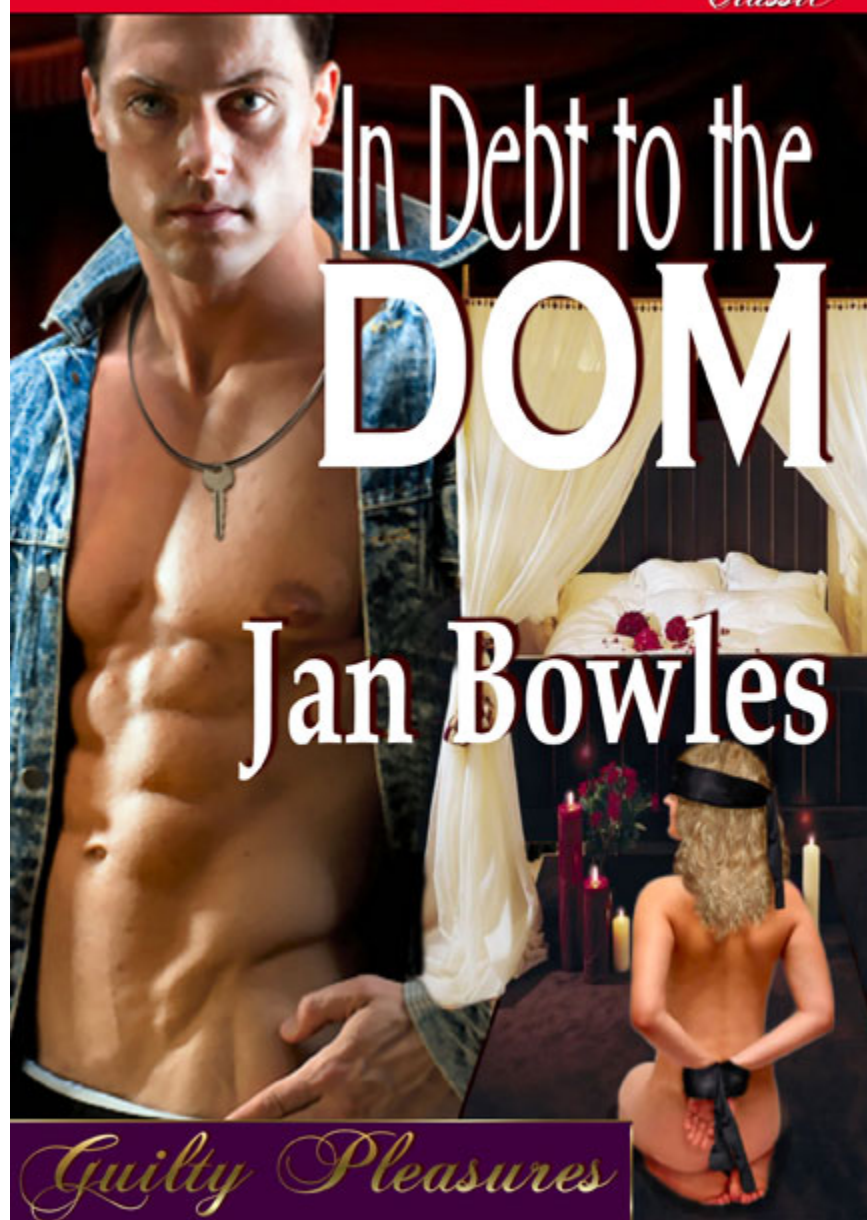


SIREN PUBLISHING *Classic*



# In Debt to the DOM

Jan Bowles

*Guilty Pleasures*

## Guilty Pleasures 1

# In Debt to the Dom

At twenty-eight, Maddie James has risen through the ranks of investment bank Goldstein Rivers to achieve great success. All of that changes when she receives a demand for half a million dollars for the safe return of her sister. Torn between her allegiance to her job and the demands of the kidnappers, she secretly wires the money, hoping to replace it with the sale of her house.

When thirty-six-year-old wealthy businessman Keaton Rivers discovers the money is missing from his company, he suspects Maddie. Will he throw her to the wolves or find another way for her to repay the debt?

As a Dom, Keaton knows Maddie would make the perfect submissive. From the very first moment he laid eyes on her, he'd wanted her. Only this time it will be on his terms...

To save her career, will Maddie make a deal with the Dom?

**Genre:** BDSM, Contemporary, Romantic Suspense

**Length:** 29,342 words

# **IN DEBT TO THE DOM**

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**Jan Bowles**

**EROTIC ROMANCE**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
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*“The course of true love never did run smooth.”*

William Shakespeare

# IN DEBT TO THE DOM

## *Guilty Pleasures 1*

**JAN BOWLES**

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## **Chapter One**

Keaton Rivers settled back in his executive chair and stared at the slowly darkening skyline. From his top floor office at Goldstein Rivers, he had an uninterrupted view. At this time of day with the lights just starting to come on, the city of Chicago looked stunning.

He chewed on his pencil and idly flicked through the personnel files once more. One of the managing directors was leaving in little more than a month's time, and, as CEO, he always liked to have a hand in their replacement.

So far, he'd narrowed the field down to three candidates. All holding senior positions within the company, they could all bring their own personal skills to the job. He needed to wrap this up before he took his annual month-long vacation.

He flicked a switch on his intercom and spoke. "Leanne, please arrange working lunches with the following—Robert Kincade, Martin Scott, Joe Magnusson, and Maddie James."

*"Yes, Mr. Rivers. Anything else?"*

"No. I'm gonna call it a night. You, too, Leanne."

He turned to the bank of windows and stared once more into the night, seeing without seeing, his mind deep in thought.



So why had he asked the fourth candidate, Maddie James, to lunch? To get her hopes up? He knew he'd already decided against her. At the age of twenty-eight, Maddie James was far too young for such a senior position. Managing Directors were usually in their mid-thirties. Maybe she'd get her chance in a year or two when she'd gained a little more experience, but not now.

The fact was he'd seen Maddie James several times around the office. Those pale green eyes and that wild hair, cascading around her face in a cloud of blonde, intrigued him. He guessed he just wanted to take a closer look to see if she lived up to his expectations. An abuse of his position, he knew, but what was the point of having power if he couldn't occasionally use it to his own advantage?

\* \* \* \*

Maddie James walked purposefully across the restaurant, the heels of her black court shoes sinking deliciously into the luxurious deep pile carpet. Every table she passed was exquisitely laid with cut crystal glass and fine bone china. Floating lilies were large centerpieces on each and every one.

This was fine dining in the extreme, and she took a deep breath to calm her nerves. Meeting her CEO for lunch had caused her one long sleepless night. His rise through the ranks of investment banking had been legendary. Although the son of the then-current CEO, when his father had died, he'd taken on the responsibility with aplomb, breathing new life into Goldstein Rivers.

Now, she needed to pull all her resources together in order to impress him. The position of Managing Director might be the answer to all her recent problems. She really needed this job.

Maybe a miracle might happen after all.

Adjusting the lapels on her dark gray business suit, she finally reached his table. Keaton Rivers was deep in conversation on his cell phone. With a strong jaw, he had deep creases running up to his eyes.

Her heart flipped in her chest. Close up, he was extremely attractive, with broad shoulders and a fine physique.

Combing a hand through his jet-black hair, he looked up as she approached and ended the call.

“Maddie, good to see you. Thank you for coming.” He motioned to the seat opposite. “Please sit down.”

Deep blue eyes held her transfixed as she sank into the soft velvet dining chair.

“It’s good of you to consider me for the position of Managing Director, Mr. Rivers.”

He nodded, and then stared at her for what seemed an eternity. He cleared his throat. “What would you like to drink?”

Maddie desperately wanted a large gin and tonic, but said, “Just a sparkling mineral water, please.” It certainly wouldn’t impress him if she had a lunchtime drink, and she desperately needed this promotion. Like, yesterday.

A stray tendril of her willful hair fell across her forehead, and she pushed it nervously aside.

The waiter took their drinks order and then handed them each a menu. As she scanned the expensive card, he spoke. “So, Maddie, tell me what you feel you can bring to the position of Managing Director at Goldstein Rivers.”

Placing his menu down, he linked his fingers together under his chin and leaned on the table. His eyes silently took in every detail of her face as he stared intently at her.

Feeling under intense scrutiny, she smiled. Keaton Rivers was certainly business-like. This was probably his way of seeing if she could cope under pressure. Well, she had pressure coming from all sides. Her sister for one, the sale of her house another, the money she hadn’t quite got enough of, and now the head of Goldstein Rivers interrogating her over a job. Pressure visited her on a regular basis. She was used to it.

\* \* \* \*

As he listened to her deposition, he could see why she was on the short list. Confidence oozed from her. It was an ideal attribute when having face to face dealings with clients. In the investment banking world, it was a clear asset. They were dealing with large portfolios. Clients needed to have confidence in the people who managed their accounts.

As impressive as that was, he still couldn't offer her the position. Clients would also question her lack of experience, too. No, he'd been right. Still, he'd seen her up close, and he felt an undeniable attraction toward her. He wondered if she felt it, too. Blonde hair cascaded about her oval-shaped face in tiny, unruly, corkscrew curls. He noticed she kept brushing them from her eyes. How he would love to just run his fingers through it. He imagined his body servicing hers, stroking her repeatedly with his cock so she mewed loudly beneath him. He shook the thought from his head. This was not the way to behave with an employee.

"So, Maddie, what do you do when you're not working?"

"This and that. I'm sure it's all in my personnel file."

"True, but that's what you want me to know. What does the real Maddie James do on an evening?"

She laughed. Her fingers idly fiddled with her glass of water. "Well, if you must know, I sit in front of the TV, sipping Chardonnay and eating Ben and Jerry's ice cream."

"Sounds very decadent." He wondered if she had anyone else. According to her personnel files, she wasn't married, but she was so attractive, surely she had a boyfriend. He let his gaze wander over her hands, noticing she didn't wear an engagement ring.

"So, is there a special man in your life to share the ice cream and Chardonnay with?"

"Not really. There's only me, and just for that hour before I go to bed, it's nice to wind down."

So she was unattached. He had a thousand questions he wanted to ask, but instead he said, "How does it feel having a supermodel for a sister?" The information was all in her personnel file. Recently, Simone had hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons. She was similar in looks to Maddie, but the complete opposite in height. Where Maddie was small and petite, Simone was tall.

Taking a sip of mineral water, she spoke. "I don't mix very often in her circle. Unfortunately, she's fallen in with the wrong crowd." She looked sad for a moment. "In fact, I've been meaning to call her to see if she's all right. Not that I have much influence over her anymore."

"Well, I wish you luck. I have a brother, and I'm damned fed up telling him to get it together." He looked up as the waiter approached. "Now what would you like to order for lunch?"

\* \* \* \*

Often, Maddie would stay behind after work finalizing letters and contracts, and tonight was no exception. She loved her job with a passion. Maybe that was why she was still single. Her previous partners had all thought she gave far too much attention to her work. When you wanted a successful career, something had to give, and the men in her life had suffered.

Her mind whirled with the tasks she still had to do. A large portfolio of assets needed to be sold to pay death duties. Quickly, she flicked through the stocks. Good. All prime.

The door to her office was ajar, and she looked up as a shadow moved across her peripheral vision.

Keaton Rivers' large frame stood in the open doorway. He had a smile on his face. "It's Friday night and it's late. I didn't think you'd still be working, Maddie."

She smiled back. Was it only yesterday when they'd had lunch together? Had he come to tell her about the position? Either way, she

had to be pleased that he'd made a personal appearance, but then their lunch had been a very pleasant experience. There had been an easy, relaxed atmosphere between them.

"I usually work late, Mr. Rivers. Force of habit, I suppose, but I find it helps make the following day easier for me."

Dressed in a dark gray suit, he sauntered across her office and perched on her desk. "Please, call me Keaton."

"Very well." Maddie sat back in her chair, her senses aware of the close proximity of him. His large masculine frame seemed to tower over her. With his hand splayed on the mahogany wood of her desk, her gaze traced the strong veins on the back of his hand and the smattering of dark masculine hair that disappeared into the white cuff at his wrist. A simple plain cufflink with the letters *KR* engraved on it held the white linen in place.

After realizing she was taking far too much interest in his physique, she raised her eyes to his. Big mistake. Keaton Rivers had been studying her the whole time. The breath caught in her throat. If she didn't know any better, she might actually think he was coming on to her.

She cleared her throat. "Can I get you a coffee, Keaton?"

A faint smile brushed his lips. "For me, it's too late in the evening for coffee. What else do you have?"

"Only water."

"Then water will do just fine."

Maddie rose from her desk and walked out into the corridor and filled two Styrofoam cups from the cooler. When she returned, Keaton was still perched on her desk, his fingers idly flicking through her diary, until she handed him the cup.

"I don't suppose you've a bottle of bourbon hidden away?"

She laughed. "No. Sorry to disappoint you."

"Maddie, you don't disappoint." He smiled as he gazed at her. He reached out and took the cup from her hand, placing them both on the

desk. “Look, Maddie, the reason I came here was to ask if you’d like to have dinner with me one evening.”

“Oh?” Maddie felt her brows rise in surprise. Had Keaton Rivers just asked her on a date? Was the boss of Goldstein Rivers interested in her? To say she was flattered was an understatement.

“I see you look lost for words, Maddie.”

“Just a little surprised,” she answered truthfully. “Is this business or—”

He pulled her into his arms and delivered a hot steamy kiss that left her in no doubt about his intentions. She couldn’t help but respond, enjoying the delicious male scent that seemed to swamp her senses. His hands wove into her hair, as he pulled her into his embrace.

“This is strictly personal, Maddie. I like you and feel that we have a lot in common. Surely you can tell that?”

She shook her head as her eyes connected with his. He seemed to stare right into her soul. “I’m afraid I’ve been out of circulation for a while. For the last few years, I’ve focused entirely on my career.”

“Hmm.” He smiled at her, his eyes flicking from her hands to her face. “Now, this promotion, Maddie. That’s another reason why I came in person. Upon reflection, you’re too young for the position of MD, but I’m sure we can come to some agreement about promoting you in the future.”

Immediately, she was transported back to the beginning of her career. At the tender age of twenty-one she remembered her first encounter with a so-called executive manager. His abuse of power had put her completely off men for a whole year.

“I see.” She pushed him away and moved around her desk, and then sank into her chair. Her whole life was unraveling around her. She really needed this job. It would solve all her financial problems. Now it looked like Keaton Rivers wanted something in exchange.

“So, Mr. Rivers. Let me get this straight. I go out with you, and...” She waved a hand in front of her in a dismissive manner.

“And you’ll see that I get promoted. Isn’t that rather convenient?” She raised her chin, her mind made up. “Thank you for your dinner invitation, but I have to decline.”

He twisted around to meet her frosty gaze, an amused expression on his face. “Promotion was the last thing on my mind.”

“So I noticed, Mr. Rivers. I don’t care if you’re the CEO of Goldstein Rivers. I’m not sleeping my way to the top. I have my principles.”

“Then I admire your principles. There’s one thing you should also know about me. I don’t give away high-powered jobs to just anyone. They have to have some merit. They have to earn my respect.”

“I know all about the type of hoops that women are made to jump through in order to achieve success, and I’m not about to go down that route.”

“Everyone has a price, Maddie.” He held up his hands. “Now, please, let’s say no more. We have a genuine misunderstanding here. Let’s just leave it at that.” He stood and began walking from the office. Just as he got to the doorway he turned. “If you change—”

“Careful, Mr. Rivers, or you may find yourself looking at an indictment for sexual harassment.” Maddie held her breath. She knew she’d said too much, but the moment had just caught her off guard. Keaton Rivers had wanted her, and she’d just thrown it all back at him. Why? Just because she didn’t get the job? Was she crazy? He was an incredibly attractive man, and, truth be known, she wanted him, too. It was just how her life always worked out. One step forward, two steps back. Everything was unraveling around her. She still needed to sell her house before the bank foreclosed on her.

If she could just hold out for a month or two while the house sale went through, then this financial burden would finally be lifted. And if her sister asked for any more money, she would just have to be firm and say no.

Keaton’s gaze hardened as he stared at her. “Be assured that I won’t be bothering you again, Ms. James.”

## Chapter Two

When Maddie arrived at work on Monday morning, she went through her daily rituals: checking the stock markets around the world and taking phone calls from worried clients.

An hour later, her secretary brought her coffee. Kim also handed her an envelope. "This is addressed to you personally, Maddie."

When she was left alone once more, she turned the padded envelope in her hands and looked for the postmark. She couldn't find one. Inside she found a DVD with the words *play me* written on the back.

Not giving it too much importance, she walked over to the combination TV in the corner of the room and inserted the disc. The screen burst into life, and she stared in horror at the scene.

Her sister Simone sat in the middle of a dimly lit room, her hands tied behind her back. Her mascara smeared where it had run down her face. Her lips trembled as she looked at the camera. Then she spoke. "Maddie, you have to help me. They said they'd kill me if you don't wire them the money."

With shaking hands, she held up a newspaper showing yesterday's date. "Maddie, I'm scared. Please do as they ask."

