



SANDHAIN PRODUCTIONS LLC

See Me

NATASHA MOORE

Through the eyes of desire...

These days, Lydia is feeling increasingly restless, and tired of being invisible. No one at work notices the nose-to-the-grindstone colleague dressed in business drab. Her neighbors don't even know her name.

No one knows she burns off her frustration by dancing to her favorite music, alone in her apartment. No one knows her closet is a wardrobe divided: monochrome and flats by day, silk and stilettos by night. No one knows her secret ritual has slowly evolved into private stripping...then dancing naked on her tiny balcony, daring someone—anyone—to notice.

Then, at the apartment across the way, the curtains move.

Wes can't believe what he's been missing by working the night shift. He is drawn to the amazing woman whose every sensual move makes his body ache. And when she catches him watching, the evening explodes into an erotic fantasy. Afterward, though, she confesses she's not all she seems. No way is this fiery siren as boring and unlovable as she claims.

And no way is he going to let her go without convincing her she is brave, beautiful...and the face he wants to see every morning.

Warning: Contains erotic dancing, stripping for a stranger, hot sex on the balcony, and lots of sexy shoes.

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See Me

Natasha Moore

Dedication

To Laurie, for being willing to take a chance

Chapter One

I've always been invisible.

Growing up in foster homes, that was a good thing most of the time. No one teased me. No one bothered me. But no one saw me, either. I've been on my own for a long time now but nothing seems to have changed. Today is just one more in a string of lousy days and I can't wait to get home.

I'm stripping my clothes off almost before I slam the apartment door closed behind me. What a fucking day. Sweat prickles my scalp beneath my heavy hair and the damned starched collar makes my neck itch. The evil brown flats that pinch my toes are the first to go, kicked across the room.

I'm so damned tired of being invisible. Just when I think I've found a job I like in a city that's interesting and a top floor apartment with plenty of closet space, I discover people are the same everywhere.

In their little cliques. In their own little worlds. Keeping me out.

I tear the shirttails of my white blouse out of the waistband of my skirt, nearly popping the buttons in my rush to get it off. I wouldn't have to wear long sleeves in the middle of the summer if the stupid office air-conditioning wasn't cranked up so high.

When I'm finally free of the shirt, I fling it onto the black leather sofa. I can breathe better already. The khaki pencil skirt is the next to go. I slither it down my hips and kick it away. The frustration choking me seems to ease up with each article of clothing I shed.

My pantyhose are strangling me. As usual, I put a hole in them with my fingernail as I rip them off. I buy them by the dozens because I'm never patient enough to be careful when I remove them. They end up on the floor over by the shoes.

Down to my plain white cotton bra and panties, I pad down the short hallway to the huge walk-in closet I made out of the spare bedroom. Tingles of anticipation dance along my skin when I step through the doorway.

While I'm always in a rush to get out of my work clothes, this is the moment when I make myself slow down. There's no need to hurry anymore. I have the rest of the evening to savor this, the best part of my day. I don't want to be in some crowded bar anyway, surrounded by people I don't know, talking about stupid things. Laughing. Having a good time.

Fuck 'em all. *This* is what I live for. The money I make answering phones pays for everything in this room. One side holds my work clothes, the khaki pants and calf-length skirts. The button-down blouses in

white and beige and pale blue. The sensible flats in brown and tan and ecru and ivory. Classic. Practical. Boring.

Turning my back on that side of the room, I peel off my cotton undies and pitch them in the hamper. Then I walk into the bathroom and turn on the water in the shower, hot and hard. If this was my place instead of a rental unit in a city I picked out of a hat, I'd get rid of the plain white tiles and the steel blue walls, the utilitarian vanity and the downright ugly light fixtures.

I'd turn this room into a luxurious spa, somewhere to relax after my lousy days at work. I'd put in a steam shower and a jet tub and cover the walls in a soothing sage green with heated travertine tiles on the floor. It would be a calming space where I could pamper myself before I got on with the rest of my night.

The small room starts to fill with steam, so I step into the shower-tub combination and pull closed the shower curtain. I sigh with delight as the spray from the massaging showerhead I installed washes away my sweat and frustrations. The lavender scent of my shampoo is already relaxing me, and by the time I rinse and condition my hair and scrub the moisturizing body wash over my skin, the day's worries and problems have washed away.

Before stepping out of the shower, I adjust the spray to a sharp pulse and lift off the handheld showerhead, directing the pulsing water at my breasts. It stings my nipples like tiny needles. Or greedy teeth. Then I lower the showerhead until the force of the water pummels my pussy. I suck in my breath at the sharp bite. But I only tease for a moment before I pull it away and turn off the water. I don't want to get ahead of myself.

Wrapped in a plush blue towel, I dry the worst of the moisture out of my naturally curly hair and clip it up on top of my head. It's useless to try to tame it, just like I can't restrain the wild need bursting inside me. I return to my walk-in closet, eager to prepare for the evening ahead.

I toss the towel into the hamper and then pump a generous squirt of shimmering body lotion into my hand. The sweet aroma of cocoa butter bursts into the air and sinks into my pores as I began to slather the scented cream along my arms. I hum with pleasure. That damned office air-conditioning is so drying.

The lotion is warm and silky, oozing between my fingers as I smooth it along my feet and ankles and calves. I squirt out another palm-full of the pearly white cream and start on my thighs. After a moment, I close my eyes as I massage the lotion in wide circles up my sensitive inner thighs.

When my eyes are open I can feel my body beneath my fingers, smooth and not quite as firm as I would like. The shimmer from the lotion makes my legs look pretty. As the moisture seeps in, the surface looks fresher, softer, sexier.

When I close my eyes though, I feel fingers stroking my skin, the soft pads massaging me. It's easy to pretend someone else's hands are on me now. It's been so long since any fingers but my own have caressed me, held me. Touched me.

The emptiness makes my stomach ache, but I push it away and concentrate on the sensual pleasure of skin on skin. Even if it's just my own.

I finish smoothing the lotion over my body, my not-quite-flat stomach, my long arms and legs, my ordinary breasts. I linger there, on my breasts, kneading the firm flesh, rubbing the sensitive nipples between my thumb and fingers—making sure the lotion is absorbed completely. A couple sharp pulls start that delicious tingle shooting between my legs.

As much as I enjoy this ritual every evening, I'm soon anxious for the next part to begin. I turn my back on my work clothes and face the other side of the closet where colors burst from every hanger.

This. This is what I live for. Why I put up with colleagues who ignore me. Who chat with each other and laugh when they should be working. Who talk about meeting for coffee or drinks and never say a word to me. They didn't even keep their voices down while they made their plans this afternoon. When they glanced at me, I quickly looked away, not wanting to see the rejection on their faces.

I dive my hands into the lingerie drawer and run them over the satin, the silk, the lace. Red is the color for tonight. Perfect for my mood. The thong I step into barely covers my tightly trimmed curls. My excitement has already made them damp.

I feel more daring than usual tonight. Today's snub pushed me over the edge. I reach for the red demi-bra I'd ordered online but hadn't even tried on yet. I slip my arms through the slender straps and snug it up under my breasts. After I hook it behind my back, I step in front of the full-length mirror.

The push-up bra fits perfectly, tight enough around my ribs to notice, but not enough to restrict my movements. I wouldn't want to do that. My heart beats a little faster as I see the way the cups stop just short of my nipples. They've beaded quite nicely as they peek over the top, obviously looking forward to brushing intimately against whatever garment I choose for tonight's performance.

I don't know why I bothered with the panties. They're soaked already.

Some nights I linger here in my safe closet, taking my time while deciding which dress to wear. I love to run my hands over the various textures, the different colors, debating necklines and hemlines. But tonight I'm anxious to get started. Ready to crank up the music and feel the blood pulsing through my veins again.

The silk wrap dress will be perfect. The fabric slides sensuously against my skin as I slip my hands through the armholes and draw it up my back and over my shoulders. The long sleeves are tight, an erotic binding along my arms. When I wrap the bodice over my breasts, my nipples send tingles of delight shooting straight between my legs. I tie the sash tightly at my waist. Quivers of anticipation dance in my stomach.

Now for the shoes.

