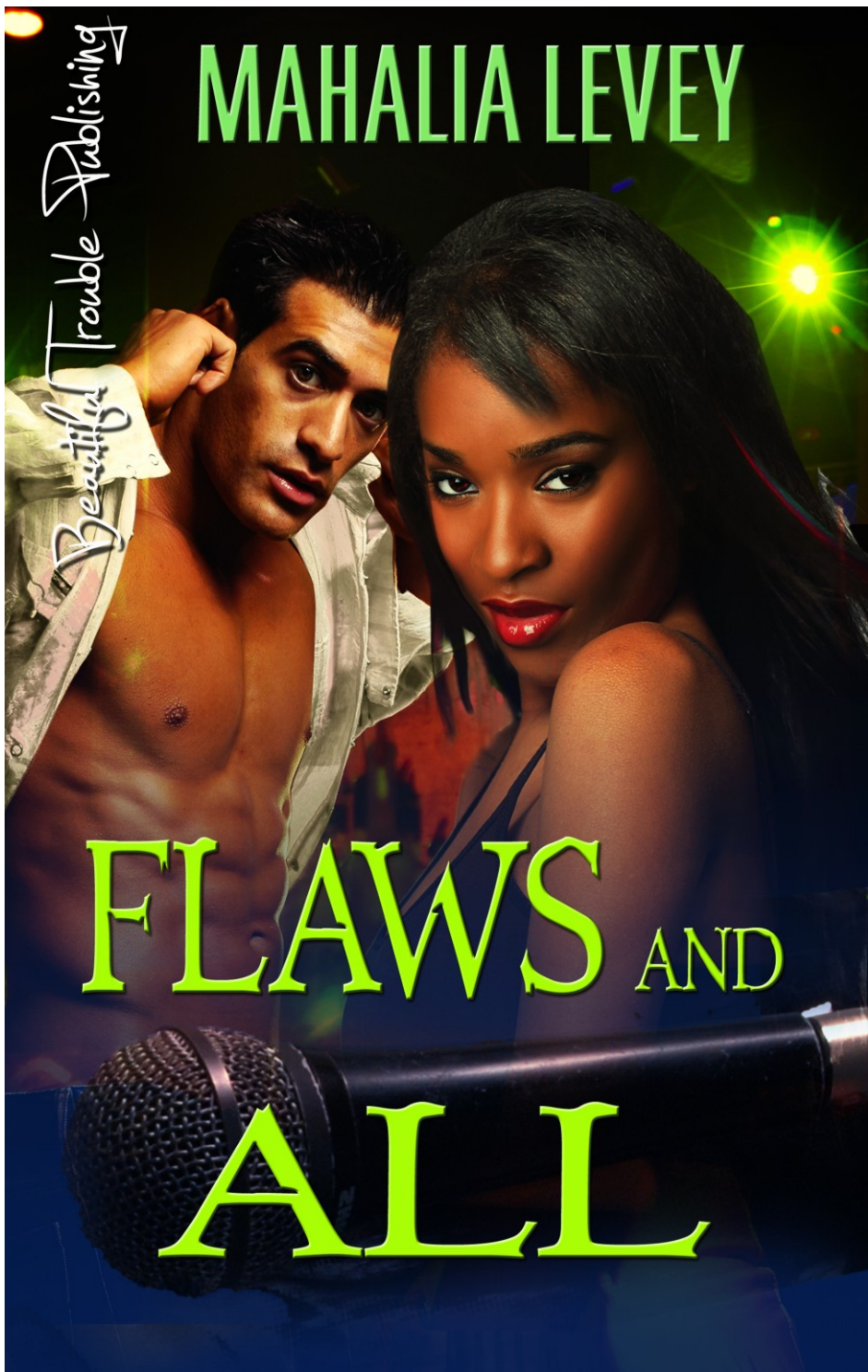


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MAHALIA LEVEY

FLAWS AND

ALL





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# Flaws and All

Mahalia Levey

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This story is dedicated the readers who buy my work, my family for being so understanding of my limited time, and my crit team for being the best eva!

—Mahalia



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This work of erotica contains adult language and sexually explicit scenes, which are smoking hot. This book is intended only for adults, as it is defined by the laws of the country in which the purchase is made. Keep this book out of the hands of under-aged readers.



# Chapter One

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*How to Seduce Your Man.* Nadja Mederios thumbed through the book she'd picked up at the local bookstore. Chapter one sealed her fate. She possessed none of the social skills necessary for snagging men—or rather one man in particular, Donato Falcone. He was tall, tanned, broad shouldered, and muscled. A host of ideas came to mind involving herself and her sexy co-worker in the heat of the night. She wanted to be the woman gracing the cover of the book in her hands—craved to feel the intensity the model projected and relish in the savage hunger of the male holding her. To make it a reality meant she'd have to step out of her safety net.

What did she know of romance, of seduction? Nothing. Nada. Zilch.

One of the book's suggestions was to mail a man a pair of panties or wake him up with oral sex. Nadja blushed and closed the book.

Looking back on the path her life had taken amazed her. Singing wasn't a planned career. Yet when she'd surfed for a job, she'd fallen right into it, and with the right look she made a nice salary. Her dear friend, Deja, helped her find a more sophisticated look, and a trip to the costume shop as needed gave

her a wardrobe she didn't have to purchase. She'd come a long way since leaving home.

No longer was she a varsity football player on her high school team. Her family had wanted a change, and she didn't blame them. It wasn't as if she'd ever play pro football or wanted to. She played her heart out, and even against the odds she'd proven herself a true athlete, but did that make her any less a true woman? *Could* she be? The sad fact was she lacked courage when dealing with the male species, except when it came to the friend zone.

Her few failed relationships had left a permanent mark on her, convincing her she was sexually inept. One man in particular had defined her as a waste of time. Marc had no problem reiterating how unhappy her lack of being a girly female had made him. Callous statements hurt regardless of whether or not they were made jokingly. Marc had bombarded her with insults and harsh words. He'd questioned why she couldn't act like his friends' wives, who were "normal" women. While the comparisons hurt, his worst insults were the ones that attacked their sex life—or rather their lack of one.

Nadja had begun to feel unattractive around him. Her self-esteem had taken a beating since Marc, so she'd chosen to shy away from relationships, effectively avoiding falling into the same sinkhole of

nothingness. Turning around her self-image took work, and she was doing that.

The jazz tone of her cell pulled her from thoughts of her ex. “Hello?” Nadja leaned back on her couch, clutching the phone to her ear.

“Chica, what ya doin’?”

“Nursing a root beer and reading.”

“Oh, what?”

“*How to Seduce Your Man*,” Nadja rattled off.

“Yeah, you skipped a whole book.”

“Leena!”

“Well, you need to get the man first. Unless you’re studying the dirty parts.”

Nadja knew her friend teased to get under her skin. “Think I should mail Donato a pair of my panties?”

“I think I should come over and roleplay some more with you. Get you up on your game.”

“Sure. This coming from the girl who waited a year before deciding to get Jason’s attention?” She snorted.

“That just means I have recent experience.”

Nadja tightened her hand on her cell. “Yeah, a whole six months’ worth.”

“So how are you going to get his attention?”

Nadja shrugged off the irritation rising rapidly within her. "Invite him over for a beer and football game?"

"That's not sexy."

"I'm not a girly girl or someone who drinks those frou-frou cocktails. I don't like malls, drama flicks or dressing up like I'm in some fashion show. Give me action or thrillers and sports documentaries. I. Am. Not. Sexy."

