"And *not* Labor Day weekend if you want me there," Gel said. "Southern Decadence, baby."

Margot nodded. Southern Decadence was a massive event spanning many days that was geared toward the gay population, but it seemed every free spirit in the city got wrapped up in the parades, parties, and general debauchery. "Probably not the weekend after either," she said. "We'll all be recovering."

"Damn straight," Gel said.

"So we wait for mid-September," Sig said, "or do it the last weekend of this month."

"Is three weeks enough time?" Haley asked.

"I think we can do it," Sig said. "None of us have much else going on, right?"

"Great." Margot made a note in her composition book. "Two weeks from this Saturday it is. I'm sure I can find someplace this time of year."

Another hour passed as they hammered out particulars. Then the group split up. As Margot walked home in the humid afternoon air, her stomach rumbled. Too much coffee, not enough food, she thought.

She unlocked the gate at the house and headed down the side alley to the courtyard. She could smell something grilling. Her mouth watered. When she came around the edge of the house, a Styrofoam cup in her face greeted her.

"Daiquiris," Brad One cried, shaking the cup a little, obviously encouraging her to take it. "I heard the gate squeak, so I knew you were coming."

"I've really got to eat something first."

“Guacamole over here,” Brad Two said from his seat at the patio set.

Margot took the offered daiquiri and sat down with her landlords.

“We've been waiting forever for you to get home,” BO said.

Margot picked up a chip, dipped it into the guac, and came up with a big helping. She popped it in her mouth, chewed, and followed it up with a long sip of the frozen daiquiri. One of the best things in New Orleans: buying daiquiris by the gallon. “What flavor is this?” she asked.

“Blue,” BT said.

“Blue Hawaiian?” Margot creased her brow, trying to match the sugary flavor to any known drink she could mix.

“No, just blue.” BT laughed. “They're not really original with their names, are they?”

“So tell us,” BO said, “where have you been?”

Margot had no reason to feel shy around Brad and Brad. She'd met them at a performance before she'd started renting from them. They'd even worked a few before retiring to the role of observers and “private practice,” as they liked to call it. Brad One dominated, and Brad Two served as the sub. Brad One, for a while, had tried to get people to start calling them Alpha Brad and Beta Brad, but One and Two had already been ingrained in their friends' heads, and they never took; he did still get teased about the idea, though.

Margot explained everything to them, and immediately she had another cat and exhibitor.

“That sounds like fun!” BT clapped his hands. “I want to be a Siamese. Can I be a Siamese, BO?” He said it like *beau* rather than *bee oh*, which made it sound sweet instead of suggesting the need for a shower.

“Little rhinestone collar and everything?” BO asked.

BT nodded enthusiastically.

Margot told them the date.

“That's purrrfect,” BO said. “Nice warm-up for Decadence. Perhaps we can get some early arrivals in. I'll post on the message board. You don't mind if there's a large contingent of gays there, do you?”

“Why would I mind?” Margot asked. “It's a fun fetish for everyone!”

“Say that five times fast,” BT said then chuckled.

“Staying with us for dinner?” BO asked Margot. “I’ve got shrimp on the barbie.” He said it with his best Guy Pearce *Priscilla* voice. “And salad.”

“And more daiquiris,” BT added. “I bought two gallons.”

Margot loved spending time with the Brads. It gave her hope. They’d found each other and lived a perfect dream life, in Margot’s opinion. She’d give anything to find the same kind of happiness they had: totally comfortable and open with one another, not needing to hide anything.

Margot sighed and thought how sad it was that she didn’t even have any contenders for her lifelong master. She thought about the man she’d seen in her bar the night before. He had the look, for sure, but he’d probably turn out like everybody else: never really letting go, always playing it safe and never getting too close to that line between play and abuse. Guys who didn’t get too close to that line didn’t trust themselves, and if they didn’t trust themselves, why should Margot trust them? If they couldn’t take a risk, she had no reason to be there. Her failure at finding a master made life difficult.

But that man. He’d swept aside any pretense of proper server-servee etiquette when Margot confronted him. He *had* been a dick, as Tina pointed out, but then his eyes had smoldered when he said, “*You’ll do*,” as if he hadn’t just meant Margot’s mixology skills.

As they ate, BT offered to make up the posters. Margot was thrilled; not only had he studied graphic design, but he also worked at a print shop part-time and could get her a real deal on the copies. BO offered to make BT’s costume, which took some of the workload off Haley.

After dinner, with slightly wobbly steps, Margot went to her apartment and shot off a few e-mails. She let Haley know BO would make a costume and e-mailed some organizers of past shows she’d done, to find information on from whom to rent a hall.

She took another shower—this one just for the purpose of getting the day’s grit off—and went to bed.

She had another dream that night, similar to the first, but this time she could see her owner’s face. The man from the bar.

* * *

Late Sunday night, after another evening schmoozing a vendor who had something Maxwell wanted, he finally climbed the stairs to his fifth-story flat. The rest of the building, still in the tear-down stage, lay silent and empty around him. When he’d finished, the building would

be completely handicap accessible, but as of now the old freight elevator didn't work. Tomorrow, Maxwell decided as he caught his breath on the fourth-floor landing, he'd call the elevator technicians.

The whole building felt like his life—giant shell keeping everything else outside, far away. He looked forward to the day that other families—people from all walks of life—would inhabit the apartments around him, the ones he planned to renovate. But in reality, the idea also scared him. Having people *living* that close meant they might learn something about him. If they learned something about him, he might scare them. He didn't want to scare any more people.

Maxwell opened the door of his apartment. Inside, he'd created a model of the high-end version some of the other units would look like: pecan floors, artisan concrete counters made by a local caster, views of the Mississippi River.

On a small table by the foyer sat an answering machine, and the light blinked rhythmically. He took off his glasses and set them down with his keys next to the answering machine. Then Maxwell hit Play.

"Hey, baby." A sultry voice—a voice from his past in Chicago—came out. *"I miss you. I hope you don't intend to stay down in that cesspool too long. We need you up here. Anyway, you know I'm here anytime you ne—"*

Maxwell hit Delete. He couldn't listen to her. She was one of the reasons he'd come down here. She'd started confusing love with being his sub, and he couldn't stand to see that in her eyes every time she knelt in front of him. He wanted to love too—though not necessarily her—but he couldn't. He couldn't let himself go like that. He'd gotten close too close to the edge of his control with her once, and he had seen the glimmer of fear in her eyes. Better to run than risk a mistake like the one he'd made when he'd just started out.

Maxwell crossed the room and sat on the long sofa that faced the windows. He looked out at the Port of New Orleans as he unlaced his shoes. Hearing her voice took him back to another time, a time when, younger, he *had* let himself go.

While in college, Maxwell had given himself over to the tutelage of an older master: a suave, silver-haired fox named Gregory. All the subs loved Gregory and would do anything for him without question. Maxwell wanted that type of devotion. Gregory gave Maxwell a set of

rules to follow: ways to watch a sub, the right way to swing a whip or adjust a cuff. Everything Maxwell knew, he'd learned from Gregory.

For a long time, Maxwell worked scenes in clubs with the older man. Gregory was always nearby to correct the younger man's actions, to tell him what to do next. Then one night, after Maxwell had graduated and found a position with a real-estate development company, Gregory didn't show up. Maxwell never heard from him again.

Maxwell tried a few scenes alone, but he proved too timid for many of the subs. They demanded more, and Maxwell seemed to always be looking over his shoulder, waiting for directions from someone who was not there.

Finally, when he'd strapped one particularly feisty sub to a St. Andrew's cross, he broke through his barrier. He could tell she was the type who would egg on a Dom just to get him to react. She liked the pain, not necessarily the sexual arousal of it. And Maxwell gave it to her. No restrictions, no rules. He didn't hurt her, not physically, but he scared her. She ran out of the club that night. He followed her, wanting to apologize, to make it better, but in the heavy rain outside, she quickly disappeared.

Maxwell never forgave himself, and he never let himself get that close to the edge again. He didn't want to scare anybody, particularly his subs. He wanted control and satisfaction for himself and his sub, so he needed to keep himself held back. He always listened to Gregory's advice in his head now: never deviated, never took a risk.

This didn't make his love life a happy one, but the consequences if he did otherwise were much worse.

Chapter Four

Monday and Tuesday came and went, and Margot's inability to book a hall or warehouse had her in a panic. She thought she'd snatch one up the first call she made. Everyone else had started on their projects and plans, but every appropriate location she tried to secure was either already booked or the owners had left town for the long, late-summer holiday that many New Orleanians relished. Therefore, no arrangements could be made, no contracts signed. She couldn't get permits until she had an address either.

She came home from work late Tuesday night feeling defeated. She didn't even want to think about her planned event because it had her so frustrated. She hated that things moved too slowly or didn't move at all. She wanted everything organized and done with.

She found Brad and Brad in the patio hot tub as she crossed the courtyard to her flat. "Hey, guys."

"Why so glum?" BO asked.

Margot sighed and walked over to lean on the edge of the aboveground Jacuzzi. "I can't get a hall for the show."

"Oh no," BT said. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know." Margot dipped a hand into the bubbling water and swirled it around. "I've tried everything."

"I'm sure we'll think of something," BO said. "Don't worry." He paused and raised his eyebrows. "Want to join us for a dip?"

"No, thanks. I think a cool shower and crashing out is more my speed tonight. I'll see you guys tomorrow."

When Margot had finished her shower and crawled into bed, she could still hear the hushed sounds of Brad and Brad discussing something in the tub.

* * *

When she got up to go to work on Wednesday, she found a sticky note on her door. It had a name and a phone number scrawled in BO's handwriting. He'd also managed to fit, *He has an unrenovated hall. Will trade the night if you agree to paint interior.*

Margot carefully slipped the note into the pocket of her pants. She would call when she got to work. The place couldn't be that bad, and she'd grown desperate trying to go the traditional route to find a hall. Plus, it could be fun, getting everyone together for a day of painting, pizza, and frozen daiquiris. Like a preparty.

Margot rode her bike to work, feeling much better than she had in days.

Things had started to come together, really. She'd introduce her friends to a whole new scene. They'd have a huge party, maybe even make some money at it, then...

A new realization hit Margot just as if some kid had smacked her across the chest with a Wiffle ball bat. She nearly had to stop her bike to catch her breath.

She had no exhibitor, no "owner," no Dom to show her off. So excited in the planning, she'd missed the whole point.

I'll make it work, she told herself. She could still throw the party and have the show. Maybe someone already into the lifestyle whom she'd never meet otherwise would come, and it would be love at first sight.

Right. Stop dreaming, princess. Stuff like that didn't happen in the real world.

I'll call someone, she thought. One of my old Doms or friends will do it. She thought of Master Lev from the last party. Had she kept his card? It was probably in her bag of gear that she still hadn't cleaned or put away. *Ugh.* Something else to worry about.

Margot locked up her bike and went into the bar to work. Wednesdays didn't often get busy, so after she'd stocked everything, she went to the phone and dialed the number on the slip of paper Brad One had left her.

"Hello?" The voice on the other end sounded deep and very serious.

Margot swallowed. Suddenly she felt nervous. She'd made plenty of calls already about this; why this one should bother her, she couldn't say.

"Hello?" the voice asked again.

“Uh... I'm calling for”—Margot checked the name on the paper again—“Maxwell Billew.”

“You've got him.”

Margot's brow creased. The voice sounded familiar. “This is Margot Granville. My landlord, Brad One—I mean, Brad Sims—gave me your number.”

“You're calling about the hall.”

“Yes.”

“Margot, did you say your name was?”

“Yes.”

Margot could hear paper shuffling on the other end of the line. “Ah...I can meet with you tomorrow at one to pound out an agreement. Brad told you the place needed painting.”

“Yes. I could arrange for my friends to come—”

“You'll get it done?”

“Yes.” He drove right to the point, didn't he?

“Good. My office is in One Shell Square. Do you know where that is?”

Margot almost choked. She couldn't imagine someone with enough dough to have offices in that building would trade paint for a hall rental. “Yes. I know where it is.”

“Thirty-seventh floor. Don't be late. I have other engagements.”

“Yes, Sir.” Margot's hand flew to her mouth. The “Sir” had just slipped out, like she'd had no control over it. Something in his tone had compelled it.

“Are you mocking me?”

Oh God. He took it the wrong way. “Oh no, Sir—I mean, Mr. Billew. I just—Thursday at one. I'll be there.”

Margot hung up the phone in a panic. She'd never had a slip like that before, where her lifestyle bled into her daily life. She wondered for a moment. If that voice on the other end of the line had told her to strip and play with herself on the bar, she might have started to unbutton her blouse before realizing how inappropriate that would be. Even over the phone, she had felt that *master* vibe. She wondered if he knew the kind of power that he had, or if he involved himself in the scene at all. Second vibe this week, Margot thought. Odd.

A woman in a polyester skirt suit came in and ordered a sex on the beach.

Margot mixed it as she thought about her meeting the next day. What would happen when she actually stood in his presence? *I'm so hard up*. But he'd probably be just like all the other Doms out there, if he did actually cop to the title. He could just be some domineering asshole, Margot reminded herself. She didn't need that. She needed someone who understood the boundaries of play and real life but who could let himself go 100 percent when he played. She didn't want to get told what to order at dinner or made to sleep on the floor if she didn't do up the bed right in the morning. She wanted a spanking when she acted deliberately coy, restraints here and there, and praise and petting when she behaved correctly. Too much to ask?

"My drink?" the lady at the bar asked.

Margot realized she had stopped working while lost in thought.

"I'm sorry," she said and went about finishing the sex on the beach. She set it down, and the woman gave her exact change and no tip.

On Wednesdays, Margot didn't get Tina to barback. If she needed something, she had to call the hotel kitchen, and they'd send one of the busboys or dishwashers to help her out. It would be a slow and lonely night.

Margot heard her phone buzzing in her purse. She pulled it out and looked at the number.

Master Grant.

She didn't want to alienate him, knowing she might need him to step in for the show, but she didn't feel like dealing with him right now either. He'd probably want to get together and play his way, and she wasn't in the mood. She sighed and answered. "Hey, Grant. I'm at work." He'd question why she didn't say "Master" or "Sir" if she didn't explain right away that she was in mixed company.

"Hey, babe. What's going on?"

"Nothing. Just working." Margot moved away from her customer and stood at the far end of the bar. The woman shot her looks as though she expected to be the center of attention. Margot turned her back to the woman.

"Do you want to get together sometime this week? I've got all the toys laid out and ready."

"This week's not good for me, really. I've got a lot going on."

"I heard. Saw the announcement on Craigslist, and a little bird confirmed you were the brains behind the show. Subs don't usually go off on their own like that."

How did he know she'd planned the next event? Brad Two must have taken it upon himself to start the promotion before she'd even begged down a venue, but she thought he'd know better than to put her name out there. "Well, I needed to try something different." She hoped the inflection in her voice hinted at her full meaning, but knowing Grant, it probably went right over his head.

"If you need any help, little one, I'd be happy to step up."

"I would appreciate that."

"Master Lev would be happy to help too."

Margot thought about it for a moment. She wasn't sure about Master Lev yet. "I'll keep that in mind."

"Talk to you later, then."

"Bye."

Margot put her phone back in her purse and shoved it behind the extra bottles of booze.

"It's rude to carry on a conversation when you're supposed to be working," the woman said.

Margot ignored her tone, put on her best service-industry smile, and offered to fix her another drink.

* * *

Thursday, Margot found her bike had a flat tire. She'd meant to give herself plenty of time to get to One Shell Square on her bike, but now... She had no money for a cab, and she'd just heard the number five bus go by; another wouldn't pass for half an hour. The Brads were at work. She didn't feel comfortable asking any other neighbors for a ride.

Guess I'll have to walk. She set out down the sidewalk. She'd be drenched in sweat by the time she got to One Shell Square.

