



PPB

Red Hot

New Year

Rita Sawyer

Sarah is sick and tired of being the good girl everyone expects her to be. She's already made plans to start her new life; she just has one more thing to cross off her list – getting laid. She's made a resolution this New Year's to let the fun loving woman inside her free. She just needs a man, and when Eddie, a hunky real estate developer, finds her half-dressed in a closet, he's more than willing to oblige.



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RED HOT NEW YEAR

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PPB

Chapter One

Sarah stared at the huge brown stain on her brand new, white silk blouse. She had been having one of those days where if it could go wrong, it did. She'd hoped to break out of the funk once she'd arrived at the office, but if anything her day had only gotten worse. The final insult had come when she had only ten minutes left on the clock. One of her father's underlings had run into her, almost knocking her off her feet. Though she'd managed to stay upright, the bonehead had poured his ooey-gooey peppermint iced coffee down the front of her. The coffee shop in the lobby was still pushing its Christmas-flavored drinks.

She guessed she should be happy it had been an iced coffee instead of hot. Otherwise, she'd have an awful burn along with this nasty stain. Knowing she wasn't going to get any cleaner, she opened the bathroom door, hoping everyone had already gone home. The place was quiet, though not totally dark, which meant there had to be a few people mulling about. All she wanted was to get the hell out of there before she had to face anyone. She rushed down the hall to her reception area outside her father's office.

His door was ajar, though not enough to see inside. She heard him talking to someone. Sarah rounded her desk, taking a second to glance down at the appointment list. She assumed he was on the phone since he didn't have any appointments. Sarah quickly shut down her computer like she did every night. Then she turned to the file cabinet against the wall behind her desk and locked it. She opened the closet door to the right of the filing cabinet, reaching in for her coat. She listened to her father tell one of his lame jokes. She was just about

to close the door when laughter, other than her father's filled the air, followed by the sound of rustling clothes, then footsteps.

Fuck! The last thing she needed right now was to have to endure another lecture from her father about her appearance. She knew he considered it a direct reflection on him. So she did the only thing she could. She stepped into the closet, easing the door closed. The footsteps got loud enough to let her know her father and whoever was with him were standing right outside the door. She was thankful to be hidden from view, and his powerful voice came through the door loud and clear.

"Well I'm not sure where my receptionist has gotten off to. I'll have her call you tomorrow to schedule a meeting for the second week in January."

She knew it wouldn't be professional for him to tell people she was his daughter, but the receptionist tag really sucked.

"That will be fine." A feminine voice said, and a few more platitudes were exchanged, Sarah prayed her father would offer to walk her out.

He didn't. Silence filled the air, so she figured he went back in his office. Sarah wrapped her hand around the knob, waiting a few extra seconds to make sure they were gone.

She'd started to turn the doorknob when she heard a male voice that she recognized as her father's assistant Harvey say, "You know you don't give your daughter enough credit, after all this was a surprise visit. Sarah runs your office with a smooth efficiency that most of the other partners and associates would kill for."

"I know that." Her father's grudging tone didn't give her any warm fuzzy feelings.

Another voice more familiar, yet too muffled to identify, asked, "Then what's your issue with her?"

"I don't have any issues with my daughter."

That was true, she admitted to herself. He didn't care enough to have issues.

"Someone might swoop in steal her away if you're not careful." Harvey said with a chuckle.

Her father laughed for a minute. "My daughter is too well mannered to ever do something like that. In fact, sooner or later, hopefully sooner to make my wife stop worrying, she'll make some man a very dutiful wife."

Dutiful? Is that really what he thought of her?

Okay so maybe she'd tried to win his love by always doing what he wanted. Well, nearly all the time. The one exception had been when she'd refused to attend the college he'd wanted and get the degree he thought would be best. Oh he still paid for her schooling, with conditions, hence her receptionist position with his firm. Back then, it'd seemed like such a small price to pay for her freedom. Now, she wasn't so sure.

"She might surprise you."

Her father's deep huff announced his disagreement with whoever had made the comment.

Though Sarah wondered who her mysterious defender might be, she wasn't about to open the door to find out. He was correct, after all. She may be playing the role her father wanted right now. The time was coming for her to show him, and everyone else, she wasn't the obedient female they all thought her to be. A mere three days from now she'd lay her resignation in her father's hand. December thirty-first was going to mark the beginning of a new phase in her life. Sarah Leary wasn't going to be a shrinking violet anymore. She was going to break out of her shell and experience life to the fullest.



Edward Capatellio, Eddie to his friends, stood outside Robert Leary's office like he had a thousand times before. Tonight seemed different somehow. He looked around the room, trying to figure it out. The room was maybe half the size of Robert's office. Compared to his heavy masculine furniture, the desk and cabinet out here was purely functional. It wasn't the lack of personal items. The

room felt colder without Sarah sitting behind her desk smiling up at him. He'd have to send her some flowers to brighten the place up.

"I didn't think she was dating anyone special." Eddie hoped Sarah's father didn't know something he didn't.

Robert Leary shook his head, his mood taking a turn towards the serious. "She's not dating. Period."

"What happened to the guy from the probate court that I'd heard asked her to dinner?" Harvey James, Robert's number two, asked, not seeming to be bothered by the personal topic.

Eddie hated talking about Sarah behind her back. Even though it was innocent speculation on her love life, he felt wrong. Someone needed to set her father straight. He wouldn't mind being the one to do it, but now wasn't the right time. Sarah may be shy, but Eddie liked to think she was like glowing embers ready to ignite into a wildfire. He wanted to be the match that struck the flame within.

He'd been giving Sarah time to get used to him. Eddie knew he was one of her father's most prolific clients. He always had something in the hopper, therefore Robert was usually drawing up some kind of legal form for his latest project. Still, it was getting harder to find excuses to come into his office. He didn't need to see her father to get his opinion on the terms of his contracts. Until Sarah had come to work for her father last year, most things had been handled by phone and courier. Now he made the time to stop in, even if it was for some lame excuse like picking up copies.

Each and every time he came into the office, he made a point of stopping by her desk for a quick visit. Eddie hoped his subtle flirting, and lately more blatant advances, had warmed her up, because he was on fire. Over the past few months, he'd had plenty of invitations that would have helped ease his desire. He happened to be a one woman man. Once he got a hold of the woman he wanted, she'd find that out first hand.

"She turned him down flat." Her father's voice spoke volumes on his disappointment.

It occurred to Eddie, even though he was the one who'd started this line of conversation, Robert should have instantly called a halt to discussing his daughter's private affairs. Or lack thereof, with a client.

Since Robert didn't, Eddie decided he would. "How's Robert Jr. doing at Harvard?"

"Good. Why don't we step inside for a quick drink?" He motioned to his office, Harvey nodded obviously thinking it was a good idea.

Eddie knew there was nothing Robert liked more than to brag about his son. If it got Sarah off the hot seat, Eddie could listen for a few minutes. Besides if he stuck around for a while, she might come back. Then he could offer to walk her to her car or something. He'd prefer the something given the choice. He was about to agree when he noticed movement out of the corner of his eye. He turned his head in time to see the knob on the door behind her desk move.

"I'll have to take a rain check. My Aunt Harriet is supposed to be stopping over tonight." He watched the way Robert's shoulders lost some of their stiffness.

"How is the old girl?" Robert held his aunt in high esteem, though Eddie wasn't quite sure what their connection had been.

Old girl. Robert's use of the term had him chuckling, because his aunt was well into her sixties and Robert was right up there with her. She swore Robert would never steer him wrong. Since she was the smartest woman he knew, he had no reason to doubt her. Eddie knew she had a good business sense, which she'd used to amass a pretty good portfolio. She trusted Robert to guide her through many legal issues. So Eddie decided to give him a shot. Eddie hadn't regretted it, but now he wondered how his business relationship with Robert would fair after he slept with his daughter.

"Still spry as a spring chicken. She told me you two have a review coming up soon." She'd been really animated when she'd informed him and his cousin Daniel about the meeting.

Robert nodded with a smile, giving Eddie the impression he was really looking forward to seeing Aunt Harriet. "I'll have to make Sarah remembers to pick up cherry Danishes and hazelnut coffee."

"She's on a new vanilla chai kick. Supposed to be healthier or something. I think she's drinking it because my mother hates the smell," Eddie suggested. They both laughed while Harvey just stood there looking lost and waiting for Robert.

"Well, you go on then. Tell her I said hello." Robert patted his shoulder, and with Harvey dogging his heels, he headed back into his office.

Eddie waited for her father to close his office door. Then he slipped quietly to the door behind her desk and wrapped his hand around the knob. With a quick twist of his wrist, he yanked the door open. Sarah stood in the darkness shrugging her way into a long leather coat. It would have taken a miracle for him not to notice that she wasn't wearing a shirt. Not that he minded. Quite the contrary.

All that pink skin drew his attention like a magnet. The black jacket, black skirt combo really enhanced the white lace cupping her glorious breasts. A fierce urge to touch her raged through him. Her gasp barely penetrated the erotic haze filling his brain. Not wanting anyone else to see her like this he stepped inside, closing the door behind him.

"What are you doing?" Her breathless voice sounded so sexy he fisted his hands to keep from touching her.

He was glad the darkness hid the obvious response of his body. "I should be asking you that."

She made a noise, he had no idea what it was supposed to mean. "Sarah, I need more than that."

"Can't you just go away? Do me a favor and forget you ever saw me." The plea tugged at him, but he wasn't about give up on a chance to help her get over her shyness around him.

I don't think I'll ever forget. I don't want too. "Sorry, not a chance."

He heard her huff and something made a slapping noise. "Fine. Some bonehead associate decided to share his iced coffee with me. So instead of ruining my coat with the gooey mess, I took my shirt off."

"Makes sense. Though it doesn't explain why you are hiding in a dark closet. Surely the ladies room would have-" He lost his train of thought when something touched his hand then thigh. "Sarah?"

"Sorry. I'm embarrassed enough. Can we just say I was a little impulsive?"

Impulsive. If Sarah's stripping out of her clothes was a sign of action rather than thought, he'd have to keep her from thinking. May be he could slide past her defenses if he had her focused on something else. First, he needed to get her out of there before her father found them. *Or he could pretend they were playing Seven Minutes in Heaven and kiss her.* He doubted a girl from her high class upbringing had played those kinds of games as a kid. He'd love to teach her the rules.

Taking advantage of the dark he adjusted himself, easing the tightness of his slacks. "You ready to get out of here?"

"Yes, please." They both moved at the same time, Sarah ended up pressed firmly against his chest.

Her hair tickled his nose. Eddie reached out to smooth it down. His hand landed on the silky soft skin of her cheek instead.

She gave a swift inhalation. So his touch affected her after all.

He wanted her to feel desire, not fear. Damn it. He wished he could see her face to determine which it was. He wanted to look into her eyes and see the second she realized that he was about to kiss her.

"We should go while your father's tied up in his office with Harvey." He dropped his hand. Backing away slightly, he wrapped his hand around the doorknob.

"You're right." Her soft tone made him wonder if he'd hurt her feelings.

They managed to make it out of the closet and to the elevator in silence. He did his best to ignore the way she clutched her coat around her breasts. Knowing they were practically bare was driving him insane. She pressed the button for the parking garage.

The doors barely slid closed before he spoke. "Sarah?"

"Yeah." Her eyes stayed on the floor, which for some reason pissed him off.

He moved up behind her, gently laying his hands on her shoulders. Eddie did his best to ignore the way she stiffened under his touch. He turned her to face him. Her eyes rose only to his chest. He put his index finger under her chin tipping it up until they stared at each other. The uncertainty in those deep brown eyes of hers really got to him. Even more than her quick, witty sense of humor. He noticed her sassy smarts came through loud clear on the phone, while she was more reserved in person. Eddie wondered what it was going to take to bring that side of her out where everyone else could see it too.

He gave her a quick smile before saying, "I just wanted to talk about before. I didn't mean to be so...abrupt. I just didn't think you'd like your father catching us like that."

"He would've gone off the deep end." She returned his smile.

He hoped her returning his smile was a good sign. "You know it might not be such a bad thing to shake him up every once in a while." Eddie waited a few seconds before adding, "It did wonders for my parents when I told them I was going to become a house builder instead of going to college."

Her sudden burst of laughter made him feel like might actually be getting somewhere. "After dealing with him for the past six and a half years, you haven't seen him in many social situations have you?"

He shook his head.

She laughed harder putting her hands on his chest. Her coat eased open giving him a teasing view of her ample cleavage. She caught him looking and reached for the lapels. Eddie grabbed her hands bringing them back to his chest. *Time to keep her from thinking.* He started to lower his head, but stopped short when he caught her nervous glance at the camera hanging in the corner. Eddie backed off with the knowledge he did the right thing.

They stood there staring at each other, neither of them saying a word. The chime of the bell made Sarah jump, her cheeks turning a nice shade of pink. She spun around the second the doors slid open. Eddie followed her into the garage. It was well lit, and he knew it was monitored by closed circuit cameras like the elevators. Still the garage had enough dark corners to make him worry about her being there alone. She pressed a button on her key ring, which caused a set of taillights to blink a few feet up ahead.

"Do you always park so far away?" It occurred to him she might think it was none of his business. He didn't care he wanted to know.

Sarah gave a light shake of her head.

She needed to learn from the start that he wasn't going to play guessing games. He raised a brow at her, inviting her to answer the question.

"I was running late this morning. Normally I park much closer. This isn't too bad though."

"Why?" The question was past his lips before he could stop himself.

Between the tilt of her head and the way the corner of her mouth kicked up, it was obvious she thought it was a stupid question, yet she answered him anyway. "Because it's safer."

Duh. That explained her expression. "I meant why were you running late?"

Through her laughter, she managed to say, "Of course you did."

"Well?" Her stalling made him even more eager to have an answer.

"I overslept." Something about the way she said it made him think there was more to it than that.

Dozens of scenarios floated through his mind. None of them were pleasant, because most of them involved her being in bed with someone else.

"Did you have good reason to stay in bed?" If not, then when he got her there, he'd make damn sure he give her one so she never wanted to get out.

"I wish." He caught her faint whisper before she added in a louder voice, "My alarm clock didn't go off."

He followed her to the car, keeping the rest of his thoughts bottled up tight. They rounded the huge concrete column she'd parked beside. He wasn't about to let her drive away without making sure she knew he wanted her. He grabbed her hand tugging her into the shadows. Her gasp was smothered beneath the pressure of his lips.