She heard a sigh on the other end. "But a guy doesn't want to sleep with 'one of the guys' who just happens to be a girl. He wants a woman."

"I know, but at least I have all the right parts, so that's half the battle." Nadja nodded to herself. She knew guys thought about sex about every four minutes, so the odds were in her favor.

"Where's the woman I see on stage performing?"

She knew Taleena meant well, but sometimes, she just wanted to throttle her. "She's performing. It's an act. The sexual being up there is not the flesh and blood girl. I don't want to be the sparkle and pizzazz female. I just want a man to accept me for—well, me."

"I have to go. There's a man glaring at me. Break time is over. I know you're not a Cosmo girl, but just try to tone down the tomboy status. Any man who doesn't love you for yourself can piss off. I love you. I

just want to see you happy. Maybe you could drink your beer out of a chilled glass instead of the bottle.”

*What a waste of a clean glass.* “Sure I could. Talk to you later,” Nadja said as she hung up the phone and took her soda off the coaster. The sweaty bottle nearly slipped out of her hand. Though it was tepid at best, she finished the rest of the sweet drink and hugged her knees to her chest.

With two hours to spare, Nadja picked up her favorite magazine, thumbing the dog-eared pages. Fashion remained elusive to her. Her heels for work had inserts to make them easier to wear. Her friends all boasted beauty meant sacrifice. Her screaming sore muscles after a night of standing around were hard pressed to agree.

*“The Secret to Making Your Boyfriend Happy.”* One had to wonder where columnists got the answers. And what made them qualified to ask the questions in the first place. Not that she needed the advice. *I don’t have a boyfriend. Why? Because I’ll never trust a man enough to lower my guard for a second time.*

Giving the thick fashion and relationship bible one more glance, Nadja gave a derisive snort and tossed it in the wastebasket. Inspiration seized her, and she walked across her sunny living room to her baby grand piano. Her previous night’s work lay in front of her. The music sheet was filled with music

notes and lyrics. Soon she'd be done with "Let Me Be Me" and ready to test it out at her job.

She took in the stark white keys as she warmed up. Wood polish lingered in the air, tickling her nose. Her reflection smiled at her from gloss-polished mahogany. Sleek and perfect. Only when she played did she open herself to the fantasy of having Donato caress her with tenderness, stroke her and bring her to a gradual increase of ecstasy, the ultimate of crescendos. As her voice grew husky with sorrow, elation and joy, she gave into her love for song, the perfect string of melody. Out of nowhere the hook called to her and she belted it out, plotting the chords to memory.

When she was breathless and her throat constricted, she looked to the clock. Time had flown right by. She had little to no time to pen her new notes on the contemporary clef sheet. *Grr. Stupid. Why do I always do this?* She still had to dash over to Deja's to get her new costume.

Forty minutes later, Nadja emerged from the shower refreshed and dressed in short shorts and a print tank. She slid into wedge sandals that wrapped around her ankles and buckled. Making music always took away the time frame she needed to layer cosmetics on. Internally she kicked herself. Since she'd



begun singing, no one ever saw her without makeup in public. The thought of becoming invisible scared her.

Without the layers of goo covering her face, she felt naked and vulnerable. At least with the excessive eye shadow, fake eyelashes, and heavy kohl boring Nadja became Nadja the Seductress, confident and wanted. But today, circumstance forced her to settle for a quick application of eyebrow liner and clear gloss.

Settled in her car, she finally took off at top speed to get to Deja's, breaking at stop signs until she hit the highway. The short drive taxed the rest of her patience. Road construction and detours backed up the roads, making her take a longer route to her destination. She thrummed her fingers to the music playing and blasted the a/c. When she turned into the parking lot, she slid into the first available slot, slammed her car into park, yanked up the emergency brake and exited her vehicle. She clicked on her alarm before tossing her keys into her shoulder bag.

The late afternoon sun beamed down on her with its stifling warmth. Pressing forward, she entered the store. Immediately, cool air soothed her overheated skin. "Hey Barbie, Deja around?"

Nadja breathed in the subtle smell of incense and smiled at the rocker with her newly bright-red-streaked hair. "Heya, Nadja!" Barbie leaned over the

counter, pressing price tags into merchandise with her tagging gun. “Deja’s in the back.”

“The new scent is nice,” Nadja commented as she walked over to the girl and went through the pile of skimpy costumes.

“Tahitian Nights—I had an image of a sheik meeting an American girl pop into my brain, and played with the oils until I found a nice scent.”

“That’s funny. I’m surprised Deja let you experiment in here again after the incident with the sexual massage oils.” The adult section always called to her, but she couldn’t imagine wearing anything like that for anyone.

“I did it with those perfume cards and did a poll. I have another called Satin Sex, but Taleena wants it for a perfume. Oh, and I saw your new formal wear—it’s gorgeous. Better not keep Deja waiting. She’s a bit jumpy this week, sooo not like her at all. She’s been touchy since she came back from her buying trip.”

Nadja laughed. “Taleena’s a trip. Thanks for the heads up on D.”

Light peeked through the double doors left ajar in the back of the shop. She squeezed through the clothes racks and walked down the main aisle. “Deja.” Raising her hand, she knocked on the door.

“Come on in.” Deja looked up and beckoned with her hand.

“I got a message that you have some new choices of apparel for me.”

“I do. You look different today.” Deja put her pen behind her ear and went to retrieve three garment bags.

“I didn’t have time to plaster the goo on.”

“Fresh and clean. You have too pretty a face to weigh it down with cosmetics.” She unzipped bag one and pulled out a short white dress that flared at the knees. “What do you think?”

“It’s nice, but I’m not really a show-my-knees type.” The dress looked lovely, but on her, she feared it would show too much.

“Hmm.” Deja slid it back into the bag and moved on to bag number two. “I brought two of these.” She removed a burgundy dress with zippers for shoulder straps. “I have it in royal blue too.”

“I like the red wine color more than the blue. The dress is gorgeous. I’ll take it.”

“Great. I’ve been thinking you could model the formal wear for me. I’ve acquired two more stores. This place houses my only mixture of costumes and show wear. The other two stores are formal wear. I’ll need catalog models and print ad models. I prefer the natural, clean look, and I want you.”

Nadja zipped up the bag. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Just think about it. You have a striking face and you’re modest. Lord knows why you haven’t moved to some bigger town to get noticed for your voice.” Deja put the garments back on the hanging rack.

“I like being a Belton, Missouri girl. Large cities freak me out...” Loud pinging drowned out the rest of her reply, making her ears ring. “What’s that annoying noise?”

“Sorry, it’s nothing. Just someone who doesn’t get...I’m not interested.” Deja huffed and clicked on her computer.

“Oh?”

“Yeah, met a guy while on my last trip. Don’t get me wrong, Derek’s handsome, but I’ve never dated outside my race before.”

Nadja draped her bag over her arm and sat down. “Dish.”

“We had a drink in the lounge and then two, and so on and ended up...well, you know how the story goes.” The pinging didn’t stop.

“So?”

“The one-night stand turned into a week of mind-blowing sex after the shows.”

“And?”

“What we did terrifies me. Though not as much as how he made me feel. I haven’t been the same since I met him. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. Let’s

face it, I'm not the have-a-fling type." Deja sighed and looked over at the computer. "I'm a controlled woman who has her eyes on the prize. I don't have time for playing. I have a future to plan and goals to finish, and the last thing I need is to have my mind cluttered with thoughts of a man."