The image widened, and a man with a mask covering his face came into view. Bugs Bunny had never looked so menacing.

Maddie gripped the table for support as his chilling words slammed into her.

"We know you have access to a lot of money. Follow our demands exactly if you want your sister to live. Cross us, and she dies." To emphasize his threat, he moved closer to Simone and held a



knife against her throat. Simone struggled, and Maddie could just see a trace of blood ooze from beneath the blade.

A scream left her lips at the same time as Simone's.

"Call the cops, she's dead. Fail to deliver the money on time, she's dead." He walked closer to the screen. "Wire five hundred thousand dollars to this account." He held up a number. "Do it by midnight."

Then the screen went black, and Maddie, unable to catch her breath, literally fell to the floor.

How could she pull this off? Surely she had to call the cops. Her hands shook as she crawled over to the easy chair and collapsed into it, her heart pounding.

Her secretary knocked on the door and walked in. When she saw her trembling demeanor, she rushed to her side. "I thought I heard a noise. Are you all right, Maddie?"

She fought for composure. "Yes, Kim, I'm okay. I just went a little dizzy, that's all." The kidnappers' words filled her head. *Tell no one*. "I'll be fine in a minute or two."

"I'll get you some water." Kim went to the cooler, filled a Styrofoam cup, then handed it to her.

Fear and anxiety crippled her thoughts, leaving her in a mindless stupor. This couldn't be happening. What if they killed Simone? No, she wouldn't even go there.

Her sister must have mentioned her line of work to some undesirable people. She'd been mixing with the wrong crowd for some time now.

An icy hand gripped her once more, constricting her breathing. Simone had looked so scared. What was happening to her right now? Were they abusing her? Or worse still—no, she wouldn't even contemplate that. Surely, she had to do as they asked. If she did as they wanted, would they release her, or would they come back asking for more money?

If only the sale of her house had gone through, she might have been able to cobble the money together. This was the biggest dilemma of her life. Would Goldstein Rivers lend her the money? She guessed not. Would they notice if she wired them the money? If they found out, her career would be lost, but at least her sister would still be alive.

She picked up the phone then replaced it. *Tell no one.*

\* \* \* \*

With no word from her sister, and one long sleepless night, Maddie arrived early at the office of Goldstein Rivers. Thankfully the doors opened at six in the morning.

Once inside the foyer, she walked quickly across the marble tiled floor to the bank of elevators waiting to whisk her to the thirtieth floor.

All night she had repeatedly dialed her sister's cell phone and home phone numbers. There had been no answer.

Maybe there would be a message waiting on her desk—something to give her hope.

When she reached her office, she unlocked the door and stopped dead in her tracks. Her computer was missing.

The hairs on the back of her neck stood to attention as the most gut-wrenching, sinking feeling invaded her thoughts, paralyzing her with fear and anxiety. Did Goldstein Rivers know about the transfer of money? Almost immediately, her stomach churned, and she rushed headlong into the corridor, desperate to reach the restroom. She only just made it in time.

After clinging to the toilet bowl and retching uncontrollably, she washed her face, splashing herself with cold water. She stared at her reflection in the mirror as she cleaned herself up with a dry towel.

*Thief.*

Her face appeared pasty, and she hadn't even bothered putting makeup on that morning. She was too busy worrying about her sister to bother with that. Her eyelids looked puffy from the lack of sleep and the constant tears she'd shed.

*Think, Maddie, think, Maddie, for God's sake, think.*

Her mind whirled with all sorts of useless information. Then a thought surfaced from the darkest depths, bringing light and warmth.

She'd been onto maintenance for days now about her computer, which kept crashing. That must be it. They always performed maintenance during the night. She'd just arrived too early in the morning. That was all. Any minute now and her computer would be brought back, fully functioning once more.

Patting the dry towel over her face, she breathed in and began to relax. Everything would be fine. She'd covered her tracks well. No one would find out. When she sold her house, she'd replace the money and no one would be any the wiser.

Holding her head high, she emerged from the restroom.

Two burly security guards were waiting outside, and her heart sank.

"Maddie James?"

Swallowing, she nodded. "Yes." It was amazing that her voice worked at all, knowing her career must be at an end.

"Please come with us."

Standing on either side of her, they escorted her to the elevator.

This had turned into a nightmare. Her sister was still missing, and she had secretly wired five hundred thousand dollars to a bank account who knew where.

Throughout her training and early career, they had been warned about moments like these. Their line of work opened them up to unscrupulous individuals. Blackmail was a distinct possibility. It was drilled into all investment bankers that they must involve security from the beginning, yet she hadn't followed that advice. Why? Because, when it came to her family, simple rules didn't apply. How

could she jeopardize Simone's chances of staying alive? Instinct had just taken over.

Now she would have no choice but to own up to her actions and take her punishment. If that was the only way to keep her sister alive, then she was glad she had done it.

\* \* \* \*

Keaton Rivers paced his office one more time, anger surging through his veins. How dare anyone steal from his company. But Maddie James? It seemed almost impossible that she would do such a thing. He wondered why? Was it revenge because he hadn't given her the promotion she so obviously wanted? Surely the woman wouldn't be so dishonest? Or maybe she just wanted to punish him for stepping out of line, by assuming she'd sleep with him. He still seethed on that count. The woman had made a fool of him.

Well, security was bringing her straight to his office right now. So he guessed he'd find out. He dragged a hand through his hair. Even though he'd been awake all night following the trail of money, he didn't feel remotely tired. A primal need to regain what was his pulsed inside him. He had to remind himself that whatever Maddie James had done he couldn't lash out. He had to keep a firm grip on his emotions. There would be time enough to have his revenge in court.

A knock at the door brought him face to face with the culprit. Maddie walked in, her head lowered. He nodded to the security guards, and he was left alone with her.

He walked purposefully behind his desk and sank into his leather chair. The disappointment in her actions made him put a barrier between them.

He waited a while. The silence continued uninterrupted as she stood in the center of his office and occasionally shuffled her feet.

He shook his head and spoke in a dismissive tone, “And I had such high hopes for you, Maddie.”

Her head immediately snapped back, and she looked straight at him. He saw the worry on her face—the burden of something more. Maybe she had been blackmailed. A softer tone reached his voice.

“If you have a reason for doing what you did, then please divulge it now.”

She shook her head. “I’ve nothing to say.”

Feeling exasperated, he leaned on his desk and stared at her. “Then it was all for personal gain?”

Keaton rubbed his hand across his face, and then into his hair. He let out a deep breath. Shouting wouldn’t help. “This is so disappointing. I’ve been up all night following this money trail.” He looked at his watch. “I need to have this sorted before I go on vacation later today. You should know that as soon as someone authorizes a large transaction it’s automatically flagged by the system. You were naïve to think you could hide your tracks. We’ve followed the trail all the way to a bank account in Switzerland.”

Maddie looked surprised. “You have?”

“Goddamn it, Maddie. You’re not dealing with the girl guides here. We’re professionals. Did you really think you could steal half a million dollars and just walk away with it? So, let’s make this easy for everyone. Tell us where it is now and then we can wrap this up.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Why?”

“I just can’t.”

He flipped open her personnel file. “We know all about the foreclosure notice on your house. The area where you live has some very expensive real estate, even for someone in your position. It seems you’ve been living a lifestyle beyond your means, Maddie. And you thought you’d help yourself to my money.”

“That’s not true.”

“Then what is it? You can’t have it both ways.”

"I can't say. As soon as my house sale goes through, I'll pay everything back. I promise."

The first sign of contrition made him round on her. "Is that an apology? So you just thought you'd borrow the money for a few months? Is that it?"

"What are you going to do?"

"What would you do?"

She hung her head in shame. "Call the cops."

He picked up the phone. "Good idea. Now we're thinking in tandem." His anger, now exasperated by her lack of an explanation, spurred him into action, and he began dialing.

"Please don't."

"Pardon?"

"Please don't, Keaton. I'll do anything."

Her pleading made him disconnect the call. Her submissive tone brought something in him to the surface. Something he had kept locked and hidden away for years.

He stared at her. "Anything? Do you have any idea what anything means?"

"Yes." Her hands clasped tightly together. "I have a buyer for the house. In just over a month, the sale will go through. I can pay you back then."

"So, in the meantime, you'll do *anything* to keep me from turning you in?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what that makes you, Maddie?"

"Yes."

He stood and walked around his desk. At six foot three, he towered over her small petite figure. She couldn't be more than five-four. Standing in front of her, he looked down into her trembling features. With a finger under her chin, he angled her face.

"Look at me."

Her gaze rose to his, and he saw the frightened girl in her eyes. Physical desire spun its way into his body as her pale green irises connected with his. He wanted to dominate and make her compliant to his will. He wanted to seek some sort of satisfaction for her abuse of his trust. He wanted to bury his hands in her hair and love her the way he'd wanted to since the first time he'd seen her.

"I thought you had principles?" He mocked.

"They won't do me any good now."

"No, they won't."

"I can make up for last week when I was so despicable. I can be whatever you want, whatever you desire."

"Is that so? Careful, Maddie, because my desires might not be the same as yours."

"Oh, I think we're on the same level when it comes to sex."

He shook his head, and laughed out loud. "You have no idea, do you? Vanilla sex is okay for the right occasion, but I prefer something a little more exciting."

Digesting what he'd just said, she stared directly at him. A faint blush tinged her pale cheeks. "You wanted me once. You can still have me." She paused briefly. "However you desire."

"You put a high price on..." he let his eyes sweep over her before continuing, "your services. Do you really think you're worth half a million dollars?"

He saw her wince. She was fighting for her survival, and he knew it, yet he couldn't—wouldn't—back down. He wanted his pound of flesh. Maddie had broken his trust.

"Until my house sale goes through, I haven't anything else to offer."

He stared at her. At that moment, he felt it was possible to crave and despise in equal measure. She aroused a primitive need in him. He thought of the money she'd stolen, and his heart hardened. Either way, she would pay back everything she owed him.

“Depending on how you view things, you may have just made a deal with the devil, Maddie.”



## **Chapter Three**

Maddie felt as though a whirlwind had taken over her life. Like a dervish, Keaton Rivers had seized control. Even now, as she sat on his private jet, the events of the past twenty-four hours were nothing but a blur.

How had she ended up selling herself, her soul, to him? How could she divulge the truth and risk losing her sister to the kidnappers? She had done what she had to do.

Self-preservation had also kicked in. In order to save her deep humiliation at the hands of the law, and indeed the press, she had offered herself to him on a plate.

There had been an attraction between them when they'd lunched together just over a week ago and again in her office. Otherwise, she'd very much doubt he'd have gone for it.

The relief she'd first felt when he'd changed his mind had now turned to trepidation. Did he really expect her to come willingly to his bed? Would he force himself upon her? Keaton Rivers was a man used to getting his own way. He was certainly assertive and arrogant, but she doubted he had to look far for lovers. He was an attractive man. So why had he agreed? Revenge seemed the only possible answer. Anger showed in his eyes as he'd stalked around her in the office—anger and intense disappointment.

Maddie felt it, too—anger at her predicament and anger at the kidnappers who held her sister. Where was Simone? Why had there still been no word from her? Fear kept her from telling anyone.

Frantic for any news of her sister, Maddie refused the meal the hostess served her. Instead, she spent her time staring out the aircraft window.

Occasionally, she would cast a glance at Keaton sitting across from her. He'd either be on the telephone or looking at papers. She never once saw him look at her. It was as though she didn't exist.

Well, that suited her fine. All she had to do was get through this crisis, and then move on with her life. No one, absolutely no one, would know, except the two of them. Maybe she had sold herself to the devil, but it was better the devil she knew than the long jail sentence awaiting her if she didn't.

The thought of sex with Keaton Rivers sent shivers down her spine. He'd also said he preferred unconventional sex. Her mind boggled. What had she gotten herself into? Yes, there seemed to be a mutual attraction between them, but was that enough? Surely, it would be a cold, clinical affair, with neither of them gaining anything from the experience. Perhaps he would lose interest in her proposal very quickly. It was her only hope. Or her worst nightmare.

\* \* \* \*

By the time they arrived at his ranch in Tennessee, Maddie felt exhausted. Lack of sleep, lack of news, and lack of food had all given way to a severe migraine. Keaton must have noticed her obvious distress, although he was silent during the whole of the car journey from the airport, he arranged for his housekeeper to take her immediately to her room.

The pale blue bedroom with its Shaker-style furniture was a much needed respite. Sinking into the white lace bedspread, she curled into a tight fetal ball and cried herself to sleep. Whatever the future held, she would face it tomorrow.

\* \* \* \*

Keaton had just finished his second glass of orange juice when Maddie finally joined him for breakfast. She wore a white blouse and jeans. He noticed she didn't look at him as she sat down, although, she did appear a lot more refreshed than he'd last seen her. Maddie had been practically out on her feet last night, so he'd arranged for Helena, his housekeeper, to escort her straight to her room.

"What would you like to eat, Maddie?"

"I'm not hungry," she mumbled, still staring at her empty bowl.

"You have to eat, Maddie. You didn't eat anything on the plane last night, either."

Her eyes flew to his, wide and accusing. "Under the circumstances, perhaps you'll excuse me for losing my appetite."

"Don't try to make me feel sorry for you. You only have yourself to blame for your predicament.

"And don't I know it." Her mouth pouted petulantly.

"While I have your attention, you may as well use the facilities here. There are horses, a tennis court, and a swimming pool for your entertainment. No need to feel like a prisoner. However, you will be under my direct supervision until such time as you pay back, shall we say, *the loan*." He emphasized the last two words in a derisory tone and watched her flinch.

He continued, "I've told security that you're not allowed to leave the ranch, under any circumstances." Obviously, he hadn't done any such thing. He didn't want all the staff knowing his private business, but just saying it would keep Maddie where he could keep a close eye on her.

"What's the matter? Afraid I'll disappear?"

"You're my investment, Maddie. At the moment, you're worth half a million dollars to me. I need to keep you contained until such time as you pay me back. Talking of payments, you didn't come to my room last night."

Her jaw literally dropped open. “I was exhausted last night. Besides, apart from not knowing where your room is, I thought you’d be coming to me.”

He shook his head, almost wanting to laugh out loud at her dismissive behavior, but he didn’t. “That’s not the way it works within this relationship. I do not force myself on anyone. From now on, this is how it will be. You will come to my room. You will give yourself to me freely and willingly for the duration of the night. Let’s say from midnight to seven. Is that clear?”

When she nodded, he smiled inwardly. If she came to his room and gave herself freely, then he wouldn’t feel guilty. There was no way he would force her to do anything she didn’t want to.

Maybe he’d scratch the itch he’d had for this woman, and then move on. He felt sure that once the object of desire had been attained, the spell would be broken.

“As for my room, it’s right next to yours. You can’t miss it.”

He folded the newspaper he’d been reading and placed it on the table. He shook his head. “What it is it with you James girls anyway? You’re both as bad as each other, always getting into trouble with the law. Tut, tut.”

Her head snapped upright, and she asked quickly, “Why, what have you heard?”

He pointed to the newspaper as he stood to leave. “Oh, so you don’t know. Your sister Simone was arrested in Cannes yesterday for drunk driving. It’s all over the press.”

Maddie snatched the paper up. “Yesterday? Are you sure?” Frantically, she turned the pages until she found the article—a double page spread, with pictures of Simone leaving the police station with her hands partially covering her face. A silent gasp left her lips as she stared at the photograph.

The last thing he heard as he walked from the dining room was, “How could you, Simone?” Then the sound of crockery smashed loudly against the wall before she rushed past him.

“Manners,” he called after her, as she hurriedly went outside. He wondered why she was so upset. Her sister’s misdemeanor wasn’t even in the same league as her own. So what was her problem?

\* \* \* \*

It took an immense effort to keep herself together as a young ranch hand saddled up a horse for her.

“There you go, ma’am. You’ll not have any trouble with Lucinda. She’s a fine mare.”

She hadn’t ridden since she was a teenager, but she set off at a determined gallop away from the colonial style ranch house.

The direction didn’t matter. Just so long as she was alone. The wind whipped through her hair as she urged the bay mare faster and faster. When she came to a creek, she slowed the horse down and dismounted.

Immediately, she burst into tears. Her sister had deceived her. Anger racked through her breathless body. Sinking to her knees, she hurtled several stones into the rippling water.

Eventually she could hold it in no longer, and she screamed her frustration at the top of her voice, “Simone, you fucking selfish bitch!”

When she had seen the newspaper, the initial relief that Simone was still alive was fast replaced with seething anger. Never in all her life had she suspected that the kidnapping had all been a hoax—a scam to dupe her into sending money. What her sister had done to her was evil. Pure evil.

Simone had been sponging off her for years. As someone who liked to impress, she had constantly lived beyond her means. When she started to mix with the wrong crowd, cocaine and heroin had become major factors in her life. She guessed the money was to feed her habit and to pay off her mounting debts. It was obvious that her

sister couldn't care less how she got it. *You bitch, Simone. Just wait until I get a hold of you.*

Now, because of her sister's selfish behavior, she'd become the property of Keaton Rivers. She was his to do with as he pleased until such time as she paid him back.