It only took a few seconds for her to stop thinking and to start kissing him back. He gave her complete control of the kiss. Her tongue touched his bottom lip timidly, and then darted away. He let her explore at her own pace. Sarah pulled back slowly ending the kiss. She stared up at him with an expression that was filled with confusion mingling with desire.

"What's wrong?" He slid his hand up and down her back, keeping her in the moment with him.

She gave him a smile that didn't even come close to reaching her eyes. "Nothing."

He pulled her closer, his mouth against her ear. "Sarah, I'm only going to tell you this once. *Don't ever lie to me.* From here on out, we're going to be completely honest with one another."

She nodded, all the stiffness in her body easing away, "Okay."

He eased back, doing his best to keep his building excitement out of his voice. "Now tell me what's wrong."

She nibbled on her lip for a few seconds and just when he figured she wasn't going to say anything, she said, "It wasn't what I thought it would be."

Yes. Finally this could be the sign he'd been looking for. "So you've thought about kissing me."

"Yes. No!" Her cheeks turned bright red, but she kept her gaze on his. "I've thought about you kissing me."

"Is that what you really want?" He knew he was headed down a slippery slope, but she'd be worth every second of the ride.

He backed her against the cold concrete, bracing his hands on either side of her head. Her teeth sank into that plump pink lip again, and his dick throbbed. The things he wanted her to do with that mouth were indecent. This wasn't going any further without her say so. He refused to be pushy, so all we could do was wait for her to make up her mind.

Sarah's hands fisted in his shirt, jerking him towards her. "Yes, please."

He swooped in, taking her lips with his. Her lips parted instantly, which let him slide his tongue into her mouth. The kiss was rough and full of all the built up passion he'd held back before. He was beyond being gentle. Their tongues dueled, tasting and teasing in a primitive dance. He pressed his hips against hers, wanting her to feel what she did to him.

His hands slid into her wavy brown hair. The silky tresses wrapped around his fingers so easily. She moaned, rocking her pelvis against his hard cock, which ached to be inside her.

Things had gone far enough. Eddie knew he needed to end this before he tossed up her skirt and took her right there. Sarah deserved better. More importantly, he was determined to give her better. He eased away, taking her whimpering as a sign he'd given her what she wanted.

"Better?" Eddie asked, taking her hands on the way to her car. He opened the door for her.

"Yeah." She let him help her into the car.

"Good, give me a call when you're ready to take the next step." He closed the door and walked away, refusing to think about the major pitfalls in his plan.

Chapter Two

Sarah had spent most of the previous night thinking about Eddie's departing comment. She'd driven herself crazy wondering what exactly he'd meant by the next step. If his kiss was anything to go by, she could be in some major trouble. Eddie Capatellio was out of her league in every possible way. If she hadn't already known it, she did now.

He had more money and moved in higher circles. From what she'd recently discovered, her limited sexual experience would probably bore him to tears. She pulled her car into the closest parking spot nearest to the elevator, his words from last night ringing in her mind.

"I refuse to think about him anymore," she said to herself as she climbed from the car. "Just think about something else.

Unfortunately for her, the first thing that popped into head was her father's comment about how dutiful she was. Facing him this morning wasn't going to be easy. Now, stewing over her father's insensitive comments, Sarah shuffled off the elevator with the rest of the employees who worked on the eighth floor. She knew her father's words hadn't been intended to cause her harm, but they were hurtful all the same. She debated telling him she'd overheard. In the end, she'd decided it wouldn't change anything, so it was best just to let it go. All she wanted to do was get through her day so she could go home. Two days until freedom.

She hung her coat and purse in the closet, and then pressed the switch to start her computer. While waiting, she stepped into the little nook hidden

between her desk and her father's office to start the first of at least three pots of coffee they'd drink today. Mostly due to the fact that she was going to need the brew to keep her mind straight.

She went back to her now brightly lit computer. Like she had every other morning, she typed in her password. Today though she wondered how long it would take for her father to get used to her replacement. Even though she hadn't quit yet, she'd already fully trained someone to take her place. Her replacement wanted to start now, but first she needed to actually resign. Then she'd tell her father about his new receptionist. She'd chosen the best and brightest from down in paralegal to take her place. The fact that he was a male would hopefully score her point with both her parents. There was no way she was going to set up some little cupcake with the job. Neither of them would ever let her hear the end of it. Of course daddy's lackey Harvey would have been in heaven if she'd chosen some silly schoolgirl. His secretary could barely string two sentences together without breaking into a fit of giggles.

Sarah pushed the negative thoughts out of her head. She had plans of her own she wanted to start. And even though her father didn't know it yet, he'd given her new career a big push. Being big on details added to the fact she loved parties meant her new position as an event coordinator was going to be awesome challenge worth her time. Instead of sitting behind a desk all day, she'd be using her skills to do her best to procure whatever she needed to make her client's wishes come true.

If her father hadn't given her *carte blanche* on the firm's New Year's Eve party, she might not have even realized how perfect the job was for her. Actually he'd told her he didn't care who she used, he wanted her to '*Just Get It Done*'. It was one of his favorite mandates. Her best friend April was the one who suggested they open their own firm. Having her father as their first client would be a great stepping stone if it all turned out the way she planned. Everything was in place and as long as the caterer didn't flake out on her, this party would be the best one *Leary & Associates* had ever thrown.

Sarah scanned her father's appointment calendar as she sat and almost missed the chair. Damn she hadn't even gone twenty minutes without thinking about him. Eddie's name stood out from all the others. She groaned, because once word got out that he was coming into the office, everyone would go into a tailspin.

She could understand why all the women, even the married ones, started primping. Last night's mini-interlude had really clarified why they'd want him. Edward was the kind of guy that had women taking a deep breath hoping to enhance their attributes. At six-four and easily two hundred twenty pounds, he was one of the sexiest men she'd ever seen. Actually, she had a really hard time looking at him and hiding her body's reaction. It was going to be impossible now.

This brought her to the second and most important thing his visit prompted. Her stomach clenched, and then started doing the flip-flops it always did when she thought of him. She remembered his kiss, her stomach's acrobatics feeling more like a group of midgets jumping on a trampoline. She could never stop thinking of the things she'd like to do with, or to, him. Of course that could have had something to do with the way he always managed to invade her personal space. His scent, spicy yet not over-powering, swamped her when he'd lean in close to tell her something.

Not to mention those rare occasions when he'd rest his hand on her shoulder and press his hard body against her as he dropped something on her desk. It may have seemed innocent, but deep down she'd always hoped there was more to his actions. Like most, he seemed to appreciate her ample curves. Now she was sure that unlike most men, he didn't take her shyness as a sign of disinterest. He'd probably done all those things on purpose. Man, if she could choose one guy to help her shed her good girl image, he was the one. Last night he'd left the ball in her court so all she had to do was throw it at him.

She felt her cheeks get hot, which brought her to the third thing. *Will people be able to tell there's something different between us?* Would her father? She had the morning to prepare herself.



Eddie slapped the files against his leg, knowing he could have dealt with this yesterday. He was glad he didn't so he had a reason to stop by the office today. Sarah hadn't called last night, not that he'd expected her to take the first step. Sarah didn't come off as the type of woman who'd feel comfortable calling a man for any reason, especially not if she thought he just wanted to have sex. If he had any chance of her taking him up on his offer, he was going to have to be around as much as possible.

Of course if he could give her a few more kisses, it wouldn't hurt either. He stepped off the elevator, unable and unwilling to hide his smile. However, when he found her desk empty, his grin morphed into a straight line. She had to have known he was coming. There were open folders covering her desk. She had to be avoiding him, and he didn't think she'd gone far.

Eddie was so focused on his thoughts, none of which were good, he almost missed seeing her dash out of the hole in the wall and into her father's office. He followed, not caring if he was being rude by walking in unannounced. Catching her off guard would give him a chance to see her instant reaction upon seeing him for the first time since he'd kissed her senseless.

It turned out he wasn't the one ready to see her. At least not in her current position. Bent at the waist, she'd stretched her body across the desk. Her pale pink skirt, tugged tight across her ass, had risen high enough on her thighs he could see the lace edging of her white stockings.

"Holy shit!" The files in his hand, not to mention his wayward thoughts, were instantly forgotten.

She looked over her shoulder at him flashed him a smile, slowly standing. "Hi."

"You didn't call." Shit, he hadn't meant to say that. Hell he hadn't meant to say anything about their arrangement until she did.

"I don't have your number at home. I couldn't very well come back here to get it." True, though even if she'd had the number, he still didn't think she would've called.

"We can fix this problem if you give me your number." Okay he'd put her on the spot.

What the hell is wrong with me? So much for taking it slow and easy. One kiss was all it had taken for his brain to bypass all its common courtesy features and move on to the caveman protocols. Eddie found it strange he didn't feel like the heel he thought he would be for pressuring her, however slightly. She didn't seem upset either. Her attention had been drawn to the door by her father's voice.

"Edward, you're a bit early." Her father walked behind his desk not even bothering to acknowledge Sarah.

"Too bad you didn't bring those forms last night. We could have killed two birds with one stone." The ever present Harvey said as he took a seat on the couch against the wall.

"Not a problem on my side. I would've been in the neighborhood anyway." He dared a quick glance at Sarah as she headed for the door and caught her smiling.

"Sarah before you go running off, Harvey's date for the New Year's Eve Party had to cancel so I told him you'd accompany him." Her father's announcement hit Eddie like a sucker punch.

Eddie's hand tightened on the folders in his hand. Unable to stop himself he looked over at Harvey. The gloating kiss ass stood there wearing a smile Eddie wanted to knock off his face.

"Sorry, daddy, I can't. I already have a date."

All three of them turned towards her.

Who the fuck? It didn't matter. When he finished this meeting, they'd have a nice little chat. Then she would be calling to cancel.

Harvey just chuckled, shaking his head.

Her father had a totally different reaction. His face turned a light purple shade, his mouth opening and closing like a fish. "Who?" He asked like if she needed his permission, which Eddie knew she didn't.

"Excuse me?" Sarah clasped her hands in front of her tight enough to turn her knuckles white.

Her father leaned back in his chair, his face regaining its normal coloring. "Who are you going with? Just last night your mother was lamenting about you being the only single woman there without a date, which led to a discussion on whether or not we've been introducing you to people of the right gender."

Eddie watched her stiffen. He couldn't believe this was happening. Her parents were totally clueless if they had any doubts about her interest in men. Even if she wasn't straight, this was not the type of conversation to be had in front of other people. It was private. Eddie could come to her rescue. He wasn't sure she wanted his rescuing. He may go to hell for letting her suffer this embarrassment. The only reason he was willing to let it go further was because he wanted to know the name of his competition. It might help to check the guy out, even though he wasn't all that concerned. At least that's what he told himself.

Her stiffness seemed to melt away, however her foot started to tap out a quick little beat. "I haven't called mother yet. Trust me, I'll rectify that the moment I leave this room." She turned to walk away.

Her father wasn't done. "Sarah Elizabeth Leary, I asked you a simple question that I'm sure has an equally simple answer."

Does the bastard have to grill her in front of Harvey? Eddie's heart stuttered when Sarah looked over giving him a quick smile. She winked at him.

"Actually, Eddie asked me. We were just finalizing our plans when you walked in." *Touché.* Her wink should have been a warning, and he should have figured it out. Apparently she had made the next move.

Chapter Three

Eddie couldn't wipe the smile off his face. In fact, his triumphant grin only got bigger when he saw Harvey's pout. He assumed having the ability to keep emotions hidden would help lawyers. It seemed no one had taught Harvey that, which just verified his low opinion of him. He made a mental note to instruct Robert to never let Harvey handle any negotiations on his behalf. On the other hand, Robert could have been carved in stone.

Robert's eyes were focused on him. Eddie did his best to read the man. Robert was good enough at hiding things that he couldn't guess what the older man was thinking. Sarah might think she'd pulled a fast one by dropping her little bomb and running out of the office, leaving him to deal with the fallout.

Eddie took a seat in one of the leather chairs across from her father. He glanced back at the closed door. He knew if she was standing close enough on the other side she'd be able to hear every word they said. All he could do was wait for her father to say something, and try to keep the conversation under his control.

Harvey beat him to it. "Sarah doesn't seem like the type of woman I'd expect to see draped on your arm."

"Why?" Eddie and, surprisingly, her father, said at the same time.

"Well, um..." Harvey floundered, his nervousness at possibly insulting the boss's daughter plain.

"Does your asking her have anything to do with our conversation last night?" Robert said, letting the weasel off the hook.

Eddie wanted to say what he really thought. *Fuck No! It's all about getting a sexy smart woman in my bed.* His need to get her plush body wrapped around him dominated his thoughts. Besides, he hadn't asked her. She'd just informed all of them that he was taking her. He was damn sure going to hold her to her declaration. *They had a date.* Eddie was going to use every minute of it to sweep her off her feet. So instead of answering, he just shrugged his shoulders.

Harvey wasn't smart enough to let the conversation drop. "She'll see through you. If nothing else, Sarah is smart."

Damn it! Eddie had heard enough.

"Listen here," Eddie surged to his feet, towering at Harvey as he pointed at him, "You want to insult me that's your choice. Not a smart one, but still it's yours to make. Don't ever disparage any woman I date. More importantly, don't ever let me hear you talk about Sarah like that again."

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean anything untoward I was just saying Sarah is a very bright young woman." Eddie smiled, knowing just how much saying sorry had to be killing Harvey.

"She is smart, but that's only one of the things about her I find attractive." Eddie took his seat and thought he saw a smile curve the corners of Robert's mouth for a second.

"Well whatever prompted you, I'll do my best to run some interference for you with my wife." Robert's chuckle was accompanied by a huff from Harvey.

"Interference?" Eddie didn't like the ominous feeling that came over him.

"My wife takes a lot of interest in my daughter's life. I'm sure she'll have plenty of questions for both of you." Robert's explanation went a long way toward easing Eddie's trepidation.

Then he realized dealing with Sarah's mother might show everyone just how serious he was about her. He'd do whatever he had to do to get his point across. Eddie planned on starting the second he got out of this office.

“I’m sure I can handle it with Sarah by my side. Now let’s get these contracts taken care of so I can finish making plans with my date” Eddie held out the file to Robert, who morphed into legal mode, dropping the subject of his daughter.

Eddie’s mind however wandered frequently to Sarah. He wanted to know what she was doing. Would she be at her desk waiting for him? Or would she be off hiding somewhere? It didn’t matter because he’d find her.



