



# THIEF



Lily Harlem

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

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**Warning:** This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

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## Prologue

\* \* \* \*

The jeweller stretched thick arms above his head, linked sturdy fingers and rotated his calloused palms towards the ceiling. As the stretch travelled down his aching spine, a tap on the office door accompanied by a sharp trill jerked his head to the right.

"John, Miss Worthington-Hurley is here to collect her ring." A pause then another rap. "John, John, can you hear me?"

"Yep, be right there," he called in a rough voice as he lowered his arms and pushed to his feet. A nerve in his jaw twitched as he forced weight onto his left leg. "Dead son of a bitch," he muttered.

Using the table for support he moved to the safe and pulled out Miss Worthington-Hurley's ring. He slipped it into a black velvet box embossed with gold lettering, flicked open the lock on his door and limped to the front of the shop. As he stepped into the glittering display area, he pasted a dazzling smile on his rugged features and forced a flame to life in his eyes. "Miss Worthington-Hurley, such a pleasure to see you," he said brightly.

"Mr. Taylor." The young woman bounced to the glass counter, blonde bob swishing, blue eyes flashing. "I trust you are well."

"Fine, thank you, and yourself?"



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"Fine, great... excited actually... really, really excited." She clasped her hands beneath her chin and skipped on the spot.

"I thought you'd be looking forward to finally getting it." He held the small black box over the counter. "The alteration went fine. No hitches. I think you'll find the fit perfect."

She flicked open the lid and sucked air through glossed lips. "Oh... I'd forgotten how beautiful it is. It's completely stunning... Don't you think?"

"It is indeed, flawless in every way. You could not have chosen better, madam."

She pulled the ring from the spongy holding and slid it onto her left ring finger. "It fits perfectly. You're so clever. It feels made especially for me."

"It was made especially for you."

She held the three-stoned ring up to the artificial lights, tilted her hand and sighed as the light fracturing through pebbled the counter with frantic stars. "Thank you so much. You've done a simply marvellous job."

"My pleasure."

"Has Tobias settled the account?" she asked, scooping the presentation box into a Gucci handbag.

"He has, and once again, congratulations on your engagement." John leant his hip against the counter and shifted his weight.

"Thank you, you're so kind. We'll be in to sort out the wedding rings when we've set a date."

"Very good."

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She pulled her handbag onto her shoulder, tapped across the redwood floor and breezed onto Park Lane, leaving behind a cloud of spiced perfume.

John's smile slipped as he left the display area. There were no other customers in the shop. Just two junior female assistants chatting quietly as they conducted a laborious stock take.

He secured the lock on his office door, reached into a metal filing cabinet and withdrew a half full bottle of whisky. He splashed a triple into a stained mug and downed two-thirds in two gulps. He sank into his chair, shoved up his sleeves and pushed a heavy microscope to one side. The solid steel base scattered several delicate instruments onto the floor. He left them lying haphazardly—a complicated game of pick-up sticks.

He crossed corded forearms on the table and rested his head on a deeply ingrained snake tattoo. His eyes shut, his mind drifted. Alcohol eased the way.

Suddenly, he was hit with the stale scent of unwashed men and the creaking sound of straining canvas overhead. The atmosphere was studied, the tension mounting. He could hear himself asking questions, making calculated, important decisions, yet like being on a plane and waiting for ears to pop, his own voice sounded unfamiliar and watery. He took a deep breath and watched the Al Jazeera broadcast. Was there anything he could glean? His mind whirled through the finer details of the intelligence, piecing it like a macabre jigsaw he knew off by heart.

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He raised his head, disorientated, and squinted into the staring glare of a table lamp. Remembered where he was, in his office. He reached clumsily for his mug, swallowed, banged it down and fumbled for the light switch. His eyes closed once more, and sleep claimed him.

The temperature plummeted. He was being jolted over stones and boulders. His jaw rattled and his spine tensed. The wheel suspension groaned its complaint. He studied Cobra One. They were an intimidating bunch. From their boots to their balaclavas, everything was the colour of the darkest night, including exposed flesh. Gadgetry and hardware bulged from every pocket, their outfits swollen with deadly loads. There was an atmosphere of grim anticipation. An energised but sombre tension only men going into battle emit, it filled the APV, inhabiting the space like another physical presence.

He jumped onto a ruined suburban road. Dust scattered around his heavy boots as his legs absorbed the impact. His night vision goggles gave the area a surreal green glow. A skinny Afghan dog stopped and stared, luminous pupils flashing, then it ran away, whip tail straight as a cane.

He was outside the house now—dilapidated, barely a roof and only three and a half walls. No complete windows and rusting corrugated iron wedged as a feeble fence. He flattened against the pock-marked wall at the north side with Eagle and Hig. The other three men rounded the corner to the south side to act as deadly lookouts.

Through the shadows, he saw his own gloved hand sign three, two, one. The door frame brushed his shoulder as he ducked through the narrow gap. He came face to face with a

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bearded man—stained turban, round glasses, the right lens cracked like a lightening fork—with a primed AK47 in his hand.

John's reflex created a sickening crack. He felt the soft flesh of broken neck on his forearm and the slack of dead tendons melt over his wrist. He lowered the body to the floor.

He tuned into the low hum of distant conversation. Hig and Eagle moved in tight behind him, and although he couldn't hear them, he knew they were following. Adrenaline raced through his veins, his heart rate sped. His senses were sharp, acute, alive.

The voices were clearer now, men laughing and talking in Arabic, high pitched and jabbering. He reached the end of the passageway and came to a splintered door, which was open a convenient crack. He flicked his head and eyeballed the candle-lit room to see what they were dealing with. Two hostages, bound and gagged, sat in the far left corner, five armed insurgents hung around, weapons relaxed.

He braced for the contact, gathered his energy, ready to burst into the room. His nerves were on fire, his survival instincts in control.

Suddenly gun shots burst from the street outside. Ear splitting cracks. His men out the front had been spotted.

His forward momentum switched to a hasty retreat down the corridor with Eagle and Hig.

Treacherous light filled the passageway as the door was flung open. Frantic Arabic shouts punctuated the air, and John knew their shadowy figures had been seen.

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Eagle and Hig ducked out into the night. But spinning just past the dead guard, John was greeted with the unblinking eye of a gun. He raised his weapon and fired a double tap, watched two small black holes appear on a surprised forehead. They oozed as the body crumpled.

He ducked outside and slammed his back against the wall. "Shit. We gotta get the hostages out now," he hissed.

Eagle swung his arm and rolled a flash bang into the house. It rattled like a tin can before exploding into a burst of lightening and slamming out a clap of thunder.

He charged back in, saw hazy, glowing movements in the swirling smoke and fired. The ground absorbed a solid thud. Hig's mass moved with him. More hysterical shouts and screams, terrified English accents mixed in with panicked Arabic.

*"Hostages down on the floor!"* The shouted words tore at the flesh of his throat. The sole of his boot connected with the door. He lined a standing man in his sights and pulled the trigger, twice. Hig and Eagle flanked him, mimicked him. Three satisfyingly heavy thumps.

Five down.

Mission complete.

Four more thunderous shots rang out. Chest...violence...no air. A force like a charging bull flung him on top of the terrified hostages. Pain in his back circled and squeezed his body armour, pushing every scrap of air from his lungs. He gasped for breath like a fish out of water, suffocating on empty lung cavities. There was a shocking tearing sensation in his left leg. The agony was sickening, every nerve in his

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body screamed for attention. He caught his breath, cried out—a primitive, guttural scream. He dropped his gun, grabbed for his leg, sure it would be gone, sure he would feel nothing but a soggy stump. His mind was a white blank of panic. Death smiled at him.

"Shit, boss there were six of them." Eagle swung his gun away from a now slumped body in a concealed nook behind the door.

Hig bent double, taut blue tourniquet in his hand. There was sorrow in his eyes, a look of sympathy, and in that unguarded second, before professionalism intercepted, John knew it was all over for him...

Another bang on the office door brought him home from his secret duties.

"We're off now, John, its five-thirty."

"Okay." His voice was hoarse. He reached for the last drop of whisky. "I'll be right out to lock up." He flicked on the light, pushed up and headed out the office with only a hint of a limp. At the front door, he said a final goodbye to his colleagues. They didn't know it was the last goodbye, but he did.

He performed the elaborate locking ritual for the last time and set the high tech alarm then pinched up the gems he'd been working on that morning—the three diamonds he'd expertly removed from Miss Worthington-Hurley's engagement ring and replaced with cheap cubic zirconia. He dropped them into a small, well-used fold in the lining of his trousers and smoothed down his shirt. After switching off the light he grabbed his jacket and headed into the early evening

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sunshine humming an old tune. Life was finally on the up. Soon, he'd be readdressing the balance, equalling out all the shit inflicted on him since that fateful night. Soon, he'd be living it up in the sun, away from endless physiotherapy, which caused nothing but more pain, away from London, away from all the reminders of what he used to have and of the man he used to be. It had taken a long time to squirrel away what the British tax payers owed him, what the British government had denied him, but now he had enough, enough to live in luxury for the foreseeable future and he couldn't wait to get on his way.