Angry thoughts filled her head. Jesus, what would she do to that girl when she finally caught up with her?

## **Chapter Four**

How many times had she done that? Every few minutes, she would glance at the clock on her bedside table and her heart would flip as the minute hand moved inexorably closer to midnight.

Just five more minutes, and her fate would be sealed. She'd be nothing more than a common whore. What else could you call it when she was selling her sexual services to stay out of jail?

It had been her intention not to make any effort in her appearance, but pride made her do otherwise.

Her hands were shaking as she tied the white satin robe around her naked body. Keaton Rivers would soon know her intimately. How on earth could she gain any pleasure from the experience? It would just be cold, unemotional sex—nothing more than that. The possibility of climaxing would be unthinkable.

As midnight arrived, she knew her time was up.

Her breathing increased as she opened her bedroom door and stepped out onto the landing. For some reason, she actually counted the steps to his room. Seven was her lucky number, and the irony was not lost on her.

Raising her hand, she tapped lightly on the door. She heard his rich, deep voice reply, "Enter." With trembling hands, she pushed it open, fear and excitement in equal measure.

The room was dimly lit by just one bedside lamp. Its light spilled over a huge brass bed and, picked out in golden glow, the colonial-style furniture.

Keaton sat on the bed, a newspaper in his hands. She swallowed hard. Apart from a towel around his waist, he was completely naked.

Her eyes drifted over the hard ridges and ripples of his stomach and his strong muscular arms covered with dark masculine hair. It was obvious that he was no stranger to serious workouts. No boardroom belly and three-hour lunches for this guy.

He abruptly tossed the paper aside and then looked directly at her. His gaze pinned her to the spot. Her legs shook, and she felt like a wild animal trapped in a car's headlights.

"Lock the door and bring the key to me."

The hairs on the back of her neck prickled at the deep tone of his voice. With trembling fingers, she turned the key and removed it from the lock. It was a deliberate act to show his control over her. Her hand shook as she handed him the key. He smiled as he took it from her, and then secured it on a chain around his neck. Now it would be visible whenever she looked at him, a symbol of his power and domination over her.

"You look quite the sacrificial virgin, all dressed in white, Maddie. Am I supposed to feel guilty?"

Her head jerked up to stare at him. "You must make your own judgment."

"Then let's get the ball rolling." When he stood, he towered over her. Her whole body shook as he reached out a hand and undid the tie at her waist. Her robe fell open, giving him a tantalizing glimpse of her naked body. She could clearly see her breasts rising and falling with her increased breathing. The white silk robe visibly shook.

He pulled the flimsy silk garment from her shoulders, and it fell to the floor, pooling at her feet. Now completely naked, she closed her eyes, unable to think straight.

"You have a beautiful body, Maddie. One I will enjoy fucking again and again. And I won't feel guilty, because I'll be thinking of that half a million dollars you still owe me."

He moved behind her. When his hands caressed her breasts, she jolted from the contact. Squeezing her nipples between his thumb and forefinger, he felt their weight in his hands. She felt like a piece of



merchandise that he was sizing up. Slowly, he slipped one hand down to her neatly trimmed pussy.

“Breathe,” he ordered, against her ear, as his fingers teased her clit. Up until then, she hadn’t realized that she’d been holding her breath, and she gasped for air, filling her lungs as she leaned back against his bare flesh.

“You’re as skittish as a wild filly. I’m going have to break you in gradually to my tastes.”

She closed her eyes. His hands made her wonder if she’d sold her soul to the devil. Surely, she should feel repulsed, but nothing of the kind entered her mind—scared, yes, and immense shame, too, but not repulsion.

Keaton Rivers was a powerful and attractive man. Most women would be glad to share his bed.

He nuzzled her neck, and she felt his masculine skin rasp against her cheek.

“Legs wider. I need to check if you’re enjoying any of this.”

Trapped against his torso, she did as he commanded, widening her stance as his fingers dipped into her pussy. She held her breath again, trying to be unresponsive about the whole thing. “Keaton, I need an emotional bond in order to have complete enjoyment.”

“I really hope you enjoy this time with me, Maddie, but if you don’t, I won’t be too disappointed. Your feelings are unimportant to me. You are simply servicing a debt.” He paused and then added sarcastically, “Isn’t it better being here with me, than spending your time locked up with a couple of lesbians sharing your cell?” He laughed. “They could make you do far worse things than I ever could.”

“I’ve no idea, but then I’m concerned because I have no idea what you expect of me, either.”

“Hmm.” His hand moved to her hair, where he pushed it aside to kiss the nape of her neck. “You smell so good, Maddie. Good and wholesome. By the time I’m finished with you, you’ll have a whole

new outlook on the world.” He licked the exposed skin, and a shiver ran down her spine. “Tonight, we’ll get to know each other conventionally, and then tomorrow your training will begin.”

Her heart started beating faster. He’d said it so casually, but the words were laced with intent. Just what had she gotten herself into? Images of bondage and fetish acts surfaced in her mind, and she shivered involuntarily. “Training?”

“Yes, you need to be punished for stealing from me. I have to make sure you don’t do it again. Now, I’m going to lie on the bed, and you’re going to straddle me on all fours.”

She complied with his demands, telling herself that all she had to do was switch off and think about the day she sold her house, and could pay back the money she’d stolen. *Then you can have your revenge on Simone.* Only it was hard to concentrate, as he trailed a hand down her spine in a slow, deliberate manner. She couldn’t help but respond to his touch, and her body curved away from the sensuous feeling.

His other hand smoothed a path to her pussy, where he tantalized the sensitive nub with gentle strokes of his fingers. How could she ignore his touch? When he squeezed her clit between his finger and thumb, she gasped with enjoyment.

“I know you like that,” he said confidently. “You’ve gone so wet.”

Immediately, she closed her eyes, and he admonished her. “This first time you will look directly at me until I say otherwise. Understand?”

Complying, she stared into his bright blue piercing gaze, knowing he wanted to see her reaction at all times. She wondered if he was trying to lessen his guilt. Would he feel better if he saw pleasure registered there?

As she stared relentlessly into his eyes, she almost felt hypnotized. She glanced at his mouth. He hadn’t once kissed her properly, and yet she felt she somehow knew him. Perhaps she was kidding herself,

making herself believe that this man touching her intimately wasn't a stranger to her.

When he began rubbing his thumb and forefinger over her clit again, she let out a tight moan. Surely, she wasn't supposed to enjoy it. Embarrassed, she turned away, but he spoke in a clear commanding voice.

"Look at me. I want to see everything you're feeling." Staring once more into his eyes, she felt out of control. His fingers began to slide into her pussy, and she knew she'd gone wet by how easy it felt.

The idea of sex without emotion had always kept her from sleeping around, but this felt illicit, dangerous, and exciting. Keaton Rivers was an attractive man. His body appeared perfectly honed and lay just a few inches beneath her. She felt his heat rising around her, bringing with it the heady smell of his male musky scent. Kneeling on all fours, she could feel his thighs on either side of her legs, his masculine body hair tantalizing her skin.

Her breathing increased, and she could barely contain the moans inside her lips as he finger-fucked her closer and closer to ecstasy. Almost at her breaking point, she bit down on her bottom lip.

Obviously, he must have known she was close because he withdrew his fingers, and then pulled the towel from him.

His cock looked huge, the end swollen and ready with pre-cum. Unable to comprehend what had happened, she was desperate for him to be inside her, but she kept her cries firmly locked away.

"Now we're going to get to know each other real well." He pulled her down so that she lay flat against him. Her legs splayed on either side of his. His cock just touched her moist aching flesh. The warmth and masculinity of his hard body next to hers, felt both intimate and shocking.

Her breathing increased, the short sharp breaths erratic as his cock lay poised to enter her at any moment.

He brushed the hair from her eyes. A smile almost touched his face. "Still think you need an emotional bond in order to achieve

pleasure?” His rhetorical question hung in the air between them. “I know you want it bad, but just how bad, Maddie? Let’s find out, shall we? Now, hook your legs around mine.”

## **Chapter Five**

Maddie did as he ordered, and, almost immediately, he spread her legs wider with his own. His cock invaded just an inch of her wet pussy. She needed release, and she squirmed as he held her firmly in place. A whimper of frustration escaped her lips. Being just on the edge was pure torture. The man had so much control over his own body. It frightened and amazed her. Surely, he would want his own satisfaction, but he seemed to want her complete surrender, too. He forced her legs even wider. His cock dominated her thoughts as it speared the entrance of her vagina even more.

Staring into his eyes, she finally gave in. “Keaton, just do it. I want it. You know I do. Just fuck me hard.”

“Good girl. For telling the truth, you get rewarded.”

The air left her lungs as he finally sunk inside her. Nerve endings already sensitized pulsed and rippled as his huge cock impaled her. Her body automatically arched from the intense pleasure as he stretched her wet channel to its breaking point.

Writhing in ecstasy, she moaned as he ground his length to the hilt. When he flipped her on her back, the full force of his weight behind his actions sent her spiraling into meltdown. With her hands pinned above her head, he gazed into her eyes as he began grinding his length into her.

“I know you like the idea of us joined so intimately. It really turns you on. My hard cock pumping inside you as you lie trapped beneath me.”

When she glanced down between their bodies, she saw her feminine juices coating his shaft as he sank repeatedly inside her. The

whole of his stomach flexed as he made bold inward strokes. The hairs on his body caught the light as he moved over hers.

A moan escaped her lips. He knew exactly what to say to light her fires. Leaning down, he took a nipple into his mouth and sucked hard. With her resistance failing, her whole body lifted from the bed to accept the pleasure he gave her. She welcomed the exquisite sensation as he lapped her nipple with his tongue.

Writhing beneath him, an extreme spasm gripped her insides and rippled out with an intensity that shocked her. She'd had orgasms before, but never like this. Her whimpers of satisfaction filled the quiet of the bedroom as her body convulsed and bucked involuntarily.

He kissed her then, as he drove his hard prick through the aftershocks, licking her lips as if to savor her climax. "You come so sweetly, Maddie. Now I know I'm going to really enjoy our time together."

Trapped beneath him, she stared into his eyes, fighting for breath. Aware of his hard lean body held over hers, he began thrusting even harder inside her. It was the most exquisite feeling she'd ever experienced. Nothing before had come remotely close. Surely, she should hate every minute of it. Instead, her back arched into the pleasure, loving the feeling of being dominated by such a powerful man. The key around his neck swung back and forth every time he moved, banging relentlessly against her breasts with each delicious stroke. It symbolized his power over her like nothing else could. It reminded her that she had committed a crime and was being punished. Well, if this was her punishment, she wanted more of the same.

\* \* \* \*

Keaton lay back against the pillow, his breathing hard. The sex session with Maddie had surprised him. She had surprised him. It had all started so clinically, but they'd both found enjoyment. Her cries and whimpers had really turned him on. He realized he might have

just found the perfect pupil, because she seemed to like being submissive.

“Should I go back to my room?”

“No. I may need you again.” He was harsh with her, he knew, but at the moment the money still dominated his thoughts. In reality, she should be in jail, not enjoying herself.

When she turned away from him, her shoulders heaved and he knew she must be upset. He stroked his hand along the delicious curve of her body, accentuated by the softness of the mattress, until he reached her hair, where he gathered a handful. It was so soft as it billowed around his fingers. He would never get tired of touching it. “Look, I’m still angry about the money. If you have a good reason, then say it now. Because this way is madness.”

Her blonde corkscrew curls moved as she shook her head. “You wouldn’t believe me.”

“Try me.”

“I can’t believe it myself. So you wouldn’t either.”

He wrapped an arm around her, and pulled her tight against his body. Her soft skin melted into his, as if it was always meant to be. “Maddie, I had such faith in you. I’ve admired your rise in the company. You had such excellent credentials and high principles. That time in your office, I genuinely wanted to take you out. It wasn’t about promotion or anything of the kind. I wanted to know you as a woman.”

She turned to look at him, her face highlighted by the soft glow from the bedside lamp. Her gaze locked with his, the pale green irises wide with a thousand questions that he knew she would never ask. “And how do you feel now, Keaton?”

“I’m not sure.” He let out a long slow breath, as he stared at her mouth. “I guess you wouldn’t be here if I hadn’t felt something then.”

“Then I’m genuinely sorry I’ve disappointed you. I’ll pay you back the money as soon as I can, and then we can go our separate ways.”

“Good. Until then, we can both gain something from this experience, because you do not disappoint me in bed.”

\* \* \* \*

The next morning, Maddie stared at her reflection in the bathroom mirror. She still looked the same. Had she really expected herself to look any different? Perhaps she had half expected her forehead to be stamped with the word “whore.” She didn’t feel like one, but surely that’s what she was. What else would you call a thief who had given her body away in order to stay out of jail?

Her hands clenched on the sink, and she turned from the mirror, disgusted with herself. Her cheeks burned hot as she thought of last night until she splashed her face with cold water.

Keaton had made love to her—she corrected herself—Keaton had *fucked* her three times. Each time he’d dominated her, and she’d loved every minute of it. It had been a new experience for her, climaxing every time. When she’d had sex with her previous lovers, she’d only managed to reach orgasm on rare occasions. So why was it so easy with Keaton? Perhaps it was because what they were doing together was dangerous and forbidden. Yes, sex was far more exciting when it was illicit. He had so much control over his body he seemed to be able to give her as much time as she needed. Indeed, the more powerful her orgasms, the slower he became until she was lost in peaks of ecstasy.

To begin with it had all seemed alien to her, but when they’d started talking, she’d gained a better understanding of his needs. Now she genuinely regretted the time in her office, when she’d declined his invitation to dinner. She sighed at what might have been, and then realized that Simone would have still ruined it for her anyway.

Her hands gripped the towel as she dabbed her face dry. Simone would get her just desserts. A grimace formed on her mouth. Revenge



was a dish best served cold. By the time she was finished here, she would be just about ready to seek justice for herself.

She smoothed her hands down her pale green dress, pulling it into shape, about her womanly curves. Her hair had billowed out into an impossible cloud of blonde curls. Too bad. For the first time in her life, she had quit worrying about her hair. There were more important things to worry about, like breakfast with Keaton Rivers. Just how was she going to face a man who had given her intense pleasure, but who still remained a total stranger to her?

As Maddie made her way down the wide sweeping staircase, she heard him on the telephone. His deep velvety voice, assertive and controlled, said, "Tell the board that I have contained the incident. The money is being traced and will be re-instated in due course." He listened and then spoke again. "As far as I'm concerned, the incident is closed." He chuckled, and then said, "Tell them they have my word—oh, all right, Harry Taylor always was a stickler—no, in that case I'd put the money back myself. Like I said, it's contained. Case closed. No, she won't be coming back. Just pack up her possessions and send them here. Very well, Bob."

Slipping past his open office door, she heard the phone click dead as she edged into the dining room. All this trouble because of her. If she didn't come up with the money, would Keaton use his own money to fill the shortfall? And if he did, what would he do with her?

Just as she sat down at the table, he appeared in the doorway dressed in faded jeans and a light gray T-shirt. His eyes narrowed on her, assessing her appearance. "I shall be out all day. If you need to use the telephone to find out about your house sale, then please go ahead. All phone calls are monitored, so I'll know exactly what you say." He studied her. "Remember, until you pay back the money, you belong to me. Only then will you be free to go."

His words sent a shiver down her spine, and she pushed her cereal bowl away. Her appetite had still not returned.

"I hope you'll eat something today."

“Maybe later.”

“Very well, but don’t keep it up. There’s only so much sympathy one can bestow on a thief.”

Her heart sank. Having spent the whole night together, she had hoped he’d be friendlier toward her. How wrong could she be? She guessed he despised her.

“Surely, you don’t want to control every aspect of my life?”

He walked toward her, then leaned down and whispered in her ear, “At this moment in time you should be languishing in jail, so any freedoms you still think you have are now null and void.” He placed a finger under her chin, lifting it, forcing her to look at him. Her stomach coiled tightly, not in fear, but in desire, as her eyes met with his. God help her. She wanted him to dominate her. She wanted the sheer intensity she could see in his gaze focused entirely on her. It simply took her breath away.

“Tonight we’ll start to understand what made you turn to a life of crime.” With that, he walked away.

Through the dining room window, she watched him slide into a brand new black Mustang. Within seconds, he was gone, leaving just a cloud of dust and stones in his wake. Deep down, she couldn’t help but look forward to their night together and wonder what pleasures it would bring.

\* \* \* \*

As he sped away from the ranch, Keaton reflected that Maddie James brought out the very worst in him—the part he’d always kept hidden for years. Just one look in her eyes and he was lost. He had thought that after one night, he would tire of her, making it easy to keep emotions and feelings in check. Only, Maddie was like a drug. One fix just wasn’t enough. Now he wanted more.

Needed more.

Last night had brought it home to him like nothing else could. He'd been living a lie his entire adult life. He needed to allow the person he always knew existed inside him to the surface. Otherwise, he would never be whole.

In his previous relationships, he'd always been looking for that certain excitement that only dominance could bring. He'd let all the relationships slide, floundering for him in unsatisfactory sex. He'd never wanted to pursue any of them.

Now Maddie was different.

