

*Miniature
Rose*

Scarlet Rose

Captive Valentine



L. Rosario

Captive Valentine

by

L. Rosario

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Captive Valentine

COPYRIGHT © 2006 by Lora Darling

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author or The Wild Rose Press except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Contact Information: info@thewildrosepress.com

Cover Art by *R.J.Morris*

The Wild Rose Press
PO Box 706
Adams Basin, NY 14410-0706
Visit us at www.thewildrosepress.com

Publishing History
First Scarlet Rose Edition, January 2007

Published in the United States of America

San Francisco—12:30 am

Seraphina Scala nearly jumped out of her skin when a knock came at the apartment door. She flattened her hand over her pounding heart and stared across the small living room. Who the heck could it be at this hour? Before she could even get off the couch to go check, the phone in the kitchen rang. Great, what to do first?

Whoever was outside, knocked again over the second ring.

Sera rolled her eyes and hurried into the kitchen. She snatched the phone, barked “hello” and headed for the door.

“Hey, baby.”

The voice stopped her in her tracks and whoever waited outside ceased to matter. “Hi.”

Even to her the greeting sounded lame. Valentino laughed in her ear, sending shivers up her spine. It didn’t matter that he’d been living with her for almost a year, the simplest things about him still affected her. His laugh was just one of them.

She forced herself to focus on the fact that it was very odd for him to call from work. “Is something wrong at the club?” Most nights Valentino was the one responsible for closing down Captive Fantasy. Once the strippers and the other workers left, he had the peace and quiet he needed to see to the business end of things, but the club wouldn’t close for another hour or so.

“No, nothing’s wrong.” Loud music and screaming women nearly drowned out his voice. “Hey, let me switch phones. I’m behind the bar, and it’s getting too loud.”

Sera smiled. “Who’s on stage?”

“Dominic. You don’t know him. Hang on.” Valentino said something to whomever he handed the phone to, and then there were two clicks. “I’m here. Is this better?”

Before Sera could answer, the person at the door knocked again. "Val, someone's at the door."

"Yeah, that's why I'm calling. Answer it."

This sounded a tad weird. "You called to tell me to answer the door?" Yes, being a vampire gave Valentino the ability to read minds, but it didn't explain how he could know someone was at the door. Unless he sent them.

"Just answer it, baby. I promise the guy on the other side won't bite." He chuckled. "Only I'm allowed that privilege where you're concerned."

Sera refrained from commenting. She and Val usually took their blood from mugs, like civilized vampires, but every now and then the temptation of each other's veins was too much to resist. Thinking about that now made her blush as she headed for the door to pull it open.

The guy on the other side smiled and extended an enormous bundle of roses toward her. "Are you Miss Scala?"

It was hard to think with the intoxicating smell of the flowers wafting over her. "Yes."

"Do you like them?" Valentino said in her ear.

The guy thrust the flowers at Sera and touched the brim of his baseball hat, while flashing a wide, dazzling smile. "Have a nice Valentine's Day, miss."

Sera juggled the phone and the flowers as she kicked the door shut. "How did you get someone to deliver flowers after midnight?"

"That was Charlie, he's one of my dancers and he manages a floral shop during the day. I asked for a favor, and he agreed. Is he already gone?"

Sera headed for the kitchen. "Yes."

"Good, he needs to be on stage in fifteen minutes. So do you like them?"

"They are stunning." The roses were blood red, in the truest sense of the word, and they smelled divine. She wanted to bury her face in them and inhale until she passed out.

"I knew you'd like them. Happy Valentine's Day, baby."

"I thought you'd forgotten, to be honest." She set the

heavy flowers on the kitchen table and sank into one of the chairs. She stared at the bouquet as she talked. “You didn’t say anything before going to work.”

They’d made love, even showered together, but not once had he indicated he had any idea what the date was. She’d let it bug her until just right this moment. Strange how something as simple as a bouquet of flowers could make the world all right again. Though it was a giant bunch of flowers and beyond gorgeous. Not to mention the man she adored was on the other end of the phone. Too bad he wasn’t right in front of her. The flowers deserved a kiss.

“I didn’t say anything because I didn’t want to ruin this moment. Did you read the card yet?”

Sera ran her gaze over the flowers and frowned. “I don’t see a card.”

“Dig for it.”

Unconcerned by the prospect of thorns—what was a little blood to a vampire, after all— Sera did as ordered and found a small card buried in the center of the bundle. She pulled it out and flipped it over. The message made her blush.

“Read it out loud.”

She shook her head. “No.”

Valentino’s chuckle brought a fresh wave of heat to her cheeks. “Come on, no one can hear you but me. Read it. It’s not dirty, for heaven’s sake.”

Sera licked her lips and gripped the phone a little tighter. “Fine. ‘For the woman whose taste lingers on my tongue and whose touch makes me come undone. I love you. V.’ Happy?” She had to admit, it was a nice message and it did strange things to her insides. She’d have to make him read it later. Right in her ear. While lying naked on top of her. Yes, definitely.

“I like that idea,” he purred.

Sera tossed the card onto the roses. “You said you’d stop doing that.” It just didn’t seem right that he could read her, but she couldn’t read him. She’d been a vampire for well over two hundred years, and he’d only been one for a year, though she’d spent a great deal of her time drinking animal or synthetic blood. Forgoing the joys of human blood supposedly dimmed one’s powers. But

Valentino drank synthetic blood and he could do neat things. Oh well, who said life was fair.

“No, I said I wouldn’t read your mind as often, but that thought was too good not to comment on. Forgive me?”

Sera nodded, then realized it was a wasted gesture. “Yes.” As if she could stay angry at him. He knew better.

“There’s one more thing.”

“Uh-oh,” she teased.

A wave of sound filled the phone, as if someone had come and gone from Valentino’s office. Whoever it had been, they didn’t warrant a moment of his attention. “I want you to come to the club tonight. After we close,” he added before she could get the “no” off her tongue. “Say you will. I have a surprise waiting here for you, and I can’t bring it home.”

“Did you buy me a car?” He’d been telling her for months that she needed a new one.

“No, but I should have. Your Mustang is a piece of shit.”

“I happen to think it’s fine.” Though it didn’t run as well as it had forty years ago.

“We’ll continue this battle later. Just say you’ll come to the club.”

Sera reached out to skim her fingers over the soft flowers. A fresh wash of fragrance filled the room at her touch. “What time?”

“I’ll have everyone out of here by two.”

“Does it matter what I wear?” Knowing Valentino, it was safer to ask.

“Nope.”

For some reason that was a rather disappointing answer. “Okay, see you at two then.”

“Great. Love you.”

“I love you, too.” She clicked the phone off and continued to stare at the flowers. An idea struck and she glanced at the microwave clock. 12:35. She had a little over an hour to get ready. Plenty of time. Grabbing a handful of blooms from the giant bouquet, she hugged them to her chest and hurried toward the bathroom. It might not matter what she wore, but she’d smell like roses.

Sera pulled up to the club with ten minutes to spare. Should she wait in the car, or go inside? Ugh, neither prospect sounded enjoyable. It wasn't that she didn't want to see Valentino early, she just didn't want to be a part of the festivities inside. A male strip club was not her idea of a good time, and she was thankful everyday that Valentino was only the owner and sometimes bartender. If he'd been one of the dancers, she'd drive herself crazy with doubt and jealousy.