I love shoes. My mood, my attitude can change completely depending upon the shoes I put on my feet. I stand in front of the rows of pumps and sandals and boots in colors to match every outfit hanging

beside them. It's a toss-up between the red sandals with the half-dozen skinny straps that hug my foot like a lover's hand or the red pumps with the sparkly bling on the heels and toes. I hold them up to the light and the bling wins. I step into them, and my muscles stretch and tremble in anticipation.

I practiced for hours before I could actually dance in four-inch heels. I could barely toddle around my living room for the first few weeks. But now I don't even have to think about it and the way they make my legs look, long and lean, is so worth it.

I turn to catch my reflection in the mirror. My dark, heavy hair is still clipped up, but stray ringlets have escaped around my face. I trade out my tiny pearl earrings for some shiny silver ones that dangle almost to my shoulders. I add some dramatic make-up, deep ruby lips and creamy blush, thick mascara and bold eyeliner. My nipples poke at the silk, my skin shimmers beneath the light. Some days I think I must have a split personality. No one at The Information Station would recognize me now. Sometimes I don't recognize myself.

Or is it the mousy phone rep with the boring wardrobe that I don't recognize? When did I become her? How did it happen? I run my hands over my body and push the questions away. There's no time for deep thoughts right now. I'm restless and ready for action.

Foreplay can only last so long before the body gets anxious for the real thing. I turn away from the mirror and walk down the hall and through my tiny living area to the other end of the long space which was intended to hold a table and chairs.

To my left runs a breakfast bar that faces the corridor kitchen. One bar stool is all I need for a dining area. Against the wall in front of me stands my state-of-the-art sound system and the row of CD cabinets. The stretch of hardwood floor calls to me to begin.

This is my dancing space.

The front wall is taken up by wide sliding glass doors that open up onto the world's tiniest balcony. I draw open the curtains, pull back the sheers and peek out. It's getting dark already. Three floors of apartments in the U-shaped complex face a dreary courtyard, barely more than a couple trees and a concrete path that's broken and overgrown. Not much to look at, but is that any reason to keep the curtains drawn day and night?

I have never seen any of my neighbors open their curtains. Ever. Is it because they don't want to look out or because they don't want anyone looking in? If it weren't for the occasional glimpse of a man or a woman walking through the courtyard or climbing the stairs, I'd think I was living in an empty building. Alone in my apartment, I sometimes feel as if I'm haunted by the ghosts of the other tenants. Sometimes I wonder if I've imagined them.

I think it's slowly driving me crazy.

The short skirt tickles my thighs as I close the sheers and draw the curtains again. First things first. My body is buzzing with the restless need to move. My heels rap sharply on the wooden floor. I choose one

of my favorite CDs and slide it into the player. I take a deep breath and let out a sigh as the sensuous notes glide over me. Stress drains completely from my body and excitement jumps in to take its place.

Months ago, I'd started dancing as a way to burn off all the frustrations from my job, my co-workers, from all the restlessness that had been building inside me during the day. Some nights I would stomp and whirl wildly to flamenco music. Some nights I would sway and bend gracefully to a classical orchestra. If my neighbors have ever been bothered by the music, or my dancing, they've never complained.

But then, maybe I live unheard as well as unseen.

Tonight the blues have me tightly in their grasp. I begin to move my hips—slowly at first—stretching my arms and legs until the muscles are warm and fluid. The music is warm and fluid too, flowing over my senses, guiding the dance. I circle the room, covering the floor with slinky steps. My heart speeds up, pumping my blood faster, sending waves of anticipation rushing along my skin.

I run my hands along my body, tracing the curves, the silk soft against my fingers. My breasts rest heavy in my hands as I cup them, squeeze them. I close my eyes and let out a shaky breath. My nipples tingle as sharp fingernails scrape across the tips, then roughly twist them, tug them. The tingles shoot through my body and head straight for my pussy.

My skin sings with the arousal playing across its surface, my body aches with the craving that throbs deep within me. I pulse my hips to the beat of the music, slide my hand between my legs and press my palm against my aching sex. A low cry of need slips from between my lips.

I open my eyes and stare at the long, dark curtains that separate me from the rest of the world. The dance isn't enough any longer. Hasn't been enough for a while now. I need more than blues riffs and warm muscles and the swish of silk on skin to feel alive.

I can't remember when I first started stripping to the music, but I remember clearly the night I first pulled open the curtains before I began to take off my clothes. It was only a couple weeks ago, on my birthday, and I had been yearning, somehow, to connect with other people.

I'd still been timid fourteen days ago. That night, I'd drawn open the heavy curtain, but left the thin sheers closed. My heart had pounded against my ribs as I stripped down to my fancy black satin underwear to the rhythm of a salsa beat. I'd nervously stayed in the shadows that night, but I could have just as well been under a spotlight. It hadn't mattered. There'd been no sliver of light to betray the movement of a curtain. Nobody saw me.

Day by day, I grew bolder.

Tonight, I step up to the curtains and yank them open without a second thought. Darkness has fallen. The lights are still on behind me. If anyone looks out, will they see more than my silhouette behind the sheers? Can they see the red silk that hugs my body? The heels that make me stand tall and thrust my breasts out?

I can't see out into the darkness and at this moment, I really don't care.

The throaty cry of the saxophone sends shivers up my spine and I slowly unknot the sash at my waist. I slide the narrow strip of silk through my fingers as the dress gradually parts. Although I know no one sees me, I imagine someone's dark eyes staring at me out of the shadows. He's looking at my cleavage laid bare by the parting red silk. The dress slides open and my nipples prickle as the fabric glides across their sensitive tips.

Can he see them, this imaginary man watching me? Can he see my nipples tighten and poke against the fabric as it catches on their tips? In my mind he can see it all. I spread my arms wide and the dress floats to each side, revealing my pushed-up breasts, my exposed stomach, my barely-there panties, my long bare legs.

I'm still moving my hips to the beat of the music. Still feeding off the heavy bass and the soaring brass. When I roll my shoulders, the open dress falls back. It can't slide too far down my body because the tight sleeves halt the fall of the fabric. The sensual sway of the melody, like the sway of the dress, feeds the need building inside me.

The need to move. The need to be seen.

I can almost feel his eyes on me, this imaginary voyeur. His hungry gaze lingers on my tight nipples peeking up above the bra, then sweeps down my body, zeroing in on the spot between my legs. Can he tell I'm wet? Are my panties darker between my legs? My hand drifts down and I cup my sex, sliding my palm along the damp silk. I press tightly against my pussy and feel the heat on my hand.

The dress is in the way now. I need to be free. I grab the edge of one sleeve and tug, dragging it down my arm until I finally pull it off. My skin is sweaty and the last sleeve sticks, clinging as if it doesn't want to let go, as if it wants to keep me bound in the red silk forever.

But soon I'm free and I begin to strut around the room to the beat of the music, the dress hanging from my hand, sweeping the floor behind me.

Is he watching? Does he see me? I toss away the dress and tear open the sheers. My reflection stares back at me in the wide expanse of glass, my eyes wide, my bra and panties dark against my pale skin. Is anyone out there?

See me! I want to scream. I dare you to see me!

I open the sliding glass door as far as it will go, then step into the opening. A slight breeze brushes against my sweat-slicked skin. The sax is crying through the speakers. I grab onto the door jamb and the edge of the door, arch my back and toss my head as the saxophone hits the high note. My body is crying too. For a touch. For a taste.

I brush my fingers lightly up my arm, across my shoulder, tickling the skin and sending shivers of awareness raining along the surface. I catch the bra strap with my finger and slide it off my shoulder. Then I do the same with the other side. The straps brush against my upper arms like the tips of teasing fingers. I leave the bra in place for a moment while I cup my breasts in my hands and roughly tease my aching

nipples with my thumbs and forefingers. Flames of arousal lick my skin and I struggle not to tear the bra off my body. Instead, I focus on the music, match my movements with the sensual rhythm of the blues and continue to move.

The vocals burn into my brain as the music steers my body. Lyrics of longing and loss, of need and sorrow, of searching and wandering. I sway to the music there in the doorway of my tiny balcony, in full view of anyone else craving more than this solitary existence.

Or am I the only one?

I reach behind me slowly and unhook the bra as I imagine that nameless, faceless lover watching my performance. His mouth waters. His palms itch. His cock aches with need. He can't take his eyes off of me. He thinks I'm doing this show just for him.

