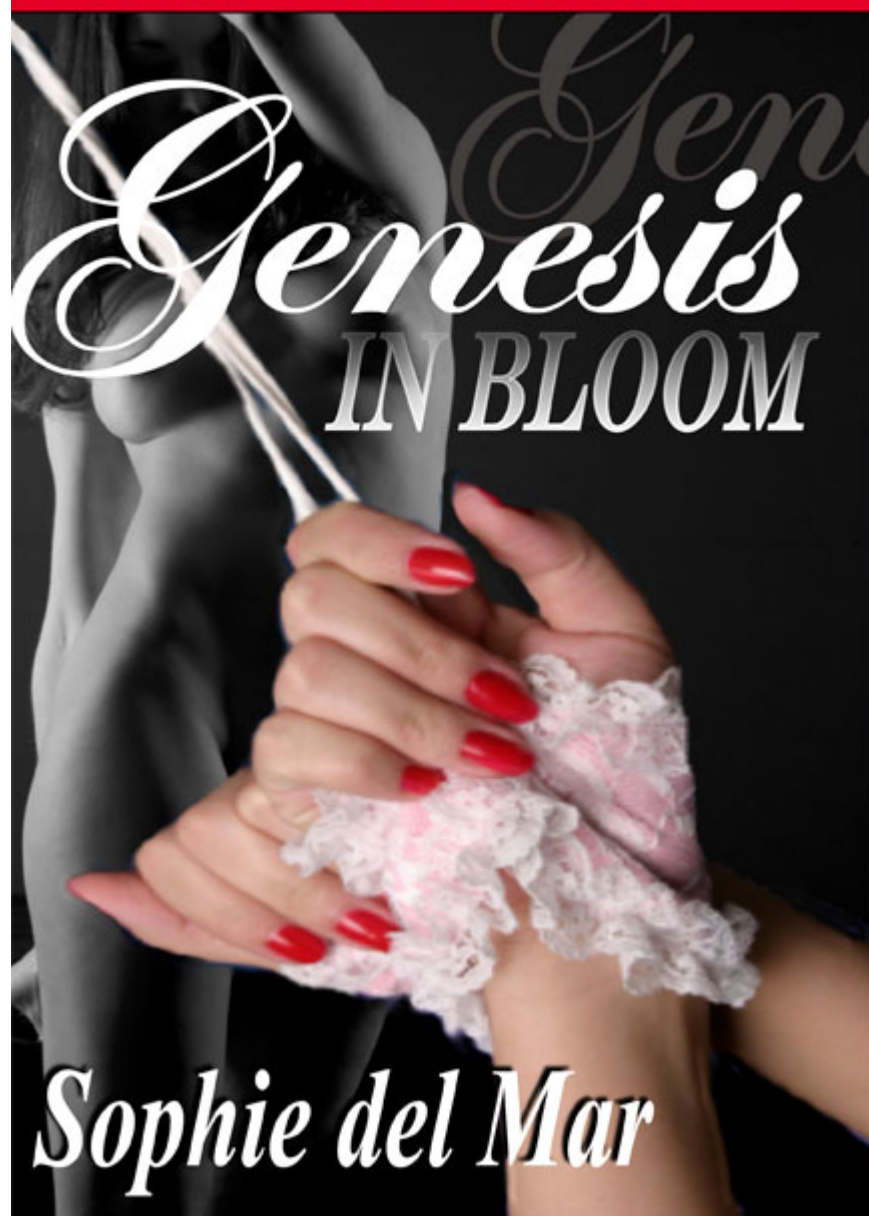


SIREN PUBLISHING



# Genesis

## IN BLOOM

*Sophie del Mar*

## Genesis in Bloom

Alexander Lansing ran a trembling hand through his hair. There was something about this woman which made him feel like a callow, inexperienced youth.

Even if this was only a brief sexual encounter, he wanted it to be special...

After being abandoned by her mother, Genesis Kelly trusts no one and believes in nothing. However, she wants to understand the mysteries of sex and seeks employment in a high-class brothel.

When a gorgeous stranger falls for her, she must choose between his love and the way of life she is determined to follow.

**Sensuality Rating:** **SCORCHING**

**Genre:** Historical/Multiple Partners

**Length:** 33,000 words

# **GENESIS IN BLOOM**

**Sophie del Mar**

**EROTIC ROMANCE**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
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# **DEDICATION**

To the gifted writer Lisa Valdez. You've taught me so much.

# GENESIS IN BLOOM

**Sophie del Mar**  
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## Chapter 1

"Come Alex, you must see the women of Le Petit Palais for they are the most beautiful courtesans in all of Paris."

Lord Alexander Lansing, the Earl of Landower, smiled at his friend. "I have enjoyed dinner and a game of cards, but now I wish to take my leave."

"And return to your solitary home?" Gregory shook his head. "I thought when you moved to Paris, we would spend more time together."

Alex looked around the elegant restaurant with its glittering chandeliers, reflective mirrors, and candlelit atmosphere. Suddenly he was reminded of the ballrooms of London, of the night he had danced with Anna for the first time.

"I see it in your face," said Gregory. "You still mourn her, don't you? It's been two years, and you must get on with your life."

"How can I stop myself? If I had shown her more love, if she had trusted me more—"

"She was a suspicious woman, and you couldn't have done anything more to allay her fears and jealousies. She was torn between her love of you and the life she left behind."

"She gave up her child to be with me. Her husband wouldn't consent to a divorce, neither would he allow her to see the boy. This was the beginning of her decline, but her jealousy made things intolerable for her."

"She made the decision to end her life. If she had kept faith in you, if she had kept faith in the future, but she didn't possess those qualities."

"If she had trusted me more perhaps she wouldn't have taken her own life."

"You must pray you never fall that deeply in love again for that sort of passion never survives."

"Do you really believe that?"

Gregory nodded. "My way is better. No emotional attachments to muddy the waters. I take their bodies, and they take mine. Everyone is happy."

Alex gave a bitter laugh. "You make it sound so easy."

Gregory shrugged. "What's hard about it? Listen, you can't rewrite the past, and you can't blame yourself for Anna's death. What you need is a woman to help you forget." He spread his arms wide. "And if there's any place on earth which will offer forgetfulness, it is Paris. The women here are the most beautiful and elegant in the world."

Alex looked around the crowded restaurant and studied the happy patrons enjoying a delicious meal. Perhaps his friend was right. Paris was a city of life, of light and hope. There was beauty around every corner, from the colorful flower stalls to the cozy cafes where one could spend a lazy Sunday people watching. There was the majestic cathedral of Notre Dame and the magnificent boulevard Champs-Élysées which had often been referred to as "la plus belle avenue du monde" or "the most beautiful avenue in the world."

"Very well," said Alex. "Let us visit these courtesans which you find so entrancing."

The drive through Paris soothed Alex's troubled spirit. His newly adopted city was at her most enchanting in the evening when the city lights glittered and finely dressed people were out on the town. They passed the famous Left Bank, the most romantic area of all. Artists who were building their careers called this community home, as did others who were not so well known and who supported themselves by selling reproductions of more famous works. The city throbbed with energy, with youth, with a vital essence which had been missing for too long in his life.

For the first time in months, Alex inhaled deeply of the perfumed night air and smiled.

Their carriage pulled up in front of Le Petit Palais at midnight. Even at this late hour, the mansion glowed with light from every window. The

grounds were well-landscaped, and a butler opened the door to their carriage and greeted them warmly.

"Gentlemen, we are full at the moment but I invite you to have a drink in the bar. There are many lovely ladies to entertain you while you wait for a room."

Alex's cock pulsed with life at the thought of an evening spent with an attractive woman. The butler led them into a foyer which was wallpapered in luxurious red damask trimmed in gold. Off the foyer, they entered a large, smoky room filled with well-dressed men. After all, this was the most expensive brothel in Paris, and only the wealthiest men could afford it. Men such as himself.

A bare-chested young woman with rouged nipples approached them with a swish of her skirts. Alex watched her breasts bounce as she glided across the soft carpet. For the first time he noticed that all the women in the room were topless.

"What can I get you to drink, handsome gentlemen?" Her gaze lingered on Alex.

"I think she means you, my friend." Gregory laughed, long used to his friend's attraction to the opposite sex. "A whiskey, if you please."

"The same for me," said Alex.

She nodded as she ran her tongue over crimson lips. "It's a shame I'm working the bar tonight for I would like to invite you upstairs. Would you care to call on me another night? My name is Gigi."

Alex smiled at her. "Perhaps another night, Gigi."

She pouted and threw back her mane of blond curls. "I don't think I believe you, but I shan't give up hope."

Her taffeta skirts flounced as she walked away. A few minutes later she returned with their drinks.

"The drinks are on the earl," said Gregory. "I could scarce afford a drink of water in this place."

Alex laughed. "Why do you pretend your family hasn't made a fortune in the wine making business? You own the largest vineyard in France, yet you pretend to be as poor as a church mouse."

Gregory lowered his voice. "Because once my fortune is discovered, I suddenly have dozens of new friends. I prefer meeting people who think I'm poor. That way, I know they're true friends."



"Makes sense." Alex raised an eyebrow. "I had no idea your heart concealed the soul of a philosopher."

A group of women entered the room, and if he hadn't known better, Alex would've guessed them to be daughters of wealthy aristocrats. They carried themselves with self-assurance, each dressed in a gorgeous gown which complimented her coloring. There were so many beautiful women in this one room and yet he felt nothing except loneliness and a sense of melancholy. If there was a woman who would help him forget Anna, she wasn't to be found here.

"Have you chosen the one you want?" Gregory's eyes were warm with appreciation as he looked at the women who lined up as if for inspection. "I'm partial to the redhead myself."

"Then you better hurry because that elderly man is making a beeline toward her."

"What?" He stood up. "I'm sure I can beat that old codger to the lovely maiden."

Gregory headed across the room and was at the redhead's side before the elderly gentleman could take three steps.

"Lucky Gregory," Alex said under his breath, deciding he needed a breath of fresh air. Then he decided what he really wanted was to explore the mansion, for he was partial to architecture, and beautiful lines always commanded his attention. He walked out into the hallway and then up the stairs, running his hand along the curving banister which smelled of lemon oil. The lovely house had once been a private estate in the distant past. If he could see one of the bedrooms, there might be examples of exquisite crown molding.

He passed a large man with a scarf tied around his head and a gold earring dangling from one ear. His skin was the color of café au lait, a beautiful golden shade. The man didn't smile as he passed Alex, but simply nodded at him. This must be one of the Nubian bodyguards, employed by Madame Colette to ensure no customer got out of line with the ladies. It was rumored she had imported eunuchs from a Turkish harem to control security in Le Petit Palais.

A group of giggling ladies passed Alex as they hurried down the hall. The sound of their tinkling laughter ceased as they turned to smile at him and follow his progress. He moved further down the hall until it intersected

with a narrower hallway. He followed the narrow hallway until he found himself in a quiet section of the second floor. Here the lights were dimmed and there were no sounds coming from behind the doors. No conversation or laughter reached his ears. Perhaps these rooms were empty.

He knocked softly on one of the doors. He waited a moment but there was no answer. As he opened the door, he was struck mute by the glorious creature who turned to look at him.

## Chapter 2

The golden-haired man raked his gaze across her body and then imprisoned her with his startling green eyes. "Oh, excuse me. I wished to examine the architecture and I thought this room might be empty."

"As you can see, it's not." Genesis squirmed under his perusal, but held her head high as her gaze met his.

"No indeed, for it holds a treasure beyond compare."

She looked at him in surprise.

"I'll pay a king's ransom for a night with you," he said. "How can it be I've discovered a goddess residing in a brothel?"

He closed the door behind him and then walked over to the bed. He stared at her face for a long moment before sitting down next to her.

"Hello, beautiful lady." His smile revealed strong white teeth and adorable dimples. Her nipples tightened in response to his tall, strong body in such close proximity to hers.

"I think you've made a mistake," she stammered. "I'm not one of the girls for sale."

*At least not yet.*

"For sale? Surely Madame Colette didn't teach you to speak with such indelicacy? From what I've heard, the girls in Le Petit Palais are well-educated, only working here until they can marry into the aristocracy. Have you not learned how to turn a phrase to please a gentleman's sensibilities?"

"As you've chosen to visit this establishment, you surely must be no gentleman." Genesis found herself curious about this devastatingly attractive man. With his handsome face, he surely didn't have to pay a woman for sex. In fact, she guessed he had to beat them off with a stick of some sort.

"I confess this is my first time to visit."

"And why are you here?" she asked.

"Why does any man with money come here?"

"To have sex, I suppose."

He burst out laughing. "You are certainly blunt with your opinions. I was told flirtation is an art form every courtesan excelled at, but I have yet to see that demonstrated from you. Tell me, are you new here?"

"Yes I am, my handsome Apollo." She batted her thick eyelashes at him and he blinked in surprise. Why shouldn't she flirt with this golden Adonis? If things got out of hand, she could simply ring the bell and one of the eunuchs would remove him.

He raised an eyebrow. "Perhaps I was incorrect about your lack of flirtation skills."

She leaned back against the pillow and smiled at him. "And perhaps it only takes the right man to sharpen my skills."

His gaze held hers. "I can see why a man would fall in love with one of you ladies. How many love letters should I write to you, my beautiful enchantress?"

"Why, an even dozen of course. You don't want to be different from my other suitors."

"Oh, but I do want to be different." He frowned. "I'm not sure I wish to be just another client to you."

"But that's what you are, aren't you?"

"Am I? I haven't paid you any money, so technically I'm just a—"

"Potential client?" She studied him through lowered lashes. Who was this gorgeous man who had slipped into her room by mistake?

"For the moment, we are simply a man and woman engaged in conversation. Shall we leave it at that?"

She nodded. "As you wish."

"Then let me introduce myself. I'm Alex Lansing."

"How do you do?"

"I'm very well now. And may I ask your name?"

"It's Genesis."

He lifted his mouth in a seductive grin. "I like that. I suppose it's one you made up."

"I'm afraid not because it's my own."

And it was. Her father had given her the unusual name in a fit of whimsical self-indulgence.

"It suits you."

Under his appreciative gaze, her nipples tightened until they were pebble-sized nubs which pressed against the material of her gown.

Her gown! When he'd entered the room, she had been trying on the sheer gowns Madame Colette had provided for her. She raised her hands to cover nipples which were clearly visible through the sheer fabric. Then she lowered her hands to cover the triangle of dark curls which could also be seen through the transparent material.

"It's a little late for that, isn't it?" His gaze lingered, not on her body, but on her full lips.

"I—" She reached for the throw which lay across the bed and covered herself with it.

"Are you sure you belong here?" The laughter in his voice caused her skin to flame with embarrassment. "You behave as if you've never been alone with a man in your life."

She hadn't.

At that moment, Genesis cursed her father and every male member of the species. She remembered the events which had brought her to this place.

After years of begging for information about her absent mother, her father had finally given it to her. When she attended his funeral, she had occasion to read the sealed letter he left for her along with his last will and testament.

"As you can see, you're now a wealthy woman," the solicitor informed her. "I know you've just graduated from university. Do you have any immediate plans?"

Several possibilities crossed her mind. She could follow in her father's footsteps and become an archaeologist. There were some females in the profession, although they were few and far between. Perhaps she could secure a position as a teacher or a governess, for she was qualified for either profession. If she chose, she could even be a lady of leisure because her fortune was such she never had to work a day in her life. But this wasn't her way. She would use her money to help the street orphans she'd seen in the back streets of London and Paris. She would set up an orphanage for them, helping them escape lives of sadness and poverty.

But first, Genesis knew she had to find out everything she could about the mother who had abandoned her on her father's doorstep. The mother who had been a French prostitute in this very brothel when she had fallen in

love with a handsome English archaeologist, and then gotten pregnant with his child.

As she glanced around Madame Colette's luxurious, richly appointed office in the heart of the exclusive, expensive brothel, Genesis wondered if she was making a mistake in attempting to discover more about her mother.

"You wish to service customers?" Madame Colette eyed Genesis with a speculative glance. "You're an exquisite beauty just as your mother was. You could make a fortune working here, perhaps marry into the upper classes. Even the British royal family visits us on occasion."

Genesis interrupted her. "I already have a considerable fortune which my father left me on his death."

"Ah yes, the famous archaeologist. I remember what a dashing young man he was. He never visited another courtesan when he came here. From the moment he saw your mother, he always requested her."

"She bore his child and then ran away. That child was me." Genesis bit her lip in frustration as feelings of abandonment overwhelmed her. "Why didn't she marry my father? Didn't he want her?"

"That's something I can't answer." Colette shook her head. "She was never one for confiding much in myself or the other girls. However, I know she found your father to be incredibly attractive because she told me so herself. She couldn't understand why he never requested any of the other ladies. I believe she was in love with him."

"And I believe he loved her as well because he never married anyone else. He raised me on his own without a woman to help him."

"I'm sorry, ma petite. But now you're wealthy and can do as you please." Her voice turned businesslike. "I take forty percent of the earnings and you keep sixty. If you're interested in my proposition, please let me know. Until then, I'll rent the room to you for as long as you wish to live here."

"I've never been with a man." Genesis considered her options as her mind wandered. "I want to know everything about my mother. If that means adopting the lifestyle she chose, then I'll do it. I want to discover everything about the sexual act, but I don't wish to fall in love because it seems to lead to misery."

What was she saying? Was she actually thinking of becoming a high-class courtesan as her mother had been? How better to know the woman who bore her?

And why shouldn't she? There was no one to judge her if she chose this path. She cared nothing for any of the wealthy suitors who pursued her. She had her own fortune and needed no man to take care of her. A pinpoint of anger crystallized in her heart. Love didn't last. She had seen enough of the world to know she would never become a vacuous socialite, married to a man who frequented brothels while she sat home raising his children alone.

"For the time being, I only wish to rent a room so I can absorb the atmosphere of this place," she said. "But soon I might entertain gentlemen as my mother did."

"I knew your mother better than anyone." Colette's face softened with remembrance. "But after she gave birth to you, she left the brothel and I never heard from her again. Eventually, word reached me she had died of consumption."

A tear slid down Genesis's cheek. "How I wish I could've known her."

"Before she met your father, she had a group of gentlemen callers who asked for her by name. *I wish to visit with Miss Eugenie*, they would say to me. She was one of my most popular girls."

"It's hard for me to accept my mother was a whore."

"Not a whore, you must never call her that." Colette's dark gaze narrowed with anger. "She was a courtesan and entertained the likes of the Duke of Windsor and the Prince of Wales. A courtesan is proud of her skill; she's no gutter slut or tavern wench. I hire only the best, and these women go on to marry the leaders of industry or become the mistresses of royalty. If they're careful with their money, they retire and enjoy wealth and privilege."

Genesis shook her head. The woman made it sound like an honorable profession. What was honorable about offering your body to one stranger after another? It wasn't love; it was simply fucking. And yet it was honest, wasn't it? No pretense, no false promises. At the moment, it was what she craved.

"I have some books which might help you understand your mother's personality." Colette smiled at her. "She was a woman who truly enjoyed men, all types of men. Until she fell for your father, she enjoyed tasting the delights the stronger sex had to offer. There are women who were born for lovemaking, and she was one of them. This is nothing to be ashamed of, despite the way Queen Victoria wishes to shroud sex in secrecy. Is it true the

English even cover the legs of tables with tablecloths so they won't appear improper?"

"I'm afraid that's true."

Colette laughed as she moved to a large bookcase in the corner. "At least you're half French, so perhaps there's hope for you if you decide to pursue this line of work."

"I'm not sure yet. Please give me time to decide."

"With your outstanding looks, you could become the belle of Le Petit Palais."

