



Changeling Press

Project:

Silhouette

Ruth D. Kerce

Project: Silhouette
by Ruth D. Kerce

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Prologue

Lying on the pull-out sofa, Garret's fingers curled around his rock-hard cock. Each time he indulged in a sexual act, the power of the Shadows grew stronger. He'd tried to abstain, but without success, for they pursued him relentlessly, tempting him with image after erotic image, until he could no longer resist. They knew his weaknesses.

The figures now outlined in shadow on the cabin wall caused his heart to pound and his pulse to race. Enthralled, he couldn't pull his gaze away.

Bound and tied, the silhouette of a woman, with her arms stretched above her head, held his attention. She'd just climaxed from an intense pussy-licking by another silhouette. Male or female, he wasn't certain. The nearly shapeless Shadow resembled some sort of multi-tongued alien creature to him.

He'd never witnessed anything so arousing, probably because his imagination had to fill in what details he couldn't really see.

The woman's long hair hung down an inch above her shapely ass. Full breasts thrust forward, with her nipples peaked, just begging to be sucked. He ran his tongue along his lower lip.

A silhouette of a second woman stood behind the first, with some sort of whip or lash in her hand. She struck out, landing a slap against the bound woman's ass, causing the

captive to arch and her mouth to open in what looked like ecstasy.

"Oh, yeah. Give it to her good, honey." The Shadows never crossed the line and became abusive with each other, but they enjoyed sexually extreme acts, as did he.

His hand moved up and down his engorged shaft. The faster he stroked his cock, the faster the lash struck the woman, as if he and the silhouette in charge moved in perfect rhythm with each other.

As Garret and the Dominatrix eventually slowed their strokes, the female inflicting the ass-whipping faded a little at a time, until she melted away altogether. Too bad. He'd been enjoying the show.

Two masculine silhouettes eased into view, their large cocks erect and ready to fuck. One lifted the tied woman and wrapped her legs around his hips as he thrust into her cunt. The second silhouette, much larger than the first, rounded behind her and after some maneuvering, his huge cock disappeared up her ass.

"Damn." Garret's whole body ached. He needed a woman badly. His hand was a poor substitute for a warm, wet pussy or a tight asshole milking him.

The men fucked the bound female mercilessly, buffeting her roughly back and forth between them. Garret didn't know what had happened to the woman with the whip.

As soon as the thought crossed his mind, she appeared on the wall right next to him. He jerked in surprise, but forced himself to relax.

With the position of the lamps and the lack of other lighting in the cabin, he saw his own fisted cock as a silhouette on the wall. Her tongue eased out and touched the shadowed tip.

"Y-Yes!" The sensation rocketed through him. He actually felt the moist flicking of her tongue on the head of his cock. Never before had that happened. "Ah!"

At his groan of pleasure, the three other silhouettes stopped and turned toward him. They watched for several moments, and afterwards resumed fucking each other even more vigorously.

Garret moaned, his balls ready to explode. "Oh! Yes! I'm going to come!"

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Chapter One

All she'd wanted was a candy bar and some toilet paper.

She was new to the rural town. No family, no job yet, no local friends. Days or even weeks could pass before anyone realized she was missing. A sob escaped from behind her taped mouth.

Two men had grabbed her tonight outside the isolated convenience store, tied her wrists, taped her mouth, and stuffed her into a trunk like a piece of luggage.

They drove separate cars—nondescript black sedans. Both of the men had been dressed in dark suits and tinted glasses, like some sort of high-classed mobsters or government agents. The thought of either possibility made her shudder. If true, this might not be a random kidnapping.

The trunk, stuffy and cramped, might turn into her grave, she feared.

She couldn't see. Too dark. She could barely breathe and felt close to suffocating. Though it was mid-winter, sweat trickled down the back of her neck. Her heart pounded so hard her chest hurt.

Don't panic! She kept repeating the words in her head, knowing she needed to stay calm if she had any hope of surviving, but the words were much easier thought than the action done.

She couldn't help but wonder if this had anything to do with the government project she'd recently worked on. She couldn't think of any other reason for the abduction.

It all happened so quickly. Maybe the clerk saw what happened. Maybe he'd called the cops.

A few tears escaped her and trickled down her cheek. She felt so vulnerable and alone. *Someone save me.*

Garret slid behind the wheel of his rented sedan. Pushing the light on, he checked his watch. Almost time for the pick up. While the car idled, he thought about the last several months since leaving Project: Silhouette, and the strange turn his life had taken.

Had the Shadows that his sister "created" for the government sexually tempted her as they did him? Was that why Cleo had run when she'd found the chance?

If he could only resist the Shadows' temptations, maybe their power would drain away and they'd cease to exist. He hadn't been able to do that though, and he couldn't get away from them. He'd tried. Wherever he went, they also went. Sometimes he felt he'd go insane.

The Shadows needed to be destroyed. They'd taken no specific hostile actions toward him yet, but he had a feeling they possessed the ability to turn quite dangerous if provoked.

He didn't stand a chance in hell of figuring out how to disintegrate them without Cleo's help. He put the car into drive and headed out.

Motion in the back seat caught his attention and he glanced in the rearview mirror. Yes, always with him.

Not for much longer, Garret hoped. He'd finally tracked down his sister again, and this time he didn't intend to let her slip away.

They drove for a long time, or so it seemed to her. The sedan turned onto what felt like a dirt road from all the bumps and holes. As the car bounced, she grunted, feeling bruised all over from being jostled back and forth. Her full bladder didn't help her comfort level any, but she refused to urinate on herself.

The car rolled to a stop, then nothing. Only the frantic beating of her heart reached her ears. Trapped and alone, her panic grew and she whimpered.

What next? Would they rape her? Bury her alive? Kill her and dump her to rot in the woods?

Plan... she needed a plan for when they came for her.

Wait. A noise. A car door. Her stomach clenched. Muffled voices. An engine? Then, again, nothing.

Every minute of silence that passed felt like an hour.

She'd heard the driver get out of this car and get into the other car, hadn't she? That's what it had sounded like. In her head, she kept trying to make sense of the noises, replaying them.

Her panicked thoughts, and lack of sufficient air, caused her to drift in and out of consciousness. Pieces of time seemed missing from her memory. Other memories turned foggy, and she wasn't certain now what was real and what was simply hopeful imagination.

She feared making any noise in case they actually hadn't left her and one or both of them remained in the car, maybe sleeping. One of the men had flashed a serrated knife in her face and the other had carried a gun with a silencer attached. When they'd approached her, neither of them had said a

word. Just grabbed her, restrained her, and stuffed her away, before she could even utter a protest.

After what felt like an eternity, she heard another car approaching. She prayed for a highway patrolman or some other law enforcement person. The car slowed and stopped nearby. She held her breath, listening intently. *Please, please, please...*

A car door slammed. Another stretch of silence.

Taking maybe the only chance she'd get, she kicked against the inside of the trunk to draw attention. After a few moments, she heard a scraping sound so close by it startled her. Someone was opening the trunk. *Thank goodness!*

The lid lifted and a tall, massive-looking form loomed over her. Her heart skipped a beat at the sight of the huge shadow in the dark. Her first instinct was to scream, but she didn't utter a sound. Not that she could have screamed with her mouth taped. She lay statue still, frozen and waiting. Obviously a man stood over her. But friend or foe?

The stranger grumbled while he fiddled with something in his hands.

What in the world was he doing? Thankful the lid was open, she breathed in the cold, fresh air while she had the chance. A silhouette moved behind the stranger, but she couldn't really make out the shape. He wasn't alone.

A light suddenly hit her in the face, startling her. She curled into herself and squinted from the brightness.

"Hello, Cle—what the fuck?" The man moved the beam over her body. With a click of a switch, he doused the glow.

At hearing his words, any hope of rescue died. From his response to seeing her, his semi-friendly hello before his voice turned harsh, he definitely wasn't there to save her. He'd known she was in the trunk. Something had disturbed him though. His voice sounded strangely familiar to her. Must be wishful thinking on her part due to the stress of the situation.

He stuck the flashlight inside his coat. "Hang on." Grabbing her arms, he pulled her out of the trunk.

Her legs felt so stiff, she was barely able to keep to her feet. She felt like wailing, but sniffled back the tears.

"Damn. Please, don't cry. I hate that."

She reined her emotions under control. He was right. She needed to stay strong and concentrate on survival. When she tried to make out his face, all she saw was watery spots. Her eyes couldn't adjust through her weepiness, especially after being in the dark trunk for so long and getting that beam in the face.

Trying to run right now was out of the question, at least until her eyes focused and her legs felt steadier and regained more circulation. She'd wait for her chance.

When he propped her up against the car, the clouds moved away from the moon, and she finally managed to get a good look at him. Surprise struck, then a huge sense of relief washed over her. Oh, yes! Garret. She'd thought his voice had sounded familiar.

"Shit!" he bellowed. "Idiots!" Pacing back and forth, he raked a gloved hand through his thick hair. He rounded on her. "Gina, are you all right?"

What did he expect her to say? Her mouth was taped. The concerned look in his eyes did seem genuine, although his aggravation filled the air, like he'd expected her to be there, but not. If that made sense. Confusion, more than any other emotion, struck her, especially when she glanced around and saw no one else. She'd have sworn she saw someone with him.

What was Garret Renke even doing here? Months ago, she'd worked with him on Project: Silhouette, but she'd never expected to see him again.

Over six feet tall, broad shoulders, dark hair and eyes. He'd always made her so sexually aware of her own body, and his, without even trying. He was much more than an acquaintance, but not quite what she would label a close friend.

He removed his gloves and stuffed them in his coat pockets.

Yes! He was going to free her. She'd worked with Garret and his sister on the highly classified government project, until things started going very wrong. When that happened, she'd bolted. Though only a lowly assistant, she knew more than she should about Project: Silhouette, enough to scare the hell out of her. After leaving the project, she'd moved several times, trying to find a place where she felt comfortable and secure.

Garret stepped forward and slowly pulled at the gray tape over her mouth. "Sorry, it's going to grab a little. Hang on. Easy, easy. Okay, it's off. Take a moment and catch your breath."

He didn't untie her, just stood there studying her intently. The concentrated look on his face slowly caused her to worry, but before she even uttered a sound, he spoke again.

"What are you doing here, Gina?"

"Will you," she swallowed, her throat feeling dry, "untie me already?" The fact that she'd had to ask didn't settle well on her nerves. More so, when he still didn't move to loosen the binds. His look hardened and uneasiness crept up her spine.