Since he's invisible too, I don't have to tell him, as the bra slides off my arms and hits the floor, that I'm doing it for myself. It's the only thing that makes me feel alive. My pussy twitches in expectation. I've had enough teasing. Enough yearning.

I step out onto the tiny balcony and lean back against the cool glass. The curtains of all the apartments facing me are still drawn tight. My eyes drift shut and I can feel the fingers stroking my skin. I sway slightly from side to side in time with the music, then sweep my hands up over my stomach and gather my breasts in my palms. They seem to swell beneath the kneading strokes. My nipples are even needier than before and I almost cry out when the fingers pull and pinch them.

My pussy throbs, need pulsing through my body in time with the drum beat that anchors the melody in the background. I drop my head back against the glass, hitting the large plastic clasp that holds my hair up. I reluctantly let go of my breasts, reach up and release my hair. My dark curls swirl around my shoulders. I drop the clip to the floor and open my eyes in time to see it bounce and slide through a space in the narrow, black, wrought iron railing.

As I glance up from where my hair clip disappeared, I notice the light is on now in the apartment directly across the courtyard from mine. I freeze when I think I see the curtain move slightly. But I realize I don't really care if someone actually is watching. In fact, my heart races and my body becomes even more alive at the thought that someone might be. The curtains don't move again, if they ever had to begin with.

Still, the shivers of need become more urgent. I close my eyes once more and imagine someone watching me again, but this time he is at the window across the courtyard. He's staring at the tiny triangle of lace between my thighs. A slow smile lifts my lips, and I slide one hand beneath the red lace and cup my pussy.

Hot and wet. The labia are puffy and very sensitive. The scent of my arousal surrounds me. I rock my hips as I slide two fingers through the slick flesh and plunge them deep inside me. At first I try to stay with the rhythm of the piano player, but before long there is no rhythm but the timeless one to which my body dances.

I slide my cream-slicked fingers out and as they brush against my sensitive flesh the delicious tension starts to build, begins to spiral quickly out of control. There is nothing I want more now than that ultimate satisfaction. I pump my fingers vigorously in and out of my core. I slide my other hand beneath the wet lace and begin to tease my pulsing clit. The pressure builds higher. My hips rise to meet each thrust as I lean my shoulders back against the glass. My breath comes faster, harder. My heart races, the frantic beat of my pulse echoing in my ears.

His eyes burn into me.

The sensations whirl around me, through me. Overwhelm me. Carry me over the top. I cry out as the orgasm slams into me. My inner muscles try to suck my fingers deeper. I rub my sensitive clit harder and harder to keep the spasms rolling through me. The glass rattles as I bounce wildly against the door.

My fingers finally stop their assault on my clit because I can't think enough to make them move any longer. I'm nothing but a bundle of exploding nerve endings rocking my body and shaking the glass. I slowly draw my hands out from beneath the red lace. They drop to my side and my knees finally stop trembling. My breath slowly returns to normal and my eyelids drift open.

And the breath leaves my body.

A man steps out of the shadows of the balcony across the courtyard. He stares at me, stroking the magnificent hard-on jutting out from his open blue jeans. I can almost hear his heavy breathing from here. I should be embarrassed, should turn and run, but I can't tear myself away from the erotic sight. I swallow as I watch his hand encircling that rigid cock, dragging the skin up and down with each strong stroke.

His face is still in the shadows, but I can see that he's tall and lean, strong and fit, with a runner's build. His cock is long too. I run my tongue over my dry lips. How long has it been since I've had a cock between my lips? Between my legs?

Suddenly he tucks his erection back into his jeans and zips up quickly. He holds up one finger and disappears into his apartment. My heart starts to race. Is he coming back? What does he mean by that gesture?

One minute?

Wait there?

I give it a one?

He's left the curtain wide open and I can see into his apartment. He doesn't have a dining table in the middle of the floor either. An impressive weight machine takes up the space. The image of him pumping iron while he watches me almost makes me come again.

I'm still standing on my tiny balcony, lightly panting, leaning against the glass door in only my red thong and heels. My door bell rings and I realize the raised finger must have meant, *Be right there.*

Chapter Two

I dash back into my apartment and quickly slip my dress back on. My hands shake as I tie it loosely at my waist. I run a hand over my wild hair and know it's a lost cause. The bell rings again and I yank open the door. He's even better looking up close. His light brown hair has golden highlights. His dark eyes are like melted chocolate, and his lopsided grin makes me smile in return.

"I'm Wes," he says, slightly breathless. He must have run down the three flights of stairs, across the courtyard and up another three flights of stairs. I'm breathing more heavily than he is. "I...um...I saw you."

My heart skips a beat. Those words. I barely register that his gray T-shirt is stretched across a sculpted chest. That his blue jeans are faded and torn at the knees. That he's wearing worn brown leather sandals on his feet. A thousand thoughts are running through my head, but the only thing I can focus on is the heat in his eyes. My body is on fire. "I'm Lydia."

I grab the front of his T-shirt and yank him into the room. He's leaning into the kiss even while he kicks the door closed behind him. This is not a tentative, meeting-for-the-first-time kiss. Our lips slip and slide frantically against each other. Our bodies rub. His hard cock pushes against my stomach and my pussy clenches in response. Our mouths open to each other and I suck on his tongue, drinking in this man who sees me. Kisses me. Touches me.

Finally we fall apart, gasping for breath, his hands on my shoulders.

"Why haven't I seen you before?" he asks. "Did you just move in?"

I shake my head. "No. Kiss me again."

He does, pulling me against his hard body and lowering his lips to mine. Sparks of desire shoot through my body, dancing along my skin and zeroing in on my clit. It throbs as if it's been weeks since I've come, instead of just a few minutes before.

"Skin," I gasp. "I need skin." I can feel the heat coming off his body and I long to soak it in. I tug at his T-shirt and yank it out of the waistband of his jeans.

He steps away to pull the shirt off over his head. I miss his heat immediately. Then I focus on his muscular chest, his well-defined abs and sculpted biceps. I whimper with the desire to run my hands over that toned body. And the need to feel his hands on me.

While I've been checking him out, I realize he's been looking me over too. "Lydia," he says softly. "You are beautiful."

I suddenly feel like a fraud. What would he think if he knew this wasn't really me? If he knew I didn't really dress like this? Look like this? Act like this?

"I love this music. It fits you," he continues as I stand there, not knowing what to say. I haven't been paying attention to the blues still singing through the air. "It's exotic and sexy and erotic."

Exotic? "You don't know me."

"I'd like to." He runs his hands along my arms. "You're the most exciting woman I've ever seen. The bravest woman I've ever known."

Exciting? Brave? I take a step away from him. "No, I'm not."

"Are you kidding? You just stood out there on that balcony tonight and bared yourself to the world."

"So did you," I remind him. I never thought I'd see anything like him standing on his balcony, stroking his thick erection and staring at me. Seeing me. Wanting me.

He shrugs. "I would never have had the guts if you hadn't done it first."

I've never felt brave, only desperate. "I just wanted someone to see me."

"I saw you, Lydia." He slowly reaches out and takes the sash of my wrap dress in his hand, tugs me closer with it. "I saw every inch of you." My heart scrambles in my chest. "And I really want to see it all again." I think he's going to untie the dress, and maybe he planned on it, but he stops and a sly grin spreads across his face. He drops the sash, letting it bounce against my thigh. "Strip for me."

I stumble backward. "What?"

"Come on." He steps around me, crosses the dance floor. His voice is low and smooth, the words seductive. "You know you want to." He leans back against the breakfast bar, like he belongs there, and folds his arms over his bare chest. He looks so good, I want to lick him all over. "Let me watch you, Lydia."

Watch me? I can't speak. I can't move.

"Isn't that what you want?" His voice speaks to all those dark needs bubbling up inside me. "Someone to watch you while you do those sexy things? Those naughty things?"

It *is* what I want. But before when I danced, when I stripped, when I touched myself, I didn't think anyone really saw me. The curtains were always closed. I danced for that imaginary man who stared out of the darkness and I danced for myself.