He teased her about it, but one night he'd confessed she was the only one he wanted to perform for these days. Needless to say, that had pleased her immensely.

The exit door swung open, pulling Sera's attention toward the club. Three women pranced out on really high heels and dressed in outfits guaranteed to make any normal man hornier than hell. They caught sight of her sitting in the car and stopped to stare. Were they trying to figure out what was wrong with her? After all, who would sit outside Captive Fantasy when all the good stuff was inside?

Sera huffed and got out of the car. She managed a smile for the women, and they smiled back. One even held the door open for her. How friendly. What would they think if they knew Valentino belonged to her? He might not perform, but that didn't stop the clientele from wishing he did.

Sera reached for the door. "Thank you."

"A little late to be going in, isn't it?" The leggy blonde holding the door looked Sera up and down, but her glassy blue eyes effectively hid any opinion she might have of what she observed. "The last guy just finished."

"I'm here to pick someone up." It was all Sera would offer unless asked point blank.

Three very curious expressions fixed on her face, but no one seemed to have the courage to voice the burning question. Sera smiled again and entered the club, content to let them wonder.

Stepping into Captive Fantasy was like taking a trip back in time, though so much had changed in her life since then. Her first time here had been the result of a confession to Becca about never having an orgasm, and

her friend had believed a night spent at San Francisco's premier ladies' club would solve all of Sera's problems. Sera hadn't wanted to go, but sometimes you had to do stuff you didn't want to do. Funny thing was, if she had that night to do over, she wouldn't change a thing. After all, she'd have never met Valentino.

Before taking over ownership of the club, Valentino had worked here as a...well, she didn't really know what to call it, but suffice it to say, Captive Fantasy had sold sex and Valentino had been on the menu. In fact, he'd been literally created by a deranged scientist to have sex with women. Women like her, as pathetic as that made her sound. Needless to say, he'd given her the orgasm she'd never had and much more than she'd bargained for right along with it. Love being the most shocking.

"Hi, Sera."

Her reminiscent thoughts scattered as Raphael, co-owner and former employee of the original club, approached her. Unlike Valentino, Raphael did on occasion strip and tonight he was still dressed in what she assumed was his dancing costume; skin tight, white leather pants and a white, silky, dress shirt. All the white with his golden skin and blond hair was rather stunning. No wonder his nights of the week were supposedly some of the busiest.

Sera returned Raphael's friendly smile. "Where's Valentino?"

Raphael pointed toward the back of the club. "He's cleaning up the bar. He told me to watch for you and take you to his office if you got here early, which you did." His smile went from friendly to wicked in the blink of an eye as he offered his arm. "So, shall we?"

Knowing Raphael's flirtations were harmless, Sera merely shook her head. "I'd rather just sit at the bar, if that's okay?"

Raphael shook his head, sending his longish blond hair slithering over his shoulders. "Nope. Orders are orders." He took her hand and wrapped it around his elbow. "To the office we go."

The twinkle in Raphael's blue eyes let her know he was teasing, and sure enough, instead of leading her toward the office, he took her straight to the bar.

“Company, Val.” He slapped the bell on the counter for good measure and winked.

Valentino popped up from behind the bar with a wad of money in one hand and a set of keys in the other. His smile made Sera’s heart jump in her chest, and she barely noticed Raphael slipping away. No matter how often she looked at this man, it always took a few moments to regain her equilibrium. It was just too easy to get lost in the chocolate depths of his eyes. Add to that the roguish strands of brown hair that hung over one side of his face to tease the edge of his sensual mouth, and it almost hurt to be face to face with him.

Valentino dropped everything on the counter and reached for her hands to pull her toward him. “Hello there.” The kiss he gave her was way too intimate for the setting, but who was she to argue. She sucked his tongue deep into her mouth and fought the urge to crawl over the bar in order to press her body against his.

His chuckle ended the kiss, and he released her hands to pull back and run his eyes over her. “I told you it didn’t matter what you wore, but I like the outfit.” His gaze locked with hers. “I like it a lot.”

After bathing in hot water and scattered rose petals, Sera had changed out of her pink jogging suit and into a little black leather dress she’d bought on a whim but never worn. Valentino had never even seen it, because the moment the package came by mail, she hid it at the back of her closet, feeling silly for ordering something so sexy. The expression on his face now made her feel silly for not pulling the thing out sooner. Live and learn.

He hooked a finger in the deep V of the bodice and coaxed her forward until her hips dug into the bar. “I’ve never seen this before, have I? What else are you hiding from me?”

“Whips and chains.”

His eyes widened. “God, tell me you’re joking.”

The quiet, nearly empty intimacy of the club made Sera feel bold. The patrons were all gone and the handful of workers roaming around knew her. She lowered her lids and licked her lips. “Does the thought of whips and chains frighten you?”

Valentino’s hair eclipsed one eye as he shook his

head. The finger in her bodice slid deeper to lay buried in her cleavage. "Does it frighten you?"

Before meeting him, she would have said yes without even thinking about it. Now, well, he'd liberated her, to say the least. "We'll work up to whips and chains, okay? You've just gotten me comfortable with walking around the apartment naked, so don't push it."

He laughed and eased his finger free of her dress. "It should be an interesting evening." With that, he turned his back and started to arrange all the liquor bottles.

"Excuse me? Are you planning to chain me up and whip me?" She glanced over her shoulder just in case the words really had been as loud as they sounded to her. No one spared her a glance.

Valentino shrugged and kept his back to her. "Maybe."

"Look at me," she hissed. He did and with a straight face. Damn him. "I'll leave if you're planning something wicked."

"You like wicked, don't deny it."

Sera leaned into the bar and dropped her voice. "Tell me what you have planned. I don't like surprises." Nervous anxiety coiled in her belly. It got worse as a naughty grin spread across Valentino's lips. Oh dear. "Valentino."

If he heard the warning in her tone, he ignored it while looking past her shoulder. "Hey, Raphe. Take care of this, okay?" He gestured toward the money on the bar and then settled his gaze on her once more. "Don't worry, what I have planned isn't *too* wicked."

Now why didn't she believe him?

Tucking his hair behind his ear with one hand, he tapped the tip of her nose with the index finger of the other. "Have I told you lately how adorable you are?"

Sera tried to glare at him as he strolled toward the edge of the bar and circled around to approach her, but the sight of tight black leather stretched over his thighs distracted her like nothing else could. Well, his naked thighs were more a tad more distracting. With the pants, he wore a sheer black T-shirt that revealed the rippled perfection of his torso. His bartending uniform, he called it. She focused on his visible nipples and shook her head.

Was it any wonder he came home with a bag full of tips? No doubt they'd be millionaires if he did strip.

He stopped before her and wrapped his arms around her waist to pull her into a tight hug. She couldn't resist touching him and spread her hands across his chest. Through the shirt, his skin was warm—the result of all the combined body heat in the club as well as healthy shots of synthetic blood he did throughout the night. He had explained that drinking with the patrons put them at ease, so for the ones that didn't know he was a vampire, he told them the drink was a Bloody Mary. Didn't the silly women wonder why or how he never got tipsy?

Valentino buried his face in her hair and laughed softly close to her ear. "They are too distracted by the body to care."

Sera jerked away from his mouth and lightly punched the center of his chest. "If you read my mind one more time tonight and then tease me about it, we're through."

He brushed his lips across her forehead. "Why am I not scared of that threat?"