"Two guys grabbed me." Her voice shook, and she worked hard to curb her fear, not wanting to appear weak. "What the hell are *you* doing here, Garret?" Okay, maybe not so good to curse at him, but she wasn't feeling sweet and cooperative at the moment, given the circumstances. "Where are we?"

When he didn't answer, she puffed out a frustrated breath and once again glanced around. They looked to be out in the woods somewhere. Well... nowhere, actually. The middle of nowhere. Something cold touched her nose. She glanced up. Snow. Damn. She shivered. All she wore was a light jacket. Having moved here from a warmer climate only yesterday, she hadn't unpacked her thicker coat yet. She certainly hadn't expected to be abducted and out in the elements for any length of time.

Frowning, Garret grabbed her arm. "Come on. Get into my car. We're going to my cabin and straighten this all out."

She pulled against his hold. Cabin? He had a cabin here? That was just too odd, both of them ending up in the same place. They were a long way from the research center in Washington, and given he still hadn't answered any of her questions, she felt more than a little panicky. "Take me

home. I don't know what you're involved with these days, and I don't want to know."

"Don't fight me on this. Come on. I'm not going to hurt you."

"Yeah? Prove it. Untie me." Garret always had been hard to read. Although not one of the two original men who'd abducted her, he'd known she was there in the trunk. He'd had a key to get her out. He was definitely in on this. At one time, she'd trusted him, but now, she wasn't so certain.

A movement in the dark drew her attention, but it disappeared so quickly she wasn't certain she had actually seen anything at all. She shuddered and shook her head. Was her imagination working overtime? Every time a shadow moved, or she thought a shadow moved, the memories returned... and she wondered and worried.

"You stay tied until I figure out what happened and what to do with you. Come on." He pulled her toward his car.

She dragged her feet and started to scream. At this point, she had nothing to lose. This wasn't the Garret who'd stood up for her when others gave her grief at work. This was someone she didn't know. She fought the best she could, kicking out at him. If she caused him enough of a problem, maybe he'd take her home or just cut her loose right here.

Evading her attempts to inflict damage, he grabbed her around the waist. "Stop shrieking! You're wasting your breath and killing my ears." With one arm restraining her, he pulled open the passenger door of his sedan with his other hand. "There's nobody around for twenty miles. I guarantee the chipmunks won't rally to help you."

Chipmunks? She was not amused. Her boot connected with his shin.

"Ow! Damn it!" His leg went out from under him.

Unfortunately, he didn't let her go, just held on tighter as he regained his footing.

He forced her into the car and pulled the seatbelt across her shoulder and lap. "Calm down. I already told you that I wasn't going to hurt you. No need to get violent."

With her hands tied behind her back, she was pretty much bound in place with the seatbelt across her shoulder and stomach. She'd expected him to be strong, but he'd tossed her around like she weighed nothing. "Why should I believe you?"

"No reason. Apparently." He frowned down at her. "No reason at all."

The disappointed look on his face surprised her and unexpectedly touched her deep down. He actually looked hurt, as if he'd expected her to trust him without question, no matter his actions.

He tugged off his tie and began to blindfold her.

"Damn, Garret." She tried to jerk her head away. "What the hell is going on? Is all this really necessary?" Darkness enveloped her once more. Leaning back against the seat's headrest, she sighed in defeat.

"Afraid so. I don't want anyone to know how to get to where I'm staying right now." He slammed the door closed.

"Fucking idiots," Garret muttered as he limped around the car to the driver's side. She'd kicked him good. Regina Howard. Damn. What was he supposed to do now? Say,

sorry, I meant to kidnap someone else, please don't tell the police, and I'll let you go? How could they have made such an error?

Cleo had done this on purpose, created a false trail, so he'd mistake Gina for her. If he let Gina go, even if she didn't go to the authorities, she'd probably alert Cleo to his location if they'd been in contact. His sister had worked this out brilliantly for herself.

He yanked open the door and slid into the driver's seat. Contemplating the possibilities, his fingers drummed against the wheel. Gina might know something valuable or even how to control the Shadows. All hope was not yet lost.

As he started the car, he glanced over at her. She did look a lot like Cleo. Tall, slim, long auburn hair, light brown eyes. But unlike Cleo, something sensual emanated from her, something his carnal side had always responded to, though he'd never made a move on her.

He hadn't thought seducing her would be wise while they worked together. But he'd fantasized about her... a lot. The female silhouettes, when sexually arousing him, often took her image in his mind. He grumbled in frustration and put the car into drive.

After they'd gone several miles and she hadn't spoken, he couldn't take the silence anymore. A woman who remained quiet this long must be planning something. Okay, not a politically correct thought, but probably a true one in this case. He knew Gina. "You're awfully quiet."

She sat stiffly, facing straight ahead. "Excuse me if I don't feel up to chitchat right now." Her voice dripped with disgust. "I have to go to the bathroom."

"Well, don't pee in my car. We'll be there soon, if you can hold it a few minutes longer."

"How about you stop and let me go in the woods?" She turned in the seat, facing his way. "I won't take long."

Yeah. I bet. "Not my first choice. I'd have to untie and unblindfold you. Too easy for you to slip away from me in the dark. I don't want to take the chance." He could sense her uneasiness and frustration. Even though he wasn't about to turn her loose, he still felt for her. "Did they hurt you?"

"Yes."

His stomach clenched, and his anger boiled. The handlers he'd hired were supposed to be extra careful with her. "What did they do to you?" If they'd touched her inappropriately, they wouldn't live long enough to voice any excuses. He'd been adamant about no harm coming to the woman he'd sent them to capture.

"They kidnapped me, bound me, taped my mouth, and stuffed me in a trunk!"

He relaxed a little. "Nothing else?"

"Isn't that enough?" With a furrowed brow, she sat in silence. When she spoke again, the words came out softer and in a weary tone. "If you mean, did they beat or rape me... no." She hung her head. "I want to go home."

"I know. I'm sorry. Maybe soon." Though how that would happen, he had no idea. If he let her go, he'd have to leave this area. Relocate. Again. In case she tried to turn him in.

Though blindfolded, if she pushed the authorities and they really looked, they could find his remote cabin.

Of course, if Cleo was nowhere nearby, he'd have to leave regardless, in order to find her. *Shit.*

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Chapter Two

Garret reached over and pulled the tie away from her eyes. "Okay. We've come far enough. I don't think you could easily find the area again."

Trying to regain focus, Gina blinked several times. She stared out of the car window as a small cabin came into view. The place actually looked cozy—what she could see of it in the dark anyhow. One story, a cleanly swept porch, chopped wood neatly stacked on the side. A soft light even glowed in one window behind a colorful curtain. She almost expected some grandmotherly-type to step out the door. Almost...

Snow fell heavily now, and she continued to shiver, even though Garret had turned the heat way up in the car for her. If she'd been here with a lover, she might have thought it a winter wonderland.

She'd fantasized Garret as a lover on more than one occasion, and he still affected her sexually, even after all this time. But right now, he was being a dick.

He stopped the car beside the cabin, under an overhang of some sort. Natural or manmade, she couldn't tell.

Garret got out of the car and circled around to help her out. She was trying to keep up a good hate for him for putting her through this, but it wasn't easy. Staying mad at Garret had never been easy. He had a way about him that always made her emotions melt.

She no longer feared for her life. He wasn't a murderer but he definitely had an agenda, and she didn't want to be

dragged back into Project: Silhouette or any other government project.

"I'll untie you inside. But I need you to stay calm. In good time, I'll explain all this... if you'll let me."

In good time. He was working to get her on his side, trying to manipulate her the best way he could. She knew how he thought. Well, she'd do whatever was necessary, even pretend to be meek, mild, and cooperative if it got her answers about why he was doing this and a way out. Meek... blah. That would be a stretch, for sure, and he'd never believe it.

"You're planning."

"What?" She blinked up at him.

"I can see it on your face. You used to get the same look whenever you were working with Cleo to solve a project problem. I used to watch you."

Her heart leapt. "You did?" She swallowed hard, wondering if their attraction had always been mutual, and she'd never even realized it. From the time Cleo first introduced them, he'd been able to cause her heart to race with one look, one smile, one softly spoken word.

Smiling the same heart-racing smile now, he led her onto the porch. "Remember. Stay calm."

Though her heart responded in a staccato rhythm, irritation chafed her. Why did he keep saying that like she was about to go hysterical on him? She looked toward the cabin door.

Suddenly, the hair on the back of her neck rose. Uh-oh. Not good. Somehow, she felt if she crossed over that doorway, she'd never be the same.

He swung open the door and nudged her inside.

Ack! Her heart lurched and raced in panic. Bodies. All around. Silhouettes. Forming, stretching, dashing to and fro. Backing up, she bumped into Garret.

"Easy." He held her steady.

Watching in disbelief, she glanced from side to side at the Shadows, moving against the walls, along the floor, across the ceiling. They were here! With him. As they rushed around her, she screamed.

"Cut it out!" Garret shouted.

The Shadows slowed, stopped, and melted into the floor.

"Sorry about that."

Her heart and pulse raced like it hadn't done in months. "What—what the hell? How?" When she'd left the project, she'd made certain to outdistance their range and hoped to have seen the last of these damn Shadow people. What were they doing with Garret, instead of Cleo?

Not answering her questions, he untied her. "The bathroom is over there." He pointed to a door off to the side. "Go ahead. You're safe."

Slowly, she started forward, rubbing her wrists. As she proceeded, she picked up her pace and rushed into the small room, slamming the door closed behind her. No lock. She swirled around. A window. Too small.

No escape from in here. She shook her head. "Calm. Stay calm." Okay, maybe she *was* on the edge of hysterics, but

she wouldn't topple over. She just needed to adjust herself and her mode of thinking here.

Gina raised the toilet lid and took her time doing her business. Glancing around the bathroom, she hoped not to see any movement and relaxed when she seemed to be alone. No Shadows on the walls or ceiling watching her.

The Shadows could be dangerous if they didn't get what they wanted. Now that they'd attached themselves to Garret, she suspected she knew exactly what they wanted and wondered if Cleo had told him about the aberrations she'd accidentally created instead of the infiltration beings the government had wanted.

Garret stared at the closed bathroom door. He was in such deep shit. He shrugged off his coat, then pulled out his cell phone. No service. He glanced out of the window. By morning, probably sooner, they'd be snowed in. Good thing he'd fully stocked the cabin after renting it last week.