Wes is waiting for me to begin. He's better than any imaginary man. Suddenly I'm itching with the restless desire to dance for him, to strip for him, even though I never thought I'd actually be doing it for a man standing so close to me that I can smell the raw, masculine scent of him.

I feel strangely self-conscious, so I close my eyes. For a moment I let the music soak into my pores, slide through my veins. I begin to slowly move my body with the beat of the song. I open my eyes and Wes's gaze heats me. Urges me on.

The greedy look in his eyes gives me an intense sense of power that surges through me. Maybe this was what I'd been searching for ever since I started to indulge my exhibitionist streak.

I begin to play with the ends of the sash, running them through my fingers as my hips sway to the beat. For me, stripping had always been more about anticipation than the actual reveal. More about teasing and tempting, even when it was for an imaginary man. So I don't rush, even when I can hear his ragged breathing over the solo piano. Even though I can't wait to get naked with this man.

After winding the end of the sash around my hand, I slowly tug on it, holding his gaze. Then the bow releases and the dress begins to fall open. I quickly turn around so my back is to him before it opens completely. I let the parting fabric slip over one shoulder and look back to grin at him. He's standing straight now, no longer leaning lazily against the bar. His eyes are wide, his hands fisted at his side, watching me. Wanting me.

I can't stand still and so I'm suddenly dancing, the dress parting farther. I hadn't taken the time to put my bra back on before I let him in, so my breasts are soon bared to his eyes. The nipples bead tightly under his hungry gaze.

I grab onto the two sides of the bodice and playfully cover my breasts again. When I slowly begin to rub the fabric across my nipples, teasing Wes, teasing myself, we both moan at the same time. The skirt has parted, giving him quick peeks at my pussy as I continue to dance around the floor, the fabric swirling around me, the music telling me what to do.

My breasts throb with the need to feel his hands on me. My sex clenches with the desire for him to fill me. I want to crawl over to him, climb onto him, but I also want to dance for him forever.

I spy the wooden barstool beside Wes. I dance over to him and he reaches for me. I wink as I wiggle out of his way and pick up the stool. Then I whirl around, away from him, and place it in the center of the dance floor. When I turn to face him again, I see he's grinning widely. Who knew a smile could be so sexy?

As gracefully as I can, I prop one foot on the rung halfway up the stool. The high heel of the shoe holds my foot in place as I bend my knee and arch my back. I grasp the top of the stool with both hands and push my body up and down in time with the music. My leg is bared by the parted fabric, my breasts peek out of the open bodice.

Testing my balance, I let go of the stool and begin to touch myself, still moving to the beat of the blues. If I wanted to take the time, take a break and stop the flow, I'd change the music to something more upbeat. I'm not riding the blues anymore tonight. But I'm not going to stop what I'm doing and really, there isn't a rhythm much more sensual than the blues.

Wes groans when I gather my breasts in my hands and squeeze, then flick the nipples with my fingernails. Tingles shower over me and I shiver with delight. Can he see the moisture trickling down my thigh?

Sweat runs down my neck and I lift my hair with one hand. But there's no cooling down now. My body's on fire. I slide my other hand lower, beneath the red lace, to play with the slick flesh between my legs. Finger my swollen lips. Plunge into my heated core. Everything is heated now.

I watch him watch me. His mouth is slightly open, his eyes dark and shadowed. I sweep my tongue over my dry lips and my breath hitches in my chest. I let go of my hair and it tumbles down my back, and I draw my hand out of my panties. I don't want to do this alone anymore.

He steps away from the bar then, as if he knows, and walks silently over to me. I grasp the seat again. My heel is still hooked over the rung of the stool. He circles around behind me and leans over my body. He runs his hands along my arms, still bound in the red silk, then covers my hands with his. His jeans are rough against my skin, even through the dress. His heavy cock presses the zippered fly into the cheek of my ass.

"Lydia," he whispers in my ear. He bends me over the stool with his long, hard body. I shiver and push my ass back against him. The edge of the round seat presses into my stomach. The bare wood is cool against my skin. "God, Lydia, I have to touch you."

"Yes. Touch me, Wes. Touch me anywhere. Touch me everywhere."

He shifts to one side, releases one of my hands and runs his over my bottom. "Your skin is so smooth and soft." I feel the skirt slide up my legs and over my ass to puddle in the small of my back. He caresses my bare cheek with his large hand, warming me even more.

"You liked my eyes on you," he says smoothly. "I know you did. Do you like my hands on you now? Do you want my mouth on you? My cock inside you?"

I moan as his words excite me. As his touch arouses me. Does he know he's just what I needed tonight? Does he know he's made me come alive? He's the answer to a wish I never even dared to make.

I need to move again. To see him. To touch him. I wriggle beneath him and push up on the seat of the stool. He backs away so I can straighten, unhook my heel, and step away from the stool. When I turn around to look at him, Wes is so close I almost bump into him.

The open dress tangles around my legs as I turn. I never even finished my striptease, but I'm done teasing now. I tug impatiently at the tight sleeves until they release their hold, then let the dress slide down my back. The silky fabric makes me shiver as it slithers down my body. I push the pile of silk away with the toe of my shoe.

Wes lets out a long, shaky sigh. "More."

More? Then I realize I'm still wearing the red thong. The wet fabric drags against my skin as I tug it over my hips and down my legs. I grasp his strong shoulder with one hand to steady myself as I step out of it, teetering on my stiletto heels as I shift from one foot to the other. With a sly smile, I hand it to him, dangling it from one finger. His eyes widen and he snatches it out of my hand, lifts it to his nose and inhales deeply.

“Mmm.” He stares at me over the lace. “I’ve never met anyone like you.”

The smile slips from my face and I shrug, still feeling like a fraud. But from somewhere deep inside I remind myself that I *did* masturbate out on that balcony. I did perform a striptease for a man I’d never met before. I did just hand that stranger my soaking wet panties to do with as he’d like.

Maybe this *is* me.

“What about the shoes? Do you want me to take them off too?” I grab onto his shoulder again to steady myself as I lift my right foot.

“No!” He clears his throat, then repeats a little softer, “No.” I lower my foot to the ground. He looks like he’s going to say something else, then just shrugs, shakes his head and once more says, “No.”

“Okay.” I hook my fingers into the waistband of his jeans, just above the snap. His skin is hot against my hand. I tug him forward and he doesn’t resist.

“I haven’t seen you before,” I say. “Where have you been? Exercising behind your curtains?” I pop open the snap on his jeans, holding his chocolate brown gaze. He sucks in his breath.

“I used to work nights,” he says, his voice a little rougher now. Wes reaches out and caresses my breasts, softly at first, as if he’s learning the shape of them, the firmness of the flesh, the texture of the skin. Then he squeezes, not hard, just enough to make them ache in a really good way. When he scrapes his thumbs over the tips of my nipples, sparks zap through my body and I gasp out loud. It feels different, better, when he touches me.

He chuckles. “If I knew what I was missing, I’d have changed jobs a long time ago.”

Another time, another place, I might have asked him what he did for a living, but right now I don’t care. “I’d like to see more of you, too.” I grasp the tab of his zipper with a steady hand. “May I?”

“Hell, yeah.”

His cock pushes eagerly against the zipper as I slowly pull down the tab. The rasp of the zipper seems nearly as loud as our ragged breathing. Once the fly is open, I run my hand along his soft cotton briefs, cupping the hard ridge of his erection. Wes moans and presses into my hand. I flick my gaze up to meet his dark eyes, then back down as I release his hot penis from the underwear.

“Talk about beautiful,” I murmur. His long cock curls up from a tight nest of hair, pointing at his flat abdomen. My pussy moistens, softens, anticipating the thrust of that hard shaft into my hot core. Another trickle of moisture runs down my inner thigh.

He tucks my panties into the back pocket of his jeans and snags a condom out of the other pocket. Then he kicks off his sandals, pushes the jeans and his plain white briefs down his legs and steps out of them.

I’ve never dropped to my knees in front of a man before, but I do it now. His musky scent surrounds me and makes my mouth water. When I reach out and take him in my hand, Wes sucks in a ragged breath. He shudders as I stroke the hot velvet skin that covers his hard cock. Veins stand out along the rigid length

and the round head has already been moistened by a few drops of pre-come. I dart my tongue out to lick the liquid from the tip. His groan sounds as if it comes from deep within him.