She hit him again, and he laughed and grabbed her hand to lead her back toward his office. "Come on. Your surprise awaits you, my fair lady."

Sera rolled her eyes but then gladly followed Valentino's leather clad ass. She'd have to ask him to wear this outfit at home. They could strut around in black leather and pretend to be master and slave.

He halted in front of his office door and glanced back. A faint smile teased his lips. "Do I get to be master or slave?"

She decided not to scold him again. "Which would you prefer?"

"Let me give it some thought." With that, he pushed the door open and stepped aside to let her precede him.

Sera froze on the threshold and stared. The entire space was filled with the same roses that now adorned her kitchen table. Lifting a hand to her gaping mouth, she turned to Valentino who lounged with a shoulder propped against the door and a smile on his face.

Whatever expression she wore made him chuckle. "Why should you be the only one to get flowers?"

“So you sent these to yourself?” She turned back to face the office. There had to be at least thirty bouquets. All enormous. Some had been placed in vases, while others remained in their open boxes, nestled inside black tissue paper. In the center of his desk sat an unopened box, but it was the wrong shape to contain more flowers. Hmm.

“Go on, open it.” Valentino moved into the office and shut the door. It wasn’t a big room, and the combined fragrance of roses, him and leather saturated Sera’s senses. Good heavens. She swallowed and tasted the erotic combination. It didn’t matter what was in the box, she wanted to unwrap him. He smiled, letting her know he was reading her thoughts again. Naughty boy.

Strolling by her, he lifted the box off the desk and held it out. “I promise it isn’t another mug.” He’d given her a customized coffee mug a few months ago as a surprise gift. He’d also said he loved her for the first time that night. Needless to say, she treasured the stupid mug.

Sera reached for the box, but he didn’t relinquish his hold on it. She met his gaze. “What?”

“Before you open it, you have to promise me something.” His tone was as serious as the look in his eyes.

Uh-oh. She nodded and bit into her bottom lip.

“You have to promise to trust me tonight. No matter what happens or what I do, you have to trust me.”

Well then. “That sounds a little ominous.” Not to mention a bit exciting.

He pushed the box into her arms. “Open it while I make sure the club is empty. I’ll be back.”

“I didn’t promise yet.” She hugged the box to her chest, surprised by the weight of it. What the heck was inside?

Valentino hesitated at the door. “Do you trust me?”

Sera nodded. “You know I do. I have since...well, the very first time.”

He came back toward her, cupped her face and captured her mouth. The kiss rocked her world. Pulling back, he brushed his nose over hers. “Remember how you felt that night?”

Sera nodded. How on earth could she forget?

“Well, that was nothing compared to what you’re going to feel tonight.”

Oh God. She swallowed the lump in her throat and found her voice. “Promises, promises.”

After another quick kiss, he headed back toward the door. “I won’t be long.” He left her with a wink, leaving the door open behind him. Okay, so whatever was in the box couldn’t be that bad or he would have shut the door. Right?

Sera carried her package around the desk and sat in Valentino’s chair with the box in her lap. Why was she so nervous? Cautiously, she untied the red velvet ribbon and lifted the lid. She could only stare at what lay partially concealed inside a nest of black tissue paper. It looked like a chain, but it couldn’t be. Could it?

She glanced toward the door and then reached into the box. Her fingers closed around the unmistakable feel of metal. Oh my gosh. She lifted the heavy links up, leaving the majority in the box. The chain was painted red—blood red. The color was a perfect match for the flowers surrounding her. She lifted the rest of the length out of the box and pooled it in her lap to see if anything else remained hidden. Her eyes nearly bugged out of her head when she spotted a pair of wrist shackles. They were covered, inside and out, with fluffy red fur.

Was Valentino insane?

“I might be before the night is through if you let me actually use that stuff on you.”

His voice couldn’t pull her gaze from the naughty shackles. “No.” Did he really believe she’d let him chain her up?

The sound of the door closing finally drew her gaze upward. Valentino strolled into the office, no longer dressed in the tight leather pants. He’d swapped them for a pair of black, silk lounge pants. They rode very low on his hips, showing the golden skin between the bottom of his tee and the waistband. Her mouth watered, and she tracked the dangling drawstring toward his groin.

“No?” He stopped on the other side of the desk and reached across to snatch the chain from her lap. It dangled over his hand and clanked against the desk. “I want you to be my captive fantasy tonight.” He winked

and stroked the chain.

All the blood in Sera's body raced to the center of her thighs and she squirmed in the chair, making the leather creak. Suddenly the office was too hot, her dress was too tight, and Valentino's expression promised way too many things. He continued to stroke the chain. Petting it until she envied every damn link.

"You said you trusted me, and you know I'd never hurt you."

She dragged her gaze off his hands. "Where, exactly, am I going to be chained up?" Dear God, was she really going to agree to this? Maybe she was the insane one?

He gathered the chain in his hand and reached into the box for the shackles. "Follow me."

Despite the subtle stirrings of unease, she followed him into the club, only to be shocked by the transformation it had undergone. The lights were usually turned low, for ambiance of course, but they were turned off now. Dozens of fat, red candles were scattered around to light the large stage, and they gave off a strong cinnamon fragrance that turned Sera's unease to hungry anticipation.

She'd always loved the smell of warm cinnamon. In fact, cinnamon rolls were the one thing she missed most since becoming a vampire, so she baked them over the holidays to fill the apartment with the aroma and then handed them out as gifts. Silly? Yeah, but whatever.

Valentino headed for the stage and hopped up onto the sleek black floor. Normally, it was lit from below with lights that flashed in time with whatever music the dancer chose. How did she know? Becca, her friend and a waitress at the club, shared every minute detail of most of the performances. The only guy she didn't gossip about was Raphael. Why? Simple. Becca was head over heels for him and considered him off limits. As if Sera cared what he looked like naked.

Anyway, the stage wasn't lit up right now, except for the candles. Their flames flickered over the floor and in turn over Valentino as he knelt down to look her in the eyes. "Give me your hand."

Sera did, and he helped her up onto the stage, rising to his feet in nearly the same motion. He led her to a chair

she hadn't thought to look for. It had a padded leather seat and a high, fancy back. It looked like a little throne, in fact. She met his gaze. "I take it this is to be my prison?"

He used his grip on her hand to pull her against him. "If you don't want to do this, say so." The smoldering look in his eyes said he really wanted to.

Sera eased out of his partial embrace and sat on the chair. She folded her hands in her lap and looked up at him. "I trust you." And she did, but she was still a little concerned about the chain.

"Good." Valentino let the chain fall out of his palm and drop to the stage. It made a loud noise that echoed around the quiet club, but neither of them flinched. Moving behind her, he asked for her hands, and when she complied, he clamped the furry shackles around her wrists. "Too tight?"

Sera shook her head. For some reason, her nipples strained against the front of her bodice and she was already soaking wet. Maybe Valentino knew something she didn't? Clearly this bondage scenario turned her on. "So what is the chain for?" she asked as he moved back around to stand in front of her. A quick peek at the front of his pants let her know this little scenario affected him as well.

He kicked the chain under the chair. "It's for later."

"Later. Now, why does that scare me?"

He dropped to his knees and spread his hands over the top of her thighs. The dress was short enough to show a great deal of skin, and as he trailed his fingers over the hem, he could have easily touched the crotch of her panties, but he didn't. Damn him. "You aren't really scared, and we both know it."