"So what's really bothering you...his race or the fact that he affects you?" Nadja asked as she plucked a cinnamon disc candy out of a dish.

"Both, maybe. I don't know. I didn't plan on having any one particular male enter my life."

"I say go for it. Life is short. It's apparent there's great chemistry. Who cares how it's packaged?"

Deja punched her keys, answering the e-mail. "I don't know if I can do this."

"Sure you can. You have a growing business and guts. He's just a man." Nadja winked.

Deja crossed her arms and sat back. "So how's Donato?" She glanced at the computer screen again.

"He's fine, I guess, why?"

"Taleena mentioned you had him in your sights."

"I should put superglue on her lips. I swear."

"Tell me."

"He's nice. After work, he makes sure no one's around and starts my car for me. I'm not sure, but I think he's behind the cop tail that follows me home and disappears as I enter my place."

“You know, we understand why you hide under all that makeup. But you might find Donato’s not like Marc.”

Nadja shrugged.

“Tit for tat. You gave me advice—try seeing what’s there. Everyone knows he digs you. Hell, you know Taleena won’t let anything happen to you. If she’s not happy, Jason’s not happy. Jason threatened him to ensure peace in his own relationship.”

“Donato hasn’t made a first move,” Nadja said, crinkling the plastic candy wrapper between her fingers.

Deja slapped her hands on her desk. “I got it! Tell him you need a bodyguard. I have two photographers but only know one of them well. Even if I did, it’s not my practice to send any woman alone to be photographed.”

“That might work. Maybe I’ll see a different side of Donato when he’s outside of the club. He, well—he glares a lot.”

Thinking about her sexy Donato brought a flush to her face and wetness to her panties. On stage, she pretended he, and he alone, watched her. The crowd fell away, and she performed for him. Too bad he couldn’t really enjoy her voice or even hear her, thanks to the ear buds he wore. Besides, upholding order in

the club kept him busy. She looked up to see Deja frowning at her computer screen. "What?"

"Derek's in town and wants to have dinner."

"Ahh. Must be why he keeps trying to contact you." Nadja turned her thoughts from Donato to her friend. "So, is it creepy he's, like, here in town?"

"No. He owns a brewery here and some other corporate real estate. I'm just not ready to see him again so soon."

Nadja couldn't help but laugh. "How long has it been?"

"Two days."

"Go to dinner. You can always call me and beg off with womanly symptoms if you need to."

Noticing the time on the clock, Nadja leaned over and gave Deja a quick hug. "I have to get to work."

Seeing Deja flustered made her grin. She wanted her friend happy and not so career consumed that life passed her by, leaving her with regrets. A man to make her crazy might just be a good change of pace. With that, she got up and made her way out of the store.

Instead of climbing back inside the stuffy car and driving to work, she crossed the major intersection and walked the short block with the garment bag draped over her arm. The club had keyless entry for employees. She pinned in her code

and pushed the door open. Again she was thrust into a cool interior. “Evenin’, Gaestavo.” She kissed his leathery cheek and leaned a hip against the bar.

“Bella. Your usual?”

“Yes.” Gaestavo spoiled her. She cherished the few moments she could steal before patrons and Donato arrived. He handed her an ice-cold beer, and she pressed the bottle against her forehead. “Ahhh.”

“Hot outside?” The older barkeep asked.

“Sweltering. Hotter than—never mind.” Saying it was hotter than sweaty balls definitely wasn’t what Taleena told her to work on. She tilted the bottle into her mouth. Heaven sent, the amber liquid quenched her thirst. Now all she needed was a sports game. As if on cue, the sound of a game being transmitted via radio filled her ears. She turned in time to catch Gaestavo’s understanding wink before he headed off to stock the bar.

The scenario brought her back to the time he’d found her hiding with a beer and trying to listen to a game without being caught. In her circle, ladies just didn’t do that. They prepared the New York or Chicago-style hot dogs, chips, and dips and stocked liquor and beer. Not one of them nestled down with the fellas to watch the game. Instead her group of friends watched the women’s television network or played bunko—a card game based entirely on luck that



came with fuzzy dice, a timer and scorecard. To give them credit, she did like the show that concentrated on women killing their husbands. She had to hand it to a group of women so intelligent, they skirted past conviction and had a series given to them.

After swallowing the last of her drink, she stepped behind the bar and tossed it into the trash bin. Out of curiosity, she slid open the cooler and withdrew a chilled mug and popped another beer. She tipped a tentative mouthful for a taste test. "Ugh. It's not the same." In utter disappointment, she finished pouring the beer into the cool glass. Digging in her purse, she took out a five dollar bill and set it on the bar. Although she didn't have to pay for her drinks, she did anyhow.

The loud sports announcer interrupted her thoughts, and Nadja turned off the radio.

"Evenin', doll."

She turned to see Donato put down his duffle bag. "Evenin', Donato." She sipped her beer and set it down on the coaster in front of her.

"I thought drinking alcohol hurt the vocal cords."

Nadja laughed. "Vodka and hard liquor. Beer doesn't affect me, Girl Scout's honor." She raised three fingers, her thumb holding down her pinky.

Did the man ever really smile? She watched him, waiting for a sign that he might have a thing for her. Put off, she took another drink.

“Hmm. That’s good to know. Disappointing people is bad business.”

*Crash and burn.*

Here one second, gone the next. If that wasn’t the story of her life... She clicked her tongue, watching him scoop up his bag and head toward his office without a “by your leave.” So, yeah, he had tapes to watch before the security team reported for work. That didn’t mean flights of fancy didn’t occasionally slip through her mind. However, it looked like she could scratch the fantasy about being abducted into his office off her list for today. Too bad it wouldn’t pan out. With a heavy sigh, she walked behind the bar, washed and dipped her mug in the series of disinfectants, and then placed it inside the cooling rack.

“Did I hear Donato?” Gaestavo appeared, carrying crates to stock the back bar.

“Yes. Let me help you.” She frowned when he batted her hand away.

“You do enough here, Bella.”

“I sing.”

“And check the invoices and books,” he reminded her.

“Someone has to.” She grinned big. “I’ll see you tonight.” She swiped the counter off with a clean rag and headed to the office. The books called to her, as did the purchasing vouchers. How they maintained themselves before she’d answered the ad as a bookkeeper eluded her. Disorganization drove her crazy. In less than two weeks, she had the office humming like she wanted and the books organized. She’d persuaded Gaestavo to order a new computer and installed new software, showing him how to write it all off during tax season. Fondness for the older male crept in.

Everything was fine until his nephew came home from the service. Hearing the news that he owned the club came as a surprise to her. She realized then that the reason changes took so long had nothing to do with Gaestavo and everything to do with Donato. Since his arrival, she’d fallen over herself trying to stay out of his way.

Her computer screen blipped.

Dejavous121: Have you asked him yet?

Beergurl54: I just got to work! No.

Dejavous121: Don’t punk out.

Beergurl54: I thought you were on a date.

Dejavous121: I punked out!

Beergurl54: You’re too much.

Dejavous121: Joking. He’s on his way.

Beergurl54: You comin' by tonight?

Dejavous121: Hell yes. The dress is hot.

Beergurl54: You got a good eye. Have fun on your date.

Dejavous121: Hair down. No makeup and I will.