Sarah swept the files off her desk shoving them into a drawer. She rushed over and shut down the coffee station giving it a quick clean before returning back to her desk. Tomorrow, she’d come in early and straighten everything out. Taking the coward’s way out sucked. She just couldn’t deal with facing her father right now. If she was being totally honest, she was a little nervous about seeing Eddie too. She’d never asked a man out before. Never mind asking! She’d basically told Eddie he was taking her. He could always refuse. She was pretty sure from the way he kissed her, she didn’t think he would.

Maybe she should stick around to talk to him? Still, that didn’t mean she had to talk to her father. She wondered how a more confident woman would approach the situation. Showing up at his place uninvited wasn’t something with which she was comfortable. She could call him and suggest dinner someplace quiet where they could talk. *Who was she kidding she wanted way more than to have dinner and talk with him.* Her best, well safest, option was to apologize for her brazen behavior over the phone. She finished clearing off her desk and left a brief message for her father on his machine, since she never bothered him when he was with a client. He’d see the light flashing and check his messages when they were done. Hopefully long after she was gone. Sarah pulled up Eddie’s info on her computer, jotting down his home phone number. She jotted down his cell number just in case he didn’t have a machine.

She shut her computer down not bothering to go through her normal end of the day routine. Once she had everything secured for the night, she stood there

staring at her father's closed door. Two of the three men on the other side were probably waiting to talk to her. She figured neither conversation was going to be very pleasant. She could count the times she'd had discussions, okay gotten lectures, from her father that hadn't been intimidating on her fingers. Perversely she figured dealing with him was going to be easier then facing Eddie after her audacious behavior. She might be building up the tension in her mind, but she couldn't help it. No matter how many times she told herself it would be okay, she couldn't seem to suppress the nerves tightening her stomach. Sarah stepped into the elevator, as the doors started to slide closed, she saw Eddie and her father exit his office.

Eddie's gaze locked on hers. Though it only lasted a few seconds, a raw surge of heat flared between them. She leaned back against the wall, letting out a deep breath. Dealing with Eddie, even for the short time it took for him to get bored with her, was going to take its toll. The party was in two days. She hoped she could keep it together that long. Because she knew after one night in his arms, she wouldn't be able to think straight.

She rounded the corner coming to halt, her heart smashing against her ribs. Eddie stood beside her car, more like leaned against it. The closer she got, the easier she saw the heavy rise and fall of his chest beneath the tough looking black leather jacket he wore. She stopped a few feet away, waiting for him to say something. He looked wild and dangerous, so unlike the calm collected real estate developer she normally dealt with.

"Did you run all the way down here?" Duh, it was obvious he had. She couldn't think of anything else to say.

He tilted his head to the side, giving her a crooked smile. "You didn't really think I was going to let you get away that easily after you pulled your little stunt, did you?"

Sarah bit her lip and nodded. Eddie chuckled shaking his head. His next move surprised her. He reached out, grabbing her hand and pressing it to his

hard chest. He held it there. His heart raced beneath her palm, instantly, hers took off to catch up.

"You and I have some details to work out. Including the things you do to my body." He wasn't smiling anymore.

"That's from running down the stairs, not me."

His eyes grew darker, more intense as he slid her hand down over his stomach to the bulging zipper of his black jeans.

Sarah drew a deep breath. His look set off something inside her. Her whole body was like a raging fire with only one way to put it out. Her fingers molded around him getting tighter as he pulled her closer.

"I was planning to call you later." She let her body go lax against his.

"Really?" His smile disappeared just before he lowered his head.

His lips brushed over hers in a gentle teasing touch. She tipped her head wanting more. Her purse slid from her shoulder, the strap getting caught in the crook of her elbow. This time when his lips touched hers, she gave his erection a gentle squeeze. He spun her so her back was braced against the car. His tongue invaded her mouth, luring hers into a game of cat and mouse. He slipped his hand inside her coat, easily finding her breast.

She should have known from the force she'd felt in his kiss that his touch would be even more powerful. It called out to her inner vixen, so she stopped holding back and unleashed her. She took full advantage of his tongue being in her mouth by sucking on it, while rubbing her hand over his jean-clad cock, giving him a teasing taste of what she'd like to do to him. Eddie's intense moans matched hers in volume. Her thumb flicked the button of his jeans. He pulled his hips away from her. He grabbed her hands and placed them against the car holding her at his mercy.

He tore his mouth from hers leaving them both gasping for air. "Damn Sarah. You're not the good girl everyone thinks you are."

"Did you think I was?" It occurred to her that it might have been what had drawn him to her in the first place.

"Yes. No. I sensed you had a wanton side waiting for you to let it loose." She wondered what he'd seen that had led him to think that and why no one else had seemed to.

"So you decided to find out if you were right by kissing me?" It hurt to think he was capable of treating her like an experiment or a play thing.

"Honey, if you think that, I guess I haven't made a very good impression." He sounded so serious, she hated to think she may have insulted him because of her own insecurities.

"I'm sorry." She knew a lame apology wouldn't make up for automatically thinking the worst of him.

"Hey, no apologies necessary. Now that we're *dating*, I just want you comfortable enough with me to be yourself."

Sarah's heart actually fluttered just thinking about dating such a hot guy. A little clarification would be good, before she got too excited. "Dating? We're going on one date."

"Wrong. We're going on our first date right now. Honey," Eddie leaned in so close she could see the yellow flecks in his green eyes, "we're exclusive, so don't forget it."

He let go of one of her hands using the other to tug her with him. Eddie walked away from her car heading even further from the door.

Sarah trotted along behind him unable to wipe the smile off her face. She knew she should at least ask where he was taking her, but she was too excited to care.

He pulled her to a stop beside a blue truck with Capatellio Development lettered on the side in sparkling silver. He opened the passenger door before pulling her to a complete stop in front of him. Of course this meant she was trapped between the car and the door. His hard body blocked the only way out.

She glanced inside, then back to him.

Eddie must have thought she wasn't going to get in on her own because he scooped her up, ignoring her squeal, practically tossing her inside before closing

the door. Sarah quickly adjusted her skirt, which had been the only reason for her hesitation in the first place. She'd just finished pulling it down enough to keep her stockings from showing, when Eddie climbed in beside her. He looked over and smiled as he started the engine. The truck rumbled to life echoing off the concrete walls. They drove out of the garage into the steady stream of traffic. Instead of heading deeper into town, where most of the best restaurants were located, Eddie drove out of the city. After a few minutes, Sarah relaxed enough to stop clutching her purse and undo her jacket.

The intense quiet started to get on her nerves. One of them should probably say something. Luckily she was rescued from having to when the obnoxious ringing of her phone shattered the silence. She dug her phone out of her purse, not needing to check the display since she'd assigned the annoying ring to her father.

She punched the on button and in a voice coated in saccharine she sweetly answered, "Yes, sir."

"Where the hell are you? You must be here somewhere since your car is still downstairs." Her father's furious bellow was possibly the most emotion she'd roused from him in a long time.

"Actually I left my car there. I'll be back to pick it up later." She decided he didn't need to anymore of an explanation than that.

"I thought we were going to go over the rest of the event details tonight." Sure she had mentioned it, but he'd waved her off so this had to be about something else.

Whatever it was, she wasn't going to get into it right now. "We can go over it tomorrow morning."

"Fine. Don't forget to call your mother." He conceded, throwing out a warning she didn't need.

If her mother caught wind of her date, before Sarah told her in person, her mother would be crushed. Being an only daughter, Sarah and her mother were very close. Eddie took a right turn a little sharper than necessary, which had her

falling against him. She sat up moving back into her seat. Eddie would have none of it so he pulled her closer to his side draping his arm over her shoulders.

"I take it that was your father," Eddie said.

She nodded. "Yeah, he wanted to know where I am and to tell me to call my mother." She waited for Eddie to laugh, or ask why.

"What are you waiting for? I won't be able to eat if I'm thinking you're sitting there stewing about calling your mother."

Eddie was too good to be true. Sweet, caring, hot as hell, and could kiss a woman senseless. There had to be some really big flaw she was missing. *Maybe he was a masked bank robber in his free time?* She dialed her mother's number, mentally debating what she should tell her. Fortunately, she got the answering machine. Sarah left her a short message saying she had a date for the party and would call her later tonight with the details. She hung up and tossed the phone back into her purse.

She took a few minutes to look out the window at the neighborhood they were driving through. Somewhere along the line they'd moved into an upscale section of town. Large estate style homes with big yards replaced the smaller homes and occasional businesses. Her normal good sense of direction went haywire just sitting next to him. She searched for a street sign to figure out where they were.

Eddie pulled into a long circular driveway, coming to a stop at the bottom of a cement staircase. It was wide at the bottom and narrowed at the top where it connected with a porch that looked like it might wrap around the entire house. Sarah stared at the house in awe. It was a dark bluish-gray shade two story classic beauty. The light above the front door cast a glow across the porch. Though the windows were dark, the light reflected off the glass. She looked higher and saw a dim light in one of the upstairs windows. Eddie's arm slipped from around her shoulders.

He climbed from the truck without a word. She moved across the seat to her door. Before she could open it, he was there doing it for her. She just sat there

in her stupor, gawking at the house while he stood there. Finally, she turned to ask where they were. With his tall broad body just a foot away from hers, heat surged between them. The way he stared at her had the words vanishing again. He took a step closer bringing them face to face.

“Ready?”

For what was the first thing that popped into her mind.

Chapter Four

She slipped her hand into the one Eddie held out. His fingers closed around her hand, his rough palm pressing against hers. The firm touch calmed her nerves, and yet excited her at the same time.

"I hope you're hungry," Sarah knew he was talking about food, but his tone and sexy smirk hinted at more.

"Where are we?" She asked letting him help her down from the truck.

Eddie's attention stayed on her legs. She couldn't blame him since her skirt had slid so high he probably got a glimpse of her panties. Instead of feeling self-conscious like she would with anyone else, the chance of exposure actually gave her a little thrill.

"This is my place. I'm going to cook you dinner while you talk." It didn't sound like he was making a suggestion.

"You can cook?" Man, she really had a lot to learn about him.

He held the door open for her, moving in close behind once she'd walked past him. "Honey, I can do it all, but cooking is one of my specialties."

The bright cheery yellow paint in the entry hall made the dark hardwood floors really stand out. Beside the closed door directly to her right, she spotted a framed picture. Drawn in, she moved to get a closer look. Sarah was pretty sure it was the same house, just not in the same condition. The house was even more impressive in the daylight. She could see lots of windows downstairs, but fewer on the second floor. She couldn't discern if there was an attic or not. In the picture, the left side of the porch was cluttered with stuff, which had probably

built up over time. The right side had vines growing up the porch railing leading up the columns to the roof. The house and porch had patches of different color paint that had eroded and was flaking.

Eddie didn't say anything about the picture, so she didn't either. She turned to the doorway of a large living room off to the left. Eddie clapped his hands behind her, making her jump. The huge Christmas tree in the corner lit up, filling the room with twinkling, colorful lights. As Sarah moved down the hall, she noticed the navy blue and crème tones throughout the room. Not sure where to go, she came to a stop. Moving to her side, Eddie took a few minutes to remove his jacket and toss it onto a chair. He came over and laid his hands on her shoulders, helping her out of her coat and tossing it over his. Once he closed the distance between them, he wrapped his arm around her waist. She leaned into him, enjoying his warmth.

He flicked on lights as they moved through the house. Eddie's hand slid to her lower back, his touch firm and hot. He added a slight amount of pressure to guide her. They walked past the flight of stairs at the end of short hall. To her right, there was an arched opening leading to a cozy family style dining room. They walked through the room and turned left into the kitchen.

"Make yourself comfortable." Eddie pressed a quick kiss to her cheek before walking away, leaving her standing there staring like a fool.

He pulled food out of the fridge. He moved to the cabinets quickly finding everything he needed for dinner.

Sarah strolled around the room, taking in the shine of the stainless steel appliances. The glossy granite counter tops were deep green marble with thick black veins. The pale oak shade of the cabinets and flooring lightened the room, making it feel inviting. There was a small table in the corner, however after a few minutes Sarah finally chose to sit at the counter bar across from where Eddie was working.

"Your place is amazing." *It put her tiny apartment to shame, that was for sure.*

"It is now. When I bought it, this place should have been condemned." The pride in his voice made her smile.

She was curious if that pride brought out a sentimental side as well. "So the picture in the hall, did you take it or did you get it from the people you bought the place from?"

"My sister took it. The day I started the remodel she showed up with her boys. They knew how personal this project was, so they had the photo blown up and framed so I had a way to remember all my hard work." Sarah could sense the love in his voice.

He stripped off his black button-down shirt and hung it on the back of a chair. Sarah couldn't stop staring at him. His tank-style undershirt showed off his muscles. She wanted to offer her help in getting him out of the rest of his clothing. The thought made her give a nervous giggle. He glanced over at her. She got the feeling he was about to ask what was so funny.

Not wanting to have to tell him, she asked a question instead. "How long did it take to get the house in shape?"

"I bought the place about a year ago, but the majority of the work took about nine months. I don't mind spending a lot of time on something, if I know it's worth my time." The look he gave her made her fidget in her seat, then he added, "If you think down here is nice, I can't wait until you see upstairs. I've wanted to show it to you for a long time."

"Oh." What else could she say, besides *wow*? Maybe *what are we waiting for?*

Okay, she could just ask him why he hadn't asked her out. Being a client of her father's may have been an issue for him, but that hadn't changed. So she had to wonder what was different now.

"Sarah. Relax. Nothing's going to happen that you don't want. You are in charge."

She nodded, focusing on his eyes instead of his hands to read his sincerity. *Well that just sucked. Would it be rude to say no thanks, I'd rather be ravaged?*

Maybe he didn't think she could handle him, so he wanted to let her take this where she was comfortable. Or it could be that he needed her to tell him exactly what she wanted. After all, when she'd told him she wanted to be kissed, he'd done a damn fine job. Either way, she decided to show him she wasn't afraid of him.

Sarah rose, strode around the counter, coming up behind him. She ran her hands up his back to his shoulders. With a gentle push, she turned him to face her, making sure to keep clear of his hands. They were covered in whatever sauce he'd been rubbing on the chicken. She rested her hands on his chest. His heart raced hard and fast under her palms. So his calm collected attitude was just a show.

"You know since this is your place I think I'd rather have you in charge." If they ever hooked up at her place, she'd gladly take the reins.

Sarah moved in raising her leg, pressing her knee against his leg. She rubbed her thigh up then down.

"Sarah, be sure about this."

"Oh, I am." She slid her hands up over his shoulders, locking them behind his neck.