She headed down Chartres toward Elysian Fields, trying to stay in the shade of the overhanging oaks and crape myrtles. The sun, however, hung so close to directly overhead that it seemed impossible to find shade, particularly when she got out of the Marigny and into the

French Quarter, where no trees graced the sidewalks. Margot had worn a light cotton dress and Chuck Taylor low-tops for the meeting. She hoped her dress would dry quickly when she got into the cold air-conditioning of One Shell Square, but she knew now she looked a mess as she tramped along the uneven sidewalks, dodging tourists and slow locals.

At Canal Street, she impatiently waited for traffic and mobs of conventioners. The construction convention had ended; optometrists had replaced them.

Finally she made it to Poydras Street and turned toward the lake to walk the last block to One Shell Square. She ran up the flights of stairs at the front of the building just as she heard bells from somewhere toll one o'clock.

Shoot, she thought. She hoped five minutes wouldn't make that big of a difference. Security checked her bag at the door and phoned up to tell Mr. Billew she was on her way. Margot dashed for an elevator and just made the closing doors.

People filled the car. Margot went to hit the button for the thirty-seven and took a quick breath as she saw at least ten other floors already selected; each person in the car had a different floor to get off on, all below Margot's.

It would take forever to get to the top.

She thought about getting off and taking the stairs, but climbing thirty-five stories didn't sound like fun, so she waited it out, gritting her teeth as people got on and off, held the elevator door for slow movers, and tried to maneuver mail carts and other deliveries in the small space.

Finally the car stopped at floor thirty-seven, and Margot pushed herself out into the hallway. She checked the directory on the wall, found *Billew Development*, then headed toward the suite. At this point, she figured she would show up fifteen minutes late. Would he understand her tardiness? Accept her excuses? He didn't sound like the type of guy who would do that, even if she turned on the tears. Instead she decided she'd apologize and get right down to business. She didn't really want to be there anyway, so best to get out as soon as possible.

She opened the suite door and walked up to the desk, where a young, cute administrative assistant sat.

"Good afternoon," he said to Margot, eyeing her up and down. She looked awful—the elevators had mirrored walls—hair disheveled, gleam of sweat still on her face. She could even

feel the perspiration seeping through the fabric at her armpits. This would be the worst meeting ever.

"I have a one o'clock with Mr. Billew." That was how they said it, right? People who had offices in buildings like this just said the time, not "meeting" or anything like that.

"You're late, Miss Granville," the assistant said.

Margot nodded.

"Mr. Billew had to take a call. You can sit, and he'll be with you when it's convenient." The assistant motioned to a chair.

Margot sat down, and in the quiet of the office, she tried to still her racing heart. She'd probably blown it. *Damn bike.*

The phone on the assistant's desk rang. He picked it up, listened, and nodded. After he hung up the phone, he told Margot, "You can go in now, but I'm to warn you to keep it brief."

Margot stood and crossed to the door behind the desk. She took a deep breath, turned the knob, and went in.

She looked at the man behind the desk.

She knew him.

"You?" he said. "I thought that name sounded familiar." His eyes narrowed.

Margot swallowed. It was the jerk at the bar the other night. The one with the Dom vibe.

Maxwell let himself smile, but only on the inside. He didn't want to give anything away. He'd hoped to see the bartender again but didn't want to just waltz back into her place of employment. This was so much better. And he had something she wanted.

"Screwed up any more drinks lately?" he asked.

"As a matter of fact, yes." She offered him a weak smile.

So insecure. "Sit down, please."

She nearly scampered to the seat opposite the desk and perched on the edge of the chair.

"I told you to be on time," he reminded her.

"My bicycle had a flat. I had to walk."

"I see." Maxwell leaned back in his chair. "I have a meeting in thirty minutes across town, so I can't possibly complete this deal now."

"I understand." Margot clutched her hands in her lap and stared down at them. "Can I still get the hall, though?"

"Yes, but we'll need to conclude the deal at another time. You will procure the paint with which to complete the project? And do the work?"

"Does color matter?"

"Not particularly. Something with general appeal, I think."

Margot nodded.

"Give me a few days to arrange the paperwork. We could meet Sunday for the final run-through. Dinner, perhaps?"

"What?" Margot asked.

"Dinner. We can meet for dinner to sign the agreement."

Margot cocked her head. "Just business?"

"As you say," Maxwell said, finally letting his smile reach his lips. She would be fun to explore, he knew. Perhaps it was only in this element that she found herself so ill at ease.

"Okay."

He passed a leather notebook across the desk. "Write your address here. A car will pick you up at seven." He could afford to woo her at first, but in the end, she would have to understand her boundaries.

"Can't I just come in Monday morning to finish the paperwork?"

"I'll be all booked up next week." He might not be now, but he could arrange it so as not to lie to her.

"Okay. Sunday at seven."

She stood and thrust her hand across the table. Maxwell could tell she'd made a big effort to do that. Yes, he certainly had her shaking.

He stood and took her hand, held it for a moment, looking across the desk at her. He watched her chest rise and fall. Finally, he let it go.

Margot turned and left the office.

When the door closed, Maxwell sat back down and turned slowly. Brad Sims, who had worked as his architect on several restoration projects, had told him something of his tenant, but now Maxwell had a full picture of her. The bartender, the sub who lived behind Brad's house, a party planner. All in one. An interesting package, to be sure.

Maxwell picked up his phone and called his assistant in the front office. "Teddy, do me a favor and book a dinner at Restaurant August for Sunday. If they say they don't have space, remind them who's calling."

"Right on it." Teddy hung up immediately, presumably to make the reservation call.

Maxwell leaned back and put his hands behind his head. He'd give himself a little time to savor the idea of Miss Margot Granville before heading off to his meeting.

* * *

Margot felt certain the other people in the elevator on the ride down could smell how turned on Maxwell had made her. She'd soaked her panties. From the moment she'd set foot in that office, he'd had her like some kind of hypnotized snake. He'd held her from the first moment, and she'd loved every minute of it.

When she got to the ground floor of the building, she found the ladies' room and ducked inside. Luckily it appeared empty. She went into a stall and closed the door behind her, put one foot up on the seat, and pulled her panties down from her pussy, just enough to slip her fingers inside.

As she rubbed her clit, she thought about how Maxwell Billew's long, dark fingers would feel stroking down her back. She imagined her fingers were his, and she touched herself more roughly, as she knew he would touch her. She thought of his voice calling her *pretty kitty* or *bad pussy* and his wide palms landing on her ass when she did something wrong.

She could feel her orgasm bunching inside her, ready to leap up and through her entire body. She increased the pace of her fingers, and her other hand gripped onto the handicap bar with white knuckles.

Margot bit off her cry when she came, then stood in the stall for a few moments, catching her breath. Her heart beat raggedly, and anyone who would see her would have no doubts about what she'd just done. She adjusted her clothes, left the stall, and washed her hands. She threw some cold water on her face in an effort to rid herself of the red blotches she saw on her cheeks

in the mirror. She checked herself again, tucked one tendril of her brown hair behind her ears, and exited One Shell Square.

She decided to save the bus fare home by walking and stopped in at Bicycle Michael's for a tire tube on the way. She spent the afternoon fixing her bicycle, cleaning out her bag from the party the week before, and surfing the Internet for kitten-play paraphernalia. Items were woefully lacking or ridiculously expensive. She found an artist in the United Kingdom who created polished wooden butt plugs with a long fox's tail attached. They were beautiful examples of craftsmanship. Margot wondered what it would feel like to have that real fur brushing against her bare legs. *That would work for a Persian cat*, but Margot didn't know what kind of cat she wanted to be. Besides, he created each tail custom, and they probably took weeks to get to the United States.

Margot e-mailed Sig, Gel, and the Brads to get together to paint the hall on Monday; no one was working. They could buy paint from the Green Project, a not-for-profit that recycled construction supplies. Then she called Haley.

“Want to go shopping?” she asked.

Haley was totally up for it.

* * *

They stood in the aisle at the adult store, staring at the wide array of butt plugs. Back in Haley's car, they'd stowed their earlier purchases of fun fur, bells, lace, and ribbons for Margot's costume.

Haley had offered expert advice to Margot on tail construction. The ones she made, she explained, generally started with a premade plug that came with some sort of whip or tail attachment. She took them apart, added a lot of artificial extensions in bright colors, and came up with a serviceable tail à la *My Little Pony* with minimal investment. The same would work for Margot, though they'd have to sew a tail out of fun fur and then attach it.

Haley grabbed one of the plugs off the pegboard wall and handed it to Margot. “This one would work.”

Margot took it from her. She'd had plenty of things up her ass, and she mostly enjoyed it, but the plug had to be substantial enough to hold up to the weight of the tail and comfortable enough to wear for a long time. This would probably work, but she didn't like the color.

“I want it to match.” They'd decided on a lavender and dark gray color scheme for the rest of the costume. The combination brought to mind the Japanese anime kittengirls and reminded Margot of the Cure song “All Cats Are Grey.” She hung the plug back up, and they kept looking.

Margot saw one in purple with a big finger loop on the end. It would work perfectly, and it was well within budget.

“We can tie it on, no problem,” Haley said as she looked it over.

“Then let's get it and go. I want to get started.”

The two girls stayed up late into the night working on their costumes together. By the time they'd finished, Margot decided she didn't want to bother packing her stuff up; she just left it at Haley's and stumbled down the street to her house.

Chapter Five

I can do this, Margot thought, but even the idea of seeing Maxwell Billew—his hard eyes, large hands, and dark skin—made her damp standing there on the street. Do I have time to go change my panties? She doubted it. As she thought about turning, a sleek black town car came to a stop in front of her. The driver got out and opened the rear door for her.

“Um, thanks,” she said and slipped into the back.

Maxwell Billew sat there. He wore a simple black dress shirt with a red satin tie. Behind his glasses, his eyes twinkled. “Good evening,” he said.

Margot thought maybe this would turn out to be more than a business dinner. At least, she sort of hoped it would. After all, who made it a dinner date just to sign some papers?

“Hi,” Margot managed. She smoothed her skirt. She'd tried very hard to dress in what she thought he would think of as business attire. Black pencil skirt, fitted blouse. She'd even traded in her vintage hobo bag for a delicate—though still vintage—clutch.

“I've booked us a table at Restaurant August.”

It was the type restaurant Margot never got to go to. She smiled. At least she could get a good meal out of him before she had to run away screaming to avoid getting enticed into anything more.

They rode in silence until the driver stopped at the restaurant and let them out. As they exited the car, Margot realized Maxwell had no paperwork with him. She felt concerned for a moment—what was this all about, anyway?—and then thought he probably had it folded up inside his coat pocket or something. This wasn't some huge business transaction, after all.

Maxwell held the door open for her as he ushered her into the restaurant.

What an ass in that skirt. He shook his head, astounded by his luck. He hoped she would be as willing to indulge him as she seemed. He'd come to realize—through close observation in the car—her nervousness was not entirely because she probably saw a large, financially successful black man and he saw in her a hot but uneducated service-industry worker. No, he'd caught a whole other wave off her. She seemed most definitely, as Brad Sims had suggested, a sub. She'd do what he wanted when he asked her to do it. Immediately his mind turned to all the things he'd tell her to do, and he couldn't help the hint of a smile that must have touched his lips.

Still, a little sadness touched Maxwell. He could never give all of himself to her, no matter how much he wanted her. He'd have to hold back in order to keep her at all, and eventually she'd see that and give up on him, or she'd expect too much and he'd have to push her away.

Maxwell resolved, though, to have his fun while it lasted.

The maître d' showed them to a table in one of the many intimate dining rooms. No other diners sat in the room. Teddy had done well; Maxwell would have to reward his assistant in the morning.

They ordered drinks and filled the time before their arrival with talk of their pasts, though nothing too personal came up. Maxwell learned that Margot's family had lived in south Louisiana for many generations; she'd only left long enough to go to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge for a few semesters before moving to New Orleans. She'd never even left the state, except for the occasional trip to Biloxi with a few girlfriends to hit the casinos.

When the waiter brought their drinks, they ordered dinner. Well, actually Maxwell ordered dinner. He let Margot peruse the menu, but when the waiter appeared, he didn't think twice about ordering the scallops for her and the speckled trout for himself. He didn't bother with appetizers. If Teddy had done as well as Maxwell expected, then they'd receive more from the kitchen than just their basic order. Little treats from the chefs were not uncommon here, particularly if someone as influential as Maxwell had come to dine.

In fact, the waiter appeared with an amuse-bouche only a little while after the entrée order went in. An eggshell filled with seafood sabayon.

"I've never had anything like this," Margot said as she scraped the shell empty with her demitasse spoon.

More courses and wine came, and they chatted, the idle type of verbal intercourse that occurred when two people of any variety were getting to know each other. He ordered dessert for both of them, and finally, when the coffee came, Margot looked Maxwell squarely across the table and finally broached the subject. "Can we get the contract out of the way before I go into a food coma?" she asked.

Took her long enough.

"I would first like to learn about your plans for the night you reserve the hall."

A look of worry crossed her face. "Does it really matter?"

"Call it a professional interest." *But it is so much more than that, isn't it?*

She glanced down, probably watching her hands in her lap as she laced and unlaced her fingers; Maxwell couldn't see her hands, but he could see the way her arms twitched here and there above the table, indicating the movement. He liked the way she showed her anxiety. He thought it would be fun to play with that. How long could he draw it out before she'd crack? Where was her breaking point?

Margot didn't know what to tell him. The fact that he worked with Brad One showed he had to be open-minded—BO wasn't exactly subtle—but then again, she'd never met him at any of the Brads' parties, so maybe he kept himself a little separate.

What if he turned out to be conservative, despite the vibe she got, and reneged the deal? She had less than two weeks now, and no other potential locations available.

"Do you really need to know?" she asked. When she looked up to see him watching her from across the table, though, she knew he already had something figured out.

He nodded but remained quiet.

Margot sighed. "Well, how well do you know Brad and...what he's into?" God, what if I just outed Brad as a Dom to one of his acquaintances, Margot thought. He was definitely out and proud regarding his gayness, but most people didn't feel as comfortable about their fetishes.

"Ah, you mean the sadomasochistic stuff," Maxwell said matter-of-factly.

"You do get right to the point, don't you?" Margot smiled. "Well, there is sort of this...subfetish that falls into that category, and we are setting up a party and performance for people who are sort of into that scene. A burlesque evening."

"A subfetish?" Maxwell asked. "I'm not going to have to hire people to clean the place after, am I?"

Margot actually laughed. She felt at ease now; she could tell he was teasing her, and she liked it. "Nothing like that. It's...uh... This is sort of embarrassing to talk to you about. I'm not usually this shy." What was causing that, anyway? She'd done things in front of other people that, well...acts that were illegal in some countries, anyway, and she couldn't talk about dressing up as a cat to this guy?

"It's okay. Go on."

Margot forced it out of her mouth. "Kitten play." There, got it out, Margot thought. She felt relieved, like if she could talk to him about it, she could talk to everyone about the fetish. Not that she necessarily wanted to, but she *did* want the hall and, more than that, his approval for some strange reason.

"You mean with animals." His words came out in a hiss. "Like bestiality."

"Oh God no." Margot shook her head. "No, people *dressed* like cats, in costumes, with handlers."

She could see the relief cross his face. "Stupid of me to jump to that conclusion," he said. "Like pony play, obviously. The animals are the subs; the handlers, the Doms."

"Exactly. In fact, we have at least one pony who will make her debut as a cat at the happening. We plan on setting it up like a cat show, with a judge and prizes. It should be really fun and cute."

"Rather tame, though, don't you think?"

This would get into the personal area of things, and Margot wasn't sure she was ready to share her reasoning with him.

"It's like BDSM light, sure, but it has its own appeal too. There's a lot of domination when an owner nurtures a cat, you know? Like brushing and feeding and petting." Margot took a bite of dessert. "It's being in complete control, without the...meanness that sometimes comes with regular BDSM."