Totally.

He knew she'd gained from the experience, too. He'd seen it in her eyes as she'd stared back: An acceptance, an acquiescence, a handing over of control.

Well, he didn't want to start becoming attached to her. There couldn't possibly be a future for them. Maddie was a thief. She'd stolen from him. He might need her submissive characteristics, but he needed trust, too. No, tonight he'd try a different tack. See if that didn't get her out from under his skin.

## Chapter Six

This time Maddie deliberately went to his room ten minutes late. She didn't like this feeling of need running through her, and she wanted to give the impression that she still had some control.

"Come in," he answered, after she'd knocked three times on his bedroom door.

After pushing the door open, she noticed that, like yesterday, the room was dimly lit with just the one bedside lamp. Only this time, Keaton was nowhere to be seen. She guessed he must be in his bathroom.

He spoke again. "Lock the door and remove the key."

Knowing the key was a symbol of his hold over her, she did as he demanded. Last night, he had kept it around his neck until the very last minute when he'd finally removed it and handed it to her. *You can go now.*

After taking the key from the lock, she moved further into the room until his voice halted her progress. "Stop."

Instantly, she complied with his instructions. Almost at once she became aware of him coming up behind her. Her heart beat frantically in her chest. Just what was going to happen to her? He unnerved and excited her at the same time.

His hand brushed into her hair, as he moved it to one side. She shivered as his lips touched the bare flesh of her neck. The heat from his body radiated through the flimsy silk gown she wore, and she welcomed it, arching back against his torso as he feathered kisses down to her shoulder. "You're late."

“I didn’t think you’d notice.” As she spoke, her voice wavered nervously.

“I notice everything. The key. Give it to me now.”

She raised her hand and he took the key from her.

“Did you arrive late on purpose?”

“No.”

“Hmm. I think you did. Apart from the stealing, we’ll have to address the lying, too.”

Her senses heightened as he stood behind her. She gasped as he tied a silk scarf securely around her eyes. “Is that necessary, Keaton?”

“Yes, Maddie, now you’ll be doubly aware of everything I say and do.”

Without sight, she would only have her sense of touch, smell, and hearing to guide her. Instantly, her breathing heightened as he began peeling the robe from her. Her body stiffened as the cool air from the bedroom feathered across her bare flesh.

“Your shyness amuses me. I already know your body intimately. Surely, you remember we fucked nearly the whole night long?”

His words were said to shock her, she knew, so she kept her mouth firmly shut. She wouldn’t be drawn into a conversation.

He touched her breast, and squeezed her nipple hard. She was just about to cry out in pain when his mouth covered the tortured peak. His tongue lashed and soothed over the sensitive flesh. The combination of pain and then intense pleasure made her moan out loud.

“Now, when I ask a question, answer me directly and truthfully. Otherwise, I may have to discipline you. Do we understand each other?”

“Yes, Keaton.”

“So did you enjoy last night?”

“Yes,” she answered honestly. This feeling of losing control only heightened her arousal more. In all her life, she had thought tender,

loving words were the only way she could achieve sexual satisfaction. It appeared she was wrong.

“Good girl.” He clasped her chin and kissed her lips. “Now we’re finally getting somewhere. Hold your hands out in front of you.”

Maddie held her arms out, and immediately they were bound with something soft, like cord or silk. Completely at his mercy, she let out a moan of opposition.

“When you’ve answered all my questions, I’ll let you go. So how do you feel now?”

“Scared, frightened.”

“Anything else?”

She swallowed hard. He must know. Surely he could see her increased breathing. If he looked into her eyes, he would know. Was that why he’d put a blindfold on her? Or maybe he didn’t want her to see his own sexual arousal?

Her nipple was squeezed even tighter. This time he didn’t let go, and she moaned in pain. “That hurts.”

“I asked if you felt anything else.”

“Arousal,” she answered quickly. “Intense arousal.” He let her nipple free, and then sucked it hard, soothing the inflamed flesh with his tongue. She couldn’t help but moan her appreciation.

“I want the truth, Maddie. Just the truth.” He pulled her toward him before roughly pushing her onto the bed. The feeling of being controlled heightened when her hands were secured above her head, onto what she assumed was the brass headboard. She pulled at the restraints.

“There’s no need to tie me up, Keaton. You’re in charge. I won’t try to escape.”

He roughly grabbed her ankles before pulling her legs apart and tying them to the bedstead.

“It will focus your mind. Besides, I told you my tastes in sex are, shall we say, unconventional. I noticed you didn’t object when I was about to call the cops.”

“No, I didn’t object, did I?” she whispered, wondering what was about to happen to her. At the moment, she longed for him to touch her everywhere. The fact that she couldn’t touch him would only heighten whatever he did.

Kneeling between her legs, she felt him lean over her. His hands cupped her face, and he kissed her lips sensuously. An object fell against her breasts, and she knew it was the key that hung around his neck.

“You do have a great body,” he murmured, as his hands trailed a path across her collarbone and down to her breasts. He squeezed both her nipples then kissed her breasts one by one, lashing his tongue over the now prominent peaks. For the life of her, she couldn’t stop her body arching toward him.

Her lips parted as his hands moved lower across her stomach, smoothing a path down, down.

Oh, God. She swallowed as his fingers slipped past her now dripping pussy, just skimming her clit, then smoothing over her thighs. She knew he would be watching every movement, every nuance of her body, as she responded helplessly to his touch.

“Now, I’ve a few questions to ask. If you lie, you get one spank. If you come, you’ll get five spanks. Bearing in mind you’ve already acquired ten spanks for being ten minutes late. You don’t really want to add anymore.”

“I didn’t know the rules, Keaton. I don’t want a spanking.” Anyway, how could she come when she was tied to the bed?

She heard the amusement in his voice. “Very well, we’ll forgo the late arrival this time, as I didn’t warn you in advance, but as we’re assuming the roles, you can start by calling me Master.”

“Yes.” She choked out the word as his hands began travelling back up her thighs.

“Yes, what?”

“Yes—” His fingers grazed across her clit, and he squeezed it momentarily until she gasped, “Master.”

Her stomach rose and fell as she panted breathlessly. Trapped where she lay, she tugged against the restraints. She was powerless to resist. It excited and frightened her at the same time.

He dipped his fingers inside her, and she squirmed from the delicious intensity of it. "It's good to know you're sexually aroused by this. Now why did you turn up ten minutes late?"

"To prove a point."

"To prove a point, what?" He clasped her clit hard, squeezing it until she gasped.

"To prove a point, Master."

"Which is?" he soothed the swollen nub, caressing it tenderly with his tongue.

The combination of alternating pleasure and pain made it hard for her to think straight. "I wanted to show that I didn't need you." A moan tore from her lips as he pressed his teeth against her sensitized clit, and she added quickly, "Master."

"But you really wanted to be here with me?" She could almost sense his smile against her pussy.

"Yes, Master."

"Why?"

Now here was a question. The answer of which eluded her. Whatever she said would feed his ego. As she sought an answer, her clit was squeezed exactly at the same time as her nipple. "Master, I don't know why. I've never known such pleasure before."

He began to soothe her clit with his tongue, lashing it closer and closer to ecstasy. Then she remembered she shouldn't come. She didn't want a spanking, too. "Master, I'm not allowed to come. Please stop."

She pulled at the restraints securing her to the headboard to try and edge away from his all-powerful tongue, but it was no use. He lapped her whole slit and sucked on her clitoris, drawing it against his teeth. When he inserted two fingers into her wet pussy, she arched up from the bed.



“No, Master. Please, stop. I’m begging you. I won’t be able to...”

He curled his fingers upwards, heightening her pleasure, caressing her G-spot. Her whole body pulled against the restraints on her arms and ankles, intensifying the feelings running through her.

“Master, I don’t want a spanking. Please...”

He continued unabated until she could hold back no longer. The dam she had placed on her emotions burst open, and the most intense orgasm flooded through her, making her pussy convulse and vibrate against his mouth.

Her cries of ecstasy pierced the still air of the bedroom. Gasping for breath, she cursed the blindfold. If she could just see, she could at least focus on something else. A cobweb, a picture, anything to take her mind off Keaton.

“You remember the penalty for coming is five spansks?”

“Yes, Master. Sorry, Master.”

“Good, you learn well. Now, do you know where the money is?”

“No, Master.”

He squeezed her clit hard. This time, because of her recent orgasm, it was even more painful.

“Master, I’m telling the truth.”

He didn’t relinquish his hold on her, and she added quickly, “I was deceived, Master.”

He soothed her clit with small strokes of his fingers. “By whom?”

Would he believe her? She had no choice but to tell him. “My sister, Master.”

“Do you expect me to believe that? I think you’re lying.”

“No, Master. I’m telling the truth.” She felt him lean forward, and he pulled the blindfold from her eyes. It took her a while to adjust to the light. When he came into focus, he was staring down into her face, and the key around his neck glinted from the lamplight.

“Is that why you acted so strongly when I showed you the newspaper?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Has she double-crossed you?”

“Yes, Master.”

“So while you’re here, doing my bidding, she’s enjoying herself in Cannes?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Are you angry with her for treating you so badly?”

“Yes, Master. My revenge will be all the sweeter.”

A faint smile tugged at his mouth. “Yes, you seem to have lost everything, but I’m not about to feel sorry for you. You still stole my money, and that will not be tolerated.”

“Yes, Master. I know.” What possible use would further explanation be? Keaton despised her. He might need her sexually, but that was all.

“Now for your punishment.” He leaned down and untied her legs “Now turn over and kneel.”

She did as he commanded. Her restraints, although still attached at the headboard, allowed her to twist onto her front.

Keaton stood to one side and showed her his hand, which he flexed in front of her. Then he pushed her shoulders down, so her head lay against her wrists on the duvet, her butt in the air. She held her breath as she prepared for the spanking.

“Trust is the most important thing, Maddie, and when you lie, you break that trust.”

The first blow swiped low across her thighs. The intensity was shocking as the pain rippled through her body. She bit down on her lower lip to stop herself from crying out.

He leaned forward and slipped a hand under her stomach, gripping her pussy hard as he inserted two fingers deep inside her.

When he spanked her again, she whimpered, wincing as the pain slashed through her. The motion rocked her body, and her clit jarred against his teasing fingers.

By the third stroke, her ass had numbed and the pain didn’t feel quite so bad. Instead, a feeling of pleasure began to mingle with the

pain. Each swipe of his hand on her butt cheeks made her tighten her ass muscles, intensifying the feel of his fingers inside her pussy.

“Liars, cheats, and thieves are not to be tolerated, and they will be made to take their punishment as I see fit. Understand?”

“Yes, Master.”

Heat began to build in her ass cheeks, and the fourth slap made her pussy clamp down even tighter onto his fingers. The motion pushed her clit even harder against his hand, bringing untold pleasure to her senses. Surely she wasn't meant to enjoy his discipline so much?

The fifth slap hit her square on the butt. She screwed her eyes tightly shut as the last slap rained down, making her yelp in the process. He soothed her reddened ass with circular strokes of his hand while the fingers of his other hand remained inside her.

## Chapter Seven

He removed the last of her restraints and pulled her into his arms. He had an overwhelming desire to comfort her, yet he was the one who had administered the punishment. All he wanted to do now was soothe her fears away. He stroked his hands into her hair as he held her tight against his body.

“It’s okay, training is over for tonight.”

“Thank you, Master.”

He gazed down into her eyes, so open and accepting. He rubbed his thumb over her lower lip and then followed with a kiss. She felt raw, passionate, and needy. He had hoped that by using the blindfold he would be immune to her feelings, but as soon as he’d looked into her eyes, she had given him exactly what he’d needed: Her compliance, her submission, her complete surrender.

“You excite me like no other woman, Maddie.” He pulled the towel from around his waist, and allowed his hard cock to spring free at last.

He entered her swiftly as he rolled her onto her back. Immediately, she arched, her breasts thrusting forwards with ripe raspberry nipples. He plucked them into his mouth, drawing them one at a time against his teeth, until she moaned out loud. He felt powerful and manly as he thrust hard inside her. She needed to be mastered and brought into line. She had to bend to his will.

She stared mesmerized at the key hanging around his neck. He knew it excited her. This power he had over her. Her lips parted and she wrapped herself around him, taking comfort now from his closeness. It made him feel needed and wanted.

Taking a handful of her hair, he wound it through his fingers. Her head tilted back, and they kissed a deep passionate kiss. A caress so raw it seemed as though their lives depended on it.

Her body tightened around his cock as he thrust deeper and deeper. Slowing the rhythm, he kissed her lips, driving his tongue into her mouth as the first of her convulsions rippled around him. He swallowed her whimpers of ecstasy, reveling in the sheer femininity of the woman beneath him.

Her skin glowed from the lamplight—the round mounds of her breasts, perfect and womanly, the tight velvet sheath of her pussy, warm and inviting. He needed this like a drug. How would he get his fix when she finally paid him back?

Casting the thought aside, he thrust harder. His balls constricted tightly until they pumped his seed deep inside her in an intoxicating rush. Panting, he lay back against the pillows and nestled her head on his shoulder. For the moment, he couldn't care less about the money, just the intense enjoyment of sharing such an incredible sexual experience.

\* \* \* \*

Over the past week, the creek had become a favorite spot. With her horse tethered beside her, she sat on the rock and stared at the shimmering water, noticing her own reflection. Did she recognize the person staring back? The person she thought she was had gone forever, and some strange woman had now taken her place—a stranger with feelings and thoughts that she'd never dreamed of.

Odd as it seemed, she couldn't say she hated her time here. The days might be long and filled with waiting for news of her house sale, but the nights were packed with intense sexual excitement. She wondered what tonight would bring and shivered, knowing that every night he would raise the stakes, delving deeper and deeper into her fantasies.

It felt peaceful here, and she lay back against the rock, covering her face with her hat to shield the sun from her eyes.

If she could just sleep for a few minutes, she felt sure she'd wake revitalized and ready for anything.

Her mind drifted to her sister. Simone had trapped her in a relationship that could only end in tears. In fact, she'd taken her life from her. Her sister had it coming to her and then some.

\* \* \* \*

So this was where she was hiding. Keaton rode his stallion into the enclosed creek bed, surrounded on all sides by leafy trees. They fluttered noisily in the evening breeze, bringing the scent of hickory as the sun dipped lower in the sky.

He might have known she'd choose his favorite spot. He, too, would often come here when he had things on his mind.

Dressed in jeans and a blue blouse, she lay on a rock, her hat covering her face, her blonde hair streaming out from under it.

She didn't rouse as he brought his stallion to a controlled halt and then dismounted. It was obvious she was sound asleep.

He felt—what did he feel other than anger at her betrayal of his trust?—a deep need to cherish and protect her. Surely these feelings were at odds with each other. But the experiences they'd shared over the last few nights had marked her indelibly on his psyche.

He had forced her to submit to his will. He had pushed her limits. He had gained her compliance and submission. By giving him those things he craved the most, he owed her at least her well-being.

He leaned down and touched her shoulder. Almost immediately, she sat bolt upright. Her eyes widened as she fought for air. In her panic, her hat fell to the ground.

He picked it up and handed it to her. "Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you."

She took the hat and fanned her face. "It's okay. I was dreaming. What time is it?"

"A little after six."

"Oh?" She looked surprised. "I must have been asleep for hours."

He felt guilty. He'd barely let her have any sleep these past few nights. He dug into his saddlebag and pulled out a bottle of water and a wrapped sandwich. He handed them to her.

"Helena tells me you haven't eaten any breakfast or lunch for that matter."

She eyed his offerings suspiciously, looking first at him and then at the food and water.

"Go on," he urged. "At least have the water. You must be thirsty."

She stopped fanning herself and placed the hat on her head, and then took the sandwich and bottle from him.

"What's the matter, Keaton? Frightened I might not be fit enough for tonight?"

Her accusation cut into him, but he wouldn't be provoked. "You might not believe it, but I do care about your health. I don't want you becoming ill."

"No, because I wouldn't be able to pay your money back in that case."

"Look, Maddie. It's eighty degrees out here. You've been gone all day without any water or food. You will become seriously dehydrated and ill if you don't start acting sensibly."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. Anyway, it's out of your hands now. You've forced me to take action. I've told the staff not to let you have a horse unless you've got food and water with you."

In exasperation, he picked up a handful of stones from the pebbled bank and began skimming them across the water. Just to spite him, Maddie would probably rather die of thirst.

"I haven't done that," she said, as she opened the bottle of water and took a sip, "since I was a child."

He hurled another stone, watching it bounce several times, before sinking into obscurity. A trail of ripples expanded out in ever-increasing circles. “What, this?”

She nodded and swallowed more of the water.

“The secret is choosing the right stone.” He hurled another, pleased that she was at least drinking something. “The flatter the stone, the better it will skim.”

“I’ll have to have a go in a minute. I must admit I do feel a little light-headed.” She opened the sandwich and began eating. “I don’t usually fall asleep during the day. Can’t think why I should now.”

He heard the sarcasm in her voice, but when he turned to look at her, all he saw was a sexy half smile on her lips as she stared back.