He walked slowly round the block to a secure car park, the pain in his knee nipping like piranhas now the whisky was beginning to wear off. For the millionth time, he wondered what those dumb ass do-gooders had been doing in Afghanistan. If they hadn't gone and got themselves taken hostage, he'd still have two functioning legs and a job he loved. He hated them. He knew it wasn't how a military man was supposed to think but he couldn't help it. They were as much to blame as the insurgents.

He shoved his hand into his pocket and pulled out a key fob. He clicked it once and a silver Porsche blinked to life, greeting him with a sharp, echoing beep.

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## Chapter One

\* \* \* \*

Kat sat alone at the bar in The Fox and Goose. She felt weary, but that was plain old laziness. She'd hardly done anything all week, and last night's client, Kevin Milford, had been easy prey. He'd fallen instantly for her charms and almost as quickly into unconsciousness. He'd been pig ugly to look at all evening and more than a little dribbly to kiss, but at least, thank goodness, she hadn't had to have sex with him to take off with the goods. She was still thanking her lucky stars for that stroke of good fortune.

Tonight, once again, she'd spotted her hit soon after she'd entered the pub, partly because he looked exactly like he did on his photograph, but also because he was easily the biggest guy there, making him impossible to miss.

Brooding and alone, he sat hunched on his elbows nursing a tumbler of iced amber liquid. Kat took up a strategic position in his direct line of sight and, within minutes, trapped his gaze through the milling crowd.

His face was square and raw boned with hollows beneath jutting cheekbones, and he had a slightly hooked, but perfectly straight nose. She kept her gaze locked with his and let her thumb and index finger run up and slowly down the long, perilously thin stem of her glass of Sauvignon Blanc. It was a measured and deliberate gesture she knew would hold his attention and give him a clear idea of her intentions.



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It did.

His wide mouth lifted and his pot-hole black eyes sparkled back across the bar with burning, dangerous intensity.

Kat let the corners of her glossed, scarlet lips rise in response, pulled her eyes away and went back to fake texting an imaginary friend. Tonight's hit was a distinct improvement in the appearance department. In fact, the two men couldn't have been more different. They were entirely different species from entirely different planets. Unlike Kevin's thin, weedy, asexual physique, John Taylor was a big, solid hunk of a man who looked as though he'd seriously overdosed on testosterone. His plain black T-shirt stretched over broad, powerful shoulders and a wide, defined chest. His biceps bulged beneath his skin and a snake tattoo coiled around his left forearm. Buzz cut, charcoal hair was cut in a neat, no-nonsense kind of way, yet he had considerably more than a five o'clock shadow spreading around his jaw and running down over his Adam's apple. Kat wondered why he'd been picked out for her to approach. He wasn't her usual type of client.

She looked back up to catch his eye and continue her assault.

Her heart stuttered.

He was gone.

Shit, where was he?

She couldn't lose him. She scanned the other side of the bar.

He wasn't there either.

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"May I?" A deep voice rumbled by her left shoulder. She spun and looked straight into the intense eyes she'd been searching for. Her heart rate didn't settle.

"Sure," she replied, trying to act nonchalant and forcing her body to appear relaxed.

He placed his drink on the bar, pulled up a vacant stool and sat his bulk down. "John," he said, holding out a colossal hand.

"Kat." Kat placed her hand in his and felt it completely enclosed in his warm palm. He held her firmly but gently, as if savouring the softness of her skin. She was used to this. It was how men usually held her, but John lingered even longer than most. She looked down at the grip, noticed the haze of dark hairs sweeping from his corded forearms, over his wide wrists and onto the back of his hand; a hand that could crush her bones in an instant without an iota of effort. For a second, she felt trapped, taken prisoner, but as soon as the feeling bubbled, he released her, reached for his drink and took a deep slug.

"Nice to meet you...Kat," he said after he'd mashed his lips together and swallowed. "Are you waiting for someone?"

"Well, I was." Kat wrinkled her nose. "But my friend just texted me to say she can't make it after all. She's having a family crisis, you know how it is." She spun her usual line, making it clear she was newly available for the whole evening.

"That's a shame." He didn't sound like he meant it in the slightest. "So, can I buy you another drink?" He indicated her nearly empty glass. "You know, try to salvage your evening

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since you're..." he cast his eyes downwards, a loitering, unselfconscious assessment of her whole body, "since you're done up all nice."

Kat rewarded his compliment with a dazzling smile and lifted her glass to her mouth. After she'd drained the last drip, she retrieved a spot of moisture from her lip with the tip of her tongue and said in a silky voice, "That would be very kind...John."

He cleared his throat and called to the barman, who he knew by name, ordered a double whisky and a large white wine. "Would you like to take a more comfortable seat?" He gestured to a corner sofa which had become free in the now busy pub.

Kat nodded and slid from the stool with her replenished drink. It was all going very well. Even if he was enormous, it made no difference. He'd be putty in her hands by the end of the evening. Once she'd played all her usual tricks, turned up the charm and let him fall under her spell.

She lifted her purse and led the way to ensure he got an optimum view of her curvy figure from behind. She arched the base of her spine, set down her shoulders and sashayed her hips. She sensed John's heated gaze burning through her tight black dress and heard him blow out a slow breath. She hoped he was imagining what it would be like to unzip her dress and roll off her stockings, slowly, one by one. He wouldn't get that far, but there was no harm in him thinking he would.

She sat, and he squeezed in close, his eyes glazed as if lost in a pool of dirty thoughts. Kat smiled and let her fingers

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drift to her new diamond necklace, let the moment stretch out in his mind by showing him how lovely she was to touch.

"So, Kat... I haven't seen you in here before." His attention was fixed considerably lower than her necklace.

"No, I haven't been in here before. But it's halfway between my friend's house and mine, so we thought it would be good for an evening of girly gossip."

"Gossip about what?"

"Oh, you know, this and that." Kat let go of the necklace and brushed long strands of her raven hair over her shoulders.

"This and that being the...er... men in your lives?"

Kat laughed, treating him to a flash of her perfect white teeth. "No, there are no men in either of our lives to gossip about." She tugged at the side of her bottom lip with her teeth, a gesture she hoped he'd find both erotic and innocent, and to let him know he had a very good chance of scoring, added, "Not at the moment anyway."

He grinned and leant his body closer as he lifted his drink. She knew he'd be getting a good hit of her delicate floral perfume because she was getting a nose full of his deeply masculine smell. It wasn't fancy, expensive aftershave. It was just soap and whisky and a whirl of raw pheromones, a full dose of the power of the opposite sex for any woman who got close enough to appreciate.

"So definitely no husband or boyfriend then," he checked.

"No, I've been single for a while—the last one cheated—and I'm afraid that wasn't how I wanted to have a

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relationship. There has to be trust for it to work, don't you agree, John? There has to be trust, it's so important,"

"Gotta have trust," he confirmed with a serious nod before straightening against the back of the seat. "Do you have family in London?"

"Not in London. My parents are retired and live in Cornwall."

"Beautiful part of the world."

Kat nodded. "My older sister is a journalist and landed a great job in New York a couple of years ago with Reuters."

"Yeah, I've heard of them." He took a big gulp of his drink.

"I miss her terribly. We're very close and talk on the phone loads but it's not the same as chatting face to face." She paused. "What do you do to pay the bills, John?"

He shifted his weight, stretched his left leg under the table and pressed a thumb into his knee cap. For a moment, it looked like he wasn't going to offer anything, then he said, "I'm a jeweller."

"Gosh, are you really? How interesting." She smiled and leant forward. The necklace fell from the upper groove of her cleavage and swung into the air between them. "My sister sent this a few weeks ago for my birthday." Kat didn't have to say what she was referring to—his concentration was already settled in the direction of the pendent. "What carat do you think it is?"

He reached and took the small gold disk between his thumb and index finger, turned it and examined the back. His movements were surprisingly dexterous for someone with

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such massive hands. "The hallmark is tiny," he commented, leaning right in. "And the diamond's clarity is...er...very good"

Kat could feel the heat from his stubbled cheek against her breast, burning off him like a roaring fire. "It doesn't really matter," she breathed, wondering why he was affecting *her* temperature. "It's the thought that counts."

"Mmm..." John agreed with a frown. He didn't let go of the diamond necklace.

Kat tilted her head and gave a questioning lift of her brow. Something had shifted in the depths of his eyes, but she wasn't sure what. Before she could ponder the change, he stretched his hand forward and laid the necklace perfectly central between her breasts. He let the pads of his fingers settle on her sensitive skin. He kept them there for a long second, his wide mouth set in a straight line and a muscle flexing in his jaw, twice, three times.

Kat didn't pull away from his touch.

They continued to chat, flirt and drink until the barman called last orders then gathered themselves to leave.

Heading towards the exit, John strode forward and held open the heavy wooden door. Kat brushed past him. Even in her towering heels, she didn't come anywhere near his gargantuan height; he was a whole foot taller. It made her feel tiny, doll-like, female. It should have made her feel vulnerable, but Kat didn't invite that emotion into her world. Not anymore, not since she'd broken away from an endless string of dismal foster homes, made it off the bread line and learnt to look after herself. Okay, she was immoral and a liar, but she was just doing what she needed to do to survive in a

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world where she'd only ever depended on one person—herself. She couldn't see what was so wrong with that.

She stepped out on to the bustling street and turned to face his looming shadow. He threw a glance left and right and stepped quickly up to her. He didn't appear drunk, or even tipsy, but he wasn't walking quite right. Kat hoped the whisky had affected his body more than it showed. She needed him drunk, it was crucial to her plan.