Genesis scanned the rows of books. If the bookcase was any indication, then the owner of this brothel was a well-read woman. There were copies of Dickens' novels and Shakespeare's plays sitting side by side with books on erotica. Colette pulled out a volume with a plain black cover and handed it to Genesis.

"Read this," she said. "Afterwards, you might be in a frame of mind for your first gentleman caller."

"Thank you." Genesis took the book and then walked to the door.

"Just a moment," said Colette. "I have one more thing to say. If any of the clients bother you, simply ring for the eunuchs. They're always on duty to protect the ladies. I had them brought from a harem in Constantinople, and they no longer have any interest in women. However, they're loyal to me because I don't mistreat or disrespect them. That's one thing you must understand about my little kingdom." She spread her hands to include the lovely sitting room filled with antiques and expensive paintings. "I allow no one to be mistreated in my kingdom."

When she returned to her room, Genesis sat down on the bed and opened the book. Instantly, she flipped it shut. There had been a drawing of a naked woman on one of the pages! Who wrote this filth?

However, her curiosity eventually overcame her outrage. As if expecting a poisonous snake to jump out at her, she lifted the cover and took a peek. The title caught her attention. *The Erotic Adventures of a Chambermaid complete with pictures.*

She lay back on the bed and began to read. The novel was interspersed with pictures of the chambermaid as she did her erotic adventuring. All told, the lusty maid had relations with her employer, her employer's gentlemen friends, another chambermaid, and the employer's wife.



The more she read, the warmer the room grew. She reached for the small fan on her bedside table and fanned herself vigorously. Heat radiated from her body and she removed her clothing to get more comfortable. As she read the part about the chambermaid and the employer's wife, she put a hand to her breast. She squeezed her nipple and gently pulled on it. The distended peak grew harder under her exploration and she moved her hand down to the silky triangle between her legs. She began to stroke the soft skin.

"Excuse me, am I boring you?" asked Alex.

Genesis was brought back to the present by the man's rich, warm voice. He watched her with an intensity which caused the blood to rush to her cheeks.

"Forgive me. I-I was distracted." Her mind was full of thoughts she dare not name. What if she was a chambermaid and this tall, handsome man was her employer? She could be as seductive and wanton as the woman in the novel.

He raised an eyebrow, and she realized he waited patiently for her to answer some question he must have asked.

She cleared her throat. "I'm sorry, what were you saying?"

"I said, how is it that you're so beautiful?"

"I'm sure you say that to every woman you find attractive."

"No." He shook his head. "I usually just fuck the women I find attractive. I have no interest in talking to them."

"Then why are you talking to me?"

His green-eyed gaze narrowed. "I'm asking myself the same question. Believe me, I'd like nothing better than to ravish you at this very moment, but for some reason I want more."

"More of what?"

He laughed. "More of what indeed? I don't have the answer." He picked up the book she'd left lying on the bed. She grabbed for the obscene novel, but he held it out of reach.

"What do we have here?" He flipped through the pages, stopping to study the pictures.

"Give that back to me," she demanded.

He held up the book so she could see the picture. "What do you think of this position?"

She looked at the drawing of the chambermaid being fucked by her employer with great enthusiasm. As she continued to stare at it, her clitoris throbbed with growing excitement. Her nipples pushed against her gown until they ached to be touched.

"I love that position," she said seductively. "And I'd like to try it with a handsome man such as yourself."

## Chapter 3

Alex ran a trembling hand through his hair. There was something about this woman which made him feel like a callow, inexperienced youth.

Blood rushed to his loins as he savored her beauty. Her face was angelic yet wanton, with high cheekbones and full pink lips. Her pouty lower lip looked delicious enough to devour. She had creamy skin and lush curves which made her body ripe for lovemaking.

She leaned toward him and touched her mouth to his. Her lips were as soft as rose petals. His lips responded to hers as his erection grew. He fought the urge to pin her to the bed and mount her with enthusiasm. He wanted their time together to last as long as possible. Even if this was only a brief sexual encounter, he wanted it to be special. With her, he wanted more than a quick, casual fuck.

He savored her flesh as he licked the hollow of her throat. Her skin tasted sweet and salty and smelled of lilacs and springtime.

"That tickles." She gave a small giggle, and the sound of her sexy laughter caused him to harden to stone. His erection was almost painful, thicker and harder than it had been in years. He buried his face in her hair, inhaling the intoxicating scent of her soft tresses.

"Please open the window," she said softly. "It's a bit stuffy in here."

The night air was fresh and reviving after the cigar saturated rooms of the brothel. The lights of Paris glittered like diamonds in the distance, and Alex wondered if the city ever slept. It was one joyous celebration after another, and for once he felt part of the festivities, not merely a spectator. He was filled with the *joie de vivre* of the French people.

\* \* \* \*

"Your accent is English." He turned from the window and his exquisite emerald eyes held Genesis captive. "Yet there's a trace of the exotic about you."

"My mother was French, my father English." She tried to look away from him, but found it impossible.

"And do your parents know you're employed in this place?"

"My parents are dead."

"How did you come to be here?"

She sighed. "Why are you so interested? It's not important, is it?"

"I suppose not."

"Because what I want right now is you in this bed."

He raised an eyebrow. "There's still the matter of your remuneration."

"We don't need to discuss money either."

He ignored her words and mentioned an amount which caused her eyes to widen in surprise. Madame Colette had briefed her on what she could expect to earn from rich clients. The amount he quoted was ten times higher than anything she expected to earn.

"I—" Genesis stared at him wide-eyed. At a loss for words, she found herself flattered anyone was willing to spend so much for a night in her company. Then revulsion clawed at her like a wild creature. If she actually accepted payment, then she was well and truly a whore. Besides, it was not like she needed the money anyway.

"Let's not ruin the mood by discussing financial matters," she finally said.

He gave her a quizzical look. "Very well. We won't ruin the mood with crass talk. But I must tell you, you're a most unusual young lady. In my experience, women of your profession take care of business before pleasure."

"I like being unusual. It's better than being run-of-the-mill."

"Well said." He walked back to the bed and his tall, powerful body commanded her attention. His aristocratic bearing was evidence of wealth and breeding. Who was this man?

Nervousness gripped her. Could she actually go through with this? Exhilaration and fear warred within her. Shouldn't her first sexual experience be with someone as handsome as him? Perhaps it would make it easier to endure and she might even enjoy it.

Alex had an aura of danger about him with his steely-eyed green gaze. His chin was firm, his sensual lower lip created for kissing.

Her skin tingled and her nerves ignited with desire as his vivid eyes pierced hers.

His fingers gripped her shoulders, and he looked at her with a burning intensity. "I desire you, my angel. Do I meet with your approval?"

She took a shaky breath. "Would it matter?"

"It matters to me because I want you to enjoy our evening together as I know I will."

This was the moment of truth. The moment to decide. Her breathing came hard and fast as his intent gaze locked with hers. Genesis found herself ensnared by his incredible good looks.

She willed away her fears. Instead, she allowed her lust to have free reign. This was what she wanted, wasn't it? Under her stylish clothing and socially acceptable manners, she carried the legacy which came from her sinful mother. For so long, she hid a silent fire which no one imagined she possessed. Tonight she would fan the flames of that fire and see what happened.

She took a trembling breath and smiled at him. "You definitely meet with my approval, and I desire you as well."

He grinned in triumph, and she had no regrets about her decision.

## Chapter 4

Alex looked at her for a long moment, sensing hunger in her gaze and something more. Surely it wasn't fear he saw in the depths of her beautiful eyes?

Sweat dampened his palms. Why was he nervous? He was no stranger to amorous attention from women. His heart beat against his chest as he imagined dancing with her horizontally across the sheets.

He pulled her to her feet and then wrapped his arms around her waist. As he kissed her, he sensed a welcoming response from her luscious pink lips.

How many men had she entertained in this room? He frowned, deciding it was best not to think about it. He had never cared about the past history of any of his mistresses, so why should he care who this woman fucked before him? He knew he was being irrational, but he couldn't control the jealousy which threatened to engulf him.

He broke the embrace and feasted on the sight of her kiss-swollen mouth. Then he licked those lovely lips while her perfume wafted toward him. The sweetness of lilac, but underneath that, she smelled of desire.

\* \* \* \*

He stood before her, aristocratic and proud. Intense hunger for him was a craving Genesis knew she must satisfy. She inhaled his scent, the clean masculine smell of him mixed with a spicy aftershave. Her nipples hardened to firm buds as he framed her face with his strong hands.

"Am I dreaming?" he asked.

"Only if we're having the same dream."

He chuckled and she admired his brilliant white teeth and sensuous lower lip. If this man had been one of the suitors for her hand, she might

have considered giving marriage a try. Instead, she had met him in a whorehouse of all places. Life laughed in your face sometimes, she thought ironically.

What did it matter anyway? She had no interest in marriage. No man would throw her aside like garbage, as her mother had been treated. Of course, she didn't know the entire story, but she still blamed her father. If he had loved her mother enough, if he'd offered to marry her maybe she wouldn't have left her child on his doorstep. Maybe she would still be alive. Maybe they could have been a happy family.

She stood and put some distance between herself and Alex. Seating herself on a plush settee, she fought the sting of tears.

"Have I done something to offend you?" he asked in surprise. "I thought you were rather enjoying yourself."

She was torn between her desire to know this man and her desire to be alone with her thoughts. Perhaps she should ask him to leave. All she had to do was ring the bell and one of the Nubian eunuchs would see that he was removed without a word.

Was that what she wanted? For the first time in her life, she struggled on the horns of a dilemma. Was her virginity worth so little she would offer it to the first attractive man she met? This was a simple business transaction, not a love affair. It was all so cold and businesslike.

What had she expected? She was the one pretending to be a whore. No, she amended, he was the one who stumbled into her room by mistake. She simply went along with the deception.

But that face! His face was a work of art which could have been sculpted by Michelangelo or Rodan. The planes of his high cheekbones were sharply angled and his mouth was so kissable. And those eyes. She had never seen eyes that green, that pure, that sharp, almost like finely cut emeralds. His dark blond hair shone golden in the lamplight. She had the urge to rip the stiffly starched shirt from his body and see what lay underneath. She was sure he would resemble one of those nude Greek statues she had seen in a Paris museum. He would have well-defined and finely toned muscles.

"Join me here on the bed." His voice was honey to her ears. "I promise I won't bite you unless it's expected of me."

Sparks of erotic heat shot through her body.

Torn between her desire to flee before things got out of hand, and her desire to know this Greek god in evening attire, Genesis hesitated. Why did he have to be so damn gorgeous?

Feeling like a defiled vestal virgin, she walked towards him. He met her in the middle of the room and she ran a hand through his thick hair. He slid his thumb across her lower lip then slid his hand down her throat until it cupped her full breast. Finding her hard nipple, he stroked it through the sheer material of the gown. She gave an involuntarily moan, which he silenced with his kisses.

"Have you been treated badly?" His voice was a hoarse whisper. "Is that why you found my touches distasteful?"

"They weren't distasteful by any means," she said quickly. "Sometimes women have their moods."

Sadness softened his strong features, making him seem young and vulnerable. "I know something of female moods. If I've done something to offend you, I beg your forgiveness."

"You've done nothing at all." She surprised herself by resting her head against his powerful chest. "I pray you will continue with your distasteful touches."

He threw back his head and laughed. He appeared happy and carefree, not the same dour man who first stepped into her room. She wondered about the melancholy expression which had touched his face. Perhaps like her, he wrestled with his own demons.

She had little time for speculation because his warm mouth skimmed across her throat. A thrill of desire coursed through her system, and she licked her lips in anticipation.

Her pulse quickened as lust engulfed her body and roared through her bloodstream like a consuming fire. She tangled her fingers in his hair as he slid the strap of her gown off her shoulder. One of her breasts sprang free, and he took it gently in his hand.

"So beautiful," he said softly, "so damn beautiful."

Then his mouth claimed her nipple and she gasped with surprise and pleasure. He licked and suckled on the extended peak as she embraced him tightly against her body.

She saw the hunger in his eyes, and his craving for her aroused her senses. He had a look of wonder on his face as his gaze held hers. At that



moment, she felt like a fairy princess on her wedding night. She knew no princely groom could be more attentive to her than Alex Lansing. Feminine power surged through her body with this new and compelling emotion. Yet she also felt humbled by the thought of this exquisite man desiring her with such intensity.

"I want to fuck you and keep fucking you," he rasped against her skin.

The crudeness of his words didn't offend her. Instead they caused a heavy fullness between her legs, an urgent need to be touched by him, caressed by him, fucked by him.

"I feel the same way," she whispered against his ear. "Though perhaps you won't enjoy it enough to request an encore."

"I've only had a few moments with you and I already crave an encore." He stroked her nipples and they stiffened under his touch. "These are the most succulent buds I've ever seen."

Her skin tingled with excitement and his eyes held a predatory gleam.

His voice was a low growl, rich and deep with a hint of roughness. "I know I'll be back in this room tomorrow night and every night until I get you out of my system."

He took her nipple between his teeth, and she gave a sharp gasp.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked with concern.

"Not at all. It just felt so good."

"Do your clients pleasure you in this way?"

"Some of them," she lied.

He drowned out her words with a kiss which was manly and potent. "Do any of them kiss you this way?"

"No."

She knew no one would ever kiss her with such passion.

## Chapter 5

Genesis looked toward the closed door which had brought Alex into her life. How easy it would be to leave this room and this brothel and return home to England. She considered it for only a moment because his warm lips on hers caused the blood to roar in her veins. She hungered for his touch, imprisoned by his rough maleness as his exquisite sensuality overpowered her. She whimpered with desire as his kisses fluttered across her flushed skin.

He slid her gown slowly down her body and she stepped out of it. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her to the bed as if she weighed no more than a kitten. When he lay her gently across the soft bed covers, she didn't attempt to cover her exposed flesh, and his hot gaze roamed over her as he removed his jacket and loosened his collar. She drew a ragged breath as he unbuttoned his shirt and his tall, powerful body held her rapt attention. His bare chest seemed carved from marble, with a well-muscled torso tapering to narrow hips. A sweep of blond hair fell across his forehead, framing his perfectly handsome face.

*An untamed, green-eyed panther.*

He reminded her of the finely-carved statue of a majestic cat which rested in a drawer beside her bed. It was her most treasured possession, a gift from her father which he obtained on one of his frequent trips to Egypt. She had been allowed to accompany him on this particular expedition, and it remained one of her fondest memories of their time together.

Alex reached for his belt and unbuckled it. Suddenly, she felt shy and a blush crept up her throat. She looked away from his stimulating presence. "Would you turn off the light? It's a bit bright in here."

"I prefer it that way," he said. "I want to be able to see your beautiful eyes while I fuck you. And I want you to see me."

Genesis risked a glance at him and was rewarded with her first look at his naked body. She had been right in her estimation for he did resemble the nude statue of a Greek god. Her hungry gaze slid down to the dark hairs which dusted his thigh and the thick organ which stood at attention between his legs. It was so huge! Was she supposed to take this into her body? Still, she couldn't help but admire every inch of him, from his silky, black lashes to his long, finely-muscled legs.

His voice was deep and hypnotic. "Wouldn't you rather have the lights on?"

The tingling which began between her legs spread to every cell in her body. "Yes, by all means."

He sat down on the bed and she instinctively moved to the furthest edge of the mattress.

His gaze caught and held hers. "Do you think I bite?"

"Of course not."

"Then I'd prefer you stretched out across my chest."

Her blood ran warm in her veins. Warm hell. It was positively boiling! After looking at the pictures in the erotic novel, Genesis had discovered sexual positions she'd never thought possible between two people. She had the desire to try some of those positions with Alex.

As if reading her mind, he said, "Do you think the chambermaid enjoyed her employer's mouth on her pussy? Do you think she enjoyed him probing her most intimate parts with his tongue?"

Her body pulsed with excitement. "I think she enjoyed it very much."

His finger brushed against her hard nipple and then pinched it. "And how would you feel, Miss Genesis, if I was the employer who seduced you? Would you like my tongue buried inside your pussy as I licked you until you screamed with pleasure?"

Her nipples tightened with desire. She craved his cock between her thighs, and her pussy throbbed with the need to feel him inside her.

Her breathing came hard and fast, her heartbeat a rapid, heavy thump in her chest. She spread her legs and gave him an enticing look. "I don't know about the chambermaid, but I want you inside me now. I can't think of anything I'd enjoy more."

The words were out of her mouth and she couldn't take them back. She was being honest about her feelings because nothing would please her more

than to experience her first taste of lovemaking with him. Alex was her ideal man, exactly the sort of heroic figure she had always dreamed of while reading stories of highwaymen and pirates.

He cleared his throat as his hand cupped her breast. "I confess I find myself a bit nervous."

She grinned. "Why? Is this your first time with a woman?"

He laughed. "What I meant was I've never shared a bed with a woman so beautiful, so graceful, so exquisite. I fear my performance won't live up to your expectations."

"I'm sure you'll exceed every expectation I have."

"You flatter me. I feel I should kiss your feet for the opportunity to spend an evening with you."

"Perhaps I'll allow you to kiss my feet later this evening."

His smile was seductive. "You're a saucy little beauty, aren't you?"

"You bring out the sauciness in me."

"And you bring out the lust in me."

Alex straddled her and pinned her wrists to the bed. He kissed one firm nipple and then the other as his tongue licked the stiff peaks. He moved to kiss her lips and his chest hair rubbed against her taut, aching nipples. She lifted her hips in a silent plea for his body.

He poised himself between her legs and then thrust himself into her. He met resistance and Genesis bit her lip as pain engulfed her. She closed her eyes and turned away so he wouldn't see the tears.

"Look at me." His voice was authoritative and brooked no argument. She opened her eyes and looked at him through a shimmer of tears.

"Why didn't you tell me you were a virgin?"

"I—"

"What sort of game are you playing?"

"I'm not playing a game. I planned to work here, but I haven't had any customers yet. You're my first."

"Who just happened to stumble into your room by mistake?"

"Yes."

He kissed her forehead. "I'm sorry I hurt you, but you should've told me. I just assumed—"

"You didn't really hurt me that much."

He stroked her breast. "Soon it will stop hurting and you'll begin to enjoy it. And the next time it will be even better."

She nodded.

"I need to move now," he said softly. "I need to thrust, but I'll try not to hurt you."

He began to move inside her with fluid, rhythmic thrusts. After awhile, she no longer felt pain but writhed beneath him as her body was stretched and filled by his thick, hard cock. The throbbing force of his organ brought her to the point of madness.

"Oh God," she cried. "I need—"

"You want to come, don't you?" His breath was hot against her earlobe. "Say it."

"Yes, I want to come. Is that what I need?"

"That's what we both need." He moved faster, pumping her, riding her with an intensity which seared her flesh with his every touch.

"You were made for love, my darling." He moaned as he took her nipple between his teeth.

"No, not love." She shook her head. "This is only sex, nothing more. I want no part of love."

Then a tidal wave of sensations washed over her, an explosion of pleasure which blinded her with its intensity. She cried out loudly and he gave her a triumphant smile.

"Now it's my turn, beautiful angel." He increased his movements until sweat broke out on his brow. He thrust faster and faster until finally he groaned as his hot seed spilled into her. Her muscles clenched around him as she came again with a mind-numbing jolt.

He pulled her against his chest and kissed the top of her head. "I was the first man to have you."

"Yes."

"You're mine now. You belong to me"

"No." She shook her head as her gaze held his. "I don't belong to you or any man. I'm officially a courtesan, and I'll fuck whom I want when I want."

He frowned darkly, and she almost regretted speaking the words. But not enough to take them back.

## Chapter 6

Alex's body was still wracked with blissful tremors as he rolled off Genesis and rested his head on the soft pillow. A sheen of sweat covered his skin, and his breath came in ragged gasps.