“How familiar *are* you with BDSM?”

She felt her cheeks burn. *Here it comes*. While she could share this kind of information with her friends and people she knew around the scene, this was different. “Did Brad tell you anything?”

“I want *you* to tell me.”

“I've had my share of masters,” Margot admitted. “Most were fine. I've never had any issues. I just want...something different.” It was the same excuse she'd given Grant on the phone. What would Maxwell think of it?

“Why is that, do you think?”

“Most masters I've had are there for the show, to be in control in front of me or a bigger audience. They're egotists. I want someone more selfless, I guess. Having an animal—a real one, I mean—is all about sacrifice for the animal. I think some of that comes through in kitten play. The master, or owner, has to be willing to make changes to keep an animal safe and healthy, and the animal has to be good for its master.” She eyed him across the table. “*That* should be what domination is about. Sacrifice, devotion...”

“I see what you mean,” Maxwell said.

“Really?”

He nodded. “I think I would like to be involved in this show of yours.”

“Wow.” Margot hadn't anticipated that at all, but her stomach fluttered at the idea. “I assume—and I'm sorry if I'm wrong—you would serve as an owner. Do you have a sub in mind to be your kittengir?” She felt certain a guy as hot, cultured, and successful as Maxwell had a whole stable of subs beating down his door.

Maxwell didn't answer right away. Instead he reached across the table and brushed a strand of hair off her forehead. “That depends. Do you, my dear, have an owner?”

Margot nearly fainted. *Came right out with it, didn't he?* “I-I've only just met you,” she said, trying to think of a way out. “I...I don't know.” *Maybe I don't want a way out of this...*

Something in his gaze told her that, even if they had just met, he still felt determined to get what he wanted. “Let's practice, see how it works out. Will you at least allow me that?”

Margot thought about it. She'd handled herself around strange Doms before; heck, she knew more about Maxwell than she did about Master Lev, or the sub he'd made fuck her, for that matter. She glanced at Maxwell again, assessing him. She couldn't deny that he sparked something in her. Hell, she got wet when she walked into a room he occupied. But Margot didn't know if she could handle herself around someone that turned her on *that much*. She couldn't remember it ever happening before. She took a deep breath. "Okay."

"That's all I ask," Maxwell said. "I'll call you sometime next week. We'll see if it works."

Margot sighed and nodded.

"Shall I escort you home?"

She felt disappointment. Why? They'd only just met. Did she expect something different? She'd nearly begged off on committing to the cat show, after all. *Oh God. Not that, Margot.* She recognized that flutter in her stomach; she'd last felt it when she met her Baton Rouge Dom. Falling like that for Maxwell could be a real problem. She didn't know anything about him except for the basic information she'd gleaned over dinner. Probably for the best that she wait. She needed to cool off, and he definitely needed to think about this awhile.

"Home sounds good. Thanks."

* * *

Gel picked Margot up on Monday, and together they bought paint, used brushes, and trays at the Green Project. Margot had learned how much paint they needed the night of her date; knowing, too, what she now knew about Maxwell, she decided to paint the entire inside of the building a rich, deep red. It seemed perfect for their burlesque kitty show, and it sort of reminded her of Maxwell, of heat and power. She and Gel loaded half-empty cans, full cans, and some buckets for mixing into Gel's truck. Then they went to Maxwell's hall to begin work.

It turned out to be an old church in a part of the town that had flooded during Katrina. Workers had already finished most of the renovations, but no one had completed the interior work. A low stage sat at one end of the building, and tall windows lined either side. Margot could already see in her head how perfect the place would look on the night of the show: elaborate cages where the kittens could recline and pose before the show, prize ribbons for the winners, and a crowd of interesting people.

Everyone came to work: the Brads, Sig, and Haley. They decided to make short work of the place so they could spend some time planning layout and decorations before it got too late.

By six, they'd nearly finished. Margot heard a door open and shut. She turned to the entrance, and there stood Maxwell.

He wore jeans and a white T-shirt, the most informal she'd ever seen him. He didn't move, just ran his gaze down one wall, across the stage, and up the other.

Oh no. What if he doesn't like the color? Margot dropped her roller in the tray and walked toward him. Paint covered her clothes, and she was sure she had it on her face too. She'd sweat despite the functioning AC and felt tired to boot. She really hadn't expected to see him. As she approached, he said, "I finished up work early and thought I'd come by to see how things went."

"Good to see you," Brad One said. "We're nearly finished."

For Margot's ears only, Maxwell said, "You think the neighborhood associations that will meet here are going to like this color?"

She couldn't tell if he teased or not. "I thought *you* would like it, and it's what they had enough of, Mr. Billew."

They stood toe to toe now, and he whispered, "Bad kitty."

Margot felt a frisson course through her, and her cheeks glowed with heat. She couldn't believe how her body reacted to him, and when he talked to her like that... *Oh God, I might melt into a puddle.* "You should meet everyone." She took his hand tentatively and led him into the hall.

She made introductions, except for Brad One, whom Maxwell already knew.

"I think it's time to finish up here and get some dinner," Maxwell said. "It's on me. Least I can do for all the work you've done on this place. The neighborhood will really appreciate it."

"Where we going?" Haley asked.

"Well, kitties like fish, don't they?" Maxwell smiled.

They finished quickly, cleaned up, and decided on a laid-back sushi place in the Marigny; the staff there wouldn't mind the paint.

"You will ride with me," Maxwell told Margot. She nodded and climbed into his car without question.

It wasn't the town car from the other night but an understated, though probably pretty expensive, Mercedes station wagon.

"I have to move stuff around on occasion," Maxwell explained. "I can put plywood in the back when the seats are down."

As they drove to the sushi restaurant, Margot watched Maxwell out of the corner of her eye. When she saw his dark brown eyes behind his glasses, the sure way he held the steering wheel with his long fingers, the way he focused on his driving, she felt that tumble in her stomach that sent off warning signs in her head. She wanted him so badly, on an animal level that defied description. She shouldn't crush on him, not this early. Bound to be disappointed, after all. That was her lot, wasn't it?

He drove them straight to the restaurant, and they beat everyone else. Margot felt relieved to get out of the small space of the car. Another moment and she might have thrown herself on him. Maxwell ordered sake and tea all around, and by the time that arrived, the others came in, covered in paint and laughing about something Gel had said. Finally Margot felt as if she could trust herself in Maxwell's company. The others gave her the strength to resist.

This would be a test, Margot realized: Central Business District Success Story meets Marigny Bohemia Kink. Could they all mesh?

She liked Maxwell and couldn't stop the realization she really wanted him to work out as her owner, and maybe even more long-term than that, but if he didn't get along with her friends, she couldn't keep him around.

But dinner went well, and everyone left stuffed and moving slowly from the sake. At the door, Margot turned to Maxwell.

"I can walk home from here," she said. "It's only a few blocks."

"I will walk with you," Maxwell told her, taking her arm and following the Brads down the street.

"But your car—"

"Will be fine until I decide to come get it. If I get a ticket, I can pay it."

"Okay."

“Besides”—he lowered his voice—“I thought we could start practicing. I’ve done a little research since last night.”

Margot felt, all of a sudden, that her sake had completely caught up with her. Heat flushed her face, and she tripped over an uneven seam in the sidewalk.

Maxwell caught her. “Careful,” he warned.

“You’re not kidding,” Margot said under her breath.

Chapter Six

At the main house, Brad and Brad let themselves in through the front door and waved good night to Maxwell and Margot.

"I didn't expect guests," Margot explained as she unlocked the gate to the side alley.

"It can't be that bad," Maxwell said. "You should see the building I live in."

"I'd like to."

Maxwell warned himself to keep his cool. He *had* to remain in control, no matter how alluring she seemed. He couldn't risk losing her as quickly as he had others or having to sever any ties they'd already created. This one was playful and could open a whole new area of play for him that he hadn't tried before.

Margot led him down the alleyway to the courtyard. He'd never seen Brad Sims's house before; he and Brad had, for the most part, kept their relationship pretty professional, despite the fact that they both knew about the other's sexual proclivities. If Maxwell started keeping Margot, though, he would probably have to cross that boundary too.

The courtyard appeared immaculate, with its Jacuzzi, bright, powder-coated, vintage patio furniture, and lush plants. Tall bananas and palms framed Margot's quaint two-story. The fact that she lived in old slaves' quarters made him smile, though if she were his slave, full-time, she would have to like his more modern apartment.

Don't get ahead of yourself.

Really, he'd avoided the BDSM scene in New Orleans since his arrival. In Chicago, he'd found enough different outlets to keep him moderately satisfied, but here... Brad had told him of one private club, mostly aimed at swingers, though it had a dungeon level. Then of course there were the parties, but one had to know where to find them when they happened, and they weren't always well staged. He'd missed one two weekends ago that he'd heard had served up some pretty hot subs.

The next one, despite its niche market, happened to be Margot's—even with its not-so-traditional theme—and he'd definitely secured himself entrance to that.

As Margot unlocked her front door, she offered him a meek smile over her shoulder. “Like I said, I didn't expect guests.”

She pushed open the door.

The place did sort of look as if a hurricane had struck. Books and papers littered the coffee table, a rumpled throw covered one end of the couch, and laundry sat piled high on one of the lounge chairs.

Maxwell did notice, however, she'd left no food lying around. She evidently had some boundaries. He looked left into the small kitchenette: no dishes in the sink either. *Good.*

“I'll just clear some space,” Margot said as she left him standing by the front door. She gathered up armfuls of stuff and started trucking it upstairs.

“You might not want to pile everything up there if it's where you keep the bed,” Maxwell called to her. When Margot came back down the narrow spiral staircase, her face glowed bright red, and Maxwell knew it wasn't just from the leftover paint she hadn't removed.

“Do you think we'll need that tonight?”

“You'll definitely need someplace to crash when I'm done with you,” he said, “regardless of whether I join you there.”

Margot folded the throw and laid it across the arm of her small sofa. “That's better,” she said, seeming to ignore his last statement. “Do you want to sit down?”

“Thanks.” Maxwell crossed the room and sat in the chair that the laundry had previously occupied. Margot took the sofa, then seemed to realize paint still covered her.

“I should really clean myself up before we...start anything, don't you think?”

“So long as you don't take too long, my pet.”

She stood and headed for the stairs.

“Or do you think,” Maxwell said, “it is an owner's job to wash his pets?”

Margot stopped, turned, and smiled. “Meow.”

He'd gone right for it, hadn't he? Margot thought as she climbed the stairs.

Behind her, close enough that she could feel his body heat, came Maxwell. At the top of the stairs, Margot headed for the bathroom, went directly for tub, and turned on the water. Maxwell filled the tiny bathroom door. He's stripped off his shirt at some point, and his dark, hairless chest gleamed in the fluorescent light.

Oh God, I'm staring. Margot turned her attention to the bath, adding some of her specially mixed oil. The scents of jasmine and gardenia soon filled the room. Margot took a deep breath. All summer nights in New Orleans should smell like this, she thought.

"Take off your clothes," Maxwell told her. He still hadn't entered the room.

Second thoughts, Margot? She searched her brain. *Nope. None.*

Just don't fall too fast. She nodded slightly to herself, steeling her resolve to play it as cool as she could.

She stripped off her paint-covered clothes, trying to go for seductive. She threw them in the hamper. No leaving stuff around now if she were going to have a regular visitor. For some reason she'd had the foresight to wear a matching thong and bra—one of the sets she liked to buy to spoil herself, and she knew she looked good in them. She almost hated to take them off, but she did, one strap at a time.

She shimmied out of her undies and stood in front of Maxwell in the nude for the first time. *Just like any other show.* She'd appeared naked in front of strangers many times, so this should make no difference.

Except usually there's lots of other people, and usually none of them look at me that way.

She felt nervous. Maybe the idea of playing a new way had her strung a little tight. After all, really, who'd think to dress up and act like a cat for fun? Then again, who'd asked to be spanked for fun? Either way, she definitely didn't fit the norm mold, and she had no reason to think any differently about collars and cat toys than she did about cuffs and floggers.

So, even in her doubts, Margot grew warm.

And the look on Maxwell's face showed nothing but appreciation.

"The bruises on your wrists have healed. Good. Turn for me."

Margot spun in a slow circle.

“And no other flaws. We must keep you in perfect shape for the show.” He finally stepped into the bathroom and ran a hand down the front of her body. Margot arched into his touch. “Now, I know kitties hate water, but you're going to do as I ask and get in the tub. Now.”

Margot did just that.

“Good kitty,” Maxwell said as he sat on the closed toilet. “First thing, let's get this paint off you, shall we?”

He used his long, slim fingers to pick the latex paint off Margot's face and out of her hair. She proceeded to work on her hands, peeling away the splotches in satisfying pieces. She found something soothing in the action and had since she was a child, when she used to spread Elmer's glue on her hands and let it dry, just to peel it off again.

To have someone else doing it too was...different. She'd showered with lovers before, but that meant both kinds: with hands on each other, or in less erotic settings, trying to save time and water. Being bathed—with him perched on the side, not coming in—reminded her more of being a child or a pet, when the parent or owner had to do all the work. Margot felt cared for.

Though he hadn't said it, Margot felt she should not touch Maxwell yet. This was his time to prepare her. She'd wait for his order to do so.

He picked through her hair so delicately, she barely felt it, but she could see the pile of paint developing on the floor at Maxwell's feet.

“Almost done, little one,” he told her. “Then we'll wash your hair.”

No man had ever offered to wash her hair for her. She smiled to herself.

“Hand me the shampoo,” he said.

She reached to the other side of the tub, picked up the bottle, and gave it to him. Margot watched as he poured some into his hands, lathered it up between his palms, and then reached toward her.

“You should do that for a living,” Margot said as his fingers massaged her scalp.

“Cats don't speak.”

There was something she hadn't thought of. How would she tell him what she needed or wanted? Some masters allowed their kittengirls to talk; she'd seen it in a discussion on the message boards. “Permission, Sir, to break role just a bit?”

“What?”

“Well, I mean, some kittengirls *are* allowed to speak, to make things easier.”

“So?”

“So couldn't I?”

“How do cats show what they want?”

Margot thought about it. *Rub on your leg, meow over a bowl, paw at the door to be let out.*

Maxwell nodded as she made her mental list. “Real cats don't need words. You don't need words. But I'll give you one exception. A safe word, or in our case, a word you can use when you are too tired to go on. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Fish sticks.”

“What?”

“That's your word. 'Fish sticks.'”

“Technically that's two words.” Margot felt like testing him to see how far he'd go.

He pushed her under the water, but only for a moment. When Margot came up, sputtering, she looked at him. He had a wide grin on his face. She smiled back. So he liked to play a little too? She could live with that.

“That was a warning, kitty.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Maxwell went back to washing her hair. After he had her rinse it, he gave her shoulders a nice rub. “You painted a lot over your head today. I can feel it in your back.”

Margot didn't respond.

“Won't get lured in? Good kitty. Now stand and I'll dry you.”

She did as he told her, and he wrapped her in her only towel. He brushed his hands down her body, ensuring the towel sopped up all the water.

Margot sighed at the contact. Even through the thick terry cloth, she could feel the warmth his hands. Maybe she imagined it, but she relished it nonetheless. She didn't usually get this intimate with her play dates.

“Dry your hair and then fetch your brush.”

Margot removed the towel and covered her hair with it. She stepped out of the tub as she briskly rubbed her hair and scalp to dry it. She left the bathroom, and Maxwell followed her out; she could feel his gaze on her back. She kept her steps perfect, her posture erect. She wanted to show him exactly how much discipline she had.

Where is that brush? She had made a mistake in piling all the stuff from downstairs in her tinier upstairs. Now she couldn't find a thing. Her posture failed as she fell to the bed, digging through the stuff to find the desired implement. Finally, after throwing aside some laundry she'd yet to put away, she found the brush. She crossed the small room, trying to regain some of her poise, and handed it to Maxwell.