“Is that so?” He nodded, letting his gaze drift over her upturned face. Such a beautiful face. He couldn’t decide if her cheeks were glowing from the heat or embarrassment. He felt sure she wanted to add to the conversation. “Go on. What’s on your mind?”

“I don’t know how much to tell you. You might use it against me later on.”

“I can’t promise anything. What we know about each other will always have a bearing on our actions.” If she confided something to him, he wouldn’t be able to separate it off. “Anyway, I have the distinct feeling that you enjoyed it as much as I did.”

“Yes, but what I can’t understand is why?”

He skimmed another stone across the water. “How do you mean?”

“It puzzles me—given the circumstances we find ourselves in—why we would get intense pleasure from each other. I mean, you hate me, and I don’t really know anything about you. You’re virtually a stranger.”

“I don’t hate you, Maddie. I’m disappointed, that’s all. As for me being a stranger, perhaps we should remedy that. I’m doing some shooting tomorrow. You’re welcome to come with me.”

“Maybe.”



“Good. Last night, you found some of your inner self. All those fantasies you’ve kept hidden inside you. I just brought them to the surface. And because I took all the responsibility, you don’t have any of the guilt.”

“I suppose, only...” She finished her sandwich and took a swig from the bottle.

“If there’s something you want to discuss, then say it now. I don’t think we should have any secrets.”

“I’m scared, Keaton. What if you did something I absolutely hated? Would you stop? Having stolen an awful lot of money, I know I haven’t got much power, but...”

Her eyes looked huge, and he felt the same emotions as when he’d dominated her into submission last night. They swamped his senses, making him feel very protective of her. He wanted to soothe her fears away.

“I know it sounds crazy given the type of relationship we have, but you’re just going to have to trust me on this one.” If she didn’t get any enjoyment from it, then he knew deep down that he would stop. Though, from what she said, he realized he hadn’t reached her sexual limits yet.

She stared at him for a moment, digesting what he’d said. “But *you* don’t trust *me*.”

“You know why.”

After picking up some stones, she stood. “You’ll be pleased to know the house sale is progressing. As soon as I get the money, I’ll wire it to your account. It shouldn’t be more than a fortnight. Tops.”

“Fine.” He wondered what she would do when she left here. “Where will you go afterwards?”

“I have the urge to visit Cannes. There’s someone I need to see.”

“I don’t suppose you’ll be making it a long visit.”

“No.” She cast a stone into the water. “It will be the last time I see my sister. I’ll make it a reunion to remember always.”

Her words were laced with intent, and he knew she was seething inside. He almost felt sorry for her, but not quite. Two wrongs didn't make a right. She and her sister, Simone, were like two peas in a pod, out for everything they could get. Well, criminals often came to blows with one another when there was a lot of money involved.

Just as she cast another stone into the creek, she stumbled forward, almost falling into the water. She held her hands to her head. "God, I feel dizzy."

## **Chapter Eight**

Keaton took hold of her arm and sat her back down on the rock. Her head pounded, and it was hard to focus. He cupped her chin and looked down into her face.

“Look at me,” he ordered.

Returning his gaze was difficult; he seemed all blurred and fragmented. A hissing noise sounded in her ears, making her head spin. She gripped a hand to her forehead. “I guess I overdid it with the sunbathing.”

“You’ve probably got heatstroke. Drink some more water.” He opened the bottle and handed it to her. “You must be dehydrated. Now do you see why you should take water with you at all times?”

Feeling suitably chastised, she nodded and sipped obediently from the bottle. The white shirt he wore fluttered in the breeze as he stared at her. He looked so manly in his jeans and black cowboy hat—so incredibly powerful, masculine, and strong. Feeling a little intimidated, she turned away from his striking blue gaze. He simply excited the hell out of her.

After a few minutes, he said matter-of-factly, “We need to get you back to the ranch. Let’s see if you can stand.”

When she stood, her legs gave way and she fell into his arms as the dizziness returned. “I’ll be all right in a minute.”

“No. You’ll have to ride with me. If you refuse to eat and drink properly, this is the result.” He sounded irritated as he untied her horse and tethered it to his own.

“Is it absolutely necessary?”

“It is. If you pass out on the way back, at least you won’t fall off and hurt yourself.” He scooped her effortlessly into his arms and placed her on the horse. Within seconds, he mounted behind her and wrapped one arm securely around her waist. When he leaned forward and took the reins, his hard body pressed against hers. Over the last few days, he’d dominated her every waking thought. He’d even dominated her dreams. She reveled in his male musky scent as he turned the horse and headed back to the ranch.

“What’s that place called?” she asked as she leaned back against his torso.

“Cold Creek Crossing.”

“I like it there. I’ve gone there every day since I arrived.”

He wrapped her more firmly in his arms and rested his chin on top of her head. “Yes, it’s one of my favorite places on the ranch, but there are others, too. We’ll have to go for another ride and I can show you them before you leave.”

“Yes, I’d like that.”

Their relationship seemed to have shifted slightly. For the first time, she felt that Keaton might actually care for her. Well, at least her health and safety. As he held her in his arms, she felt secure, and she leaned against his muscular torso, enjoying the way his body touched hers from her shoulder blades down to her thighs. It was a perfect fit.

He guided the stallion back along the track that would eventually lead to the ranch house. The ground was parched, with just the occasional brush and bush breaking the monotony. Tumbleweed rolled past in the warm breeze that blew into their faces.

“So how come you got into financial difficulty with your house?”

She sighed. If he wanted to know the details, then she’d tell him. “I had a long-term relationship with a city banker. Last year, he decided that I focused too much on my own career and left.”

“That’s too bad.”

“It was my own fault really. I spent too much time on my job and not enough time with him. After he left, I started having difficulty with the payments.”

“So he didn’t help?”

“No. He knew how much I loved that house. I think it was payback time for all the missed dinners and late phone calls.”

“So, in the space of a year, you’ve lost everything.”

“Yes, thanks for reminding me, Keaton. When I leave, I won’t have anything. Not even my self-respect. Perhaps you could lend me the bus fare out of here.”

“As bad as that?”

“Yes, as bad as that.” Her mind focused on her sister, and anger seethed inside her. Her head hurt even more as she tried to figure it all out. It seemed impossible to comprehend that she’d lost everything. Teardrops fell from her eyes, running down her cheeks to converge around her mouth. There was no way she’d let him know she was crying, so she stopped herself from wiping them away.

It seemed to be getting hotter, and she struggled for breath. The dizziness returned, and as if in slow motion, she felt herself falling, falling. She just hoped it would be a soft landing.

\* \* \* \*

Without warning, she slumped forwards, and her head touched the neck of their mount, Apollo. Luckily, Keaton had a firm grip around her waist. He pulled her back against him. Holding her in his arms, he removed her hat and looked down into her face. Tears stained her cheeks, yet he hadn’t known she was crying. He guessed she’d deliberately kept it from him. Obviously she didn’t want his sympathy. Or maybe she thought he had none to give.

He withdrew his cell phone from his jeans and made a call.

“Helena, it’s Keaton. You’d better get the doctor. Maddie is suffering from heat exhaustion.”

*"I'll get him straight away, sir."*

*"We'll be back in ten minutes."*

He returned the cell phone to his pocket, and urged Apollo into a canter.

Something didn't sit right with him. Why had Maddie jeopardized a career she so obviously loved? She'd been so dedicated, too. She'd even lost her partner over it. However, she'd told him she really loved her house. Maybe that had caused her to turn to crime. He supposed she'd do anything to keep up the payments. He shook his head. No, there was more to this than he first realized. He would make a point of getting to the bottom of it. When she felt better, he'd find out a little more about her sister, Simone.

\* \* \* \*

The rest of the evening was just a blur. She'd been vaguely aware of Keaton carrying her up to her bedroom, and then the doctor had arrived. He'd prescribed bed rest and plenty of fluids.

Later, she had wondered if Keaton would still expect her in his room, but Helena, his housekeeper, had brought word with a hot cocoa that he would see her at breakfast the next day.

She realized that Keaton Rivers was firm but fair, and that he'd looked after her. He was reading his newspaper as she eased herself into the dining chair the next morning.

"Feeling better?" he asked.

"Much." He was staring at her empty cereal bowl, and she knew he was watching to see if she would eat something. This time she had learned her lesson. If she was going to get her revenge on Simone, she needed to be fit and healthy.

Leaning forward, she picked up a container of cereal and loaded her bowl with it.

Keaton folded his newspaper and relaxed back against his chair. She guessed he'd half expected her to still put up a fight.

“Thank you for being so understanding yesterday.” She poured on milk and began eating. “I’ve learned my lesson. If I don’t eat and keep from wallowing in self-pity, I might not be fit enough to seek out my sister and give her a good hiding.”

He nodded and smiled. “Good. I’ve read some interesting articles about your sister, Simone.”

Maddie’s attention sharpened, and she lifted her head to look at him. “Is there something in the newspaper about her?”

He shook his head. “No news of her today.” She relaxed slightly, and Keaton continued, “I just wondered if any of the rumors about her were true.”

Maddie spooned some cereal to her mouth. “Which ones? There’s been plenty of stories circulating.”

He drummed his fingers on the table as he stared intently at her. “The wild parties, for one?”

“True.” Why should she lie? Simone was the last person she wanted to protect.

“And what about the drugs? Was there any truth in that?”

Maddie nodded, a cynical smile pinned to her lips. “Absolutely true.” She pointed the spoon at him. “What you have to realize is, Simone is completely out of control. She’s spoiled and has an ego the size of Texas. When she fell in with the wrong crowd...” She thought for a moment. “In this case, the wrong crowd was not some low-lives from the rough end of town, but highly respectable professional people who indulged in, shall we say, recreational cocaine. Amongst other illegal narcotics.”

“Figures. So did she have enough money to fund this extravagant lifestyle?”

“At first she did, but when she didn’t turn up for castings and major bookings, the work dried up. She still might be famous, but it’s more for what she does outside the modeling industry now.”

He stared at her. His blue gaze held her entranced. “And did she ask you for money? Is that why you couldn’t keep up with the payments on your house?”

“Partly. At first I wanted to help out, at least to see if I could get her into rehab. It did work, but the people she became involved with sought her out.” She shrugged. “I guess the rest is history. So, yes, when I put my house up for sale, she had a big part to play.”

“Now I can see exactly what drove you to steal the money.” His lips compressed together, and she had the distinct feeling that he was annoyed with her. He now had the perfect reason why she’d stolen the money. He rose from the table. “I said yesterday that I would be going shooting. A little target practice first. Would you like to come?”

If she turned him down, she might never be asked again, and rattling around the ranch all day on her own was a lonely experience. Maddie had always been more of a social animal.

“Thank you, I’d like that.”

“Can you shoot?”

She shook her head. “I know nothing about guns.”

“Good, then I will enjoy teaching you the correct way. I’ll be leaving in,” he looked at his watch, “a half hour.” With that, he left the room.

Maddie wondered if she had done the right thing by accepting his invitation, then shrugged her shoulders. What did it matter? Surely, he wouldn’t have asked her if he didn’t want her to come. She just couldn’t shake the feeling that he had something more to say.

\* \* \* \*

Keaton watched as Maddie emerged from the ranch wearing jeans and a multicolored chiffon blouse. She looked much better than she had yesterday.

He remembered what he had learned this morning about her sister, Simone. Why would a sister be so selfish? And why hadn’t Maddie



told him the whole truth? Well, later on he would enjoy getting to the very bottom of this sorry mess.

He opened the passenger door to the black Mustang and she slid inside, revealing the swell of her ample cleavage as she leaned forward.

Yes, tonight he would get to sample everything that Maddie had to offer. He'd make it a night to remember in more ways than one. There was something in particular that he wanted to show her, something that he would enjoy surprising her with.

He must have been smiling as he settled into the seat next to hers, because she commented, "You seem in good spirits."

He turned to her, focusing on her pale green eyes. "I am. I've just discovered something rather interesting."

"Oh?"

"Hmm." If he wasn't careful he'd let the cat out of the bag and ruin the surprise element. He gunned the car into life, reveling in the heady offbeat sound of the V8. "I've just shed some new light on a business agreement, Maddie. That's all."

He drove for several minutes down the dusty dirt track, all the while aware of the woman sitting next to him. Occasionally, he caught a whiff of her perfume, reminding him how incredibly feminine and soft she was.

Eventually, they reached his private shooting range and parked the car. He stilled the engine, and then turned to Maddie. "Now, we'll be firing live bullets, so you need to follow everything I say to the letter. Understand?"

Her eyes looked huge, and he knew the idea of live rounds scared her.

"Perhaps it's best if I just watch."

"Maybe. We'll see. There's no reason to worry if you follow everything I say." He stroked a hand into her hair and tucked a few stray tendrils behind her ear. He noted with some satisfaction that she accepted his touch without surprise or by pulling away. Maddie was

clearly warming to the way he worked. And because she was neither submissive nor combative once out of the bedroom, he realized he was warming to her, too.

“Come on, I’ll show you around.” He guided her to the range. “I had this built a couple of years ago.” His staff had prepared a table with an awning earlier in the morning. It gave dappled shade to the two chairs placed beneath it. He pointed to the excavated earth that lay sculpted around a pit dug into the side of the hill and allowed a line of paper targets to stand safely in a row.

“It’s very impressive, Keaton.”

“It’s all fully automated.” He pressed a button on the table and the targets fluttered like drying laundry toward them. Within seconds, he had them returning to the range.

“Make yourself comfortable. It’s been quite a while since I was last here. Work pressures see to that. Let’s see if I’ve still got the knack.”

## Chapter Nine

Maddie relaxed into the soft seating, glad for the shade that the awning gave. Keaton had brought a cooler box full of drinks and food, and she opened a bottle of sparkling mineral water. This time she'd make sure she didn't dehydrate.

The light breeze that blew in occasionally from the west kept her cool, although whenever she looked at Keaton, her temperature rose. What was it with jeans, cowboy boots, and Stetsons, anyway? The man looked like he'd just stepped off the movie set of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Every so often he'd fire off a quick succession of rounds, and then bring the targets up for inspection, some of which he'd replace. He seemed meticulous about safety. The barrel of his shotgun, when not in use, was left open and pointed at the ground. The earlier anxiety she'd felt at the mention of live bullets had eased somewhat. There was something quite macho and exciting about guns that turned her on, even though she would hate to admit it. However, she definitely had second thoughts about having a go herself.

After a flurry of bullets, he turned and started to walk back to where she sat. "We'll have some lunch, and then you can have a go with the hand gun. It will be lighter and easier for a woman to handle."

He placed his shotgun back in its gun case, along with the rounds of live bullets, and then took the seat beside her. His long legs stretched out as he relaxed back in the chair.

"How did you do?"

“Rusty at first, but I soon got back into it. Working in the city means I miss out on all of this. I’d much rather be here at the ranch, close to nature. I’m a natural cowboy at heart.”

“Then why don’t you?”

“What? Give up my position at Goldstein Rivers?” He opened the cool box and handed her a sandwich.

“Yeah, why not?”

“I took over as CEO at Goldstein Rivers when my father died. I hold the majority of shares in the company. What I say goes, and all my employees know it. I’m not ready to hand over power just yet, although the idea of breeding horses on this ranch appeals to me. It’s something I may do when I retire.”

Maddie peeled the foil from her sandwich. *God, pastrami again.* She wrapped it back up and placed it on the table.

Keaton didn’t miss a trick. “I hope you’re going to eat that.”

She shook her head. “I hate pastrami.”

“But you ate it yesterday.”

“I did it to please you.”

He looked amused. “You ate something you hate in order to please me?”

“I thought that was the type of relationship we had, although I have to admit, I was extremely hungry at the time.

He shook his head, a faint smile on his lips. “Now we’re getting somewhere. I can’t make you do anything you don’t want to do.”

“Is that so?”

“Believe me, I can’t. What happens between us is by mutual consent. I enjoy dominating you, and you enjoy being dominated by me.”

A tight coil of desire centered low in her stomach at the way he looked at her. His bright blue gaze burned into her very being. My God, what did he have in store for her this evening?

Breaking eye contact, he reached into the cool box and fished out another sandwich. He pushed it toward her. “I hope you like tuna.”

“I do, but how do you figure mutual consent when I have little choice in the matter?”

“It’s the way your body responds to mine. You like what I do, and you’re already looking forward to tonight.”

Maddie felt her cheeks flush with heat, and she hurriedly turned her attention to her food. Keaton made it worse when he laughed out loud. Thankfully, he just left her to drown in her own embarrassment because she knew what he’d said was absolutely true.

\* \* \* \*

He lifted the handgun from the case and grabbed some live cartridges. “Come, Maddie, it’s time to teach you how to shoot.”

He waited for her to come to the center of the range and then held up the gun. “Now, this is a forty-four Magnum. At the moment, there aren’t any rounds in it, so it’s perfectly safe.” He showed her the empty chamber and then handed it to her.

She held it gingerly as though it was about to explode. “It’s very heavy, Keaton.”

“Yes, it carries quite a kick, too. It’s the exact gun that Clint Eastwood had in the Dirty Harry movies.” He laughed out loud and then said, “You remember the one. ‘Make my day punk,’” in his best Clint Eastwood voice.