She saw his smile as he lowered his mouth to hers for a quick peck.

"Alright. Let me toss this chicken in the fridge to marinate. Then I'll give you a full tour of the house."

Sarah backed away, letting her hands drift over him. His stomach muscles flexed beneath her touch, and he let out a loud groan. Driven by her desire, she hooked her hands in his pockets tugging until his hips were flush with hers. His eyebrows lowered over his almost closed eyes. His jaw line looked so tight Sarah wondered if he was grinding his teeth. He fisted his hands, his whole body went stiff. She liked taking control.

The other men Sarah had been with, even way back in high school, were so different from Eddie. They were shy and sweet. Later, there were a few who thought dating her would get them an introduction to her brother, sometimes

even her father. College had brought out a whole new level of ass kissers. What they wanted had nothing to do with her family. During her senior year in high school, she'd gained a little weight, filling out quite nicely, which got guys to notice her. Still none of them seem liked her Mister Right. Though she hadn't minded the lost years, she didn't want to waste anymore time. This was a chance to let herself be the woman she wanted to be. Eddie might be the one to get her to take a risk.

"I'll just go freshen up while you get cleaned up in here." She pressed a quick kiss to his lips and did her best to saunter away.

Halfway across the room she paused looking back over her shoulder at him. She slipped off her pink suit coat, leaving her in just her silk and lace camisole. Satisfied with his intense expression, she turned for the door. She felt his gaze following her as she left the room.



Eddie turned, bracing his messy hands on the counter. He was doing his best not to come on too strong and scare her away, but she wasn't making it easy. It wasn't his style to just sit back and let other people make the moves. Since he was willing to wait with her, he knew just how much she meant. He'd hoped cooking for her would take his mind off what he really wanted. The problem was that he hadn't counted on how it would feel to have her watch his every move like a hungry cat. She had the ability to turn him into a babbling fool.

He washed his hands at the sink, his mind beginning to wander. He wondered what she'd feel like covered in bubbles. He groaned as his cock pulsed against his straining zipper. Eddie knew he should have taken her some place more public. Being alone with her just ratcheted up their undeniable heat. *How the fuck was he going to keep things from getting out of hand?*

Until he determined whether her coyness or brazenness was an act, he needed to keep his head. Eddie hoped one of the personalities were, because the combination of the two was driving him insane. He covered the chicken and

shoved it in the fridge with more force than necessary. Grabbing on to the handle of the freezer door, he considered sticking his head in to numb his mind. But he decided he'd have to stick in another part of his anatomy for it to have any effect, since it had a mind of its own lately.

He pressed his forehead to the cool surface of the door. Tonight would show what he was really made of. If he was able to keep his hands off her long enough to get to know her better, someone should nominate him for sainthood. Light footsteps sounded behind him, his whole body jerked in response. He gave himself maybe five minutes before he broke down and touched her in some way.

"Eddie, are you okay?" The concern he heard in her voice had him rushing to reassure her.

He pasted on a smile before turning to her. "I'm fine. You ready for the tour?"

She nodded, though he could sense her nervousness. Eddie hated that he made her uncomfortable, even for a few minutes. He walked over to where she stood, making himself a promise that he'd find a way to make it up to her. He put his hands on her hips and smiled down at her.

"Other than my office, you've seen everything down here. So would you like to see upstairs or downstairs first?" In his opinion, they were equally impressive. He didn't think she'd find his game room very exciting, at least not as exciting as he hoped she found his bedroom.

While his head wanted her to choose the safer basement, the rest of his body screamed with desire to show her his bedroom. Somewhat patiently, he waited for her answer, he wondered if either choice would help him out.

"Why don't we start by going down?" There was nothing naughty about the way she spoke, but his mind came up with a slideshow of sinful images.

Gathering what he had left of his control, he managed to walk to the basement door. He held it open, motioning for her to go first. Her shoulder touched his chest, and the back of her hand brushed against his fly. His cock lurched in response. Eddie barely held back the groan building in his chest. The

smile she flashed him led him to believe she was already getting over her trepidation. He took a much needed deep breath as he watched her descend the steps.

This room had been designed for guys. He figured after a busy week he deserved to have a place where he could unwind. He had a forty-two inch flat screen TV and a regulation-size billiards table with all the accessories. So far only his nephews had gotten the chance to use the pool table because he'd been so busy.

At ten and twelve, they were a little too young to really enjoy the game. It didn't matter, because he was having a hell of a time teaching them to play. He hoped someday he'd have his own kids to teach. Out of the corner of his eye he watched Sarah running her hand along the old mahogany bar he'd painstakingly restored. He missed the bottom step and almost fell on his ass. Lucky for him, she wouldn't have noticed. She'd moved from the bar to the leather couch, her fingers lingered as she ran her hand over the back of it. It was insane to be jealous of a piece of furniture, but he wanted her to touch him like that.

Eddie wished he could read her thoughts. He could ask if she liked the couch. The problem was that he didn't want to sound like he was fishing for compliments. Her face was so hard to read. That wasn't good since he prided himself on being able to read people. Sarah was turning out to be the exception. When she turned to the pool table, something flickered in her eyes.

"Have you ever played?" He doubted her father would've let her learn the way he had.

He'd spent a few summers working on construction crews learning everything he could. A couple of the guys had taken him under their wings, which involved trips to bars that would give his mother a heart attack if she knew he'd visited. He'd learned a lot about himself back then. He knew he wasn't much of a drinker, but he was a damn fine pool and dart player. He figured there was always a chance she'd had an opportunity to give it a try at some point.

"I've played some." Her hand glided back and forth over the green felt.

"How about a quick game?" He picked up the triangle, twirling it around on his finger.

"I don't know." She bit into her lip.

He wondered if he'd feel an indent if—no when—he traced it with his tongue.

"Come on. Just a friendly little game we don't even have to keep score."

Eddie wouldn't mind letting her win, too much.

Sarah walked over to a rack hanging on the wall and took down a pool cue.

"Are you any good?"

"I can hold my own." He'd done just that quite a few times with some very tough competition.

"So you know how to handle yourself. That's good to know."

Damn she couldn't have meant what he thought, could she?

Her innocent comments wreaked havoc in his dirty mind. He kept finding the slightest things erotic. It was only a matter of time before he did something about it. For now though, his determination was stronger than his libido, or at least he hoped so. Still a little flirting couldn't hurt.

"Everyone should be able to handle themselves, but having things handled by someone else is even better." He glanced over at her before he started racking the pool balls.

Her cheeks turned pink, an amused smile on her lips. "Are you saying you'd like me to handle your balls?"

Her suggestive tone surprised him. She rolled a couple of balls under her hands on the table. Eddie knew she had a playful side. She often joked around with him on the phone, but this was the first time she'd done it so blatantly. He hoped it was a sign that she was growing more comfortable with him. Maybe she'd finally let her guard down and really let him in. She raised an eyebrow waiting for an answer.

"I wouldn't say no. Actually, I was thinking about how hard it's been to keep my hands off you." He may be pushing his luck, however, he'd asked her for honesty. He might as well reciprocate.

“You know, I think we should place a little wager on this game.”

Okay, that wasn’t the response he’d expected. He was willing to let her sidestep it for now.

“I’m game. I’ll even let you name the stakes,” he replied, wondering if he sounded too eager.

Chapter Five

Sarah knew where she wanted things to go from here. Though she'd never let things between her and a guy progress so quickly, this time she was the one ready to jump the gun. She'd always made sure she knew a lot about a man before they had sex. She usually knew his full background before she even let him get to second base. Sarah wasn't surprised she was willing to let things go this time. Eddie made her want to throw caution to the wind and jump his bones. A woman had ways to entice a man into acting on his urges, tonight Sarah was going to give it a try.

He didn't seem like he was in any rush to move things along. Though, if he was truly having trouble holding back, she could think of a few ways to push him over the edge. Besides, she was getting a bit antsy. There was no reason she couldn't start the personal side of her new life a few days early. She just wanted it to seem like it had been his idea, so he wouldn't think she was the sex-crazed woman he made her want to be.

"How about we play a game of eight ball? Winner gets to choose their prize." Of course, she planned on adding a few small details as they went, but she knew how to draw in her prey before pouncing.

He tipped his head and asked, "Do you have something in mind?"

"Maybe." Inch by inch, she'd get him where she needed him before springing her trap.

"Alright. You get to break." He lifted the rack and rolled her the cue ball.

She set the ball where she wanted it, then picked up the little square blue chalk and rubbed it on the tip of her cue. "You know if you really want to make this interesting, we can raise the stakes a little with each shot."

"Like if you miss you have to answer any question?" He caught on pretty quick.

"Or I could give you something." She shrugged her shoulders, hoping he'd take the bait.

"Anything of my choosing?" Eddie's voice went deep with a roughness that called out to her.

In her opinion, that was always a good sign. She nodded, and his eyes widened. Closer and closer. She had him like a fish on hook. As long as she didn't try to reel him in too quickly, she was golden.

"So *when* I win, you're going to be okay with that?" She nodded and shrugged again, playing it off like it wasn't a big deal.

His eyes closed for just a second, she thought he might balk. If so, she'd just find another way to get what she wanted without looking like a tramp. When he opened his eyes, his gaze locked on hers. Right then and there, she knew he was toast.

"Shake on it." He stuck out his hand.

She shook her head.

"Please. You must not make many bets with women, which is okay by me. I think we should seal this deal with something a little more intimate." Cue stick in hand, she walked over until their bodies touched.

"I don't bet often. I prefer sure things." Did that mean he thought he knew what he was getting?

Well he was wrong, because she wasn't even sure yet. She reached up and fisted her hand in his shirt. Sarah pulled him down, stopping only when their lips were firmly meshed together. His arms wrapped around her waist, yanking her flush against him. She opened her mouth under his, allowing his seeking tongue entry. Deepening the kiss helped to keep him just a little off balance and

bolstered her confidence at the same time. His fingers pressed deeply into her flesh as his hands tightened on her hips. Sarah rocked her hips against him, eliciting a moan from him. The sound vibrated into her, creating delicious little tingles shooting through her system. She bit his bottom lip before easing out of the kiss altogether.

She backed to the other end of the table, clearing her mind with each step. When she lined up her shot, the only thing she thought of was the triangle of balls on the table. The white ball connected, sending balls ricocheting around the table. She watched the solid blue number two roll into the corner pocket, right in front of where he was standing.

He looked over at her expectantly. "You're solids."

"That makes you stripes. For my bounty, I'll take that fancy leather belt of yours." She watched him slide it slowly from his jeans while she calculated her next move.

There were three difficult shots she could easily make. Instead she chose to take an easy looking shot she was sure to miss. Sarah lined herself up noticing the way his attention locked on her ass instead of the table. She took her shot. The balls connected with a loud clack and rolled in opposite directions.

"Nice try." Eddie said, taking the cue stick from her hand, instead of picking one from the rack.

She looked at the striped balls scattered across the table and waited to see what he chose to do. He really only had two decent shots. The yellow nine and the green fourteen were his best bets since the rest were behind, or really close to, hers. She watched him line up the shot, paying more attention to the way his body leaned over the table. Sarah heard the balls clunk and glanced over just in time to see the nine ball roll into one of the side pockets.

"Nice shot." Her compliment wasn't just lip service, it had been a good shot.

"Thanks. I'll take an answer for my reward." He walked around the table eyeing the balls drawing out her anticipation at the same time.

"Ask me anything." A deal was a deal and she'd been raised to stand by her word.

He stopped walking, picked up the chalk and rubbed it on the tip of the stick. "Why are you working for your father when you hate it?"

"Is it really that obvious?"

He nodded.

She shrugged her shoulders, it was too late to change it now. "We agreed that after I finished getting my degree, I would give him a full year working at the firm to prove my education hadn't been a waste."

"Didn't agree on majors, huh?" He asked with a smile Sarah couldn't help but return.

"Majors, schools, damn near all of it. My mother was on my side like always. Daddy might think he's in charge, but with a subtle pout here and there, Mom always gets her way." Sarah didn't know why she was telling him all of this when he hadn't even asked.

"Your father warned me she'll have some questions for me at the party." He leaned over the table lining up his shot.

"Her first one will be when's the wedding?" He hit the side of the cue ball sending it rolling into nothing. He looked up at her.

"Sorry. Want to take that shot over?"

He shook his head. Sarah walked over and took the stick from him making sure her fingers brushed his. She assessed the table realizing his error had left the table set for her. Still, she didn't want to give it away too quickly. So she circled the table before lining up her shot. This time she gave a little wiggle of her hips, getting nice and comfortable. She forced herself not to see if he stared at her, or the table.

She cocked her arm and let the cue slide through her fingers. The white connected with one of her solids and one of his stripes, sending them in opposite directions. His stopped in the middle of the table, while hers rolled into the corner pocket.

“Why don’t you take those boots off and relax?” She teased, moving into position for another shot.



Eddie sat down gingerly, not wanting to injure himself. He’d never been so hard. He undid his boots, telling himself he wasn’t losing. He just needed to concentrate. On the game, not how spectacular she looked leaning over the table. More importantly, he needed to stop thinking about moving up behind her and taking her while she was curved over the side of the table. It would be so easy to slip up her skirt, drop his jeans, slide inside her and give her everything he had.

It was hard to wipe the image from his mind when every time she bent forward to take a shot, her skirt rose a good two inches. He knew those skimpy white and pink lacy panties he spotted earlier were just one more wiggle away from showing. He may not be losing the game yet, but man, he was seconds from losing his fucking mind. Sarah leaned over the table, resting her hand on the edge of it. She slid the stick back and forth between her fingers.

Eddie decided to busy himself at the bar to keep from acting on his impulses. “How about a drink?”

“Sure. I’ll take that undershirt too.” He stripped it off tossing it onto the growing pile on the coffee table.

He walked over behind the bar, grabbed two mugs from the shelf, setting them down on the bar.

Sarah started humming a little tune as she circled the table.

Eddie tossed some ice in the glasses.

“I have juice or soda,” he said peering into the fridge.

With a shrug of her shoulders, she said, “Soda’s fine.”

Eddie held up cans of cola and orange giving her a choice. Sarah pointed to the orange. He poured their drinks, wishing his had something a bit stronger. He took a quick, fortifying sip of his drink, before carrying Sarah’s out to her.

He held out her glass. "Here you go."

"Wow." She took the glass from him, her attention focused on his chest. "If you ever get tired of real estate, you could make a killing in tips as a topless waiter."