"Thanks for a great evening," Kat said, locking her eyes on his. "It's been so much more fun gossiping with you than it would have been my girlfriend." She hung the statement in the air and watched as he pondered his next words. How such a big, not-bad-looking guy had been targeted as a loner was a complete mystery. She hoped Carlos knew what he was doing with this one.

But she didn't have time to worry about what ifs. She needed to get down to business—the business of survival—and in the eight months she'd been working for Carlos, he hadn't got it wrong yet.

She stepped in closer. The swell of her generous breasts touched his chest as she pouted a shy but sexy smile up and fluttered her lids. "Your place or mine?"

"Mine," he answered without hesitation. "It's just around the corner."

He draped his weighty leather jacket over her shoulders, placed a large hand in the small of her back and steered her past the front windows of The Fox and Goose. A group of male revellers eyed him and side-stepped out the way, their banter hushing for the briefest of moments.

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John's flat really was just around the corner. There were no clubs to stop off at for another drink and no off license to buy more ammunition. Within seconds, he was tapping in a four-digit security number and leading her towards a battered lift.

Kat began to wonder if this was going to be one of the rare occasions she actually had to perform to get her loot. As a rule, she was even better at getting guys drunk than she was at seducing them. John, however, whilst not immune to her considerable charms, appeared unnervingly alert despite their evening of heavy drinking. Hell, even her knees felt wobbly and she could handle wine better than most.

"Here we are," he said, shoving the key into the lock and pushing open the door with a spread palm.

"Thanks," Kat said as she stepped past him. She glanced around. It wasn't a fancy pad. Minimal and practical. No pictures, no ornaments, no plants; just plain walls, a pale green carpet and a stark white kitchen at the end of a corridor.

She tapped into the kitchen towards the fridge, trying to give off an air of cool confidence even though her heart was skipping. "Any more wine?" she asked.

"Sorry." His deep voice was suddenly right by her ear.

Kat spun round, startled. He'd arrived close behind her in utter silence. She almost bumped her nose on his chest.

"I'm not much of a wine drinker. Other things turn me on."

"Oh..." She got the feeling he wasn't talking about drinks anymore.

"Whiskey," he murmured. "You want a whisky?"



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"Er... Yes, that would be lovely." Kat didn't fancy a whisky, but she hoped he would down his.

He extended his arm over her head, flicked open a high cupboard and wrapped his fingers around a half full bottle of Scotch. Kat slid sideways and upturned a couple of glasses on his drainer into which he splashed several generous inches.

"Cheers," he said, passing her a glass. "Here's to your friend not turning up, very fortuitous...for me."

"And me," Kat said with a strained smile. This really was not going to plan. The guy was acting stone cold sober. She could see his keys next to him on the kitchen counter, one of which was definitely for a car but she had no idea where the actual car was—there'd been no sign of it on the way in. At this rate, she was going to put out for nothing, the absolute worst-case scenario, for her and Carlos.

"Shall we sit down?" she said, hoping to buy some time.

"Sure." He led the way to the small living room they'd passed on the way to the kitchen. He flicked on the overhead light—a bare bulb—which filled the room with a harsh white glow.

Kat watched him pull thin cream curtains shut and walk to the sofa. As before, his stride wasn't quite right. "Have you hurt your knee?" she asked.

"Yeah, old injury, plays up from time to time."

"So, er...how do you get around? You can't walk to work, to the, um...jeweller's shop if you're in pain."

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"Too right I don't," he said, sinking his long body onto a low burgundy three-seater. "I've got a set of wheels in the garage downstairs."

"The garage? I didn't see a garage."

"No, we came in the front way. It's round the back. Behind the bins there's a row of three garages, I rent one of them. I don't reckon my car would last a night out here. It's hardly the best neighbourhood in London."

Kat perched on the edge of the sofa. She felt suddenly lighter, more optimistic about the evening. In the garage by the bins, that should be easy enough to find. Now it was just a case of knocking him out and sneaking off with the keys.

"Hey," John said, shuffling closer and resting a broad hand in the centre of her back. "You look worried, what's up?" He rubbed a big circle over her shoulder blades. His fingertips brushed onto the exposed skin of her upper arm. Irritatingly, the feather light touch made her skin tingle and a snake of sensation wiggled to the base of her spine.

"I'm fine." She turned to him with a forced smile. "Really, I'm fine."

He studied her, his brows fell low and his mouth set in a tight line. "You sure? You don't look it."

"Yes." Kat gave a tinkle of laughter. "Really, I'm absolutely fine."

His face broke into an easy smile. "Good," he said. "Because I haven't felt like this in a long time."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, you know, just life and stuff, it gets in the way with meeting people, people like you... Beautiful women." He

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knocked back the rest of his drink. "I'm pleased you're here, really I am, but if you want to go home just say, I'll call you a cab."

If only it was that simple. Carlos would have her guts if she didn't turn up with the goods. He was expecting her to deliver a Porsche in a few hours, and if she didn't, well, he knew where she lived and Carlos in a bad mood was not something she wanted to witness tonight—or ever.

She looked at John's face. He appeared desperate for her to believe he wasn't going to hurt her even though he could crush her like an ant if he decided to. Perhaps she should try and extract herself from this line of business—it was getting too damn stressful.

"There you go again."

"What?"

"Drifting."

"Sorry, it's all the wine, I guess." She could hardly say she was thinking of a career change.

"Well, it's not the whisky. You haven't touched a drop."

She looked down at the fiery liquid. "No, it's not really my thing, after all."

"Doesn't turn you on, eh?" John took the glass from her hand, straightened out his left leg and pushed up. He moved to the mantel piece, knocked back her un-drunk whisky and placed the empty glass on the fake marble. "Come here," he said, turning to face her and shifting his weight onto his right leg.

Kat looked up. He wore a soft expression, but she could see hot flames of desire licking through his dark irises. He

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swept his tongue over his bottom lip and pushed a hand over his harshly cut hair. She wondered if there was a glimmer of uncertainty in his face, but it shot away before she had chance to examine it.

She stood, hesitated then walked towards him. It seemed she had to be the one to go to him; he wasn't going to throw himself on her. It was sweet in a way. If they'd been two normal people about to get it together with no hidden agenda, it would have even have been romantic.

He smiled down at her when she stopped right in front of him. "I'm nice, Kat, really I am. It's risky for a woman picking up a guy in a bar, but you're okay with me... I promise."

"I know." She looked into the depths of his eyes.

"Good." He hooked a finger beneath her chin and tilted her face to his. "Because it's going to be a night to remember...just fun stuff, okay?" He bent his head and pressed his mouth against her lips. He tasted of whisky—oaks and barrels, heavy and mature. When he probed into her mouth, she felt like he was tentatively offering a part of himself.

She opened up.

Gentle and exploring, he delved deeper. He was one hell of a kisser, and despite her normal aversion to tongue action, Kat found herself wanting more, wanting him to fill her mouth with his taste and his offerings.

He pulled back, slightly out of breath, and dropped his finger from her chin. "God, you're delicious," he said then leant back in. This time he wrapped his arms around her

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body, encased her in muscle and wedged her against his rock hard chest then set about devouring her mouth all over again.

Kat sent her hands between their bodies and tugged at the metal button of his fly. May as well get to it, get him satisfied and into a deep sleep so she could take her payment and keep Carlos happy.

"Hey, Pussy Cat, what's the rush?" He reached down for her hands, gripped her wrists and pulled them up.

"I want you," Kat murmured and pushed onto tiptoes to reach another kiss.

"I want you, too, but we've got all night." He tipped his head to nuzzle her stretched neck. "I want to savour every tiny bit of your gorgeous body, enjoy having a woman in my bed for the first time in...well, a while. Then, after we've come together, we're going to do it all over again."

Kat felt a shiver sizzle to her nerve endings. She didn't know if it was his tender little kisses or his deep, confident voice deciding how their night was going to be. But whatever it was, it had her buzzing in a way she never had before with a hit. Buzzing in a place which didn't normally buzz except when she gave it attention herself.

"Turn around," he whispered into her ear, his hands already placed on her shoulders and exerting gentle pressure.

Kat let her arms hang limply at her side and did as he asked. Her sleek mane of hair appeared over her right shoulder as he scooped it from her nape to gain access to the zip of her dress. She felt a tug, heard a quiet whiz and became aware of the material loosening around her ribs and hips. His hands came back up to the small straps on her

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shoulders, and he slid them off. The dress crumpled in a heap at her feet.

Kat looked down. She was wearing all black underwear, a good solid bra to support her double-Fs, a lacy thong, and fishnet hold ups. She'd had no intention of getting them on show. She'd worn them for her own pleasure, but now she was glad she was a girl who liked to be prepared, a girl who had a penchant for luxury undies.

"Step out," he ordered from his crouched position by her ankles.

Obediently, she moved her three-inch heels and let him lift the dress from the floor. He straightened, stepped past her to the sofa and laid it over the arm as if it was the most delicate fabric he'd ever handled. He walked back over and stood directly behind her again.

Silence

She waited.

He was so close yet he wasn't touching her. He didn't utter a word. His body heat blasted her bare back and buttocks. The steady stream of his deep breaths washed over her neck and shoulders and tickled like a summer breeze.