He stood behind her and directed her. “Now, using both hands, take the weight of the gun in your dominant hand. That’s it. Stand with your legs shoulder width apart, your left leg slightly forward.” He heard her gasp as he gently kicked her legs into position with his feet. *God, she smelled good this close up.* “Raise your arm until your elbow is almost straight. That’s it, good girl. Now line up the two sights on the target.”

“Feel happy?” he asked when she’d followed his instructions.

She nodded.

“Now gently squeeze the trigger. Don’t jerk it.”

The soft click of the trigger being pulled belied the power that could be unleashed.

“Now, let’s try it with a live round. Keep the gun pointing down at all times until you raise it to the target, okay?” He placed a live bullet into the chamber and handed it back to her.

“Keaton? Do you think it’s wise handing me a loaded gun when I still owe you half a million dollars?”

She said it so casually, but he couldn’t help but hear the irony in her voice.

“Don’t worry, I’m not about to step into your line of sight, and somehow I don’t think you’re the murdering type. Now remember what I told you. Take your time, and when you’re ready, take aim and squeeze the trigger.”

When Maddie lifted the gun, he saw she had difficulty stopping it from shaking due to a combination of its weight and her anxiety.

She sighed and let her arms down. “I guess you were right. I can’t do it. It scares the hell out of me.”

“Shall I help you?”

“Would you? I know I’m being a girly, but I’ve always had a fear of guns.” He heard the worry in her voice.

“It’s okay.” He moved behind her, pressing his chest against her back. He could feel nervous tremors racking through her body, and he couldn’t decide whether it was because of his close proximity or the gun. “Shh. Now raise the gun again, and I’ll squeeze the trigger for you.”

He ran his hands down her arms, enjoying the response as she shivered from his touch. He cupped her hands in his as she held the gun and pressed his body firmly against her back. “Now line it up with the target and breathe in. When you breathe out, I’ll squeeze the trigger, okay?”

Regaining her composure, she nodded. Just as she began to exhale, he pulled the trigger. The loud bang had her backing into him

even more. It made him feel needed, and he wrapped an arm possessively around her waist.

“Wow. That has some kick to it.”

“Yeah, it’s probably a little too powerful for a woman. Want another go?”

She shook her head. “No, I don’t think my shoulder will stand any more.” She made to move, but he held her more firmly around the waist.

“Not so fast. How does it feel to have something so potent and explosive in your hands?” he whispered against her ear.

A strangled moan escaped her lips, and he knew she’d caught the double meaning to his words. He smiled to himself. He’d push her just a little further.

“I’ve got something equally hard as steel for you tonight. I know you’ll enjoy it.”

He knew he’d hit his mark when she breathed deeply and lowered her head. “Keaton, I can’t think straight when you talk like that.”

“You don’t need to think. You just need to feel.” She ignored what he’d said and handed the gun back to him. “Do I unnerve you, Maddie?”

“You know you do.”

A moan escaped her lips as he slipped a hand inside her blouse and gently caressed her breasts, tugging at her nipples before placing the barrel of the gun between her cleavage.

“You’re frightening me, Keaton. Please don’t do that. Is it loaded?”

“Yes. It wouldn’t be exciting if it was empty. Go on, admit it, Maddie. The feel of a loaded gun between your breasts really turns you on. It makes you feel alive.”

“Yes, it does, but you’re freaking me out.”

He laughed. “You protest too much. I know you like the feel of it next to your skin.” Satisfaction flooded through him as she ground her ass back against his hard cock.

Taking the gun from between her breasts, he placed it on the table. He smoothed his hands down to her jeans and unbuttoned the waistband. When he teased his fingers into her panties, a small animal cry left her lips. Her pussy was soaking wet. "I'm so glad I turn you on, Maddie," he whispered gently into her ear.

The words, "Oh, fuck," hissed from his lips as her fingers explored his throbbing shaft through the material of his jeans. It was the first time she had ever touched him intimately.

"I know I turn you on. Do you want me to fire this gun, too?" Her strokes became bolder as she caressed his hard cock, feeling its thickness beneath the rough material of his jeans.

"Careful, Maddie," he said. "This has a potent kick, too."

Her fingers squeezed his balls, and he closed his eyes, enjoying the moment between them.

Taking his hand from her pussy, he stopped her progress. He didn't want her gaining control. "You're going to get into some serious hot water tonight. I shall enjoy showing you the error of your ways."

"Is that a promise?"

"Bet on it, lady."



## **Chapter Ten**

It was with some trepidation that Maddie knocked on Keaton's door. She had the feeling that she would regret her boldness earlier in the day.

She had just wanted to gain some control, and it had worked up to a point. Keaton had responded to her overtly sexual touch, and it almost felt like a normal relationship. Only, he'd soon stopped her. She guessed the control aspect was what made him tick, and it certainly heightened her sexual arousal whenever he used it.

His deep voice called out from behind the door. "Come in." This time when she walked into the room, although dimly lit, it had a large flat screen television at the end of the bed. When she closed the door, she remembered to take the key out of the lock.

He emerged from the bathroom. As usual, a towel was tied around his waist. "Take off your robe," he ordered, "and then come over here and kneel on the mattress facing the end of the bed."

She did as he commanded, the effects of adrenaline making her legs tremble as she did so. Truth be known, she wanted and craved his touch so much it almost hurt. She handed him the key and watched, mesmerized, as he secured it to the chain around his neck.

He walked to the bottom of the bed and faced her. "Hold out your hands."

Maddie saw the soft cord held in his grip. "Please don't tie me up, Master. I'll do anything you want."

He leaned forward and roughly took her hands in his. Holding them together, he began binding her wrists. "This intensifies whatever

I do to you. It makes you more aware of everything. Now don't argue with me again. Understand?"

"Yes, Master. I'm sorry, Master."

After restraining her hands, he looped a three-foot length of rope around her bindings and secured her to the end of the bedstead.

Her heart rate increased immediately. There was no escape now. His eyes connected with hers as he tested the fastenings. A burning intensity showed in his gaze, and she had the distinct feeling he was angry with her.

"First, we're going to watch the television. Then we shall discuss what we've seen. Then I will administer your punishment."

"Punishment?" She saw the look on his face and immediately added, "Master, what punishment?"

"You'll see." He knelt on the mattress behind her and pulled her on to his lap. "Comfortable?" he asked, holding her possessively around the waist.

"Yes, Master," she replied weakly, knowing he was in full and total control of her.

He flicked a switch on the remote and the television clicked on. At first, she wondered if he was going to show her a porn movie. She guessed it would be heavy with domination and submission as that seemed to be what aroused him the most. However, as soon as the screen flickered into life, she recognized her sister, Simone, being held hostage. Her whole body tensed as she watched. Strange how she could see the overacting by her sister now. At the time, she'd been convinced it was real. Even the whole set looked fake and overdone, and when the knife cut her skin, she could now clearly see it was no more than a crude magician's trick.

The screen went dead, and Keaton remained silent. She was just aware of his heavy breathing filling the space between them.

The hairs on the back of her neck rose when he eventually spoke.

"Things could have been so different, Maddie. Why didn't you show this to me when you came to my office?"

“I couldn’t, Master. I feared for Simone’s life.”

“You’re well aware of company policy. You should have implemented it.”

“Master, it’s different when it’s your own family. I was scared. Now that I’ve seen it again, it does look staged, but at the time I was sick with worry.”

He let out a long, slow breath. “Your sister is something else. A nasty, manipulative piece of work.”

“Yes, Master, just wait until I disown her face to face. It will be a day to savor.”

“I know you’re angry, but I’m angry with you, too.”

“Why, Master? You have the truth now. You know I didn’t steal the money for myself. I did it because I thought my sister would be killed.”

He tucked a stray hair behind her ear. “I can forgive you for the stealing, but I can’t forgive you for not trusting me with the truth. Can’t you understand that I like you? All this could have been avoided. While your sister is spending my money, I might add, we’ve been wasting a lot of time. I’m sorry, but you need to be disciplined once and for all, and then we can move on. Twenty spanks ought to do it.”

“Please, Master, you don’t have to.” Maddie was worried now at the seriousness to his voice.

He thought for a moment. “Very well. This time I will let you choose. You can have either the punishment or a lesson in self-control. If you fail the lesson in self-control, you will still receive the punishment. The choice is yours.”

The idea of receiving twenty spanks made Maddie say, “I’ll choose the self-control lesson, thank you, Master.”

Her relief was short-lived as he produced a large metal phallus. The cold steel touched her breast as he rubbed it between her cleavage, and she shivered involuntarily. It reminded her of the gun earlier in the day, and she knew then that his meticulous character

meant he'd planned everything in great detail. He simply thrived on control.

As she squirmed away from the exquisite feelings, her body pushed further back into his. She could feel the masculine hair on his legs and chest rasping against her naked flesh.

"If you come before I say you can, then...I will redden your cute little bottom in no uncertain terms."

"Please don't, Master."

She cried out as he trailed the sex toy down to her pussy and slowly pressed it against her clit. The cool metal made her jolt on contact, and she writhed against his torso. This was so unfair. Surely she would lose.

"No, Master. Please don't, Master. Please don't spank me again. I promise I'll always tell the truth from now on."

He trailed it back up to her breasts and circled each nipple in turn. He moved it to her mouth. "Now lick the end properly. It will make it far easier to insert this nine-inch baby between your legs."

Maddie sucked it provocatively into her mouth as though it were his penis. It felt huge as the bulbous end pushed past her lips and pressed against her tongue. A tight coil of nervous energy centered low in her stomach at the idea of it deep inside her pussy. He smoothed the toy back down her body with excruciating slowness, lingering on her belly button, before touching it once more against her clit.

She held her breath and counted silently to herself, one—two—three—anything to keep her mind from what was happening. A cry escaped her lips as he slid it against her moist aching flesh. Her whole body arched as it entered her slowly. The coldness of the metal phallus felt in complete contrast to the unbridled heat of her aching wet pussy.

He began teasing her clit with the fingers of his other hand as he pushed the sex toy fully home.

“I’ve been thinking about doing this all day,” he whispered against her ear. “The cold steel shaft slipping so easily inside you. I just knew you’d choose the lesson over a spanking.”

A moan tore from her lips as he began moving it inside her.

She cried out, “Please, Master, don’t make me come. I mustn’t.” She panted as she tried to keep the tide at bay. Squirming away from him, she pulled on the restraints. “Help me, Master, please,” she begged, knowing that a few more strokes of his fingers would send her over the top.”

“Breathe,” he ordered, behind her. “Deep breaths. Divert your attention to another part of your body.”

All she could think of was to bite down on her lower lip hard. The pain eased the imminent climax and pushed it further back in her mind. Keaton removed his fingers from her clit and clasped her around her stomach as he held her tightly against his chest. His other hand pumped the metal phallus repeatedly inside her. Just on the point of giving in to the sensual pleasure, he pulled it from her aching pussy, and she lay gasping against him.

“Well done. For keeping control of your body, you get rewarded.”

“How, Master?” she asked breathlessly, grateful that the spanking was no longer on the agenda.

He shifted her forwards, and she felt him remove the towel from around his waist. She held her breath.

“Now grip the brass railing in front of you and hold it tight.”

She did as he asked, and almost immediately she felt his hard shaft pressing at the entrance to her pussy. Her whole body arched as his thick cock seated to the hilt inside her. Nerve endings already sensitized swelled and rippled from the delicious intensity.

Both his hands cupped her breasts, and he pulled her back, making her body arch like a bowstring as he began pounding into her. “You like that?”

“Yes, Master.”

His one hand slipped to her clitoris, his fingers sweeping across it with bold strokes.

“And that?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Maybe you prefer to be fucked harder?”

“Yes, Master. Fuck me harder, please.” She couldn’t believe she’d said it, but all her inhibitions were gone. She wanted sex with Keaton to be full on. It made her feel alive for the first time in years.

He began pumping harder, his long hard shaft sliding from tip to base over and over. With her back arched, her whole body stiffened from the most intense pleasure she’d ever known. An almost painful convulsion began to grow with each delicious inward stroke he made. Keaton was servicing her body as never before, building the moment with manly precision. His hands dipped to hold her firmly by the hips.

The wave grew in intensity until it gripped like an iron fist at her very core, sending spasm after spasm of pleasure pulsing through her body. She screamed out, “Oh, my God,” as her orgasm finally smashed through, her pussy convulsing and milking his cock with a potent ferocity that shocked her. Her climax became monumental in its entirety. On the point of collapsing against the bed, she became aware of Keaton spilling his hot seed deep inside her with a low guttural growl as he, too, gave in to instinct.

“Untie me please, Master. I need...”

## **Chapter Eleven**

He heard the urgency in her voice, and then her words trailed away.

“Have I hurt you?” Immediately, he leaned forward and removed the restraints, noticing the reddened marks they left behind on her wrists. He rubbed his hands over them. “I’m sorry. I’ve hurt you, haven’t I?”

Her eyes lifted to his, and he felt his heart constrict. At that moment, she looked like the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen. Still glowing from her recent orgasm, she had a vulnerability he hadn’t witnessed before.

“No, I’m fine.” She made to turn away, but he stopped her progress. He clasped her chin with his finger and thumb and tilted her face so she would look at him once more.

“What were you about to say? What do you need?”

She shook her head and lowered her gaze. “It doesn’t matter.”

He watched her bite on her bottom lip. “Look at me.” She raised her eyes to his. “Tell me, Maddie. I want to know.”

“This relationship we have. I’m finding it difficult to know how to behave. I so wanted you to hold me afterwards. I’m sorry, Master, I forgot my place.”

He realized how selfish he must seem. She met his requirements to perfection. She was exactly the type of woman he needed. Surely, he should show her more compassion and kindness.

“Come,” he said, lying down on the bed. “I’ll hold you now.” He stroked his hand through her hair as she nestled against his shoulder. “Better?” he asked.

“Much. Thank you, Master,” she whispered, barely a sigh.

It was funny how tender he felt toward her, now that he’d found out the truth about her sister’s involvement.

“Look, things have changed between us. Now I know why you stole the money, it’s altered my opinion of you. I just wish you’d told me sooner. I want us to get along. I want you to feel free to discuss things with me.” He let out a long slow breath. “Only there’s obviously a right time and place. As you know, the control aspect heightens my sexual arousal, and I think yours, too.”

He looked down into her eyes, and she caressed the side of his face with her fingertips. “It brings me more pleasure than I could ever have imagined, Master.”

A deep satisfaction flooded his body that she enjoyed the experience, but he sensed a wariness to speak her mind. “Lie on your stomach, and I’ll give you a massage.”

She turned over and he began kneading her shoulders with his fingers and thumbs, working on the knots clearly evident there. Using his thumbs, he pressed them into the groove of her spine and smoothed them over her back in bold upward strokes.

“How does that feel?”

“Fabulous, Master.” She groaned as his hands found a tight knot. He smiled to himself. She had the most delectable soft skin, and the cutest butt, ripe like a juicy peach. He found it almost irresistible not to squeeze and caress it whenever he saw it. He trailed his hands down to the groove of her ass, running his fingers over her tight little puckered hole. He noticed that she clenched her buttock cheeks in complete opposition.

“Has anyone ever touched you here before?”

“No, Master,” was her short sharp breathy reply.

“Then I will get you used to the idea, but not tonight. We need to talk.” He smoothed his hands back up her spine and massaged the slender muscles of her neck. “Right, sit up now. We’ve got things to discuss.”



He propped himself on the bed and waited until she rested back against the pillows. He took the chain from around his neck and held it up. The key to the bedroom door swung on the end of it.

“This is a symbol of my control over you. When I remove it, you are free to say and do as you wish, but when I wear it, I expect your complete obedience. Understand?”

Maddie nodded. Was it relief or disappointment he saw in her eyes, as he placed it down on the bedside cabinet? To him, it seemed the most obvious way for them to understand each other better.

“What do you want to discuss, Keaton?”

“Our problem.”

“Oh?”

“Your sister.”

“It’s not your problem. It’s mine. I can hopefully pay you back in less than a fortnight.”

“It is my problem, Maddie. As far as I’m concerned, that money is mine, and we’re allowing your sister to fritter it away. In which case, you’ll soon be left with nothing.” The idea of her being penniless because of her sister’s selfish way of life made anger flare inside him.

“What do you propose to do?”

“I think we should both fly to Cannes tomorrow. We can take my private jet. I want the money back.” He dragged a hand through his hair in irritation and corrected himself, “*My* money back, just as much as you do. That way you won’t be left completely destitute by all of this.”

“I appreciate your help, Keaton, but she won’t be that easy to find. I don’t even know where to start looking for her.”

“I have contacts all over the world, Maddie. I’ve already had inquiries made in Cannes. She’s been tracked down to a hotel just on the outskirts. The reports I’ve received tell me she’s living a life of luxury. And on my fucking money, too.”

“Really?” Her mouth opened in surprise. “Why are you doing this for me?”