"Thanks. If you keep sinking shots, you're going to get to see what kind of underwear model I'd make."

She choked on her soda.

"Sorry." He took the mug and patted her back, which turned into rubbing.

Touching her was torture. She glanced at him, his hand stilled. Sarah laid her hand on his bare chest. His dick, which had been wavering between semi-hard and a flag pole, lurched against his zipper begging for a stroke or two. She licked her lips, and he just couldn't help himself. He lowered his head at the same time she rose onto her toes. Their lips brushed, and then she squealed jumping away.

Eddie jerked his hand away, staring at the puddle of soda on the floor. "Shit. Fuck. Sarah, I'm sorry."

He rushed to the bar and grabbed the whole roll of paper towels. Hurrying back, he ripped a bunch of handing them to her. He got down on one knee to wipe up the mess. Not even a foot away, Sarah stepped out of her high heel shoes. He watched as she popped her right foot on one of the bar stools. From his position he had a great view of her panties. Sarah hiked her skirt up and started rolling down her stocking. Slowly, her hands moved the silky material from her thigh to her toes.

His hand froze over the spill. Eddie realized his mouth was hanging open and snapped it shut so hard his teeth clacked. When she switched feet, he dropped the roll of paper towels. They left a trail as they rolled across the floor into her foot. She paused with her hands on her calf and looked over at him.

"Cheater." She finished taking the stocking off and tossed it at him, "That counts as four balls for you."

The stocking floated through the air landing on his knee. He watched her walk away, while he wadded the paper towels up onto the bar counter. There

seemed to be more sway in her hips. Her bare feet made little pat noises on the hard wood floor as she went. She circled the table and made quick shots, pocketing the rest of her balls by the time he finished wiping up the mess.

She waited until he joined her by the table, and then pointed to the far right corner of the table calling her shot. "Eight ball. Corner pocket."

He watched the ball roll over the felt straight into the hole. "You win. What do you want to do next?"

"Hmmm, let's see. First," Sarah walked over and grasped onto his waistband sliding her hands to the button. "I want my prizes."

He stood completely still waiting to see what she'd do next. Her fingers dipped inside not only the waistband of his jeans, but also the elastic of his underwear. His stomach quivered when the back of her finger brushed his shaft. Sarah's fingers slid the short distance she needed to make contact with his cock. Her slight grazing touch made him twitch.

She managed to pop the button and undo the zipper without any help from him. When she started to tug down his pants, his brain snapped into action. He tucked his thumbs under the elastic at his hips, helping to shove them down. She swiveled her body down with them. The sight of her mouth so close to his cock fried half his brain cells. His breath caught in his throat. She braced her one hand on his knee using the other to lift his feet out one at a time. After tossing his pants aside, she laid her hands on his ankles.

As she worked her way back up, she slid her hands all over him, avoiding the area begging for her attention. His erection bobbed inches from her face, so it wasn't like she could miss it. She just chose to tease and torment him. He let her get away with it for now. It wasn't easy. He told himself it would be worth it, because he'd get his chance for revenge later.

He couldn't shift his focus from her face. She stared at him, leaning in a little closer, stroking the tip of his cock with the silky soft material of her shirt. His legs trembled and he reached out, grabbing onto her shoulders. Her smile

pushed him over the edge. He fisted his hands around the straps of her shirt and dragged her to her feet.

"Tell me you plan on putting me out of this misery." He tried to ignore the way his cock pressed against her belly.

"I'm considering it." She splayed her finger on his chest, kneading his pecs.

He tugged the zipper of her skirt down letting it slide to the floor. "How about I give you a nice relaxing massage while you think it over?"

"Are you bribing me?" She asked, lifting her arms so he could tug off her shirt.

Standing there in lace and silk, he almost wished he could keep her like that. "No. I'm trying to help you clear your mind so you can think about nothing except being naked, and my pleasuring you."

"Well when you put it that way, how can I say no?" She allowed him to lead her to the couch, where he had her lay on her stomach.

He straddled her legs, his cock coming to rest against the crack of her ass. Her panties between them reminded him she hadn't agreed yet. He clamped down on his need and desire, focusing on making her feel so damn good she'd be begging him to take her.

He kneaded her lower back with his palms, using a steady pressure. Sarah moaned, melting into the cushions. Using his thumbs, he made small circles moving up her spine. She wiggled her hips, torturing him. He groaned along with her when he leaned forward to slide his hands up to her shoulders. The movement also rubbed his cock against her ass. She lifted her hips, making the pressure more intense and he had to pull back. She wiggled around, pulling her hands out from under her cheeks.

Sarah grunted rolling her shoulders. "You know if I take this off it'll probably feel better."

She started to reach for the clasp at her back, but he pushed her hands away and did it himself. "I've got it."

All that soft bare skin under his hands felt amazing. He plied her muscles using gentle, yet firm, strokes. Sarah moaned, arching her shoulders. He drew his hands down. His finger tips grazed the sides of her breasts, but he didn't stop until he reached her hips.



Screw being an underwear model, he should be gracing the pages of a muscle magazine. He was definitely centerfold quality, not that she looked at those kinds of things. Sarah had figured the leather couch was going to be clammy, but the material was butter soft and felt amazing against her bare skin. Laying there on her belly with his cock pressed against her ass, Sarah couldn't help squirming.

His touch felt amazing, she wanted it on other parts of her body besides her back. Sarah couldn't take it anymore. She twisted beneath him, forcing him to move enough to allow her to turn. Settled in her new position, she smiled, crooking her finger at him. He straddled her thighs, sliding his hands up her belly as he leaned his big, buff body down over hers.

His hands closed over her breasts, his mouth covering hers. She wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders. Sarah had never been with a man built so powerfully before. Muscles and good looks matched with brains were proving to be her undoing. She still had no idea how long this thing between them would last, but she was more than willing to ride it out.

She pulled her mouth from his with a whimper. "Protection?"

"Hold on!" He leapt over the back of the couch in a blur of rippling muscles.

Sarah sat up and tugged off her panties, watching Eddie run to his jeans. He scooped up their clothing and dumped it into the recliner next to the couch. He yanked his jeans from the pile, pulling his wallet from the back pocket. After a little fishing around, he turned to her, the tiny packet in hand. She watched him tear open the foil, then slide the rubber over his solid length. Though she was glad he had a condom so readily available, she kind of hated the idea that he

had it. Then again, it was like a girl being on the pill. It didn't make her promiscuous, just prepared.

He took a step towards her and grabbed her foot giving it a shake. "What's with the frown?"

"Nothing. I just started thinking." She wasn't about to ask how often he needed to replenish his stock.

"Well, no more of that." He lowered his body over hers, and the second his skin slid against hers she decided he was right.

Thinking would get her nowhere. Later, she'd have plenty of time to consider the ramifications of her actions. Right now, she was just going to enjoy herself. She didn't bother to hold back her moan of pleasure as he cupped her breasts, taking his sweet time licking one nipple then the other. Sarah opened her legs wider, letting him drop into the cradle of her thighs.

His thick cock pressed against her. Sarah slid her hand between them to guide him. He lifted enough for her to wrap her fingers around him. Once she had his hot flesh in her hand, she didn't want to let go. She angled the swollen head of his cock, running it along her drenched slit. The friction made her shudder. It felt so good, she rubbed harder passing over her clit.

"Sarah, you're killing me." He pressed his hips forward and the sensation became too much.

She needed him inside her. Deep, hard, fast, and rough. She'd take whatever he wanted to give. She placed the tip of his cock at her entrance, and he slid through her fingers on the way into her. His mouth closed over hers. His tongue mimicked his cock while she writhed under him.

Sarah slid her hands to his ass, holding tight. He pumped his hips, driving into her with repeated powerful strokes. Eddie tore his mouth from hers, giving her the air she desperately needed. His hand slid under her shoulders. He pulled her down, surging upward. She tried to hold back just a little, wanting it to last. His powerful strokes tortured her swollen flesh. Lost in her rapture, she barely noticed where she started and he ended. Sarah's nails dug into him, and she

shouted his name. Uncontrollable shudders racked her body as she came apart. She trembled in his arms, overwhelmed by the intensity of her orgasm. Sex had never reached that point of ecstasy for her before. And what a shame that was.

Eddie's movements slowed a little, his strokes less rough. She looked up at Eddie's face. His eyes were closed and his forehead furrowed. She knew he was holding back. Sarah let her hands travel up his back, feeling his taut muscles tighten even more under her touch. The pressure started to rebuild within her and she was determined to make sure he find his release with her this time. She rocked her hips, eliciting a loud groan. Sarah kept moving until he grabbed her hips lifting her ass off the couch and resumed pounding into her with a wild abandon. She tightened her muscles around him, trying to hold back her release until he came, but it was useless. She shattered again. This time it was Eddie who shouted out her name as he followed her into the abyss. His head dropped to her chest. After a few seconds of lying there, his arms trembling, he managed to roll them onto their sides.

She was surprised, because she couldn't move a muscle after that workout. She'd repay him, hopefully very soon.

Chapter Six

Sarah took advantage of their shared space to curl closer against Eddie's side. His arms wrapped more tightly around her. Not all men were cuddlers. It seemed for now Eddie was more than willing to give it a go.

"So now that we've broken in my new sofa, wanna tell me where you learned to play pool like that?"

It was hard enough to form a coherent thought lying naked next to him. With him rubbing his hand over her thigh, which happened to still be draped over his hips, it was damn near impossible. Luckily her stomach growled wicked loud, keeping her from having to answer.

"I'm glad to hear I'm not the only one who's worked up an appetite." His laughter was infectious.

"I guess I could explain while you cook." He deserved to know why she'd wiped the table with him.

"Deal." He helped her up, but when she reached for her clothes, he handed her his undershirt instead. He walked over to the bar and made quick work of cleaning himself up.

She held it before her and looked down at it. "This isn't going to cover much."

"I know." He waggled his eyebrows, pulling on his boxer-style briefs and jeans.

She slid the shirt over her head, tugging at the sides to make sure she wasn't hanging out anywhere. She grabbed her panties and slid them on. She

pulled the bottom of the shirt down over her hips, relieved it at least covered her ass. With the way her curves stretched the ribbed material to its limits, she figured Eddie would never be able to wear it again. He held out his hand and Sarah slid hers into it.

Oddly comfortable walking around his house half-dressed, Sarah allowed him to lead her back to the kitchen. He eased her onto one of the barstools. She looked at him, deciding he looked quite satisfied. He leaned down, pressing a quick kiss to her lips before rounding the bar. He moved to the sink and started washing his hands. Once he had his back to her, Sarah did a happy little dance in her chair. She watched him pull pans out of the cabinets and food from the fridge.

"So about the party..." She waited for him to respond.

He shook his head. "Later. Right now you're going to tell me how you learned to play pool."

"It's a real boring story." She paused.

With a little wave of his hand, he urged her to continue.

"I wanted to go to a college that my father thought had a less than stellar reputation. So when he finally agreed, he requested I keep a low profile. We had a table in the dorm. I found it was a good way to spend my free time."

Saying it out loud made it sound depressing when it had actually been a lot of fun.

"So what did you major in?"

"Public relations, which is why I spent the last year proving to my father he hadn't wasted his money." Now that she had a firm plan for using her degree, she felt like she was ready to deal with the upcoming confrontation with her father.

"So even though he disagreed with your choices, you stood your ground and went where you wanted anyway." His smile encouraged her.

"Yeah." She nodded, rising from her stool. "I know how to fight for what I want. It just has to be worth it."

“It’s good to know you don’t cut and run when things get tough.” He winked, and then turned his attention back to the chicken he was slicing.

Sarah had the feeling he was trying to tell her something. The clues were all there. Sarah was too hungry, for him, and food, to put it all together. The last thing she needed was to sit there staring at him like some lovesick puppy. She washed her hands, then walked over and used the towel hanging over his shoulder to dry them.

“What can I do to help?”

Eddie handed her a knife and slid half of the veggies he was dicing towards her.

They worked side-by-side laughing, joking, even stealing a kiss or two. By the time they sat down to eat, it had gotten dark. Sarah was so worked up from all his teasing touches, she almost pushed her plate away and suggested he take her upstairs and show her his bedroom. Her stomach, however, rumbled loudly, reminding her she needed to eat if she hoped to keep up with him. Eddie had already dug into his food. She watched him for a few seconds before taking a bite. His version of pasta primavera had teriyaki chicken in it. It looked, tasted, and smelled pretty damn good. Eddie hadn’t been kidding when he’d bragged about being a good cook.

“Alright, so tell me about this shindig we’re attending.” He reached for his glass of soda laughing when she spun her chair so her feet were out of his reach.

Sarah knew that like all the firm’s other clients, Eddie had been sent an invitation to the New Year’s Eve party. So she didn’t bother with the basics.

“Well, since I have to be there way before anyone else, I was wondering if we could meet there? I mean if you want to come with me that’s fine, but I’ll be so busy with the final details, I won’t have much time to spend with you.” She would have enjoyed having him pick her up, but it really wasn’t fair to have him sitting around being ignored.

“Afraid I might distract you?”

She laughed, realizing that was part of it, too.

"If I say yes, will it go to your head?"

His cheeks turned a touch of pink. She found it endearing that he was embarrassed by her question.

"How early are you going to be there?" She wondered if he was avoiding her question by asking one of his own.

"Cocktails start at seven o'clock. So, I need to be there by four to make sure everything is set up right. I want to make sure we get started on time. Since the hotel comped me a suite for the night, I'll be checking in at three." She waited for him to ask why the hotel provided her a room. He didn't.

If he had asked, it would have given her a reason to let him in on her secret. Now he would have to wait and find out just like everyone else.

"So, how do you want to do this?" He asked between bites.

"I was thinking I could call you once I know my room number. Then you could come up to get me once you arrive. Or we could meet in the lobby at six-thirty?" Her cheeks heated with the thought about how great it would be to have the hotel room for later that night.

"Your mind has gone to that naughty place." With a quick look under the counter she could tell his had too.

She got up and slid into his lap. "I hope we're thinking the same thing?"

He wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her tight against his chest. The hard bulge behind his zipper jammed into her hip. He pressed a quick peck to her lips.

"If you're thinking I need to make a stop at the drugstore before tomorrow night, we are. I'll pick you up at your room and escort you to the party." He slid her plate closer. "Now hurry up and eat so I can ravage you again."

"Maybe I'll ravage you this time." She taunted as the phone rang.

Eddie dropped his head to her shoulder. It was obvious he didn't want to be disturbed. The phone continued to ring. After the fifth ring, she started to get a little annoyed, but Eddie just laughed.