Wes grasps my head, as if he's afraid I'm only going to tease him with my tongue. He doesn't have to worry. I'm not going anywhere. I part my lips and guide him into my mouth with my hand.

He eases past my lips, gently at first. His taste is salty on my tongue. The texture of his skin is as soft as silk, yet the shaft is as hard as iron. He slides all the way in until he bumps against the back of my throat. I quickly get used to the feel of him in my mouth, the space he takes, the way he rubs against my tongue.

I begin to rock back and forth on my heels, and my earrings jangle and swing against my neck. I slide my wet lips along his hard length, taking him in as far as I can. The strangled sounds he makes let me know he likes it when I take him deep. The entire length won't fit into my mouth, so I encircle the base of his cock with my hand and stroke him with a firm grip.

I like the way his fingers curl into my hair, the way his moan sounds all shaky. The thrusts past my lips become more frantic, less controlled. I like knowing I'm doing that to him.

"Oh, God, Lydia," he moans. His grip tightens on my hair and he stops thrusting, leaving his cock buried between my lips, lying heavy on my tongue. "Look up at me."

With his cock deep in my mouth and his hands tangled in my hair, I can't move my head. So I raise my eyes the best that I can. My gaze sweeps up over his flat stomach and bare chest, with their light dusting of hair. I notice his tight little nipples and wonder how they would feel in my mouth. Lifting my eyes a little farther, I finally see him gazing down at me.

"I can't stop looking at you," he says, breathless. "Your beautiful wide eyes. Your crazy hair dancing around your head. Your dark red lips all wet and shiny and stretched wide around me." He groans and starts thrusting again, riding my tongue. When he plunges deeper than before, I grab onto his hips with both hands to steady myself and open as wide as I can.

Then he suddenly groans and pulls away. My mouth feels empty. "Not yet," he gasps. "I'm not ready to go yet."

"Good." I'm not ready for this to be over yet, either. "I want to feel you inside me."

Wes takes my hand and tugs me to my feet. I stumble to gain my balance on the high heels and he grasps my upper arms to steady me, his grip strong.

"Thanks," I whisper. I lean up against him, brushing my sensitive nipples across his chest. His heavy cock rubs against my stomach. I sweep my hands over his chest, savoring the feel of his warm skin beneath my palms. His tight nipples scrape against my fingers and I lower my head to take one of those hard, little beads into my mouth. I roll my tongue around the hot, pebbled nipple then, as he gasps, I suck hard on it, thrilled at the way his hands grip my shoulders. I give equal attention to the other nipple before he gently pushes me away.

"I need to see you better," he says. He surprises me by putting his hands on either side of my waist and lifting me effortlessly up onto the stool that still stands in the middle of the floor.

My laugh is a little breathless. "So, I guess you really use those weights I see over there." I grasp onto the edge of the seat on either side of my hips and prop my feet up on the rungs. My legs are spread apart in that position and while I know I should feel a little self-conscious about it, I can't find it in me to be embarrassed. I'm willing to give him everything he wants because he's given me so much already.

He barely looks over his shoulder to acknowledge the weight machine in clear view across the way. He brushes my hair away from my face and lightly kisses my lips. "You are beautiful."

I squirm uneasily. "Watch out. If you keep saying that, I might start to believe it." The last thing I want to do is blush all over.

"You should believe it." He sweeps his hands across my breasts, awakening the nerve endings beneath the skin. "Don't you ever look at yourself?"

"Every day," I reply wryly.

"But do you see these bright green eyes with the long lashes when you look in the mirror? This straight nose that curves up just a bit at the end? And these wide, lush lips? Incredible." He lightly rains kisses over my face. His gentleness is unexpected. Isn't he hurting? Isn't he horny? Why does he want to talk about me instead of acting on his arousal?

I shrug, uncomfortable with the direction this conversation is taking. "Don't you want to fuck?"

Wes laughs—a sharp, quick bark. "Desperately. But I'm not done looking at you yet." He pinches my nipples between his fingers and those sparks shoot through my body again. Then he cups my breasts in his hands. He doesn't squeeze, just holds them, as if he's weighing them. "Your breasts are perfect. Not too small and flat. Not too big and heavy."

"I thought guys liked big boobs."

"Not too big." And without another word, he leans over and takes one sensitive nipple into his mouth. Talk about incredible.

My breath catches and I press into him, gripping the stool even tighter. My pussy twitches as sharp prickles cascade through my body. He rolls his tongue around my nipple, and I can't stop the moan that slips from my lips. Then he sucks so hard it hurts and I gasp.

"Suck harder," I cry, surprising myself. He does, and before it becomes unbearable, he switches to the other nipple and begins the delicious torture all over again. I close my eyes and savor the wild sensations swimming through my system. I have to rock my hips against the hard stool to try to relieve some of the pressure building between my legs.

Too soon, he lets go of my nipple, straightens and takes a step back. He begins to look me over again. "Do you ever notice how slender and shapely your arms and legs are? Your dancing keeps you in shape, doesn't it?"

“I guess it does. Can we fuck yet?”

He has the most delicious grin. “Soon.” He takes a step closer to me again. I shiver from the intense expression on his face. “There’s another part of you I want to see a little better first.” He sinks down onto his knees in front of me. My pussy quivers in eagerness, but he sits back on his heels and just looks.

Now who’s teasing? I shift on the seat again to try to scratch the itch between my legs.

“So pretty,” he says. “Pink and plump and shiny wet.”

“You talk a lot,” I grumble.

He just looks up at me. “You’re an amazing sight, Lydia, perched on that stool. Your hair gleams under the ceiling light. Your eyes sparkle. Do you always nibble on your lower lip like that?”

I shrug, not realizing I ever did that. I restlessly lick my lips and wonder why he doesn’t just shut up and get on with it. My body is starting to itch all over. Then, as he begins to describe my firm, pale breasts and nipples like little luscious berries and soft, smooth skin and on and on, I finally get it. Wes is doing this for me. He’s telling me all the little things he’s noticed about me, showing me that he’s looking at me, really seeing me.

I melt a little bit.

“Are you done yet?” I mean to sound a little cranky, but there’s a softness to my voice I don’t expect.

But he won’t be rushed. Wes rubs his face lightly against my inner thigh and I feel the beginnings of a five o’clock shadow. Our ragged breathing sounds louder and I realize the CD has ended. He runs one finger lightly along my inner lips, a mere tickle that sends wild sensations exploding through my body.

I shift my gaze from his shiny brown hair and look out through my open patio door. What would someone think, if they did look out and see me exposed like this, nude and on a pedestal, a naked man at my feet?

Actually that doesn’t sound so bad.

At that moment, he leans into me and runs his tongue the full length of my slit and I don’t care if anyone sees me as long as he keeps doing what he’s doing. Wes grabs onto my knees, pushing my thighs farther apart as he dives in. I cry out with the intense sensations he creates with his lips, his tongue, his teeth. I clutch the stool to keep from sliding off as I find myself pressing my pussy into his face. Silently begging for even more attention.

He obeys my wordless command, tugging at my sensitive flesh with his teeth, nibbling with his lips, licking and sucking and quickly driving me to the edge.

And then he pulls away before I can tumble over. “No, don’t stop!” I cry out, but it’s too late. I groan and glare down at him. He looks up and grins again, this time his face is wet with my juices. “You’re cruel,” I whine. “I was so ready to come.”

Wes rises and helps me off the stool. “I thought we could take the trip together.”

“Oh.” I like the sound of that. And like even more the fact that he thought of it.

He pulls me close, rubbing his cock between my parted thighs. I gasp as it runs along my labia, tingling the swollen flesh. "I'm going to fuck you now."

"Finally." My voice sounds ragged.

He picks up his T-shirt off the floor and wipes his face, then grabs the condom packet from where he must have placed it on the bar.

"Here, let me," I say after he rips open the condom packet. He hands me the latex and I drop to my knees again. His hot hard flesh brushes against my cheek and I take a moment to enjoy the sensation of the smooth, warm skin against my face. His cock is so beautiful it almost seems a shame to cover it up. I indulge in a few long, hard strokes on his velvet cock and then can't resist taking him deep into my mouth for one sweet suck.

"Lydia," he groans. I understand that desperate edge to his voice.