Cleo had to have set this up to throw him off her trail. His sister was smart—too smart. His sources indicated she was moving to the nearby rural town sometime within the week. He'd given his men a description, along with a fairly crappy photo, thinking this time he had her, an easy catch. She'd fooled him. Now, he wouldn't be able to search out Cleo's real location until the phones worked again.

The sleeping arrangements tonight were going to be dicey. The cabin didn't have a bedroom, just a pull-out couch. When he'd sent the two men to pick up Cleo, after they'd informed him of her arrival, he hadn't expected the snowstorm or for her to spend the night. He'd just needed a few hours with

her, just enough time for the Shadows to detach from him and reattach to her. They belonged to her, after all, and he wanted them out of his life.

Now, Gina had been added to the mix.

Under different circumstances he'd have looked forward to this time alone with a beautiful, sexy woman. And Gina certainly was that, and more. But they weren't really alone. He hadn't been alone for a long time now.

Just as that thought struck him, a female Shadow appeared on the wall. "What do you want?" he asked. Of course, she didn't answer. If any of the Shadows ever did talk, it would probably scare the crap out of him. Somehow, he felt better off not knowing their thoughts. Dealing with their sexual needs had proven bad enough.

When she went down on her hands and knees, his curiosity peaked. Another Shadow eased into view. The multi-tongued weird one. It approached the woman, slowly gliding closer. That thing had to have at least four tongues, if not more. Long and slithery.

One tongue touched her ass and she shuddered.

His mouth dropped open when the tongue worked its way up into her ass. "Damn." A second tongue followed the first, causing the woman to arch her back and tremble.

Garret's cock grew rock-hard. He rubbed himself through his pants, trying to get some relief.

A third tongue slid underneath her and disappeared inside her cunt. Her mouth opened as if to scream. In ecstasy, he presumed, since she didn't try to get away.

The tongued creature started to shake. Was it getting pleasure from fucking the woman? He didn't know.

Man, he needed to come!

The creature and the female remained locked together. Tempting him. Making him think of Gina and taking her as soon as she came out of the bathroom. Tossing her down on her stomach and fucking the hell out of her.

The Shadows climaxed, undulating wildly. They collapsed onto the floor, seemed to melt into each other, and finally disappeared.

Only after they'd gone was Garret able to get himself under control. What had he been thinking? To just take Gina like that, without any concern? They were messing with his mind. Getting him so sexually aroused that all he thought about was his own needs and desires.

He needed this problem solved and finally put to rest. Cleo understood the Shadows. He didn't. Once they returned to her, she could figure out how to destroy them, or she could deal with their proclivities. He didn't have a clue how to handle either, not one that had worked anyhow.

The experiment had gone so wrong. Cleo had thought she could control the Shadows—beings she'd stripped from their real life human host, given independent movement and thought, and partially re-attached, so they could feed off a human's energy to survive. The human host she'd used was herself.

After stage one, she'd been unable to re-strip the live Shadows from her body as she originally had the non-

animated ones, which significantly slowed the progress of the project. Stage two had failed.

She'd fallen ill, and somehow the Shadows detached by themselves and reattached to him, a matching DNA, he suspected as the reason. And in a twist he hadn't expected, they'd multiplied.

Gina had already run by the time of the switch. Cleo never would tell him why, beyond some bogus story of a family emergency. The woman had no family. He'd thoroughly researched her life even before she'd disappeared. Then Cleo had disappeared, too.

At first he'd thought the government had whisked Cleo away, until he found out she'd left on her own, supposedly no longer willing to do the work the government wanted, according to an email she'd sent him. He'd been left holding the bag, so to speak, not really certain what to believe as the whole truth, especially when his emails back to her began bouncing.

A virtual prisoner to the project, he'd had enough. When he left, slipping away one night, the Shadows left with him. Now, the government was after him, and he was after Cleo.

He strolled over to the door and locked it, pocketing the key. Garret didn't want Gina running out into the snowstorm and getting lost. He made certain all the windows were locked, even though most were too small to fit through.

"Try not to scare her too badly." He spoke to the seemingly empty room.

A Shadow reared up against the far wall and appeared to be laughing. *Lovely*. Why couldn't his sister have been a freakin' high school science teacher?

The government had somehow heard about Cleo's university funded Shadow experiments and agreed to privately fund her efforts to try and separate a Shadow from its host and give it enough energy to attain an identity of its own. He'd thought the idea preposterous, until he'd seen her success himself.

Only later did Cleo find out the government wanted to use the Shadows for foreign infiltration missions. She'd thought the research was going to be used to study the essence of life itself, to discover yet unknown secrets about cell development and how new and different forms of life might generate or be created. Or some such shit. He wasn't a researcher and didn't know the scientific aspects of the project.

The bathroom door clicked open, and the laughing Shadow slid away. Gina stepped out, with a wary look on her face. He couldn't blame her.

"We're stuck here for a while. Take off your jacket and relax. Phone service is down, probably because of the snow, and it doesn't look to be clearing anytime soon. The roads will be impassable in less than an hour, I imagine. Please," he held out his hand toward the couch, "sit down."

Tentatively, she walked over and perched on the end of a cushion, as if waiting for a chance to flee. She didn't take off her jacket. "So, do I get to find out what this kidnapping is all about?"

He took his time making a fire in the large fireplace, then sat in a stuffed chair across from her. "I'm sorry about what happened to you." She must have been terrified. "It was a case of mistaken identity."

"Mistaken identity? Really." She didn't sound convinced. "Kind of a coincidence that we just happened to know each other, don't you think?" When he hesitated, she cocked her head. "Go ahead. I'm listening."

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Chapter Three

Yeah, sure. She was listening. Sort of.

More so, Gina was trying to figure a way out of the cabin and out of the woods. She needed the car to get back to town. Good thing she knew a thing or two about hot-wiring, thanks to the "bad crowd" she ran with in high school. She doubted Garret would just hand over the keys.

No way was she getting pulled back into some government project gone awry. Unless he gave her a hell of a good explanation why she should willingly stay, she was history as soon as she got the chance.

"You saw the Shadows," he began, speaking slowly.

"Um, yeah. Obviously." Gina glanced around the room and wrapped her arms around her waist. They looked to be alone, but she knew better. Sneaky-assed creatures. "Hard to miss."

"I'm trying to either get away from them or destroy them. When you were taken, those men thought you were Cleo."

As soon as he said the words, a female shadow, with claws extended, loomed up behind him. Gina shrieked and pushed herself into the corner of the couch. "Behind you!"

Garret turned abruptly. "Shit!" He shot out of the chair, and the Shadow melted away. "I don't know why those damn things attached to me."

Gina unclenched her fingers from the fabric and pulled herself together. "Well... I do. Maybe." *The perverted things, out for self-gratification above all else.* "At least, I have an idea. I've been thinking about it. I know that Cleo got sick

sometime after I left. That must have been when it happened."

His eyes narrowed, and he sat beside her. "She did fall ill for a while and almost died. How did you know?"

"After I left, I periodically checked in with Cleo, for updates. In fact, she called me briefly, not long ago. She wanted to know how I was doing and my plans."

"You know how to contact Cleo?"

He looked so hopeful that she hated to disappoint him. "I did, but last time I called, her service had been disconnected."

"Oh."

"She didn't tell you we'd been in contact? Why would you need to kidnap her?" He'd said those men had thought she was Cleo, so his sister was obviously the one he'd intended to abduct.

"She didn't tell me squat. She set you up, Gina. That's why she wanted to know your plans. Cleo's been missing for a while now. After the Shadows left her and she recovered, she ran. Just like you. Every time I think I've tracked her down, something goes wrong. Why did you leave the project? I know Cleo's story about you having a family emergency was a lie."

Hesitating, she stared into his concerned eyes. She didn't really feel comfortable going into details, so she kept what she said brief. "Wouldn't you leave? If you could? Especially now that you know more about the project." That was all she intended to say, for now.

Was it possible that Cleo had set her up as Garret said? It didn't sound like Cleo, but when it came to Project: Silhouette, nothing was out of the question.

Sporting a frown, Garret nodded. "Yeah, I would leave. I did. Finally. It did me little good. Why do I think there's more to it where you're concerned?"

Because there was, but she needed to work up to those details. "The Shadows require a healthy host. I didn't realize Cleo had gotten *that* sick. She never mentioned they weren't with her anymore. She never even mentioned she'd left the project. I can't believe she would take off and leave you with this problem. I mean, the Shadows are her creation." Worry for Garret's safety rolled through her. More was going on here than she'd first realized.

"Yeah, well... Cleo keeps to her own agenda."

Garret was well aware that Gina knew a lot more than he did about this project. Not a surprise, given her position on the team as Cleo's personal assistant.

A handful of other scientists also worked on the project, but he hadn't been able to locate any of them. They all seemed to have mysteriously disappeared.

Well after Project: Silhouette's inception, he'd been brought in to handle security for the facility. Cleo had known he could be trusted, and he had enough experience to handle the job. He was already in charge of security for several Washington-based foundations and centers.

He studied Gina, wondering at her knowledge of the project. Cleo was the scientific mastermind behind Project: Silhouette, but as Cleo's right hand, Gina probably knew more

Project: Silhouette secrets than anyone else. She'd handled all the files. He had a feeling his sister kept a lot of secrets where Project: Silhouette was concerned. If he couldn't find Cleo, well, Gina was his next best hope.

"So, how do I get the Shadows back to Cleo? Can that be done without her being here?"

"No, but..." Her eyes darted back and forth.

"But what?"

She lowered her voice. "There might be a way to destroy them."

Her words started Garret's heart pounding. They both glanced around quickly, but saw nothing. The absence of the Shadows worried him. They usually listened to everything. If they weren't around, that meant they were planning something special, usually sexual. Though, now with Gina here, he couldn't be certain what was on their freaky, little minds. He couldn't help but wonder if they knew who she was, if they remembered her.

Gina scooted closer to him and kept her voice low. "After the Shadows started getting out of control and were showing violent tendencies, Cleo began working on a way to get rid of them. Unknown to those funding us, of course. All Washington cared about was the military potential. They didn't see the danger, or chose to ignore it."

"So, they *are* dangerous?" He'd suspected the possibility.