Sera licked her lips and jerked her head toward the stage. "Are you planning to dance for me?"

"Is that what you want me to do?"

She rattled her shackles behind the chair. "It would certainly add to the torment." To have him naked in front of her without the ability to touch him...ugh, there weren't words to describe the cruelty of that.

His hands slid under the hem of her dress, close to but still not touching her panties. He leaned into her legs

and brought his face close to hers. "Ask me to strip for you."

The longer she was with him, the easier it became to voice what she wanted out loud. Nonetheless, it made her blush every time. "I want you to strip for me," she whispered. They were alone, but still, it was awkward.

Smiling, he dusted his fingers over her panties. The brief contact shot fire up through her body and straight to her heart. "Your wish is my command."

His touch trailed lightly down her thighs as he rose to his feet then turned to saunter away. If she weren't a vampire, she'd have lost sight of him beyond the candles' reach, but there were benefits to having to drink blood and she gleefully enjoyed the flow of his pants over his ass as he bent at the waist to hit a button on some built-in sound system. Low, thumping music filled the club, and he turned back to her. His smile was nearly enough to send her body into orbit, but the prospect of watching him strip was good, too.

He walked—no, he strutted—to the center of the stage, his gaze locked on her face the whole time. Very slowly and deliberately, he peeled his black T-shirt off and let it drift down to the stage. The music pulsed, and his hips caught the rhythm with fluid gyrations. The movement drew her attention to the low waist of his pants and the outline of his penis against the silky fabric. He wasn't fully erect, but he didn't need to be to be impressive. She stared and licked her lips, envisioning the pants down around his ankles.

"Stripping is an art, Sera." His voice pulled her gaze to his face. "If I just shove my pants down, where's the show?"

"Trust me, it'll be a delightful show if you cut right to the chase." She squirmed on the leather cushion and pulled at her shackles. The fur tickled her wrists and increased the sexual tension in her body.

Valentino continued to slither to the music, moving closer with every beat. Eventually, he stood near enough to touch if she'd had her hands free. He coiled the drawstring of his pants around his finger and pulled. The waistband loosened and slid low enough to torment her with a glimpse of his pubic hair. Oh God. His seductive

chuckle tightened her skin and she glanced up. He winked and blew her a kiss.

"I'm very glad you don't do this professionally anymore." She had to force the words past the dryness of her throat.

Releasing the drawstring, he leaned forward and braced his hands on the high back of the chair. His arms caged her in. "Do you say that because I'm no good?"

Sera turned to kiss Valentino's forearm. She brushed his skin with her lips then licked him from wrist to mid-arm before looking him in the eye again. "You're too good, and you know it so stop asking me stupid questions."

He chuckled again and pushed away. "I have to keep going or the song will end."

"Heaven forbid." Her sarcasm only earned her a sexy wink before Valentino dropped to his knees and leaned back to brace his weight on his hands. The position stretched the defined muscles of his torso and pulled his pants tight across his groin. The display bordered on obscene and made her mouth water. He pumped his hips then rolled them as the song's tempo increased. The sexy movements of his body actually paled in comparison to the expression on his face. With his lids at half mast and his lips slightly parted, he looked ready to come and Sera could only stare, gnaw on her bottom lip and wish they were having sex right now.

Her thoughts became more vivid when Valentino slid his hands outward in order to lie on his back. His ankles met his spine, creating a beautiful line of muscle and golden skin. For some reason, becoming a vampire had done nothing to dim Valentino's luscious natural coloring, and for that, she'd always be eternally grateful. She loved the way her pale legs looked entwined around his golden thighs. Not to mention the contrast of her hand around his—

Her mind went blank as Valentino slid a hand down the center of his body. His fingers disappeared inside his pants and she watched with her mouth hanging open as he rearranged the long line of his penis. He eased his hand back out and rested it over his naval, just above the now visible head of his erection. Oh God.

She couldn't take anymore, and he wasn't even naked

yet. "Val, let me go."

He lifted his upper body off the floor with the ease of someone used to doing a thousand or so crunches a day. "I'm not done."

"Well, I am." She pulled and pulled, but the shackles were annoyingly secure. "What the hell are these made of that I can't break them?"

Valentino smiled and sat back on his heels. "Silver."

Sera stilled. If not for the fur lining, the metal would burn through her skin. "A little dangerous, isn't it?"

"The paint and fur protect your skin. You're in no danger, but I needed something you couldn't break." He shrugged. "I knew you wouldn't last very long."

Sera scowled. "Cocky bastard."

"But you love me." He dropped onto all fours and started to crawl towards her. His hair fell over his eyes, but he made no move to toss it back. Through the sable curtain, his eyes glowed with mischief. He reached her legs and rubbed his cheek against her shin. "Don't you?"

"I must, or I wouldn't be shackled to this chair." He licked the front of her leg, making her gasp. "Val."

"Hush, I'm concentrating on my performance." His tongue flicked out again to trail up past her knee. She spread her legs to accommodate his shoulders as he pressed closer. He licked her inner thigh and then caught her gaze through his hair as he clamped his teeth onto the hem of her dress. He curled his lips back to show that his fangs had descended. He was hungry, and she knew exactly what he wanted.

"Are you going to bite me?" Her voice sounded breathless. The only thing that came close to comparing to the feel of Valentino inside her was his bite. Just the thought of him sucking at her skin before piercing her with his fangs nearly gave her an orgasm right then and there.

He nodded and nuzzled his face into her lap, still holding her dress in his teeth.

"Where?" Anywhere sounded good to her, but she opened her legs wider in the hopes that he'd aim for her inner thigh.

Before he could answer or bite her, the music stopped. He released her and looked over his shoulder

with a muffled curse. “Damn.” Pushing to his feet, he propped his hands on his hips and glared at her with no real anger in his eyes. “You distracted me and ruined the performance. I’ll have to start over.”

“If you do, I’ll kill you.”

“Oh yeah, good luck with that.” He turned as if to head for the sound system.

“Valentino, don’t you dare!” The shackles rattled against the back of the chair as Sera stomped her foot and yanked at the restraints. “Please, stop torturing me.”

He halted after only one step and faced her with a devilish smirk playing at his lips. She barely had time to register the subtle warning of that expression before he hooked his thumbs in his waistband and pulled it down. The black silk caught on his ass and cupped the weight of his balls, exposing the entire length of his erection.

Sera swallowed and went limp on the chair. Still holding the front of his pants down, he came toward her and straddled her knees. His height put him exactly where they both wanted him, but one step prevented her from even touching him with her tongue.

Pleading with her eyes, she whimpered and tried to move closer.

“What’s wrong, baby?” He wrapped his free hand around his cock. “See something you want?”

Sera nodded, her gaze riveted on the slow glide of Valentino’s fist. Dear God in heaven, he was determined to give her a heart attack.

To her delight, he took the final step and slid his hand to the base. “Take it.”

Sera didn’t hesitate. She wrapped her mouth around him and swallowed him down to his fist. He tasted like cinnamon, for goodness sake. She pulled back and looked up. “How?”

“This night is all about what you like. Roses, the color red, the taste of cinnamon,” he paused and shrugged. “Me.”

She kissed the head of his penis. “You should move yourself to the top of the list.”

“Oh yeah?”