They had made love again, and her delicious cries of pleasure had inspired him to greater heights of passion.

His cock was still half-erect, as if unwilling to remain flaccid in her presence. He smiled to himself because hers was the sweetest, tightest cunt he had ever fucked.

He wanted her all to himself, yet she was determined to pursue the life of a prostitute. If he had his way, he'd move her into his estate and make her his mistress. He wondered what she would say if he asked her for that privilege.

Alex devoured her naked body with hungry eyes for she was spread before him like a banquet offered to a starving man. Her breasts and high, firm nipples called to him like a siren's song. His lustful gaze slid to the mound between her thighs and the dark, silken curls which covered it. She gave him an appraising look from lovely moss-green eyes shaded by thick, sooty lashes. Her pouty, kiss-swollen lips begged to be kissed.

Even though they had just made love, he found himself growing hard again as he gazed at her soft, feminine beauty. There was something about her which captured his imagination and made him crave her like no woman he had ever known.

The door to the room swung open and a tall, dark-haired man appeared in the doorway. He was dressed in the uniform of an officer, although his jacket was unbuttoned and he was barefoot. He carried a pair of boots in his hand and his cap was tilted at a rakish angle. His gaze slid to the bed and he raked it across Genesis's nude body. She sat up and looked at him for a long moment before reaching for a sheet to cover herself.

"What's the meaning of this?" Alex demanded. "What do you want here?"

The man gave them a half-smile as he leaned against the door jamb. It was obvious he was intoxicated and barely able to stand. He attempted to bow and nearly fell forward on his face.

"Captain Graham Murdoch at your service." His dark gaze ignored Alex and focused on Genesis. "If I'm not mistaken, this must be the party room. I was next door when I heard the cries of ecstasy coming from in here. I had to meet the glorious lady with the exquisite voice. Would that be you?"

He gave her a disarming smile which set Alex's teeth on edge.

"Forgive me for disturbing you, Captain Murdoch." Genesis gazed at him boldly as her luscious mouth curved into a seductive smile. "I'm afraid I lost control during the heights of passion."

"Believe me, you disturbed me in the nicest possible way."

"Then it's a pleasure to meet you." She lowered the sheet and Graham blinked in surprise and pleasure. His gaze was captured by her full, heavy breasts and rose-colored nipples. A provocative smile played across her face as she watched him.

Alex grabbed the sheet and pulled it up to cover her body.

"What are you doing?" He glared at her. "How can you behave like—"

"Behave like what?" she said softly. "Behave like a courtesan? That's what I am, don't you agree?"

"Yes. I mean no. This evening was your first sexual experience, so you're barely a beginner."

"I just missed having a virgin?" Graham gave a self-mocking laugh. "Then perhaps you'll allow me to be your second conquest tonight."

Alex's voice was a deep growl. "The lady is spoken for this evening."

"Then tomorrow night?" Graham asked hopefully.

"You must speak to Madame Colette, but I'm sure she can schedule it." She tossed back her hair. "Tell her Genesis is now accepting gentlemen callers."

"No, she's not," Alex contradicted her.

"Genesis." Graham smiled. "I like your name."

"I *am* accepting clients." Her mouth was set in a determined line. "I'm sorry, Alex, but if you wish to see me again, you must make an appointment."

The captain nodded. "Then I shall speak to Madame Colette so I can book you for the entire evening." He blew her a kiss. "Until tomorrow night, my beauty."

Murdoch stumbled down the hallway carrying his boots. Alex considered racing him to Colette's office so he could speak to her first. Then he realized it might be more advantageous to offer her a hefty bribe in order to secure Genesis's charms for as long as possible. He needed time to get her out of his system. Until then, he had no desire to share her with amorous cavalry officers.

He stood up and slammed the door before turning his angry gaze on her. "You seem determined to jump into this lifestyle with both feet. Are you at least taking precautions to prevent pregnancy? What if you end up carrying that drunkard's child?"

Genesis raised an eyebrow. "Drunkard? I found him extremely attractive. Tall, handsome, virile. Much like yourself."

"Don't compare me to him." He scowled at her, too angry to speak.

"And to answer your question, I'm taking the herbs Madame gave me to prevent conception. She said they're very effective. I have no desire to end up unmarried and pregnant like my mother."

A frown furrowed his brow and he wondered about the significance of her words. Why had she chosen this life for herself? Did her mother have something to do with it?

His temper softened as he drank in the sight of her half-bare breasts and the raven hair which spilled across her cheek. He thought she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

After a long moment he said, "I look forward to learning more about you, Miss Genesis. Perhaps we can begin with your last name?"

\* \* \* \*

Alex stood in the adjoining bath and looked at himself in the mirror. As he bent to splash his face with cool water, he saw the dried virginal blood staining his cock.

Genesis Kelly had marked his body as well as his heart.



Scrubbing the blood from his skin with scented soap, he thought of her soft, creamy flesh. Her beautiful features held a touch of the exotic which excited him.

*He had taken her virginity. She belonged to him!*

He shook his head to clear it. What was happening to him? He, who was always so calm and composed, was behaving like a lovesick fool. He slammed his fist against the cabinet. It wasn't too late to simply walk away from this place and never return. Love was a silken, velvet trap, but a trap nonetheless. He needed to get away before his heart was ensnared to such a degree it would be impossible to escape.

\* \* \* \*

Genesis reached for Alex, but discovered his side of the bed empty. Bright sunlight streamed in through the open window, and she shaded her eyes as she glanced at the clock on the bedside table. It was half past noon. How could she have slept so late? She sat up quickly and winced with the effort. There was a heavy soreness between her legs, a memory of her spirited lovemaking the previous night. Alex had fucked her three times and each time had been better than the previous one. Just thinking about his exquisite body made her clitoris tingle with desire.

A large bouquet of red roses sat on the dresser across from the bed. A note written on thick vellum paper rested against the vase. Genesis opened the note and read the bold handwriting:

*Miss Kelly, thank you for one of the most exciting nights I've ever experienced. The beauty of these flowers pales in comparison to yours. Until I see you again, I remain enslaved.*

*Yours,*

*Alex*

She inhaled the sweet scent of the bouquet, and a tear slid down her cheek. It wouldn't be as easy as she thought to avoid falling in love with him.

*No, no, no!* Already she was becoming obsessed with his tall, muscular body and she mustn't allow herself to feel that way. She wouldn't fall in love with him. She wanted nothing to do with love because it only led to heartache. She must never forget her mother's tragic fate.

She decided not to see him again.

Perhaps that was a bit drastic, she amended. She would still see Alex, but she would also see other men as well. Handsome men such as Captain Murdoch, who would teach her all manner of sensual delights. Now that she had a taste for sex, she wanted more of it. There was also her underlying desire to feel everything her mother had felt while working in this place.

A knock on the door disturbed her thoughts. She slid into a robe and hurried across the room, thinking it might be Alex returning to visit her again. The thought sent an erotic charge through her body.

When she opened the door, she was disappointed to find one of the housemaids standing in the hallway.

The maid curtsied to her. "Good morning, Miss Kelly. It's time for me to change the sheets and clean the room. As soon as you're dressed, Madame wishes to speak with you."

"Thank you. I'll be down as soon as possible."

"Very well. I'll inform her you're on your way."

Genesis closed the door and looked at the bed where she had spent so many blissful hours with Alex. For the first time, she noticed the blood on the sheets. *Her* blood. *Her* passage from girlhood into womanhood. She was happy she had given her virginity to him. Of all men, she had chosen a patient, skillful lover who had brought her to orgasm multiple times. She held the memory close to her heart.

\* \* \* \*

"You've barely lost your virginity and men are already fighting over you." Madame Colette shook her head. "How this brings back memories of your dear mother."

"I slept with my first customer last night," said Genesis. "And now I'm ready to see other clients."

The older woman gave a merry chuckle. "So I've heard. What am I going to do with you, young lady?"

"Excuse me?"

"Do you know who the Earl of Landower is? He's one of the wealthiest men in England, and he paid me an unheard of sum of money for your time last night. Then he offered me a king's ransom to insure you were

exclusively at his beck and call. I was at a loss because I had no desire to offend him."

"But that's not fair to the other clients." Genesis knew she couldn't spend night after night with Alex because it would be too easy to fall in love with those beautiful emerald eyes and full sensuous mouth.

"Therein lies the problem." Colette sighed and put her fingers to her temples in a dramatic gesture. "Captain Murdoch is also infatuated with your beauty, and he's determined to spend the remainder of his military leave with you. He's no mere Army officer for his family is also one of the richest in England. I have no desire to offend him either."

"I wish to see Captain Murdoch this evening."

"And so you shall. I explained to Alex he may see you the following evening. I've decided to book your services on a day-by-day basis so as not to offend either gentleman. I convinced the earl he couldn't monopolize all your time because there were others who wish to sample your charms."

"What did he say?" Genesis bit her lip, wishing she hadn't asked.

Madame raised an eyebrow and wagged a finger at her. "Are you growing fond of the man who took your virginity?"

"No," Genesis said quickly. "I was merely curious."

"Hmm. Well, let's just say he wasn't happy with my decision. I lost a fortune by not agreeing to his demands. At the same time, I couldn't offend Captain Murdoch either. His family is powerful, and they have many friends who travel from England to visit Le Petit Palais."

"I'm sorry to have caused you trouble."

Colette shrugged. "It's the nature of the business. Men were ready to fight duels over your mother, but I hope it won't come to that in your case. I'm too old to deal with young stallions with a fire in their blood." She leaned forward, resting her palms on the desk. "Now you must tell me how on earth you met two such attractive rogues in one night. I thought you were going to remain in your room and read."

Genesis sighed and told her the story.

Colette's eyes widened in surprise. "So Alex walked into your room by mistake?"

"It would seem so."

She laughed so hard tears came to her eyes. "And your cries during orgasm brought Captain Murdoch to your door?"

"Yes."

"My girl, you have certainly had an auspicious debut as a courtesan."

## Chapter 7

"It sounds like you've gotten yourself into a quandary." Gregory took a bite of the *Crêpe Suzette* on his plate. "Falling in love with a courtesan isn't the smartest decision you've ever made."

They sat at a sidewalk cafe, drinking the rich, sweet coffee Alex preferred.

"I'm not in love with her," said Alex. "I'm—"

*Imprisoned, enslaved, ensnared.*

"I just want to continue seeing her. However, she views me as just another client."

"She's not interested in becoming your exclusive mistress?"

Alex shrugged. "To tell you the truth, I hesitate to ask her."

"Why? I've never known a woman to refuse you anything."

"I'm not sure she would even consider my offer because she is determined to pursue the life of a high-class prostitute." He took a sip of his coffee before turning a speculative gaze on his friend. "You have connections at the brothel. Perhaps you can discover something about her by asking the other women."

Gregory gave him a wicked grin. "I'll handle that assignment with the personal, hands-on attention it requires."

"I'm sure you will. I questioned Madame Colette, but she revealed nothing of interest. Unless you count the information that Captain Murdoch comes from a wealthy family."

"Ah yes, your rival for the lady's hand and all her other delicious parts."

"Don't remind me." Alex scowled. "How can I avoid becoming just another number on her dance card?"

"Perhaps you should court her with flowers and candy."

"I left flowers for her this morning."

"That's a start."

"Perhaps the key to understanding her will come when I discover something about her personal life. She said her parents were dead, but that might be a lie."

"She sounds like an intriguing puzzle."

Alex's smile held a tinge of admiration. "She may seem as delicate and fragile as a rose, but there's a core of steel in her spine."

"When do you see her again?"

"Tomorrow night. She has an appointment with Murdoch this evening." Alex slammed his spoon into the empty cup. "What am I doing to do, Gregory? I don't want her to see other men. I want her all for myself."

"Then I'm afraid you have a serious problem."

\* \* \* \*

Genesis petted Napoleon, the spoiled, midnight black cat who lived on the grounds. He was decked out in a faux diamond collar which gave him an aristocratic appearance. Lately, he had the habit of climbing into her room from the large tree outside the window. She often kept the window open day and night because she enjoyed the fresh air. Napoleon appreciated the treats she pilfered for him from the kitchen, and now seemed devoted to her.

"Do you have a girlfriend?" Genesis whispered in his ear. The obese cat purred loudly as he gave her a bored stare.

"Let me guess," she continued. "You probably have a different female under every bush and tree, much like your human counterparts who frequent this place."

"You have him pegged," said Sylvie, her closest friend in the brothel.

"They're all the same, aren't they? Every oversexed, unfaithful male of the species."

"Here's to oversexed, handsome men." Sylvie giggled as she sipped a glass of white wine. "Without them, I'd be out of a job and probably begging on the street. Not to mention deprived of the pleasures of the flesh."

Genesis smiled. "I must agree I'm enamored of my first taste of the pleasures of the flesh."

"So tonight you're seeing Captain Murdoch? Is he as handsome as Lord Alexander?" She plowed on without waiting for an answer. "I saw the earl

leave your room this morning wearing a dark scowl and a determined expression. Nevertheless, he had the face of a fallen angel."

"Have you ever met him?" A frisson of jealousy sliced through Genesis as she looked at her beautiful companion. She fought against the emotion because she had no claims on Alex, and he had none on her.

Sylvie sighed. "Alas no, for I heard last night was his first visit to Le Petit Palais. Of course, I know *of* him because he's a regular customer at the Moulin Rouge. One of my friends dances there, and she told me of his good looks and generous tips."

"I'm sure he's quite generous." Genesis glanced at the bouquet of roses on the dresser. "I wonder how many women have received flowers from him?"

"He seems quite taken with you. After all, he requested another appointment tomorrow night. Now, will you please answer my question?"

"What question is that?"

"I asked you what Captain Murdoch looked like."

"Oh, he's very handsome. Tall, dark-haired, broad-shouldered."

"Mmm, I envy you. The client I had last night resembled a small, white rat."

Genesis laughed. "I'm sure I'll have my share of white rats as time goes on."

Sylvie stretched her arms over her head. "I must have a nap before this evening's gentleman caller."

Genesis envied her friend's lush figure and sense of style. Sylvie was an artist with make-up and wore her clothes with an assured confidence. Her brown eyes tilted at the corners and shimmered with golden flecks of color, reminding one of a feline's mysterious and luminous stare.

She hesitated, wondering how she could frame her question. "I wish to know everything about sex," she began.

Sylvie raised an inquiring brow. "Doesn't everyone?"

Genesis blushed as she spoke the words. "What I'm curious about, what I wish to know is, have you ever been with another woman?"

"But of course."

"You have? Tell me what it's like."

Sylvie was silent a moment. "It's different than a man. Softer, gentler, depending on the woman. On a purely physical level our bodies respond to

stimulation, whether it comes from a man or woman. However, I much prefer a thick, hard cock attached to a darkly handsome man."

"Then you would definitely appreciate Captain Murdoch."

Sylvie took another sip of wine. "I'm getting aroused just imagining him."

"Would you like to meet him? You could be here when he arrives tonight."

Sylvie's eyes glittered with excitement. "I would like that very much."

Genesis cleared her throat. "May I ask you another question?"

"Ask away."

"If I wanted to experience sex with another woman—"

Before she could finish the thought, her friend leaned over and kissed her on the lips. "I suddenly feel like my nap can wait."



## Chapter 8

Sylvie kissed her with full, pillowy lips which were soft and gentle, not firm like Alex's strong, insistent mouth.

"Lay on the bed so I can rub your back," she whispered.

Nervousness and excitement warred within Genesis as she stretched herself out on the mattress. She gasped as Sylvie straddled her hips and massaged her shoulders with delicate, yet firm fingers.

"You're so tense," she said. "Just relax."

"I'm trying to relax."

Sylvie began to hum a lullaby, and her voice soothed the tight muscles of Genesis's shoulders. After a few moments, she finally relaxed, closed her eyes, and drifted into sleep.

As her eyelids fluttered open, she saw her friend's nude body on the bed next to hers.

Touching her cheek, Sylvie asked in a quiet voice, "Are you sure you want to do this?"

Genesis swallowed her fears. "Yes, I do."

"Then let's get these clothes off you."

Sylvie helped her undress, taking her time as she removed each item of clothing. Genesis's gaze was drawn to Sylvie's large breasts and dark-hued nipples, and a hot flush of desire shot through her system. Her breath came in short bursts as she hesitantly cupped Sylvie's breast in her hand and then stroked the thick, distended nipple.

Sylvie lowered her head and took one of Genesis's taut, hard nipples in her mouth. She sucked on it until Genesis juttied her hips forward, demanding more stimulation for her throbbing clitoris. Sylvie thrust a finger between her legs and stroked the swollen, straining bud.

"Lay back on the bed," she ordered.

Genesis did as she was told.

"Spread your legs." Sylvie placed a hand on the mound between her thighs. Her voice was deep with desire as she asked, "Have you ever touched yourself there?"

"No."

"Then you must try it. When there's no one available, you'll be able to satisfy yourself."

Genesis tentatively stroked her swollen clitoris with her middle finger. Liking the way it felt, she increased the pressure until a moan escaped her lips.

"That feels good, doesn't it?" Sylvie moved between her thighs as her tongue captured the swollen clitoris. It slid across the moist surface, driving Genesis wild with pleasure.

Her chest tightened as she lifted her hips, thrusting them toward Sylvie as the other girl licked her slick skin and the soft folds of her pussy. She closed her eyes as intense sensations overwhelmed her. The urge to reach climax was a driving force which couldn't be ignored. Thrusting her hips wildly, she arched her back at every touch of Sylvie's tongue on her fevered flesh.

Finally, her body was wracked with a stabbing pleasure which shot through her nerve endings like a runaway train. She couldn't control her cry of delight as she came with a fierce explosion of ecstasy.

Sylvie's voice was a husky whisper. "I can see why your cries of pleasure brought Captain Murdoch to this room."

Genesis pulled her into a tight embrace, kissing her mouth and tasting herself on the other girl's lips. She brushed Sylvie's hardened nipple and gave it a gentle pinch. As she ran her tongue over the distended peak, she played with the other breast, kneading and squeezing it.

"Tell me if I'm too rough with you," she said.

Sylvie giggled. "You sound like a man."

"If I were a man, I'd fuck you hard because your body is absolutely glorious."

"As is yours."

Genesis sought the swollen bud between her friend's thighs which gave such pleasure. She touched it with hesitant strokes and then lowered her mouth to lick it. It tasted delicious, and the scent of Sylvie's pussy was a powerful aphrodisiac. The more she tasted it, the more she wanted to taste it.

"I understand why we like men," Genesis said slowly, "but now I understand why they like us."

Sylvie's laughter filled the room. "Knowledge is a wonderful thing, isn't it?"

"And this type of knowledge is certainly fun to obtain."

Genesis thrust a finger into her warm cunt as she flicked her tongue over Sylvie's red, swollen clitoris. She moved her finger in and out of the wet folds of her pussy as Sylvie lifted her hips off the bed. Finally, she squeezed her eyes shut and gave a cry of release. After a moment, she fell back against the pillows, and Genesis admired her beautiful form.

Her friend looked at her and smiled. "Now I really do need that nap to regain my sagging strength."

They lay next to each other and Genesis rested her head on her friend's breast. She had enjoyed her first sexual experience with a woman, yet she felt something was missing. Her body was fulfilled, but she still craved a thick, hard cock to make the experience complete. And not just any man's cock.

*Alex.*

As Sylvie slipped into sleep, Genesis stared out the window at the sunny Paris afternoon. She wondered where he was at that very moment.

\* \* \* \*

A soft knock roused her from sleep. Night spilled into the open window and a dark shape sat on the window sill. Genesis gasped until she realized it was just fat Napoleon licking his paws. Another knock followed and then the door opened. Captain Murdoch walked into the room, but hesitated when he saw the two naked women in each other's arms.