She went to turn, wanting to see what expression was playing on his rugged features, but the second she started to twist, pressure was applied to her shoulders as he urged her to look at the doorway to the kitchen again—the kitchen where his keys lay on the counter, waiting for her.

"You have beautiful skin," he said quietly. "It's flawless—honey and silk."

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Kat was about to reply when a swarm of butterflies floated down her neck, kisses so delicate she had no choice but to flutter her eyes and mouth shut. She felt the increasing warmth from his body on her naked skin and his deeply male scent surrounded her like a soft cashmere blanket. An involuntary sigh trickled from her lips.

Fingertips lighter than fairy steps danced down the bones of her spine until they reached her bra strap. The temperature and pressure increased as he undid the small hooks. Kat felt the full weight of her breasts suddenly hang heavily down. He glided the straps down her arms and she heard it fall to the floor. She dropped her head. The flesh of her breasts looked translucent, veined under the direct beam of the overhead bulb. Her nipples were milk chocolate circles, every bump and wrinkle exposed as they peaked in the cool night air.

A dart of desire shot from her rib wall through the weighty flesh and collected in her nipples as she studied herself. John was back behind her, but she knew it was just looking at herself that was creating the hot circle of sensitivity—she was sure of it. It had nothing to do with him.

A stubbly chin scratched gently into her temple. "You okay?" he asked, looking down at her body from the same angle she was.

"Yes."

"Sure?" His hands slid round her waist, big fingers practically meeting over the gentle curve of her belly as his thumbs touched in the dip of her lower back. He rubbed his thumbs up and down, soothing, reassuring, and a well of

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tension dissolved in the hollow of her spine she hadn't even known was there. She rested backwards onto him. He felt so solid and warm, a gentle giant. Okay, so she was going to steal from him soon, spectacularly, but there was no harm in revelling in the feeling of being looked after, cherished. It was a feeling that rarely came her way.

"I'm fine," she whispered.

"Just fine?" He lifted a hand from her waist and let the thick knuckle of his thumb brush her left nipple, just once, very lightly.

Instantly the little branch of her areola shot out, straining for another touch, begging for it. The weight in her breasts doubled with an unfamiliar feeling of longing. She wanted him to touch the other nipple, wanted him to cover them both with his big hard hands. Every nerve in her chest was crying out for it.

"Better than fine..." she managed. She watched, fascinated, as he moved his hand to her right breast and slowly took the nipple between his thumb and index finger. Very gently, he rolled it to a tense point. The skin puckered and strained farther into a slight twist.

She sucked in another deep breath. The response her body was having to his touch was electric, like nothing she'd ever felt before. This was no quick drunken grope; this was her body being worshipped, indulged. John's delicate touch was making her knees weak and her stomach clench. She pressed back farther into him, glad of his support as he switched his attentions to her already excited left nipple.



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She should just get out of the flat; these feelings were getting too intense. This wasn't the plan. Why wasn't he behaving like the other five hits she'd had to sleep with to get their cars? Then it had been 'wham, bam, thank you, ma'am'—all over and done within minutes. A drunken post-coital sleep, and she'd been free to take whatever her light fingers desired.

She spun in his arms, an excuse to leave forming in her mouth. "I...I ought to..."

His dark brows knitted together.

"I...I...really should...should..." Kat frowned in frustration at her ineloquence; she never suffered from stuttering or a lack of excuses.

"What's up?" he asked as he bent an arm over his shoulder, fisted his black T-shirt and scraped it over his head in one smooth movement.

It landed on the floor by her bra, instantly forgotten, as were Kat's excuses. The sight of his wide chest, carpeted with dark coils of hair which trailed to the loose waistband of his jeans had her thoughts of running fleeing to the hills.

Since her head only reached his chin, she was face to face with glorious maleness, and his musky, slightly salty scent hit her full on. She had a sudden, overwhelming desire to push her straining, hungry nipples into the scratchy hair of his chest. She was desperate to know what it would feel like.

"Relax," he said, twining his fingers into her hair and cradling the back of her skull with his palm. "It's all good, I promise."

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Kat placed her palms on his shoulders and leant forward for the kiss he was sending down. Her nipples connected with downy hairs on granite muscle. She gasped in surprise; she'd expected a crispy texture, not silken smoothness.

He read her gasp as encouragement and his tongue delved deeper and his hands journeyed to her hips. "Can we lose these?" he asked into her mouth, hooking thumbs into the elastic of her thong as his fingers lingered on her buttocks. "Pretty as they are, I'd rather see what's beneath."

Kat spun what he'd said around her mind. She'd been so consumed with the sensations of kissing and his chest connecting with hers she'd barely thought of the next stage. "Er...yeah," she said, taking a small, tottering step backwards.

John let his hands fall to his sides, let her move away, but he kept his eyes trained on hers, offering calmness and inviting trust.

Kat stood still in her heels, hold-up stockings and lacy thong. She looked calm on the outside but inside she was in a state of turmoil. It wasn't the prospect of having sex with John making her feel this way, it was the desires he was invoking in her. Lust was something she'd never experienced in her paltry excuse for a sex life. Sure, she could tempt, seduce, walk the walk, but actually doing the deed and enjoying it was not for her. Kat found the best pleasures were at her own hand; she had control then. She knew where and how she liked to be touched and trusted herself to control a short, hard climax every time.

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But right now, control was slipping away fast. He wasn't even touching her, just looking. In fact, now he'd sat on the sofa and relaxed back in the cushions with one arm stretched casually sideways and the other resting on his lap. Yet still she felt like he had power over her, even worse, she wanted him to have that power. She wanted to hand herself over to him and trust him to satisfy the tug in her belly. It was an uncharted emotion, and she was unsure how to handle it. She felt both nervous and excited at the prospect of giving her body to John.

"You want me to do the honours?" he said quietly, with an amused lift of one thick, black brow.

Kat shook her head, dipped her fingers into the elastic at her hips and rolled down the thong. Like string, it peeled down to her knees, and she wriggled and let it drop to the floor around her feet. She stood back up, tall and straight, awaiting his judgement. She swallowed—hard.

He let out a long, low whistle as his eyes travelled lower. "That I like," he said, tugging at his bottom lip and his eyelids drooping. "Very pretty."

Kat let her hand travel to the bare, hairless lips of her sex. She was freshly waxed, just the way she liked it, not a stray pubic hair in sight. She rubbed indulgently at the sensitive skin. It felt like two plump velvet cushions, neat and ordered.

"You gonna let me have a feel or is it just for you?" He leant forward with his elbows propped on his knees.

Kat kept her fingers hovering over her slit and took three steps up to the sofa. Her knees felt weak and her heels suddenly felt too high, too unbalanced. She focused on his

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wide shoulders, rock-hard and square, and his biceps, tough balls of raw power. The snake tattoo on his forearm was highlighted in glorious detail under the hot bulb, its yellow eyes flashing and its red fork tongue licking towards his elbow.

Once she was within reach, he placed both hands on the top curve of her hips and urged her between his bent knees. He leant forward and very slowly, very gently, placed a soft, warm kiss a fraction below her naval.

Kat looked down at his head, hovering so near to her sex and taking ownership of her body. She lifted her hand and rested it on his crown. Ran her fingers over the tight turf of his hair. It was too short to muss up and just pinged back to its easy, low maintenance, military style.

He looked up and winked, cheekily, an unexpected grin spread on his face. "Give me your foot," he said.

Kat shifted her balance and lifted her foot to his knee. She wondered if he had a weird foot fetish he was going to indulge, but all he did was release the small silver buckle of her stiletto, guide her foot back to the floor and reach for the other one. Once both shoes were removed, he set them neatly side by side.

His calloused palms smoothed up her calves, over her knees and stopped at the delicate stitching circling her thighs. "You have any objections to leaving these on?" he said in a deep voice. "I want to feel your stockings rubbing against my hips later."

"No problem." It would be one less thing to have to put back on in silence. She glanced at where her thong and bra

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had landed and made a mental note of their whereabouts in case she had to locate them in darkness.

He gave a half smile with his soft, sensual mouth and returned his attention to her bare pussy, waiting only inches from his face.

Kat tensed. She had no idea what he was going to do next—this was way out the realms of her experience. *She* knew where she needed to be touched, but she doubted he would know about that special place, that delicate little bud that longed for rhythm and pressure. She chewed at her bottom lip as she watched him smooth his right index finger over the rise of her hip bone and down into the juncture of her thighs. The fullness of her breasts interrupted her view, but the cool skin of his fingertip sweeping very gently over smooth waxed skin told her exactly where he was.

He trailed over all the indents of her shape, watching his own movements with intense concentration. His finger travelled across to the other hip bone and back again, but this time he dipped into the warmth of her folds, just a fraction, just enough to apply the tiniest pressure to the stalk directly above her clit.

His touch was an electric shock. Kat rocked backwards, a tangle of conflicting emotions flooded her. She hadn't realised how turned on she was until he'd touched her with such devastating accuracy, exactly where she needed it. Now her pussy was struggling to withstand the force of gravity. It felt heavy with longing, aching for her own finely tuned skills.

She clutched his rigid shoulders for balance.

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"You are the epitome of perfection," he sighed as he ducked his head and pressed a tight kiss on her bare mound. He sent one hand round to her back and supported her over the twin dimples above her buttocks. Keeping her exactly where he wanted, he breathed in deep and indulgently, then he trailed the tip of his tongue from her the top of her moist slit up to her naval.