With a nod, she swallowed him again and curled her tongue around his thickness. He pushed his pants to his

thighs and leaned forward to brace a hand on the back of the chair. A low growl of pleasure rumbled out of him, and she smiled around her mouthful. She might be the one shackled, but he was the captive now. In the past year, she'd learned really quickly how to please him with her hands, mouth and body. Normally she had the use of all three, but she wouldn't let the handicap get in the way tonight. If all she had was the feel of her lips, tongue and teeth, she'd use them to her advantage.

The taste of cinnamon flavored the inside of her mouth, and she closed her eyes and moaned. This beat any cinnamon roll she'd ever had. She bit down lightly, and Valentino drew in a sharp breath. Although her fangs were tucked safely up in her gums, she still had to be careful or the sharp tips would draw blood. Biting him while giving him a blow job seemed too kinky. Never mind that she was shackled to a chair in the middle of a deserted strip club. Everyone had to have their limits.

Valentino let go of the chair to twist his fingers in her hair. He eased her mouth away and tilted her face up. "We'll finish this later, okay?"

Sera nodded and swept her tongue across her lips. Valentino moaned, making her laugh softly. She loved tormenting him. "So what are you going to do for me now?"

Instead of answering, he released her and stepped back so he was no longer straddling her lap. He peeled the silky pants off and tossed them away. Naked, he was perfection, pure and simple. For several moments, she just stared at his body, and he let her. No matter how many times he stripped his clothes off for her, or how often he strolled around their apartment naked, she'd never grow tired of looking at him. There seemed to always be something to discover. Whether it was a freckle she'd never noticed before above his left nipple, or the vein that streaked down his right bicep from time to time, or even the way his hair swirled over his groin.

It was all delicious to feast her eyes on, and for all eternity it was what she planned to do.

"Let me know when you're done." There was just enough arrogance in the statement to pull her gaze to his face. He smirked and spread his arms out. "Don't stop on

my account. I like when you fuck me with your eyes.”

Sera dipped her head as a hot wave crept up her neck. She might have learned how to please him and she might never tire of looking at him, but he could still make her blush with annoying ease. Through her lowered lashes, she watched him stroll toward her. She stared at his perfect bare feet and scraped her teeth over her bottom lip. Anticipation knotted her stomach.

“Are the shackles bothering you?”

Sera jerked her head up. That question wasn’t what she’d been expecting. “No.” She shifted her arms within the furry cuffs. “Not at all, why? Do you plan on keeping me like this until dawn?”

Valentino smiled and dropped to his knees. He put his hands on her thighs and pried her legs open. The short skirt offered no resistance, and by the time he had her positioned like he wanted, it was bunched up to her panties. He ran his hands toward her crotch. “You’re hot down here. I don’t even have to touch your pussy, and I can feel the heat.”

Sera squirmed. Of course she was hot down there. There didn’t seem to be anything else to say about her aroused state, so she held her tongue and watched his hands disappear between her legs. His fingers tugged at the front of her panties until he had her sex exposed. He licked his lips, and she groaned.

“Just got hotter,” he mumbled as he lowered his face to kiss her right above her tight black curls. “Mmm, I smell roses.” Another quick kiss and then he met her gaze. “I take it you really liked the flowers?”

“I bathed in them.”

Valentino’s eyes widened and his fingers flexed on her thigh. “Is that so?” He shifted closer, wedging his upper body between her legs and angling his face up to kiss the underside of her jaw. “You bathed in roses and dressed in leather.” He licked the side of her neck before going on. “All for me?”

Sera nodded. “Who else would I do it for?”

Easing back, he cupped her face and held her gaze captive. “No one.”

She couldn’t ignore his hungry expression. It wasn’t blood he craved, but reassurance. “There is absolutely no

way I'd allow anyone but you to do these things to me." She rattled her cuffs just to make sure he knew what things she was talking about. "You have to know that?"

He nodded, and his hair slid into his eyes. Her fingers itched to brush it back, but she couldn't. "I love you, baby."

Sera's heart stopped. Literally. Those words just never got old.

Smiling, she leaned forward to catch his lips. They parted under hers, and she sucked his tongue into her mouth. He pressed against her, forcing her legs as wide as they would go, and pinned her to the back of the chair. His fingers tangled in her hair, and the kiss deepened as he took control. The chain he had kicked under the chair rattled when he tried to scoot even closer, reminding both of them of its existence.

Sera pulled back, licking the taste of the kiss away while savoring the flavor of Valentino. A smirk curled the edge of his mouth and he looked at her with heightened lust. Before she could ask if it was time to use the chain, he sat back on his heels and dragged it out from under the chair and onto his lap. In one fluid movement, he rose to his feet, and the smirk turned to a full blown grin. She managed to close her legs before he dropped the chain in her lap, and the cold metal against bare skin, made her hiss.

"Is it time for that now?" She nodded toward her lap, but didn't take her eyes off Valentino.

"This night has not exactly gone according to plan, you know?" There was only a hint of disappointment in his tone.

"No, I don't know."

"I was going to dance for you and then make you beg me to fuck you."

Oh man. Sera forced her voice to work. "Um...you did dance, and I'm very close to begging, trust me."

Valentino chuckled and shook his head. "I gave you a half ass performance, Sera. If you came here during business hours, you'd realize that."

"I don't want to watch other guys strip, thank you very much."

"You might enjoy it."

Maybe she would, maybe she wouldn't, but she had no real desire to find out. "I'm rather happy with the guy I have, and there was nothing half ass about your performance. In fact, I didn't even get to see your ass." Her cheeks burned, but the comment was worth the look on Valentino's face.

"God, forgive me." He turned around. "How's that?"

Sera's mouth went dry. She wanted to reach out and dig her nails into the taut muscles staring her in the face until he was branded with red marks. Then she'd bite him. Hard.

Valentino glanced over his shoulder. "Careful, you're starting to scare me."

Sera swallowed a giggle and glanced away. "You can turn back around."

He did, but then he circled around to the back of the chair to unlock her shackles. He slid one wrist free and pulled her to her feet as he moved in front of her again. The chain clanked to the floor and slithered over her feet. "Time to get down to business." With that, he picked up the chain in one hand and kept hold of both her wrists with the other. He led her toward the back of the stage and through the red velvet curtain that hid the dancers as they were being announced.

Sera dug her heels into the wooden floor as she spotted the metal ring affixed to the wall and flanked by two burning torches. Valentino looked back at her, and she shook her head. "You can't be serious?"

"Oh very." He yanked on her wrists and spun her around to flatten her back against the wall. The metal ring dangled about a foot above her head, and the heat from the torches made her wish the leather dress was gone. "All in good time," Valentino mumbled as he lifted her arms over her head and relocked her cuffs. He slid the chain through the center of her shackles and then secured it to the metal ring.

Sera pulled on the chain and discovered that there was enough give to rest her hands on the top of her head. Lot of good that would do her. She still couldn't touch Valentino.

He braced his hands on the wall and leaned into her. The torchlight flickered over his face, making him look

dangerously sexy. "I like this," he purred.

Sera jerked at the chain in frustration. "This isn't funny."

Valentino nuzzled at her collarbone. "Isn't supposed to be funny." He rocked his hips forward, pressing his erection into her belly. "I'm going to fuck you like this." He lifted his head to look at her. "I'm going to wrap your legs around my waist and pin you to this wall."

Sera went very still and lost herself in the depth of Valentino's chocolaty eyes.