Beergurl54: Won't have time to plaster it on anyhow, clicks on the D'oh face.

Dejavous121: Damn, he's one fine ass man.

Beergurl54: I take it he's arrived. Wipe the drool before he sees the puddle.

Dejavous121: Oh I'm puddlin' all right and in the right place.

Beergurl54: Ugh. I just yakked up the taste of beer. TMI.

Dejavous121: Haha laterz.

Nadja clicked "busy" on her instant messenger list and tried to forget Deja and her complicated life.

Two hours and the onset of a migraine later, she logged off and shut down the computer. The headway she'd made brought her a sense of ease. One stressor down, she slipped into the back room to ready herself for the night.

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Donato walked the perimeter of the club. The day's heat-stifling temperature plummeted, leaving a

nice cool breeze. He took note of the bouncer carding and the line of patrons growing even longer. His uncle's decision to have live acts every Friday had proved to be lucrative. Sales rose and stayed strong. In his absence, his second in command, Tomas, did a damn good job. Of course, he expected no less, as there wasn't a man he trusted more than his childhood friend and colleague. "Tomas, all clear," he spoke into his mic as he strode back indoors.

Music reverberated through the building. The D.J. played the top hits on the billboard while waiting for the majority of the crowd to get in. Donato weaved his way through the occupied tables, his trained eye on the lookout for trouble. And there she stood—Nadja. The gown she wore hugged every single curve on her body. Arms crossed, he leaned back against the door jam and watched her. A short time later, he listened to the D.J. play the last song, cueing Nadja to take stage left. From his standpoint he watched her saunter upstage to take her position.

When the lights dimmed, her soft face radiated against the dark contrast of the curtains. He recalled the earlier series of warm-ups she sang before blasting him with the most entrancing voice he'd ever heard. It normally took his breath away. Tonight, though, she looked so glamorous he couldn't focus on her voice. His attention wandered to her cleavage and down to

where her arm lightly cradled her abdomen. Her hair spilled over her shoulder. Devoid of cosmetics, her mocha skin glowed. Her vibrant hazel eyes twinkled.

*Did she glow under a lover's touch? How musical would her moans be if she was touched just the right way?*

*Stop it. Get her out of your head. She works here. Sexual harassment is no joke.*

Try as he might, the thoughts didn't go away. Donato settled down in his nightly spot to watch the show.

Soulful. The difference from her usual set of music hit him. Not poppy and upbeat tonight, she allowed everyone to see her as an artist for the first time, instead of performing the trendy renditions she loved. He didn't recognize the lyrics of this one. The heat in her voice, the emotion behind her words painted a sad picture. His heart stopped when he noticed a trail of moisture in her eyes. Whoever had caused the pain belted out by her sultry voice better not step in his path. They'd become mincemeat if they did. Her expressive song sucked him in good. She possessed such a talent for persuasion, he forgot for one solitary moment she hid behind a façade, not showing one hint of her true self.

"Boss. Trouble outside," came through his ear bud.

“On my way,” he replied tersely, agitated that he’d let her affect him. If she couldn’t drop her guard to have a normal conversation, it wasn’t his problem.

Outside, Tomas and Sean fought to restrain two men. The bulkier aggressor elbowed his employee, and Donato took control by means of pressure points. “Now then. What’s the problem?” he barked.

“Bro, just trying to take care of my baby sister.”

Donato looked at the young woman. “She looks grown. Was she carded?”

“Yes, sir. Ran through the machine too. It passed.”

“What do you have to do with this?” he addressed the other restrained man.

“I brought her. She’s twenty-one. I swear. Met her at a frat party.”

Donato let go and pinned a glare on the downed man. “Move and I’ll taze you.” His feet crunched the gravel as he walked over to the distressed young woman. He tilted his head one way and then the other, appraising her. Guilt shone on her face. “Parents’ number,” he ordered.

“Please don’t call them. I’ll go home. That guy’s my brother.”

Only a fool fell for the wiles of an embarrassed, forlorn female. “For all I know he’s another classmate or college student.” A fool he might be, but he wasn’t

born yesterday. "It's your parents or the police. Don't think too long, my niceness lasts about two minutes." He shrugged, feigning indifference.

The pixie-faced girl looked miserable as she rattled off a phone number.

"Name?"

"Tabitha."

Donato called the number and requested a pickup for the party's underage daughter. After he hung up, he addressed clown number one. "You. Pick someone in class with you to date. Now, get off my property." He watched the young man leave, his pants falling down. He turned to the young girl. "That clown was your date? With the pants hangin' around his ankles?"

"He's the coolest frat boy I know. He's gangsta," she stammered.

"Gangsta? That clown. Darlin', you have a lot to learn." He turned to address the other young man. "And for a brother, you've got a fucked way to show your sister who to date and who not to."

After fifteen minutes of waiting, a car arrived. He walked to the driver's side and peered in. "Mr. Lathan?"

"Thank you for not calling the authorities."

"No problem, but if they come back again, I will. This is a one shot warning." He looked at the brother.



“Don’t forget what I told you.” He pivoted and headed back indoors. Nadja was no longer on stage. He scanned the crowd and got a glimpse of her fine ass on the far side of the room. It wasn’t normal for her to stand in the middle of a crowd in her gown. As he approached, he heard her musical laugh and relaxed when Deja came into his line of vision.

Loud talking became hushed the closer he neared. Beaming a bright grin at Deja, he stepped into their space. “Diva Deja,” he ribbed.

“Pretty boy,” she mouthed and turned to point to her date. “Derek, Donato. Donato, Derek.”

“Nice to meet you, bro.” He turned to address Nadja. “Do you need an escort to go change?”

“Boy does she!” Deja shouted.

“Deja,” Nadja groaned. “No, Donato. I’m capable of making it across the room without help.” She rolled her eyes at her friend.

“Sooo, Donato—”

“Stop it, D.” Nadja scowled and looked at Donato.

“I need security. Up for the job?”

“Sure, just name the time. You’ve got my number.”

“Derek, let’s go find a table and order drinks.” Deja strode off with her date.

“Sure you don’t want me to walk with you? Why chance getting your dress dirty?” Out loud, that schoolboy line sounded ridiculous. He wanted to do dirty things to Nadja in that dress.

“No. And you’re probably needed elsewhere.” She smiled and brushed past him.

*I’m not going to follow her.*

After counting to ten, he set off after her. The cluster of people partying and drinking swallowed her whole. In the general vicinity he heard raised voices, and with the music playing overhead he couldn’t discern her exact location. “Tomas. Can you see Nadja?”

“Your two o’clock. Some guy’s got a hand clamped on her arm. I’ll be down in a sec.”

“No. I got this.” Donato pushed his way through the crowd of people, following Tomas’ directions.

“Let go of me.” Nadja was struggling with a drunken customer.

“C’mon, you sounded real pretty up there. Let a real man show you how to take care of a lady.”

“I always thought Marc’s friends were a particular kind of sleazy, but this takes it to a new level. Does your wife know you’re here, hitting on everything in a skirt?”

“Sir, you heard the lady. Let go of her arm.” Chances of the drunkard being congenial and letting

go were slim to none. Recognition hit him as he came face to face with someone his family knew all too well.

“We’re just having ourselves a lil’ talk,” he said as he tugged Nadja closer to him. “Marc doesn’t know what he gave up.”