“The next time I come over, this place should look spotless. Kitties need to live in a healthy, Zen-like environment. It suits their dispositions.” He pulled the towel off her head. “Now turn and go kneel on the bed.”

She knelt facing away from him. He pulled up the chair she had by the side of the bed—after clearing it of magazines and laundry—and sat. Soon she felt the bristles of the brush moving through her hair. His strokes came slowly, one hand smoothing the hair as the strands left the brush.

“You should leave your hair down more often.”

Really? Margot liked intricate, looping, braided updos and anime-inspired pigtails. She didn't like her long, lank brown hair hanging all over the place and getting in the way of...stuff. As a cat, she'd fancied doing up her hair in intricate buns to serve as ears and decking them out with ribbons and bells and lace.

“You'll wear it down for the show.”

Did he read my mind?

“And your tail must match.”

And brown? Oh no. It totally wouldn't match the stuff she'd already picked out. But at this point in the game, she had little to go on. Perhaps he'd be so enchanted with her outfit when he saw it, he'd forget his own desires.

Or maybe he wouldn't, and she'd get a spanking.

Either way works for me.

“There. All done.”

Margot sighed. The brushing had felt good.

“Now, you've been such a good kitty, I think you deserve something special. Would you like a nice petting?”

Margot nodded slightly, hoping body language would not be too much in breaking with character. Cats used it all the time, though not so obviously.

Margot shifted to lie down in her nest of blankets, twisted sheets, and clean laundry.

I will have to get up early tomorrow and clean before work, she thought. She should not have let him in with her place looking like this. Good subs kept immaculate houses to show off to potential masters. They expected it.

She turned her eyes to Maxwell and took in a sharp breath. He unbuttoned the fly of his dark blue jeans and pushed them down his hips with his underwear.

His cock sprang free when the fabric cleared. In all Margot's play, she had seen larger, but Maxwell's dusky member stood as a perfect example of manhood: colored beautifully, strong, and well proportioned to his body. She had a good idea he knew how to use it well rather than just letting it look pretty.

“I see the appreciation on your face, and I thank you.” He made a little mocking bow and smiled big again, showing all his teeth.

Margot smiled back, showing her own teeth in way she hoped looked kittenish.

He joined her on the bed. The old mattress sank under his weight. Before he lay down next to her, he threw off all the extraneous material—sheets, towels, clothes, extra pillows—until only he and Margot and the fitted sheet beneath them remained.

Without the makings of her nest around her, Margot felt more exposed. She had nothing to hide behind if a moment of shyness caught her, but she kept her gaze level and open on Maxwell. He leaned his head on an elbow, and they faced each other as they lay reclining.

Maxwell reached out a hand and ran it down the length of her body, from shoulder to thigh, and repeated the action.

“It's not that difficult to see you as a cat when you lie like this,” he said as he stroked her body, “but I would like a bit more of a suggestion.” He smiled knowingly but did not speak further.

Margot stretched beneath his touch. His focus, she knew, was fully on her, and she loved it. But he was right; she didn't feel entirely the cat. She needed something else. She relaxed into the bed nonetheless. This type of contact was one she rarely allowed. Generally she thought it too vanilla, or maybe it was the level of intimacy, but for some reason she felt comfortable lying naked in front of Maxwell.

His touch traveled down her thigh again, then stopped. A shiver of anticipation ran through Margot. He lingered at the joining of hip and thigh for a moment and gazed at the apex of her legs.

“This will be shaved as well,” he said, trailing his fingers down her belly the last few inches to the hair covering her sex.

She normally did keep it neat and tidy down there, but the length of time she had between events had tempted her to let it grow out just a bit. *I have a lot of work to do, I guess.*

Finally he dipped a finger in and brushed her clit as he passed to her lips.

Margot shuddered. She had grown wet by now, and she knew he could feel it. She hoped it pleased him that she got that excited that quickly, that he could do that to her. She thought back to the other day at the office building, of how just looking at him over the width of a desk had driven her crazy. She rarely felt that way about a man; she hoped he could be everything she needed.

“Knees up. Spread your legs,” Maxwell told her.

She did, shifting so her pussy faced him.

“Keep them like that, or I'll have to somehow tether you. Do you understand?”

Margot made a small sound in the back of her throat that she hoped sounded like a cat's yes.

Maxwell readjusted himself on the bed and moved his head between her legs. “Hold your ankles,” he told her. She reached down and grabbed both ankles, keeping the soles of her feet firmly planted on the surface of the bed. “Don't let go.”

She had a small supply of toys and restraints somewhere in the house, but generally the Doms brought their own supplies to the scenes and parties she visited.

“Normally I would like to see handprints on those ankles when I’m done, but not tonight. I don’t want to mar you for the show.”

She held tight as he dipped his head down and took a first assertive lick at her sex.

Margot moaned. Maxwell ate cunt the way he did everything else, it seemed: self-assured and direct. There was no traipsing about the issue, and Margot liked that.

“No words, remember,” Maxwell said. Margot could feel his hot breath against her pussy. She squirmed beneath him, wanting to raise her hips to his face but knowing that sort of directness would result in punishment of some kind. Instead she kept hold of her ankles and gritted her teeth against the need building in her cunt.

His licks felt soft but insistent at first, stroking, and she thought of a cat cleaning its own fur. Then he slipped two of those long fingers into her pussy. Her hips rose off the bed this time—she couldn’t stop herself—but she kept her hands on her ankles.

He licked and thrust with his fingers, running their pads against her G-spot, and Margot moaned and met his thrusts. She wanted more, though: his prick, restraints, clamps—anything. This felt so good, but...

He brought his unoccupied hand up to her breasts and ran a palm over a nipple until it tightened. Then he pinched it, running the nub between thumb and forefinger.

The feeling shot right to Margot’s sex. *Ah, a little pain, a little force.* She needed that. She wanted to reach up and grab her tits, yank on them until she came, but she couldn’t let go of her ankles.

“Wetter still?” Maxwell said. Margot mewed.

Maxwell pulled away, found his jeans, and took out his wallet. He removed a condom and unwrapped it.

“Kitty’s nails are too sharp,” he explained as he slipped it on himself. Margot watched the slow, seductive movement as those lovely fingers caressed his cock. She so wanted to be those fingers. He stroked himself a few extra times, seeming to know Margot enjoyed the show. She hoped he’d shove it in her cunt as decisively as he’d eaten her out.

“You are so wet,” he told her. “Too wet.” He knelt on the bed. “On all fours, my pretty pussy. Facing me.”

Margot climbed up to her hands and knees and faced his cock.

“Suck it.”

She took the perfect member in her mouth. She sucked it all the way to the back; it was not so long that it couldn't comfortably fit, which she loved. She began moving her head along its length, tripping her tongue over the veins and furrows, flicking it over the ridge where the head swelled. She could feel herself responding to his desire. The taste of him turned her on more, and her juices flowed.

Maxwell's hands kneaded up and down her back. He spanked her a few times. Margot writhed, arching her back to get her ass closer to his hands, wanting more—so much more—and harder. Could he deliver that? She didn't know at this point, but she gave herself over to what he did, trying to lose herself in the sensation.

With his body leaning over hers, Maxwell used both hands to play her pussy like it was an instrument. He smeared her juices up and down her crack, coating the seam of her ass with her own wetness. Then, while the fingers of one hand played in her cunt, he insinuated a finger from the other hand into her ass.

Margot sighed around his cock, overcome with his taste and the glowing burn on her ass, and her body grew taut. His fingers felt nice, but she had a butt plug in the drawer of her dresser that would be so much nicer. She only wished she could tell him.

“This is where you will wear your tail.” He hissed out a breath. “Oh God. I could put my cock in there right now, couldn't I?” He moaned as Margot's sucking grew more insistent. She hoped he understood this to mean *Yes, yes, you could. And do so by all means, please.*

Margot wanted more of his hands on her, more of him inside her, yet the sensations at her cunt and ass drove her on; she needed to satisfy this man. She had to show him what she could do to him, give him a reason to let go as she so desperately wanted.

“Just loose enough, aren't you? You'll need a nice butt plug for that tail.”

He started thrusting, light but rapid, into her mouth. He met the movements of her head fluidly, as if he knew her mouth, knew how she worked. She wanted to move her hands up to hold him, but she'd lose her balance.

“The idea is so hot, to just fuck you in the ass now, but I won't.”

Margot moaned, half in disappointment and half because she was so close to coming. Her body was knotted up with the approach of it.

“I'm going to put another in, kitty, because I know you can take it.”

He did, spreading her ass even more. She gasped and groaned, craning her neck to try to see it, and his cock slipped from her mouth. She had to bob her head about to retrieve it. She sucked harder now, wanting to emulate for him what she felt, the tightness, the fullness...

The pace of all the fingers, the sucking, the thrusting... Margot felt *nearly* completely gone, as if she'd reached that part of sex she'd never felt, where the mind goes blank and there is only the body. It all cumulated, and as Margot felt Maxwell's lips at the top of the crack of her ass, she came, the sensation rolling through her like a fast-moving thunderstorm front across Lake Pontchartrain.

She sobbed around his cock as the feeling of the orgasm overtook her. In an instant, his touch was gone from her body, and his hands became tangled in her hair. He continued to thrust into her mouth, controlled and precise.

Finally, with a grunt, he held her against him and came. She felt her lips stretched around the base of his cock. Against the back of her throat, the reservoir at the tip of the condom ballooned with his seed as his cock twitched. As she pulled back just slightly, she grinned.

The grip in her hair loosened somewhat, but he used it to direct her up to a kneeling position in front of him. He wrapped his arms around her and kissed her forehead. She didn't look up at him. Slaves didn't do that unless told to.

Her arms dangled at her sides. She didn't hold him back. She'd never reached *that* moment, though she had come so close. Her mind had worked and commented the entire time.

All that felt nice, Margot thought as she reflected on the evening. Very nice.

But oh so vanilla.

What the hell had happened?

Chapter Seven

After throwing the used condom in the bathroom trash, Maxwell spread out on Margot's bed and held her against his front, spooning her. Her breathing came in a calm, steady rhythm. He tried to match his own to hers, but he couldn't. Even after that perfectly adequate release, he was still wound tight, a consequence of the control, of holding back the way he did.

Should I tell her? He had felt her disappointment in the coupling. She knew he could give more and hadn't.

Not enough, the voice in his head said. Definitely not enough. He'd barely scraped the surface. Margot didn't face him, but he knew what he'd see in her eyes if she did: discontent, despondency. Flat-out, unmasked emotion. She didn't even try to cover it for his benefit as a master. He'd turned her away so he didn't have to see it.

He'd thought to keep her at a distance so he could have her longer, but he saw she had no tolerance for his control. He'd read it on her face, could feel it in the set of her muscles below the skin. Though not the egotists she'd talked about, he still had shortcomings that couldn't satisfy her. He could never give himself over completely to a fantasy, be it kittengirls or racks and whips. He had to remain constrained, and he would constantly disappoint.

He sighed, realizing too late that Margot would most definitely pick up on it. She did and turned to look at him.

"What?" she asked.

He searched her face. Yes, there it was. She'd quickly gone from disappointment to being pissed off. He took a deep breath.

"I should probably go."

"Already?"

"Yeah... I don't know that this will work." Best to get right to the point. Maybe she would have enough time to find a new trainer.

Margot sat up. He could tell she agreed but was trying to formulate some sort of pep talk in her head. She chewed the inside of her cheek.

"It was the first time," she managed, "and we're both sort of getting used to this kind of play. Maybe we didn't take it far enough. You have to admit. That was a little...normal."

He could see she didn't half believe what she'd said. "I know, but I can't give you what you need. I can tell that."

Margot sat quietly, staring at him with those deep green eyes of hers.

What I could do to her... Maxwell reached out and touched her cheek. "Thank you, though, for trying."

The look on her face shifted.

That was, evidently, the wrong tone to take.

"Don't fucking patronize me," she said as she stood. "If you wanted a quick screw, or whatever that was, fine, but be honest about it." She started digging through her piles of clothes. "I thought you were something special. I mean, I got the *vibe* off you, and God knows no man has gotten me wet like that since...college." She pulled up a garment, looked at it—the robe she had evidently sought—and threw it on. "You *are* just like the others. Too. Fucking. Scared."

"You nailed it in one," Maxwell said quietly.

"I had hoped to, but now, well..." She stomped to the top of the stairs. "I have to unlock the fucking gate for you so you can fucking leave, okay? I'll wait downstairs while you get your fucking clothes on."

She descended to the room below, and Maxwell watched her go. Better it end like this, he reasoned, than later when something much, much worse could happen.

He found his clothes, dressed, and left. At the gate, once Margot had closed it and refastened the padlock, he turned and looked at her through the wrought-iron bars. "This is not how I anticipated things going down."

"Whatever," she said and looked away. "Just get the fuck out of here." Her tone didn't hold the venom it had in the bedroom. She'd lost the life, the force of will.

He thought again about telling her why he couldn't give her what she wanted, but he could tell right now she would not listen. Maxwell sighed and turned away. He didn't look back at the

gate. He wondered if she watched him depart, and hoped she didn't waste the time on him. He probably wasn't worth it.

Margot watched Maxwell walk away, hoping he'd look back, maybe even change his mind. She absolutely *knew* he had something he hid from her, some spark he kept concealed. *Wasn't I good enough to bring it out?*

But he didn't turn.

Soon the angle of the fence blocked her view of him, and she went back to her bedroom. Nobody goes for spinster subs, she thought as she rearranged the nest on her bed, and I keep striking out.

He had potential, though, even if...

Margot lay down and stared at the ceiling. She really had sensed something there, some contained power. But of course, he would never let it show. She knew the type.

She knew it all too well. Most every Dom she'd ever been with filled that stereotype to a tee.

She also knew, if given the chance, she could do something about it. She thought about his rough fingers and dark skin. He'd already treated her so well, even if they'd only been out a couple of times. He'd make a great boyfriend for any normal girl...

Maybe she could free him, but it would take a lot of work.

With Maxwell, it might just be worth the effort.

* * *

Tuesday before work, Margot cleaned her apartment top to bottom. She didn't do it because Maxwell had told her to, but instead out of the pissed-off energy that flowed through her veins when she woke up that morning and remembered everything that had happened the night before.

Now she only had a week and a half before the big night, and no master to serve as her trainer. *If only I could get through to him...*

Wednesday, she thought about calling Maxwell, at least to make sure they still got to use the hall on the big night, despite her cussing breakdown. She thought she should apologize, and maybe that would open the door to further advances. She found his number and called.

“Billew Development. Teddy speaking.”

“Teddy, this is Margot Granville, an...acquaintance of Mr. Billew's. May I speak to him, please?”

“He's indisposed. Can I take a message?”

She knew he had probably been warned to field calls from her. Leaving a message with the assistant might be the only way to get through. Margot thought of the best way to phrase it. “Would you please tell him I'm sorry for anything I said the other night, and I hope we can still do business?”

“Got it. I'll let him know. Good-bye.”

Margot hung up.

* * *

Maxwell walked into his office Thursday morning.

“Messages on your desk, Maxie,” Teddy said. Teddy had latched on to that nickname, though no one else used it. Maxwell knew most people didn't look at him and think “Let's give him a cute, shortened form of his own name.” Most people just thought “Sir” worked well. “You got a couple calls after you took off yesterday.”

“Thanks.” Maxwell entered into his smaller, private office and closed the door behind him. After booting up his computer, he started shifting through the stack of *While You Were Out* messages. A couple from vendors, one from his PR guy, and...

Margot Granville.

...still do business.

Maxwell gazed at the note, surprised she'd called him at all. She should not apologize, Maxwell told himself. He needed to apologize to her. He'd gone about things all wrong.

As he sat at his desk, he remembered the round globes of her ass, how wet she'd been, and the taste of her under his lips. His prick swelled in his pants, and he rubbed his palm over it. He'd wanted to do so many things to her, and the power of that attraction for her had put him on red

alert. He could so easily take her down a path they both might regret, one where he'd lose control and she'd run screaming.