"Would you like that?" He bent his knees just enough to position his cock between her thighs. He slid in and out, tormenting her bare skin and teasing her nearby sex.

In her frenzy to nod, Sera bumped her head against the wall. She swore softly and scowled at Valentino when he grinned at her. "You're a demon for enjoying this, you know that, right?"

"I'm not the only one enjoying it." He trailed his hand down the side of her body until he reached the hem of her dress. He dragged it up out of the way and hooked the fabric over his wrist. Pressing closer, he brushed his cock over her panties with a persistence that threatened to drive her insane. She rolled her head on the wall and bit back a moan of pleasure. He took advantage and kissed the side of her neck. When his fangs scraped her skin, she shuddered.

"Are you going to bite me?" The question was nothing more than a hoarse whisper.

"Is that what you want?" His words feathered over her moist skin.

Sera nodded and squeezed her eyes shut. "Please."

He nipped her skin between his teeth but didn't bite through. Holding her like that, he shoved her dress all the way up to her breasts and used his body to hold it in place. Then he wedged a hand between them to move her panties aside. The first real contact of his flesh against hers brought her frightfully close to orgasm. She dragged in a deep breath and tried to calm down.

He released her from his bite and flicked his tongue over her skin. "Easy, baby. Won't be any fun if you come now."

Sera nodded and tried to focus her thoughts

elsewhere. Had she remembered to lock the apartment door on her way out? Should she have taken the time to put the roses in water? Would she find them dead when they got home?

Valentino laughed directly in her ear. "Is that working?"

"No."

"Good." He kissed her ear and then aimed for her neck again. This time, his teeth pierced her skin, and her blood raced through her veins. He sucked, and the sensation of feeding him made her knees weak. If not for the press of his body, she'd be on the floor. While he continued to drink, he cupped her ass and lifted her. Instinctively, she wrapped her legs around his hips and guided him closer. She was so wet he slid inside with absolutely no effort. He ground his pelvis against her until the wall at her back threatened to scrape the skin from her spine. It hurt, but it didn't matter.

The sound of his slow, rhythmic swallows and the feel of his controlled thrusts had her at the edge of delirium in a matter of moments. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to hold off the end. "Val, I'm going to come."

"Mmm..."

Sera shuddered as his fangs slid deeper. Her skin grew cold as all her blood rushed to two very different locations. The vein in her neck throbbed between Valentino's teeth, and her inner muscles sucked at his cock. He groaned against her and lapped at the wound he'd made, but not once did the tempo of his thrusts change. He fucked her as if he was prepared to do so all night long.

God help her.

The chain banged against the wall as Sera wrestled against it. The noise was so loud it hurt her ears. She stilled and dug her teeth into her bottom lip. Her own fangs had descended, and the more blood Valentino took from her, the greater her own need became. She opened her eyes and focused on the curve of his shoulder. Fair was fair. Without the benefit of a warning lick, she bit into him. He bucked against her, sending his cock deep, and for a moment the suction at her neck ceased.

Sera swallowed the first drop of Valentino's blood, and a sense of calm washed over her. He always had this effect on her. She didn't know why, nor did she care, but she craved it like nothing else. She sucked at his shoulder and swallowed more. In time, he resumed his own pull on her neck, and they fed together while the tempo of his thrusts finally increased.

He brought her to climax with a skill that ripped her focus from the feel of his blood in her mouth. She pulled back from his shoulder as the waves of pleasure crashed over her. Her arms went slack in the chain, her eyes drifted shut and her mouth fell open. "Val..." His name was nothing more than one long sigh.

After one last contraction around the very hard thickness of Valentino's cock, Sera could almost breathe again. Valentino had stopped moving halfway through her orgasm to let her liquefy around him, and now he lifted his head to meet her gaze as she managed to open her eyes. She blinked and moistened her dry lips. "Was that supposed to be the best sex we've ever had?"

His chuckle vibrated through her body, making her clench all over again. He kissed her lips, and she tasted her blood. "Was it?"

Sera nodded, and then captured Valentino's mouth to sip at his bottom lip. It never ceased to amaze her how different their blood tasted. She preferred his, of course, but tasting hers on his lips was certainly nice. When his mouth once more tasted like skin, she released him and leaned her head back. "Yeah, I think it was."

He rolled his pelvis, reminding her that one of them hadn't finished. "Can you handle more?"

"Do I have a choice?" Sera rattled the chain. "I'm a little helpless to resist you." As if she would.

He gripped her hips tight and eased her lower half toward him. The position pressed her shoulder blades into the unforgiving wall, but she wasn't about to complain. If he released her now, she might kill him. He smiled, not even bothering to pretend he wasn't reading her mind. The little talent of his didn't bother her so much during sex, since it saved her from having to voice uncomfortable stuff out loud. She need only think about where she wanted his hands or his mouth, and he'd put them there.

Right now, she wanted the pulse of his release inside her.

He bucked against her with a groan. “Demanding little wench, aren’t you?”

Sera flashed an innocent smile. “What? I didn’t say anything—”

He shoved into her. Still holding her hips away from the wall, he took her just how she liked him to. Rough and hard.

His hair flopped over his eyes, and he stared through it. He held her gaze, daring her to break the contact. She didn’t. There was nothing sexier than Valentino’s face moments before he came. His eyes deepened in color, his nostrils flared, his jaw tightened and his lips parted just enough to make her want to kiss him until neither of them could stand it anymore. She resisted the urge now in order to watch his expression. His climax flared in the depths of his eyes, and she smiled.

“God, Sera.” He rocked against her, and the pulse of his release brought on another little orgasm for her. They both chuckled as their bodies literally gave out into one another. He rested his head on her shoulder and pinned her to the wall with his whole body. “I love you.” He breathed the sentiment between trying to catch his breath and feather kisses across her skin.

“I love you, too.”

He smiled against her shoulder and then lifted his head. The tips of his hair dripped sweat onto his cheeks. “I should let you down now. I have one more thing to give you.”

“Uh-oh.”

Valentino eased away after giving her a quick kiss on the mouth, and then helped her settle her feet on the floor. Smiling into her eyes, he unhooked the chain. Her arms tingled as she lowered them to her sides, and she flexed her fingers to regain feeling. Valentino dropped the chain at their feet, along with the furry cuffs.

Sera stared and then swooped down to pick them up. Straightening, she forced herself to be bold. “My turn.”

Valentino gaped at her. “Excuse me?”

Sera moved away from the wall and gestured toward it. “It’s my turn. Get up against the wall and turn

around.” Her heart raced with fear that he might deny her, but she should have known better.

With a truly wicked smile, Valentino turned, braced his hands against the wall and then looked over his shoulder. “Like this?”

Sera couldn’t speak as she ran her gaze down the sexy line of Valentino’s body. From the tips of his dark hair to the muscles in his calves, he was an absolute wonder. She nodded and moved closer.

“You aren’t going to be tall enough to hook the chain, baby.”

With a frustrated snarl, Sera swept her gaze around until she spotted what she needed. Still clutching the chain and shackles in one hand, she hurried into the shadows to bring back a wooden crate. She upended it behind Valentino and flashed a triumphant smile. “Never underestimate me.”

“No, never.” He turned and offered his hands. “I take it this is what you want?”

Her mouth went dry as she clamped the furry cuffs around his wrists. What had gotten into her? How had she turned into this person willing to shackle her lover to a wall? Needless to say, it was quite a leap from the quiet, reserved librarian she usually was. Too much of a leap perhaps?