Donato seized the man’s arm, not liking his leering words toward Nadja, and jerked it, breaking his hold on her. He locked gazes with the drunk and widened his stance, ready for attack. Nothing prepared him for what happened next. The coward pushed Nadja back into him. He grappled to catch her as she wobbled on stilettos, and he caught a handful of ass. *Her* ass. And it felt damn good, plump and tight. He remembered his manners and reluctantly let go. “You okay?”

He radioed for Tomas to escort the drunk out of the building. “Told ya, shoulda let me take you back to get changed. Now if you would just get your face out of my crotch, we could go.”

“I can’t,” she shrieked.

“What do you mean?” Hands tugged at his zipper. “Nadja?” What the fuck was she doing playing with his pants? He tried to lift her up, heard a rip, and stopped.

“Fucking fuck me. Deja is going to kill me. This was a loaner.” She worked the zipper again.

The warm breath over the front of his crotch damn near killed him. Rock hard, he groaned when her hand came into contact with his erection.

“Do you have to do that?” she hissed between clenched teeth.

“Sorry. Involuntary muscle. It’d help if you’d quit breathing against me.”

“Well, I’m stuck. Deal.”

He fought the urge to deliver a slap to her sexy derriere. “Be careful with that.”

Nadja pulled back and winced as it tore more. “I have to get it down.”

“Maybe it’s a bad time to tell you I go commando.”

Nadja dropped her hands. “How am I going to work my way out?”

“I can think of a few ways. Just stop struggling. I’ll help you,” he ordered as he brought his hands down on his zipper. “Gentle tugs.” He prayed his skin wouldn’t get pinched and released the zipper, thankful her mass of hair covered them. He heard her exclamation and swoosh of breath when her hand came in contact with his member.

“Can’t you control certain body parts?”

“You blew on me.” He chuckled and eased her shoulder strap out of the teeth of his zipper. “Not too fast. I need to zip back up. Keep your face there.”

“Glad to see you think this is humorous.”

“Humor is the last thing on my mind, doll.” He fixed his pants and stepped back. He zeroed in on her flushed face, and her eyes bugged out, ogling him. His cock throbbed heavy under his pants.

“I need some air, a d-drink.”

Seeing her flustered turned him on. The many faces that'd glanced their way brought an embarrassed flush to her face. No longer cool and unapproachable, he got a glimpse of the woman behind what he deemed cement walls. Instead of pummeling the asshole who started this mess, he wanted to shake hands and thank him. Christ, if that wasn't fucked up, what was? By now, Tomas should've kicked the dickhead out. He turned his attention back to Nadja and pasted a smile on his face.

“Anything for you, doll.” Donato looped an arm around her and assisted her over to the bar. Tucked up against him, her body trembled. He rubbed her arm with gentle soothing strokes, trying like hell to ignore the sparks he felt ignite when his fingertips grazed her skin. “Yo, Micah.” He rapped on the countertop to get the bartender's attention. “Get her something strong; she's a bit shook up.” He leaned on the bar, his hand tapping the counter, as the bartender brought a shot of whiskey.

“Water is fine.” Nadja declined alcohol and extricated her arm from his.

Donato frowned at her. “You need something stronger than water.” He pushed the whiskey in front of her. “Drink up.”

“I’m fine, really. I don’t want a babysitter. And anyway, Deja is making her way over.”

“No one’s babysitting you. Drink up. It’s not a request.”

“You—are not the boss of me.” Nadja slid the shot over in front of him.

“Drink the goddamn shot, woman.” The tone in his voice dropped as he was summoned elsewhere. Yeah. She was good at pushing buttons. “I’ll be back.” He handed her the glass. “One shot will not hurt you and will put me at ease. When I return, I don’t want to see any liquid left in this glass.” He gave her a parting glance, turned and headed over to the other end of the bar, his control hanging on by strings. “What, Tomas?” he barked into his mic.

“It’s done, boss.”

“You got his work address?”

“Yes, sir.”

A hint of a smile spread across his face. He thought the man looked familiar. “Good. I want him to be surprised when I make an appearance at his job.”

“Boss, you sure? You could’ve called the police.”

“Where’s the fun in that? No police will be needed. I’m just going to deliver a message.”

“Need a partner?”

Donato chuckled. “Why the hell not.” He let his gaze drift across the club. “Everything else all good?”

“No other problems have come across the system,” Tomas replied.

“Good. Let’s hope it’s an otherwise easy night then.”

“You’re a good man, boss. Don’t let anyone else say otherwise.”

“Thank you, Tomas. No one has the balls to.”

Nadja appeared relaxed with Deja next to her engaged in deep conversation. However, the shot glass hadn’t been touched. He edged closer to them, satisfied for the moment with the outcome of the incident. He gathered from snippets of conversation that Nadja was more embarrassed over being stuck to his pants than anything else. As soon as they saw him, the chatter halted. “Ladies.”

“Donato,” Deja greeted with a smile.

He looked at Nadja. “I thought I told you to make sure the glass was empty when I returned.”

Liquid stung his eyes. He blinked and reached for a napkin to wipe the alcohol dripping off his face and neck. The sheer gall of the temptress in front of him stunned him. Activity around them halted as

people whispered. His jaw ticked, and anger suffused his face. He tried counting before reacting, but he wasn't surprised at all when it failed to work.

Pushing Deja out of the way proved difficult. "Move it," he roared, his gaze catching Derek coming through.

"Donato, she didn't mean be so brazen." Deja stood as a barrier.

"Like hell I didn't. I won't be bullied by anyone, Donato, including you," Nadja said, peeking out from around her friend.

"Deja, I suggest you get out of his way," Derek interjected, his hand on her arm. "Nadja's a big girl, and she's not in imminent danger. Plus I don't want to get beat down trying to protect you for something we have nothing to do with."

Deja stuck her finger out at Derek. "She's my friend, and I don't need a punk for a man, so if this is the real you, then we have nothing else to discuss."

Donato chuckled at Derek's perplexed expression. "Nadja, come here."

"I'm fine where I'm at, Donato." Nadja held her ground.

Derek hauled Deja into his arms. "We'll take this up later. Later, Donato."

Donato slid his gaze to Derek. "Good luck with her." As the newcomer walked away with Deja, he had



a clear view of Nadja. Anger shone in her glare. The stinging in his eyes had receded, or his anger blocked out the smarting pain. Either way, she was a sitting duck, and she knew it. He continued to gaze at her, keeping his face stoic. “You can’t move fast in that gown. The best option is for you to get up and come with me peacefully. You know actions have consequences.” As she processed the information, his anger turned to amusement and then lust. Life with her would never be boring, and he’d get accustomed to her fiery demeanor. Who knows—pricking that passionate temper might prove fun.

“Don’t fire me,” Nadja muttered, sliding off the barstool and walking over to him.

“Smart girl.” He pressed a hand at the small of her back, drew her into his embrace. “Firing you is the last thing on my mind.”

“What’s the first?”

“This.” Her scent had been driving him insane all night. The urge to taste her now won as he parted her mouth with his own, sliding his tongue in to taste her spicy essence. Sweet and supple, she tasted of heaven on a warm sunny day. He groaned and wrapped his arms tighter about her, pushing deeper, sealing her taste to memory. Her haggard breathing told him she hungered. Slender arms gripped his own. The background faded, leaving just her. “I can’t believe

you tossed a drink at me,” he murmured, breaking off the kiss.