He didn't react that way to just anyone, not after everything he'd done and experienced. He wanted her, but he would need to give her more than he had on Monday night.

Maybe he could beg off on the "just met each other" and "new play" excuses. She'd called him, after all, so she wanted to talk to him. *Excellent*. He hadn't met anyone like Margot since coming to New Orleans, and he doubted there were many like her at all. She had an easy way with her friends, she worked hard, and by God, she mixed excellent drinks.

He envisioned her in a backless, vinyl maid's dress and six-inch-heeled, ballet-style shoes, trying to deliver him a martini on tray. What he'd do to her for every drop spilled...

He could definitely try again. He *wanted* to try again.

He'd have to prove himself, though, and he knew exactly how to do it.

He logged on to the Internet and started his search.

* * *

By Friday, Margot had worked up the nerve to call the one possibility for an exhibitor in the show who came to her mind. Right before she went to work, she remembered Master Lev's card and where she'd stowed it. She found it in the pocket of her backpack, tucked it in her purse, and left. Maxwell hadn't called her back, so she decided he had been a speed bump, and she'd move on.

She called Lev Hirsch Public Relations from work. The first hours of her shift always lagged, and after she'd stocked everything, she didn't feel bad about making personal phone calls.

"Hello?"

Margot took a breath to steady herself. She'd never called a master before. Generally they called her. "Is Lev Hirsch available, please?"

"This is he." The voice on the other end didn't sound suspicious or in a hurry. Margot liked that.

"Um, Mr. Hirsch. This is Margot Gran—"

"Grant's little sub. I've been wondering how long it would take you to call. Grant says you have a little project going."

“That's actually *why* I'm calling.” Margot invited him down to the bar for a drink, so they could talk face-to-face.

He lived in a condo in the Quarter, only a few blocks from her work, and agreed to come in to see her and talk. Margot felt nervous. She hadn't expected him to jump on the idea so quickly.

Within the hour, his somewhat familiar face appeared at the bar door, and Margot waved. He crossed to the bar; Margot eyed him appreciatively as he did. His olive skin and dark hair gave him a distinctly Mediterranean look, and he wore a simple but striking black linen suit, perfect for the August weather.

Lev sat down at the bar in front of Margot and smiled at her.

“Can I get you something to drink?” she asked.

“A Hendrick's martini, up, three olives.”

Margot smiled. *This* she could work with. Maybe.

Don't get your hopes up too quickly. He might not be into the idea at all.

But he had put on quite the performance at the last show, so he had to be willing. If anything, maybe she could trade sub services for his presence at the cat show. That way she could have someone to show her off, while still looking for a more suitable long-term partner at the show.

When she set the drink down, she asked, “How much did Grant tell you?”

“He said you're staging your own little performance. Something to do with some new fetish you discovered.”

“Nothing else?”

“He thought you were a brave little sub to try something out on your own. He's a bit patronizing, isn't he?”

Margot shrugged her shoulders. She knew they were friends and didn't want to denigrate Grant in front of Lev. She appreciated the fact that Master Lev clearly had lines between life and play, which Grant didn't always. Lev talked to her like a normal person, whereas Grant would have been giving her commands under his breath, even in mixed company. Probably for the best that she'd more or less ended things with Grant. He could be a prick at times, and he wasn't so

inspiring that it was worth putting up with his attitude. She already wasted two years in on-again, off-again subbing for him.

She swallowed and decided to go ahead and come out with the details of the plan to Lev. He listened, even laughed in a good-natured way. Margot realized she kind of liked him. Not in the damp-panties, get-herself-off-in-the-ladies'-room sort of way that she'd felt for Maxwell, but in a jovial, hang-out-for-a-drink sort of way. He made her feel comfortable, and he had a good smile.

Best of all, he agreed.

Sunday, they'd have a go at it, and sometime in the middle of next week too, and, he promised, he'd be ready to show her off as the best cat in the show.

A week? Margot realized the show was a week from tomorrow, so long as they still had a place to hold it. Nerves fluttered through her gut. Maxwell *had* never called her back about the hall. *Shit.*

Tina walked up to the bar with a drink order from one of the tables in the back. Margot turned around to mix them.

When she'd finished, she moved to set them on the bar and—

Someone had joined Lev at the bar.

They were talking and laughing together.

Oh God.

Maxwell.

He had his hand resting on a long white box, the kind someone would wrap a couple of very expensive long-stemmed roses in. The box piqued Margot's curiosity. And what did that say about him that he would just show up without a phone call?

It didn't take long for Maxwell to figure out exactly why Lev, his PR guy, happened to be at the very same bar as the girl he wanted to make his sub.

Lev was, of course, a Dom. Maxwell had known that, and it was part of the reason he had hired the man as his representative when he'd moved to New Orleans. Lev knew about

discretion, and Maxwell liked to support others in the lifestyle when possible. He treated it as if it was networking sometimes.

She'd already replaced him. She'd moved on in a matter of days. She had deadlines, after all, Maxwell realized.

He didn't let it faze him. He could beat out Lev for Margot. He knew he could. And Lev would have no problem backing down. Lev was one hell of a nice guy and a great, competent Dom—as far as Maxwell had heard—but he would understand the I-saw-her-first rule of getting women.

“We met at a party a couple of weeks ago,” Lev was saying to Maxwell.

“Couple of weeks?” Maxwell asked; he knew he sounded lame. Lev *could* call dibs if they treated this like an elementary-school playground.

“Yeah, this great, like, art-slash-erotic installation-slash-bondage show. She was 'in' it, you know? Like, totally hot up there on the St. Andrew's cross.” Lev lowered his voice. “I commanded another sub to fuck her. She loved it. Didn't even balk. She can take anything. Nipple clamps, paddling, restraining for, like, hours.”

If Maxwell's skin had been any lighter, Lev probably would have seen his face go red; he certainly felt the heat rise in his cheeks. *Why do I feel so protective?* He shook his head and took a deep breath. He felt catty and wanted to get back at Lev for being so nonchalant about the whole thing. “Why didn't you fuck her yours—”

Margot stood there, staring across the bar at them both. “Is there anything I can get for you two gentlemen?” She cut him off so he couldn't get out the *or didn't you have the balls?* he'd intended. *Jealousy, Maxwell? Really?* Oh yes, he'd made up his mind; Margot Granville was *his*.

Maxwell offered her his best smile, and he hoped she bought it. “We were just catching up,” he explained. “Lev does PR for my firm, press releases and that sort of thing.” He looked at Margot, then at Lev, then back at Margot. “Can we talk?”

Margot shook her head. “Not now. The place is filling up.”

“What about after work?”

“I don't get off until midnight.” Behind her, the printer by the computer began spewing out a ticket. “Room-service order. I've got to get to work.”

She turned, tore the ticket off, and started mixing drinks.

“Why don't you join me at a table, Lev?” Maxwell stood, picked up his box, and walked off toward the same table he'd had with Big George, the drywall salesman.

They both sat and ordered a round of drinks from Tina. Maxwell watched as Lev leered at the girl; he seemed to have no regard for the fact that he'd come here for one girl and now evidently wanted a second. Maxwell ground his teeth.

“I hope that whatever negotiations we have tonight won't in any way affect our business relationship,” Maxwell began.

“Of course not,” Lev said, but his gaze clearly followed Tina's ass as she walked away.

“Good.” Maxwell tilted his head and looked at his associate across the table. “I am...currently in negotiations of my own with Margot, and our last meeting didn't go quite as planned.”

“Okay.”

“She called you before I had a chance to make amends and take a different approach?”

“Right.”

“I don't know how much you've already discussed with her, but I fully intend to follow through with my commitment to Margot now that I have...formulated an approach.”

“She already asked me to step in.”

Tina brought their drinks; Lev winked at her, and she gave him a coy little lopsided smile. Maxwell sighed as he took a long sip of his vodka tonic. Perfect, again. He recommitted himself to the discussion once Tina and her batting lashes had left the table. “I'm sure we can find you a suitable replacement if you'd like to still participate.”

“It's not just about the participation,” Lev said, and Maxwell saw the other man's gaze train on the bar across the room. He was obviously watching Margot. “It's about the girl, man. Just look at her. She'll take anything. Really. Nerves of steel when she's completely involved. I've never seen anything like it. She needs to be pushed. I think I can do it.”

Maxwell had known Margot was experienced, but he really hadn't anticipated this kind of read on her.

“I spanked her good, you know? Had a complete stranger, a sub, fuck her, in public—”

“You told me.”

“And she—God, if I didn't know better, I'd say she felt bored most of the night. I can't imagine what anyone else might do to her to really get her going.”

If she could take that, Maybe he *could* open up to her. “Really?”

“I've never seen someone so comfortable and receptive in that type of situation,” Lev admitted. “Like she belonged there.” He shook his head and sipped his drink. “That's why she's so attractive to me.”

Right then, Maxwell knew he had to have her. Maybe she could help him break down the barriers he'd constructed. Maybe she'd be the one who could take all of him, with no restrictions. “What will it take for you to back off? I...need her.”

Lev raised his groomed eyebrows. “Well, well, well. Don't really know.” He mockingly stroked his chin, feigning deep thought. “If she's your sub, do I get to use her on occasion?”

“Out of the question.” Maxwell wouldn't share her like that.

“Then...I get next dibs if you let her go, and—that girl who took our orders?”

“Yeah?”

“She's a hot little sub too. I've seen her at some of the shows with Margot. Have Margot put in a good word for me. Maybe she wants to be a kitty too?”

“That it?”

“It's a start. I think you'll still owe me.”

“Fine.”

“And you can buy the drinks.” Lev stood. “Guess I'll be off, then. Have a good night.” He offered his hand across the table, and they shook.

Maxwell stayed at his table and watched Lev leave. He flagged Tina over, ordered another drink, and asked to see the menu from the hotel restaurant. He would be settling in until Margot's shift finished, it seemed. He touched the box on the seat next to him, just to remind himself it was there. It wasn't the thing he wanted to give her the most; that was taking more time to arrive than expected, but he knew she would still love it and see it as an indication of his commitment.

At ten, he switched from vodka tonics to just tonic. He wanted a clear head when she got off.

* * *

“Isn't that the guy from the other day? Maxwell?” Sig pointed across the room to where Maxwell sat in the corner.

Margot nodded and grabbed her purse. Sig had strolled in to take his shift five minutes late, and Margot was eager to get out of the bar and find out what Maxwell wanted. “Been there all night waiting on me.” *And we've only been together once. Some kind of stalker?*

“Lucky girl.”

Margot shook her head. “I don't know. He scared off this other guy I was going to use to play my owner in the show.”

“Really? Possessive much, Mr. Billew?” he asked mockingly.

Margot offered him a half smile. “I guess I have to go talk to him.”

“Good luck.”

“Have a good night.” Margot ducked under the bar gate and crossed the room to where Maxwell sat. Even in the dim lighting of the bar, she could see his eyes following her.

“You really shouldn't have waited on me,” she said as she approached the table.

He offered her a slight shrug. “I wanted to reexamine our position.”

“I thought you made 'our position' pretty clear.”

“You called me, remember.”

“I called to make sure we could still use the hall on Saturday.”

Maxwell folded his arms and leaned back in his chair. “That was the only reason?”

“And I shouldn't have cussed you out.”

“Why?”

Margot blinked. She had a right to speak her mind, even if it meant using the *F* word. Why did she feel like she needed to apologize to him?

“Do you want *my* answer to that question?” Maxwell asked.

Margot took a breath and nodded. Maxwell stood and came face-to-face with her. His voice dropped to a whisper. “Because no Dom should *ever* be addressed by his sub in that way. You crossed a *major* line, and you know you will be punished.”

Margot swallowed and took a step back. Had she heard right? *His sub.*

“Wait a second, brah.” She actually had the guts to place her hand on his chest and give him a little push. “We’ve only been together once. We’d barely met—”

“Doesn’t matter. I’ve made up my mind.”

Margot couldn’t believe it. Like that? Snap of the fingers and—*bam*—attached? “You mean—”

“And you, my sub, want to be punished, don’t you? Now, what’s going to happen is this. I’m taking you for a drink and a bite to eat. Then you will come to my apartment.”

“What about my bike? I have work tomorrow.”

“I’ll arrange for the bike to be kept safely here with the parking attendants, and I will arrange for a ride for you tomorrow. Now is the only time you can say no to me. If you say no, we end it here. You don’t see me again except to return the keys to the hall next Sunday.”

Margot thought about it for only a moment as her heart raced in her chest. She couldn’t say no to him. *I don’t want to say no to him.* She felt like she’d be in a lot of trouble if she did. “What’s in the box?”

Maxwell picked it up off the spare chair and handed it to her. “Open it. It’s for you.”

She took off the top of the box, expecting to see the customary flowers.

Instead he saw the most beautifully crafted switch, a thin rod of bamboo, stained a deep red. On one end, black leather wrapped around the switch, forming a grip. On the other end puffed a cluster of red and black feathers bound to the switch in leather. She could tell it would sting when it hit her, but the sting could be soothed by those soft feathers.

“It’s beautiful,” Margot said breathily.

“I ordered it special for you,” Maxwell said, raising a hand to her cheek. “One needs a good teaser for a show.”

Margot looked up at him and smiled. “I’m starving. Where are we going to eat?”

Chapter Eight

Maxwell dragged Margot into the now-functioning freight elevator and closed the door. He hit the button for it to ascend to the fifth floor, and the old motors, though recently serviced, still creaked and created a racket.

“Kneel,” he told her. She did so with perfect slave posture. Her black skirt rode up around her thighs. He knew the rough wood planks beneath her bare knees and shins would cause her some discomfort; he hoped she liked it.

He held the switch in his other hand with which he had teased her constantly on the ride from the Quarter in the back of the town car; he'd even reached under her skirt and knew she was definitely ready. Now, as she knelt, her head down, he ran the feathers back and forth across the back of her neck. In the dim light, he could see the goose bumps break out on her arms.

He hadn't used the cane for its other purpose, though. No, for that, he wanted to wait until her body stood completely naked before him. It would do no good through her clothes, when he couldn't see the perfect welts pop up with each stroke.

“Only a little farther, my pet.” His talk with Lev, and learning of Margot's performance in the BDSM scene from another perspective, had freed Maxwell. Obviously he had already decided to try again with her before he'd shown up at the bar, but Lev had helped set everything in stone. He definitely owed that man.

The elevator ground to a halt. Maxwell threw up the door. He smiled to himself. What type of first impression would she have of his work-in-progress residential building? It sure didn't have the same posh veneer as his offices, but it would someday.

A creaky elevator, this construction debris-littered hallway. Surely it reminded Margot of something out of a slasher film.

“Do you feel a little thrill of fear?” Maxwell asked. He liked that idea. Her adrenaline would be flowing. It would make her responsive.

“Stand,” he told her.

She did.

“Down the hall now. It's the last door, straight ahead.”

A few clip-on trouble lights illuminated the corridor. Margot moved ahead of Maxwell, carefully placing her feet as she walked around the stacks of drywall, cans of paint, and other supplies.

He followed, still using the feathers to tease her, now at her calves. He could tell she was fighting to keep from turning and swatting at the thing. She probably bit her cheek or tongue too to keep from laughing. Three feet from the door, he ordered her to stop, and she became stock-still. He moved in front of her, taking his keys from his pocket, and unlocked the door. He pushed it open and then stepped aside.

“Enter,” he told Margot.

She crossed the threshold. He followed and shut the door.

Margot, no matter how hard she tried, couldn't suppress the gasp of delight that escaped her lips when she saw Maxwell's apartment. He obviously had taste, and it manifested in every surface and detail. After the appearance of the rest of the building, she hadn't had high hopes.