Suddenly the chain felt too heavy in her palm, and she would have dropped it if Valentino hadn’t gripped her hand in both of his. She met his gaze. “I don’t think I can go through with this.” All the doubts and reservations she’d lived with prior to falling in love with Valentino, threatened to rush to the surface.

“Don’t you dare lose your nerve now.” After squeezing her hand, he turned his back and lifted his arms over his head. “We both want this, Sera.”

Not allowing herself a chance to think too deeply, she stepped onto the crate and managed to hook the chain around the metal ring and Valentino’s shackles. Once he was secured, she hopped off the crate and kicked it away.

“Quick question, baby.”

“Hmm?” Sera licked her lips and stared at Valentino’s back. Having his arms extended over his head accentuated the play of muscles across his shoulder

blades, and she fisted her hands to stifle the urge to trace each sexy ripple.

“Aren’t the important parts inaccessible now?”

Sera lowered her gaze to Valentino’s ass. “That depends on what I plan to do to you.” She dropped to her knees and took hold of his taut buttocks. He stiffened, making the muscles flex under her fingers.

“What exactly are you planning?” He sounded more curious than cautious.

“Can’t you read my mind?”

“My brain seems devoid of blood at the moment.”

Sera ducked her chin and giggled. She then ran her hand around the front of Valentino’s hip to grab his erection. “Mmm, I think I’ve discovered where it all went.”

Valentino thrust against her hand, causing the chains to rattle and her heart to race. “Jesus, Sera.” His cock throbbed within the cage of her fingers.

Still holding him in her fist, she lowered her face to his ass and kissed one cheek. His thrusts stilled but his cock continued to pulse. “I want to bite you.” She made the confession with her lips pressed to his taut skin.

“Do whatever the fuck you want.” The words came out in a gravelly rush.

Sera parted her lips, licked the smooth skin she longed to taste and then bit down. Her fangs had to work to tear through the hard muscle, and Valentino’s groan echoed in the air as she finally tasted his blood. He began to pump his hips again, sliding his cock in and out of her fist. Doing so, flexed the muscles of his ass, and she had to deepen her bite to maintain her hold on him. If the bite hurt, his harsh panting let her know he didn’t mind one bit.

How long she drank his blood and worked him with her hand, she didn’t know, but Valentino startled her from the pleasurable trance by suddenly yanking the ring out of the wall. Pieces of metal and plaster rained down on Sera’s head, and she released Valentino to scurry back out of the way. Damn, why hadn’t she been able to break free? Before she could give it further thought, Valentino turned to face her, his eyes nearly black with unspent passion and every muscle in his body quivering.

Holding her gaze, he lowered his shackled hands and

grasped his cock in with both fists. "Get over here and put it in your mouth."

Sera crawled toward him and pinned him to the wall with her hands splayed across his thighs. She took him in her mouth and swallowed as much as she could. With a shaky moan, Valentino bucked forward to shove the fat head of his cock down the back of her throat. Forcing herself to relax, she closed her eyes and took it. Slowly, he began to move in and out between her lips. Each thrust touched the back of her throat, but he withdrew before the intrusion made her gag.

"God, Sera." If he meant to say more it was lost on a shuddering moan.

Sera tasted the first drops of cum and sucked hard as Valentino thrust over her tongue.

"Come with me, baby."

Oh God. She spread her knees and reached down to hike up her skirt. Laying her hand over the wet crotch of her panties, she wiggled her fingers and gasped around Valentino's cock. He nudged deeper and circled his hips. Afraid to touch herself again, she pulled her hand away and rested it on his thigh.

"No." He pulled out of her mouth and frowned down at her as she looked up. "I want you to make yourself come while I fill your mouth." His gaze softened. "Please."

Sera lowered her gaze and blew across the tip of Valentino's erection. It bobbed in response, and a bead of moisture formed at the tip. She licked it off and then nodded. Parting her lips, she took him in her mouth again and snaked her hand between her thighs. She didn't bother to move her panties but simply pressed her fingers against her sex and rubbed swollen clit. She hoped Valentino was close because she was about to explode.

"Yes..." He rocked against her mouth, scraping the tight skin of his cock across the tips of her fangs. She tasted blood and swallowed the unexpected treat. He did it again, and the blood mixed with the salty tang of his cum. Oh yeah, he was close.

It was hard to focus on her own pleasure with the weight of Valentino sliding across her tongue, but somehow she managed to keep her fingers moving. A little moan escaped her when she passed over just the right

spot, and her entire body shook. Oh God.

“I bet you’d like to be able to scream.” Valentino tickled the back of her throat, denying her the ability to even breathe, let alone scream.

Sera caught hold of him with her teeth and forced him to be still while she increased the tempo of her fingers. Her muscles spasmed, and she squeezed her eyes shut around tears. A violent orgasm ripped through her, and she pulled away from Valentino, lest she lose control and bite him.

He didn’t seem too concerned though as he bumped the tip of his erection against her lips to get her to part them. She did, and he slid back inside. Her body continued to quake, and she let him do all the work. Thrusting into her mouth with a very controlled rhythm, he found the back of her tongue and came with a low rumbling growl. His seed shot down her throat, and she swallowed quickly to keep up with the flow.

Sometime later, after the intensity of her orgasm had faded and Valentino had gone limp in her mouth, Sera sat with her back to the wall, watching him unhook the shackles at his wrists. He dropped them and the chain to the floor and held out a hand to her. She nodded toward the painted metal. “We aren’t taking them home?”

The question seemed to surprise him. “Do you want to?”

Sera averted her gaze and got to her feet to smooth her dress down over her thighs. Finally, she shrugged. “If you want to.”

Without another word, Valentino gathered the stuff off the floor and jerked his head toward the curtain. “There’s one more gift in my office.” He turned to lead the way, and Sera stared at his naked rear. The puncture marks were already history, but a subtle bruise remained.

“Tell me you’re grabbing your pants on the way.”

“Nope.”

Ah, the torture would continue then, it seemed. She pushed away from the wall and followed on shaky legs. After only a few steps, she kicked off her high heels and instantly felt more stable. Valentino held the curtain aside and glanced back as she hurried to catch up. She

slid along his bare skin as she brushed by him and smiled when he hissed. "If you're going to run around naked, then both of us should suffer for it." She stalked away before he could do more than arch a brow at her.

His office still smelled intoxicatingly of roses. Sera paused in the doorway and drew in the lovely scent. They'd have to rip up some of the flowers at home and sprinkle them over the bed. That way Valentino would smell like roses, too. The air stirred behind her a second before his lips touched her ear. "Sounds lovely." He kissed her and then stepped into the office to head for the desk. If he was at all aware of his nudity, it certainly didn't show.

Good thing she was aware enough for both of them.

Valentino set the chain and cuffs down on the desk top and then opened one of the drawers to pull something out.

Sera's mouth dropped open as she stared at the small black velvet box in his hand. Oh my God. She tore her gaze away and looked into his smiling eyes. "Is that what I think it is?" There was really no mistaking the size and shape of a ring box. Didn't every woman dream of seeing one in the hand of the guy she loved?

Valentino plopped down into his big leather chair and crooked a finger at her. "Come here." He patted his lap. His very naked lap.

Sera nearly ran across the office and around the desk. She crawled onto his lap, facing him, and wrapped her arms around his neck. He laughed as she rained kisses over his face.