“I’m—”

“Shh. You’re not sorry. I saw it in your face.” He nipped her lip and rubbed her back, his hand dangerously close to gripping her sweet ass. Remembering they were at work had a sobering effect. He damned his libido and stepped away from her, but not before he made sure she knew how much he wanted her. There. Now. Stepping away, he noticed they’d drawn attention again. Twice in one night he’d put her in the spotlight, and not the one on stage. A private man, he disliked public displays of affection or altercation. He dropped his hand.

“Donato.”

“When you’re ready to go, have them call me. I have business to attend to.” Clearing his head came first, and then he’d figure out what to do with Nadja, besides designing a strategy to possess every inch of her delectable body. If the rest of her tasted like her sweet mouth, he was done for.

“I’ll be ready as soon as I change,” she replied softly.

Donato nodded and moved out of her way.

*Damn.*

Watching her saunter away in the form-fitting dress taxed the last of his control. He let out a breath and tapped the bar. “Micah, a shot of whiskey.”

“Sure thing.”

He took the drink and tossed it down the hatch. The burn didn’t kill his raging hard-on for Nadja, but it helped him get perspective. “Tomas. Can you lock up tonight?”

“Not a problem. You leaving early?”

“Yeah. If there’s something you can’t handle, call my cell.”

“Boss, who do you think handled the bar while you were serving our country?”

“Guess that’s a valid point.”

“No shit. You seeing the ice princess home?”

“Watch your mouth, and yes, no need for you to tail her tonight or have the cops do it.”

The response to his last was a chuckle over the mic. He grunted, clicking off his earpiece, and headed to his office to gather his things. He couldn’t get the kiss out of his mind, or her hesitant acceptance of his takeover. One thing was for damned sure—he’d have to modify his personal rules on dating employees.

After powering down his laptop and placing his mic and earpiece in their protective case, he locked up. Nadja waited for him at his door in the outfit she’d been wearing when he’d arrived. The shorts and shirt

showed more skin than the sexy dress she'd worn earlier. "Ready, doll?"

"Yeah."

# Chapter Two

---

Her nervousness was cute. He offered a smile. One she obviously took as non-predatory, as she relaxed and slid her hand into his. “I noticed your car wasn’t in the lot, so I figured it’s over at Deja’s. I’ll take you to your car and then follow you home.” When she agreed, he winked at her and led her to his Hummer. Buckled up and ready to go, he took her to Deja’s shop and helped her to her car. The parking lot was lit well. Still, at one a.m., no woman should be left by herself.

Donato waited for her car to enter traffic before he followed her. Little to no vehicles drove down the quiet streets. Stoplights worked for him instead of against him. He’d have caught up if needed but took pleasure in reminding her he was hot on her tail. When she parked, he sidled in behind her.

“Oh! I didn’t know you were going to follow me to the door.” Nadja locked her car door.

“We have unfinished business.” Donato swatted her ass and followed her up the path to her door.

“Um, are you sure coming in is a good idea?”

“It is unless you’re into exhibitionism.” He grinned when she dropped her keys and bent to pick them up for her. “I was teasing—sort of.” He’d never classified a glare as sexy till just then. As she stomped

up the rest of the way, he kept on her heels. At the door, he gripped her arm and spun her around to face him. "I'd never hurt you, Nadja." Releasing her, he took the keys from her loose grasp and opened her door.

"I feel deep down you wouldn't. Please come in." She entered her home and stepped aside to allow him in. "Make yourself comfortable. I'll be right back."

Donato inspected her décor. Warm but not too feminine. The baby grand tucked in the corner of her living room fit her personality, as did the cluttered sheets of paper all around it. The electronic synthesizer, he assumed, was for writing her music onto CDs.

Impressed, he took a seat on the couch and picked up a women's magazine. Not interested in the top ten ways to lose weight, he grabbed the pile and found three of the biggest sports magazines on the market. They were all current too. *Hot damn*. He'd found a redeeming quality.

Leaning back, he hit the edge of something in the couch and turned to pull the item poking him out of its hiding spot. *How to Seduce Your Man. Interesting*. No doubt she was on the phone, judging from the hushed voice he heard in the background, so he thumbed through the book and slid it back out of sight. Why would such a beautiful woman need a self-

help book on seduction? He spied other magazines holding advice on pleasing or catering to men.

A glass case filled with trophies on the left side of her living room caught his gaze. He stood and walked over. Tae Kwon Do, swimming, soccer, basketball, softball and football awards stared at him, gleaming as if polished daily. He replayed the sports in his mind, and then looked again. Football seemed out of place for a girl to trophy in. He surmised it must be a school trophy or a souvenir. Her name didn't grace the front as it did on all the other ones.

"Sorry about that, Taleena was apologizing for not being at the club tonight."

Donato walked back over to her couch. "She and Jason get caught up?"

"Yeah. He apparently had other plans." She sat down on the edge of a cushion. "Would you like a tour?"

"No, thank you. Come here." He patted his leg. A smile graced his mouth. The sight of her long legs straddling him brought him to half-mast for the second time that night. "So sweet, and lovely. Skin so smooth should be a crime. There's an exotic air about you I can't place. Your hazel eye color is mesmerizing. But it's the faint accent you hide so well that drives me wild," he said as he caressed her thigh and rested his hand on her hip.

“I get it from my mama. She’s Brazilian and my father is black. Everyone has an accent.” Heat radiated from her core onto his crotch.

“It’s beautiful.” He was silent a moment before speaking. “I haven’t got you figured out yet. Something’s missing.”

She went stock still at his words. Intrigued, he studied her shattered expression, hurt mixed with confusion, all written across her face.

“You saw me home. You don’t have to stay,” she whispered and looked away from him.

“Nadja. I’m here because I *want* to be. Why would I leave?” He stroked her back in an effort to loosen up her tense body. His dick screamed at him to get her naked. His brain, on the other hand, told him they needed to have a short chat before he could slide into her sweet-smelling pussy.

“I’m not—never mind.”

“Hmm. What is it? I’m a patient man, and we have all night.” He tapped her mons over her shorts and pinched her nub. Through the fabric he could feel her contract. At her indrawn breath, he knew he had her.

“You don’t play fair.”

“I don’t like waiting for answers.”

“You’re intrusive.” Nadja wiggled on his lap.

“Part of my charm. “



“Can’t we just get on with it?” She pouted and rubbed brazenly on him, slipping her arms around his neck and pressing her breasts against his chest.

“Is that what you want? To be fucked down, a one-night stand?”

“That’s vulgar.”

“Doll face, we’ve been dancing in the same circle for over a year, longer if you count my visits home from abroad. Your choice is a quickie right here, right now, or communicating and receiving more than a simple fuck.”

Unclasping her halter top, he grazed her neck with his stubble. “Don’t think too long on it, doll.”

“I’m not sexy,” she snapped and rose up to climb off his lap.

“You expect me to believe that?” he quipped, jerking her back down, his finger stroking her side.

“I don’t rightly care what you fucking think.”

He liked her hissing like a mad kitten. So much spark and fire added to the lively woman he hoped to unleash before the night was over. “Anger becomes you. Apparently there’s a raw nerve there. Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why aren’t you sexy?”

“Why are you an asshole?”

Donato took pleasure in knocking the ice princess status off her. He wanted her riled up and

admired the gumption it took for her to yell at him. He waited for her to strike him or scratch his eyes out, but she didn't. She just let those smoldering orbs flash at him. With the stubborn tilt of her chin, he surmised she was having a hard time picking her words. His finger slipped under the hem of her short shorts to her wet heat. Sliding a finger into the tight space, he wiggled and withdrew, sticking the digit into his mouth. "Tastes damn delicious if you ask me."