He gave Genesis a rakish smile. "Well, hello there."

## Chapter 9

"These are for you." The captain handed her a bouquet of colorful flowers.

"Thank you. They're lovely." Genesis set them on the dresser, conscious of her nudity but enjoying the thrill of parading around without a stitch of clothing.

She couldn't help but compare the simple bouquet to Alex's glorious red roses in their crystal vase. She took the opportunity to study Graham's handsome face through her lowered lashes. She admired the clean line of his jaw, yet there was none of the breathless excitement which had engulfed her the first time she saw Alex.

He looked at her expectantly, and she realized he was waiting for her to make the first move. After all, he was the client, and it was her responsibility to please him.

She walked over to the small bar in the corner of the room. "Would you like a drink?"

He shook his head. "After last night's excess, I believe I'll decline."

"Well then—"

What was she supposed to do? With Alex, everything had felt so natural, almost as if he weren't a stranger to her at all. It was as if they'd recognized each other's souls and were reuniting after a long time apart. But the captain *was* a stranger, and she didn't know how she would get through the evening.

A kiss might be a good first step. She wrapped her arms around his neck and drew him towards her.

"Mmm." He moaned against her mouth. "You taste delicious."

"I taste like her." Genesis nodded toward her friend's naked form. Graham's eyes were bright as he watched Sylvie with a hungry, intent look on his face.

An idea came to her.

"Would you like her to join us?" she asked hopefully.

"I'd love that," he said eagerly. "I mean if you wouldn't mind."

Genesis blew out a relieved breath. "Of course, I don't mind. It's my job to please you. If you're happy, I'm happy."

His gaze raked across Sylvie's body. "It would please me very much if she could stay."

As if sensing their attention on her, Sylvie opened her eyes and looked around the room.

"This is Captain Murdoch," Genesis said quickly. "He'd like it if you could join us this evening."

Sylvie looked at him with interest. She stood up and glided across the room with a graceful swing of her hips.

"I'm Sylvie." Her voice was soft as her gaze held his. "It's a pleasure to meet you, captain."

"Sylvie." He spoke the word like an endearment. "I'm enchanted to meet you."

Genesis smiled to herself. He hadn't said he was enchanted to meet *her*.

"Captain, I'd be happy to join you and Genesis." Sylvie's voice was a breathless purr. "But you must inform Madame since I have an appointment scheduled for this evening."

Graham reached for the bell on the nightstand as the women slipped into their robes. The bell rang loudly, and a moment later, a huge eunuch appeared in the room. His face was impassive as he stared straight ahead of him.

Murdoch addressed him. "Please inform Madame Colette I wish to engage Miss Sylvie for the entire evening. I'll be happy to pay double the amount since she must cancel a previous engagement."

The eunuch nodded and left the room as quietly as he'd entered it.

"It's a blessing everyone here speaks English," he said.

"Madame insists we all learn English because there are many clients who visit from the English aristocracy." Sylvie arched an eyebrow. "It's even rumored the British monarchy visits us on occasion, though I've never met one of the royals."

Genesis walked to the window and picked up Napoleon. She looked out into the darkness as she petted the cat's soft fur. In the far corner of the

garden, a solitary figure stood watching the house. She squinted, but couldn't make out his features.

"Come join us." Sylvie's voice distracted her.

Genesis turned to find Graham already naked as he nuzzled her friend's throat.

She shook her head as she sat Napoleon back on the sill. "I don't think so. You seem to be enjoying yourself without me."

"No." Sylvie's voice was firm. "Captain Murdoch paid for both of us, and we must give him his money's worth."

"Well, if she'd rather not," he began.

"No, she's right." Genesis immediately forgot about the man in the garden as she slid the robe off her body. "The customer must always get his money's worth."

She wrapped an arm around Graham's waist and the other one around Sylvie. She kissed her friend passionately as he watched the two of them. His cock stood at attention and a wealth of springy curls surrounded it. His chest was also matted with dark hair.

"You like dark-haired men, don't you Sylvie?" Genesis stroked her friend's thick, hard nipple.

"Is that what you like?" Graham clamped his mouth on Sylvie's other nipple.

"Oh God!" Sylvie moaned. "Yes it's true. I love darkly handsome men."

Graham knelt on the floor in front of her and put his lips to her pussy. "That's very interesting to know."

As he explored the soft folds of Sylvie's cunt, Genesis teased her erect nipples with her tongue.

Eventually, they moved to the bed. The captain spread Sylvie's legs as he poised himself to enter her.

"Wait," she said. "You're ignoring Genesis which isn't very gentlemanly."

She winked at him and he drew in a sharp breath.

"Take her first," she continued. "Satisfy her and then you can have me all you want. All night if you like."

"You promise that?" he said huskily.

"Captain, you'll find I always keep my word." She smiled at Genesis. "And I always take care of my friends."

He nodded. "Very well."

He took Genesis into his arms and kissed her as his tongue probed her mouth. He stroked her nipples with strong fingers as he positioned himself to enter her.

"Fuck her good," encouraged Sylvie. "But save something for me."

"That I'll do, beautiful lady." He pushed himself into Genesis and she gasped with surprise and pleasure. His cock felt wonderful, but she struggled not to compare him to Alex. Would she end up comparing every man she slept with to that golden Adonis?

As Graham rode her faster and faster, Sylvie bit softly on her nipple. Genesis moaned with delight and decided she was probably born to be a whore. She loved the idea of being sucked, penetrated and exposed to others. She even liked the fact the lights were on and the window was open. Anyone could see what they were doing if they bothered to look. Was the man in the garden still watching the house? The idea brought a surge of moisture to her pussy. She wrapped her legs around Graham's waist.

"Fuck me, captain," she begged. "Fuck me harder."

He groaned as he thrust his cock roughly into her. She opened her eyes and found he wasn't watching her, but gazing at her friend with a lustful gleam in his eyes. Sylvie's legs were spread and she stroked her clitoris as she watched them together.

Genesis whispered in his ear to encourage him. "Imagine you're fucking Sylvie."

He nodded. "Oh yes."

"She's just your type, isn't she?"

"She's more my type than any woman I've ever met."

"Just pretend I'm her."

"Sylvie." His muscles quivered and his cock seemed to grow larger within her.

The friction between their skin grew until an explosion of pleasure shook her entire body.

"Yes!" she cried.

"I love to hear you scream." Sylvie planted light kisses on Genesis's throat and breasts.

Graham withdrew from her and held his throbbing cock in his hand. His eyes pleaded with Sylvie's. "I did what you asked."

"So you did." She gave him a satisfied smile as she lay back on the bed and spread her legs. "Would you like to have me now, captain?"

"God yes, but please call me Graham."

"I think I'll have a warm bath." Genesis decided to give them their privacy because it was apparent there was more to their relationship than simply courtesan and client. It seemed this particular client had fallen hard for her friend.

\* \* \* \*

Alex held a small pair of binoculars to his face as he watched the lighted window from the garden below. His sweet Genesis had certainly had an eventful evening in the company of Captain Murdoch and another prostitute. The captain's large cock seemed to give her a great deal of pleasure. Alex gripped the binoculars so tightly he was sure they would snap in two.

Glancing down at his pocket watch, he saw it was after midnight. Therefore, it was officially tomorrow. She belonged to him now, and he planned to spend every second of his allotted time with her. The first thing he would do was throw Murdoch out of the room. He hoped the man would resist because he was spoiling for a fight.

\* \* \* \*

Alex knocked on the door, but there was no answer. He turned the knob and walked into her room. Expecting to find Genesis in bed, he was surprised to see she wasn't there. Instead Captain Murdoch lay sleeping on the bed, his naked body uncovered, one muscular thigh thrown over the abdomen of an attractive young woman who was also asleep. His hand rested on her breast as he held her in a tight embrace.

Where was Genesis? He opened the door to the bath and discovered her in the tub.

"What are you doing here?" She gasped as she slid under the water.

"I didn't mean to frighten you," he said when she popped up again.

"What are you doing?" she demanded. "The captain is still here, and it isn't tomorrow yet."



"The captain has his hands full at the moment, and it's after midnight. Therefore, it is tomorrow."

"Don't argue semantics. We're not in a debate class at university."

He raised an eyebrow. "You went to university?"

"Yes. Does it matter?"

"Not at all. I just find it surprising that a woman of your intelligence works in a place such as this."

She gave him a teasing glance. "Well, a man of your intelligence fucks women in a place like this. What's the difference?"

He laughed. "Point taken. I'm sure you were a champion debater at school."

"I won my share of contests."

"Had I attended your college, I would have conceded any argument after one glance at your beautiful face."

Genesis gave a lighthearted laugh and he gazed in masculine appreciation at her cherry-hued lips and the amount of cleavage visible above the line of the water.

Alex removed his jacket and unbuttoned his shirt as she watched him with a hungry gaze which turned his cock to steel. She was so beautiful he couldn't get enough of her. He craved her with a passionate intensity he had never experienced in his life. She was his woman and he would never give her up. There must be a key which unlocked her heart if only he could discover it.

"What are you doing?" she asked as he removed his trousers.

"I'm a dirty boy. Would you like to give me a bath?"

## Chapter 10

"What are you doing on the other side of the tub?" Alex pulled her into his arms as water splashed across the floor.

She giggled. "You really are a dirty boy. Just look at the mess you're making."

"Then I must leave a huge tip for the maid because I plan to make an even bigger mess."

He lifted her by the hips and then sat her down on his erect phallus. More water splashed from the tub and Genesis moaned with pleasure as his penis slid into her body. Her eager muscles clenched around his huge organ.

"Will you admit you enjoy fucking me?" He nibbled on her earlobe as she rode his cock with enthusiasm.

"I enjoy fucking you," she said breathlessly. "Was there ever any doubt?"

"I want to be the only one who does this to you."

She put a finger to his lips. "Not tonight. Just let me enjoy this."

"I believe I'm paying you so *I* can enjoy it."

"And are you enjoying it?"

"God, yes. I don't think I've ever enjoyed anything so much."

"Then where's the problem?"

He laughed. "Why does every discussion with you turn into a spirited debate? That's what I get for seeing an educated woman."

"Would you rather I be ignorant and illiterate?"

"No." He shook his head. "I want you to be exactly as you are. Spirited, opinionated, exquisitely beautiful."

"You flatter me, sir."

"I speak the truth."

She teased his earlobe with her tongue as she ran her hands through his thick, blond hair. He smelled of wonderful things, sandalwood and

manliness. Moisture flooded her cunt as she stroked his strong, firm chest and muscular shoulders. She wanted more of him, wanted to be closer, craved the intimacy. She knew she couldn't get any closer for she was already impaled by his cock, and that was as close as she could possibly get. And yet she wanted more. What she felt for Alex was stronger than lust, stronger than sexual impulse. She wanted to possess him, just as he desired to possess her.

But that way led to madness.

Genesis struggled to push her feelings aside and view their encounter as purely sexual. He was just another client after all, albeit an irresistibly sexy one.

There was a knock on the door, and then Captain Murdoch's tall, naked body filled the doorway.

"Forgive me for intruding." Murdoch averted his gaze. "I just wanted to use the facilities."

"Find other facilities," said Alex.

The captain cleared his throat. "Sylvie and I are going to her room. Goodnight to you both."

"Goodnight, captain." Genesis smiled at him. "And thank you for a lovely evening."

He gave her a rakish smile. "I should be thanking you, for it was certainly my pleasure."

Alex's mouth was set in a fierce frown, but he said nothing. He simply glared at the other man until Murdoch left the room and closed the door behind him.

Then he bent his head and took one of Genesis's taut nipples into his mouth. With a frustrated groan he murmured against her skin, "So you had a lovely evening with him?"

"Very much so, but the evening isn't over yet."

"No, it isn't." He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her hard. "And you're with me now."

"Yes, I am."

"And my cock is bigger than his."

"He's no longer erect, so how can you tell?"

"I just know."

"Actually, you're right." Her breasts bounced as she rode him faster and faster. "He's large, but you're much larger. Though I'm not sure how you knew the size of his cock."

"Just a lucky guess." He ran his hands over the soft contours of her flesh. "I can please you more than that drunken officer."

"He wasn't drunk tonight. Besides, this isn't a contest Alex."

"Perhaps not, but I wish to wipe him from your memory."

She sighed. "And will you wipe every man I sleep with from my memory? If so, you'll find yourself a very exhausted person."

"So be it."

\* \* \* \*

They lay on the bed, warm and flushed from the bath as well as the uninhibited sexual activity in the tub. Alex stroked her nipples and Genesis felt arousal begin anew in her body.

"I want to show you something, Gen." His rich, seductive voice caused a shiver of anticipation to shoot through her body.

"Gen? Have you given me a nickname?"

He nodded and his voice grew serious. "Gen is your name when we're together. It belongs to me and the other clients can't possess it."

She looked at him in confusion. "It's just a name."

"But it's mine. My way of possessing a tiny part of you which no one else can touch."

She was moved by his words and felt the sting of tears at the back of her eyes. "So what do you want to show me?"

"This." He lifted the blanket and showed her his erect member with its large purple head and thick-veined shaft. Her mouth watered as she stared at it in lustful appreciation.

"I had you just a few minutes ago, yet I crave you again." His green-eyed gaze held hers. "This is what you do to me."

"And what do you do to me? One glance at your majestic cock and I'm so wet I can barely stand it."

He chuckled. "Don't you agree we're perfect for each other?"

She didn't answer but simply gazed at him with hungry eyes.

He covered himself and she looked at him in surprise. "Why did you do that?"

"To tease you."

"You rat." She pulled on the blanket. "Uncover yourself this instant!"

"Or what?"

"Or I'll be very disappointed."

He relented and she put her hand on his cock as she squeezed and stroked it. She lowered her face to take him into her mouth.

"Not yet." He pushed her down on the mattress, pinning her wrists above her head. "This is the way I want you. Pinned beneath me. That way I can do what I like to you."

"And what do you like?"

"Everything. I desire to do everything in the world to you." He kissed her throat and then moved down to her breasts. He kissed each nipple and rained fiery kisses down her abdomen, around her bellybutton, until he was poised at the soft triangle between her thighs.

"Most of all I want this. Your sweet pussy." He lowered his head to kiss her when suddenly he jumped off the bed.

"What the hell." He cursed as he ran around the room. "Something is stabbing me in the back!"

"Oh God!" Genesis watched in amazement as he jumped around the room with Napoleon's claws buried in his back. The cat looked like a giant black tick as he bounced around hanging on for dear life.

"Napoleon, no!" She reached for the feline who glared at her with cold eyes.

Alex winced in pain. "He's digging his claws in deeper!"

She struggled to remove the obese cat without hurting him, but there was no way around it. Napoleon's claws were buried deep in his flesh and it took patience to get them out. Once free, the cat leapt for the window sill and then disappeared into the darkness beyond.

"What the fuck is his problem?" Alex shook his head in wonder. "Is he in the habit of attacking people?"

"He's never done that before." She gasped when she saw the scratches on his back. "You're bleeding!"

"That doesn't surprise me. It hurts like a son of a bitch."

"Wait here." She threw on a robe. "Sylvie has medical supplies in her room."

Moments later, the women burst into the room. Captain Murdoch followed, wearing only his trousers.

"Jesus Christ!" he said when he saw the bleeding scratches on Alex's back.

Sylvie's eyes widened in horror. "Genesis, what have you done?"

"I didn't do it!" she protested. "It was Napoleon. For some reason, he attacked Alex."

Sylvie began to clean the wounds. "Maybe he's jealous of him."

"He didn't scratch *me* when we were together," Graham pointed out.

A secretive smile played across Sylvie's face. "No, he didn't. Perhaps now he has a reason to feel jealous."

"You're talking nonsense," said Genesis. "The cat is obviously insane. That's all there is to it."

Alex grimaced in pain. "When I said I wanted pussy, this is not what I had in mind."

## Chapter 11

"Lord Alexander, please accept my apologies for what that naughty cat did to you." Madame Colette's voice was quiet and conciliatory.

He sat across from her in the beautifully furnished office lined with bookshelves.

"I'm sure I'll be fine." Alex leaned forward and winced, as if the pain was excruciating and unbearable. He saw the concern in her dark eyes and knew he had her where he wanted her. The queen was in check.

"How can I possibly make this up to you?" She spoke the words he had waited to hear.

"Perhaps I might enjoy a week in Genesis's company?" He raised an eyebrow. "Exclusively, with no other men allowed to see her."

Colette's eyes sharpened as she studied him. "That might be arranged. It seems Captain Murdoch has transferred his affections to Sylvie, therefore, I see no problem with your request."

He moved in for the kill. "On the house, of course."

"On the house? Surely, you're joking." Her eyes widened in shock. "Do you realize how much money I'll lose? I must still pay Genesis for her time while receiving nothing in return."

Alex narrowed his gaze. "I needed three stitches to close one of the deeper cuts. The pain is a constant reminder of my encounter with *your* cat. Would you care to look at my back again?"

Madame held up her hand. "Please, no."

She sighed deeply as she studied him. "All right, a week on the house. And it's only because I value your business."

"As I value a certain lady in your employ."

She gave him a tight smile. "My instincts told me there would be trouble with this girl. For once I didn't listen to the inner voice and now I'm paying for it."

"You're not the only one, madame." Alex gave her a mocking smile. "I started paying the moment I saw her beautiful face."

\* \* \* \*

Alex stood next to the bed and watched her sleep. There was no longer the urgency he felt when he knew he only had one night with her. Now he could take his time and court her properly. The information Gregory discovered would come in useful toward that end. He sat the lovely vase of roses on the dresser alongside the books he had purchased at a local bookstore. There were volumes on archaeology and ancient Greek legends, which he hoped she hadn't read yet. He had also found the English toffees she loved so much, at least according to Sylvie. They were wrapped in a pink and white striped box, and he couldn't wait until she awoke and saw the gifts.

His heart melted as he gazed at her. Genesis looked as innocent as a child in the simple, cotton nightdress she wore.

Innocent and sweet like the first dew on the morning flowers. She smelled of lilacs and desire. Later he would tear the soft, white gown from her body and feast upon her luscious flesh. But for now, he was content to study the lines of her exquisite face and dream about the future they might have together. A few stolen moments watching her, desiring her, loving her. His heart was ensnared as surely as if it were caught on a lure. There was no escape for him unless he tore the organ from his chest.

His memories were drawn back to a time when he owned a particularly wild, untamed mare. Headstrong and skittish, the horse was determined to remain free and not submit to the saddle. Alex had slowly tamed the beautiful animal by gaining its trust day by day, wearing down its defenses a little at a time. Eventually, the animal had responded to his love and given hers in return.

He thought of Genesis that way—spirited, skittish, unwilling to submit to the desires of her own heart. But perhaps if he was patient.

\* \* \* \*



Genesis hadn't had the dream in years. Even as she slipped into the nightmare, she tried to wake herself up before it grew too intense.

*Wake up! Wake up!*

Her mind wasn't listening. The dark man appeared in front of her as he had done so many times in the past. When had she first had the dream? When she was nine or ten? What did it matter now? It always began the same way. The man threw a dark shroud over her head and she groped around blindly as she sought a way to escape. She pulled at the shroud, but it wouldn't budge because it was too heavy. She tried to scream for help but her mouth seemed packed with cotton. No sound escaped her throat.

She stumbled and fell. She fell through space, wrapped in the shroud, falling further and further down. Screaming for help, yet no sound emerged from her mouth. Then the dark man was on top of her, pushing his weight against her chest, forcing the air from her lungs. He was so heavy she couldn't catch her breath. Her lungs ached as they begged for air. Then he was gone, but her relief was short-lived. She was now buried in a box under the earth. What seemed like a ton of dirt pushed down on her coffin. Even if she could escape the box, she would never be able to crawl through all that dirt. She would suffocate before she reached the surface. Yet, she still clawed at the box which confined her. Sharp splinters of wood lodged under her fingernails. Her fingertips were worn to bloody stumps and still she clawed.