"I want you so much it hurts." He shifted forward on the sofa, straightened his back and adjusted the creases of his jeans. His head came in line with her straining breasts. "Every single inch of you is edible." His voice rasped with the sudden desperation of a starving man. He shot out his tongue and lapped at her peaked nipple, first one and then the other. Unexpectedly urgent, he flicked between the two and drew them to identical stiff peaks. Then he latched onto her left breast with a surge of hunger, drew her in deep, sucking and using his wide hands to form the ripe flesh into a cone.

She was aware of the pulsing, boiling heat of his mouth, the wetness of his tongue and the scrape of his teeth against her skin. A car honked sharply on the street outside, but other than that, all she heard was the eager suckling noises coming from his mouth. A rising throb of arousal wound through her as he massaged each breast in turn.

Kat shut her eyes and let the blood red of the inside of her lids play with her vision. Her heart thudded so hard it seemed to leave no space for her lungs. What was she doing...? She didn't care anymore; it felt too good. She couldn't do this to herself; she couldn't play with her nipples with her own tongue and make peaks of satisfaction rock over her skin like

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he was doing. A small groan escaped her lips and her spine crumbled, tipping her backwards.

"God, I'm so sorry." John snapped his head away from her breasts. "I didn't mean to hurt you, I'm sorry."

"No... I..." Kat quivered at the loss of his mouth. Cool air swirled on moist flesh.

He pushed up from the sofa and towered over her. "I'm sorry, really I am. I didn't mean to let it get out of control. It won't happen again." His face twisted with anxiety.

"But..."

He silenced her with a soft, apologetic kiss, his tongue lingering on her lips to trace their outline. "I'm in control," he murmured into her mouth. "I promise. Let me make it up to you."

Kat felt herself swung into the air. With a movement that required zero effort, he cradled her against his hot chest, one arm behind her knees and the other wrapped around her waist. "It's time to go to bed," he said, his low voice ragged with intensity as he strode from the room.

Within seconds, John laid her on a king size bed. Kat's naked behind sank into a soft khaki duvet and she felt a mountain of pillows curl around her head. The dark bedroom glowed amber, invaded by a streetlight through an enormous, curtain-less sash window.

She held her breath and looked up at his looming silhouette.

He stilled and stared down at her.

A maddening silence came between them.

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She clenched her fists and waited, not sure what his next move was going to be. He was impossible to predict, but she hoped he'd do something about the need simmering between her legs because its intensity was raging through her body like the grip of hunger used to.

He leant forward kissed the tip of her nose. "Relax, I won't hurt you."

"I know." For some reason, she trusted him, and crazily, he seemed to trust her.

She watched him toe off his shoes, yank at his socks and undo the fly she'd reached for impatiently earlier. He pushed jeans and boxers down his hips, and his cock sprang out, thick, hungry and enormous—just like him.

Suddenly, Kat wasn't so sure about the whole him-not-hurting-her part. A gulping noise erupted from her throat.

That was bigger than anything she'd ever seen on a human's anatomy. How would he ever fit? Surely it was a physical impossibility, and if not, one thing was for certain, pain would be involved.

John stretched out on the bed next to her and she dipped towards him on the soft mattress. "It's okay," he said as he pushed aside a strand of her hair that had fallen across her cheek. "We'll fit perfectly. We just have to get you ready." He pressed a kiss to her lips.

Kat placed a hand over the rasp of his stubbled cheek. His jaw hollowed as he continued to kiss her with a gentle, controlled passion. She'd just have to get on with it. It was all part of her unconventional job. It would hurt like hell for a few minutes, but then she could make off with the car and



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satisfy herself when she got home. No problem, she'd done it before. Only then the cocks she'd encountered were barely hard. In fact, they'd barely been there compared to this monster at her doorstep.

She tried to rid her body of tension with a long, shuddering exhalation.

He lifted his head, his eyes oddly amber in the streetlight's hue. "Alright?"

"Yeah, fine."

He began to spread her wisps of hair over the pillow like a luxurious fan. "How do you get to be so soft?" he said rhetorically.

"How do you get to be so hard?" she replied.

His chest puffed against her shoulder with a grunt of humour. "That's your fault entirely, Pussy Cat." His hand left her hair and trailed between her breasts. He shoved up onto his elbow and watched his hand circle her navel then sweep sideways across her belly. Teasing and delicate, he let his knuckle trail over her thighs, light, fluttery circles like sweet flames licking her flesh. She clenched her legs together, trying to get some pressure on that hungry little point. She couldn't help a tiny moan. She wanted him to probe inside her slit like he had before, give her that electric shock again. Her hand twitched; she would do it herself in a minute.

"Open up," he murmured. "It won't work if you don't let me in." He followed his words with a curious finger, dipping into the soft slash and again just catching that place of desperate need.

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Kat released a rumble from her throat and tipped her legs outwards, just a few inches. Her inner thighs trembled. This type of caress was so new, the odd drunken, slippery finger had slipped into her before, but never had someone been so intent on exploring her; so intent on 'getting her ready'.

"Just the tips of my fingers to start with," he whispered, watching his own careful movements.

Kat's face got suddenly hot and her heart beat raced through her ears. She squeezed her eyes shut, lost to sensation as a thick finger slid into her wet folds and rubbed straight over her clitoris. He circled the entrance to her vagina, just once, then came back up to rest on the hard bud straining from its protective folds of flesh. He applied gentle pressure with the pad of his finger.

"You're hot, so hot," he murmured and bent to suck a nipple into his mouth. He deepened the pressure on her clit and drew a lazy circle around it, taking in all the aching flesh that needed capturing.

Kat arched her back and her thighs dropped farther apart, inviting him in with her body if not with words. She wanted to reach down and press his hand harder, faster; it was what she really wanted, really needed.

John lifted his head from her breast. "Hey," he murmured. "Look at me."

Kat forced her eyes open, left behind the dancing fireworks she'd been admiring.

"You okay?"

She nodded and pushed her pelvis up towards his hand. "Yes."

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A muscle flexed in his jaw and he swallowed hard, sending his Adam's apple way down low then all the way back up again. He moved over her a fraction more, pinning her to the bed with his weight. "I'm gonna see how wet you are now."

Kat looked up at him with wide eyes. It hadn't been a question, more of a statement, but still she nodded as her flesh goose-bumped in anticipation.

Without taking his gaze off her face, he slid a single probing finger back towards her eager entrance. She kept her eyes steady on his, her mouth in a tense pout as his exploring, long finger slithered inside, just an inch, just enough.

"God, you're so wet and so damn tight." He groaned the words out and nuzzled into her neck. "Give me strength." He ground the burning length of his cock against her hip.

Kat shifted impatiently, wanting more of that filling sensation. She was aware of his heart pounding against her left breast—hers was pounding too. She wanted his magical fingers doing more of their stuff. "Please..." she managed. "Please keep touching me."

Like travelling through butter, his finger dipped once more into her vagina, pushing farther in this time. A small moist squelch reached her ears as he pulled out and eased back in, two fingers this time, stretching her, filling her.

She shut her eyes and gave herself up to sensation.

He went higher and higher, and as his fingers moved, the heel of his hand found her clit and rubbed steadily with each deft stroke he made.

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Kat groaned into his ear and grabbed at his tensed shoulder. She became a live flame grinding against him. He was touching her so deeply, so expertly, it was even better than she could do it herself. "Oh... yes..." she squeaked, feeling an orgasm build. It grew, hot and golden in her belly. She'd never orgasmed in front of another living soul, never been close enough to anyone, or trusted another person enough to let her guard down for even those few sweeter than sweet seconds of climax.

John would be the first.

Any moment now that fountain of liquid pleasure was going to erupt from between her legs. She pushed her head back into the pillow, drew her knees higher, wider. "Don't stop," she ordered. "Please don't stop..."

He stopped.

He pulled out, tipped onto his back and let out a long, low groan.

"What the hell are you doing?" Kat snapped open her eyes, furious at being denied what had been so close, at being let down by another human being—as usual. This was such a momentous occasion in her life. How could he stop when she'd opened up to him so completely? She never should have surrendered to him.

"Together," he grunted. "Let's come together."

"But, I..." Kat sat upright. "I was just about to..."

"I know." He smiled and circled her waist with his hands. "That means you're ready."

He lifted her so she straddled his abdomen, knees bent and stockings touching his hips the way he'd planned. "What

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are you doing?" Kat asked, indignant at being lifted around like a doll.

"It's best like this," he said, pushing curtains of hair from her face. "You can take as much or as little of me as you want. I won't force you to go any further than is comfortable."

Kat splayed her hands over his chest and looked through her veil of hair at his eyes brimming with volcanic darkness. She'd never tried it like this before; she'd always just lie on her back and pray for it to be over. She wasn't sure what was expected of her.

John urged her up several inches, took the shaft of his penis into his hand and dipped the wide, smooth head just into her entrance. Kat looked down at their bodies about to join. All thoughts of Carlos, the Porsche and a condom slipped from her mind; John was going to fill her to bursting point, there was no other way to look at it.

"Just sit down," he said through clenched teeth. "Sit down. You're hot and wet and ready. Trust me, it'll be real good."