"You don't have to be cruel." A tear slipped down her cheek. "Every guy I've dated has dumped me for lack of being feminine."

Donato froze at the sight of the dam bursting, the tears he wasn't prepared for. But the pain that lurked in the shadows behind them bowled him over, a direct punch to his gut. "Tell me." He kissed her neck and continued to caress her body. How she believed she held no sex appeal he couldn't fathom.

"I wear hockey jerseys to bed, not lingerie. I scream at the television when a ref screws up a call. I know football, baseball and basketball stats. I'd rather eat a loaded dog at the ballpark than go out to a romantic dinner. I'm not the typical woman. I enjoy lounging in sweats and tees at home."

"I imagine you can cuss like a sailor, too. Will you marry me?" He brushed her tears from her eyes, tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and kissed her

lips. “There’s nothing unsexy about that. So what if your hobby is sports? So’s mine. It’s my luck the losers let you get away. You have a sexy body, and now that I see what you’ve been hiding, you’re even sexier. You have guts and a fiery spirit. Any other secrets or deviant behaviors I should know about besides your drink-hurling abilities?”

Nadja sniffled. “You’ll still date me?”

“Woman, unless you’re an axe murderer, I’m gonna marry you one day,” he cajoled. Her vulnerable expression softened him even more toward her. She’d been burned badly, but he’d make for damn sure she never suffered those feelings again.

“I have one more secret.” She burrowed her face into his shoulder. “And certain qualities possibly construed as bad or trying.”

“Hmm?”

“I drink beer—out of the bottle.”

“So do I. Perfect waste of a chilled glass to do otherwise.” He slid one hand through her thick tresses, massaging her scalp while placing kisses on her nape. “Now feel free to talk dirty to me. ‘Batter up’ will get me hard fast.”

“Really?” Her face brightened up.

“Yeah, wood or steel?” He stood up with her in his arms and carried her through her house. The time

for talking had passed. The time for showing and exploring had come. "Tell me where."

"End of the hall, right side." As she gave directions, he moved and opened the door to her bedroom. He grinned big upon seeing the California king platform bed. "Now that's a bed."

He dropped her onto the mattress and proceeded to strip each article of clothing from her, stopping only to pay homage to each body part he bared for their combined pleasure. Hers in being touched, his in doing the exploring. "So beautiful." He bent and placed his lips on her thigh. "Been wanting to lick you all night." Blowing at her core, he buried his face in her sex, stabbing with his tongue to create a burning storm within her. Hands splayed on her thighs, he spread them wider, inhaling, sucking, teasing and licking to his desire.

"Donato," Nadja whispered as she clasped her legs tight against his head. He continued feasting on her. He nipped her clit and sucked the tiny bud into his mouth, alternating between tongue fucking her and sucking up her decadent cream.

"I'm going to come if you don't—"

"That's the idea." Donato chuckled from between her legs. "Come on my tongue, doll." Moving a hand up her body, he tweaked one pebbled nipple and then the other, her plump breasts filling his hand nicely.

The change in her body spurred him to hasten his tongue against her. First she tensed, then relaxed, and then tensed around him once more. Her core quivered around his tongue and exploded, filling his mouth with the sweetest cream he'd ever devoured. Like a starved man he sucked it all, every drop.

He rose from his spot and unbuckled his pants. His cock, now at full staff, popped out. He toed off his shoes and slipped out of his pants, stopping only to grab a condom out of his wallet. Foil packet in his mouth, he leaned over her body. He took in her labored breathing, her dilated eyes, and smiled. "We've just begun."

Nadja took the condom out of his mouth. He watched as she tore it open and placed the barrier over his cockhead, stroking him to the base. "Batter up." She spread her legs for him and rubbed the head of his cock over her wet core.

"Dirty girl." He entered an inch at a time, taking pleasure in feeling her core stretch for him, encasing him in liquid satin. Where he began and she ended he hadn't the foggiest idea. Each stroke into her brought him closer to the edge. Tension left his body, while invigoration set in. He pumped harder, set an increased pace, jarring her body underneath him. Her soft mewls filled his ears, and her bounding heartbeat

vibrated against his chest. The haunting strains of her last song pushed him to fulfill her soul's needs.

"I can't take it."

He shut off her frantic plea with a kiss. Mated together, they teased and sucked as she moved her body under his, undulating to meet his hard thrusts. Behind his back, she crossed her legs, anchoring him to her body. He gave her the friction she asked for, still pairing his tongue with hers, sweeping her taste into his mouth, a flavor he'd never get enough of. When she came again, he fucked her right through it, not slowing down the pace. Under him, she writhed, trying to stop him from moving.

"Shhh." He cupped her breast and moved slower, sliding out and plunging back in, as her body trembled and clutched him deep within her. He moved his mouth down her body, giving her a short reprieve. Unable to deny his blazing hunger, he slid out of her, rolling her to her stomach. He situated her as he wanted and mounted her, shoving home. He trailed kisses down her spine, enjoying her salty skin.

"Donato!"

"Doll?" He rubbed her rounded cheeks and spread them to watch his dick disappear into her. "Now that's sexy." He groaned and plunged in, his hands on her curvy hips helping to propel her back into him. His balls smacked against her shaved pussy.

The tremors from her body told him she was close again. He reached under and pinched her clit, depriving her of her orgasm. The whip of her head turning to face him brought a chuckle to his lips. "Didn't like that?" He let go and pumped hard and fast, bringing her closer to the edge of release, and himself with her. Her wetness turned him on even more, threatening to make him spill before she found her release. From this position, the harder he pounded, the wetter she became. He slapped her ass and groaned when she saturated him. "Fuck, baby."

"I'm going to come again."

"Oh yeah? Give me those pretty brown eyes when you come for me, doll." He alternated swatting her cheeks and slamming into her pussy. She turned her head so he could see her face as she came. Donato swallowed back the animalistic urge that hit him while watching her climax. Her gaze never strayed from his as she convulsed and he slid out and in, drawing them both to bigger heights. His hands locked around her waist and kept her up on her knees, leaving her unable to collapse on the bed. Through her orgasm he worked her, not giving her a chance to regroup before sending her spiraling higher again.

This time, though, his body demanded release. He jack-hammered into her one final time, spending himself into the latex barrier. Regaining his control

took longer than normal. He breathed deep and let go of his hold on her, allowing her to fall to the bed. He collapsed next to her and tugged her against his body. "That was amazing."

"I've never come that much in one time." Nadja blushed, pulling the bedding over her body.

"Don't cover yourself from me."

"Sorry, habit."

"We'll form new habits." He linked his hand in hers and brought it to his lips.

"Are you staying?"

"Do you want me to go?" He pulled the condom off, dropped it into the trash and walked to her bathroom, giving her a moment of privacy to decide. A minute later, he found the washcloths and wet one with hot water. She looked lovely, relaxed and glowing after being consumed with passion. Gingerly, he swiped the warm cloth over her and placed a kiss on the inside of her thigh.

"No. Please stay."

Satisfied for the moment, and with her answer, Donato moved to the bathroom and placed the cloth in the hamper. After washing his hands, he returned to the bed and climbed on, pulling her body flush against his. "There are no more issues with your lack of sexiness?" he asked, stroking her hair.