*Alex, please help me!*

\* \* \* \*

Her cry of terror made Alex jump and turn away from the window. Only a moment before she had been sleeping peacefully. Now she clawed at the bed covers and tossed her head violently from side to side.

"Let me go!" she cried. "Help me!"

"Gen, wake up. You're having a nightmare." He spoke softly as he held her in his arms and stroked her hair. For a moment, she stiffened against him. Then she began to weep with loud sobs which wracked her entire body.

"I was so scared," she managed to say. "I haven't had the dream in a long time. Why did it come back again?"

\* \* \* \*

Alex spoke soothing words as he held her against his chest. When she felt she had no tears left to shed, she looked up at his face. He was freshly shaved and smelled of some spicy, masculine cologne. His concern for her was apparent in his furrowed brow and intent gaze. Suddenly, she felt lonely and pathetic. She had no one to give her comfort except a stranger who pitied her. She looked away from him. Better to suffer in silence than be an object of pity.

She sat up and threw her legs over the side of the bed. "I need to get dressed. What time is it?"

"Eleven. I let you sleep because you seemed tired after last night's adventure."

She slipped into a robe. "How's your back feeling?"

"It still gives me the occasional twinge, but not enough to curtail my amorous activities." He gave her a leer and she couldn't help but smile.

"Does anything ever curtail a man's amorous activities?" She walked across the room and noticed the fresh flowers on the dresser. Then she saw the books.

"Oh my!" Genesis picked up one of the thick volumes. "Do you know how long I've waited for his latest work to be published? He's *the* authority on all things Egypt."

He gave her a wide smile. "I hoped you'd like them."

She lovingly fingered the books. Then with a squeal she threw herself into Alex's arms and hugged him tightly against her chest. "Thank you so much! I can't wait to read these."

After a moment, she looked at him suspiciously. "How did you know what I liked?"

"I have my spies."

She put her hands on her hips. "Who? Has Madame Colette been talking about me?"

"You know better than that. It would take a crowbar to extract information from her."

She laughed. "Then who?"

He gave her a guilty grin. "My friend Gregory obtained some information from one of your friends. Her name is Gigi."

"She's no friend of mine. In fact, I don't think she likes me at all."

"Nevertheless, she wasn't averse to sharing a bit of gossip about you for a steep price."

"And what's this?" She couldn't keep the excitement out of her voice when she saw the beautifully wrapped package resting on the dresser.

"English toffees. Sylvie said they were your favorites."

Genesis looked at the box of delicious sweets. She thought she had no tears left to shed, but discovered she was mistaken. A single tear slid down her cheek and plopped on the colorful box.

"Come here, mister." She took his hand and pulled him toward the bed. "I crave something sweet, and it isn't English toffee."

## Chapter 12

Alex's velvet tongue circled her nipple and then his mouth closed over the hard peak. Heat broke over her skin with each insistent tug of his mouth. She needed him so badly, wanted him to take her. She wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him towards her, smothering him against her body.

He released her nipple and a crooked smile played across his exquisite mouth. Desire darkened his gaze as he looked at her. "As much as I'd like to drown in your arms, my love, I can't get any closer. Yet you want me closer, don't you?"

An embarrassed flush spread across her cheeks. What was the point in denying it? "I want you closer. I can't get enough of you."

Laughter rumbled inside him as he settled himself between her thighs. He teased her clitoris with the tip of his tongue. She arched her back in response as she tangled her hands in his hair.

"Are you willing to give up this pleasure when our week is over?" The sound of his voice, rough with passion, made her nipples tingle with desire.

"I can't talk about it now," she moaned. "I just want to enjoy it while it lasts."

"It could last forever. It doesn't have to end."

It *could* last forever!

No, nothing ever did. He would grow tired of her and find another woman. He would toss her aside, perhaps with a baby in her belly.

"Relax," he whispered. "This is only sex, remember? It doesn't mean a thing. Enjoy it while it lasts."

His words soothed her and she was able to enjoy the feel of his probing tongue. It was slightly rough, like sandpaper against her soft skin. She thrust her hips forward, wanting more, greedy in her desire for the touch of his skin against hers. She felt moisture fill her and wondered if he felt it too, flooding her body and coating his tongue as he lapped it up.

Her breathing came faster as her body pulsed with excitement. This was so good! It was so much better than her encounter with either Sylvie or Captain Murdoch.

Because this time she was in love.

*No! Never!* She wasn't in love. It was only sex. Enjoy it while it lasted. She forced the words to take root in her consciousness.

"You're so wet for me." His tongue filled her as it darted about, seeming to be in every secret part of her at once.

"I can hardly stand this," she managed to say.

"Neither can I." With obvious impatience, Alex spread her legs and mounted her. When she felt the thick hardness of him push against her wet entrance, she knew she could die right then. Never had she experienced anything so wonderful. When his cock entered her with a mighty thrust, it felt like pure heaven. She *was* in heaven, at least for a little while.

She looked up at his sculpted face, as beautiful as a Raphaelite angel. *Was* he an angel who walked among humans?

They slid across the mattress in a dance as old as time. The bed rocked and the headboard slammed against the wall as they mated with unbridled enthusiasm. With each thrust, he penetrated deeper until she was panting like an animal. She was past caring how she appeared, past any embarrassment whatsoever. She bit her lower lip as she moved her hips against his. She grabbed his firm buttocks in her hands and squeezed them. Then she wrapped her legs around his waist. Sweat beaded on his brow as he fucked her with hard strokes. She loved his strength as he moved against her, his roughness, his power. Oh God, she couldn't stand much more.

And then she screamed with joy.

\* \* \* \*

"Tell me something about yourself." Her head rested against him as she played with the curly hairs on his chest. She enjoyed listening to the strong beat of his heart.

"Like what?"

"About your life. You know quite a bit about me, but I know nothing of you."

"Ouch, that's my hair you're pulling on."

"Sorry. I was being greedy again."

He gave her a wry smile. "You? Greedy? I can't imagine that."

"Careful. I haven't gotten to the hairs below your waist."

He smiled. "If I tell you about myself, will you promise to leave those hairs alone?"

She giggled. "Perhaps."

"Where to start? Well, I was once in the military." He found himself telling her of his life as an army officer, of the demands made on him by his parents.

"Is that what it's like to be born into an aristocratic family?"

He nodded. "It's all about duty, honor, responsibility. Sometimes I felt those words were tattooed on my forehead."

"Hmm, it does sound awful."

"Not awful." He smiled as he remembered. "There was also wealth and privilege. I don't have much to complain about in that regard."

"Have you ever been married?"

"No, but—" He hesitated, not wanting to reveal more, not yet.

"But what?"

He rolled over and faced the dresser where the two crystal vases sat side by side. The first batch of roses was already wilting. A single scarlet petal fell from the stem and joined the others piled on the dresser. Soon she would throw them out. Just as she would rid herself of him eventually.

"I'm tired," he said. "Perhaps we can talk later."

She sat up. "Very well."

"Don't leave." He turned to face her. "Stay with me."

"You can't expect me to stay in bed all day. It's not like we're on our honeymoon."

He frowned. "If only we were."

She lay back down. "I'll stay a little longer, but I'm getting hungry. Aren't you?"

"The only thing I hunger for is your body." He rolled on top of her and playfully nibbled on her throat.

"Get off me, you beast!" She giggled as she hit him with a pillow until he released her.

"Seriously though, I'm starving." She rubbed her flat stomach. "Shall I call down to the kitchen and order some dinner?"

"I have a better idea. I'm taking you out on the town tonight."  
She clapped her hands together. "Really? Do you mean it?"  
"Of course. I know the perfect restaurant."

## Chapter 13

"You'll be the most beautiful woman in the restaurant tonight." Alex kissed the back of her neck as Genesis adjusted her necklace in the mirror. His hands on her shoulders bespoke an intimacy between them which didn't exist, as if they had a real relationship and he wasn't merely paying her for sex.

That thought saddened her, and she turned away from her reflection.

The longer she spent with Alex, the harder it was to imagine her life without him. Things were becoming complicated, and she foresaw heartache when the time came for them to go their separate ways.

She came to a decision. After dinner, she would tell him not to come to her room again. Her life was spiraling out of control, and it was time to put an end to this destructive relationship. Many more nights with this gorgeous man and she would never be able to leave him.

\* \* \* \*

Alex watched the expressions play across her face as the maitre'd led them through the restaurant. He had chosen *La Maison de Conte de Fées*, which literally meant "The House of Fairytales," because he knew Genesis would be charmed by the colorful, mural-covered walls. Each mural depicted a scene from a different fairytale. There was Sleeping Beauty awakening after a kiss from the prince. Across another mural, Cinderella danced with her own handsome prince at the ball. Genesis studied every scene, her face as rapt as a child's on Christmas morning.

"This place is magical!" Her eyes sparkled under the soft glow of the chandelier. "Thank you for bringing me here."

Alex held the chair for her as the maitre'd departed.



When they were seated across from each other, he said, "Did you notice the mural depicting Sleeping Beauty?"

"Yes."

"That's how I see you. As Sleeping Beauty awaiting the right man to bring you to vibrant, sensuous life."

She looked at him for a long moment and then sighed. "Except life isn't a fairytale, is it?"

He put his hand on hers. "What's troubling you?"

She shook her head but didn't answer. He didn't press the issue, sensing her reluctance to speak about her feelings. The restaurant was famous for its rich cuisine and they feasted on Boeuf Bourguignon and Gratin Dauphinois. Alex liked the way she savored and enjoyed her meal. They declined dessert, and then walked around the entire restaurant so she could study the murals a second time.

"I shall bring you here again. Then you can see any detail you might have missed." He was impatient to get back to the brothel and back into her bed.

As they walked toward the exit, she seemed quiet and subdued. He wondered if she might be feeling ill, yet her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright. Maybe a bit too bright.

Like a stab from a sharp, piercing blade, he remembered the last time he had seen Anna. She had also looked ill. If only he had—

He pushed the memory away from him. Was he destined to bring misery to every woman he cared for? His shoulders slumped as he watched her tense face and unsmiling expression. For awhile, she had seemed happy. Now melancholy touched her delicate features. He held to the hope that perhaps her thoughts had nothing to do with him.

"Baron Kristovsky is having his annual summer ball tonight. Would you care to attend?" he asked hopefully. "There will be waltzing, and I desire nothing more than to hold you in my arms while we have our dance."

\* \* \* \*

Genesis imagined the two of them together on the dance floor, his powerful arms around her as he held her against his broad chest. Heat filled her body and her pussy dripped with moisture at the thought.

Then she remembered her resolve. Why prolong this sweet agony when every second in his company made it that much harder to leave him? Because she *would* leave him before he left her.

"If you don't mind, I'd prefer to go back to my room." She pulled a lie out of thin air. "I feel my menstrual cycle about to start, so perhaps we can call it an early night."

His face darkened with disappointment, and she almost changed her mind.

Then he gave her one of his devastating smiles. "I shall be content to massage your back while you rest. Would you like that?"

*Would she like it?* She wanted him in her bed for the rest of her life. Her willpower weakened, but not enough to change her mind.

"I think I'd like to be alone if you don't mind. I'm not feeling up to company."

"Oh, I see." He didn't hide his dejection, and she loved him all the more for it.

She felt her self-discipline crumbling under his devastating emerald gaze. "Perhaps we could—"

Suddenly, a voice intruded into their conversation. "Miss Kelly, what a delightful surprise."

A well-dressed man stood at the entrance to the restaurant and she recognized him as Lord Armbruster, one of her former suitors.

She extended her hand. "Hello Lord Armbruster, it's a pleasure to see you again. What brings you to Paris?"

He bent forward and kissed her hand. "Family finances on this side of the channel. All rather boring I'm afraid." He gave her a speculative glance. "I haven't seen you since your father's funeral. How have you been?"

"I've been well. Thank you for asking."

"I'd like to see you while I'm visiting relatives." His dark gaze held hers. "Are you staying with friends in Paris?"

Genesis found herself at a loss to explain her presence in the city. Panic set in as her mind went blank and she couldn't concoct even the most feeble lie.

Alex stepped forward and placed an arm around her waist. He introduced himself to the other man and then said, "Perhaps some evening you will join my fiancée and I for dinner at my estate."

Armbruster's face clouded with confusion as he looked at Genesis. "I hadn't heard you were engaged. Surely this is a recent development?"

"We've known each other for some time," Alex said smoothly. "I'd like to think her father would be pleased with our engagement. After all, his little girl meant everything to him."

His gaze held such love and concern, Genesis almost believed the fabrication.

"Well then, congratulations are in order." Lord Armbruster frowned as he sized up Alex. "You're certainly a lucky man, for many have vied for Miss Kelly's hand."

Genesis wished for nothing more than to escape the restaurant and find a corner to hide. She was unable to breath, suffocated under a mountain of lies.

\* \* \* \*

"Thank you for helping me out of an awkward situation," she said politely, and then settled into silence as their carriage traveled across the city. Alex wasn't sure what to say to her in this mood, so he remained silent as well. But as the magnificent Notre Dame cathedral came into view, he felt it was time to confide in her about his past.

"You asked me if I was ever married," he said quietly.

She turned to look at him. "Yes."

"I haven't been married, but I was once in an intense relationship." He closed his eyes and rested his head against the leather seat. "Her name was Anna and we had a passionate affair. Her husband was wealthy and a much older man. When he found out about us, he made her choose between her son and me."

Alex winced as memories churned to the surface of his mind like long-submerged pond sludge. Suddenly he felt ill, and wished he had never brought up the subject.

"He made her choose," she said quietly.

"Yes, and she chose me. She missed her son each day, but wasn't allowed to see him. Her husband wouldn't consent to a divorce so she was trapped, shunned by society, and without the support of family and friends."

Genesis looked at him with large, luminous eyes. "What happened to her?"

"She—" His voice broke. "She killed herself."

She put a hand on his arm. "I'm so sorry. How you must have suffered."

He couldn't control the tears which slid down his cheeks. Impatiently, he wiped them away. "I've always felt it was my fault. You see, I took her without any thought to the consequences. I destroyed her life."

"No." She shook her head vigorously. "Anna chose to end her life. You didn't kill her."

"How do you know that?"

"Because we must all be responsible for our own actions."

She stroked his arm with gentle caresses. He longed to hold her against his chest and give way to tears, but he didn't want her to see his weakness.

"I can't imagine how troubled your Anna must have been." Her voice was soft with compassion. "I would never kill myself, no matter how hopeless the situation. I would fight until the bitter end because I wouldn't allow death to have the victory without a hard-won battle."

"She didn't have your strength."

She gave a bitter laugh. "I'm not strong. I only pretend to be. Perhaps I can convince myself by saying it often enough. In truth, when things become too hard to bear, I simply run away."

His gaze captured hers. "And will you run away from me?"

"I already have."

## Chapter 14

"I won't give you up." Alex gave her a deep, longing look as they stood in the doorway of her room. Genesis held the doorknob, blocking him from entering her room.

"Give up what?" She hardened her heart against her growing desire. "Screwing each other till we can't screw anymore? There's nothing to give up because you're simply paying me for sex."

He shook his head. "There's more to our relationship than that."

"I don't want to talk about this tonight. I'm not feeling well. Perhaps tomorrow."

Why wouldn't he just leave? Didn't he know what the sight of him, the smell of him, was doing to her senses? She stepped forward but stopped herself from moving into the circle of his arms. His gaze pinned hers, and she was powerless to look away.

"Will you answer a question for me?" he said quietly.

She gave him a wary glance. "Maybe."

"And will you be honest with me?"

"If I choose to answer the question at all, I'll tell you the truth."

"Fair enough." He brushed a stray curl from her cheek. Even that simple gesture of intimacy sent her senses into heightened awareness. She closed her eyes as desire for him flooded through her body.

She opened her eyes and found him watching her closely as his green eyes twinkled under the muted lights.

"Why are we standing here in the hallway?" His voice was low and seductive, hypnotic in its sensual tones. "Couldn't we go inside your room and talk?"

*Oh God.* She felt her knees buckle under her, but forced herself to concentrate on the conversation. "What did you want to ask me?"

"So we're all business tonight, are we?" He chuckled. "Very well. My question is why are you really working here?"

His gaze lingered on her lips, and it was almost too much for her to bear. She opened her mouth to invite him into the room. After all, it was only sex, wasn't it? It didn't mean a thing. No one would get hurt.

But she was already getting hurt.

After a moment, she said, "I want to understand what my mother experienced as a courtesan in this very brothel. I wish to know everything about her life, for I have nothing of her except this place."

He nodded as if satisfied with her answer. "I'm trying to discover what happened to your mother after she left you on your father's doorstep."

"Why would you do that?" Hope filled her heart. Could he possibly discover something about the mystery?

"Because you want to know the truth, don't you? It's important to you which makes it important to me. If you know what really happened, maybe it will free you from your desire to work here."

Tears stung her eyelids. "Alex—"

"I don't want you working here," he continued. "I don't want you fucking other men. I want to be the only man who claims you."

"Those are hypocritical words coming from a man who fucks prostitutes."

He cradled her face in his hands. "I have no desire to visit a brothel ever again. The night I met you, Gregory dragged me here, and I agreed because I needed something to get me through another lonely evening. I had no idea I would meet the woman of my dreams and my heart's desire in such a place."

"Oh." She lowered her gaze so he wouldn't see her tears. "You must understand. While I find you the most attractive man I've ever met, I also wish to enjoy physical relationships with other people."

"No." He shook his head. "You want to prove to your mother and yourself that you're stronger than her under similar circumstances."

"I wish to know my mother, that's true, but I also want to experience any number of sexual encounters."

"I don't believe you."

"You still don't understand me." As she spoke the words, she tried to convince herself, as well as him, of their truthfulness. "I have a fire in my

blood and a desire to indulge my sensual appetite, to enjoy the sexual act with anyone I choose."

"I understand fire in the blood because I burn for you." His voice was rough with emotion as he placed her hand on his chest. "Can't you feel my heart beating for you? Craving you? Desiring you?"

"I crave you as well, but not enough to see you exclusively." She spoke the lie with a straight face. Did he believe her?

She wouldn't fall in love with him. Love never worked out, except for a select few. Most people were unhappy in their marriages and their lives. That was why there were so many clients in the brothel. She knew her way was better.

She put on a flirtatious mask as she ran a finger down the front of his shirt. "If you wish to keep seeing me, you can't be jealous of those I bring to my bed."

"I don't have to like it." His expression hardened and his mouth set in a dark scowl.

"You don't have to like or accept anything. You can simply walk away. There are many beautiful women in this house, any of whom would be happy to satisfy your needs."

"You're right, of course." He gave her a speculative glance. "There are women such as your friend Sylvie. I'd pay Madame Colette a fortune for a night with her."

Jealousy gripped her in its cruel embrace. *Not Sylvie! He couldn't sleep with her friend!*

"Sylvie is an exquisite beauty, don't you think?" His voice deepened with appreciation. "I wonder what her flesh tastes like?"

Her temper flared and consumed her like a forest fire. "Believe me, she tastes like honey from the gods. I know because I've had her. And don't forget to send her roses afterwards."

Alex looked at her for a long moment. "Have you always been this cold? There's no way to reach your heart because it's encased in metal armor. Perhaps I should call you Joan of Arc."

A tear slid down her cheek and she wiped it away. "Armor didn't save Joan of Arc. She died a horrible death."

His gaze softened as he touched her cheek. "I don't think you're as tough as you pretend to be."