"Shouldn't you open the box before you thank me for it?" He dodged her next kiss and shoved the box under her nose. "You might be wrong about what's inside."

Sera snatched the box. "If I'm wrong, I'll kill you."

"I think that's the third time you've threatened me tonight." He tapped the tip of her nose. "I had no idea you were so bloodthirsty."

"Yes, you did." Sera answered without taking her eyes off the box. She was afraid to open it. Valentino solved her little dilemma by lifting the lid for her. A stunning band of rubies and diamonds winked at her, and she immediately started to cry.

“Hey.” He pulled her against his chest and kissed the top of her head. “You aren’t supposed to cry, silly.”

Sera rested her cheek over Valentino’s heart and stared at the ring. It was actually a stack of five bands made into one thick one. There were four bands of pave set diamonds, and in the center, a wider band of square, blood red rubies turned on their points. All the stones marched all the way around the ring in a never ending circle.

“Put it on.”

Sera had to move away from Valentino’s chest to do so. Her fingers shook and she nearly dropped the ring in his lap as she took it out of the box. He snatched the velvet case from her and tossed it toward the desk. She held the ring in her right palm and met his gaze. “Which finger?”

He took the ring and her left hand in his. Still holding her gaze, he slid the ring on her fourth finger. “I was afraid it wouldn’t fit.” But it did. Perfectly.

Sera curled her fingers into her palm and treasured the weight of the thick ring. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she stared at it. “Are you asking me to marry you?”

Valentino lifted her gaze with a finger under her chin. He shook his head. “No.”

Sera narrowed her eyes and sniffed rather loudly. “Wh—what?”

He traced a line from the underside of her chin to the hollow of her throat. “I’m asking you to love me forever.” His touch went further toward the V of her dress. Hooking his finger into the leather, he pulled her in for a kiss. She drank his next words directly into her mouth. “Will you?”

Sera nodded and squeezed her eyes shut around the hot pressure of more tears. A few managed to escape, and she tasted them along with the kiss.

Valentino was the first to pull back. He rested his forehead on hers and stared into her eyes through the fall of his unruly hair. “I want to hear you say it.”

This she didn’t have any problem saying out loud. “Yes, I will love you forever. And then some,” she added with a smile.

He kissed the tip of her nose and then her forehead. “You aren’t just saying that because of the fantastic sex are you?”

She knew he was teasing. “Maybe.”

With a rather fierce snarl, he gripped her shoulders and gave her a little shake. “Don’t make me chain you up again.”

Sera squirmed on his lap, delighted to discover he was hard and ready to go again. She reached down to move her panties out of the way. Next time, she wouldn’t wear any. When she brushed her wet curls over Valentino’s erection, his grip eased on her shoulders and his expression softened. She did it again and said, “I liked being your captive.”

“Oh yeah?” He took hold of his cock. “Lift up.”

Sera got to her knees and then settled back down after Valentino positioned himself at her opening. With a little hum of pleasure, she melted against his chest and licked his neck. “Are we ever going to go home?”

He clasped her hips and started to move her up and down. “Yeah, eventually.”

As long as eventually meant they could finish what they were doing, Sera was beyond ecstatic. Resting her left hand on Valentino’s shoulder, she stared at her new ring and smiled. “It’s really beautiful.”

“Yeah, you are.”

She giggled and then gasped as he hit just the right spot inside her. “Oh!”

The strong smell of roses nearly knocked Sera over as she stepped into the apartment. Valentino came in behind her and kicked the door shut while wrapping his arms around her. He buried his face in her neck. “How ‘bout you grab the roses, and we’ll see about making your little rose petal fantasy come true.” He licked her neck and then nuzzled her ear. “Unless you can’t handle me again?”

Sera wasn’t silly enough to say no to such a wonderful opportunity. She worked free of Valentino’s embrace and crossed the living room to gather the giant bouquet in her arms. She turned back just as he was locking the door. He’d changed back into his leather pants and T-shirt before leaving the club and the box with the

chain and cuffs was tucked under one arm.

He caught her gaze and smiled. "What?"

"Nothing." On the way home, she'd worked herself into a guilty frenzy for not having something to give him for Valentine's Day. How awful did that make her, but that was one of the risks of ordering something. You just couldn't guarantee it being where you wanted it, when you wanted it.

Valentino set the box on the couch and joined her in the little dining area. "I don't need any gifts Sera, so stop fretting." He took the flowers and headed for the bedroom. "Are you coming?"

Sera shoved aside her guilt and started after him. After two steps, she froze and turned back toward the living room. As Val disappeared down the hallway, she began to search for the piece of mail they'd received about a month ago. There was no way Valentino would have thrown it away, not after he'd spent hours pouring over the shiny pictures. She might not have the gift, but she could certainly tell him what it was, if she could find the stupid brochure. Where the hell was it?

Almost ready to cry with frustration, she finally located the catalogue tucked under one of the couch cushions. With a smile, she rolled it up and headed for the bedroom.

Valentino had wasted no time. The bed was littered with rose petals and he was sprawled naked on top of them with his hands laced behind his head and his luscious body stretched out toward her. He flashed *that* smile "Hello."

Oh God.

"Are you going to gape at me, or join me?" He held out a hand.

Sera clamped the brochure between her teeth and quickly stripped out of her dress and shoes. The unasked question in Valentino's eyes made her grin. Naked, she crawled onto the bed and laid the brochure on his chest.

He looked at her and then looked at it. "What is this?"

"You said you always wanted one, right?"

He sat up, releasing a potent cloud of rose scented air. Flipping the brochure open, he stared at the one page

that had been dog-eared. His expression resembled a kid at Christmas. "Are you serious?" He finally managed to look at her again. "*Really* serious?"

Sera brushed her index finger over the black Harley Davidson spread across both pages and nodded. "Yes. I'll keep my Mustang, and you can sell your truck once the bike gets here."

He rolled his eyes. "You and that damn car. Funny how my nice, new pick-up has to go, but your hunk of junk stays."

"There is nothing wrong with my car." She reached for the brochure, but he refused to let her snatch it away. Their gazes locked. "Do you want the bike or not? I'm sure I can cancel the order."

His eyes sparkled with just how much he wanted it. Tossing the brochure over the side of the bed, he reached for her and pulled her onto his lap. "Is that my Valentine's Day gift then?"

Sera nodded and pushed him back onto the rose petals. "But you have to promise not to look too sexy on it." An image of him dressed in leather and straddling the bike made her groan. Oh God. Maybe the bike was a bad idea?

Valentino wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her down on top of him. "Too late to change your mind." He brushed his lips over hers. "Besides, I plan to have *you* straddle it while I thank you properly. You can even wear your sexy little leather dress."

Sera braced her hands against the pillow and pushed up to look down into Valentino's face. "Maybe I'll buy something else?"

"Such as?"

She shrugged, but already she imagined his reaction to the red leather outfit she'd seen when buying the dress. It matched the shackles, after all, so why not?

Something shifted behind Valentino's gaze, and he reached his arms through hers to cup her face. "It seems I've created a monster."

Sera curled her lips back to flash her fangs. "Yeah, maybe you have." With a teasing snarl, she grabbed his wrists and pinned his arms over his head. "You should be very afraid because I plan to ravish you." Somehow she

Captive Valentine

managed to say it without laughing.

Valentino arched his head back and exposed his neck. “Do your worst, baby.”