“I take it you like the apartment?” he asked, crossing in front of her and moving toward the windows that looked out over the river. “Eventually, several of the units in the building will look like this. Others, I intend to outfit more modestly for families and people on a fixed income. I'm even arranging to rent the warehouse portion on the bottom floor to a health-food store; residents of the building will get discounts.”

She hadn't expected him to be the kind of developer worried about mixed-income housing and urban renewal. Margot watched out the window. Even in the darkness of early, early morning, the Port of New Orleans bustled with the activity of ships, cranes, trucks, and trains.

“They used to process sugar here, you know? Location made sense, so close to the river, but the operation moved downriver into St. Bernard Parish and, well, this building has been sitting empty for quite a few decades. It's taking some work bringing it up to code, but it will definitely be worth it in the end.”

Margot still remained silent.

“Can't draw you into conversation?” Maxwell asked. “What a good sub.”

Her belly felt warm from the praise. He walked back toward her, slapping his own palm lightly with the switch.

“Now, first we must get this punishment about the cussing over with. Then we will move forward with your training.” He used the feathered tip to raise her chin. “This little toy was not the only thing I sent away for this week.” He offered her a wicked smile.

Margot felt an irrational hope spring up inside. She couldn't explain it, but something about him had changed. She could tell the difference, the way his eyes sparkled in the lights coming in through the tall windows. He'd let down some barriers, and she saw more of the man who'd first impressed her at the bar, less of the disappointment from the other night at her apartment.

“Permission to speak, Sir,” she whispered.

“You already lost your privilege to say no.”

“It's not that, Sir. It's just...you seem...different.”

Maxwell's chest sank as he let out a deep breath. “You noticed.” He turned and walked to the sofa, then sat down. “Come, kneel here.” He pointed to the spot on the floor directly in front of him. Margot crossed the room quickly and took the indicated space; she kept her head down, her gaze on the floor.

She felt his hand in her hair, removing the rubber bands and bobby pins that had kept it up in its elaborate, braided buns. He worked the braids out, and the tension on her scalp eased. She sighed as he ran his hands through her now-loose hair, combing out the waves created by the braids with his fingers.

He told her a story about his mentor Dom, the night he never showed up, and the sub who ruined him. It had only happened two years before, but the wound still felt fresh. Margot listened, realization dawning as to why she felt so strongly drawn to him and why he couldn't have given her what she wanted the first time they came together.

When he finished, Margot started crying. “I used to have a Dom like that,” she told him. “He was a good mentor to me, but obviously in a different way than yours was to you.” She raised her eyes to look at him. “I'm so sorry you had such a bad experience, Sir. It's not fair that something like that happened when you know so certainly that you're meant to live this life,

especially when you'd just started out on your own.” She raised herself up on her knees and pushed herself forward into him, wrapping her arms around his neck. It was the first time she'd hugged him; his body felt like cast iron under her hands, but she knew he needed the contact. She needed it too. “That's why I felt you holding back. I could tell. That girl at the club—she could have been new to the scene. She could have been withholding some kind of information from you that made her vulnerable. I'm sure it wasn't entirely your fault.”

“Then I talked with Lev tonight about you,” Maxwell went on. “I'd already wanted to try again, but he made me realize, with how he described your performance at the last show, that you could take me as I am.”

Margot's mood shifted; she let go of Maxwell's neck and dried her eyes. “I can take you any way you want, Sir.” When their eyes met this time, his gaze hid nothing. Margot's stomach flipped. He'd let go completely. She knew he could give her what she wanted now.

He growled as he pushed her up to her feet. “Remove your clothes, then, kitten, and let's begin.”

Margot took a step back and bent at the waist to unbuckle her patent leather Mary Janes. *Everything feels so right.* She pointed the toe of the shoe she worked with, carefully and slowly unfastening it and then setting it neatly aside. She did the same with the other, her gaze on her feet, not looking at Maxwell.

Then she turned away from Maxwell and unzipped her black skirt, letting it skim down her hips as it fell to the floor. Beneath it, she wore a lacy thong, standard fare beneath her tight pencil skirt. She turned back to face him and slowly undid the mother-of-pearl buttons down the front of her white cotton shirt.

Still, she kept her eyes down, not daring to look at her new master.

My new master. She smiled ever so slightly, hoping he wouldn't notice. It was a leap, but one she was willing to make if he lived up to her expectations. She hoped he felt the same. *Stop thinking.* She took a breath and dropped the shirt, leaving herself only in her bra and panties.

“All of it,” Maxwell demanded.

She complied, removing the last scraps of lace and standing before him completely nude, her brown hair brushing her lower back.

Maxwell picked up the switch and stood. He whipped it through the air a few times. It made a sharp *whisp* sound as it moved.

Margot swallowed. It had been a long time since someone had used a cane on her, and she remembered enjoying it. He circled her.

“Now, we must have you remember that masters are not to be cursed at. If I take you to a club, and a master spills his drink on you, what do you say?”

“I thank him for sharing it with me, Sir.”

“If a master steps on your foot, what do you say?”

“I apologize for leaving my foot beneath his, Sir.”

“If a master hurts your feelings because he's afraid to tell you the truth and because he doesn't trust himself, what do you do?”

Margot could hear the restrained emotion thick in Maxwell's voice. If we were in therapy, she realized, this would be a breakthrough. He trusted her, it seemed, and this made her smile more. She said, “I keep an open and loving heart and hope he will return to me, Sir.”

“But never will you curse.”

He remained quiet for a moment as he circled her one more time. Finally he stopped, out of the range of her sight. She clenched her ass, ready for the first blow.

“I can't recall how many times you said 'fuck,' but I think seven blows,” Maxwell said. “That should suffice.”

The blows came, quick and sharp, from the top of her buttocks, down her thighs, and back up again. Heat suffused the flesh there, and blood rushed to her clit.

“What do you say?”

“Thank you, Sir, for teaching me my lessons.”

She felt the feathers now brushing over the welts, and her knees threatened to buckle from the sensation. She wanted to fall on the sofa in a faint, but she kept herself upright, back straight, head up, eyes down.

“And that is the end of the talking for tonight. Now, you are all kitten. Stay here.”

Maxwell left into another room, then came back out again. He'd tucked the cane under his arm and had something resting on the upright palms of his hands.

Margot looked at it: a green leather collar, inset with tiger's eye with gold hardware and a single gold bell hanging from a D ring.

"I'll remind you, you gave up all possibilities of saying no when you came home with me tonight. You will wear my collar."

He dropped the cane to the ground and reached up to fasten the collar around Margot's neck. She choked back a sob. No one had ever offered to collar her, and yet this man, after only a few days, had ordered her something this *beautiful* as a commitment to her. Margot felt tears well in her eyes, but she fought them.

"It suits your eyes," he told her after taking a step back. "Sadly, the best present has yet to arrive. You'll just have to wait. Now come."

He took her hand and led her into the other room.

The bedroom.

His mattress sat on a simple black wooden platform with a wide ledge around it. Eyebolts had been installed in the ledge, obviously for restraining. Contrary to what Margot expected to find in Maxwell's room, though, were the plush pink bedspread, satiny princess pillows, and abundance of stuffed mice, balls of yarn, and more feather teasers.

As Margot took it in, trying to suppress her delighted laughter, she heard a bright *snick* of metal, a sound she knew all too well: a snap hook. She tried to take a step forward, but Maxwell stopped her short. She turned to look at him. He held the end of a green leather leash that matched her collar.

"Now, now," he said. "Kitty gets to play with her toys *after* she's done her tricks. On your hands and knees."

He led her around the room like that a few times, instructing her on how to arch her back, where to place her hands and feet, how to hold them to look the most like paws. She did everything he told her as best she could, and sometimes he would correct her, using the point of the cane to reposition her foot or encourage her to move her head a certain way. Then he gave her milk in stainless steel dish and rewarded her with small, fish-shaped chocolates. Margot relished all of it. He had gone to ridiculous lengths, she knew, to make her happy and to prove that he wanted this to be a part of his life, along with her.

"And now on the bed."

She climbed onto the bed, and Maxwell tied her leash off to one of the restraint points. He took a few steps back. As a cat, she could watch him and gaze at him adoringly, which was so much better than the eyes-down slave posture. She didn't have to avert her eyes. So she sprawled out on the bed, the pink fur cover beneath her, and watched the man. He stripped down to nothing. His dark body gleamed in the light coming in from the port below. Margot licked her lips.

She looked forward to this. It took all her will not to throw herself against him.

He stroked himself as he rounded the edge of the bed and went to one of the side tables. He opened a drawer and took out a condom packet.

He held it up and unwrapped it. Then he placed it just over the end of his penis but didn't push it on.

"Use your mouth, but watch those sharp little teeth of yours."

Margot got up and crawled across the bed toward him, her leash giving her just enough slack. She lowered her face to his prick and used her lips to roll the condom down his long shaft.

"Perfect," he told her.

But Margot wasn't done. She wanted to feel his cock in her mouth. She ran her lips up and down its length, lapped at the tip, then let it go and moved her mouth down to suck on his balls.

She heard Maxwell hiss out a breath. She lapped at the skin of his balls, sneaking a lick down to his taint. She breathed in, smelling the musk of him, and nipped lightly on his sac.

"Bad kitty."

The switch met with her behind, and it was her turn to hiss. She looked up at Maxwell with her eyes narrowed but a wicked grin on her face.

"Now on your back."

She did as he told her.

He climbed onto the bed and knelt over her. From the assortment of toys on the bed, he picked up a vibrant purple feather duster with a butt-plug end and another long, slim teaser fitted with peacock feathers.

A wide smile spread his cheeks, and Margot's stomach flipped as she thought about what he might be thinking.

"I know all of this is still pretty light," he said. "But I promise you, I'm not afraid anymore."

Margot's mood swung again at the heart-wrenching sweetness of it all, and her eyes felt damp with tears again. Maxwell, however, didn't let her feel that way for long. He started tickling her mercilessly with the two toys, and she couldn't help but burst out laughing as she squirmed beneath his torments. She batted at the toys and rolled from side to side, trying to avoid his strokes.

Then the peacock feathers seemed to focus only on her breasts. She sucked in a breath as the soft brushing brought her nipples to hard points.

Maxwell tossed the other toy into the air the caught it by the opposite end.

"Spread your legs," he told her.

She extended them as wide as they could go, pulling her ankles up near her hips.

"I guess you're going to be some kind of griffin tonight since you'll have a tail of feathers." Maxwell rubbed the butt plug through her wet pussy, lubing it up. She moaned at the feel of the slick silicone against her sensitized flesh. He dipped it into her cunt, rotated it a few times, then pulled it out.

He moved it a little farther back and tested it against her tight pucker. Margot groaned at first, but the feel of the feathers on her nipples and Maxwell's murmured encouragement had her relaxed and open in a moment. She'd had bigger in her ass; she *liked* bigger in her ass. She'd like Maxwell in her ass, but she couldn't say anything.

The plug slipped in, and Margot cried out. She welcomed the tightness but wanted things elsewhere too.

She couldn't ask, though; she needed to trust that Maxwell would see it. She knew it had to be plastered all over her face.

He positioned himself between her legs, and she eyed his straining cock. She remembered the feel of it in her mouth and lifted her fingers there to suck on them now. She wanted to feel full everywhere. He reached down, grabbed her hips, and pulled her up to him, impaling her cunt in one swift motion.

Margot cried out again. She readjusted her feet to the new position, pinned against Maxwell's prick, hips and ass off the surface of the bed, his hands in a viselike grip on the flesh of her ass. She'd have bruises there tomorrow. Hopefully they would heal by the show.

Fuck the show. All she cared about right now was this man *taking* her. *Marking* her as his. God, she loved the idea.

Maxwell didn't move right away. She knew he wanted to give his little kitten a chance to get acquainted to the feeling of his cock and the butt plug in her at the same time. But she didn't need the time. She wanted him to thrust into her again and again, to bounce her ass off his thighs as he punished her with strokes of his cock.

"You are so tight this way," he told her. "And it's been so long for me. I don't know if it can last."

Margot smiled up at him, not caring. He could get her off with one drive into her. She felt stuffed, and the welts on her ass gave a lovely sting. Maxwell may not have flogged her till his arm grew tired, or tied her up or restrained her hands above her head, but she could tell, whatever they did in the future, he would not hold back. That shadow had left his eyes, and Margot's heart leaped.

Finally he began to move. The combination of the butt plug and his cock worked against each other, filling Margot as full as she'd ever been. She loved it. Both of her channels rippled and clenched as her hands grasped her ankles; she might have marks there too come morning. Maxwell's strokes felt steady and sure. She pressed down into the bed with the soles of her feet.

She wished so much that she could tell him how good it felt, but he had not given her permission to speak. Instead she bit her lip, closed her eyes, and let herself drift on the current of sensation that slowly overtook her.

Margot took her fingers out of her mouth and felt around the bed; she found one of the teasers. She lifted it up and started running it across her nipples, then fanning Maxwell with it. But she still didn't open her eyes, letting the passion and sounds wash over her instead. She gave herself up completely.

Maxwell's rhythm began to increase.

Margot reached her free hand up to pinch one of her nipples. She pulled at it, loving the shock of pain that sent an even sweeter jolt of desire through her sex.

“We'll...have...to...pierce those,” he said, his words choppy through what must have been clenched teeth.

Her pussy grasped at the idea, and her mind drifted to clamps and needles and pretty jewelry. She smiled. She definitely liked that idea.

She could feel Maxwell's pace increase yet again. “It's going to be soon,” he warned.

Margot pushed up with the soles of her feet and dropped the teaser. She took a nipple between each thumb and forefinger and pulled.

He pumped into her, jostling the butt plug.

All the sensations gathered together. She opened her eyes wide to see Maxwell's face squished up in intense concentration. Finally he cried out and rammed into her one last time.

As he came, Margot felt his cock jerking inside her. She circled her hips, rubbing her clit against him. His face didn't relax. Instead he still gripped her tight against him, but loosely enough to let her move. He reached one hand down and grabbed the feathered end of the butt plug. He began turning it, dipping it in and out ever so slightly.

Margot tilted her head back and let out a yowl as her orgasm finally over took her. The waves of it rocked through her, clenching every muscle in her body. Her mind washed over in white—every thought gone, every worry departed. She *couldn't* think.

Maxwell pulled out, taking the butt plug with him, and lowered her to the bed. Her body still jolted with tiny spasms.

“There, there, my pet,” Maxwell said, leaning over her and brushing a hand through her hair. “That had to have been nice for you.”

Margot mewled her agreement, curled up in a ball, and fell asleep.

Maxwell watched the sleeping kittengirl. He still couldn't put his finger on how she could have changed him so easily. It smacked of magic, maybe a little Southern voodoo, but he knew better.

Margot was just Margot, and she was the one who set him free. He let a huge smile spread across his face. Now he knew she was definitely the one. As he moved silently through the room toward the bathroom, he thought of all the ways he could make her happy.

And all the ways she *would* make him happy.

Yes, this was not something he would throw away. Not ever.

Chapter Nine

Margot woke up surrounded by cat toys and tethered to a bed.

She couldn't have been happier.

Except...?

"Master Max?" It flowed so easily across her lips that she had to smile.

She heard footsteps from the other room, and Master Max popped his head around the corner of the door. "So, my little pet is up, is she? Just in time for *pain perdu*."

She could smell the French toast frying in the kitchen. "And bacon!" she said.

"Only the best aftercare here at Chez Billew," Master Max said with a little bow. "There's a hot bath drawn for you. You have permission to unclip the leash, but you must wear the collar."

Margot didn't think she'd ever want to take off the collar if this is what life with Master Max would be like. She'd been awake less than five minutes, and he already treated her like a princess. Her past Doms had never really shined in the aftercare department, so it was just another point in Maxwell's column against the others.

She let herself loose and crossed to the bathroom. She found her clothes, evidently already cleaned, folded neatly on the vanity. She wouldn't even need to go home to change, then, given that she wore the same thing to work every day anyway.