"Not to their host, as far as I know. But I have seen them go after a cat and an elderly maintenance man—the man had a fatal heart attack. He dropped near the Separation Chamber right in front of me." Her eyes watered, and she sniffled. "The

Foundation covered it up, or so I suspect, since nothing more ever came from it. Poor man. I liked him. Shortly after that. Cleo brought you in."

Garret nodded. "I'm sorry you had to be involved with that." He could tell how the man's death upset her. "What happened to the cat?" Garret couldn't help but ask. He'd always found those who went after defenseless animals to be compassionless individuals, beyond hope. A cat couldn't possibly have posed any threat.

One corner of her mouth hitched up slightly. "The cat managed to get away. Cleo knows more, I'm sure. I wasn't privy to everything that happened."

Garret noticed her fingers shaking, and he reached over to cover her hand with his. "I won't let them hurt you."

A tentative smile crossed her face. She cleared her throat, avoiding his gaze as she continued to fill him in. "After hours one night, shortly after the man's death, Cleo and I ran a disintegration test... successfully. The next day, she made up some excuse for the Shadow's disappearance."

Garret nodded. "I vaguely remember overhearing some sort of argument between her and a suit about one of the Shadows, after I got there and set up the new security system."

She met his gaze. "That was probably it. I left shortly after a failed second test. I couldn't—well..." She shook her head. "I'm wondering if someone high-up found out about her plans to destroy them and purposely tried to get the Shadows detached from her."

"You've lost me."

"If they got rid of Cleo, the Shadows would be freed from her, their host. The Foundation could do whatever they wanted with them, without her interference. If true though, it backfired on them when the Shadows attached to you, and you left."

"Wait. You think someone purposely made Cleo sick? Tried to kill her?" Family protectiveness reared up inside of him. No matter his and Cleo's differences, he would take out anyone who dared to harm his sister.

"It's possible. Does the Foundation have people after you now?"

"Yeah, they do. They want the Shadows back, which means getting me back." He scratched his jaw. "Did the Shadows retaliate after your tests?"

"Not that I know of. We're not sure of their cerebral capacity, other than they do possess the ability to learn. We think they only learn at a slow pace though, mostly acting toward self-gratification, instead of actual intelligent thought and reasoning. The intelligence tests were incomplete when I left, however, so I really don't know for sure."

"Did they attach to me because Cleo and I are related?"

"Doubtful. Cleo theorized the Shadows could survive as long as they attached to any healthy host. The Foundation probably didn't plan on that host being you. We know that someone hacked into her computer files on the project. They'd know her theories and try to work them to their advantage."

"What? I ran security. Why wasn't I informed? I could have run a trace and stopped any further infiltration."

"Things got complicated by that time. Everything happened all at once. I don't know."

It bothered him that his sister hadn't come to him about the computer security problem. He wondered if that had truly been her decision, or if something more was going on.

"It's likely the Shadows attached to you because you were with Cleo at her weakest point. If the Foundation finds you, they might try to kill you, too. You need to be careful. Of course, I didn't have access to all of Cleo's notes, so I'm just guessing here."

"Your guess seems plausible. That same suit I mentioned earlier was trying to get me away from Cleo while she was sick, but I wouldn't leave her side. The Foundation may have planned for the Shadows to attach to one of their own people."

"Makes sense to me. They'd have total control, and with Cleo's notes, they could continue her experiments. You've discovered the Shadows' source of power?"

"Maybe..." He didn't want to blurt it out, in case he was wrong. It all seemed so outrageous. "You tell me."

"Any extreme emotion."

"Any?"

"Pretty much. The two strongest, and most effective, are fear resulting from a violent act and ecstasy from sexual climax. They feed off the energy."

He nodded. So, he'd been correct. Or at least partially. If he wanted Gina's help, he needed to be honest with her right now. "They, um, tempt me. Sexually. I've tried to resist, but I

can't. I thought if I could, their power would eventually drain away. Instead, I'm afraid they've just grown stronger."

She shook her head, then turned her hand over to grip his.

The gesture, one of trust and caring, affected him more than he'd expected. Her skin felt so cool and incredibly soft.

"Wouldn't have worked anyway. When low on energy, they go into a hibernation state until the next emotional episode. It's not a permanent drain."

So, he'd been fighting his desires for nothing. Only if he could have abstained forever would it sort of work. He would have needed to suppress his other emotions as well. Not realistic, for sure. "But you said you did a successful test?"

"Right. Flip your deduction. Instead of draining their power, we created a surge and managed to disintegrate one of the Shadows. It separated, obtained totally independent life, then exploded."

"Damn. Was all that in Cleo's notes?" If the government was aware of the possibility of independent life for these Shadows, they'd never stop their search for him... and Cleo, if they hadn't already caught up with her.

"Unfortunately, yes."

"So, the Foundation, or whoever hacked into her files, knows if they stop the disintegration process, these Shadows can essentially be classified as a new form of life." He stated his thoughts aloud, looking to Gina once more for absolute confirmation.

"Yes, but we don't know how to stop the disintegration. Or at least, I don't. At the time, before I left, Cleo had separated

four Shadows in all—the Dominatrix, the Submissive, the Player, and the Worker."

"I recognize the first two." He waited for more details, eager to hear everything she knew.

"Each of the Shadows represents a side of the host, Cleo in this case. We disintegrated the Worker, who was the strongest and led the others. Unfortunately, that caused the remaining Shadows to become even more out of control. The Player, who was the wildest and most sexual by nature, we tried to disintegrate and failed. It turned into—well..."

Ah, of course. "The multi-tongued one?"

"Right." Her whole body shook. "So, now there are three left."

She was in for a surprise. "Five."

Gina's eyes widened. "Five?"

"Two male Shadows appeared within weeks of the others attaching to me." When it happened, he'd been just as shocked as she looked right now.

"They're spontaneously regenerating?"

"Don't ask me." Garret shrugged. "You know more about the project's specifics than I do."

"If Cleo knew about that ability, she never told me. When I first entered the cabin, there seemed to be a lot of Shadows here, but it didn't register with me that there were more than I knew about. The new ones must be... two sides of *your* personality."

"Me?" He didn't like the sound of that. What if a future host were some serial killer? What kind of Shadows might

generate? He now understood even more the need to destroy them, before it was too late.

Another disturbing thought struck. "So, what does that mean? When they get into their sexual mode, my Shadows are fucking my sister's Shadows?" *And my sister's Shadow licked my cock. Crap.*

"Don't sound so horrified. They're not actually related to you or to each other."

"Still..." He'd rather not analyze the possibilities or similarities too closely. "How did you get rid of the first one?"

She pulled her hand away from him and rubbed her arms through her jacket, avoiding his gaze. "Do you have any coffee or anything?"

"Oh. Yeah. Sure. Sorry." He stood up. "I'll heat us up a pot."

"Thank you."

Wondering at her timing, he entered the kitchen and grabbed a tray and two cups. She obviously didn't feel comfortable and was stalling. She'd said sex and violence were strongest, so the testing had probably involved one of those.

He flipped on the coffeemaker. He'd made a fresh pot earlier in the day, but needed to heat it up.

As a thought came to him, Garret turned back toward the living area. Damn. He hoped they hadn't killed or tortured some poor slob just to test Cleo's theory.

He shook his head. Knowing Cleo, she'd probably seduced someone into helping her. Sex was much more likely.

A male silhouette on the wall suddenly caught his attention. The Shadow was facing back toward Gina and jacking off.

"I know how you feel," Garret muttered.

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Chapter Four

Garret set the tray with coffee, along with some sliced cheese, on the ottoman in front of the couch. After he sat, he handed Gina a cup. "Just the way you like it." He smiled. "I remembered. And your favorite cheese."

"Oh." She smiled back. "Garret, that's so sweet. Thank you."

He shrugged. They'd gone on a coffee break or two together in the past. He remembered every moment of those times. "Now, tell me about this test." He took a mouthful of the hot, bitter liquid.

"Cleo and I had sex."

Garret spewed coffee. He coughed repeatedly. As he set his cup down on the tray with a *thunk*, his other hand wiped at his mouth and splattered shirt.

She clapped him on the back. "Sorry to blurt it out like that."

He just stared at her. Sex. Gina had sex with Cleo. His sister had seduced someone all right. Damn. Did Gina prefer women? Disappointment hit him hard. "I see," he choked out, unable to manage more than that. Wait. He knew his sister was into men. She'd even been engaged once. Maybe she'd switched sides, or however that worked. Maybe she liked both men and women? Maybe Gina liked both? "I think you're going to need to elaborate," he finally said.

"Fear through violence was out of the question—the type needed to generate enough of a surge anyhow. That left sex.

Lone sex doesn't work, but simply builds the Shadows' power, as you know."

Yes, he knew that only too well.

"Cleo didn't want to bring in an outsider, and she needed a partner. The two male scientists working with us were married, and she didn't want to create problems there."

"Really? She's not generally that generous when it comes to her creations."

Gina looked at him oddly.

"Sorry. I do love her, but she frustrates the hell out of me sometimes."

Gina nodded, took a sip of coffee, and set her cup back on the tray. "Initially, when she approached me, I said no way, but she finally convinced me, for the good of the project. The first time, um..."

Leaning forward, he listened intently, hanging on her every word.

"It worked, let's just say."

Dang. He'd hoped for details. Okay, so he was a pervert. But Gina and sex fascinated him. For longer than he could remember, he'd wondered what her skin would taste like, what her pussy would look and taste like, the type of sex she craved. He held back a groan, just thinking of seeing her naked and stroking her body, licking her nipples. Damn Cleo for getting to her first. "A Shadow was destroyed."

"Right. The second time, well, was awkward and not intense enough. That's when the multi-tongued creature formed from the Player, and I left. I just couldn't handle any more. Cleo was mad as hell at first. Later, she just seemed to

get over it. Maybe she was on to a new theory. I don't know. It was kind of strange actually, but you know how Cleo is."

Garret thought over everything Gina had said. And tried not to think too much about her and his sister doing the nasty together. "Maybe Cleo's change of attitude occurred after the switch, once she was already gone and working to set you up." Or maybe the Foundation had gotten to her.

"I don't know." Gina rubbed her forehead. "Right now, all I'm certain about is that I'm really tired. It's been a long, stressful day."

"Yes, of course. Why don't we get some rest? The couch pulls out. I can sleep in the chair there. Tomorrow, depending on the weather, we can figure out what we're going to do."

Gina looked at the chair, then looked at him. "That seems silly. You're too big for that thing, even with the ottoman. We're adults. We can share the bed. You're not going to jump me or anything, are you?"