Kat eased the tension in her thighs a fraction, let her slick folds swallow his shiny head.

"Oh, jeez." He screwed his eyes shut and shoved his head hard into the pillow.

He was stretching her width-ways but there was plenty more space length-ways. Kat dropped down farther, relaxed her muscles and took in a few more inches, felt his thick glans pushing on her vaginal walls.

He sucked in a breath, kept his eyes shut.

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She sat herself upright and dropped some more. He was so hard and long, she was being impaled. She eased down until she was sure she could feel him prodding her cervix.

She stilled, didn't move a muscle.

She had him. He was all the way in.

"God, you're amazing," he said, opening glazed eyes. The orange shadows in the room highlighted every ounce of tension in his facial muscles as he increased the pressure on her waist, lifted her up a fraction and dropped her back down. "Move... Like this."

Kat did as he suggested. Slowly up and slowly down. His hands left her waist and he fisted the duvet into tight twists. "You like that?" she asked with a sudden sense of power.

"Like you wouldn't believe." He released the sheet and adjusted her angle, slid her forward an inch. "But tip this way and rock—you'll like it better."

She gasped in shock, instantly getting what he meant.

"I'm not hurting you, am I?" he asked, his head rising and concern filling his eyes.

"No...no." Tipping forward had connected her clitoris to his pubis bone, and now when she moved, she could control all the pressure and the speed.

"You choose the pace." He pushed a tense kiss to her lips then dropped back down as if exhausted. "I'm good with slow or fast, whatever you prefer, baby. I'm easy."

She began to move. She knew what she wanted—it was a rapid, hard rhythm that worked best. Encouraged by John's moans of approval, she rocked faster and faster and soon became lost in their delicious connection. It was all she could

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focus on, all she could think about. The rest of the world ceased to exist.

Her neck fell forward, the weight of holding her head up too much to bear. She whimpered. The intense friction, the power of the pleasure building was both terrifying and incredible. Her clit was about to explode. Not only that, but her internal walls were hot and stretched, and undiscovered points of pleasure were being massaged and pounded.

He circled her waist, his fingers gripping but at the same time loose. His abs were a row of bricks, and she felt hard thighs rise to meet her buttocks. But his hips were completely still, letting her control depth. She managed a look at his face; it was screwed up with intense concentration. She wondered how much it was costing him to remain so passive. But her concern for him was fleeting, because at that moment, with very little forewarning, her orgasm took over and she flew apart. Liquid heaven spilt through her veins and suspended her on a high, flinging her into another dimension entirely. She called out his name, she didn't know why, but it poured from her lips over and over like a mantra.

He gripped her harder during her explosion and his cock turned to solid concrete. Then he gave up his last ounce of control and jerked his hips upwards. Keeping her trapped, he surged in—hard and powerful—unleashing, just for one second, the supreme animal within. He grunted from deep down in his chest, a low, agonised moan that stretched the tendons of his neck with its vibrations.

Kat tried to flop, boneless with her own shudders of delight. But he kept her tight upright as he pulsed within her,

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releasing semen straight into her womb. "Holy shit," he said through clenched teeth. "That's so fucking good, so fucking amazing..." His arms gave way, and he allowed her to collapse onto his chest in a heap. "You're something else, woman," he murmured, pushing her hair from his damp face. "Really something else."

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## Chapter Two

\* \* \* \*

Years of sleeping on a knife's edge had left John a superficial sleeper. He suffered torturous bouts of insomnia when the pain in his knee and old memories haunted him from impenetrable shadows. But now, sprawled across his bed, butt naked and one hundred percent satisfied, he wallowed in a rare state of complete and utter physical relaxation.

It was the click of his own front door which caused his eyes to fly open and his senses to spring to full alert. The familiar sound of the latch being quietly slid into its hole registered deep within his unusually slumbered brain and immediately brought him back to life.

It was as if he'd never been asleep at all.

He stretched his arm across the bed for Kat's warm, naked and particularly sexy body.

She was gone.

"Damn!" he cursed, sitting upright. He'd liked her and she was good. A little nervous, a lot naive, but last night had been amazing. He'd forgotten how much he liked sex. No, make that *loved* sex. He at least wanted her phone number before she left. Perhaps he could ring her when he'd set up his new life. Invite her for a repeat performance of their nocturnal athletics, up her experience levels a few hundred notches.

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He pulled on faded blue jeans and, from the living room, grabbed the black T-shirt discarded on the floor the night before. After ramming his feet in trainers, he grabbed his keys and wallet and headed out the flat.

He made for the fire escape instead of the lift—it would be a quicker route—but instantly cursed his decision when the familiar burning pain shot through his knee, the joint complaining bitterly at being asked to flex and take his weight so soon after rolling out of bed. But if he wanted her telephone number, it was a sacrifice his body would have to make. Kat was the best thing to happen to him in very a long time.

He reached the bottom of the stairs and limped into the small communal lobby.

He froze in his tracks.

His ears were sending his brain a signal he didn't want to believe. Didn't want to acknowledge.

The meaty hum of a Porsche reverberated around the lobby walls—its echo unmistakable in the bare concrete enclosure.

"*Shit!*"

How could he have been so stupid? So bloody gullible?

He held up his key-ring and it confirmed what he already knew. The Porsche key was missing.

Its absence sickened him.

His heart pounded and his lungs exploded. He charged through the front door of the lobby onto the dark street.

"*Hey, thief!*" he shouted as he saw the tail end of his precious car, with its even more precious load, slipping

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*by Lily Harlem*

smoothly up the gears. A low flash of silver in the London night which signified his whole damn future disappearing into the distance without him.

Kat drove steadily away from John's flat. Driving a sleek silver Porsche in the dead of night would undoubtedly draw some attention. But what she didn't want was police attention. She didn't want to give them an excuse to stop her, not least because she was probably still over the limit.

She had to drive a mile and a half to get to the pre-arranged drop off point. Then as usual, she'd hand Carlos the keys and grab a cab home. She was looking forward to home. Having a long, hot shower and climbing into her own bed and sleeping undisturbed until she woke naturally, probably late the next afternoon. She shifted on the seat, still buzzing, still swollen. At least there'd be no need to satisfy herself tonight. John had more than taken care of that department. A smug smile tickled her lips and the muscles in her pelvis flexed at the memory of his skilful fingers and even more skilful cock. It had been such a unique experience, so deliciously satisfying that it was almost a shame it was over with him.

After several sets of traffic lights and three left turns she purred the Porsche up to the kerb directly outside Walberg's Meats as instructed. She plunged the car into darkness and silenced the engine so as not to disturb anyone sleeping above the small parade of shops. She didn't want the distinctive engine registering in drowsy memories.

Opening the car door, she swung her legs out, paused briefly to retrieve her black purse from the passenger seat and stepped onto the deserted street. As usual, she

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*by Lily Harlem*

shuddered as Carlos's menacing shadow loomed from a BMW parked in the darkness. His apish shoulders swung and his bald head shone under the serrated halo of a street light. Her hard earned karate black belt would be worthless against his huge bulk—and utterly futile against the gun he stored about his person.

He hulked his body along the pavement on a collision course with hers, his footsteps heavy and his breathing laboured. He swept a meaty upper arm against her shoulder so she could drop John's car key into his ogre-like hand. His thick throat didn't emit a grunt and there was no pause in either of their steps. Then she felt his body heat disappear, and his footsteps faded.

She heard the Porsche's engine return to life. Kat knew a hefty sum of money would be transferred into her bank account on Monday morning. Deal done! Another step away from poverty, despair and the mercy of a fate which had never looked kindly upon her.

She stepped into the road, rubbing the chill of the night air from her bare arms as an available cab appeared round the corner.

The early morning sky was glowing in the East, a brilliant wash of yellows and oranges blending with deep blue, black. It was Kat's favourite time, and as she alighted outside her apartment block, she felt like she had London all to herself. She liked that thought immensely.

Pausing, she looked up at the exclusive high rise towering above her. Sleek and modern, the sharp lines of the blue opaque balconies circled the building like a row of bangles.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

Her eyes automatically reached upwards to the top floor and searched out her own balcony. Branches belonging to her olive tree swayed over the chrome and glass rails, and next to them sat her little wooden table and chair. Chair in the singular because Kat never had visitors in her apartment. No friends or family and a job which didn't involve work colleagues meant she existed in a very solitary world despite the hustle and bustle of living in a capital city.

There was just her in her life. Nobody else.

She pushed through revolving doors into the elegantly furnished lobby and spotted the security guard sleeping in his office; mouth open, head hanging down and his paper on the floor in a creased heap.

She bent to remove her heels and wiggled her toes as she set each foot onto the cool tiles. As she padded to the lift, she relished the soothing sensation that spread through her stockings onto the balls of her aching feet.

Once on the top floor, Kat stepped into her softly carpeted apartment, alert to her surroundings. It was her beautiful home, and she loved it, but a little bit of paranoia could be healthy for a girl in her line of work, especially with the connections she'd developed with the underworld.

Her eyes darted as she stood looking for signs of disturbance and listening for signs of life coming from within the four rooms. Had anyone broken in and moved things while she'd been out? She didn't think so. But just the same, Kat didn't drop her purse and shoes like most girls would. Instead, she ritualistically went through each room, checking cupboards and behind doors.