"Mmm." I hum my understanding before I slowly slide my lips off his cock. Then I gradually roll the condom over his erection, inch by inch. I glance up to see his eyes close in obvious pleasure.

Wes grasps my shoulders and helps me to my feet. I start to turn to lead him into the bedroom, but stop before I take the first step. This is not a bedroom night. Not a pillow and mattress night. There is nothing ordinary about tonight.

Chapter Three

I take his hand and lead him to the open sliding glass door. He doesn't hesitate as we step out onto the balcony.

"Hey, what's this?" Wes leans over and reaches for my bra, which is still lying in the doorway. He holds it up and studies it, then looks at me with a grin. "I think I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to see this on you."

I lift one brow and laugh. "Do you want me to put it on now?"

"No." He tosses it into the apartment. "Maybe next time."

That he even mentions a next time sends a tickle through my stomach. I'm not going to think about next time until we've had a *this* time.

"All the curtains are still closed," I say as I step up to the railing. I can hear the traffic on the street beyond the building, people in cars and trucks rushing here and there with no idea of what is happening just a few feet away.

The air is still muggy with almost no breeze now to lift the moisture from my sweaty skin. The clouds drift lazily across the dark sky and a half-moon starts to peek out at us.

"Our neighbors don't know what they're missing." Wes comes up behind me and wraps his arms around me, cupping both of my breasts with his hands. His body is hot and hard against my back. When he rolls my nipples between his fingers, sharp jolts of arousal once again burst through my body. I drop my head back onto his shoulder and run my tongue along the damp, salty skin on his neck.

He turns his head and catches my mouth with his, kissing me briefly, leaving me breathless. The light in the courtyard is dim, leaving us bathed in shadows. I push my ass back against him and his covered cock rides the crack between my cheeks. My legs tremble, my pussy aches. He groans, the sound loud in my ear. His body covers my back, pressing me into the waist-high railing. The metal is hard against my heated flesh.

"I couldn't believe it when I saw you out here," he says. "I'd just gotten home and the apartment was like an oven, so I went to crack open the door to see if there was a breeze." His hands run wild over my breasts, tugging, squeezing. I lean back against him, breathing heavily. Sweat tickles as it rolls down my chest. I wish there was a breeze.

"I heard the music first," he continues. "I looked out and I saw you dancing in the doorway. Then you burst onto the balcony like a goddess rising from the sea." He rubs his cock hard against me, sliding himself along the cleft of my ass. "I almost came right then."

Wes reaches one of his hands down between my legs and runs his fingers through the slippery folds. My hips rock against his hand, building the desire that's scrambling along my skin. Greedy tremors of arousal run through my body, wanting more, needing more.

"Do you always put yourself out there like this, Lydia?"

"No." My laugh bursts out, shaky and weak. I grab onto the railing and lean over, my stomach lurching as I stare at the cracked pavement three floors down. "I usually play it safe."

"Play it safe?" He leans over my body, keeping me bent at the waist. He nips my neck and shivers rush along the surface of my skin. "You?"

"I used to." I gasp as he scrapes his teeth along my shoulder, then licks the skin with his tongue. "I couldn't do it anymore. I was invisible."

"Invisible?" He drops his head down on my shoulder. "I can't believe that."

"I was. No one saw me." But it's already hard to remember, at least it is at this moment with Wes's body pressed into mine.

"You're not invisible tonight." His breath is warm against my neck. He runs his hands down my spine and I arch back. I don't want him to stop. Maybe I've been craving his touch forever. His hands roam lower, running over my ass. He slips his fingers down through my slick flesh, teasing me again before slipping them out. He cups the cheeks of my ass and lifts me up onto the toes of my red pumps with the sparkly bling.

Wes plunges into me from behind, lifting me even higher. For a moment I'm afraid I'm going to fly over the edge of the railing, but as he fills me, nothing else matters. I cry out, the sound echoing off the walls of the apartment building. But even that doesn't cause any of the curtains to stir. Maybe I should cry out a little louder.

And then he thrusts harder, burying himself even deeper, and I do.

"God, Lydia! You're so tight. So hot!" He wraps an arm around my waist as he plunges into me again and again. He surrounds me with his body, his scent. Fills me with his heat. He's everywhere, inside and out.

He slows down his strokes and starts to talk again. I don't know how he has the breath. "The moon's right over you now, curving around your head like a halo," Wes whispers in my ear. "But you're no angel, are you? You tempted me with your siren call, a seductive mix of the blues and orgasmic bliss."

I want some more orgasmic bliss. "Anyone ever tell you that you talk too much?"

He chuckles and pulls almost all the way out of me, then oh so slowly, slides his cock back in. "I think you like my words. You like me to tell you what you look like. What you do. What you do to me."

mouth is dry from panting. I swallow, but I can't seem to speak.

"Do you want to know what you do to me, Lydia?" He tugs me more tightly against him with his arm around my waist. "You've turned me into a horny teenager. I can't think about anything but your wild hair and fuck-me heels and hot, wet pussy." He slides his other hand across my abdomen and down to cup my sex. His hand rests heavily there, but doesn't move, doesn't stroke or tease or tangle with the sensitive, needy flesh. "I can't think about anything else but burying myself deep inside you. I can't think about anything but feeling you come beneath me and hearing you scream when you go over the edge."

He's right. His words turn me on as much as his body does.

I moan, but he doesn't move his hand where it rests against my mound. Does he want to drive me crazy? Or is he teasing me? The tension builds with each drag of his cock against my inner walls. I rock my hips with each thrust, but with his hand pressed against my pussy, my arousal can only spin so far.

"Please, Wes, please," I beg. My head drops forward and I groan in frustration.

His light chuckle tickles my ear. "Easy. Do you want this over so soon?"

I groan again. Prickles of desire are eating at me from every surface and deep within me as well. "Maybe."

He kisses my spine, then finally moves the hand between my thighs. Wes slowly brushes his long fingers lightly over my pulsing clit before abandoning it to slip over the swollen folds surrounding his plunging cock. I close my eyes and savor every amazing sensation. Now I understand his desire to take his time. I want to come so badly, but I don't want it to end.

This time there's no piano playing through the speakers, no solo saxophone crying the blues. This time our moans and heavy breathing are the erotic background music that serenade our pleasure. The rush of the traffic below us and the slap of flesh against flesh are the sounds I'll remember when I think about this night.

He's going at me from both sides now, his cock thrusting into me from behind, his fingers rubbing me from the front. I'm bent over the railing and my body rocks against the hard iron, digging into my stomach. I open my eyes and look up at the moon.

I idly wonder about the people in the apartments around us. Is there anything more interesting happening on their TV screens than what is going on right outside their windows? Do they ever check to see what they might be missing? Why do I even care?

Wes pinches my clit roughly and I come with a strangled scream, wiping thoughts of anyone else completely out of my mind. Waves of sensation slam into me. I hold onto the railing with a white-knuckled grip as my body bucks beneath him. My pussy spasms around him and he roars as he comes, pulsing inside me and groaning my name in my ear.

He collapses against my back. My knees are trembling with the aftershocks of all that orgasmic bliss. After a moment, he pushes himself up and slips out of my body. He helps me stand and turns me around into his embrace. I like it there.

“Wow,” he says softly and kisses me lightly. “That was an unexpected pleasure.”

I smile. “Yeah, it sure wasn’t what I had planned for tonight.” And even though I’m certain I’m going to step away from him, I sink deeper into his embrace instead. “And I’m really glad.”

“Me too.”

A car horn honks somewhere below and we both jump, startled. Laughing, we step apart.

We walk back into my apartment, closing the door against the world, leaving our neighbors to their boring evening. I point out the bathroom and then realize his is probably at the end of the hall too. He leaves to take care of the condom, and I grab my dress off the floor and yank it back on before he comes back in the room.

I’ve never had sex with a complete stranger before. Does he think I’m a total slut, used to having sex with any guy who comes to the door? Will he walk away now, content with a one night stand? Will he want to see me again? Yeah, he said so in the height of passion, but what about now?

How do I know if I want more than a one night stand with him anyway?

“Wow, this is some closet!”

He must have looked through the doorway on his way back from the bathroom. What will he think of my custom-made closet? When he doesn’t reappear in the living room, I join him in there, more nervous than when I opened the door to him in the first place.