Sharing with Gina... an erotic and dangerous thought. "If I say no, you'll believe me?" She shouldn't.

"I'll believe you," she answered without missing a beat.

Her trust in his word surprised and touched him, especially after all she'd been through tonight. "I won't jump you." Probably.

While Garret was in the bathroom, Gina looked out of the front window. She obviously wasn't going anywhere tonight. She'd need a snowmobile to get around in this weather.

She tried the front door of the cabin. Locked and no way to open it without a key. Garret had taken every precaution to keep her here, it seemed. Not that she could blame him.

Looking back toward the bathroom, she made her decision. Given his current predicament, she didn't feel like she could just leave him here with the Shadows and an uncertain fate.

She'd left Cleo and still harbored guilt over that decision, but Cleo held all the knowledge of Project: Silhouette. Garret was an innocent bystander in all this, even more so than she'd been.

They had to destroy the Shadows. Or try. Just not tonight. It had been a long day and she needed to rest. She stripped off her jacket.

She'd approach him in the morning about what they needed to do.

As she pulled off her sweater, her gaze fell upon the now open couch bed. She didn't know what had possessed her to offer to share the bed with Garret.

Only a standard size. So, they'd be really close tonight.

If she wasn't attracted to him, she wondered if she'd have been so generous about sharing. Somehow, she doubted it.

Quickly, she discarded her jeans while watching the bathroom door. She wanted to be in bed by the time he came out.

As she folded her clothes, she noticed her fingers trembling. Though tired, she couldn't help but wonder if she wanted Garret to touch her tonight. *Hell, yes.* Well, maybe. So many complications existed. Right now, she truly didn't know what she wanted.

When Garret emerged from the bathroom, Gina was already curled up in bed and looked to be asleep. He'd put her through a lot in the last few hours.

Was she naked? His heartbeat kicked up a notch. No. She'd taken off everything except her underwear.

He could see her bra strap on one exposed shoulder and one bare calf sticking out from under the blanket. Enticing.

Her other clothes were folded neatly in the chair. He smiled. She'd always been way too organized. He used to tease her about her obsession. Everything had needed to be just so and in its place at the office.

Maybe that's why she knew more about Project: Silhouette than someone in her position normally would. Back in Washington, she seemed to constantly be in the files, referencing and cross-referencing reports.

For now, better she was asleep, he supposed. No awkwardness about him sliding into the bed with her, especially since he had a boner that would probably send her screaming into the night.

He'd found and dressed in a pair of pajama bottoms to make her feel more comfortable, even though he preferred to sleep naked. He probably should have stayed fully dressed but he *could* control himself, or so he kept repeating, even if his cock had other ideas.

After turning down the dimmers on the lamps to only a glow, he crawled into the bed next to her. With a groan, Garret stretched out on his back. It was going to be a very long night.

On the ceiling, the creature—the Player—roamed back and forth. Its long tongues flicked all about, as if lusting to get to Gina.

"Stay away from her, you freak of nature," Garret muttered. Before he closed his eyes, he turned onto his side and draped an arm over Gina, just to be assured she was safe.

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Chapter Five

Gina's eyelids fluttered open and she stretched, feeling rested. She hadn't slept so well in months. She looked up and froze. Her heart slammed against her chest. A male Shadow loomed above her on the ceiling, watching her. Too creepy!

Determined not to give in to her uneasy feelings, she glanced beside her. No Garret. Was it morning? Light filtered in from the window. Yes, daylight. Still slightly overcast from what she saw of the view, and still snowing.

"Garret?" she called out.

Nothing. Shivering, she slipped out from under the covers and padded into the bathroom, trying very hard to ignore her Shadow stalker. Since there was no getting away from the aberration, she did her best to carry on as if nothing was wrong. At least, she knew Garret had to be near.

The Shadow didn't seem to follow her into the bathroom, so she took a quick shower. After drying off, she pulled on Garret's robe, hanging behind the door. Big. The soft material felt nice against her skin. Garret's unique aroma enveloped her—sexy and warm.

When she came out of the bathroom he was stacking some logs beside the fireplace, giving her a nice view of his jeans-clad butt. "Morning," she greeted with a small smile.

Pulling off his gloves, he straightened and turned toward her. "Morning. I was out getting more wood. It's still snowing."

"So I saw. Is there breakfast?"

"Yep. As long as you don't mind toaster waffles and nuked syrup." He shrugged out of his thick jacket and hung it on a hook beside the door.

Her stomach growled loudly, and they both laughed. "I guess I don't mind," she responded. "I borrowed your robe."

"So you did." He strolled over to her and fingered the neckline. "It looks good on you." He leaned close and whispered, "Let's eat."

As his breath wafted along her neck, she trembled and her legs felt weak. She grabbed onto his arm to steady herself. "Careful. I'm not made of steel."

"Good to know. I was beginning to wonder."

Smiling, she slipped past him and padded into the kitchen. "Feed me, if you please, before I starve to death."

"Yes, ma'am." He followed and fixed the food, while she set the table.

They ate mostly in silence, with only the occasional chitchat about nothing in particular.

An uncomfortable tension hung in the air. Gina knew one of them had to broach the subject. "The Shadows need to be disintegrated."

"I know." He stood and cleared the table.

She glanced about the room. "Why do you think they haven't been around much?"

"I think they remember you. They've probably been listening. Maybe they even understand what's going on."

"Maybe." She pushed the chair back and got up. "Even so, we can still lure them out. They have very little self-control."

He loaded the dishwasher. "So, what's your idea?"

"Well, I have two. I'll let you pick." Wringing her hands, she took a large breath and slowly released it. "You can either beat the hell out of me... or fuck the hell out of me."

Garret hesitated. He closed the dishwasher with a snap and turned toward her. A smile crossed his face. "Always nice to have a choice." The smile faded, his face growing serious. "Are you sure about this? It'll need to be intense."

"That depends on which choice you make." Not that she had any doubts about his choice.

He walked over to her. Without another word, he grabbed the back of her neck and dragged her against him. His mouth descended and covered her lips in a heated kiss.

Garret groaned deep in his throat. When Gina suggested he fuck the hell out of her, his heart had practically pounded out of his chest, and it still pounded like a hammer on an anvil against his ribs now.

She'd made the suggestion in order to get rid of the Shadows, but she had to feel something for him. A woman didn't offer a man her body otherwise. Or so he'd like to think. If she didn't want him, she could have thought up a different way besides sex. Besides violence, which was definitely out of the question. He'd never purposely hurt her, no matter what. Or she simply would have let him fend for himself with Cleo's Shadow people.

Her lips parted, and he took immediate advantage, slipping his tongue into her mouth. She tasted slightly of coffee and sweet syrup. And hot sex. His cock strained painfully against his jeans.

When he pulled back and looked down into her beautiful eyes, he saw her desire, her need... for him. The absolute realization that this was more than just a duty for her almost floored him. He stroked her cheek with his fingertips. "I've wanted you for such a long time."

"I used to fantasize about you, Garret, while pleasuring myself," she whispered, with no hesitation or embarrassment in her voice.

Damn. "You're making me crazy." He nuzzled her cheek and neck. His fingers tugged at the tie holding her robe closed. His robe. He liked her wearing it.

"For this to work, you can't hold back."

As a variety of feelings rolled through him, he stared into her eyes. "I really want to make love to you—soft, slow, and gentle. At the same time I know I need to fuck you—hard, fast, and rough. That turns me on like you wouldn't believe."

"Me, too." She raised her lips to his ear. "So, let's do it. Fuck me now. Love me later."

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Chapter Six

Gina watched Garret's eyes dilate, and her excitement grew. When he spun her around so her back pressed against his front, she gave out a little squeak.

The Shadows immediately appeared on the wall in front of her. They'd obviously felt the sudden increase in emotional intensity and came to feed off the energy.

"Ignore them," Garret whispered in her ear. His voice sounded harsh and tight with sexual need.

She wasn't certain she could ignore their presence until Garret's tongue dragged down the side of her neck. At the moist, erotic feeling, her world immediately centered on only the two of them. Her body trembled and she moaned his name. No longer would she need to only fantasize about sex with him. Yes!

Garret growled and pushed her over onto the table. He shoved the bottom of the robe aside. "Oh, yeah. You're so hot." He caressed her butt. "So sexy. I especially love a sexy ass." He kicked her feet apart.

Gasping, her hands slid along the table surface, trying to find something to grab onto. Other than a serrated knife they'd used to cut a waffle in half—which he hadn't loaded into the dishwasher—she found nothing. Practically on her toes and right in the middle of the table, she couldn't really reach over the table's edges too well, so she lay sprawled there, feeling helpless, vulnerable, and at Garret's mercy.

Pressing his groin against her ass, he yanked the tie out of the robe's loops. He ripped the garment off her, leaving her in only pink silk panties and a white lacy bra.

"Oh!"

He grabbed her wrists. "You're getting bound." Pulling her arms behind her, he tied her hands behind her back.

"Garret!" She'd never been bound during sex. The idea of such complete submission with him sent waves of excitement and anticipation through her.

He stepped back and yanked hard at her panties, but the material didn't give an inch.

With what sounded like a frustrated groan, he grabbed the knife and she felt him slice each of the side straps. He ripped the panties off her and stabbed the knife into the table next to her.

Gina's heart pounded uncontrollably, and she felt her body flush. *Oh, my.* Garret's fingers slid between her legs, and he teased her clit.

She squirmed. *Yes.* She loved this. *More.*

"You're soaking wet... all for me. Good."

Against her butt, she felt him fumbling with his pants. "Condom, condom," she barely managed, her breath coming fast and hard. Damn, she hoped he had a good supply.

"Shit! Don't move!"

Then he was gone. The sudden void broke the sexual tension, until the Shadows began to slowly draw closer. She felt physically vulnerable, splayed on the table for them like some sexual meal.

Gina tried to stand up, but couldn't. "What —" Being bound made it difficult, but the problem was more than that. Were they holding her down? She trembled, her fear escalating. "Garret?" She felt something brush against her ass. Definitely *not* Garret. "Oh! Garret!"

When Garret rushed back into the kitchen supplied with condoms, a male Shadow hovered behind Gina. The Shadow looked more solid than he'd ever remembered seeing any of the aberrations. A result of the increase in energy? Anger and protectiveness rose up inside him. "Back off, you fucker. She's mine!"

The Shadow turned toward him.