"Perhaps not, but I'm determined not to fall into the trap of jealousy, suspicion, and misery which so-called love breeds. I'll fuck whomever I please, and I won't allow myself to suffer the same fate as my mother or your Anna."

The color drained from his face and his eyes were twin green fires. "Well, goodnight then. I'll see you tomorrow provided I'm not too tired after an evening with the lovely Sylvie."

He stalked down the hallway toward her friend's room. Genesis fled into her own room and slammed the door so hard the pictures on the wall rattled.

\* \* \* \*

"So how was last night's lovemaking session?" Genesis struggled to keep her voice casual as she sat in front of the mirror eating English toffees.

Sylvie gave her a blissful smile. "Absolutely delicious. The man fucks like an artist, as you well know."

Genesis dragged a brush through her hair, managing to pull out several strands by the roots. "I'm happy you had a good time."

"What's wrong with you? You sound positively fierce."

"Nothing's wrong with me. What could possibly be wrong?" She tangled the brush in her hair and winced in pain.

Sylvie took the brush from her hand. "Let me do that for you. I fear you'll go bald if you keep combing it."

"Don't bother." She snatched the brush away. "Perhaps you should leave now because I feel in need of a nap."

"You just woke up."

"Can't I have a nap even if I've just woken up?"

"Of course you can."

Genesis slammed the brush on the dresser. "So he fucks like an artist, does he?"

"Excuse me?"

"You said he fucks like an artist. What does he do that's so artistic?"

Sylvie stared at her as comprehension dawned. "The green-eyed monster has certainly claimed you as a victim."

"I'm not jealous."



"Of course you're not." A teasing smile played across her face. "When he slid his tongue inside my pussy, I thought I might melt with pleasure. And his cock is so big, so thick, so hard."

"Shut up!" Genesis exploded. "I grow sick of hearing about your amorous exploits."

"You always enjoyed them before."

"I don't care if Alex finds you attractive. He can fuck anyone he likes."

"Alex? I wasn't talking about him."

Genesis stood up and gripped her friend's shoulders. "Then who?"

"Graham, of course. He's the one who fucks like an artist of sensual enjoyment."

Genesis laughed, suddenly feeling lighthearted with relief. "I thought you were speaking of—"

"You thought I fucked your darling Alex? I would *never* do that to you because anyone can see you're in love with him. Why can't you realize it?"

"I'm not—"

"Yes you are, whether you admit it or not." Sylvie smiled. "I know something about love these days."

"What do you mean?"

"I have a secret."

"Tell me!"

"I'm desperately in love with Graham, and he's asked me to marry him."

"Marry him!" Genesis squealed with delight. "And I was the matchmaker!"

"And you'll be the maid of honor. We're getting married in a month. He's resigning his commission from the Army, and soon he'll spend his time managing his estates. He's buying a home here in Paris because I told him I couldn't bear to live away from my friends."

Genesis hugged her. "I can't believe it! And you met him here of all places."

Sylvie laughed. "I think we'll keep that fact a secret from his family."

They both giggled.

"And guess what?" Sylvie continued. "Madame Colette is hosting a reception in the ballroom, and she's spared no expense. She says it's like losing her own daughter whenever a girl marries and leaves Le Petit Palais."

The day after the reception, we're having a formal wedding ceremony in the cathedral. His family is traveling here from England. I hope they like me."

Genesis kissed her on the forehead. "I know they'll adore you, and I couldn't be happier if you were my own sister."

"In my heart, you are my sister."

"And I always will be."

## Chapter 15

By late afternoon, Alex hadn't arrived and Genesis found herself pacing the floor. The walls seemed to close in on her as she held Napoleon in her arms and petted him. Perhaps Alex had found another woman to keep him company for the evening. She decided to visit Madame Colette and discreetly quiz her for information.

"I'm glad you're here." Colette lit up one of the thin, fragrant cigarettes she was fond of smoking. "There's something I need to discuss with you."

"What is it?" Genesis eyed the other woman's pale, concerned face.

"I shall discuss this with every girl who works in the house. Perhaps I'll call a meeting tomorrow. Yes, that's what I'll do." She pushed a newspaper across the desk and Genesis picked it up and stared at the front page.

Colette exhaled a plume of exotic-scented smoke. "Have you heard about this awful man who is killing women in London?"

Genesis read the headline out loud. "Jack the Ripper slays five prostitutes in London's Whitechapel."

"They have no idea who this monster is. He could be anyone."

"You're not worried he'll show up here?" she said in surprise. "It says he's killing streetwalkers in one of the poorest slums in London."

"True." Colette paused. "Still, it drives home the point that we must all be careful. There might be others like him, others who seek to copy him."

"The eunuchs seem to be efficient at doing their job. I have barely to ring and they arrive in my room." Genesis grinned. "I know because I've tested them."

"Clever girl." Madame studied her with a thoughtful expression. "And now let us speak of something more pleasant. How is the earl treating you?"

Genesis couldn't prevent the flush which spread up her throat and colored her cheeks.

"I can see by your face he's treating you very well indeed."

"I have no complaints." She hesitated. "Er, I don't believe he's coming here tonight so I'd like to work the main parlor if I may."

Colette studied her from behind the desk. "What makes you think he won't be back tonight? He's booked your services for the entire week."

"We had a disagreement."

Madame frowned. "You're not paid to have disagreements with paying customers."

"I'm sorry." Genesis struggled to look properly chastened. "I'll try harder to get along with the clients."

"Hmm. If he shows up tonight, I'll expect you to entertain him."

"Very well. But until then, I'd like to mingle with the others in the parlor. I grow tired of my own company."

Colette's gaze was shrewd. "Perhaps you grow tired of pining for Alex."

"I'm not pining for him. I wouldn't waste that much energy on any man."

"Very well then. Work the parlor, at least until he arrives."

Genesis stood up to leave. "Thank you, madame."

"And remember what I said. You ladies need to be especially conscious of safety."

\* \* \* \*

As Genesis entered the spacious, smoky parlor, many heads turned in her direction. There were some very handsome men sitting on plush, comfortable chairs, but her gaze slid away from them. She sought the most unattractive, non-threatening person in the room as her gaze settled on a man old enough to be her grandfather. He blinked in surprise as she made a bee-line toward him.

"Enchanting." He rose from the divan and took her hand in his as he bent to kiss it. "Would you care to join me?"

He introduced himself as Monsieur LeClaire, a retired banker. As she sat next to him, one of the women played a sweet, haunting melody on the harp. Genesis leaned her head against the older man's shoulder and pretended he was her grandfather. After all, he seemed harmless enough and had made no sexual overtures towards her.

That was when she saw Alex standing across the room. His gaze never left hers as he closed the distance between them.

"You weren't in your room." He pinned her with an angry expression. "If you recall, we have an appointment tonight."

Genesis frowned. "I don't wish to see you again."

His eyes burned with a hidden fire. "I've purchased you for the entire week."

"From what I understand, it was on the house. Therefore, I suggest you find another woman to satisfy your needs." She refused to lower her gaze. "Every woman is interchangeable. Don't you find that to be true?"

"Genesis."

"Young man," interrupted Monsieur LeClaire. "The lady has made her wishes clear to you. Will you continue to behave like a boorish cad?"

Alex's mouth tightened. "Never let it be said I didn't respect a woman's wishes."

With that he stalked out of the parlor as Genesis struggled to hold back her tears.

Monsieur LeClaire wished only to talk about books and art. She spent the remainder of the evening having a stimulating conversation with him before returning to her lonely room. Stripping off her clothes, she got into bed nursing the hope that Alex would come to her during the night.

He didn't.

Had she finally driven him away? It was what she wanted, wasn't it?

The next evening, she was back in the parlor searching for Monsieur LeClaire. He wasn't anywhere to be seen so she chose another older man to keep her company. Lord Cranston, a member of parliament, invited her to accompany him to the opera.

As she viewed the performance, she felt herself being watched. Gazing up at the private boxes, she saw Alex's handsome face.

He sat with other well-dressed, wealthy patrons. Genesis forced herself to concentrate on the beautiful music, but it was nearly impossible. Was he following her? Or had he already planned to attend tonight's performance?

Lord Cranston leaned toward her. "Is something troubling you, my dear?"

"No, I'm just fine."

He took her hand in his. "Good, because I long to return to your room at the brothel. I have plans for an entertaining evening."

She swallowed her fears. "I look forward to that, my lord."

\* \* \* \*

Alex sighed as pain filled his heart. So this was what his life had come to. Standing outside her window, spying on her as she entertained other men. First he had followed her to the opera and now he stood in the garden below her room. As usual, she had the lights on and the curtains open. Did she want him to see what she was doing?

If she removed a stitch of clothing, he would be in her room in a matter of seconds. So far she hadn't undressed, and he'd watched her for over an hour. Instead, the older man she entertained sat on her bed and cried while she talked to him.

Eventually, the man removed his clothing before handing her a small whip. Alex gripped the binoculars in a tighter grasp. What the fuck were they doing? If he laid a finger on Genesis--

## Chapter 16

"I wanted to be a priest," said Lord Cranston. "It was my goal in life to serve God."

Genesis frowned. "What happened?"

"I couldn't stay away from women, especially married ones."

"Well, we all have our flaws."

He burst into tears and she felt at a loss. What was she supposed to do?

She put a hand on his shoulder. "Lord Cranston."

"Call me Mikey."

"Mikey?" She smiled. "So your first name is Michael?"

"Yes."

"Well Mikey, I think you're being hard on yourself. You're a member of parliament, so you've accomplished worthwhile things in your life."

He shook his head. "I gave into peer pressure and signed a petition to abolish brothels in London. Yet here I am in a Paris brothel."

"Well, nobody's perfect."

"I deserve to be punished for my hypocrisy and lust for married women."

He removed his jacket and unbuttoned his shirt. He took off his trousers and Genesis stepped away from him.

Then he took out a small whip from a hidden pocket in his jacket.

"Take this," he said. "Use it on me."

"Where?"

"On my back, of course."

"Of course." She whacked him softly on his bare shoulders.

"Much harder, mistress. Tell me you're doing this for my own good."

"I'm doing this for your own good, Mikey." She controlled her urge to giggle.

"Harder mistress," he begged.

"I don't want to hurt you."

"That's rather the point, isn't it?"

She continued to whip him, but refused to do it as hard as he requested.

"Thank you, mistress." He groaned loudly as he came with a sharp exhale of breath. She looked down at the stained sheets on her bed. How disgusting, but at least he hadn't asked her to fuck him.

After he left the room, she rang the bell. As was their custom, one of the eunuchs arrived almost immediately.

"Please send a maid to change the sheets," she said.

The man nodded and left the room.

A moment later, there was a knock on the door, and she smiled at his efficiency. But when she opened the door, she found Alex standing in the hallway.

They spoke at the same time.

"Alex."

"Genesis."

"What are you doing here?" she asked. "I told you—"

"I know what you told me." His voice sounded weary, as if he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders.

"How have you been?" She could have bitten off her tongue. Why had she asked him that?

"What do you care?" He sighed. "As a matter of fact, I haven't been very well."

"I'm sorry."

He shrugged. "I'm leaving Paris tomorrow."

"Leaving?" Her heart plummeted in her chest. *He couldn't leave her!*

"Yes. I'm going home."

"Home? I thought this was your home."

"No. The city is ruined for me now."

"Oh." She felt the tears gather behind her eyes. "Well, have a pleasant journey."

"I wanted to see you one last time, and bring you this." He held up a faded, yellowed envelope.

"What is it?"

"It's a letter written by your mother."

"My mother?"



He nodded. "The detective I hired tracked her movements. She spent her final days with her sister in Marseilles. It appears you're not alone in the world after all. You have an aunt and a number of cousins."

"I have a family?" Her eyes were bright with happiness and gratitude. "How can I ever thank you?"

"Read the letter," he said. "Your aunt held it all these years, hoping her sister's child would somehow track her down. Her address is on the envelope in case you want to visit her."

"I'll read it later."

There was another knock on the door and a young woman entered the room. She was a pert chambermaid named Claudine. Though attractive, she wasn't beautiful enough for Madame Colette to hire as a courtesan.

Claudine gave Alex a long, lustful look as she bustled about changing the sheets. Genesis frowned, wishing the girl would hurry so she could be alone with him.

He raised an eyebrow as he watched her work. "What's your name?"

"Claudine, sir."

"You're very pretty, Claudine." He turned to Genesis. "You seem to enjoy threesomes, my love. Would you like this girl to join us tonight?"

Genesis looked at him with a surprised, hurt expression. "No, thank you."

He pulled Claudine into his arms and kissed her. "Why not? I thought you'd enjoy it."

"Alex, what are you doing?" Her temper flared. "Let go of her at once."

His voice was rich and seductive. "Would you like to join us, Claudine?"

"Oh yes, my lord." She dropped the soiled sheets on the floor and wrapped her arms around his waist. "And you won't even have to pay me."

"Claudine, you may leave now." Genesis controlled her fury by sheer force of will. How dare he treat her like--

Claudine devoured him with her eyes. "Do you wish me to leave?"

"Get out!" Genesis pointed at the door and the other girl jumped at the sound of her voice. She gathered up the sheets and gave Alex a last look before closing the door behind her.

Genesis glared at him. "How dare you treat me that way!"

"In what way?" His voice was mocking. "I thought you'd appreciate it. After all, you fucked that army captain and Sylvie, didn't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"So what's the difference? Murdoch and Sylvie, me and Claudine. We're all interchangeable, aren't we? Those were your words."

"Please stop."

"I see you have clean sheets now. Shall we christen them?"

He pulled her into his arms and then threw her on the bed. He straddled her and pinned her wrists above her head as she struggled against him.

"Alex, let me go. I don't want—"

"You don't want what?" His voice was warm against her throat.

She ceased her protests. "Mmm, I want you."

"Tonight is not about what *you* want," he said roughly. She suddenly felt afraid as he slid his hand into her neckline and ripped the gown from her body.

"There's no need to do that. I'll take it off."

"I've danced to your tune since the moment we met." His eyes were bright with anger. "But I've decided to get you out of my system once and for all."

He loosened his cravat and before she knew what was happening he tied her wrists to the headboard. Then he removed the rest of her clothing.

"Alex, please don't do this." She struggled against the restraints as he took off his shirt and trousers.

"Why not?" He laughed. "Isn't this what you want? To be treated like a whore?"

She smelled alcohol on his breath and turned away from him. "You're drunk. Please leave."

"I'll leave when I'm damn good and ready."

Despite her fear of the mood which had come over him, she couldn't stop herself from staring at his swollen, thick-veined cock. Her mouth watered in anticipation.

"Is this what you want?" Without waiting for an answer, he spread her legs open and thrust himself into her. She gasped in surprise as her muscles clenched around his large member.

"You're always ready for me, aren't you?" he whispered in her ear.

She nodded. "Always."

She longed for him to kiss and caress her, but he didn't. He simply thrust himself into her, as if she were nothing but a piece of meat. Despite the pleasure he gave her, she felt used and disrespected.

But that was the point, wasn't it? That was the way he wanted her to feel.

Her breathing grew labored and she felt herself about to climax. He withdrew from her and came on her stomach.

"Alex." Her voice held frustration and anger.

He untied her wrists. "What is it, my love?"

"You know what it is. I haven't came yet."

"But you're a whore, aren't you? You're not paid to enjoy yourself." He began to get dressed as she pulled the sheet over her naked, overheated body.

Tears flowed down her cheeks. "How can you treat me this way?"

"Get used to it, sweetheart. I'm sure you'll be treated much worse as time goes on." He slid the trousers up his legs and buttoned them. Then he pulled out a large roll of money. "If you save this little nest egg, it'll last you quite awhile."

"I don't need your money and I don't want it."

"Too bad because you've earned it." He threw the wad of bills on the bed and the money scattered across the mattress and fell on the floor.

She closed her eyes. "Get out."

"Don't worry, I'm leaving." He gave her a mocking smile. "For the first time, I can honestly say I've gotten you out of my system."

He turned on his heel and left the room without looking back.

## Chapter 17

"I hurt her, not only physically but emotionally." Alex stood on the platform waiting for the train which would carry him away from Paris. "I'm sure she'll never want to see me again."

"I don't see why you need to leave." Gregory stared at his friend's pallid complexion and listless eyes. "You go see her, you apologize. Everything is fine."

Alex shook his head. "She probably won't see me again after the way I treated her. She's a proud person."

"But if she loves you—"

"I don't think she's capable of loving anyone." His voice broke. "But I'm in love with her and that's why I've got to leave. I've gotten too involved and I must step back for my own sanity."

"I can see that. It can't be easy watching the woman you love fuck other men."

"I can't do it any longer." Alex wiped at his eyes. "I feared for my sanity when Anna died, and I find myself again poised on the edge of an abyss. Only this time the pain is greater because Genesis is the love of my life and she has no idea."

The shrill whistle of the approaching train filled the station. He picked up his case and put an arm around his friend's shoulder. "Thank you for making me feel welcome."

"I wish you could've settled here permanently."

Alex smiled. "Who knows? I may come back someday."

"Then good luck to you."

Alex nodded and turned away. Was he doing the right thing? What choice was there? If he spent another night outside her window, he feared he would lose his mind.

He needed familiar surroundings, the sights and smells of home. He straightened his spine and walked toward the train.

\* \* \* \*

Genesis awoke and reached for Alex. Then the pain hit her with renewed intensity. He was gone and she was alone. Every morning for a week she had reached for him only to find the bed empty. The day after he came to her room, she told Madame Colette she no longer wished to see clients.

"You've lost your taste for this profession?" Colette gave her a shrewd look. "Or perhaps you're in love?"

"I'm not in love. It's just not what I thought it would be."

"Well, if you change your mind—"

"You'll be the first to know." Genesis sighed. "Just give me some time to—"

"Get over your broken heart?" She leaned back in her chair. "Sometimes the cure for losing a man is finding another one."

"Perhaps." Genesis agreed with a half-hearted nod of her head.

"Now that you have free time, you can help me plan Sylvie's engagement party."

"I would love to help."

A week passed and she threw herself into preparations for the party. She went shopping with Sylvie in the fashionable salons of Paris. Her friend would soon be the wife of a wealthy aristocrat and needed an entirely new wardrobe.

"I grew up in an orphanage," Sylvie said as they sat in an outdoor cafe eating croissants and drinking tea. "When I was a skinny child, always hungry and cold, I couldn't imagine a happy future for myself."

Genesis smiled. "You deserve happiness."

"So do you, and I pray you discover what Graham and I have found."

"I believe I held happiness in my hand for a little while, but then I threw it away. What a fool I've been."

"Have you read your mother's letter yet?"

Genesis shook her head. "No, I'm afraid of what it will say."

"I don't understand."

"I can't explain it."

"I think you should read the letter," Sylvie said firmly.

"Then read it to me for I might never have the courage to do so."

Genesis pulled the paper out of her reticule and handed it to her.

Sylvie looked at the faded envelope before opening it and taking out the letter.

*"My dearest daughter," she read, "I can't be there to watch you grow up so I'm writing this letter to tell you how much I love you. Even though you're only a baby, someday you'll be a woman and perhaps wonder about me. I loved your father more than my own life. He was everything to me and even though the circumstances of our meeting were far from conventional, please know how much I cherished him. When he found out I was with child, he asked me to marry him. But there were two reasons I couldn't accept his proposal, the first being that I was already married. My husband left me years ago to journey to America. I suppose I could have explained this to a magistrate and he might have granted me a divorce."*

*"But the real reason I couldn't marry him is because I'm sick. I have the consumption and each day I grow weaker. I know I don't have much time left because the disease ravages my body with its invisible grip. I want your father to remember me as I was. Beautiful, willful, exciting. I want to remember him as the dashing, impossibly handsome man I first met. I don't want him to see me die an inch at a time, a day at a time. I love him too much to subject him to that. I'm giving this letter to my sister, Beatrice, and she will hold it for you. Someday you might track her down and meet your family. She has three children who are your cousins, and I'm sure there will be more. I pray you will find true love and happiness in your life as I had for such a short time. This is the only hope I cling to."*

Sylvie stopped reading. "The letter ends with her signature."