“Because.” He paused for thought. “I don’t like what your sister has made you become.” He raised his hands and then let them drop, unable to find the right words. Whatever he said would sound harsh. “Look, I needn’t spell it out for you. We’re in this together whether you like it or not. We both want to get our hands on your sister, but not for the same reasons. I want my money back, and you want to make her pay for the trouble she’s put you through.” He knew there could be no future for them. They had both used each other, but maybe by doing this, he could at least assuage some of his own guilt. Besides, he just couldn’t bear to think of her having nothing left.

“Maddie, before we go our separate ways, it’s payback time.”

\* \* \* \*

Maddie marveled at what a difference a day could make. Within twenty-four hours, they’d flown over to France and had booked into the Hotel Martinez, located in the bay of Cannes. She stepped onto the balcony and looked up the tree-lined avenue. The palms gently fluttered in the hot sea breeze. The golden sand and azure blue sea glistened just a few hundred feet in front of her. The French Riviera would be a superb place to enjoy under happier circumstances.

She turned and stepped back into the chic hotel suite. The walls, decorated in gold and cream, complimented the dark wood furniture. The large bed, draped in the finest golden satin, looked very inviting. No expense had been spared. The bathroom boasted twin sinks, with a separate shower stall and large luxurious sunken bath.

Keaton had made all the arrangements. Nothing had been left to chance. Because of Simone’s recent arrest, they knew her sister wouldn’t be able to leave Cannes. The court case was due to be held in two days time, so there was little chance of her disappearing into the ether.

It had surprised her that Keaton had wanted to help, but she’d put it down to his controlling nature. She guessed he couldn’t bear to

think of her sister spending all his money. The fact that he was helping her in the process was just a by-product. Keaton, she guessed, couldn't think that highly of her. Surely she'd acted like a whore.

On the other hand, she was beginning to have strong feelings for him. She knew they'd be parting in just a few weeks time, and she wondered how she'd feel when the time came for them to go their separate ways. Already, her heart told her that it wouldn't be easy. Becoming attached to Keaton was something she hadn't counted on and certainly the last thing she'd expected.

Maybe if she'd hated every minute in his company, then it would be easy, but the man had given her untold sexual pleasure night after night. She wished she had a tough exterior, just like him.

After kicking off her shoes, she lay on the bed and waited for him to come back from his business meeting. Then the gloves would be off, and she would finally come face to face with her sister. Her hands clenched into tight fists. All this trouble they'd been put to because of Simone. Keaton was right. It was payback time. She could feel her blood begin to boil. Simone had ruined everything: her career, her relationship with Keaton. Her whole life had been destroyed. Her sister had made her into a whore. If she was a whore, then what did that make Keaton? He was an extremely handsome man who could sleep with any woman he wanted. He certainly didn't have to pay for sex, but on this occasion, that's exactly what he was doing.

*Breathe, Maddie, breathe. Unclench your fists and breathe. Just a few more hours and you will have your revenge.*

\* \* \* \*

Keaton opened the door to the hotel suite and entered the room. The light coming through the windows from the bright blue sea and sky almost blinded him, and he raised a hand to shield his eyes. The door to the balcony was slightly ajar, and the curtains swirled and fluttered in the breeze.

He saw Maddie lying on the bed. With her legs outstretched, she rested on her side. He wondered if she had a headache, but when he approached, he could clearly see she was asleep.

He smiled to himself. The jet lag had finally caught up with her. He'd become so used to having her around now that he wondered how he would cope once she was finally gone. Selfishly, he realized he didn't want her to go, but surely there could be no future between them. Maddie herself would never agree; he was certain of that. He just had to face facts and watch the only woman he could really truly love walk away. Maybe it would be for the best.

He brushed the cloud of blonde curls away from her face, and she immediately stirred awake.

"Oh, sorry, Keaton. I must have fallen asleep." She began to sit up, but he placed his hand on her shoulder.

"It's okay, little one, rest for a while. Apparently, your sister doesn't return to her apartment until evening."

"Apartment? I thought she was renting a room in a hotel?"

"She is. Just a whole suite of them."

"Jesus. That must cost a small fortune."

"It does, and I'm fucking glad we came over when we did. Now we can finally put a stop to this extravagance."

Maddie sat up. "It's no use. I won't be able to rest now. My blood is boiling."

"You and I both. Would you like a drink? Maybe we could order dinner and have it here on the balcony, overlooking the bay?"

She looked up, her eyes narrowing on his, then she smiled. "Yes, why not? You choose. The only thing I don't like is—"

"Pastrami."

She laughed. "Yes, you know me quite well now, don't you? I think I'll have a shower before dinner." She slipped off the bed, and walked seductively toward the bathroom, picking up a change of clothes as she went.

He realized he knew her very well. That knowledge would only make it all the more difficult to say goodbye.

He picked up the room service menu and began scanning it. When he heard the water running from the shower, he had an overwhelming desire to join her, but now was not the time. He wondered if it ever would be again. If that was the case, then he had lost a whole lot more than just his money.

## Chapter Twelve

“How are we going to handle this?” Keaton asked.

Maddie leaned back against the elevator wall as it whisked them to the top floor of her sister’s expensive hotel. She glanced momentarily at him. She wondered if he really knew what he was letting himself in for. “We’ll just have to play it by ear. I know her. She won’t want to give the money back.”

“Okay.” He rubbed a hand over his face, and she heard the stubble rasp against his fingers. At that moment, she wished she could just turn around and go back to their hotel room. A night with Keaton would be preferable to the one she knew was coming. “I’ll leave everything up to you. She’s your sister, after all.”

Maddie grimaced. “By the time I’m finished with her, she’ll wish she wasn’t.”

The elevator stopped, and the doors parted in an expensive swish.

“It’s this way,” Keaton advised as they stepped out onto the luxurious deep pile carpet of the corridor.

They walked past a number of doors until they finally came to the right one—room 392.

Maddie nudged Keaton in the side with an elbow and whispered, “Don’t say anything until we’re inside.” She raised her hand and knocked twice on the door.

“Who is it?” came the muffled reply. Maddie felt her hackles rise at the sound of her sister’s innocent answer. She took a deep breath.

“Room service, mademoiselle.”

Maddie hoped her impression of a French accent would be enough to fool her sister into opening the door. She certainly had the element

of surprise on her side. The look Keaton gave her almost made her laugh, and she shrugged her shoulders. "You couldn't do any better," she whispered.

Anyway, her sister replied, "Just a minute." So it couldn't have been that bad.

When the door opened, Maddie immediately pushed inside. Simone's face held a look of pure surprise, right up to the moment she slapped it from her, hard.

Her sister held her hand to her cheek. "You bitch. Not my face. It's my livelihood."

"Is that all you can think of? Don't you have a warm welcome for your sister, Simone?"

"Go to hell."

"That's exactly where I've been. You, madam," Maddie prodded Simone in the chest with her index finger, and she stumbled further back into the room, "are one evil bitch. Now tell me where the money is, and we'll leave you alone."

By the look of her sister's wide dilated pupils, she guessed she was high. Her gaze drifted over her, taking in the expensive dress she wore, the diamond bracelet, and the perfect manicure. The unmistakable scent of Chanel perfume assailed her senses. All this had been achieved at her expense. Had her sister no shame?

Simone smirked, looking from Keaton to her, and back again. "Who's this? He's far too good looking for you."

"My name is Keaton Rivers and I'm the chairman of Goldstein Rivers, lady. You've got my money, and I intend to get it back."

"Hmm, I liked you better before you spoke."

He shook his head in disbelief. "Do you have any idea the amount of trouble you've put your sister to?"

"Listen, Mister whatever your name is, my sister may seem all goodness and light to you, but I know the real Maddie James, and she's no angel, I can assure you."

Maddie placed a hand on Keaton's arm. "It's no use. She's as high as a kite. We won't get any sense from her until she comes down. I've seen it all before, time and time again. What is it this time, Simone, cocaine?"

"Why, do you want some?" Simone threw her head back and laughed hysterically. "Of course you don't. You're far too prim and proper for that."

"Just sit over there." Maddie was fast losing patience.

"You don't tell me what to do, bitch."

"I just have. Now sit down." Maddie slapped Simone's face again, then pushed her onto the couch. She lifted her sister's arm and peeled back the sleeve of her dress. The tell-tale red marks on her forearm were not unexpected. "Back on the heroin, I see, Simone."

"None of your fucking business." Simone wrenched her hand away.

"You made it my business by involving me, but just for the record, Simone, when we're done here, you and I are no longer sisters."

"Suits me. Now leave me alone, bitch." With that, she curled on the sofa and closed her eyes.

Keaton touched Maddie's arm, and she turned to look at him. Did she see compassion in his eyes? Or distaste that she had such an obnoxious sibling? "How long has she been like this?"

"On and off for about eight years. The trouble with Simone is she's like all heroin addicts—very selfish. The family has tried to help her, but she just throws it all back in our faces. I can barely stand to be in the same room as the unrepentant bitch."

"So what do we do now?"

"We have to find all the drugs and hide them from her. When she starts coming down and needing another fix, that's when we can negotiate. She'll be far more likely to tell us where the money is then. She won't have such a smart mouth in a few hours time. She'll be begging for my forgiveness."



\* \* \* \*

Keaton was amazed at how many different places Simone had hidden the drugs. He was also surprised at just how Maddie knew precisely where to look. Shoes and the toilet cistern were obvious places, but who would have thought of looking in a can of deodorant? Maddie had immediately homed in on it and unscrewed the false bottom, revealing the narcotics inside.

When they were finally convinced they'd looked everywhere, they took a hard-earned break.

As he handed Maddie a coffee, he glanced at the woman sleeping fitfully on the sofa opposite them. Simone was a lot taller than her sister, but she had the same beautiful cloud of blonde curls that he'd always admired in Maddie. They might appear very similar on the surface, but he knew where Simone carried a swinging brick for a heart, Maddie was the real McCoy, warm and generous and totally genuine. He wondered how two sisters could be so different from one another. What Maddie had put up with from Simone over the years made him feel immensely proud of her.

"She's bled you dry, hasn't she?" he stated, as they sipped at their much needed coffee.

"I tried to help. I even paid for her to go into rehab, but this is the last straw, the one that breaks the camel's back. I can't do any more." She shook her head and he was convinced she was about to cry. He touched her hand and squeezed it. Then she took a deep breath and obviously pulled herself together. She smiled at him. "No, I'm fine. I realize I have to live my life now. I can't live hers. I should have washed my hands of her years ago and saved myself a whole lot of trouble and heartache."

"Look, Maddie. I have a friend who runs a rehabilitation clinic for drug addicts in Switzerland. He may be able to help. Would you like me to give him a call?"

“Switzerland? That sounds very expensive, Keaton.”

“It is.”

“Oh, no, I can’t get into any more debt.”

He clasped her hand in his and massaged her fingers with his own. “If we manage to recover most of the money from your sister, then we’ll both be better off. You and I know we can’t leave her here.”

“Maybe, oh, I don’t know.”

“Then call it conscience money.”

“Conscience money?” A puzzled look creased her face as she stared at him.

“Perhaps, something good will come from all this heartache. It would make me feel better, too.”

“Feeling guilty?”

He touched a finger to her lips. “Now that would be telling.” He regretted the situation they found themselves in, but not the shared intimacy that they’d enjoyed together.

A faint blush tinged her cheeks, and she lowered her lashes briefly. When she stared back, she smiled coyly. “I don’t regret the sex either, and if we weren’t here, I’m sure I would enjoy whatever you had in store for—”

“Maddie what have you done with my gear? You fucking bitch. I need a fucking fix, like, right now.”

Keaton turned to see her sister loom over them. Before he could react, she lunged at Maddie, sending her sprawling across the floor. A tangle of arms and legs wrestled on the pale cream carpet. They both grabbed each other’s hair, yanking it mercilessly.

“Get off me, you cow!” Maddie shouted.

“Not until you give me back my stash.”

Keaton reached down and pulled them apart. Simone seemed determined to keep fighting, and he warned her, “You better calm down, lady, and think twice because, believe me, I’m,” he held up his finger and thumb a fraction apart in front of her face, “this close to calling in the cops.”

“You don’t scare me, Mr. Big Business Man.”

“You’re not above the law, lady.” He shook his head. “Uh-uh. I’ve already been in touch with the authorities. Extradition back to the U.S. would not take long for a serious case of blackmail. You’re looking at a ten-year sentence. Minimum. By the time you get out of jail, your looks will be gone, and nobody will want to photograph you ever again. Your days as a supermodel will be over.” He saw that the idea of losing the one thing she’d always relied on scared her, and he decided to push home the advantage. “Course, all these drugs will age you faster than a plum at a prune factory. Two years tops, and you can say goodbye to your good looks, anyway.”

He watched Maddie smile as she readjusted her clothing from the scuffle she’d just been in. “I agree, Keaton. I’m five years older than Simone, but I think we look about the same age now.”

“Oh, are you the oldest, Maddie? I had no idea. Looking at your beautiful creamy skin, I would have thought that you were much younger than your sister.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Simone screamed, and he knew they’d hit their mark, as she flounced back onto the sofa once more. Her brows were drawn together and she looked agitated. He knew the cold sweats would soon begin, and then it wouldn’t be long before she told them everything.

He picked up his cell phone and made the call to the clinic in Switzerland.

\* \* \* \*

*Eight hours later*

“Please, Maddie, take the pain away. I can’t bear it.” Maddie stroked her hand into her sister’s hair. Even now, she couldn’t stop caring altogether. Simone had the symptoms of withdrawal really bad now, and she leaned over the toilet bowl, retching into it for dear life.

"I can't help you, not until you help me. You need to go to rehab. This is your last chance, because I wash my hands of you after this. You need to tell me where the money is."

"Okay, okay, take the fucking money. I'll even go to rehab. Anything to take away this bone-crushing pain."

"Good, but I can't sort this out. Not unless I know where the money is."

"My purse, my purse. Get me my purse." Simone sounded desperate now.

Maddie dashed into the living area and glanced at Keaton, half-asleep on the sofa. It had been a long night and they were both exhausted. She nudged him completely awake. "Where's her purse? Have you seen it? I think she's about to tell us where the money is."

"I fucking hope so, because I've just about used up this year's patience in one go." He rubbed a hand across his eyes and then leaned down the side of the sofa. He produced a black sequined bag. "Is this it?"

Maddie grabbed it and headed back to the bathroom. She handed it to her sister.

"Please, Maddie. I don't want to die. The stomach cramps are just so bad I think I'm going to die. Please help me."

Maddie stroked a hand into her sister's hair; it was soaked through with sweat. She felt compassion for her even though she didn't want to. "I'm here to help you, Simone, but you have to tell me where the money is."

Simone's fingers trembled as she pulled a piece of paper from her purse and handed it to her. Maddie saw it was a receipt.

"What's this, Simone?"

"The money's in the hotel safe."

Maddie took the receipt and shook her head, dumbfounded by what she'd heard. "You left the money in a hotel safe?"

"I needed ready cash, all right?" Her voice sounded strained. "Now tell me where my fucking stash is." Her hand shook

uncontrollably as she wiped it across her mouth. “I wasn’t going to put it into a bank account, you silly fucking, bitch. Dealers don’t accept credit cards. You know nothing about the real world and the people I deal with. I need a fix, Maddie. I hurt all over. Please, please help me.”

“You’ll have to wait a bit longer. I need to know I can trust you.”

“You bitch, I’ve kept my part of the bargain, now just give me my fucking gear.”

“We’ll see.” Maddie knew that very soon someone from the Swiss rehab clinic would be coming to pick her up. This time she hoped the therapy would work, because, like Keaton, she’d used up her entire supply of patience. Only in her case, it wasn’t a year’s supply. It was a lifetime’s worth.

## Chapter Thirteen

“Is that the last of it, Keaton?” Maddie asked as she placed the final bundle of money she’d counted, on the bed.

Keaton made a quick calculation. “Four hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars, give or take a few bucks. It’s a good thing we came when we did. Your sister spends money like water.”

“Yes, well, let’s hope she takes rehab seriously this time. There’ll be no more second chances from now on.” Maddie reflected on how anxious her sister had been. She really didn’t like pain and hardship. The clinic had reassured her that they do most of the cold turkey while heavily sedated. In four of five days, they would bring her out of the induced sedation, when most of the pain and tremors would have passed. So much for paying for one’s sins, but if it helped her sister back to a normal purposeful existence, then who was she to judge?

Keaton lay back on the bed and placed his arms behind his head. “As soon as I’ve rested, I need to take a shower and then get this money to a bank. It’s not safe having so much cash lying around.”

With the pile of money between them, she glanced at him. Just wearing a pair of jeans, he looked so sexy and masculine. When he closed his eyes, she let her gaze drift across the hard contours of his chest. The slight smattering of hair caught the light every so often as he breathed.

In a flash, he pulled her down next to him.

“Are you admiring me or the money?” His eyes flew wide open, and she felt her stomach coil in anticipation as his gaze connected with hers.

"I've never been this close to half a million dollars before," she teased. There was no way she would admit that she'd been staring at him.

They rolled on top of the money as he pinned her underneath him. He brushed the hair from her eyes. "Mmm. I think otherwise. You look so fucking sexy laid out on a blanket of money."

He stared at her for a moment, focusing on her lips, and then her eyes, and back again. He let out a long slow breath and then rolled away.