“You like it?” I ask lightly. “It’s my favorite room.”

“Does someone else live here?” he asks as he looks back and forth between the two sides of the room. He walks over to my work clothes and grabs the hem of a pair of khaki trousers. “Do you have a roommate?”

I laugh, but it sounds a little strangled. “No. Just me.”

He cocks his head and frowns just a little bit. “So, there are two Lydias?”

I sigh. Here is where he finds out I’m a fraud. Here’s where I’ll lose the first person I’ve cared about in forever. I didn’t even know him a couple hours ago but now I’ll miss him desperately when he’s gone. “No.” I point to the side that holds my work clothes. “No. That’s the real me.”

“I don’t understand.”

I cross the room and grab a purple dress off the hanger. “This...this is just make-believe.”

Wes looks at me from across the room. “That’s not true. It can’t be true. The woman I met tonight is very real. The most real person I’ve met in a long time.”

“You don’t know me. You see a sexy red dress and fancy high heels and think that’s who I am. But it’s not.”

He's still naked, but doesn't seem at all self-conscious when he strolls easily across the room to stop in front of me. He takes the purple dress from me and tosses it aside. "I see more than the outside," he says as he brushes my wild hair back over my shoulder. "I see a beautiful woman full of life and passion. A woman with a great sense of humor and some wicked dance steps. And that's when you're naked." He grasps my shoulders and fixes me with his gaze. "I see you, Lydia."

Tears spring to my eyes and I crush my lips to his, giving him a kiss of thanks because I don't know what else to say.

"I don't know why you feel you need to hide in these boring clothes, but I'd like the chance to find out."

"I have been hiding, haven't I?" Hiding behind the boring clothes, the closed-off cubicle. A rush of panic sweeps through me. Do I really want someone to look past all that? Do I want anyone, especially Wes, to see the real me?

What if the real me isn't...lovable?

The fear must have shown in my eyes because Wes drops his hands from my shoulders. "Sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I'll go now." Just like that, he turns and leaves the room.

I hurry after him. "Wait."

"I'm sorry. I've never been in a situation like this before," he says. "You don't really know me. Just because we had sex doesn't mean you want to tell me your life story. I didn't mean to push." He's still naked, standing in the middle of my living room, hiding nothing, while he waits for me to say something.

Maybe this is why I never let anyone get too close. "I don't know how to do this. I don't know what to say."

He gives me one of those grins I'm already getting used to. I know I'd miss them if I never saw him again.

"Hey, if you're brave enough to bare your body in front of strangers, I know you're brave enough to bare your soul to a friend."

I catch my breath, take a step closer. "Is that what you are, Wes? A friend?"

"I'd like to be." He takes a step closer to me, too. "Maybe we should take the more traditional route after tonight. Aside from the amazing sex, I'd like to get to know you better. Would you like to go out for drinks? Tomorrow night? You don't have to tell me your whole life story. A day or two at a time will be fine."

Yeah, I want more than one night with this man. I laugh and shake my head. Unbelievable. Who knew my bad day would end up like this?

"What?" he asks.

I shrug and kick off the heels that are starting to pinch my toes. "Tonight a group at work made plans to go out for a drink and I wasn't invited." Damn, that sounds like self-pity. It probably is. I should have kept my mouth shut.

"And do you put yourself out there at work?" he asks lightly. "Or do you keep to yourself? Keep your curtains closed, like our neighbors do? Hide behind those boring clothes, maybe?"

"Maybe." Why do I do that anyway? What am I afraid of? He's right. After tonight, how can I be afraid of anything? How hard can it be to smile and join in the conversations at work and maybe make some friends? "You're saying I should expose myself to my co-workers?"

He grins again and pulls me back into his arms. "Not quite like this, of course, but why don't you take a chance?"

I smile back at him. "Why don't I?" I press my lips to his and feel the heat rising between us once more.

But he pulls gently away before the heat builds too far. "So, drinks tomorrow night?"

I don't want him to go, me who has always preferred to be alone. "How about a drink right now?"

"Thanks, but let's wait 'til tomorrow night. I don't want to wear out my welcome."

"It's not even slightly worn," I tell him, but I can already tell it's a lost cause. Still I give it one more try. "Coffee? Left over Chinese?"

He laughs and kisses me lightly and I know he's going to say no. "I want you to be able to sleep on it. Decide in the naked light of day if you really want to continue this."

I groan. "If I didn't want to continue this right now, I'd appreciate your concern."

He laughed again. "Don't let anyone ever call you boring."

I brush my lips lightly over his and then hand him his jeans. "I'd love to go out for drinks with you tomorrow night."

"Good. How about a drink and then dinner? And during the evening we'll learn a little more about each other before I take to you bed."

The smile remains on my face even after the door closes behind him. I pick up the work clothes strewn throughout the apartment that he never even commented on. I take them to the closet and toss them in the hamper. Before I leave the room, I stop in front of the colorful side of the closet and run my hand over all the soft fabrics. I choose a dress for work tomorrow and lift the hanger from the rod.

I think I'll wear red.

About the Author

Natasha Moore fell in love with the written word as soon as she could read. As she grew up, she discovered romance and now enjoys the chance to add some extra sizzle to her stories. She lives in New York state with her real life hero who is happy to tell everyone that he's her inspiration. They travel in their RV whenever possible. The great thing about writing is she can take it anywhere.

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Look for these titles by Natasha Moore

Now Available:

The Ride of Her Life
The Passion-Minded Professor
Bound by Design
Binding Ties

They can't deny the heat—it's the only thing keeping them alive.

Trey

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Red Hot & Blue, Book 1

A distracted soldier is a dead soldier. That's special operative Trey Williams' motto. The last thing he needs in his life is a girlfriend. Problem is, the woman who's been recruited to pose as his wife on a special assignment is proving to be exactly the kind of distraction he can't afford.

Years ago, Carly McAfee turned her back not only on her military career, but the men who come with it. So why did she say yes to a mission that puts her in intimate contact with Trey, under 24/7 surveillance by both bad guys and good? One slip, and they're both dead. It's not long, though, before her body betrays her, followed closely by her heart.

With a terrorist arms deal going down and missing teammate's life on the line, Carly and Trey must throw caution to the wind in the scorching-hot performance of their lives—and try not to lose their hearts and minds in the process.

Warning: Contains bad men with big guns and video cameras, and an unmarried couple who need to get naked and get busy acting very married to save both their country and their lives.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Trey:

Her eyes dropped to the erection evident in the too-damn-thin silk pajama bottoms. Instead of it freaking her out, she reacted in the totally opposite way. She lifted her chin a bit, closed her eyes and started to really dance for him.

Turning in time to the rhythm of the music, she spun to face the mirror. Her eyes opened and their gazes met as she watched his reaction in the reflection.

Running her hands over her body, she danced. He alternated between focusing on her reflection in the mirror and the swaying of her hips right in front of him. All the while his erection was an ever-present sign of his enjoyment of the show. He was happy simply watching her, until she pulled down the top of the nightgown to reveal one breast to him, then wet her finger and circled her own nipple with it.

At that point, he was no longer simply an observer. He couldn't control himself. This was no longer just a show for the target. Hell, it hadn't been for some time. He pushed down his waistband and began to rub his swollen cock. Not that he had many brain cells functioning at this point, but his thinking was Smith would definitely be the kind of guy who would jerk off as his wife stripped for him. Second, perhaps if he came while watching her, he could get away with only making Carly strip for the terrorists and not have to go further.

Only making her strip. Ha! There was nothing insignificant about what was happening between them now. Especially not when her eyes caught the reflection of what was happening behind her. Knowing she was watching him, as well as the target's guards and Matt in the control center, didn't diminish his arousal at all as pre-come seeped from the tip.

His fist moved faster over the rock-hard flesh and, just when he was starting to get really friendly with his own hand, Carly turned to him. Her gaze dropped, observing every motion he made. His heart pounded faster as she moved closer. Leaning down, she braced herself on each arm of the chair, putting him eye-level with her glorious tits. When she reached out and ran the tip of her finger down the slit of his cock, Trey hissed in a breath.