"Do you want me to get that?" She'd been teasing so when he nodded, she froze.

"Go ahead. People should get used to hearing your voice since I hope to have you over a lot." He gave her a little push, and she slid to her feet.

Sarah walked over taking a deep breath before she lifted the receiver.

"Hello."

"Who's this?" A deep gruff voice demanded.

She looked over at Eddie who was focused on his dinner once again. "Sarah. Can I help you?"

"Where's Ed?" Gruff and to the point, bordering on rude...she was used to handling calls like this.

"Mr. Capatellio is right here. May I tell him who's calling?" She chose to use her most polite tone, instead of saying who the fuck is this, which she had wished she could say thousands of times since she'd become a receptionist.

"Yeah, tell him Jerry's on the line." She hoped this guy acted better in person because his phone presence sucked.

Sarah pressed the phone to her chest. "Some bozo named Jerry wants to talk to you."

"Jerry is my project manager." He stood pressing a kiss to her lips as he took the phone from her.

She moved to the counter, picking at her food. Sarah listened to the one sided conversation. Something about pipes and the layout being all wrong. After some heavy bitching and moaning, Eddie told Jerry he'd be there in an hour.

"Yeah, she's steaming." He winked.

Sarah's mouth fell open.

Did he just tell the jerk she was hot? Good! Maybe next time Jerry would be a little nicer when he called. Not that she'd be answering Eddie's phone again anytime soon. Eddie came back to the counter and started eating.

"Where will you be in an hour?" She lifted her cup to her lips.

"I have to drive back into the city. I don't know how long it'll take, but you can wait here for me. I can bring us back some dessert." It was a sweet offer.

One she'd really like to accept, but she should get home. She needed to call April. They should go over tomorrow's schedule again. Maybe she'd even get a few hours sleep.

"Can you drop me at my car instead?" He didn't look happy about her request, still he nodded.

"Do you get called out for business often?" She wondered if it would become an issue.

"Not really. Sometimes if I'm pushing a deadline, my schedule might get a little hairy." He took her hand in his, rubbing her knuckles. "Like you, I put what's important first."

She let him pull her into his embrace. "Yeah, I know sometimes it's important to put business first. I wasn't complaining. I was just curious."

"Wondering if I'd be running out on you a lot?" He kissed her hard, deep enough, to wipe any doubts about where his interest lay.

"Not any more. I'll just go get dressed." She headed downstairs to get her clothes and wipe the erotic fog from her mind.

A few minutes later they were back in his truck, heading into the city. Unlike the drive to his home, this ride wasn't silent. He talked. She babbled. Hell, they'd even sung along with the radio. Loud and out of key, but neither of them seemed to mind. He pulled to a stop behind her car, Sarah was sorry their time together was over. She opened the door to step out. Eddie met her by the front of the truck. He walked her to her car door, then kissed her senseless before helping her inside.

She watched him back his truck up, giving her room to get out of her parking place. He followed her out of the garage. When they reached the intersection, they went their separate ways. She blew out a breath wondering if she'd just made the biggest mistake of her life or the best move ever.

Chapter Seven

Sarah could tell Eddie wasn't happy with the arrangements they'd made. She couldn't do anything differently. She needed to be at the hotel to supervise and handle any last minute issues, of which she hoped there wouldn't be any. Her partner April would be there too, but with this being their first major event, Sarah couldn't throw all the responsibilities at her. She had to think of her new business first. It was really important to her that they both be on hand to show a united front.

Later, after she'd proved to herself and everyone else, mainly her father, that she could do this, she could invite Eddie upstairs to her hotel room for a little celebration. Just the two of them spending what was hopefully going to be a great beginning to the new year. A few months back, when they'd first decided to go through with this crazy scheme, April had jokingly suggested she pick one of the rich men from the party to help her cross one of her resolutions of her list. Sarah hadn't had the chance to tell her yet, but she'd reached that goal two days early. Now she was going to give herself and Eddie, if he was up for it, a really spectacular New Year's gift.

"Holy fuck. You look amazing," April stepped out of the bathroom.

Sarah turned from side to side, admiring herself in the mirror. She'd chosen to wear her hair up, which showed off the sweetheart top of her dress, tastefully displaying her cleavage without being vulgar. It also had ribbons that laced down the back that gave the dress a sexy kick. The way the knee length, well almost

knee length, chiffon skirt flowed, made her want to dance. Red and white crystals accented the red material along the top of the bodice, waistline, and throughout the skirt. They matched the ones on her red three inch heels. The stones ran up the top of her feet to circle her ankles.

She'd borrowed her mother's necklace with matching earrings. The sixteen inch chain laced with round rubies and marquis cut diamonds was finished off with a large teardrop diamond. Her earrings were ruby studs with hanging teardrop diamonds. The set had been passed down to the oldest daughter of the family for generations. Someday they'd be hers. Hopefully, she'd have a daughter of her own to whom she could pass the set. Her diamond tennis bracelet had been a gift from her mother on her twenty-first birthday. It was crafted to match the set with back-to-back teardrops separated by little round rubies.

The jewels were probably the only part of the ensemble of which her father would approve.

"You don't think it's a little too much?" Sarah needed reassurance.

Except, the more she studied April's hot pink floor-length sequin gown with a slit clear up to her hip, the more Sarah realized she was definitely asking the wrong person. April shook her head yet somehow, her pink and black spikes stayed in place. Sarah turned back to the mirror giving herself one more check.

"So this guy, does he know about us?" April had been asking all sorts of questions about Eddie since she'd showed up at the office this morning.

"No. I want to tell my father I quit before I tell everyone we've started a new company behind their backs." Not to mention she wanted to see how they did tonight.

"You know, not giving me the dirt on this guy just makes me want to know more about him and what you guys did, or didn't do." If Sarah hadn't known what to expect from April, she probably would have gone crazy by now.

"I told you there's no dirt to give." *Lies*. She was going to hell for telling so many of them today, even though they were tiny, white ones.

"Your mother will ferret it all out. I'm going to be there to catch it all." April turned to walk away. Sarah was surprised, and relieved, to see there was actually sheer black material inside the slit.

"My mother has met him before." She hoped it would keep her mother from giving him the third, and fourth, degree.

"That doesn't matter. She's not going to give up the opportunity to ask him some very personal, detailed, questions." April, despite her quirky sense of humor and wild looks, always had to be the one who told it like it was.

"I thought you were going down to check on the caterers." Sarah needed a few minutes to gather her wits before Eddie showed up and scrambled them again.

"I'm going. Are you sure you don't want me to stay here with you tonight?" April picked up her shiny little pink purse and headed for the door, sticking the com piece in her ear.

Sarah nodded knowing it would be the best things for both of them. "Yeah. I'll be fine, besides you need to go to your parents for brunch tomorrow. So you'll need to get some sleep."



Eddie told himself meeting her at the hotel was no different from picking her up at her apartment. He'd still knock on a door, take her by the arm and escort her to the party. It took away his chance to explore her personal space, but he knew he'd get another opportunity sooner or later. Hopefully sooner.

This event was extremely important to Sarah. She'd gone all out on her father's behalf to make sure everything went smoothly. She wanted to make sure that all the guests enjoyed themselves. His self-assigned job for the night was to make sure she stayed relaxed enough to enjoy it too. He had a feeling he had his work cut out for him tonight. Stepping off the elevator, he smoothed his coat and tie. He probably should have gone the safe, standard tuxedo route, but he wasn't a big fan. He hadn't found one yet that fit him through the shoulders.

So he chose a black suit, red shirt, with a black and red striped tie. The little red hankie in his coat pocket was just for show. His sister said it brought the whole outfit together.

Sarah had told him her dress was red, so at least he knew they wouldn't clash. He found her door and stood there staring at it. Damn his hands were sweaty. His heart was racing. He hadn't been this nervous about picking up a woman for a date since high school. Even back then, it was the fathers he'd been more worried about. Tonight though, he was totally worried about impressing Sarah. He wanted to make sure nothing and no one, interfered with her plans.

He knocked on the door and heard rustling on the other side. Eddie stepped back so she could see him through the peephole. The door opened, and he forgot how to breathe. Sarah looked beautiful, sexy...beyond words amazing. He looked her over from head to toe. Then he did it again just to make sure he hadn't missed anything. Her hair had been piled on top of her head with curly strands hanging down by her ears.

The top of her dress curved over her breasts, cupping them protectively. Eddie was surprised the skinny little straps were strong enough to hold her up. The skirt floated above her knees, he couldn't wait to twirl her around the dance floor. Her shoes shined with the fake little diamonds and red stones like the ones that accented her dress. The whole outfit was designed to inspire sex, so it was only natural he'd wonder what she was wearing underneath it.

He glanced back to the shiny stones dangling at her ears, wrist, and neck. Now those were definitely real. He had no doubts about it, they were real and expensive. He wondered if her father had bought them, or if they been a gift from some other man? Neither option made him happy. What did was the fact that all of her fingers were bare. He knew it was too early to be thinking like this, but he'd like to be the one to put a rock on her hand.

"I can go change." She clutched her little red purse, so tight her fingers turned white, and started to back into the room.

Eddie reached out grabbing her hand, his brain searching for the right thing to say. "I'd kill myself."

"What? Why?" She moved forward into the hall, still holding onto the door.

"I'm sorry. You fried my circuits. Give me few minutes to think clearly and I'll explain." She blushed letting the door close as she moved to his side.

She gave the skirt a little fluff with her hand and asked, "So you're saying you like it?"

"Let's just say you're lucky to be making it to the party at all." He hoped they'd be able to sneak out early.

"Thank you. You look nice too. We should head down." She turned and started walking down the hall, but he couldn't move.

Sarah looked back over her shoulder cocking her head. "Are you coming?"

Damn close, he thought looking at the back of her dress. There were ribbons crisscrossed over the back holding it closed. It still showed off a good amount of skin. They tied off at the top of her ass, leaving the ends of the silk straps dangling. He watched them sway with each step she took.

He caught up to her, laying his hand on her back as they made their way to the elevator. This was possibly going to be the longest night of his life. The most dangerous too, because he was sure he'd be staking his claim a lot over the next few hours. If she got pissed, so be it. She brought it on herself by dressing like a moving violation. They stepped into the elevator along with another group of people. With the car filled to capacity, Sarah had no choice except to stand in front of him.

She was so close he could smell her sweet scent. His already half-hard cock now rose to attention. He grasped her hips easing her back letting her feel what she did to him. She giggled, giving her hips a playful wiggle. He just tightened his grip.



Sarah hadn't been avoiding her parents. She'd just been waiting for the right time to talk with them. Everything had been going so smoothly. She could have mingled with them at any time, except she wanted to talk to them without an audience. When Eddie excused himself, she scanned the ballroom and found her parents standing by the end of the bar.

She raised her hand to her ear, activating the com device, and whispered. "Wish me luck."

"I'm right here if you need me." April chirped in her ear, shooting her a thumbs up from across the room.

Sarah tugged the little bud out of her ear and slid it into her purse. She took a deep breath and headed toward her parents. What she was about to do should have been done a long time ago. With a huge smile, Sarah's mother pulled her into her arms.

"Baby, you did such a beautiful job. Everybody is having such a great time. Quite a few people have asked me if I knew the party planner's name." Her mother gave her a quick wink.

Sarah knew she'd somehow found out her secret.

"That's wonderful." She tipped her head towards her father and thankfully, her mother gave a slight shake of her head.

They'd taken to this form of silent communication when they'd wanted to keep her father, or her brother, out of their business. Sarah was relieved he didn't know. At the same time, it would have been a good explanation for the frown he was wearing. She wasn't about to ask him what was wrong. It could be any number of things. Depending on his mood, even the slightest, stupidest thing, could rub him the wrong way.

If he didn't say something tonight, which in all likelihood he probably wouldn't since he liked to stew a while, then Monday, everyone in the office would be walking around on eggshells. Not her though. She clutched her little purse tighter. The only things inside were her lipstick, cell phone, her ear bud, and her resignation.

"April certainly looks festive tonight," her mother said, filling the awkward silence that had settled over the three of them.

Sarah looked over at the buffet tables where April stood talking to a group of older women. She barely stifled the impulse to laugh. April always drew a crowd, though normally it was hot studs surrounding her.

"Her dress borders on the inappropriate." Her father's accusatory tone told her he sought an argument. He wouldn't get one from her.

April always dressed a little differently. This was a party, so Sarah cut her some slack. Sarah could have pointed out that there were women wearing less. Or that there were actually flashier dresses sashaying around the room. It wouldn't have mattered, because her father rarely changed his opinion once it was cast. Her mother squeezed her hand and nodded her head towards the dance floor. When Sarah looked over, she saw a dark handsome stranger sitting at a table at the edge of the floor staring at April. Either her friend hadn't noticed or didn't care. Sarah's protective streak kicked in.

"Dad, who's that guy?" Her father glanced in the direction she pointed.

"That's Daniel Scott. He happens to be one of our best clients." He shook his head adding, "Why couldn't someone like him have asked you out, instead of Edward?"

"What's wrong with Edward?" Her mother asked before she could.

"In a business sense nothing, but just look at what he's done to your daughter." His clipped tone set Sarah on edge.

"He hasn't done anything to me that I didn't want him to do." She saw the heat flash in her father's eyes and knew this was about to get ugly.

Her father turned to her mother, "Do you hear the way she is speaking to us?"

"Us? No. You? Yes. I happen to think you deserve it. Edward is a nice man who likes *OUR* daughter. Anything happening between them has absolutely nothing to do with us." Her father had made a huge mistake in getting her mother's dander up, because she could be a real spitfire when she got mad.

"Amelia, just look at the way she's dressed. Now tell me he has nothing to do with this." He waved his hand at her. Even though Sarah had been expecting him to complain, felt her bubble of excitement shrink.

"*MY* daughter." Oh, he was in real trouble now. When she became her mother's daughter, the gloves were off. "Has a beautiful body. It's about damn time she accepted it and stopped hiding it just to please you."

"Please me?" It didn't surprise Sarah that he seemed so shocked by the notion.

It was useless to argue with him, but that didn't stop her mother. "Yes, you. Almost everything both of *MY* children do is to please their father. They don't have to try and please me, because I love them unconditionally."

"That's ridiculous. More importantly it has nothing to do with what's happened here. Our daughter..."

Sarah was happy he was backtracking at least a little.

"She is letting that man flaunt her around on his arm like a bimbo and we both know it."