Genesis stared at the people who passed the cafe. Tears blinded her and she saw the world through a shimmer of sorrow. "They loved each other. My father would have married her."

"Yes."

"Oh God. I had the happiness they were denied, and now it's gone." She burst into tears of regret. Sylvie stood up and helped her to her feet.

"Let's get you back to your room." She put an arm around Genesis's trembling shoulders. "You need time to mourn your losses. A good cry will cleanse your system, and then things will look better with each passing day."

Genesis barely remembered the walk back to the brothel. She wept until she thought her heart would shatter into pieces. Sylvie helped her undress and put her to bed, closing the curtains and placing a cool towel on her forehead. Eventually, she cried herself to sleep and dreamed of a magnificent green-eyed man who again held her in his arms and cherished her.

Then the dream changed and she was plunged into the nightmare about the dark man and the coffin. Awaking with a cry, she looked around the silent, empty room. Putting a hand to her head, she realized she had a fever.

For the next week, Genesis suffered through her illness as Sylvie nursed her back to health. She wanted to be left alone with her misery, but her friend insisted on feeding her chicken soup and making sure she drank plenty of liquids.

Eventually, her strength returned and she opened the curtains to breathe in the sweet scent of a spring morning. Napoleon waited for her on the window sill and she picked him up and cradled him in her arms. As she looked down at the fragrant garden, she came to a decision. She would continue to see clients. What did it matter anyway? She had lost the love of her life and there was nothing left to hope for, nothing left to lose. At least she could pretend that the men she fucked were versions of Alex Lansing. For a few moments, she would close her eyes and pretend it was him in her bed instead of a stranger.

\* \* \* \*

Sylvie kissed Graham as they lay snuggled in bed together. "I wish you to locate the Earl of Landower for me. I must tell him that Genesis loves him. Perhaps he doesn't know that." She paused. "If only we knew where he was staying. The rumor is he's left his estate in Paris and journeyed home."

Graham smiled. "I know where he's staying."

She sat up and looked at him in surprise. "You do?"

"Yes, I read in the society page that he's now in London. He spent a few days at his home, but then accepted an invitation to be the guest of Sir

Wellington. There was an article about a party he attended with Wellington's daughter. The paper hinted there might be an announcement of an engagement between them."

"But that's ridiculous!" Sylvie narrowed her gaze. "He's been gone less than a month. Surely, he couldn't have fallen in love so quickly."

Graham straddled her body and sucked on her taut nipple. "Sometimes it happens that way. It happened like that for us. It took me only one night to fall in love with you."

"Mmm, that's true." She purred with pleasure as he ran his hands down her body.

She reached for his swollen cock and held it in her hand. "Are you ready again? We just finished making love."

"With you, I'm never finished. I feel like fucking you every hour of the day." He rubbed his face against her breast. The coarse feel of his cheek against her erect nipple caused her to moan with pleasure.

"Will you contact him for me?" She arched her back as he slid two fingers into her.

"Do we have to talk about him now?"

"No, we don't have to talk at all."



## Chapter 18

Alex held the letter in his hand, reluctant to open it. He stared at the Paris postmark as memories flooded back to his mind.

Genesis. Their last night together in all its ugliness. The nights he had stood in the garden watching her window.

Then other thoughts assaulted him. Her innocent angelic face, her sexy smile, her sharp intelligence. God, would he never get over her?

"Are you riding with Katrina this morning?" Lord Wellington looked across the table at him.

"Yes, I planned to."

"Good." The older man nodded with approval. "It seems my daughter has taken a liking to you."

"She's a beautiful girl." He remembered the night they kissed and she invited him to her bedroom. He had felt a stirring of desire, but couldn't go through with it. If he fucked Katrina, he would still feel hollow and unfulfilled because she wasn't Genesis. No one was.

Once more, he looked down at the unopened letter.

"A message from a friend?" Lord Wellington said distractedly.

"Yes, a friend." He studied the Murdoch family crest emblazoned on the envelope. Why would Captain Murdoch write to him? Had something happened to Genesis?

Alex stood up suddenly and the silverware rattled against his plate. "If you'll excuse me, I must answer this correspondence at once."

"You're not hungry for breakfast?"

"Not at the moment."

When Alex returned to his room, he found Katrina sitting on his bed. Her blond hair caught the first rays of sunshine from the open window. She was enchanting, and people said they made a gorgeous couple. However, he couldn't stop himself from imagining a raven-haired beauty with green eyes

a shade darker than his own. He remembered her seductive mouth and full, heavy breasts with firm, rose-hued nipples.

"Are you ready for a ride now, my lord?" Katrina smiled at him. "You were reluctant the other night but maybe you've changed your mind?" She lay back on his bed and ran her hands down her body.

"I don't think so, Katrina." He shook his head and tried to feign regret. "I have some urgent business I must attend to."

She narrowed her gaze. "Will you join us in the park when you've completed your business?"

"We'll see." He just wanted her to leave so he could open the envelope. What if Genesis was hurt? What if she needed him? A fierce sense of protectiveness overwhelmed him and he counted the seconds until Katrina stood up from the bed and walked to the door. He gave her a half-hearted smile as she left the room.

Once alone, he tore open the envelope. He was surprised to see the note wasn't from Captain Murdoch, but from Sylvie. He stared at the elegant, feminine handwriting.

*"Lord Alexander," she wrote, "forgive me for disturbing you with this letter. However, I know we share an attachment to Genesis Kelly. She's my dearest friend, and I'm concerned about her. Let me share what has happened.*

*The day after you left the brothel, she announced she no longer wished to service customers. Then her mother's letter affected her deeply. She's in love with you. She admitted as much to me before she took ill. I've spent a week nursing her back to health, but now I worry again.*

*She informed Madame Colette she wishes to see clients again because she's lost everything which mattered to her. She feels her life is ruined, so it makes no difference what she does.*

*Soon she'll invite men to her room. Do you wish this to happen? I ask that you return to Paris because Genesis needs you. She told me she never loved anyone before you.*

*Forgive me if I seem like a bungling matchmaker for this isn't my intention. I only care for my friend's happiness.*

*Sylvie Devereaux*

Alex crumpled the letter in his fist and threw it on the floor. He couldn't return to Paris. He remembered the first time Genesis looked at him with her

flashing green eyes. From that moment, his life had been blown to hell. Now he was finally getting it back under control.

Despite Sylvie's plea, he wouldn't return. That way led to madness.

\* \* \* \*

"Sylvie's engagement party will be the social event of the summer." Madame Colette smiled with satisfaction. "And I have you to thank for all the hard work you've put into it."

"It was my pleasure." Genesis took a sip of her tea. "I look forward to the party, although I'll miss her company when she leaves the house."

"At least she'll remain in Paris, so you'll visit her often."

"Thank goodness for small blessings."

Colette studied her across the desk. "Now down to business. Are you certain you wish to entertain clients again?"

Genesis sighed. "I've thought it over and it's what I want."

"Then this is a fortunate day for both of us."

"What do you mean?"

"We're about to be honored by the presence of royalty."

Genesis raised an eyebrow. "Is that so?"

"Yes." Colette's eyes gleamed with excitement. "Queen Victoria's nephew arrives with his party next week. He's requested the most beautiful woman in the house, and I'm offering him to you."

"I'm honored."

Colette frowned. "You must buy a stunning new gown before then."

Genesis put a hand to her forehead in a mock-dramatic gesture. "That's such a chore, but I'm sure I'll manage."

\* \* \* \*

Genesis twirled around in a circle. "What do you think of this dress?"

Sylvie studied her with a critical eye. "The color definitely suits you. I'd wear that one to the royal appointment."

Genesis laughed. "The royal appointment? He's just a human despite the grand title."

Sylvie smiled. "It's good to hear you laugh again."

"Well, life goes on, doesn't it?"

They were silent as she removed the lovely gown.

Sylvie narrowed her gaze. "Are you sure you want to go through with this?"

"Why does everything keep asking me that? Why wouldn't I?"

"This life isn't for everyone."

Genesis's eyes flashed with anger. "It was good enough for you, wasn't it?"

"I had no choice. It was either this or starve in the street." She hesitated.

"I wasn't blessed with your financial resources."

"Money makes no difference. This is what I want to do."

"Is it?"

"Enough already." Genesis flung the dress on the bed. "I don't have time to argue my life choices with you. I need a bath before this honored royal arrives."

"Are you nervous?"

"A bit," she admitted. "Do you think Madame will blow a trumpet when he walks through the front door?"

Sylvie smiled but it didn't reach her eyes.

## Chapter 19

Genesis brushed a hand through her hair as she checked her appearance in the mirror. She straightened the seam of her lovely teal gown and then looked at the clock. The royal personage was scheduled to arrive at midnight, which was only a few moments away.

*The midnight hour.*

Why so late? Perhaps he had spent an evening gambling or watching the dancers at the Moulin Rouge. Despite her protests to the contrary, Genesis found she was nervous. What if he didn't like her? Well, that wasn't her concern. He could always request another girl if he was displeased with her performance.

She looked out the window and gazed into the dark stillness of the silent garden.

Tomorrow she would pick roses and placed them in the empty crystal vases which sat on her dresser. Since Alex left the city the vases had remained devoid of flowers, a silent testimony to his desertion of her. Now it was time to fill them again. In fact, she planned to fill every corner of the room with flowers. The wild ones in the garden might not be as beautiful as the exquisite buds he had brought her, but they would do much toward bringing cheer to her quarters.

There was a soft knock on the door and she went to answer it. A tall aristocratic man stood in the hallway.

"Good evening," he said. "May I come in?"

"Of course, sir."

How was she supposed to address him? Your highness? No, that wasn't right. Your majesty? That was even worse.

He wore a cape over a finely cut linen suit. His thin mustache gave his face character, and she was reminded of pictures of the queen's son, the Prince of Wales. This man was his cousin so there was a family

resemblance. Eyes the color of onyx stared back at her, and she realized she was forgetting her manners.

"May I offer you a drink?" She moved toward the bar as he took off his cape.

"Certainly. Whiskey straight."

She poured the liquid into the glass and handed it to him. "I hope this is to your liking. Madame Colette stocks only the best spirits."

His dark gaze held hers. "Everything is to my liking. I was promised a beauty, and I'm certainly not disappointed.

In one gulp, he finished off the whiskey and sat the glass on the counter. "Another."

Genesis eyed him warily because she found his stern, taciturn manner a bit unnerving. She poured him another drink and once again he finished it in one gulp.

Then he pulled her into his arms and ran a gloved finger down her cheek. "Shall we get started then?"

She nodded as she stared into his deep-set eyes. A remembered story came to her mind. The gates of hell surrounded by pools of black, unreflective water. The dark, stagnant lake a fitting companion to the place of eternal torment.

"Are you all right, Genesis?" He gave her a cold smile. "That is your name, isn't it?"

"Yes sir." She wasn't fine, and wished to be anywhere except in this room. Her nerve deserted her, or perhaps it was something about him which made her flesh crawl.

She tried to rally her spirits. "You know my name. May I know yours?"

"It's John."

She smiled. "Hello, John."

"But you might know me better by the name the newspapers have given me."

"And what might that be?"

"Why, Jack the Ripper, of course."

\* \* \* \*

"Will you be going out tonight, sir?" The coachman stood in the doorway to the bedroom and gave Alex an inquiring glance.

Alex considered the question as he washed away the dust from the journey. He had recently arrived at his estate in Paris and was weary from the trip across the channel. Surely he could wait another night before visiting the brothel.

He shook his head. "I think not."

"Very good, sir." The servant turned to leave.

"Wait," he said. "I've changed my mind. I'd like the coach ready in an hour."

"As you wish."

He found he couldn't wait until tomorrow to see her again.

\* \* \* \*

"If this is joke, I find it in poor taste." Genesis edged away from the man and moved slowly toward the bell. She had only to reach it and the eunuchs would arrive.

As if anticipating her movements, he caught her wrist and dragged her towards him. "If you knew me at all, you'd realize I don't go in for jokes. I'm afraid this is deadly serious business."

"You're hurting me." She struggled against him, but his body was unyielding.

"I know I am." He smiled. "I'm afraid I'm going to hurt you much more before this evening is over."

She opened her mouth to scream, but he slammed his fist into her cheek and she was plunged into darkness.

\* \* \* \*

Alex couldn't understand the sense of urgency which spurred him to push the horses to their limit. A niggling fear grew in his mind, but he had no idea of its source. Genesis's beautiful face flashed in front of him and then he saw it torn to pieces. Dear God! What was wrong with him?

A drunken man stepped in front of his carriage and he deftly maneuvered the horses to avoid hitting him. For God's sake, he didn't have time to waste on drunken fools. Genesis needed him.

Where had that thought come from?

\* \* \* \*

*Alex, where are you?*

She called to him as she was lowered into the coffin. For the first time, she realized the dream had been a warning. She had now met the dark man from her nightmares in the flesh, and he was a creature of untold malevolence.

*I'm on my way, Genesis. I'll be there soon.*

And then he was by her side as they sat together in a sunny spot in the garden. He held her in his arms and caressed her, promising never to leave again. Even the birds sensed their happiness and serenaded them with the sweetest songs imaginable. The air was perfumed with the scent of roses.

Some part of her knew it was only dream, but she clung to it like a lifeline. Flickering her eyelids, she saw the evil man standing next to the dresser. Opening a black medical bag, he took out an instrument of some sort. It was thin with a lethal-looking blade. He held it against his thumb and a trickle of blood stained the shiny surface.

*A surgeon's scalpel.*

She struggled to sit up, but the darkness enveloped her once again.

*Alex, it's too late. I'm so sorry about everything.*



## Chapter 20

Alex frowned as he stood in the garden below her room.

Something wasn't right. The curtains were drawn and light spilled from behind the thick draperies. She had never closed them before, so why was she doing it tonight? Then he saw that the windows themselves were shut, although it was an unseasonably warm evening.

"Bloody hell." He didn't waste a moment before sprinting across the lawn and entering the house. He passed the parlor full of well-dressed men playing cards and enjoying the companionship of beautiful women. He took the stairs two at a time and then rushed down the hallway. As he turned a corner, he collided with one of the Nubian eunuchs. The force of the impact sent both men sprawling across the floor.

Alex scrambled to his feet. "Come with me. There's a problem with one of the women."

The Nubian nodded and followed him. They flew down the hallway until they reached Genesis's room. Alex turned the knob and found the door locked.

"Genesis, open the door!" Could that be his voice so high-pitched and terrified?

He threw himself against the door, but the wood was solid and didn't yield to the power of his body, even after several attempts to break it down.

Suddenly, he saw her bedroom in his mind's eye. Blood everywhere. Saturating the carpet. Staining the walls in dark, ugly splotches of color. *Her* blood on every surface, dripping from the crystal vases which sat on the dresser.

\* \* \* \*

Genesis opened her eyes and found him standing over her, the scalpel gripped in his hand. She tried to scream, but realized her mouth was gagged. She tasted bile and feared she might vomit and choke herself to death. With an act of will, she forced herself to take slow, deep breaths and bring her fevered heartbeat under control.

He tilted his head to one side as he looked at her face, as if studying an insect under a magnifying glass. He lifted the scalpel and she closed her eyes.

He roared with surprise and anger as Napoleon buried his claws in the expensive material of his suit, just as he had done with Alex. Genesis almost wept with joy. Bless that cat!

Her joy was short-lived as the man slammed himself into the wall. Napoleon screeched as his body was assaulted with pain. Over and over the man crashed into the wall until the cat slid to the floor and didn't move again. Genesis moaned as she took in the pathetic ball of fur which had once been spirited Napoleon.

"Fucking cat!" The man turned to look at her, his face etched with anger. "You'll pay for that God damned creature attacking me."

He advanced on her, holding the scalpel up where she could see it, as if her fear gave him pleasure. Then he brought it close to her face. She shuddered as the fierce blade was poised only a few inches from her cheek. She closed her eyes and started to pray.

"Look at me, bitch."

She felt a white-hot pain so excruciating it was almost unbearable. She saw the blood spread across her upper arm, drenching the lovely teal gown she had chosen for this special occasion.

The blood intrigued her for it was so dark it was almost black. She knew she must be going into shock because she no longer felt pain as she stared in fascination at her blood-soaked sleeve. The thick fluid flowed down her arm in streams, in rivers, in valleys of red. She wondered if she would ever get the stains out of the beautiful dress.

\* \* \* \*

"Help me break down the door," Alex ordered.

The Nubian threw his weight against it, but even the tall, stalwart man couldn't budge the solid wood.

A crowd of people gathered in the hallway, watching the proceedings with unconcealed curiosity. A moment later, Sylvie and Captain Murdoch appeared at his side.

"What's happening?" Sylvie demanded.

"I don't have time to explain," said Alex. "Get the key to Genesis's room from Madame Colette."

Without another word, Sylvie took off running down the hall. After a moment, Murdoch followed her.

Alex spared himself a moment to envy the man. Murdoch had found the woman of his dreams. If Genesis was safe, Alex promised himself he would let her do anything in the world she desired. If she wanted to be a prostitute, he would share her with other men. He would love her no matter what. He would do anything.

If only she was safe.

Please God, let her be safe.

## Chapter 21

The sound of splintering wood caught Genesis's attention. The noise came from a long way off, and she wondered if she had imagined this entire nightmare. Looking down at her blood soaked arm gave her the proof it was actually happening. She knew she should be more terrified of the man who stood over her brandishing a scalpel. But she was enveloped in a layer of soothing numbness which cushioned her. Below that, the wound throbbed with each beat of her heart.

The sound of splintering wood grew louder. Where was it coming from? The man turned and looked around the room. A moment later, he fled into the darkened sanctuary of the bathroom. Had the sound frightened him?

Suddenly, people burst into the room and she was surrounded by strangers. Then Alex's beloved face came into view. He looked at her with such compassion, tears filled her eyes. What was he doing here?

He gently removed the gag from her mouth, and then covered her chilled body with a blanket.

"Hello, Alex." Her voice was a husky whisper. "Why are you here?"

"Don't try to talk." He put a hand to her forehead as he frowned in concentration.

Sylvie gasped with horror when she saw her friend's bloody arm. Pushing her way through the crowd, she rifled through a dresser until she found one of Genesis's petticoats. She pressed the material against the wound in an attempt to staunch the bleeding.

One of the eunuchs looked at her with pity, his eyes large in a dark face. She knew she presented a horrendous spectacle, sprawled across the mattress drenched in her own blood.

Captain Murdoch handed Sylvie a fresh petticoat and she replaced the sodden piece of linen.

"She's lost so much blood." Her voice vibrated with fear.

"There's a doctor downstairs and they've sent for him." Madame Colette's voice drifted from among the throng of people crowded into the room.

They had all forgotten the dark man as they focused their attention on Genesis.

"He's hiding in the bathroom," she whispered.

Alex bent close to her and took her hand in his. "I didn't hear you, darling."

Before she could say another word, her tormentor appeared behind Alex and moved swiftly toward the bed with scalpel raised. As if in a slow motion nightmare, Alex turned as the man attempted to attack Genesis with the weapon. Alex lifted his forearm to shield her from the blow as the man sliced the sharp blade across his sleeve. A second later, the deadly instrument whistled through the air again, tearing into Alex's chest. Blood spurted from the wound and the hot liquid splashed Genesis in the face.

"Alex!" A primitive howl tore from her throat, a moan of agony reserved for the dead and dying.