Her eyes met his and he saw the need in them. If she was into this, he sure as hell was too. Stopping what he had previously been doing, he released the grip on his cock and reached for her. With one finger he pulled aside the neckline of the already revealing nightie, just enough to expose her other nipple. Leaning forward, he drew the peak into his mouth and scraped his teeth against it. She drew in a sharp breath and then grabbed his head and pulled it closer to her breast.

There was no doubt in his mind now. John Smith was definitely going to make love to his wife tonight. Since it was too late to step back from the precipice on which they both teetered, he drew her another step forward. Wrapping his hands around her hips, he pulled her closer until she was in his lap, straddling him. Then she began to grind her pelvis against his erection.

She lowered her lips to his, devouring his mouth as he kissed her with equal need. His tongue drove against hers in a rhythm that mimicked what he hoped his very prominent arousal would soon do to her. She rubbed herself against the bulge of his cock. He heard her breath coming in staggered pants. In another second, she'd probably come just from the contact. If he didn't watch out, he'd come from it too.

Trey broke away. If this was to be the one and only time they'd be together, he wanted it to last a very long time and he intended on enjoying every moment. Besides, some part of his brain remembered the team wouldn't benefit from his rushing to finish this. They needed as much time as he could give them.

"Turn around. Face the mirror."

Did the pulse in her throat pound faster just from his suggestion? How hot was that?

"This is supposed to be a dance for you, remember?" Her voice sounded breathy.

"No reason why we can't both enjoy it." His own voice came out sounding raspy. This was no simple hook up. They affected each other physically. Chemically. He couldn't let himself think like that. This was a one-shot deal.

Swallowing hard from his words, Carly nodded. As her pulse continued to throb wildly, she rose and let him turn her toward the mirror.

“Spread your legs for me, baby. I want to see you.” He sat her in his lap, his hands spreading her thighs wide. Easing aside the scrap of lace that comprised the bottom of Candi Smith’s nightwear, he exposed her before both of their eyes. “Look at yourself, baby. You’re so beautiful.”

One sub to please the Master...in any way he wishes.

Hurt Me So Good

© 2010 Joely Sue Burkhart

Victor Connagher is no stranger to the Dallas BDSM scene. As CEO of a risqué cable channel that caters to adventurous adults, he ensures the lifestyle is portrayed in a positive light. He even supports a local bondage club. Yet behind the cool, confident mask, Victor lives in fear.

Once, and only once, he lost control of his inner Dom—and it cost him his fiancée. Now, no one knows how hard he works to keep his darker appetite for pain buried. No matter how much his saucy, confident associate producer makes his fingers itch to once again take up his riding crop.

Shiloh Holmes is a sub, but she's no doormat. She's always suspected Victor has the skills to feed her insatiable need for pain, and now she's found the perfect way to crack his formidable control. Develop a new reality show, America's Next Top sub...and dare him to compete.

Week after week, as Shiloh fearlessly challenges the real Victor to come out of hiding, he realizes his past mistake was only a blow to his pride. If he loses Shiloh, he could lose his heart.

Warning: Explicit sex, BDSM, reality television, a very reluctant Dom, an audacious sub willing to do anything to win for him, and one very wicked riding crop.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Hurt Me So Good:

"It's a BDSM show." Shiloh let a sultry smile curve her lips, but she didn't look directly at him. She didn't trust herself not to plop down into his lap. "If we set up the correct challenges, everyone will go home extremely happy regardless of who wins."

He checked his watch, warning that his patience was almost gone. "Either this is a reality show or it's not. There has to be a winner, and I won't stand for cheating among my own employees."

"It's a dual competition." Shiloh fought not to blurt out her response in a desperation plea. "We'll have submissives competing to win the Dominants' favor, but also a single Dominant could win the title of Master, if he selects the correct submissive to win it all."

Ms. Kannes laughed. "By God, Victor, it's brilliant. I could compete as one of the Dominants, with my submissive as one of the contestants. Patrick could compete too, and that would give us another two or three submissives, depending on who's in his stable right now. If we can get another couple from Silken, then we'd have an interesting mix of newbies and experienced players. The experienced ones would be teaching the rest, as well as having a little friendly competition among us all."

Frowning, Mr. Connagher shook his head. "There's not going to be much drama between you and Patrick. You're too evenly matched and know each other too well."

Shiloh let out her breath and took a step closer to him, waiting until his gaze swung to her. “That’s why you should compete, sir.”

His eyes narrowed to slits, his mouth flattened into a hard slant, and his shoulders squared, chest broad and muscular in a universal signal of male dominance that his suit couldn’t conceal.

Her heart froze a moment and then exploded into a rapid, thunderous pace that made her ears roar. He didn’t refuse outright, though, which gave her the courage to continue. “The show needs a Master with a capital M. Someone who’ll really bring the competition to a peak. Based on our demographics, it should be a male, and preferably, his submissive should be female. It will be even more exciting if he’s unattached, so the unowned submissives all feel like they have a chance of winning his attention. The ultimate prize, then, will be the Master’s collar, not money like the typical reality show.”

Evidently he didn’t like that idea at all. Silence stretched out, painful and heavy, his midnight eyes locked on her. Her mouth went dry and her heart hammered, but she stood her ground without blinking or flinching in the wake of his intensity. She didn’t even dare breathe.

“You presume, then, that I’m not only a Dominant, but also a man who’d be interested in a giggling, immature submissive who’s incapable of any sort of serious play.” He blew out his breath in a low snort and turned to the other woman. “As though I’d give my collar to someone just because they thought they’d won a show that we set up from the very beginning.”

Sucking in a deep breath, Shiloh squeezed her hands together so hard she felt her nails digging into her skin. She fought to hide the fierce elation burning through her. He might be dismissive, but she’d been right all along. He did have a collar, he was Dominant, and if she played this right, it’d be impossible for him to back out. The competitor in him demanded excellence in all things, even a reality show.

Feigning indifference, she shrugged and turned away from the table. “Then perhaps you can recommend another Master.”

Shuffling through her carefully researched boards, she moved the most important one to the front. Her best friend and roommate—who just happened to be a graphic design artist—had helped with the artwork. A masked man stood on a dais, dressed like an English riding master with a wicked-looking whip in his right hand. Despite the costume, the man bore a marked resemblance to VCONN’s CEO.

Contestants knelt in an arc before him, all in submissive positions, head down, some stretched out prostrate before him. Two others stood on the steps to the dais but lower than him, a man and woman, also in Victorian riding wear. Despite their higher position than the contestants, they inclined their heads to the man above.

In bold letters across the top, the board read: *One Master to rule them all.*

“V,” Ms. Kannes breathed out, her eyes bright. “You’re perfect!”

“I don’t want to do it.” Yet he stared at the board, his right hand opening and closing into a fist, as though he ached to reach out and grab that whip. “There’s no way in hell I’m unleashing that side of me on a bunch of—”

Shiloh pulled out the next storyboard and his voice fell off. In this sketch, a woman knelt at the Master’s feet and leaned against his legs. One hand was wrapped around his thigh; her other fisted in his shirt as though she was trying to climb his body. Her face was pressed against him with her hair pulled aside to bare her back. Long red stripes marked her skin and the Master’s whip curled around her vulnerable body with the heading: *One sub to please the Master—in any way he wishes.*

He ground out, “It’s all wrong.”

Shiloh’s heart plummeted and her shoulders slumped with defeat. She’d gambled everything on this show. If he didn’t like it, then she’d totally misunderstood every single signal she’d picked up from him. She’d even had her friend stylize the winner after her, a deliberate message to him, if only he were paying attention.

She’d planned this show down to the smallest detail, dreaming about winning it all. Wrapping herself around him. Learning to please him in every single possible way he’d ever dreamed. Winning *him*.

Her eyes felt hot and dry, and her bottom lip trembled. It was ridiculous to be heartbroken over a man who’d never touched her. Never looked into her eyes and burned with need. Never taken her on a long, hard ride to a sweetly painful submission they’d never forget.

“You came very close, Ms. Holmes.”

She whipped her head up.

Victor Connagher gave her a hard smile of teeth and dominance that wound her heart into knots and sent icy chills dripping down her spine. “I can live with the English riding style.” He kicked back in his chair and propped his limited-edition Lucchese boots on the edge of the conference table. “But this Master only uses a riding crop.”



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