Though she hated that he was talking about her like she wasn't there, Sarah decided it was time for her to try and diffuse the situation. "Dad, Edward has nothing to do with the way I'm dressed. Sure he likes it, but I bought the dress three weeks ago."

"No doubt *your friend* helped you pick it out." Of course if it wasn't Eddie, it had to be April. The man must think she didn't have a mind of her own.

"Actually, I went shopping all by myself. I chose everything. I picked the color, style, even the shoes." She lifted her foot wiggling it at him.

The red and white crystals caught the light, seeming to wink at him. His frowned deepened as he stared at her foot. Okay, so the shoes were totally impractical, not to mention outrageously expensive. Still, it wasn't like she was asking him to wear them. Sarah looked back to find the guy staring at April. He was gone.

"Whatever. We'll discuss your behavior Monday morning. Privately." He turned and surveyed the party, dismissing her.

"No, we won't." She managed not to cringe when her father's narrowed gaze locked on her face.

"Excuse me." His mouth barely moved, save for a muscle ticking in his jaw.

Sarah opened her purse took out the envelope with his name on it and shoved it at him. "I quit."

Her father stared at the envelope in his hand. Sarah's heart pounded as he tore it open. Refusing to back down, she stood tall and kept her gaze locked him. He almost crumpled the sheet of paper in his hand before her mother ripped it out of his grasp.

"You can't just quit. There are things that need to be taken care of." His furious tone had her hopes dwindling that he wouldn't overreact because of the guests.

Sarah knew she had to hold her ground, because if she showed any sign of weakness, her father would twist it until he got his way. "I've already cleaned out my desk. Jameson from paralegal will be taking over for me."

"Jameson?" her father's voice had grown loud enough to turn a few heads in their direction.

"Yes. He's more qualified for the job than I am. He's also very eager to please. You two should get along well." She'd shown Jameson everything he needed to know so the transition should go very smoothly.

Her father's cheeks puffed out a little turning a mottled red. "We had a deal-"

"For one year. I fulfilled that. Now I'm going to do what I want. You can either be happy for me or not. I've made up my mind."

Her mother gave her hand a squeeze.

"Robert, your daughter is asking for you to trust her."

Tears welled in Sarah's eyes, because just from the look on his face, she knew what his answer was going to be.

"You don't have to say anything." Sarah pulled her hand from her mother's and walked away.

She refused to stand there and listen to him dictate how he thought she should live her life. She didn't look directly at anyone, just headed for the door. A hand clasped tightly around her wrist, yanking her to a stop. She turned, surprised to find Harvey, the weasel, holding her arm.

"Where do you think you're going?" He asked as if he had the right to question her.

"Let go of me." She yanked her arm hard enough to pull him forward. He didn't release her.

"If you walk out of here after that little scene, there will be a lot of questions. Your father will be put in an awkward position." His hand tightened.

If she hadn't had years of practice hiding her emotions, she would have winced.

"I don't care." It wasn't true, but she couldn't back down now that she'd gone this far. "Now let go."

"I'd do as the lady suggested." Eddie's voice sounded from behind her, his hands settling on her shoulders. "As a matter of fact, I'd do it right now."

Harvey not only let go, he took a huge step back. "We were just talking."

"No, we weren't." She leveled the worm with a stare, hoping he'd slither away.

"It sounds like Sarah has nothing to say to you." He turned her away from the small crowd that had been watching the little show.

Instead of heading for the door like she wanted, he headed for the dance floor.

"I want to leave." She stopped faced him.

He didn't stop. He just dropped his hands to her hips and started walking her backwards. Sarah settled her hands on his hard chest, ready to push him away if she had too. To anyone looking, they probably seemed like a normal couple

ready to spend a few minutes in each other's arms. They didn't know she was furious, and he was just trying to keep her from having a very public meltdown.

He lowered his head, until his mouth hovered beside her ear. "I know. I'd love to get you out of here too. First though, we're going to take a turn around the floor."

"Why?" He obviously must have missed the scene her father had caused.

"Because you are a strong, beautiful woman. No matter what anyone says, or does, they can't take that away from you."

Damn it! Eddie was right. She needed to show them she wasn't going to run away and lick her wounds. Dancing with him would send a clear sign that she wasn't going to be pushed around. Rascal Flatts crooned about melting from a look from your lover, while Eddie used some pretty slick maneuvers to get them to the center of the dance floor. The song fit the way she felt about him so well.

His hands settled on her back. Their warmth seeped into her, removing the chill her father's looks had cast over her. One day he was going to find out just how wrong he'd been. Sarah knew her transformation had nothing to do with Eddie. He'd made it a hell of a lot easier for her. She probably owed him for that. She'd planned her decision out long before he'd entered the picture. Still, he accepted her for who she was, and that made Sarah feel secure enough to be the woman she wanted to be. It wasn't an easy thing to ask of someone. However, Eddie had given it freely.

As they swayed to the music, all her thoughts and fears dissipated. Soon there was nothing but the two of them. She slid her hands over his shoulders, clasping them behind his neck. His hands rested inches above her ass. She moved forward, closing the space between them. Eddie didn't talk or try to convince her to do anything, he just held her tight and swayed her around the floor.

Chapter Eight

Tension eased from Sarah's shoulders as they moved around the floor. After witnessing the incident with her parents, Eddie knew they both needed to calm down before they were alone. Then when he saw Harvey touch her, it was all he could do not to punch the bastard in the face and drag her out of there. Something deep inside told him hitting Harvey would be a mistake. So he bit back his pride and did what she needed him to do, which was simply be there for her.

Not that things were over by a long shot. He was going to be paying a visit to both her father and his slimy right-hand man. For now though, he was going to let it go so he could enjoy his weekend with Sarah. The more she relaxed, the closer her body got to his. She closed her eyes, resting her head on his shoulder. The rage that had been surging through his system slowly started to ebb. His heart decelerated to a steadier beat.

Tonight was for them, and he wasn't about to let anything change that. They were going to enjoy the box of condoms he'd had delivered to her room along with a dozen roses, a tray of chocolate covered strawberries, and a bottle of the hotel's finest champagne. Tomorrow, or maybe the day after, depending on if he could get Sarah to come home with him, he'd go have a talk with her parents. His issue was with her father, though Sarah's mother might have a few things to say on her daughter behalf too.

Feeling Sarah's soft bare skin under his hands was going a long way toward lessening his anger. It was creating a whole new set of problems. He lowered his

head to hers and let the moment take them away. The music gave him the perfect excuse to pull her tight and make sure she was okay. Her fingers played in the hair at the nape of his neck.

Eddie took a deep breath, needing to keep his control until they were out of sight. Sarah lifted her face and looked at him. The desire in her eyes matched his.

"Do you think it's okay if we get out of here now?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Yeah. Do you need to tell April you're taking off?" He asked.

Her mouth dropped open.

"Sarah you've been chatting back and forth all night into your earpiece. I was bound to figure it out. Shit anyone who really watched you tonight would have known. You have this place running like a fine tuned machine."

Her face lit up with pride. "Thank you. Sometime a lot of hard work goes into making sure people have a good time."

"So this is what you'll be doing after you quit working for your father. Planning parties?" He was glad she'd calmed down enough to talk without grinding her teeth.

"Parties, corporate events, the occasional wedding. I quit tonight. That's part of what that scene had been about." She explained, running her hands back and forth across his shoulders.

"Do you want to tell me what the rest of it was about?" She shook her head.

He knew he'd get it out of her sooner or later, but right now there was something else he wanted from her.

"Go tell April we're leaving, and make it quick. I'll be waiting by the door." He patted her butt as he sent her off.

Eddie watched her go, enjoying the sway of her hips.

"Nice woman you've managed to scoop up." The familiar deep voice so similar to his own had him spinning around.

His cousin stood there staring across the room at Sarah and April. Daniel wore a classic black tux. He always was the most debonair guy Eddie knew. Daniel practically oozed power and authority. It only made sense since he'd been raised to take over the reins of his mother's business.

"Daniel, you came. Aunt Harriet said she asked you to, but I really didn't think you'd show." Eddie slapped his cousin on the back.

"My mother insisted I come check out your newest conquest. Not quite what I'd expected."

Daniel's appearance made more sense now knowing he wasn't there to schmooze business associates, but instead, wanted to check up on him.

"I'm intrigued. What did you think you'd find?" Eddie asked knowing their taste in women was polar opposites.

"I would have thought that one was more your type." Daniel lifted his drink in the direction where Sarah stood talking with April.

"April's beautiful. Don't get me wrong, she's got all the right qualities. Sarah, however, just does something to me." Daniel was the one person he knew would understand and not judge him.

Eddie looked back at Sarah. She had so many special qualities he was surprised she hadn't been. April said something and shook her head. *Fuck*. He hoped nothing was wrong, because he really wanted to get out of there. Both women turned, looking not at him, but at Daniel.

"Since everything seems kosher with you, I guess I'll head out before I make a huge mistake." Daniel handed Eddie his drink and walked out of the room, not even slowing to look back.

"Hi." Sarah moved into the arm he held out. "You know that guy?"

"Yeah. Is everything okay with April?" He asked, handing Daniel's glass to a passing server. He hoped Sarah hadn't changed her mind about leaving.

"It is now. Do you still want to get out of here?"

"Hell yes. Come on." She took his hand and tugged him from the room.

Somehow, they managed to keep things respectable until they were in the elevator. Once those thick metal doors slid closed, he pinned Sarah against the wall. Sarah grabbed the lapels of his jacket, pulling him down until their lips met. He slid his tongue deep inside her mouth, giving her a sample of the passion awaiting her upstairs. His hand slid under her skirt searching until he found the top of her stocking along with more soft silky skin.

He pulled his mouth from hers. "Damn. I've never made love in an elevator. There's only one thing keeping me from taking you right now."

"No guy has ever said such sweet things to me." She shoved at his chest.

Reluctantly, he took a step back. He watched Sarah bend over and stick her hands up under her skirt. A wiggle or two and she slid her hands back down, along with her panties. She held the small scrap of lace out to him with a smile. Too shocked to do anything, Eddie just stood there. Sarah twirled them around on her finger. The garment flew across the elevator and hit him in the chest. He came out of his stupor quick enough to grab them before they hit the floor.

"Sarah, I never had much patience to start with, but what I did have is gone." He wasn't playing games, he was being totally honest.

He stuffed the panties in his pocket and stalked her around the elevator. For every step forward he made, she took two back. The elevator doors slid open giving Sarah a means of escape. She dashed out, running down the hall. Close on her heels, he caught her just outside the door to her suite. He pressed her back against the door.

She handed him the key card from her purse, then reached out and stroked his cock through his loose fitting slacks. "I've been waiting to do that all night."

Eddie stuck the plastic card into the slot and shoved the door open. He wrapped his arm around her waist, lifted her off her feet, and carried her into the room.



Sarah leaned against Eddie as she stared at her transformed room. The lights, which she'd left on, had been dimmed. Soft music was coming from somewhere. A huge vase of red roses dominated the once empty desk. A small wrapped box sat next to a platter of huge strawberries on the table. Some of the berries were covered in white chocolate, while the others were dipped in dark chocolate. On a nightstand, a silver ice bucket held a chilling bottle, probably champagne. If her key card hadn't opened the door, she would have thought they'd entered the wrong room.

Eddie stepped away long enough to remove his jacket and lay it over the back of a chair. Sarah suddenly wondered if he was trying to seduce her. It didn't matter if he was trying or not, because it was working anyway. She hadn't expected him to do anything except take her to bed. He walked over and picked up one of the strawberries, before carrying it over to her.

Eddie held a dark chocolate covered berry inches from her lips.

Sarah opened her mouth.

Eddie lowered the berry. She opened her mouth and let him slip the decadent fruit inside. She bit down hard, expecting the chocolate to be a barrier she had to break through to get to the berry. The chocolate, which wasn't thick enough to even make a crunch, began to melt once it hit her tongue. Her teeth pierced the berry, sending juice squirting onto her tongue and dripping down her chin. The fusion of the pungent strawberry and the creamy chocolate hit her tongue with a sensational punch. Sarah closed her eyes for a second savoring the sweet sugar concoction. She took another bite, bigger this time grazing his fingers. He groaned and popped the last bit into his own mouth. Then he surprised her by leaning forward to lick the juice from her chin. Sarah swallowed the fruit and pulled his mouth to hers. From there, seduction went out the window.

They stumbled over to the bed. She shoved Eddie and he sat down. Sarah had never performed a striptease before. Well, of course, she'd danced around in

her underwear. Everybody had at some point in their life she guessed, but she'd never stripped off her clothes for a man before. She failed to stop her laughter.

Eddie started to rise.

She wagged her finger at him and he sat back down.

"You're going to love this." She reached behind her and pulled the straps holding her dress in place. "I was going to do this little strip tease for you, but I can't make it much of a show."

"Why?" He asked, sounding a little deflated.

"Because once I take my dress off, I'll be naked. It won't be much of a striptease. So maybe you should do one for me." She couldn't stop giggling as she grabbed the robe off the bathroom door and shoved her arms into the sleeves.

Sarah let her dress drop to the floor giving him a teasing flash, before quickly closing the robe and tying the belt. Eddie just sat there for a second with his mouth hanging open. Then in a blaze of motion, he lurched to his feet and grabbed her by the shoulders. Sarah gasped as he roughly dragged her up against him. He lifted her in his arms, crushing her mouth under his. She was so lost in the moment it came as a big surprise when he plopped her down on the bed. He turned and walked over to the table. Eddie picked up a small, silver remote. He pressed a few buttons to switch the music to something with a little more rhythm. Sarah stuffed the pillows behind her and leaned against the headboard getting comfortable.

She wasn't sure what she expected to happen next. Eddie turned around and walked back to the bed. He leaned down over her, grabbed her hand and brought it to his lips, but instead of kissing it, he licked across her knuckles. She laughed, pulling her hand away. Eddie scooted and shuffled a few feet away. With a flick of his wrist, he undid the buttons at his cuffs.

Then slowly he undid the buttons on his shirt. Each one showed off a little more skin. Sarah's heart sped up at the thought of touching, or tasting, him. Her nipples hardened and a hot, wet heat had her clenching her thighs. Unable to sit

still, she got onto her knees. His hips swayed to the music, not quite in rhythm. He turned his back to her, giving a little shake of his ass. Eddie stripped off his shirt and swung it around his head. When he let go, it flew to the floor.

“Shake it, baby,” Sarah shouted, encouraging him to keep going.