"Careful," Gina warned. "They're stronger than I anticipated."

"Damn. I think the son of a bitch just gave me the finger. Move away from her!"

From the corner of his eye, he saw something shift and looked to the side. The Dominatrix eased forward along the wall, right toward them. She raised her whip.

Garret readied himself for anything.

The male Shadow immediately moved off, as the female neared, almost as if following some silent order. The Dominatrix nodded. *Hmm*. Was she telling him to continue with his dominance over Gina, of his taking of her?

"Garret?"

"It's all right. The Shadow moved away." He stepped up behind Gina and caressed her ass. "You're safe." He'd try his best not to leave her alone again, until the Shadows no longer

plagued them. After this, he had no idea what they might truly be capable of.

When it was only him, he hadn't worried as much, but he didn't want anything happening to Gina, especially since she'd been so generous in offering herself to help him. He now doubted the Shadows actually realized what was happening, otherwise they wouldn't be hovering so closely or be so eager to suck up the sexual energy.

"Let's get rid of these things."

"Are you sure?" He didn't want to force her into anything at this point. It could wait until another day, if she preferred. He really wanted this to be about so much more than just the destruction of Cleo's creatures. He needed it to be more than that.

"I want to do this. I want to be with you. Now."

Her words made him smile. They also made his cock ache.

"I think we've lost the intensity though."

"Wanna bet?" They needed intensity. He'd bring intensity. He smacked her ass.

"Hey!"

"Quiet." Nothing was stopping him from destroying these Shadows now that he had Gina's go ahead. Nothing was stopping him from finally making this woman his. He smacked her ass again, a little harder this time.

"Oh!"

Reaching between her legs, he felt her readiness. Nicely wet. He smiled. Perfect. She must have enjoyed the spansks. Good to know. She'd barely pretended a protest, and never told him to stop, so he didn't feel bad and intended to smack

her luscious butt some more. The slight jiggle and pink flush from his slaps turned him on. He opened his jeans and pushed them and his underwear down his hips.

As he smacked her ass a third time, she moaned, proving him correct in his assumption. She did like it. The tip of his cock pushed against the entrance to her pussy. "Do you want it?"

"Yes. Fuck me! Hurry."

He felt hard enough to drill through concrete. Still, he didn't just ram his cock in, even though she wanted it. He slowly pushed inside her, feeling a sense of satisfaction when she whimpered and then groaned. He intended to fill her completely, giving her every inch.

"Ah, Garret!"

A long moan rumbled up from his throat. He'd known her pussy would feel great gripping his cock, but he hadn't anticipated anything like this. So wet and warm and such a snug fit. His eyes closed as waves of pleasure rolled through him. He wanted the feeling to last forever. "Fuck, you're tight!" Garret's eyes opened and his fingers curled around her hips. He began thrusting.

"Yes, Garret! Fuck me hard."

"Hell, yeah." Her encouragement broke his control. He pumped her hard and fast, keeping the intensity high for too many reasons to list, even if he were thinking clearly enough to do so. "All you want and need, baby."

The muscles of her pussy squeezed his cock, and he about lost it, until he felt a sting on his ass. "What the hell?" He

stopped and glanced behind him. The Dominatrix. She had whipped him, and he felt it like he'd felt her tongue earlier.

"What is it?" Gina asked. "Don't stop now!"

"No way." His attention returned to her. "I'm not pulling out until my cock has no cum left to give." When the Dominatrix smacked his ass again, he groaned and moved his hips, fucking Gina even harder than before, trying to get deeper. He knew that's what they all wanted—him, Gina, and the Dominatrix.

"Oh, oh, oh!" Gina moaned. "Yes!"

Her cries of ecstasy sent him right to the edge. "Come!" he demanded, not sure how much longer he could hold out.

"Almost... almost there. So good, Garret. Faster."

He pumped his hips faster, slapping his body hard against her ass. He felt her muscles spasm. She was ready.

"Yes! Garret!" She squirmed beneath him and screamed out her climax.

"Ah, yeah!" He came right along with her, continuing to pump his cock into her, giving her everything he had. Behind him, he heard an odd pop, but his attention remained on the intense orgasm shooting through him.

Gina moaned and relaxed onto the table beneath him.

"Oh-ahh..." He collapsed over her back. *This woman is incredible. One majorly hot fuck.*

After his breathing returned to somewhat normal, he looked around and noticed the Dominatrix had gone. "I think we got one of them," he whispered in her ear. Carefully, he pulled out of Gina and tossed the condom into the nearby

trash receptacle. He raked his fingers through his hair, still feeling the effects of the climax in his body.

"Um, can you untie me now?"

"Oh, yeah. Sorry." He pulled up his underwear and jeans. He untied her and helped her up. After she turned to face him, he massaged her arms. "I didn't hurt you, did I?" He searched her eyes for the truth.

"No." She stroked his cheek. "That was great. I loved it."

"Good." He kissed her lightly. "So did I." He relaxed, and all his worries drained away. She'd loved it. Gina was turning into the perfect woman—for him.

She reached down for the robe.

"Leave that." Her acceptance of everything he'd done to her fueled his desire for more.

"I'm just in my bra here. Feels weird."

"Ah, yeah. I guess it would." He carefully unclasped the bra's front and pulled the garment off her.

"Garret." She laughed.

One strap looped easily around his wrist, and he let the bra dangle there. She had such gorgeous breasts. He reached out and massaged them gently.

Gina's mouth snapped closed. A dreamy look, along with a look of need, entered her eyes.

A good handful each. He'd take a leisurely taste of both luscious mounds soon. He shook the bra off his arm and it fell to the floor next to the robe and what remained of her panties. "Solves that problem. I want you naked. And ready for me. Come along."

Gina felt a little odd walking around naked while Garret remained dressed, but she didn't protest. She was experiencing too much of a high right now, sexual and victory-wise against the Shadows.

She followed him into the living area and over to the couch. The Shadows followed too. He must have been correct, for she no longer saw the Dominatrix. Even one Shadow less was a major victory. This *would* work. Though now, she wondered what would happen between them after all this was over. Would he just take her home with a thank you and a goodbye, never to see her again?

"Are you warm enough?" he asked.

"Better than that. I'm hot. Hot for you."

A smile tugged at his lips. "Hot. Really? That sounds extremely promising." He stroked her cheek. "Lie down. Let's see if I can get you even hotter."

"I doubt you're *up* for another session yet," she said, glancing down at his crotch. Disappointment hit at not being able to see his cock. Even so, she felt more than ready for the next round.

He chuckled. "Yes. I think you wore out my dick. For now. But my tongue still works."

Swallowing hard, she touched his lips. *Oh, yes.* "I can hardly wait," she whispered, imagining him licking her all over. She climbed onto the sofa bed, her heart picking up a rapid rhythm. After she settled on her back, she smiled up at him. "I'm ready." So ready. She intended to enjoy this, despite the Shadows. Afterward, she'd deal with everything else, her emotions included.

"So am I." He crawled up beside her. "You're more gorgeous than any woman I've ever known." His hand settled on her stomach while his gaze settled on her breasts, as if looking at a scrumptious meal.

"Kiss me first." She needed that connection with him.

His gaze rose to meet hers. "My pleasure."

Something flashed in his dark brown eyes. Some emotion she hadn't seen from him before. She couldn't figure out quite what it was. He touched his lips to hers, gently at first, and she responded in kind, brushing her mouth along his.

The small moment of tenderness from him meant a lot to her. She touched the tip of her tongue to his, and Garret slowly intensified the kiss.

After a long, heated moment of tangling tongues, he broke the bond, moved his lips down her throat, and between her breasts. He glanced up at her. "Time to scream for me, Gina. I'm going to make you come hard."

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Chapter Seven

"Yes..." she moaned.

Garret noticed the Shadows move closer. He hoped Gina wasn't paying attention. The more she was able to block their presence in her mind, the better. She'd stay relaxed and climax easier. Unless she enjoyed being watched sexually. He hadn't even thought to ask her about that. Even if she did though, it probably wouldn't be by these creatures.

He lapped at one fleshy nipple. Loving the coconut taste of her, Garret sucked the bud into his mouth. She must have found that special lotion he'd received as a freebie with the shampoo he'd purchased a few days ago.

She arched against him.

His teeth tugged at her skin while he continued to taste her with his tongue. Delicious. When he nibbled on the bit of flesh, she moaned and tangled her fingers in his hair.

Yeah, enjoy it, baby. His hand slowly slid down her body and between her legs. Garret stroked her pussy hair, so silky. Gently, he eased a finger inside to stroke her clit.

"Ah!" She squirmed. "Oh, that's nice. But I really need your tongue. Lick my pussy. Please! I've had such incredible fantasies about your tongue."

His pulse raced. Yes. He loved hearing her beg for it. Garret released her nipple and lapped at the skin between her breasts. He slowly kissed down her body, enjoying every inch of her. His tongue swirled inside her belly button, making her squirm and giggle.

He lifted his head and looked at her. "You're supposed to be moaning. Not giggling."

"Sorry." She smiled. "It tickles."

"Tickles, huh? Let's see what happens when I tickle you a little lower." She wouldn't be giggling for long. He slid down between her legs, pushing her thighs wide.

The sexual aroma from her pussy drew him like a starving man. Yeah, he intended to eat his fill of her. "Close your eyes. Know that it's just you and me here together, enjoying each other."

She nodded and her eyes fluttered closed.

So, she did prefer the sex to be just about the two of them, and she obviously trusted him to keep her safe. Otherwise, she'd have wanted to leave her eyes open and to remain on alert.

When he spread her pussy wide with his fingers, the Shadows drew nearer, as if wanting a closer look. He'd suspected they would. He hadn't wanted her to see them and freak out about what they might try to do. He intended to handle these fucking Shadows, lifting as much of the burden from her as possible.

Garret didn't like the aberrations being so near to her, but he knew the closer they got the more energy they absorbed, and the energy build up was necessary to disintegrate them. He leaned forward and lapped at Gina's clit. His thoughts focused on making her feel great and giving her a sexual experience she wouldn't forget.

She gasped and arched her back.

He sucked the clit into his mouth and drew gently on the nub.

"Ah! Yes!"

The male Shadow from earlier moved along her body as if studying her. Or maybe trying to touch her like the Dominatrix had done with him. Garret made sure to keep a close eye on the male. If it made a move any closer to Gina, he would stop the thing. Somehow. The Shadow grabbed what looked to Garret like his cock and began stroking himself.