Nadja shrugged and sighed, snuggling into the curve of his body.

“We’ll have to work on those issues of yours. You’re damn sexy, doll.” He pulled a coverlet over them and wrapped his arms around her.

# Chapter Three

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Caufield First National Bank opened at eight thirty sharp Monday morning. After spending forty-eight hours in bed with the most sensual woman he'd ever met, there was a loose end to tie up. Donato and Tomas haggled over how to make Mr. Sheffield pay for his lack of manners at the club the previous Friday. Breaking down the door to his house and beating him senseless held much appeal, but it was too short lived. He decided to pursue other means of restitution. Sure, he could've filed a police report. However, that wasn't his way.

Wearing shades and dressed in a high-end business suit, Donato entered the bank carrying a briefcase, with Tomas directly behind him. Busy typing, the gatekeeper, a young woman sitting at her desk wearing a switchboard earpiece, was oblivious to their arrival. He crossed over to her and rapped on the desk to gain her attention.

Offering her a debonair smile that showed off his pearl-white teeth, he spoke. "Excuse me, miss, my assistant and I are here to see Mr. Sheffield."

The secretary checked the list of appointments. "I'm sorry, but Mr. Sheffield doesn't have any appointments this morning."

“You can ring him and tell him Donato Falcone is here, or I’ll walk back and see myself in.”

“That’s highly improper, Mr. Falcone. He adheres to a strict schedule.”

Donato nodded. “It’s not my wish to cause you distress or bring any trouble to you. I’ll see myself in to avoid you being chastised.” He strode past her as she sputtered, Tomas following directly behind him, both of them entering the bank president’s office without knocking.

The shocked look on the man’s face was priceless. Donato smiled. “Mr. Sheffield, so nice to see you again. I trust you got home safely?”

“You. You can’t just walk in here. This is a business,” Sheffield stuttered and closed the files on his desk.

“Tomas, ensure our meeting isn’t interrupted.” Donato sat his briefcase on the man’s desk, his attention flickering to Tomas leaning against the wall with his beefy arms crossed, a scowl on his face. “We have business to discuss. In light of your ill treatment of one my employees, I’m here for restitution.” Donato fought not to chuckle as the man’s face visibly paled.

“What do you want from me?”

“First—an apology note for manhandling Ms. Mederios.”

Mr. Sheffield nodded profusely. "I can do that. Will that be all?" He shrank away from Donato.

"Not by any means. Did you think you'd get off that easy for leaving bruises on a young woman's arm in your drunken stupor? I should break something. Which would you be willing to go without, your left or right hand?" He pasted a sinister expression on his face and laced his words with angry contempt.

"Oh, God. Don't kill me. I swear it won't happen again."

Donato hated men without backbone or substance, but he really hated whiny little boys pretending to be men. He snarled at the man before speaking. "Luckily, I have something more beneficial in mind to soothe the insult you dealt me. Two charities, deserving of two rather generous checks, now."

"But I can't, I don't—"

"You will, and you can. I'd settle for ten thousand a piece. Your wife won't miss it and your bank account can stand it. No one needs to know you like to abuse women or cheat. Our families come from old money."

"This is extortion. I could have you arrested."

"Is it? I could be bluffing. I see this as a private meeting between two entrepreneurs, coming together for a greater purpose. Now here's your choice...I might

beat the shit out of you for what you did, or you can choose to be a good citizen and redeem yourself by writing two checks for charity.” Donato handed him the slips, one for a battered women’s shelter, the other for music needs in poverty-stricken school districts. “The decision is yours. Imagine explaining to those around you why you were kicked out of my club, and how some accident has left you with broken bones and a smashed-in face, no missing wallet, no robbery, just an ass-whooping that you’d be hard pressed to recover from in a few days. How do you explain to your board of directors, wife and children you propositioned my woman, and when she asked you to step away you grabbed her hard enough to leave marks? I wouldn’t wait too long—my generosity runs due course in two minutes.”

“This would end my career here on the board, and my wife would leave me this time.” He looked over at the other man. “Why’s he here?”

“Tomas? He’s my insurance policy, keeps me from doing stupid things, like kicking the shit out of women beaters. Truth is he wanted to light a fire under your ass, but witnessing such generosity to two very needy places must be documented and sent out via the Net. Your wife will be impressed, the bank will boast of your good nature. We are the only ones who’ll know the truth.”

“I’ll do it.”

“Smart man.” Donato waited and accepted the two checks. He took out a receipt book and scribbled text and signed. “One more thing. Claim this for a tax break, and I will be back. The outcome will be your worst nightmare come to life. Thank you for your fine giving nature. Hope to see you again, anywhere else but at my club.” Donato smirked and closed his briefcase. “Let’s not do this again. You’ll find I’m not a pleasant man to cross. Tomas—” Donato paused at the door. “The apology note better arrive at the club within the week. I’d suggest some pretty yellow flowers with it. Females like it when they receive flowers.” Donato exited the office and winked at the secretary.

“That went well,” Tomas said.

He was pretty happy with the conclusion.

“I thought he was going to piss himself when you crossed your arms and scowled at him.”

“Like I was gonna let you have all the fun. Think he’ll renig?”

“Nah, he’s not stupid, just weak. He’ll take the glory of being photographed and interviewed by the papers for donating.”

“You musta been one scary ass mo in the military.”

“No, just a soldier...always a soldier.”

“Let’s get going—I have to meet Nadja.” Donato climbed into his Hummer and buckled up, waited for Tomas to do the same, and entered traffic.

“So ya’ll are a thing now?”

“Yes. We have to map out her photo shoot next month.”

“Damn, the boys are gonna be bummed.”

“What boys?”

“The single ones, boss. The bartenders and security team will be low in spirit. No one could get a word in edgewise but your uncle, you lucky son of a bitch.”

“Yeah, well, chica has serious issues with self-esteem. I’m going to have one helluva time breaking each one down.”

“You always did love a challenge.”

“What’s the package in the backseat?”

Donato grinned. “Nothing for you,” he said, as he pulled into Tomas’ driveway. “See ya later, bro.”

“Yeah, you watching the game today?”

“Damn straight.” He pulled off, heading to Nadja’s place. Ten minutes later, he parked, grabbed her package, jogged up to the door and rang her bell.

“Who is it?”

“You have a package, ma’am.” God, he loved her voice and how she peeked out the curtained window before opening the door.

“I knew it was you!” She opened the door, letting him in. “The food is prepared, your beer is in the living room and the game just started.”

“Open it.”

Nadja tore the bow off and ripped the box open. Her eyes went wide with delight, pleasing him. She held out his favorite hockey jersey. The shirt’s hem would barely go past her luscious ass, always giving him a perfect view of her thighs and the undercarriage of her ass cheeks. Her squeal of delight tickled him, and then she was in his arms, kissing him, thanking him for the perfect gift.

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# Mahalia Levey

Being smart and sassy with a great sense of humor comes easily for Mahalia Levey. An avid reader of books, she found herself enchanted with disappearing completely into the worlds authors created. One day she vowed to herself she'd be one of them. Then family life came, and college right after. Swayed from her childhood course of action, it took many years for her to get back to that place she held dear as a child. Now she is running full steam ahead to keep up with the many ideas flowing freely. She plans on taking her work to higher levels and expanding her genres. Her main focus is giving her readers variety. Her works in progress include paranormal, fantasy and mainstream romance. Taking characters and watching them grow past what she's imagined is her true passion.

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