Margot knotted her hair on top of her head to keep it from getting wet and slipped into the bath; she let herself sink until the water covered her. She blew bubbles through her nose, then sat up and soaked for a while. Her parts felt tender, but in that particular way that reminded her, with every swish of bathwater or step she took today, that she had been well loved. She secretly touched herself in the bath, knowing Master Max would not approve; he'd want to watch or cause every orgasm she had from now on. But she couldn't keep from running her hands through her sore folds, playing with her clit as she thought about the events of the night before. *Oh, that*

butt plug. Maybe Margot missed her calling as a birdgirl when she decided to become a kitten instead. Was there even bird play? Did people dress up in feathers and perch in cages waiting to be fed treats for repeating phrases? She doubted it, but some people were into strange things...

"Breakfast!" she heard from the other room.

"Coming," Margot called and pulled her hands swiftly out of the water. She got out, dried off quickly, and dressed. She nearly ran into the kitchen. At the bar, she sat down on a stool, and Master Max shoved a big plate of pain perdu and bacon to her.

"Coffee or orange juice?" he asked.

"Coffee with milk, please, Sir." She felt her cheeks burning. This all seemed suspiciously like the work of a fairy godmother.

He served her drink and then sat down next to her, a plate of his own in front of him.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"Around one," Master Max replied.

A man who would cook her breakfast on her schedule? Most excellent. She hardly ever got up earlier than that. She wondered if he would make a habit of it, or was today just a special occasion? *But I shouldn't get ahead of myself*. Margot smiled.

Master Max went on. "I thought we could just kind of hang out before you go to work."

"Like watch movies or something?"

"Or get gelato on Magazine Street. Maybe do a little shopping."

Margot raised her eyebrows. "Shopping?"

"Maybe hit the House of Lounge."

Her ears perked up. It was the swankiest lingerie store in New Orleans; she could never afford anything there.

"I like my girl in certain underclothes, and while what you were wearing last night was nice, it wasn't exactly perfect. I need to find you something perfect."

"Purrrfect," Margot repeated, grinned, and shoved a forkful of French toast in her mouth.

He took her shopping, they had gelato, and then he dropped her off at work with the promise of dinner and more play on Monday night.

“Oh,” he said as he leaned across the backseat of the town car, “have Tina call Master Lev tonight, would you? I told him I'd set them up.”

“What?” Margot demanded.

“He wants to use her in the show,” he said and pulled the door shut.

The town car drove off, and Margot felt like Cinderella at 12:01 a.m. She didn't even have any of the boxes or gifts with her that Master Max had bought; he said he'd deliver them to her house or leave them at his apartment for her use there.

Almost right back where I started, Margot thought as she crossed the hotel lobby, except something was definitely different. She could tell it from the slight sting in her ass and burn that remained where the cane had struck her. She could also tell by the lightness of her heart.

She'd have a hard time wiping the smile off her face tonight.

* * *

Margot's boss gave her shit on the phone as she sat on the front porch of the Brads' house, waiting for Master Max to pick her up.

“I can't give you and Tina *and* Sig the night off this Saturday,” he said. “Covering three shifts in one night?”

Margot sighed. “I'm sure you can manage.”

“No, I can't. Not without paying overtime to Reggie *and* making him work a double.”

“We all have plans together, Mr. Argyle.”

“I'm sorry; either *you* show up for work, or I'll have somebody else in that shift permanently.”

“I'll work the eight-to-four shift and trade with the day person, okay? Then Reggie would only have to cover Sig's shift.”

Mr. Argyle was quiet. “Fine, but I'm still pissed about this. I don't have a barback for Friday night, which is going to be hell on the day bartender during your shift.”

“I'll make it up to him.” She looked up as Master Max's town car pulled up. “I've got to go.”

“Don't fucking complain next week, Margot, when you see how many eight-a.m.-to-four-p.m. shifts you end up with.”

His way of punishing her. Fine. She ended the call and slipped the phone into her purse. Getting up at seven to be to work by eight on Friday was going to suck, but it would be better than losing her job.

She ran to the door and let herself in. Inside, Master Max sat, a large picnic basket on the seat between them.

“Are you wearing what I told you to wear?” he asked.

Margot nodded. Under her loose, cotton sundress, she had on tiny vinyl outfit. It had a white tuxedo shirtfront, but the rest was a deep green that matched her collar. Heavy metal boning kept her cinched in at the middle, and a short, flared skirt barely covered her ass. Beneath, she had on a matching G-string. He hadn't told her what the occasion was, but she felt sexy as hell wearing it.

The driver pulled the car away from the curb, and Margot waited patiently for Master Max to begin a conversation. The car bounced over the potholes and uneven streets of New Orleans. They cruised around the perimeter of the French Quarter and into the CBD. In front of an older building, the car stopped, and Master Max opened his door. He climbed out, then leaned back in. “Get out and bring the basket with you. You're in sub mode now, not kitty. Understand?”

She nodded and started to follow his instructions.

Master Max lifted a hand to stop her. “Leave the dress.”

Margot blinked twice, then started undoing the buttons down the front of her dress. She shrugged it off her shoulders and left it in a pile on the seat of the car. Finally she climbed out, bringing the picnic basket with her.

Master Max closed the door, and the car pulled away.

She tried to take in her surroundings without looking too interested. She almost hated coming to the CBD, because it always seemed like she was in a completely different city, like maybe Houston or Atlanta, big, shiny cities where she probably wouldn't feel comfortable. Her own Marigny—full of its antique houses, coffee shops, and dive bars—seemed like another world compared to these tall, mirrored buildings.

Master Max clipped on her leash and led her to a door in the building directly in front of them.

“Do you know where we are?”

“No, Sir.” Margot clutched the basket to her chest.

“The Black Magnolia Club.”

She drew a deep breath. She'd heard of the Black Magnolia Club; they charged ridiculous membership fees, and then you had to pay admission on top of that. Plus, they didn't even sell booze; you had to bring your own. Margot glanced down at the basket, realizing it must not only contain their dinner. This wouldn't be scening in some reclaimed warehouse populated by bohemian artists who appreciated the act as sex and artistry and entertainment. Lawyers and doctors and their trophy-wife subs joined the Black Magnolia. Swingers who could afford weekend cruises and trips to Napa and kept full-time houseboys had memberships.

Margot usually hung out with the houseboys on their weekends off, not with their owners.

She shook her head.

Master Max gave a little tug on her leash. “Come along.”

She took another deep breath, pressed her lips together with determination, and followed after him.

Low lights illuminated the lobby. A woman stood at a lectern, a phone on the wall behind her, and a ledger on the surface of the lectern. She looked just like any hostess at an upscale restaurant, except Margot could see her dark nipples through the woman's sheer shirt. Behind her, hid by a rich purple velvet curtain, lay the entrance to the clubroom proper.

“Good evening,” she said, “and welcome to the Black Magnolia.”

Margot quickly lowered her eyes. She did not want to get caught sneaking glances at their surroundings. She played the sub now, not the cat. Eyes stayed down until told otherwise.

“Good evening,” Master Max said. He approached the lectern, pulling Margot after him. “I'm Maxwell Billew. I called about joining this evening.”

“And what a wonderful night to join.”

Margot heard pages rustling, then the soft sound of a pen scratching across paper.

“The membership fee?” the woman asked.

Margot heard more paper moving, money, most likely.

“And the door fee.”

More paper rustled. Margot swallowed. She'd heard about the club, but she didn't know exactly what to expect.

“Enjoy your time with us tonight.”

Master Max pulled Margot into the club.

He couldn't wait to show her off. She looked so perfect in the little *Neko*, anime-inspired outfit he'd found for her.

And tonight, the Magnolia had reopened its refurbished fetish room. Maxwell couldn't wait to try it out. Now that he had a sub, he'd started seriously considering busting a hole through his apartment wall into the next and converting the space into his playroom, but that would take months and months. Until then, he'd have to use equipment elsewhere. Like here.

He'd never actually come to this club, not seeing a reason for it until he met Margot. Now he wanted to show her off and try her out in a well-equipped dungeon, and they had the best in town.

The main room wasn't bad. Chrome and white leather prevailed; white Barcelona chairs surrounded low glass coffee tables. Every surface was easily cleanable, nothing plush or absorbent.

A long bar stretched down the length of the left-hand side of the room, and stairs at the back led up to the other areas of the club. People milled about or sat at the bar drinking the liquor they'd brought. The bartenders kept track of whose bottle was whose with names Sharpied onto the labels.

“First we'll eat and have something to drink. Then we'll head upstairs and see the fetish room.”

Maxwell led Margot over to a cluster of chairs around a table.

“Put down the basket,” he told her as he sat down. She lowered it to the table. “Now kneel.” She knelt at his feet, eyes down. “Good girl. Take out the bottles from the hamper and carry them to the bar. You have permission to tell the bartender that they belong to Master Maxwell. You have permission to order me a vodka tonic and you a rum and Coke, and you are to tell the bartender more Coke than rum. You may ask for a lime if you like. Do you understand?”

Margot nodded slightly and opened the hamper, then took out one bottle of Grey Goose and one bottle of Mount Gay. Maxwell saw her smile slightly. He'd guessed her brand right. He knew, because she was a bartender, that Bacardi would not have been good enough.

Margot stood with the bottles and waited. Maxwell tilted his head, wondering why she had not moved, then laughed to himself. He let go of the leash and shooed her off toward the bar.

He didn't take his eyes off her as she negotiated their drink order with the limited number of words he'd allowed her.

Then he remembered he hadn't given her money for a tip.

"Margot!" he called after her.

She scampered back quickly and knelt in front of him, head down. He reached into his pants, took out his wallet, and gave her a five-dollar bill. "For the tip," he told her. "Now go back." She ran back to the bar and offered the bartender the money with both hands, her head down. Her complete acceptance of his commands made him smile.

"Maxwell, wasn't it?"

Maxwell turned to look at the newcomer. He stood and offered a hand. "Gel, right?"

"Yeah, we met the other night at the hall. Thanks again for letting us use it. Going to be fantastic!"

"I can't wait. Margot will look spectacular."

"I'm sure. Can I sit with you?"

"Sure. Want something to drink?" Maxwell said as he sat back down. "I've brought vodka and rum. Plenty to share."

"That would be absolutely lovely. Can we get the bartender to mix a cosmo, do you think?"

Maxwell looked back at the bar. With the way the bartender looked at Margot, Max was pretty sure the man would mix her anything she wanted.

She came back with the drinks, set them on the table, and knelt.

"You can say hello to your friend, Margot."

She lifted her head slightly. "Hey, Gel."

"Hello, Margot."

“Gel would like a cosmo. Get him one, would you?”

Margot stood and returned to the bar.

Gel laughed. “I’ve never seen her take to the servitude like that before. Usually she’s all catty about it.”

Maxwell raised an eyebrow and sipped his drink. “Really? Maybe she just needs to get treated like a cat.”

Both men laughed.

“So what are you up to tonight, Gel?” Maxwell asked, scooting back into his chair and enjoying the company and club.

“I’m looking for a sugar daddy and mama. Things are a little tight right now. I don’t suppose you...?”

Maxwell shook his head. “Not into that, but I’m sure you’ll find somebody.”

Margot returned and handed Gel his cosmo. He took it with a nod of his head.

She returned to Maxwell’s feet and knelt.

“I think it’s dinnertime,” he said. He set his drink down and opened the basket. From it, he removed a stainless steel pet bowl and set it on the ground. Then he removed a nice china plate and set it on the table in front of him. He looked at Gel. “I don’t have a dish or plate for you, Gel, but you’re welcome to some food.”

Gel smiled. “I’m starting to think I’d rather just watch.”

Maxwell took several black plastic to-go boxes out of the hamper and arranged them on the table in front of him. He’d gotten takeout from the best sushi restaurant in the city.

He surveyed the room. People were definitely taking notice, but he didn’t really care. He wanted Margot content, and if this is what did it for her, then so be it. He took a set of chopsticks out of the basket and began measuring out servings of sushi for himself. He set a few thin slices of sashimi in Margot’s dish. He sprinkled it with a few drops of soy sauce from a ceramic container in the hamper and then motioned for her to eat.

“Cat now, Margot. Go on, kitty. Dinnertime.”

Margot moved slightly to give him a side view of her and leaned over her bowl. He watched her extend her tongue, lift a sliver of fish, and then snake it in between her teeth. He’d

never thought eating raw fish could be so sexy, except for those geishas who allowed it to happen off their naked bodies. His cock twitched in response to Margot's agile tongue. He remembered what it had felt like the other night, lapping at his balls.

He ate his and chatted with Gel, fed Margot a few more pieces, enjoying the way she held her back, her ass in the air, as she ate her fish. Some other people gathered around and watched, obviously enjoying the view of Margot's rear as well.

A few obvious swingers, probably not into D/s, said things like "It's so degrading" or "I can't believe she'd let herself do that."

Others, clearly the clubgoers present for the opening of the fetish room, had more supportive comments like "We should try that" or "Look at her perfect, complete submission" and "He must be a super master to feed her so well."

Maxwell smiled, though he wasn't there for them.

He packed up the leftovers and dishes and tucked the basket under the table. "Finish your drink, Margot, and we'll go upstairs."

She lifted it up with both hands, evidently trying to emulate a two-pawed hold and not using her opposable thumbs. She drank it in a few sips.

Mittens for the kitten, Maxwell thought. It would make it feel more authentic for her to not be able to use her fingers. It might be fun for him too if he could get them made with lockable straps.

She set her glass down and waited, kneeling with her palms flat on the floor, as if they were her front legs.

Maxwell picked up the end of her leash. "Good talking to you, Gel. We'll hang out on Saturday, I hope."

Gel nodded, his eyes on Margot, but didn't reply. A thin sheen of sweat had broken out across his brow.

"Good luck with your search. Let's go, kitten."

Margot stood and followed him across the floor to the stairs.

* * *

Margot stopped short in the door of the fetish room. It was completely different from the bright, modern lounge downstairs. Instead red glass sconces on the wall lit the room with a wan glow. The designers had clearly intended to go for a French-brothel theme, à la the Marquis de Sade.

It had to be the most decadent, sinful room she'd ever set foot in.

All the equipment had a gleam to it that bespoke of its newness, and Margot couldn't wait to try them all out: slings, crosses, benches, webs on the wall, chains hanging from the ceiling to tether the wayward slave. Not one piece of furniture looked to be made of reclaimed plywood like the rigs she usually ended up on at the happenings she attended.

Earlier arrivals were already engaged in various acts of sex and punishment around them. At the far end of the room, in a throne designed for boot worship, sat a local dominatrix, Lady Corneille Noire, a woman Margot admired and had met in passing at several shows and parties. A buff blond man currently knelt at her feet, polishing her shoes.

Margot realized that this would be the final test of Master Max's trust in her and in himself, particularly with that mistress looking on. If he could string her up and make her come and not hold back, then their relationship would be sealed. Nothing would separate them.

Margot swallowed. When had she become ready for that? She couldn't say, but she also had no doubts as to the fact that she wanted Maxwell for as long as he would have her.

Master Max finally tugged her across the threshold, and the game was on.

"That one." He pointed at an intricate suspended table/sling device. Margot's eyes went wide.

He pulled her with him toward the device. It had a padded table section, but it wasn't nearly long enough to support her entire body. Instead other, smaller platforms were suspended at the end. These had straps on them, obviously to secure her legs and ankles. As she examined the table, she saw the leg supports could be raised and lowered from both ends, causing them to incline. The main section had wrist restraints built in, along with a long strap for across the chest, and it too had an elaborate pulley-and-chain system, allowing an operator to tilt it at nearly any angle. She could end up head down, legs down, bent back at the waist with her knees spread wide, open for everybody.

Oh God. The thought of what he could do to her on that contraption caused Margot to go wet in a shot, and she knew it had to be leaking down her thigh.

“Shoes and panties off, now,” Maxwell demanded.