Fine. As long as it left Gina alone he was happy. He continued to suck her clit.

"Oh, oh..."

Garret knew he'd need to up the intensity quite a bit to get rid of this particular male. Right now, the Shadow was growing stronger. If the intensity level didn't generate enough energy, no telling what the Shadow would turn into.

His cock was still fairly useless right now, so Garret needed an alternate plan. He pulled back, releasing her clit. "Roll over on your stomach."

"Um, okay."

He grabbed a pillow and shoved it under her hips as she turned, raising her ass higher while still giving him good access to her pussy.

"What—what are you planning?"

Gently, and with small strokes, he caressed her ass. He leaned over and whispered in her ear. "I'm going to finger-fuck your asshole while playing with your beautiful cunt. I

want to fuck you in both places at the same time, deep and hard, until you beg me to stop."

Gina's breath caught in her throat, and her heart pounded. Exactly the intensity they needed to destroy another Shadow. Exactly the intensity she needed for another shattering climax. "Oh, yes, Garret." The idea of a double penetration thrilled her. She'd never experienced that before. "Do it to me!"

He chuckled. "I really love your enthusiasm. It's super hot." He moved down her body.

Garret was the super hot one. She wanted to experience everything with him, no holding back. She jerked when she felt his tongue lick her pussy from behind. Her whole body throbbed in need.

The Shadows moved around them, but she did her best to ignore them.

"I need to get the lube, but I don't want to leave you alone, even for a moment. I don't trust these fuckers. Come on. Come with me."

She glanced around at him. "I'll be okay for a couple of seconds. You'll just be in the bathroom, right?" With the door open he'd still be able to see her. "Go on. Really."

He looked hesitant, glancing toward the bathroom then back at her. Finally, he nodded. "All right. I'll be fast."

Laying her head on her crossed arms, Gina closed her eyes. Not watching the Shadows made her feel less nervous. She didn't even want to think about the Shadows. Instead, thoughts of Garret occupied her mind.

This kidnapping mistake had turned into the most erotic time of her life. Every moment had been more than she could have ever imagined. Secretly, she hoped this new relationship between her and Garret might somehow continue, even after Project: Silhouette became only a memory. The idea of being with him simply because he wanted her, without any other agenda, was a thrilling thought.

Suddenly, she felt something odd plop on her back. Three times. "What the hell?" Opening her eyes, she started to reach behind her.

"Whoa. What are you doing?" Garret asked, coming out of the bathroom.

"That really was fast."

"The lube was right there in the cabinet. What happened?"

"I feel something on my back."

Garret set down the lube and took a look. "I don't see anything."

"Well, I feel it. On the small of my back. It's kind of sticky, I think. It feels weird."

Garret eyed the male Shadow whose massive cock now hung limp. *Fucking bastard*. He pulled a handkerchief from his back pocket and wiped Gina's back. "Did I get it?"

"I think so. I don't feel it anymore. What was it?"

He had no intention of telling her. It would sound too outrageous, though she'd probably believe him, given the circumstances. Still, he didn't want to send her screaming into the bathroom in a rush to shower off whatever might remain.

Garret tossed the handkerchief, despising the thought of that damn Shadow coming on her. The Shadow must have attained quite a bit of power for her to have felt his cum, or whatever the hell it was, spurt on her. "I never saw anything." Which was the truth, and all she really needed to know. "Relax."

"Did you notice we keep getting interrupted just when things start getting hot?"

He chuckled. "Bad planning on my part. But that's okay. I know how to get you going again."

She smiled up at him. "Oh, do you?" She laid her head back on her arms. "Get to it. Make me come."

"Demanding little one, aren't you? I think I like that."

"Oh? Maybe we should switch positions. I can show you how demanding I can really get. Give *your* ass a few swats for a change."

He'd had quite enough of that from the Dominatrix. "Well, I'll think about it. For now, I prefer you at my mercy." Garret leaned over and kissed her ass, letting his tongue linger. "Such a sweet butt. Has it ever been fucked?"

"Um, rarely." She hesitated. "Twice."

"Did you like it?" He held his breath, waiting on her answer, not really sure what he wanted to hear. The thought of another man giving her the same pleasure he was didn't sit well. At the same time, he wanted her to enjoy all aspects of sex and to allow him access to every part of her, physically and otherwise.

"Not the first time. Sort of the next time. I'm really not sure how excited I'll be able to get. It's not my favorite sexual

act, for sure. But I've fantasized about trying it again... with you."

Garret slowly let out the tight breath he held. He could definitely live with that. "I'll change your opinion about anal play. You'll enjoy it this time. You'll more than enjoy it. Trust me." Garret massaged her cheeks, wishing his cock were hard enough to fuck her with it. But maybe his fingers would work better. He'd have more control to ensure she enjoyed the fuck. He rolled a condom over two fingers and lubed them thoroughly. "Reach back here and spread your ass for me."

A little awkwardly, with the side of her face pressed against the mattress, she reached for her butt and spread her cheeks.

Garret swallowed hard. Damn. The sight of her lying there with her cheeks open, offering her asshole up to him, made his cock stir to life. *Fingers first.*

Taking it easy at the beginning was the way to hook her, he reminded himself. With his condom-clad fingers, he circled her puckered hole. Slowly, he dipped inside.

Gina whimpered.

"Easy." He pushed in a bit deeper, inserting a finger into her pussy at the same time to distract her. He pushed a second finger into her cunt, filling both her holes. Her small gasp caught his attention. "You okay?"

She nodded. "Yes, yes."

With both hands, Garret slowly finger-fucked her ass and her pussy. She moved her hips a bit, breathing heavier, but the intensity wasn't building fast enough for his liking. He increased the speed, pushing his fingers deeper. "Come on,

baby. Let go. Maybe after my fingers, I'll shove my cock into your ass. Would you like that?"

She moaned. "You're too big. But, I —"

He rotated his fingers.

"Oh... that's so good."

He smiled. His words, yes. That's what she really liked. She enjoyed hearing what he wanted to do to her sexually, whether he actually did it or not. He could tell by the flush on her face and body when he spoke.

"Yeah, my cock's pretty big, but you could handle it." His smile widened. "I can't wait to push it into your mouth and watch you suck. See how much of me you can take." He moved his fingers faster.

"Yes! I want—I want to suck your cock."

When he worked his fingers even deeper into her ass, she jackknifed her body. Her ecstasy-filled moans urged him on.

"Oh, Garret..."

"Yeah, baby." He enjoyed giving a woman pleasure, and more so with Gina than any other. "You like this, don't you?"

"I love it! I never thought—oh, yes."

He fucked her hard, moving his fingers roughly now. He could tell she was getting close. Garret's heart pounded.

"Hold out. The longer you can hold out, the better it will be."

"I can't. It feels too good." She whimpered and squirmed.

He had another surprise for her. When he felt her muscles begin to spasm, he leaned down and eagerly licked the sensitive skin between her ass and pussy.

"Garret!" She screamed and jerked, as her body toppled into orgasm.

He continued fucking her hard and licking her the best he could with her wild movements. He almost came in his pants just knowing how much pleasure he was giving her.

"Ah! Oh! Yes! Lick, lick."

Two pops fairly close together reached Garret's ears, but he didn't stop to look around. He wanted to keep Gina coming for as long as possible.

Gina squealed and thrashed on the mattress. "Ah-ah!" After a long moan of ecstasy, she finally collapsed.

His tongue dragged along the skin between her pussy and her ass.

Her body jerked a couple of times. A whimper, then a deep sigh escaped her.

Garret slowly pulled his soaked fingers out of her. Damn, she'd come hard. As he got rid of the condom, he glanced around the room. He didn't see the submissive female Shadow or the second male Shadow. Unfortunately, the first male Shadow, the strongest one, remained. It was looking right at him.

"Son of a bitch," Garret muttered. He was going to destroy that thing if it was the last thing he ever did. With renewed determination and a raging hard-on, he ripped off his flannel shirt, then stripped off his jeans and underwear.

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Chapter Eight

Gina lay exhausted, in contented bliss. *Wow!* was the only thought running through her head right now. Her whole body hummed from the incredible sexual experience she'd just had. Garret was amazing. No man had ever sated her so completely or so erotically. A crazy, uncontrolled giggle bubbled up from her throat.

Suddenly, she felt a hand tangle in her hair. When she turned and saw Garret naked, the giggle died. Yes! His broad chest caught her attention. So strong and muscular. She itched to run her fingers through the spattering of dark hair there.

Her gaze lowered to his cock. *Oh, my!* Incredibly long and hard, with a wide head. Thick and deep purplish in color. Most definitely a powerful tool. She swallowed hard, and her body trembled.

"Come here," he demanded.

Before she could say anything, he pulled her off the bed. "What?" she finally managed. "Where —"

"On your knees. Now!"

The sexual need on his face caused her heart to lurch. She didn't protest, excited to do his bidding.

Pushing her to the floor, he plopped down in the stuffed chair across from the sofa bed. His other hand wrapped around his shaft and he gripped himself hard. "Suck my dick."

Gina's hands settled on his thighs and she lowered her head. Without hesitation, she lapped at the tip. Slowly, her

lips slid over the wide head of his cock. When she sucked, the musky taste of him filled her mouth.

"Take more of it. Suck it hard," he ground out.

She slid her mouth down a couple of inches. His cock felt huge in her mouth. She bobbed up and down, doing her best to please him. After what he'd done for her, she wanted him to feel fulfilled too.

"Ah, yeah." After a few more moments of her mouth on him and with a drawn-out groan, he pushed her away. "You want it in the cunt or the ass?" He grabbed a condom packet and ripped it open.

She stared at him rolling the protection over his massive erection. When he finished and cupped the back of her head forcefully, her gaze snapped up to his. "Wh-What?"

"Your cunt or your ass, Gina?"

The intense look on his face set her heart to pounding so hard she felt dizzy. She'd never heard him speak quite so demandingly. No way could she take him in her ass, but she couldn't seem to find her voice to tell him. Only a mouthful of sputters spilled out of her.

"Fuck it." He lubed his condom-clad cock. "Get up."

She scrambled to her feet. Just as she was about to straddle him, he turned her around, spread her ass cheeks, and pulled her on top of him.

"Ack! Wait! Garret! Oh!" The unexpected pain/pleasure of his cock pushing up her ass shocked her. Such an intense sensation! "Ah..." When he slid deeper inside her, her breaths came out in short pants as she tried to get used to his size. "You're going to split me in two." She squirmed, suddenly not

quite sure if she wanted to get away or wanted him to impale her even further.