Eddie shook it all right. First one foot, then the other, toeing off his shoes and kicking them aside. His dancing reminded her of the hokey-pokey. He turned back to her and gave her an exaggerated wink before waggling his eyebrows. She couldn’t hold back the giggle that bubbled out. Laughter and sex weren’t two things Sarah would have thought went well together, but he was pulling it off. He undid his button then lowered the zipper. Down a little then back up, then finally down all the way. God, the man was a fucking tease. Little by little, he let his slacks fall to the floor. Standing there in his boxer briefs and socks, he twirled around with his hand in the air like a bull rider.

Sarah laughed so hard she couldn’t breathe. Eddie really got into the swing of things. He hopped around, pulling off his socks, throwing them at her. When he tugged one side of his briefs down, exposing his hip, she focused on the skin. It was a lighter shade than his chest. Then, he did the other side, allowing enough room to showcase his erection. He dropped the briefs altogether, and Sarah’s laughter stopped. There was nothing funny there.

“Come here.” He held out his hand, and she rested hers in his palm, letting him pull her to her feet.

He twirled her around so fast the sash to her robe came untied. Sarah let her robe fall to the floor, leaving her in just her fancy shoes and red stockings. Eddie’s mouth actually dropped open.

“Fuck me,” he sighed, as he reached for her.

“That’s the plan, right?” She smoothed her hands up his chest letting her finger brush over the light smattering of chest hair.

Together they danced their way back to the bed. Skin to skin, her breasts pressed firmly against his hard chest she found the slight friction stimulating. Eddie eased her down, and then followed, covering her with his body. His mouth

came down on hers in a passionate kiss that didn't end until they were both panting for air. He reached over and grabbed the foil packet he'd tossed onto the bed earlier. Sarah helped him roll it on, enjoying the noises he made when she tugged and squeezed his shaft. She laughed when he grabbed her hands, bringing them up to hold them over her head.

"You're a little frisky tonight." He lowered himself between her thighs.

"I've come to the realization that I like playing with you," she said.

She wiggled, getting him where she wanted. He rocked his hips forward, and the tip of his cock entered her. Slowly, he pressed forward, and then pulled back. Each time he moved forward he'd go a little deeper, but at this rate, she'd be a quivering mass by the time he was done. She could tell he was holding back, so on his next forward lunge she raised her hips, sending him deep. He held still for just a second, and then began to roll taking her with him. The next thing she knew she straddled his hips, with him still lodged deep inside her.

His hands closed on her hips and she looked down at him. "Come on, Sarah. Show me what you what."

Sarah placed her hands on his stomach to hold herself upright. She rocked her hips back and forth until she found her rhythm. She sat straighter, the pressure felt amazing. Eddie moaned beneath her, which had her increasing her speed. Eddie lifted his hips pushing up as she rocked. Sarah's fingers dug into his chest, but she still couldn't seem to hold herself up. Eddie didn't seem to mind when she collapsed on him. He reached up behind her grasping onto her shoulders pulling her downward as he lifted his hips up.

Now it was Sarah's turn to moan loud enough to wake up half the people on the floor. Her body shook from the force of his thrust. She wanted to scream. Not wanting to have their neighbors calling the front desk freaking out, she tried biting her lip. It wasn't enough. She dropped her head to his chest and growled. One of Eddie's hands fisted in her hair pulling her head back up.

"Let it out," he demanded.

She shook her head, which only intensified the force of his grip. Using what little bit of control she had left, she pushed herself up and ground her pelvis against his. A fierce growl filled the air as he slid his hands to her hips and helped her quicken her motions.

It seemed like only seconds later she started shaking from the force of her orgasm and screaming out his name. She collapsed on him, this time complete unable to move. Eddie wrapped his arms around her and held her tight as he continued to pump into her setting off little aftershocks. He quickly found his release, hissing out her name as he came. Sarah told herself she would get off him as soon as she could move. She closed her eyes and listened to his racing heart.

"You and I have a lot to talk about," he whispered softly in her ear.

"We have plenty of time." She hoped he wanted to talk about them continuing to see each other and doing this a lot more.

"Glad you see things my way." He rolled to his side.

She laughed as she went with him.

"I love the way you laugh."

"I've laughed more with you in the past few days than I have in the past year." She hadn't planned on telling him, but it came out anyway.

"Good, I plan on hearing it a lot since we're now an official couple. Right?" His tone told her it wasn't up for discussion.

"Right, which means eventually you have to have dinner with my parents."

His groan was muffled against her neck but she heard it all the same.

Chapter Nine

One year later

Tonight she could have been spending the night making love to Eddie just like she had been a year ago, if she didn't have this event scheduled. She knew that Eddie understood with her company still being so young, she couldn't turn people away just because she wanted the night for herself. Eddie told her not to worry, they'd make their own fireworks later. This job would give her the money, and the connections, she could use to grow the business. It still sucked that she couldn't have her cake and eat it too.

She paused to straighten the gorgeous centerpiece of daisies accented with lilies before moving on to inspect the next table. Sarah knew everything had to be absolutely perfect. Though in this case perfection was just a concept, because she had no idea if the bride and groom to be would like anything they'd chosen. It was hard to believe she was planning a surprise engagement party. Sure, she could come up with plenty of reasons why the lucky couple could be too busy to throw their own party, but she felt like she had stepped over an invisible line by doing it for them.

Brides had very particular ways they envisioned things. In her opinion, it started the second the ring was slid on her finger. In this case, the groom's aunt, of all people, had hired her. She had made it clear that she wanted a very elaborate, yet still welcoming atmosphere. The lady had sworn the couple would be fine with whatever Sarah chose. She still had reservations. April, however,

hadn't had any. She jumped right in and started making suggestions before they'd even signed the contract. Since the older woman was handling the guest list, all Sarah and April had to do was take care of everything else. The choosing of the food, location, decorations, and the music were laid in their more than capable hands.



Eddie wanted to propose in a really big way. He only planned on doing it once, so he needed to get it right. Six months into their relationship, he knew there was no denying she was the one. Now, he just needed to tell her. He considered every possibility from sky writing to the more traditional ring in her dessert. The problem he kept running into was that nothing seemed to fit. Every woman deserved to be the center of attention when someone asked her to marry him.

There were so many facets of Sarah's personality that he couldn't decide on the right way to go. So he'd gone to his aunt and begged her to help him come up with a plan. Now he was going as big as he could. It was risky, because if she turned him down, he'd look like the king of fools. He knew she loved him, but did she love him enough to want to be stuck with him forever? He hoped so, because he couldn't see a future for him without her.

He'd called in so many favors on this, he felt like he owed everyone. The biggest had been her best friend and business partner, April. Without her none of this would even have been possible. He hoped her willingness was a sign she thought Sarah would say yes. Or maybe she just wanted to see him make a fool out of himself.

He had the limo stop and let his Aunt out at the stairs, where a nice door man would lead her inside. He'd wait fifteen minutes, and then go inside himself. If everything was going to according to plan, which April and his aunt had worked out every little detail of, then all he had to do was wait. Right this minute, Sarah was inside with April greeting his aunt.

Then with just an hour before the guests were supposed to start arriving, the chef would suddenly have a problem only Sarah could handle. While she was busy, April would quietly escort the guests out of the room where they had been carefully ensconced for the past half hour having drinks, and into the ballroom.

They only had a half an hour to pull off the switch. He needed them to move quickly and quietly. It could work. It had to work. He needed to pull himself together and start thinking positively. She was going to say yes. They were going to spend the rest of their lives together.

He checked the time on his cell phone as he slid out of the car. Sarah should be in the kitchen by now. He started across the parking lot, tucking the phone back in his pocket. Everyone they knew had been invited, and from the full parking lot it looked like they'd all come too. He had another five minutes before he could go inside. There was no way he could spend it sitting in the car.

April and his aunt should be ushering people into the ballroom right about now. He looked down at his blue button-down dress shirt, black slacks, and dress shoes. *Maybe I should have gone with a suit or tux?* No. For the next part of the plan, he needed to be himself.

His phone beeped, and he actually jumped, bobbling the dozen roses in his hands. Eddie slid the phone from his pocket and read the text. *Good to GO.* He took the stairs two at a time. Sarah would be surprised to see him, but that was essential. He opened the door and headed straight for the kitchen. Before he could change his mind, he put his hand flat on the door and pushed it open.

"Listen, I don't care where you get the chicken from. Just get it. Even if you have to raid some farmer and pluck the damn things yourself." Sarah yelled at the chef.

Easily six-five and three hundred pounds, the guy dwarfed her. His vixen didn't back down. Standing there in a pair of black dress pants and a shiny blue blouse, she stared at him. The color in her face gave her a radiant glow. Eddie wondered how the guy would be reacting if he wasn't in on the plan, too.

"Yo, bozo no one's allowed in here." The guy shouted, easing Sarah out of his way as he advanced on him.

"Hey, that bozo is my boyfriend, you heavy-handed lummo." Sarah practically jumped in front of the guy, and Eddie held his breath waiting for her to get plowed down.

She turned her back on the moving mountain and pointed at him. "What are you doing here?"

Eddie found his voice and morphed into action. "I just stopped in to give you some flowers and tell you 'I love you'."

"Oh." She took the flowers he held and crushed them against her chest. "I thought we were going to celebrate tomorrow?"

"We are, but I missed you." He pulled her closer to him and away from the chef, who was smiling from ear to ear.

"Look, I have work to do, so take your shrew of a girlfriend and get out of my kitchen." The chef dropped his smile and pointed at the door. Eddie tugged Sarah out knowing he owed the guy for playing his part so well.

"What a jerk!" Sarah shook her head, moving down the hall with him.

"Honey, chefs are very territorial. Maybe he thought we were invading his domain." Eddie didn't want her so worked up.

"He loses twelve pounds of chicken breasts and I'm the shrew?" She looked up at him batting her eyes. "Do you think I'm a shrew?"

"Baby, you are the most loving, caring woman I know." He pressed his lips to hers careful not to smudge her lipstick. "Did I forget to mention that you're the only woman who can rattle my bones with just one look?"

"Thank you. I'm so glad you stopped by. I needed this." She snuggled against him, and his body started to respond.

He eased her away. "I know you're busy, but can you spare a few minutes for me?"

She glanced down the hall to the ballroom, then back to him. "I can always spare a few minutes for you."

"Glad to hear it. I have little gift for you." He pulled the blindfold from his pocket and held it up.

She reached up twirling her fingers in the silk scarf. "I said I have a few minutes, and since you don't believe in quickies, maybe we should wait."

"It's not my fault you keep me hard enough to drive nails." He took her by the shoulders and spun her around, laughing at her gasp. He carefully covered her eyes.

She raised her hands to her eyes and nervously croaked, "Eddie?"

"Don't worry, babe, this is a good thing." His silent, *I hope*, was like a prayer.

He turned her back around to face him, and then scooped her up into his arms. Sarah squealed, throwing her arms around his neck, squishing the bouquet between them. Her squeal had both his aunt and April flying into the hall. They held the doors open, and then followed him into the room. Everyone stood silently staring as he carried her to the center of the dance floor. Eddie lowered her to her feet letting her body slide along his. Her hands slipped from his shoulders down his chest to his belt.

"Alright, but Eddie this time you really have to make it a quickie, because I have work to do." Her voice filled the silent room as if she'd shouted.

Eddie groaned as the room filled with gasps and laughter. He lowered himself to one knee, waiting for Sarah to remove the blindfold. Her cheeks went red, and her mouth opened and closed a few times. She looked around the room at all the familiar faces. Eddie waited for her to look down at him. When she did, he held up the black velvet box.

"Sarah, I realize I messed this up, but I would still like you to consider becoming my wife." He opened the box and inside sat a two carat teardrop diamond with rubies on either side.

She looked around the room again. He watched her eyes fill with tears. Seconds ticked by with nothing but silence filling the air as everyone awaited her answer. The box shook in Eddie's hand. Looking up at her just standing there

frozen like a statue it occurred to him that maybe putting her on the spot in front of all these people was a huge mistake. What if she didn't want to marry him, but didn't want to embarrass him? He tried to smile, but his mouth wouldn't cooperate. *Fuck how could he have been so wrong?* He should have just tied her to his bed and refused to let her go until she agreed to marry him. He could have been very persuasive.

"You did all this?"

He nodded, wishing he hadn't.

"Who is the woman you had hire me?"

"My Aunt Harriet. I'm sorry I thought it would be special to surprise you like this. Maybe you don't like it?" He started to get up so he could make his escape.

Sarah put her hands on his shoulders and shoved him back down. "What gave you that idea?"

"Well you haven't said yes, so..." It was his turn to look around at all the expectant faces.

She held out her left hand wiggling her finger. "Gosh! Give a girl a break. I was in shock."

Eddie snatched the ring out of the box and slid it on her finger. "Thank God."

Sarah threw herself into his arms, and he kissed her with everything he had. Shouts, laughter, and clapping filled the air. He hoped this was a moment she'd never forget. He knew he wouldn't, but when he got her home later tonight he'd give her something to really remember.

"I can't believe I planned my own engagement party thinking it was for someone else." She wiped the tears that had escaped from her cheeks.

Eddie held her tight as he said, "Honey, I wouldn't let you spend New Year's Eve with anyone else. This is our night."

She pressed her jaw close to his ear. "Then you're going to love the little red night gown I bought to wear tonight. And of course, I planned on wear those stocking and heels you like so much. I had this whole fashion show I was going to do for you."

“Damn, Sarah, you’re playing dirty now.” He couldn’t stop the images of her prancing around half naked from invading his mind.

“No, telling you how wet and ready I got just thinking about you taking it all off me and making love to me would be playing dirty.” She pressed a kiss to his cheek and turned to the crowd waiting to congratulate them.

Eddie knew he was one lucky son of a bitch. He had found the perfect woman. Sarah finally let everyone see the strong confident woman she was, but when he got her alone she turned into a red hot vixen ready to blow his mind. From now on they were spending every New Year’s Eve alone and preferably in bed.

About the Author

Rita lives in northern Maine, near the Canadian border, but has strong family ties in Massachusetts. Along with her loving husband they're raising three teenagers. One girl, two boys, and a house full of pets. When she's not reading or writing she enjoys spending time with her family, and fishing.

When it comes to writing she's always made up stories to entertain her kids. As they grew up she began writing romances to entertain herself. She's been seriously focusing on her writing for the past two and a half years. Luckily she has a wonderful supportive family, and friends that are willing to sit there and listen to her ramble on about what her characters have done, or are about to do. Rita is a proud member of Romance Divas and enjoys visiting the Romantic Times forum.

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