She complied. As she unlaced her black boots, she saw other shoes approach across the floor. High-heeled, shiny, purple patent leather, fuck-me witch shoes. She only knew one woman who wore those shoes.

Margot stopped what she was doing and fell to the plush carpet, bowed over as far as she could go, her forehead on the floor.

“I didn't tell you to stop,” Master Max hissed.

She couldn't answer; how could he not know the Lady Corneille Noire?

Lady Corneille said, “She shows me honor due my station, Master...?”

“Maxwell Billew, ma'am. I didn't mean any disrespect.”

“Of course not. You're obviously new to us, but your little sub is known to me. Finish removing your boots as your master has instructed, Margot, and then stand.”

She quickly did as the mistress told her, finishing with her panties as Master Max wanted, and then stood, head down.

If Margot liked girls more than she did boys, and if Lady Corneille kept female slaves rather than just boy slaves, Margot would have—long, long ago—sworn herself to the lady. She was one of the very few icons in the New Orleans scene; everyone loved her and wanted her at their parties and shows.

“Word has it, little sub, that you've planned something big and not invited this Domme to the fun.”

Margot wanted to drop to the ground again in shame. Why this woman had such an effect on her, she couldn't say. She barely kept her feet and stammered, “I'm so, so sorry, my Lady.”

“Can you not find a position for me in the festivities?”

Margot thought about it only a moment. There was only one job suitable for the lady, and Margot had no excuse not to give it to her. “We would be honored if you would judge, my Lady.”

Lady Corneille laughed lightly. “That wasn't so hard now, was it? I know exactly what to wear too.” The woman touched a finger under Margot's chin and tipped her head up. She brushed a soft kiss over her lips. “E-mail me the information, okay?” She smiled, then turned her head to Maxwell. “Welcome to our scene, Master Billew. I hope you enjoy it.”

The mistress crossed back to her throne, where the sub still knelt. He kissed the toe of each shoe, then started buffing them out again.

“On the table, kitten,” Maxwell said. He helped her perch on the larger part, then lifted one leg at a time onto their independent platforms. He strapped her down, spread her legs, tilted up her head, her back, and her ass, and looked down at her, a vicious grin on his face.

“This should be fun,” he said. “I know you're already wet. I can see it glistening from here.” Maxwell glanced around the room. “Anyone can watch,” he said loudly enough for the bystanders, “but no one else touches my pussy.” He paused for a moment. “I do think we are missing some things, though.”

What else could he possibly want?

Margot watched him walk to the wall where various toys, whips, straps, and other equipment hung.

“Aha,” he said. He grabbed two things off the wall and brought them back to Margot.

“First, nipple clamps.” He laid the two items down and unbuttoned the tuxedo front of the dress; the cool air hit her breasts, and her nipples immediately tightened. “Making it easy for me, are you?” Maxwell picked up the clamps and fastened one on each breast. She sucked in a deep breath.

Then she noticed the other toy Maxwell had retrieved from the wall. A single trident leather flogger—three lengths of heavy leather on a wooden handle.

It would make Margot scream, and she knew it. He walked around to the end of the table where her feet hung, and positioned himself between her knees. He set the flogger down on her belly as he undid his fly and took out his cock.

It was hard already, and Margot licked her lips. She wished he'd let her suck it, but she could tell he intended to go right for her pussy. That would be the proof, wouldn't it?

He grabbed a condom out of the pocket of his pants and slipped it on quickly, then picked the flogger back up.

“Adjusted to just the right height, I think,” he said, striking his palm with the flogger a few times.

Margot could feel the air on her wet pussy, but she wanted to feel his cock inside her instead. Master Maxwell ran the flogger up and down her thigh, and she broke out in goose bumps.

Then he raised it ever so slightly and flicked it against the inside of her leg.

Margot tensed.

He raised it higher and hit her again, and this time a squeak escaped her.

“I want it louder than that, kitten,” Maxwell said and lifted the flogger higher. He brought it down with a quick snap. She did cry out that time. She didn't care. She could hear others in the room doing the same around her. She'd just be part of the symphony of lust and pain, a common theme in her life. She felt comfortable playing this instrument.

Maxwell hit her again, and she sobbed, wanting him so desperately inside her.

Finally he stepped forward, and she could feel the heat of his cock against her wet folds.

“I'm going to enter you now, deep and hard,” he told her.

“Yes, Sir,” she said, and her eyes rolled up as she felt him breach her, filling her. He still held the flogger against her stomach, and as he found his pace fucking her, he slapped it back and forth against her skin, matching the rhythm of his thrusts.

Margot felt every sting and plunge as the swinging table floated back and forth against Maxwell. Her mind quickly blocked out the distractions of the room around her as she gave over completely, the endorphins prompted by the agony of the flogging and the ecstasy of the fucking pounding through her blood. Earlier this time than the last, her mind went blank, as if it melted down into her body, and she thought with every nerve and square inch of her skin rather than the gray matter in her skull. *The haze of pain and the feeling of Maxwell within...*

The sensations from all over her body joined in the surge of lust that grew in her, tumbling like an avalanche toward her, threatening to destroy her in its intensity.

It overtook her, and she screamed her release. Her legs cramped as her feet arched, and her back tried to rise up off the table. The straps cut across her chest, and the reminder of her

bondage slowly pulled her back into the present. As the spasms rocking her body slowly subsided, she became aware of Master Max's grunts, the slapping of his balls against her ass.

Only moments later, he too came with an animalistic growl, a final deep plunge, the table swinging into him. Margot could feel him pulsing within her and wished there were nothing between them to keep her from taking his seed. Margot didn't even think of all the ramifications of that; emotionally, mentally...she felt too exhausted.

He let the table go, and Margot swung back slightly. She watched him as he stripped the condom off his cock and dumped it in a nearby receptacle. He tucked himself away, did up his pants, and smiled down at Margot. She looked at her body and noticed the welts on her stomach where he'd hit her with the flogger. Thin lines of blood even dotted a few.

"That was wonderful, Sir," she said, wanting to reassure him. The blood and the welts were nothing compared to seeing her master smile at her as he did now.

And then he leaned over her, resting his head on her chest and clutching her to him. Margot—still restrained—could not hold him, but she watched him, a smile on her face. He looked up at her, and she saw freedom in his eyes.

A confused expression crossed his face; he straightened and reached into his pants. He pulled out his cell phone.

Must have been on vibrate.

He looked at the number, then flipped it open and took the call.

Margot let her head fall back on the table, waiting for her master's whim to set her free, but she listened to his conversation with half an ear.

"What? Now? How long will it take? I can't... No one else? Fine. I'll be there by the morning."

Margot felt hands undoing the tethers at her ankles and knees. She opened her eyes.

"I've got bad news," Master Max said as he undid the strap across her chest next.

"What is it, Sir?" Margot asked.

"I've got to go to Chicago, and I don't know when I'll be back."

Chapter Ten

Margot sat at the door to the hall, her head resting on her hand. From out of the hall door came the sounds of the three-piece band Sig had found; a guitar, cornet, and drum kit played cabaret jazz. It fit the scene perfectly, but Margot could barely enjoy it. She took money, checked IDs, handed out drink coupons, and stamped hands.

She wanted to be inside.

She wanted Maxwell with her, but as far as she knew, he was still in Chicago. They'd talked the day before, and he hadn't finished his work there. Some big emergency with one of his developments, he'd told her. They hadn't talked at all today; she'd worked the first shift at the bar and then taken a cab here to start setting up the benching cages and decorating the stage.

Everything, really, had gone off without a hitch, except for the missing Maxwell. Plenty of cats and trainers had shown up: the Brads, Haley and her pony trainer, Lev and Tina (arranged so last minute that Tina had to buy her tail and ears at a costume shop, but nobody faulted her for it), as well as other couples Margot sort of knew from around the scene. And the early arrivals for Southern Decadence had flooded the hall as well. People poured in to fill the audience, and some of them had come dressed up. Lady Corneille Noire had worn a sort of ringmaster outfit with her signature shoes, matching hot pants and corset, and an elaborate tux jacket with golden epaulets and huge gold buttons. She'd even brought some prizes, other than the ribbons Gel and Haley had made, for the winners she chose. They were all funny, cat-themed things like cans of expensive tuna and catnip toys.

Margot hadn't bothered to bring her costume; Haley's had turned out so amazing that she was bound to win anyway. Margot *had* tried to do up her hair to look sort of like Neko cat ears, adding some ribbon and a few scraps of fun fur, but it was more to stay in the spirit of things rather than her expecting to get into the competition.

Now, inside, all the kittens were staged in the cages as people walked around, drinking and snacking and teasing the cats. They'd laid out feathered toys and riding crops around all the cages for that purpose, so anyone could interact with the kittens. Some kittengirls had even put up AVAILABLE FOR ADOPTION signs as a last-minute joke.

Margot glanced at her cell phone; she had it sitting on the table in front of her, hoping for a call from Maxwell. It was ten fifteen already. In only a few minutes, the show would start. She sighed; she wanted to have fun but just couldn't without Maxwell. He'd insinuated himself into her life so quickly that even this party wasn't the same without him, despite all her hard work.

"Why so sad, pretty kitty?"

Margot glanced up, not for a minute fooled that it would be some knight to rescue her. No, it was only Grant. "Ten dollars gets you admission and two drink tickets," she told him. "A donation of fifteen gets you three drinks."

"Shouldn't you be in there?"

"Probably, but it didn't work out. You want admission?"

"Maybe I can help?" Grant offered, leaning down onto the table. "I mean, I could watch some of the other masters first, and then we could give it a shot."

Margot eyed him. No way would she get back on that horse. Grant just seemed...icky now.

"I think this kitty's spoken for, actually."

Now there was no doubting *that* deep voice. Margot jumped from her seat and threw her arms around Maxwell as he appeared out of the darkness.

"You're back, Sir!"

"Just got in." He held a large box, the kind beautiful dresses in old movies came delivered in. "This is for you," Maxwell told her. "Open it. Quickly."

Margot took the box and set it down on the table. She tore off the lid. Fur filled the inside, and she thought at first it was some kind of stole or cape, but then realization dawned.

She'd never even mentioned it to him, but somehow he had tracked down the man in the United Kingdom who made the custom tails with the beautiful, handworked wooden butt plugs. Even in the dim light, she could tell this tail matched her dark brown hair perfectly.

The plug seemed...larger than the ones online. *Custom, right?* He knew her well.

"It's beautiful," she said breathily. She wanted to strip right there in front of the building and try it on. Instead she threw herself into his arms again and kissed him, long and hard. Margot felt thrilled that he'd even managed to make it; the beautiful gift was just the icing on the cake. Master Max cleared his throat, and Margot's eyes went wide. She dropped her arms. Master Max pulled away, and Margot smoothed her hair and dress as she cast her eyes toward the concrete. She hoped she hadn't been too familiar or informal in her greeting. Would he punish her later? She hoped so.

"You don't have much time, do you?" He took her leash out of his pocket and jingled it. "You're still going to enter."

"That would be purrfect," she said.

* * *

Maxwell led his kitten onto the stage.

The Lady Corneille Noire watched him as he brought her up. Margot wore nothing but her tail, her collar, and a smile; she'd even taken off her shoes, convinced they "didn't go" with her look. The noise level went up in the crowd as Margot crawled across the stage, and Maxwell felt a strange mixture of pride and arousal.

"And who's this entry?" Lady Corneille asked.

Maxwell tilted his head. The other kittengirls had all had cute, punny names; he'd completely forgotten about coming up with one for Margot. He looked down at her and thought for a moment as the crowd whistled and egged him on. He could tell they were all in love with his pussy.

All that came out of his mouth was, "Heeelllooo Kitty!" and he raised his empty hand with a flourish and waggled his eyebrows for effect. He knew it looked totally out of character, but it fit the feeling in the room, the attitude of the audience, and he was having fun.

The crowd burst out laughing. He glanced down at Margot and saw her glaring up at him.

So that's not what she wanted. Oh well.

"Let's get this pussy on the table," Lady Corneille said, "and see what she can do."

Maxwell pulled on her leash, and Margot climbed on top of the table. The Lady Corneille teased her with a riding crop while she talked about Margot's lush fur and good form.

"Points off, though," the lady began, "for those scratches." She pointed at the healing welts the flogger from the other night had left. "Did Kitty get in a fight with another pussy?"

Margot mewled and batted at the riding crop.

"She was a bad kitty," Maxwell explained, "and she needed reminding who her master was."

The audience cheered and laughed.

Maxwell smiled as Margot did kitty poses and flashed the audience, all in sync to the band that played along. His cock strained against the placket of his pants. He wanted inside her so badly, and *God*, that tail. He wondered how she felt with it in. He'd ordered one that was larger than average, knowing she could take it.

"Well, thank you, Master Max. You and your cunt—I mean, pussy—can leave the stage."

More laughter and applause followed as they walked off and the next contestants came on.

* * *

"I knew she would win best in show," Margot whispered to Master Max as they sat off to the side of the stage and watched Haley get the prize. All Margot had had for her costume was her tail and collar. *God, how good that tail felt!* The plug had filled her, and the luxurious fur had caressed the backs of her legs as she moved. Many catcalls and hoots of appreciation had accompanied her naked trip across the stage and subsequent judging on the table, but she couldn't compete with the elaborateness of Haley's outfit. Plus, she'd used her pony trainer, and he knew exactly how to show Haley to her best advantage.

Margot wondered again how Haley's master felt about all this. She'd taken his money at the door and knew he was somewhere in the audience.

She couldn't imagine, now that she'd found Master Max, giving herself to more than one man. He had everything she needed, and in the past she would have tried to fill that void with a selection of Doms. Now she didn't need it. When she looked into his eyes, saw the trust and devotion there, she knew he felt the same way about her.

She thought it might even be love.

But that would have to wait for another night. There was still too much fun left to be had in the company of her friends tonight.

“Let's get Miss Margot Granville up here,” Lady Corneille Noire called out.

Her name brought her out of her reverie. Margot shook her head.

“Don't cross me, sub,” the lady warned.

At the rebuke, Margot hopped out of her seat and scrambled for the stage.

“This was her idea, everyone.”

People in the audience clapped.

Lady Corneille had a single black rose sitting on the table with the other prizes. This, she took up and handed to Margot. It was a great honor to receive a black rose from Lady Corneille—like receiving the garter from Queen Victoria—and Margot sobbed as she took it, and bowed deeply.

“Let's hope this is not the last time we get to see the lovely kittengirls—and boys—of Mew Orleans.”

Margot took it as a command to organize another event, and she smiled. Lady Corneille approved.

The Domme bowed to the audience a final time, and music came up, encouraging everyone to continue with the party.

Margot ran off the stage and into the arms of Master Max; she hoped he felt as proud of her as she felt about herself. She wanted to make him happy too. He embraced her tightly against his chest, running a hand down her back soothingly. Then he held her by her shoulders and looked into her eyes.

“I don't know what you see in her,” he said as he searched her face, evidently noticing her tears, “but I'm happy she made you happy.”

Margot smiled.

“That is, however, the closest that Domme will ever get to you again. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, Master Max.”

“Good, now let's get some food in you and mingle, shall we?”

Margot nodded. Master Max clipped on her leash and led her through the crowd.

“Look, but don't touch,” he warned to people in the crowd. “This pussy's mine.”

Yes, I am.

THE END

G. G. Royale

G.G. Royale grew up in a small town on the Central Coast of California. She started writing erotica while in college. Her inspiration came from reading a copy of Anais Nin's *Little Birds* while traveling abroad.

She began working as an editor of erotic romance in 2004 with Liquid Silver Books. In 2006, she moved to Loose Id, LLC, where she still works.

Currently, she lives in the Deep South. Ms. Royale has had many short stories published under various names and has just recently finished her second novella, *The Flapper and the Fellow*, a historic romance set in the steamy South during prohibition. She has another novella in the works already, a sequel to *Kittengirls*. She is definitely looking forward to 2010!