"Christ, what a fucking mess. I can't take advantage of you anymore, Maddie. I don't even want the rest of the money back. In fact, I insist on it."

"Why, Keaton?"

"Call it compensation. Whatever you want. I saw the tremendous courage you showed with your sister. I know it couldn't have been easy for you. I'm just sorry that we started out on the wrong foot, but hindsight is a great leveler."

"I want to pay everything back, Keaton. Otherwise it will make me feel like a—well, you know." No need to mention the word "whore." Keaton knew exactly what she meant.

"Maddie, believe me when I say I don't think that of you." She heard the sincerity in his voice and saw it in his eyes. When she nodded, he continued, "Then how are we going to resolve this?"

"I honestly don't know."

He smiled and patted her hand. "I'll let you think about it. I'm going to have a shower now, preferably cold."

As she watched him walk toward the bathroom, Maddie realized they'd come to a fork in their relationship. Two paths existed. One included Keaton. The other didn't. Did she want the safe route? Or did she want the path filled with sexual excitement and fulfillment? Only she could choose. Now that the money had been returned, she knew Keaton would never take their relationship for granted. Yet if she chose with her heart, would it be over too quickly? Surely, the

time had come to take a risk. One day, one week, one month. Did it really matter?

Finally, she made her decision. Her heart won out, and she headed for the shower. It was large enough for both of them.

\* \* \* \*

Keaton leaned back against the shower wall, letting the water cascade over his body. He felt tired from lack of sleep, but he still buzzed from the effort it had taken to get the money back. At least he had most of it here. His mind drifted to Maddie. He had to admire her spirit and determination, in spite of her sister, who he considered to be a bit of a loose cannon, even mentally unstable. Maybe Simone was a victim of the drugs, but she had dragged Maddie into her own personal hell, too, with her selfish and manipulative behavior. And he could never forgive her for that.

He looked up when he heard the shower door slide open. "Room for one more?" Maddie stood naked in the doorway with a sexy smile on her lips, and he knew then that things would be all right between them.

"Only if we stick together."

She yelped with excitement as he took hold of her hand and pulled her into his arms. Her body clung to his as the water plastered the hair to her head and ran seductively down her body. He traced the rivulets with his fingers, feeling her respond to his touch. Their kiss felt tinged with regret as their mouths and minds met.

He touched her cheek and caressed her lips with his thumb. "I wish things could have been different between us, Maddie."

She stared into his eyes. "We can't change the past. We can only change the future. I don't regret what happened between us, Keaton, just the circumstances that led us to it."

Keaton cursed under his breath. "Damn your sister to hell and back."



“It gives me great satisfaction to know that she’s probably in hell right now as she goes cold turkey. Perhaps, she’ll finally learn her lesson.”

“One can only hope, Maddie.”

He kissed her lips. All those years of inadequate sex, and, finally, here was a woman he wanted to make love to just to please her. He smiled and massaged shampoo into her hair as she covered her body in shower gel. Maddie was perfect in every respect—a great body and a pleasing temperament. He had to know what she thought of him. When all the suds had washed away, he nuzzled her neck with his lips. “Tell me what you want.”

“I want you, Keaton. However long it lasts, I want you.”

She sounded desperate now, and she clung to him. He had never felt so wanted in his entire life. Slowly, she moved down his body until she knelt in front of him. When she looked up into his face, he knew then that she was the only woman he would ever want, or need.

His cock was hard, and she stroked the shaft, the light touch of her fingers arousing him. When her tongue lashed over the end of his prick, he heard his own sharp intake of breath and grasped hold of her hair as she took his entire length into the warmth of her mouth. He couldn’t help but arch into the exquisite sensation, enjoying the pleasure of her intimate caress, as she drew him hard inside her mouth. Her lips boldly bobbed up and down as if she sucked on a Popsicle.

Then something glinted in her hand as she raised it to him. The key nestled in her palm. At that precise moment, his heart swelled with love. The key had always been a symbol of his dominance over her. Now, Maddie wanted to be his submissive by choice. Taking the key, he attached it to the chain around his neck and then took on the role of her Dom.

“Have you left that money unattended, Maddie?”

She slipped her mouth from his cock. Her eyes immediately went to the chain around his neck. He saw the look of satisfaction as she turned her gaze to his.

“Yes, Master. I’m sorry, Master.”

“Do you think you should be punished?”

“Yes, Master.” At that moment, she looked the perfect submissive.

“Then turn around and kneel on all fours. You need a lesson you won’t forget in a hurry.”

She complied.

“I’m going to fuck you right here.” He knelt behind her, and rubbed his hand into the peachy crease of her ass. He slipped his fingers into her pussy, enjoying the sound of her aroused breathing. “But I’m not going to fuck your sweet wet pussy. Oh, no. I’m going to spread your ass and fuck that instead. Maybe next time you’ll take more care of my money. Do we understand each other?”

“Yes, Master, I’m sorry, Master.”

He heard her muffled protest as he moved his fingers to her puckered hole. Immediately, she clamped her ass cheeks in resistance. He slapped her butt, and she whimpered out loud.

“Every time you resist, you get a slap. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master,” she gasped. This time, when he ran his hand over her anus, she just breathed in deeply and lowered her head.

“Good, you learn quickly.” He reached over to the side of the shower and opened a bottle of baby oil. He poured some onto his hand and down the crease of her ass. “You ready?” he asked, holding his finger against her back hole.

“Yes, Master.”

As soon as she spoke, he pushed one finger inside her anus. He knew she wanted to resist by the way she gasped and tried to pull away. He also knew that it turned her on, too. He held her firmly around the waist with his other hand, and this time, he inserted two fingers, working the muscles until the pressure eased.

“Relax.”

“I can’t, Master.”

“Relax, I’m ordering you.” He slapped her butt hard, and the stinging sound echoed around the tiled shower cubicle.

“Yes, Master. Sorry, Master, I won’t disobey you again.”

He squeezed more baby oil onto his hand and then worked three fingers inside her butt. When he thought she was sufficiently stretched to not hurt her, he positioned the tip of his cock against her puckered hole.

“Breathe in now.” Holding her steady, he pushed inside her. The tight muscles of her ass gripped him like a vice as he buried himself to the hilt. He waited for her breathy pants to lessen before pumping slowly back and forth inside her. Christ, she was tight. “Lean back,” he ordered. When she did as he commanded, he inserted the fingers of one hand into her pussy and rubbed her clit with the other. He knew the combination of sensations would prove hard to resist.

“Master, it stings,” she said, her whisper barely audible.

“You’ll be fine in a moment, once the lube is nice and deep. Now I’m going to stroke your clit. I want to know if you remember your last lesson. If you come before I say you can, I will have to punish you severely, understand?”

“Yes, Master.”

When she squirmed from his intimate touch, he commanded, “Keep still, or I will double your punishment.” Immediately, she froze, her whole body now completely under his total control. Her breathing became more ragged as she fought the slow caress of her clit with his fingers. Having this much command over her was what really turned him on. When her cries became even more intense, pleasure pulsed through his body like never before. He pressed his fingers deeper inside her pussy, feeling the tight grip of her inner muscles clamping down. With her ass impaled on his cock, he controlled her every move, her every thought, her every feeling at that precise moment. He dominated her, and they both loved it.

“Please, Master,” she begged, “I won’t be able to hold out much longer.”

“You’ll do it,” he urged. “Otherwise, there will be serious consequences.” He enjoyed the feel of her feminine juices flooding his hand, as he finger-fucked her closer to the edge.

Her whimpers became more vocal as she tried to hold back the inevitable. “Master, please...”

Eventually, he relented. “Come, now,” he commanded. “I’m giving you permission to climax.” He knew that his words would send her over the top. It made him feel incredibly sexy and powerful.

Her whole body spasmed and bucked as her cries of ecstasy filled the shower cubicle.

He kissed her head, holding her against his chest as her breathing slowly returned to normal. Maddie had given him a gift he could share with her, time and time again. The gift of her submission was priceless to him. He breathed in, and although he hadn’t found release yet, he’d never felt so satisfied.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

Keaton carried her from the bathroom and laid her on the bed. When he pushed the money aside, one of the bundles broke free from the band and spread like confetti over the bedspread. He didn't seem to mind that she was still wet from the shower and that the money stuck to her skin.

He took the chain from around his neck and laid it down beside them on the bed. Then he covered her body with his own. The hard contours melded perfectly against hers, as he nestled his weight between her legs.

He took her hand in his and kissed her fingertips. He smiled down at her. "I want you to come and live with me. I've a penthouse in Chicago. It will be ideal while we're both working there."

"Oh, Keaton, how can I work in Chicago after all that has happened?"

"I've been thinking about that. We can tell everyone that it was a security exercise, to test the systems that we have in place."

"You'd do that for me?"

He stroked a hand into her hair and rubbed his thumb over her lower lip. "Of course, I'd do that for you. We're perfect together, and with you as my new personal assistant, we'll make a great team."

Her heart swelled. Keaton didn't want it to end yet. "Say that again. I'm not sure I heard right."

He smiled. "Your hearing is not very good is it, Maddie? That's not a very desirable attribute for my new personal assistant. So I'll say it once more." He took her hands in his and stared into her eyes. "Maddie, you've a wealth of knowledge that will be invaluable to me."

I really can't do without you." His gaze scanned over her naked body beneath him, and she felt her breathing increase at the intensity in his eyes. "So, now I'll show you exactly how I feel about you."

He showered kisses down her stomach then raised her butt off the bed with his hands as he kneeled in front of her. Her legs spread open as his mouth devoured her aching pussy. His tongue licked her slit over and over until he sucked her clit into his mouth.

"Oh, Keaton," she panted, a feeling of utter helplessness as just her shoulders came into contact with the bed. There was nothing she could do but accept the pleasure he gave her.

With her ass still glowing from the sex in the shower, she fisted her hands into his hair, pulling it hard as his teasing tongue stroked her closer and closer to ecstasy.

"Oh, my God." Tight bands of tension coiled low in her stomach, vice-like in its entirety. A spasm jarred her whole body, and she bucked and writhed as wave upon wave of intense pleasure battered her body into submission. He kept going, lashing her clit onto his teeth with his tongue, until she screamed out his name, "Keaton." Her whole body writhed in ecstasy as she fought for breath.

"You must realize how much you turn me on, Maddie." As he kneeled on the bed, he gently pulled her upright so she straddled him. She wrapped her arms around him, never wanting to let him go, as his cock slid deliciously inside her wet wanton pussy.

She stared into his eyes as she rode his entire length, the pleasure intensifying with each powerful thrusting movement. They kissed, and she threaded her hands into his hair once again, enjoying the feel of it as it fell through her fingers. They'd come a long way in the last four weeks. It felt like a lifetime they'd shared together.

Holding her around the waist and shoulders, he leaned forward, cradling her as he thrust harder and deeper inside her.

"You like that?" he murmured, his gaze devouring her arched body before him.

"Yes."

“And that?” Harder, still.

“More, Keaton, more.” This felt raw and passionate. “Fuck me harder.”

“You’re mine, say it.”

“I’m yours, Keaton.”

“Again.”

“I’m yours.”

“Again.”

His cock glistened with her womanly juices as he pushed it in and out of her. She felt her whole body tighten around him, and she arched like a bowstring.

“Breathe, breathe,” he whispered against her ear as he nuzzled into her neck. He kissed her cheek. “Hold it back as long as you can.”

Throwing her head back, she panted, trying to stop the tide that threatened to burst through at any moment.

“Help me, Keaton, please.”

“You can do it. Breathe. That’s it, look at me.”

She stared into his eyes, knowing this was the only man she could ever want. Her boss, her lover, and her Dom, all rolled into one fantastic, sexy package. For as long as their relationship lasted, she was willing to give herself to him unconditionally.

“Oh, Keaton, I’m coming...” The monumental force of her orgasm astounded her as it crashed through, making her pussy tighten around his shaft as the most intense orgasmic pleasure coursed through her body, spasm after delicious spasm washing over her until she was done.

“Little one, I will never get tired of you.” He pulled her hard against him, wrapping her in his arms, as he, too, succumbed to ecstasy with a deep-seated growl.

\* \* \* \*

*Three months later*

It was Christmas Eve, and Maddie clutched her last minute shopping in her hands as she rode the elevator up to the ninety-second floor and Keaton's penthouse apartment.

As she walked down the carpeted hallway, she marveled at how the last three months had changed their lives completely. Her beloved house might be gone, but that seemed insignificant to what she had gained.

Keaton.

Her love for him grew stronger by the day, and although they'd never really expressed that love verbally, she knew deep down that it existed between them. When a relationship was built on complete trust, it had to. Every time they made love she surrendered unconditionally to Keaton's complete control. Now that took trust on a massive scale. Strange to think that it had all started with a whole lot of mistrust. She shrugged. That was all just a distant memory. They had managed to overcome the lies, to find something deep and meaningful between them.

There had been a few raised eyebrows at Goldstein Rivers upon their return, especially from the board of directors. Her heart swelled with pride at how Keaton had turned that to his advantage. "*You must expect the unexpected,*" he had told them at the first board meeting that she attended. "*This exercise has proved that our systems are robust, even for the most devious of criminals, but we must do better. That money should never have left Goldstein Rivers in the first place.*" The board had then voted in favor of a more vigorous system to be implemented. In future, no one would be able to move such large sums of money without prior authorization.

Recently, Simone had made front-page news. Since coming out of rehab, she had gotten her life back on track. It had boosted her career to no end. They would never be close after what had happened, but then they'd never been very close before. It was just one of those



things. Sometimes siblings just didn't get along. Well, she wouldn't force it. They both had their own lives to lead now.

She smiled to herself as she approached the large mahogany door. Keaton had said he had a surprise waiting for her, and that she shouldn't be late. Her stomach coiled in anticipation as to what it might be. He always managed to add an extra level of excitement to everything he did.

When she opened the door to the penthouse apartment, the aroma of strong coffee greeted her, and she called out, "Keaton, I'm home." There was no answer. She continued into the large living area and walked over to the Christmas tree sparkling decadently in the corner of the room. Quickly, she placed the parcels she held, under the tree.

Just as she stood, a pair of masculine hands clasped around her face, covering her eyes. "Keaton," she gasped, aware of the close proximity of his body as he pressed deliciously into her back.

He nuzzled her neck, and she felt his hot breath on her flesh. "You're late," he whispered. "You know what happens to naughty girls who are late, don't you."

"Yes, Keaton." Already she began to melt into his embrace. He always knew exactly what to say to turn her on.

"First, though, I have a surprise for you." He removed his hands from her face. "There's a small gift for you on the tree. That's if you can find it."

She looked quickly at him. He was so handsome, wearing jeans and a black T-shirt with a devilish slant to his mouth. She raised an eyebrow. "An early Christmas present?"

"Maybe." He nodded to the tree. "You'd better start looking."

"You're teasing me. I can tell."

"Wait and see." He touched her nose playfully. "I'm going to pour us both a coffee."

While Keaton walked across to the kitchen area, Maddie studied the tree. There didn't seem anything different about it. It looked the same as it had when she'd decorated it a few days ago. Baubles,

tinsel, lights. All exactly the same. Her gaze drifted to the fairy topping the tree out. With her tiny angelic wings, and her arms raised, she held a sparkling wand aloft. Something glinted on her wrist and she stepped closer. There, nestling on her arm, was a gold ring with the largest diamond Maddie had ever seen. She lifted the fairy from the tree and hugged it to her as a tear slid down her cheek. Keaton came over to her and wrapped her in his arms. After wiping her tears away with his thumb, he kissed her lips and then removed the ring from the fairy.

“Marry me, Maddie,” he said as he placed the ring on her finger. “If you say yes, you’ll make me the happiest man alive.”

Rendered speechless, she could only stare at him. He smiled. “My sweet, beautiful, Maddie. We’ve been through so much together. You’ve given me your trust, and I give you all my love in return. Marry me, please. I want you to be with me always.”

“Oh, Keaton.” She flung herself into his arms. “I love you so much, too. Of course I’ll say yes.” Maddie knew then that this would be the best Christmas ever. She had everything she ever wanted right here in her arms. “Keaton?”

“Yes, little one?”

“Thank you for making me the happiest woman alive.”

“Maddie, believe me when I say the pleasure’s been all mine.”

## THE END

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

At present Jan Bowles lives with her husband in an old farmhouse in Lincolnshire, England, UK.

She would like to think that she's a free spirit, having lived in various parts of the UK and Europe. When she was younger she lived in Los Angeles, and travelled by car across the entire length of Route 66 to Chicago and then finally linked the journey to New York. It was an experience that Jan has never forgotten.

Jan has an enquiring mind, and will often muse about events having an everlasting effect on the human psyche. There is always a reason why people act the way they do. You just have to look below the surface. She hopes to bring these ideas to her writing.

When she's not writing Jan likes to paint large landscapes and sweeping vistas. She loves walking, and there's nothing more she'd rather do, than stand on the top of a hill with the wind blowing through her hair, and yep, if it's raining that's all the better. Jan says there's nothing like nature to make one feel truly alive.

### *Also by Jan Bowles*

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