Then darkness descended upon her once again.

\* \* \* \*

Genesis awoke to a white, sterile environment devoid of color or character. The smell of alcohol and disinfectant hung in the air and stung her nose. Adjusting her eyes to the light, she saw Madame Colette and Sylvie sitting on either side of the bed where she lay. Madame held a picnic basket on her lap, and Genesis wondered if she had smuggled food into the hospital for her.

Then she remembered the awful events which had taken place in her bedroom at the brothel.

"Alex!" She sat up as agony gripped her in its embrace. Her arm felt like a mass of seared and charred nerve endings. For a moment, the room spun around at a crazy angle, and she was forced to take deep breaths to control her rising nausea.

"Lay down, child." Madame's voice brooked no argument. "What do you think you're doing?"

"You mustn't get up yet," said Sylvie. "You've lost a great deal of blood."

"Where is Alex?" Genesis put a hand to her feverish forehead.

Colette and Sylvie exchanged a look.

"Tell me!"

"He's in surgery," Sylvie said quietly. "The scalpel nicked an artery."

"Oh God, no." She struggled to sit up again, but Sylvie stopped her.

"You won't get up and that's final." Her friend's voice was firm. "When Alex gets out of surgery, you can see him then."

"All right." Genesis slumped back on the bed. "But as soon as I'm able, I'm going to him. He needs me."

"I'll take you to his bedside when the doctor assures me it's safe for you to move."

"Will he survive?" Her voice broke as a sob escaped her throat. "What if he dies?"

"He's a strong man," said Colette. "But we must pray for his safe recovery."

"And poor Napoleon!" Genesis blinked as hot tears flowed down her cheeks. "He was only trying to save my life."

Colette smiled as she lifted the lid of the picnic basket. Napoleon's large head appeared above the rim, and he gave Genesis one of his signature bored expressions. Wrinkling his nose as if he found the smells of the hospital distasteful, he lowered himself into the basket.

"Napoleon!" Genesis began to weep in earnest. "Thank God! You silly cat, you almost got yourself killed."

Colette chuckled. "It would take more than Jack the Ripper to put this fat, old tomcat out of commission."

Genesis shivered. "Was he actually Jack the Ripper?"

The older woman shrugged as she settled the cat back in the hamper and closed the lid. "Who can say? He might have been the same Ripper who terrorized London. Or perhaps he was someone who wished to copy his evil deeds. We'll never know for sure."

"Why is that?"

"After he was captured, he confessed to being the killer of those five prostitutes. However, he was later found dead in his jail cell. They found him hanging from a rope made from the sheets off his bed. Now there's a

massive cover-up by the monarchy, and they've offered me enough money to close the house and retire if I so choose." She sighed deeply. "That money is yours. I want nothing to do with it. You were almost killed and it should go to you."

"I don't want their money." Genesis felt nothing as the news seeped into her consciousness. The dark, evil man deserved to rot in hell for what he did to Alex, but she didn't feel any hatred for him. It was as if all her emotions had flowed out of her body with the blood she'd lost. The only thing she felt was a burning desire to be with the man she loved.

"You must take it," insisted Madame Colette. "You're always talking about helping orphaned children. This money would do much toward that end."

"Yes," Genesis said slowly. "I could open an orphanage here in Paris. That way the dirty money could be used for something good."

The older woman nodded. "A noble idea."

"I'm resigning from Le Petit Palais effective today. I'm sure it comes as no surprise I've had my fill of this profession, and now I'll have an orphanage to run." She turned to Sylvie. "But first I must see Alex and beg for his forgiveness."

She sat up and pushed her feet over the side of the bed.

"No," Sylvie began.

"Don't try to stop me." Genesis pushed past her friend. "I can't just lay here worrying about him. I want to be there when he wakes up."

\* \* \* \*

"It doesn't look good," said Dr. Dupree. "It will be touch and go, but the odds aren't with him."

Genesis put a hand to her mouth. "No. Please don't say that."

"I must be honest with you." The doctor shook his head. "He's already developed a post-operative fever. If we can't bring it down, we might lose him."

"I want to be there at his bedside."

"You're in no condition for that. You need to regain your own strength."

"I'm staying with him."

The doctor recognized her stubbornness and finally relented. Now she sat at Alex's bedside, alarmed by his pale skin and burning forehead. She wiped his body with a cool, wet towel, hoping to bring his temperature down.

"Alex, can you hear me?" she whispered. "I'm so sorry. I've made mistake after mistake, and now you're paying for my stupidity."

Her voice was a wail of grief. "Please come back to me. I love you so much. You mean the world to me, and I can't go on without you."

She rested her head on the pillow next to his face. Then she gave way to painful sobs, which wracked her entire body.



## **Chapter 22**

"How can I help you, Genesis?" Lord Cranston looked at her in confusion as he held a bouquet of flowers in his hand. He had rushed to the hospital when he learned of her attack, and had eventually tracked her to Alex's room.

Alex was still unconscious and his fever had spiked to a dangerous level. A nurse remained at his bedside, as if in a silent vigil. The overweight, sharp-eyed nurse eyed the elegantly dressed Cranston with avid curiosity before turning her attention back to her patient.

"Let's step into the hallway." Genesis walked out of the room and Lord Cranston followed her into the darkened hospital corridor.

He remembered the package he carried and handed it to her. "I brought you flowers and candy."

"Thank you," she said wearily. "I appreciate you coming to see me."

"What else could I do when I heard you'd been attacked by that madman?"

They sat down next to each other on a wooden bench.

He looked at her with a puzzled expression. "You said you wished me to help you."

"Yes," she began. "That is, I need your help in understanding a spiritual matter."

"I don't think I'm qualified."

"You studied to be a priest," she said quickly. "I only wish your opinion and then I'll make up my own mind."

"Very well," he said slowly. "I'll do my best to assist you."

"I have a hypothetical question." She drew in a breath. "If you loved someone more than anything on earth, but your careless behavior led to them being injured, what would God expect of you?"

"I don't understand."

"What would God expect of you?" Her voice broke. "What sacrifice would he expect in order to save the person's life?"

"Darling girl, this is hardly a hypothetical question, is it?" He looked toward the hospital room. "You're asking about the Earl of Landower, aren't you?"

She nodded as a tear slid down her cheek.

"God wouldn't expect anything from you."

Her eyes pleaded with him to understand. "I must do something."

He frowned. "If it's in his divine plan, the Good Lord will save his life."

"But what if it doesn't work that way?" she reasoned. "What if Alex dies because I didn't do everything in my power to atone for my sins and set things right?"

"You can't bargain with God. If he spares his life, it's out of love."

Tears spilled from her eyes in a torrent. "Perhaps I can soften his heart."

Lord Cranston fished a handkerchief out of his pocket and handed it to her. "Please calm down, little one. If you're serious about making things right, then you must rectify the root cause of this entire mess. You must stop working as a courtesan."

"I've already done that." She grabbed him by the lapels and he looked at her in surprise. "I want to know what you would do if it was someone you loved. You have a daughter. What if it was her in that hospital bed? What would you do to save her life?"

"Genesis." His eyes held concern and compassion.

"Please tell me."

He sighed. "All right. If it was my Melissa in that hospital bed, I would confess my sins to the creator and repent. Then I would promise him anything, offer him my life and everything I have, if he would save her."

"What if I devote my life to orphaned children?"

"That sounds like a rewarding endeavor. Of course, if you've wronged the earl, you must do something to make this right in the eyes of the Lord."

"What can I do?"

"I can't tell you what to do. If God saves his life, it's a free gift. You can't buy his favors."

"As I said before, perhaps I can soften his heart."

He remained silent.

"Tell me!" she said desperately.

He closed his eyes. "Hypothetically, your sins of the flesh set in motion the events which led to this tragedy. You've already promised God you'll leave the life of prostitution. Now you mustn't offer Alex your body as long as you remain unmarried to each other. You mustn't be tempted to return to this sinful course of life."

Her voice was a hopeless whisper. "I should leave Alex?"

He shrugged. "If you were married to him, that would be a different story."

"How can I possibly leave him?"

"Maybe you can't, and maybe you shouldn't." His voice softened. "I can see you love him, so perhaps it wouldn't be right to leave. But you asked for my advice and I gave it. I told you what I would do. However, you must make up your own mind and lead your own life."

"Thank you." She kissed him on the cheek. "You've given me much to think about."

She walked back toward Alex's room carrying the flowers and candy. Lord Cranston leaned back and thought about the letter he would compose to Lord Alexander Lansing, the Earl of Landower. He would make sure this particular young lady didn't throw away her chance at happiness.

\* \* \* \*

After talking to Lord Cranston, Genesis went to the hospital chapel and prayed for forgiveness. As if in an epiphany, everything became clear to her. She must change her entire life in order to gain God's favor. Then he might bless her by saving Alex's life.

Suddenly imbued with happiness and religious fervor, she borrowed a pair of scissors from the nurse and cut off all her hair. Short spiky tresses greeted her in the bathroom mirror, completing her Joan of Arc fantasy. Then she borrowed some hospital stationery and sat down to write a letter.

As she was sealing the envelope, the nurse jumped up from her chair.

"His fever has broken!" She held a hand to his forehead as she gave Genesis a wide smile.

Genesis sat the letter on the nightstand next to the vase of flowers. It was what she had expected. She gave Alex a last look before leaving the room.

\* \* \* \*

Weeks later, she sat at her desk in the office of the Caring Hearts Orphanage. Her hair had grown out, still short but no longer spiky. She wore a somber gray dress, totally unlike the bright, colorful gowns she had worn at the brothel. She was a person in authority and must now dress the part.

She looked forward to Sylvie's engagement party the following night. The wedding had been postponed due to the attack on herself and Alex. From what she had heard, Alex was scheduled to be released from the hospital today. According to Madame Colette, he had regained his strength and was now fit to return to his chateau outside Paris. Genesis knew his life had been spared because of her actions. Because she had turned away from her old life. Because she had stopped seeing him, stopped fucking him, without benefit of marriage. She had made things right between herself and the Good Lord.

But being a martyr was a sad, lonely thing. Every night she thought of Alex's hard, muscular body pinning hers to the bed as he rode her with rough strokes. She lifted the small decorative fan and blew cool air across her face.

Distracting herself, she thought of the orphanage. So far, it seemed to be coming along nicely. Madame Colette helped her secure a lease on a building for a reasonable price. She heard the men hard at work in the next room, remodeling the other offices and living quarters, making it safe and suitable for the children who would soon live here.

She put down the fan and stared dreamily into space. Soon she would make a trip to Marseilles to meet her aunt and cousins. She would be part of a family again. When she returned to Paris, the remodeling would be complete, and she would be able to help children who had no hope except to sleep on the streets. Her life finally had meaning. She finally had a purpose.

And perhaps one day she might be happy again.

\* \* \* \*

Genesis stood in the corner watching the couples glide across the parquet floor of the stately ballroom. Lord Cranston stood at her side.

"Are you sure you don't want to dance?" he asked again.

She looked down at the simple black dress she wore, hardly suitable for a festive occasion, but more in keeping with her new lifestyle. "I don't think so. I'm not really up to it tonight."

"At least you made the effort to come to the party. Will you be attending the wedding tomorrow?"

She nodded. "Then I'll be leaving for Marseilles."

"Ah yes, the family reunion."

His next words were lost on her because she looked up to see Alex enter the ballroom. Dressed in evening wear, he projected virility and incredible sexiness, like the sweetest of forbidden fruits. He looked rough and handsome, with no trace of the pale, sickly complexion she had seen in the hospital.

"Dear God," she whispered.

"Excuse me?"

"I feel in need of air. Will you escort me to the garden?"

"Certainly, my dear."

Then Alex was at her side. His presence was so intoxicating, she almost licked her lips with desire.

"Genesis," he said softly.

"No!" she cried. "I've made a vow and I won't break it."

She fled across the ballroom with both men in pursuit.

## Chapter 23

"Please listen to me."

Alex's rich, deep voice halted Genesis in her tracks. She had no choice but to stop running because the wall surrounding the garden loomed in front of her, and there was nowhere to escape.

She turned to look at him. His hair gleamed golden under the moonlight, giving him the appearance of an angel materialized into warm human flesh.

His gaze imprisoned her. "You've cut your hair. I once called you Joan of Arc, and now the resemblance is complete."

She put a hand to her short curls. "It'll grow back."

His green eyes burned with an inner fire. "That's a good thing because I'll never let you cut it again."

"Alex."

He waited for her to continue, and when she didn't he said, "I know the sacrifices you've made for me. You did everything in your power to save my life, didn't you?"

Her eyes were bright with unshed tears. "I had no choice."

"I realized something when I was trying to break down the door and save you from that maniac." A tender smile softened his strong features. "When I thought I might lose you, I decided I would do anything, accept anything, in order to have you in my life."

She looked at him in surprise. "You did?"

He nodded. "I meant it. As long as you allow me to be part of your life, I'll accept anything. I'll share you with other men, even though I'll hate it. I'll live for the smallest smile from your lips, for the merest glance from your beautiful eyes."

She sighed. "Alex, you don't understand. I've left that life because I made a bargain with God."

"I do understand. I've heard something of this bargain, though I wished to hear it from your own lips."

"I promised God I'd try to live a good life if he spared you from death. He saved you, and now I must live up to my part of the agreement. I'm trying to start an orphanage to help the street children of Paris. I've also promised him I won't sleep with men I'm not married to."

"And if you were married?"

Her heart fluttered as she looked at him. "That would be a different story."

"Indeed." He took her hand in his and brought it to his lips. "Lord Cranston, will you please join us?"

The older man stepped out of the shadows where he had observed the interchange from a distance.

Alex turned to him. "You seem to care for the woman I love since you took the time to correspond with me about her. I believe you're the closest thing to a father she has, so I'd like your permission to court her in the proper way with chaperones. I ask that you join us tomorrow at Sylvie's wedding because I'll be attending with Genesis."

Lord Cranston smiled. "I'd be honored to accompany you both."

Genesis's heart soared at the thought of seeing her golden Adonis again. "Are you sure about this, Alex?"

"I've never been more sure of anything in my life." His voice grew rough. "I almost lost you and I'll never risk that again. All I ask is that you allow me to treat you like the princess you are in my heart. Allow me to help you with your orphanage. Put me to work because I believe it's a wonderful idea. Let me be there when you meet your new family. I want to see the joy on your face when you're welcomed into their home."

Tears stung her eyelids. "I'd like that very much."

"Of course, we won't go anywhere unchaperoned," he added. "My aunt is on her way to Paris as we speak, and she's absolutely thrilled at the thought of meeting you."

Genesis smiled. "How did you know I'd accept your offer?"

"I didn't know. I only hoped it." He cleared his throat as he knelt on the ground at her feet. "You're a wealthy woman so I have nothing to offer you except my heart."

She could barely see him through the sheen of tears which blinded her.

He pressed her hand to his heart. "This heart is yours. It belongs to you for as long as it beats in my chest. I've loved you since the first moment I stumbled into your room by mistake. Will you do me the honor of marrying me, my precious love?"

She began to weep. "Oh Alex."

He laughed. "Is that perhaps a 'yes' to my question?"

"Oh yes, yes, yes."

\* \* \* \*

Alex's eyes were vivid with passion as he scooped her up into his arms.

Genesis giggled. "What are you doing?"

"It's tradition to carry the bride over the threshold."

"That's for virgin brides, not for someone like me."

"No." A frown creased his brow. "As far as I'm concerned, you're a virgin and we're starting our life from this moment." He gave her a teasing smile. "I'll share a secret with you. After so many weeks of courting you with nothing more than a chaste kiss between us, I've begun to feel like a virgin again myself."

She laughed. "That'll be the day."

He lay her across the bed and then looked at her with admiration. "I shall devote every moment of my life to making you happy."

"You've already made me happier than any woman deserves to be. Thanks to you, the repairmen finished the work on the orphanage ahead of schedule."

"I just bribed them a little. I told them I wanted everything finished before my honeymoon, and I offered to make it worth their while."

"When we return to Paris, the first children will arrive at the home."

"Are you excited about that?"

She bit her lower lip. "Excited and nervous. It's a large project."

He nodded. "We'll just take it one step at a time. Lord Cranston is championing a bill to give more aid to the street children of London. And you have the support of your new family. Your aunt is a kindhearted woman, and your cousins are thrilled to help us run the place."

"Us," she said slowly. "I like the sound of that. It's no longer just me."



He sat down on the bed and touched her cheek. "From now on, it's 'us' forever."

She smiled up at him. "Yes, my love."

He ran his thumb across her lower lip. She closed her eyes as the sounds and smells of Cairo drifted into the room from the street below. When she opened her eyes, Genesis stared in shock at the view from the window.

She sat up quickly. "We can see the pyramids from here!"

"I requested a room with a view. I knew you'd enjoy it."

"Oh darling, how did I ever meet such a kind man?"

He gave a short laugh as he lay her back on the bed. "At the moment, I'm a frustrated man. You won't deny me your sweetness any longer, will you?"

Her gaze held his. "I'll never deny you anything."

"That's what I wanted to hear." His mouth claimed hers as he fiddled with the small buttons on the front of her exquisite sapphire gown.

Genesis's thighs quivered with excitement. The feeling spread to consume her entire body. She slid her arms around his neck and pulled him against her chest.

His laughter rumbled against the hollow of her throat. "I can't get any closer, my love."

"You can try."

"You're right, of course. I can always try."

Her mouth watered as his tongue teased hers. It had been so long since he'd kissed her with such all-consuming passion. She felt his huge erection press against her abdomen. His achingly potent masculinity aroused her to such a degree she felt her cunt clench with desire.

He took her hand and placed it on his hard cock. "Do you want me, little Genesis?"

"Oh yes, my darling. More than anything on earth."

He chuckled. "More than the pyramids? I know you've been anxious to see them."

"They'll still be there tomorrow as they've been for thousands of years." She stroked the bulge in his pants. "But you're what I desire now and forever."

"Then we're in agreement." He quickly removed her clothing until she wore only a garter belt and stockings. As he stared at her long legs and voluptuous breasts, he quickly tore the clothes from his own body.

Then his tongue was between her thighs, sliding into her wet sheath, exploring every inch of her sweetness. He lingered on her red, swollen clit, teasing it until she panted with pleasure. He slid two fingers into her, and they were immediately drenched with moisture. Genesis arched her back and cried out as a wave of intense aching pleasure washed over her.

No man had ever made her feel this way, and she knew no man would ever have this power over her. This was her tiny slice of heaven on earth. She regretted nothing in her past because if she hadn't worked in the brothel, she never would've met Alex. And Alex was her destiny, her prince, her king.

He slid his cock into her and her muscles clasped tightly around him, as if she were born for that purpose. He moaned as he thrust himself roughly into her. The feel of his hard, muscular body against hers caused her to cry out with the strength of her orgasm.

"Alex!" She screamed his name as excruciatingly delicious sensations slammed into her.

"My Genesis!" His body shuddered as his warm seed filled her body.

She smiled with satisfaction as she nestled in his arms. "I love you more than anything on earth."

"And I love you more than anything in the universe." He raised an eyebrow. "Your turn."

She mumbled sleepily against his shoulder. "I love you more than heaven itself."

He kissed her forehead as he stroked her hair. "Wherever you are, that's where my heaven will always be."

**GENESIS IN BLOOM**

**THE END**



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Sophie del Mar has always enjoyed reading and writing spicy stories about passionate women and the men who love them. Her love of history has been a driving force in her stories, and most of her erotic tales are set in the romantic eras of the past. She's a self-confessed hopeless romantic and an admirer of strong, virile men who aren't necessarily politically correct.

Sophie's heart belongs to the sexy actor Sean Bean, who is something of an inspiration for the gorgeous heroes who win the hearts of the women they love.

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