"Tell me to stop. Otherwise you're getting one a-class butt fuck." His fingers curled around her hips. "Damn. Your ass feels just like a vise around my cock." He pumped his hips. "Oh, yeah."

"Ah, Garret!" The movement of his cock inside her was more powerful than she'd ever expected, much more powerful than his fingers. She didn't want him to stop. She lowered her hand to her pussy and rubbed her clit. A sexual thrill shot up her body, stealing her breath. "Yes," she whispered, barely able to talk.

A fluid movement caught her eye and she stilled. No! The multi-tongued creature slid across the floor toward them.

Garret's hands eased up to her breasts. He tweaked her nipples, then pulled and twisted the nubs of flesh.

"Ah-ah!" That felt good, but they needed to complete their agenda. Taking their time wasn't an option right now. "Hurry, Garret!" Equal amounts of fear and sexual need rolled through her. She decided not to tell Garret about the Shadow's approach. She wanted him to concentrate on the sex. Nothing else.

He must have heard the fear in her voice though, for he slowed the pace. His fingers gently caressed her breasts in lazy circles. "What's wrong?"

She'd be damned if they'd lose the intensity this time. "Nothing. Just fuck me, damn it! Hard." She slammed down her hips, and they both groaned.

"Argh! Damn, woman. Okay, fine. You want it hard? You'll get it fucking hard!" His hands returned to her hips, and he pumped her ass like a wild man, thrusting his hips up against her without mercy. "Yeah! Oh, yeah!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" Come, she needed to come.

A wet tongue slid up one of her legs. A second tongue glided along her other thigh. *Oh, shit.* Her mind battled her body, warring between the extreme sexual sensation of the tongues and the need to flee.

Two tongues lapped at the back of her hand, trying to get to her clit while her fingers still stroked herself. Gina squeezed her eyes closed and fixated on the pleasure Garret was giving her. Nothing else.

With each upward thrust, Garret grunted. His fingers dug into her hips.

She sobbed from the intense need to climax.

Another tongue! She felt it glide around and below her fingers. It flicked at the entrance to her pussy. "Oh!" Slowly, the wet tongue slithered inside her. She had no way to stop it. The tongue flicked back and forth, sliding so deeply she felt the sensations throughout her whole body. "Ah-ah!" Her muscles spasmed and she came, gushing hard. "Oh-hh!" she squealed, the feeling incredible.

Garret came almost at the same time. "Fuck, yeah! Damn, Gina! Ah, yeah!"

A loud pop filled her ears. After her body stopped spasming, she opened her eyes. The Shadow was gone.

A huge sense of relief rolled through her. No longer seeing or feeling the tongues, she collapsed against Garret.

He held her for a long time, softly caressing her body, before finally easing out of her and disposing of the condom.

She didn't intend to tell him what happened with the Shadow. Even though she'd come like crazy, she wanted to forget about the Shadow's part in it and attribute her pleasure only to Garret. "I need to sleep."

"Me, too." Garret helped her over to the bed. "Which one did we get? I heard the pop."

"The tongues." She fell on the mattress, totally exhausted.

"Figures."

He murmured something else before falling asleep. Some endearment? Or maybe it was a curse that the male Shadow wasn't destroyed instead. She hadn't understood his words and was too tired to care, right now. Her eyes closed and she drifted into blackness.

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Chapter Nine

Garret awoke some time later. He wasn't sure how long he'd slept.

All seemed quiet. He didn't see the remaining male Shadow, though he knew the aberration lurked somewhere nearby.

Rolling onto his side, he glanced down at Gina. Still sleeping. Such an amazing woman. He stroked her cheek.

"Mine," he whispered, realizing the word sounded so right. Now he just needed to convince her. After all this was over, he intended to romance her so thoroughly she'd fall completely under his spell.

Garret smiled and lay back against the pillow. He closed his eyes. Thoughts of Gina followed him into a deep, restful sleep.

Gina felt something odd. Her eyes fluttered open. What was going on? How long had she slept? She blinked several times. Dark? Was it night already?

No, wait. The Shadow! The last one. The male hovered over her, blocking out the light. He spread her thighs, and she seemed helpless to stop him. When she slapped at him, her hands passed right through his form. "Garret! Garret!"

Beside her, Garret snapped awake. He shot up. "What? What the hell?" After only a moment's hesitation, he punched at the Shadow. His fist didn't connect with the creature though. It couldn't. He cursed and grabbed her, dragging her off the bed.

Gina scrambled to gain her footing. "He's following."

"I see him."

The Shadow rushed at Garret and slammed him against the wall.

"Son of a bitch!" Garret recovered quickly from the blow. He lunged at the Shadow, but sailed right through the silhouette, stumbling against a side table. He spun around. "Shit! How come the fucker can touch me, but I can't touch him?"

Gina realized they were at a dangerous crossroads right now. "He must have stored enough energy to temporarily morph at will, using a solid form when needed."

"Oh, fucking perfect!"

The Shadow punched Garret, sending him toppling over a chair.

"Ack!" Gina looked around. There had to be something she could do to help.

Garret scrambled to his feet. He picked up a heavy book and threw it at the Shadow, but it simply fell to the floor on the other side of the creature.

The male aberration tackled Garret to the floor, then rolled away, again out of reach.

Gina spotted something out the cabin window, and her mind raced a mile a minute. It might work.

As Garret hauled himself to his feet and circled the Shadow, Gina tried the door. Unlocked. Good. He must not have relocked it after the last time he brought in wood. She rushed out onto the front porch, barely registering the cold on her naked body.

She eyed the bug zapper hanging from a wooden beam. The zapper wasn't plugged in, it being winter and all. She wondered if the thing even still worked. The cord hung beside the unit, rolled and banded. She undid the cord and found the outside outlet. When she plugged it in, the zapper hummed and the light slowly kicked on. The unit worked!

Gina lifted the zapper off the hook. It didn't generate a lot of power, but they might not need that much from a direct charge. Electrical energy wasn't emotional energy, but it still might work. Theoretically, the Shadows should be able to absorb both types.

She and Cleo had never tested direct electrical power to find out, or at least they hadn't while she was still with the project. So, she had no idea what would happen when the unit came into contact with the Shadow. She was about to find out.

The zapper was designed with a protective covering over it to avoid accidental shocks, but the Shadow should pass right through the grating. She hoped. She lugged the zapper over to the door.

The Shadow's back was to her. She held up the unit for Garret to see. He nodded almost imperceptibly and moved back and forth, getting the Shadow to move with him.

"You think you're smarter than we are, fucker?" Garret taunted. He shifted forward quickly, and the Shadow backed up a couple of steps.

Before the Shadow could lunge for Garret, and while the aberration was close enough for the cord to reach, Gina threw

the zapper. It passed right through the creature as she'd hoped it would.

The Shadow must have been in the process of morphing, for the zapper came alive while in mid-air, sparking crazily, as if it had caught a swarm of bugs before the unit fell to the floor. Yes!

An eerie, out-of-this-world scream filled the cabin, and the Shadow disintegrated right before their eyes. Only an odd silence remained. The zapper lay dead on the floor, shorted out most likely.

Gina and Garret simply stood there, staring at where the Shadow had been. Gradually pulling their attention back to each other, their gazes locked.

A smile crossed her face, and a huge weight lifted from her shoulders. "It worked!"

Garret returned her smile. He crossed the cabin and scooped her into his arms. "You are a genius!" He twirled her around, and they both laughed.

"Damn, close that door. I'm freezing," she complained, but she couldn't wipe the smile off her face. She felt too good.

Garret kicked the door closed right over the cord. He carried Gina to the bed, toppling them both on top of it. "Oh, man, I feel invigorated!"

"Me, too." She wrapped her arms and legs around him.

The look on his face sobered, and a new softness entered his eyes. "Can I make love to you now? Nice and slow and tender." He stroked her cheek. "You are incredible."

She thought he was pretty incredible, too. "Yes, Garret. Make love to me."

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Epilogue

Garret forced his eyes open. The strange surroundings confused him for a minute, until he remembered that he was in Gina's apartment, right beside her, in her bed. She hadn't felt comfortable at the cabin, so they'd relocated to her place as soon as the weather allowed. The apartment wasn't as cozy as the cabin, but he felt very comfortable here.

He glanced toward the window. Night. They'd slept the entire day away.

Tomorrow, they needed to talk. About what had happened. About their relationship. About their future.

He didn't want to leave Gina, for he'd grown to love this woman fiercely. Working together had laid the foundation, fighting the Shadows together and making incredible love had solidified his feelings.

Garret stroked her cheek. They'd been through so much, past and present. He really believed they had a chance to be happy together.

A shifting of light caught his attention and he glanced toward the open bedroom door. A shadow passed by. His heart stopped, then pounded painfully against his ribs. "No fucking way."

A silhouette grew up the door and glided into the room.
"Gina!"

Gina bolted upright. Darkness enveloped her. Had Garret called out to her? "Damn," she muttered when all seemed quiet. "Must have been a dream." She glanced beside her

where Garret slept, though fitfully. She wondered about his dreams.

Now that they were in her apartment, she felt safe. She'd asked Garret to stay with her. The Shadows had been destroyed and neither of them had any other immediate plans.

He'd agreed, putting her remaining worries at ease by telling her that even if the government caught up with them, the Shadows were now gone, making the two of them useless to Project: Silhouette's backers or other interested parties. She couldn't help but wonder about Cleo's safety though. Garret hadn't mentioned his sister, but Cleo had to be in his thoughts.

Gina wasn't certain where her relationship with Garret would end up after all this. They still had a lot to talk about. But for now, with this man—whom she'd quickly grown to love—she felt as if she had a real shot at living the happily-ever-after fantasies she'd dreamt of for years. She kissed him lightly on the lips.

A shadow on the wall caught her eye, but the outline formed out of a reflection from the moonlight streaming through the window. Project: Silhouette was dead.

Yes. She settled back against the pillow. *Only a reflection...*

The End

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Ruth D. Kerce

Award winning novelist Ruth D. Kerce loves to write. Her favorites are cross-genre stories—stories that break the rules. Ruth's futuristic, historical, and contemporary story stories and novellas are now available as e-books. Several of her titles are also available in print. She loves feedback from readers. You can visit her website at www.ruthkerce.com or email her at RDKerce@aol.com