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*by Lily Harlem*

Finally satisfied there were no intruders, she ambled into her luxury cream and gold bathroom, reached into the double shower cubicle and spun the hot water onto full blast. She dropped her shoes outside the slightly ajar door so they landed on carpet as opposed to the hard tiles. She didn't want her new shoes getting damp even if they had hurt like hell.

She stepped out of her dress for the second time that evening, twisted her hair into a wide clip on the top of her head and peeled off her underwear and stockings. Moving under the hot water, she let out a contented sigh as heat streamed down her naked body, and the hard little side jets pummelled the delicate flesh on her chest and shoulders. She needed to wash the evening away, wash away the scent of the man she'd had sex with.

She covered herself in expensive, sugar sweet shower gel before raising her face to the shower head with her eyes tightly closed. The water beat down on her cheeks and eyelids like a torrential summer rainstorm. It felt heavenly. With her lips parted, she let the water slide into her mouth, blew out a spray and lowered her head to treat the back of her neck to the same hydro massage.

There was a sudden hot pressure over her face. Hard, fast, unrelenting. Her heart beat trebled and her eyes popped open. Petrified, she realised the tightness around her mouth belonged to a hand.

A big, male hand.

It was covering the entire bottom half of her face, clamping her jaw and making it impossible to scream out. Hell, breathing was hard.

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*by Lily Harlem*

Within a split second of feeling the hand, her entire body slammed backwards into what felt like a brick wall and her naked back made contact with thin material covering a wide, solid mass which didn't move a fraction on impact.

Frantically she tried to remember her karate training for this type of hold. She'd practiced it enough times in the dojo. Surely it would come to her, if only she could think for a second.

She ground her brain into gear and flung her head backwards in an attempt to head butt her attacker and deliver a blinding blow to send him reeling. At the same time, she rammed a sharp elbow into his concrete bulk, aiming for a vulnerable gap between the ribs.

But it was futile. His big arm surrounded her bare body and pinned her arms so tightly against her own torso she couldn't get up any momentum.

She wriggled wildly, twisting and curling, trying to take advantage of the fact she was wet and slippery and difficult to hang on to. Still no good. No let up.

In vain, she tried to ram her foot down her assailant's shin onto the top of his foot but succeeded only in painfully whacking her own heel against the lip of the shower cubicle. If she'd been able to, she would have cried out in agony.

"Easy, Pussy Cat!" A deep voice rumbled into her ear as sharp bristles scratched her head.

Kat tried to twist and turn even harder, utterly terrified and beside herself with anger, furious with her attacker and even madder with herself for getting into this position. She was desperate to get out of this bracing arm lock and

searched frantically for a small break in resistance to pull her moves. Who was this monster attacking her in her own shower? How did he get in? And who would call her 'Pussy Cat'?

"Hey! I said easy." The voice was sterner this time and the grip on her whole body tightened... If that was possible. "I'll give you back your face if you stop your damn wriggling." He paused and pressed lips to her ear. "Do you promise not to scream if I let go?"

Kat stilled. She would play by this madman's rules then attack the second the opportunity arose. It was clear she would have to use technique rather than muscle with this monster, brain rather than brawn.

She nodded and let her arms go limp.

The hand was removed, though it hovered an inch from her mouth in the still streaming water.

Kat spun her head. "Shit... John," she gasped, catching a side view of his face. "You scared the crap out of me."

"Yeah, I bet you never thought you'd see me again, eh?" He smirked. Then his face shifted into a dark and dangerous expression. "I don't want games, Kat, I want answers...fast."

Kat turned to face him, trying to cover her nakedness with her hands. She looked at his huge, soaking wet, fully clothed bulk standing in the middle of her shower. How the hell had he found out where she lived? And how had he got in? Damn that stupid old security guard, always bloody asleep on the job. Her mind whirled like a computer. He must know she'd taken his car. She'd used it to get herself halfway home. The



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only way he could possibly know where she lived was if he'd followed her.

"Shy now, are you?" John dragged his gaze down her soapy body then slowly back up again. "You weren't shy a couple of hours ago in my bed. In fact, you were the complete opposite of shy then."

"Shut up and get the hell out of here," she snapped.

His black eyes darkened, and he stepped closer, backing her against the wall of the cubicle. "I'm not going anywhere. You've just stolen my whole damn future and I want it back."

She felt the chill of the tiles on her shoulders and buttocks. The shiver added to her tremble of nerves. Her first instincts had been right—she really had bitten off more than she could chew with John. "What are you on about?"

"My car." He stood directly under the stream of water. Rivers dripped from his brows and over his eyes. He didn't appear to notice.

"I didn't take your car. What a ridiculous thing to say." Her face flamed, and she felt sick with fear.

A noise similar to a lion's growl rumbled from his chest. He slammed his palms against the tiles on either side of her head and the loud slap echoed around the glass walls.

Kat sucked in a breath. "I simply got up and left so there was no awkwardness in the morning." She tried a casual shrug within the confines of his massive forearms. "We both know it was only a one-night stand." She should be protesting more violently about his uninvited entry into her shower. She should be screaming, kneeling him in the groin...something.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"Tell me where my car is." He continued to ignore the hot side jets pounding his T-shirt and the steam swirling around his body.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Kat replied, putting tight fists onto his sodden chest to prevent him coming any closer.

He stepped closer anyway. "Don't give me that crap. You know full well what I'm on about."

"No, I don't. How would I know where your car is? We walked to your flat from the bar last night." She tipped her head and raised her brows, tried to appear nonchalant. "Frankly, John, it's creeped me out that you've broke into my home. You could have just asked for my number."

John's guttural, sarcastic laugh gurgled around the water blasted cubicle; it wasn't a pleasant sound. "You have to be kidding me. You must think I was born yesterday."

Kat raised an eyebrow and swallowed a tight lump in her throat.

"I know damn well you took my car." John leant down so their noses touched. "I followed you, I saw you get out of my fucking car and then strut away as some other arsehole drove it into the night." He was thoughtful for a moment as if a riddle bothering him had given up its answer. "And I'm guessing you didn't take it because you just saw my keys lying around... You'd planned it beforehand. Whoever that big guy is, he's the organiser, he tells you who's got a flash car worth nicking. Am I right?"

Kat decided to give up on the innocent route. She'd clearly been rumbled, although how the hell he'd followed her home

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she had no idea. She was sure he'd been fast asleep when she'd left. "Yeah, well, deal with it. It's a dog-eat-dog world out there." She smirked with a confidence she didn't feel. "But you're a big boy, John, you can handle it. Go claim on your insurance...if you have any that is." She stared at the tiny crystals of water beading in the dark stubble of his cheeks.

"I couldn't give a shit about the car." Water tipped from his nose and chin onto her breasts. "It's what's in it I need back."

"So why follow me, why not follow your CD collection? If that's what you're so worried about."

His teeth clenched, a muscle in his jaw flexed and his brows pulled together even farther. "Because that big bald bastard slipped into the night before I could get after him, which left you my only damn option." He swallowed and grimaced as if biting back a bitter taste.

Kat ducked and went to bob under his arm. Her heart somersaulted; the situation was out of control

"You're going nowhere." He slid his hand down the tiles and pressed his hard groin into her soft naked stomach, trapping her and preventing her from moving an inch. "Not until you've given me answers."

Kat dragged in a sharp mouthful of fogged air. He was hugely turned on. Despite his fury, he was rock solid. "I can't...I can't give you any information," she managed through a conflict of emotions—fear and desire, terror and lust.

"Sure you can."

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

Kat stretched her mouth into a thin, flat line and shook her head. "I don't know anything. I just do as I'm told and get paid."

"God damn you!" he spat out in frustration.

"Sorry."

"Sorry... Sorry is not enough, nowhere near enough." He pushed his erection harder into her. "Jeez, I should have fucked you how I wanted to instead of treating you like a delicate little princess."

She tensed but didn't flinch from the solid dominant body invading all her senses.

"I should have gone for it hard and fast, just taken what I wanted," he said, shards of fury scraping the words from his throat. "That's what you did. Fucked me and took what you wanted."

"You looked like you were enjoying it alright." "Oh yeah, Pussy Cat, I enjoyed it, but lying still and submissive is really not my style. It took a lot to give you that."

"So why do it?"

He lifted a hand and moved a thick rope of hair plastered against her cheek. His fingertips brushed her neck, and a crackle of sensation shot across her flesh and spiked her nipples into his chest. "Because I thought you were sweet and naive. You'd taken a risk with me, and I didn't want you to regret it." He snorted and banged his hand onto the tiles, the brief moment of gentleness evaporating. "If I'd known you were a common thief, I wouldn't have been nearly so accommodating."

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*by Lily Harlem*

Kat was trapped, she could go nowhere, but something inside her didn't want to go. She liked him being so close to her nakedness again. She liked the feel of his glorious, demanding cock, which she knew could give such pleasure, pushing against her. Her heart rate rocketed and her breathing quickened as her sudsy breasts heaved harder against his T-shirt.

"So do it now," she whispered. "Take me how you wanted to."

He crushed his chest to hers, pinning her body to the ice cold wall. "What the hell did you just say?"

"Fuck me now... hard and fast." Her voice was firmer. "If it will make you feel better."

"What do you think I am?" His angry mouth hovered an inch from hers and her tongue remembered his musky taste. "You think I'm a rapist?"

Kat said nothing, just glared back up at him.

"The sort of scumbag who breaks into girls' apartments and rapes them in the shower?"

"Clearly you're the sort of guy who's up for breaking and entering, but..." Kat looked down at their connected chests. His was outlined by his wet T-shirt with hers flattened against it. She swallowed and pushed her palms against the cool tiles by her buttocks. "It's not rape..." she looked back up into his sparkling, furious eyes, "if I ask you to."

A low, growling sound erupted from his throat, just audible over the roar of the shower. "Don't fucking tempt me..."

Kat held eye contact, unwavering despite the swirling steam and the flying water. Her clit throbbed and her skin

Thief  
by Lily Harlem

prickled at the thought of him taking her how he wanted to. She'd caught such a brief glimpse of that raw wildness—a second, perhaps less—and something in her, curiosity, desire, wanted to see more of it, feel more of it.

John stared back, arrogant and confident. He pushed his groin all the harder into her flesh. "You couldn't handle it, little girl."

"I'm not a little girl." Kat frowned, her stomach tensing at the pressure of his hunger.

"No..." He glanced at her engorged, heaving breasts mashed against his chest. "I guess you're not."

Kat trembled under his heated gaze.

"But you're a temptress who can't follow through."

"That's rubbish..."

He reached for her face, placed his fingers on either side of her mouth, squeezed and gripped her jaw half open. "So how come you don't know what to do with a cock, Pussy Cat?"

"I do," she managed, something in her sparking to life at his dominant handling. She shouldn't be enjoying it, but for some reason, she was.

"Oh, yeah." His voice was mocking. "Want to prove it?"

She hesitated for a fraction of a second then nodded.

He moved back, let go of her face and reached for his sodden flies. Bubbles of terror and delight popped in her chest like a glut of champagne.

He glared down at her body, raging, unquenched lust pooling in his eyes. "And you're asking for it?"

Kat trembled. There seemed to be a sudden lack of oxygen amongst the steam; her head lightened.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"It's not rape if you're asking," he repeated her words back to her, hand poised at his zipper. "Answer me, damn it." His face looked savage, the skin stretched taut over his features, hollowing his cheekbones farther.

"I want you to do it...now," she said. "I'm asking."

His sudden, hard kiss was like that of a marauder intent on domination. His lips were controlling and urgent as his tongue pushed straight past hers, thrusting and pounding in a way her body cried out for.

She nipped at his tongue. He groaned and plunged all the harder down her throat.

The sound of his zip was drowned by the cascading water, but Kat knew it was down because she felt the hot, hard length of him releasing from his wet jeans onto her bare stomach.

He pulled back, eyes narrowed, his chest heaving as harshly as hers.

In the bright light of the shower, she could see his cock springing forward. He hadn't bothered to shove his sopping jeans down, just unleashed his heavily veined flesh from the material. She suddenly hungered for it, desperate to be re-acquainted. Her eyes devoured him. That glorious length of engorged penis had made her feel so exquisite only a few hours ago, now she wanted it all over again. She needed to know how John really wanted to take her.

His big body went rigid over hers, and he palmed her breasts, squeezing and massaging. Not gentle, but hard and urgent, like he was desperate to touch every bit of them at once. Kat whimpered as electricity fired to her core, the

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

muscles on her vaginal walls were clenching already, searching for something to grab hold of.

He caught her lips again, a hot open-mouth kiss that reduced her knees to jelly. They threatened to fold. It didn't matter because as she began to slide, he stooped, grazed her nipple with his teeth and looped a forearm behind her left knee. He dragged her leg upwards. Fortunately, she was supple, and a knee higher than her waist wasn't a problem.

But the upward force continued and his lift pulled her other foot high off the shower floor. He had her suspended on his arm with his pelvis jutting into hers, one leg bent tight up, the other dangling down. She grabbed his shoulders, needing something to hold on to. It was like grasping at a rain soaked paving slab.

"God damn you," he said as her face drew level with his. "But you asked for it." His teeth clenched as he squeezed a hand down between their balanced bodies.

Kat braced, felt him position himself so her entrance was kissing his erection. It shouldn't be so glorious to be roughly taken by a stalking, breaking-and-entering-bully, but it was... She was going to come just with heady anticipation.

"You just gonna have to cope on your own this time..." he said as his mouth sucked onto hers.

Her fingers formed claws, and her eyes squeezed shut, preparing for the inevitable.

In one hard plunge, he thrust deeply into her, his aim accurate and the suds from the shower thankfully easing his way. Kat cried out, but he caught the tormented noise in his mouth and only a faded scream echoed around the bathroom.



Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

He kept his lips locked on hers, absorbing her subsequent cries.

He'd filled her so suddenly, so acutely. The pleasure was there, but pain was knocking on the door with one foot over the threshold. Her pussy convulsed, complaining at the same time as rejoicing at his invasion. Stars danced before her eyes, and her nails bit into his shoulder blades.

Buried deep within her, he stilled and yanked his mouth from hers. "You gonna keep it quiet?" he asked gruffly.

Kat nodded, her dazed eyes meeting his.

He withdrew a fraction and heaved back in. With a Neanderthal grunt, he began to fuck her with earnest. Kat tried to stifle her moans but had little luck. The sound multiplied and rumbled around the shower like an underground echo.

A strong hand came up to clamp over her mouth "I don't want...nosy neighbours...turning up," John said between thrusts.

Kat nodded and gave herself up to his control over everything, including her voice.

He held her, supporting her as he went for long, fast strokes. Her back slammed against the wet tiles with each powerful jerk of his hips. She dragged her hand through his short, sharp hair; she wasn't gentle.

She could feel the sharp zipper of his jeans on her arse, scratching her delicate skin each time he thrust. Her clit was being battered against his hard body; ground and hammered, it begged for more. Sensations shot through her flesh, and

she felt her own hot juices add to the lubrication of the shower water.

She saw his nostrils flare and his mouth grimace. "You like this, Pussy Cat?" he said through clenched teeth. "You handling it okay?"

Kat wrapped her hand around his ear and yanked—hard.

He responded with a devastating pound she was sure went beyond her cervix. She bit into his hand, tasted the hot, metallic flavour of blood.

"Bitch..." he said, taking his hand away from her face, but immediately replacing it with hard, angry lips.

Kat thrust her tongue into his mouth this time, slammed her hands to his cheeks and felt the rasp of his stubble beneath her palms. His body jerked upwards, farther and higher. He reached for her other leg, and in one slick movement, wound them both around his waist.

Kat crossed her ankles and linked her fingers behind his neck. He was so deep inside her, each driving penetration pummelling her towards the brink. She wanted to come again, was going to...any second.

His hands ran over the globes of her backside and spread her wider to meet his relentless pounds. His fingers tickled across the tight entrance of her anus. She pulled in a sharp breath around his lips and clenched her most intimate hole against his probing.

"You said you could handle it," he mocked into her mouth.

Before she could respond, he tunnelled one finger in. She jerked as the hot pinch of pain nearly tipped her over the edge of her waiting orgasm. She felt tender tissue and muscle

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

part as he edged in deeper and deeper in time with his thrusts. No one had ever touched her there.

He braced his other hand against the tiles by her head. "I'm gonna come now..." He pulled his cock nearly all the way out but kept his finger wedged inside her anus. "You want to join me?"

"Yes...yes."

"Without a sound?"

"Yes...yes, now."

It was like flicking a switch. He pulled back another half inch and released a guttural groan as he forged back in, hard, fast, furious. The pace had been wild before, now it was unnatural. They were going to break something, either themselves or the shower cubicle.

Kat's clamped her lips together to stop from crying out. The pleasure was like the devil, devouring her, mixing with pain, flying her higher than anything she'd ever known. Another insistent finger joined the one in her tight rear hole. Stretching and twisting, he ground upwards, filled her to capacity. The devil laughed, rejoiced, stabbed her with its sharp little fork, and her body gave up its battle and tumbled over the edge.

With her arse on fire, her pussy overloaded and her clitoris being hammered to oblivion, the orgasm consumed her completely. She squeezed her eyes shut and was greeted with a pyrotechnic display she couldn't focus on. Nerve endings never before stimulated dragged in pleasure as though starving. His cock felt so huge inside her. The heavy

engorged veins of his erection pulsed and added to the tremors of her womb.

"Fuck, yes," he hissed. "Let me have all of you..."

He tipped his head up to the pummelling water and swallowed his shout of satisfaction as he became rigid with his own orgasm. His cock convulsed, and his hips bucked her up the slippery tiles farther.

Her breaths came in harsh gasps, and she dropped her head onto his shoulder. Unbelievable bliss washed over her like the water. Wave after wave of sensation crashed through her. She gave herself over to him completely.

John gave one final ram, shuddered then pulled his fingers from her back passage and his cock from inside her. His head came back level with hers. For a moment, she thought there might be a murmur of approval or a word of sentiment.

There wasn't.

He reached for her elbows, dragged them from his neck and stepped away from the wall, forcing her to release her ankles from his waist. She landed on the shower floor with legs barely able to support her weight and her insides missing him desperately as they juddered out the last tremors of her climax.

He turned through the water and stepped out the cubicle. "Now that's out the way," he said hoarsely, "we can get down to business."

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## Chapter Three

\* \* \* \*

Kat gave up trying to stay upright and sank to the floor with her knees against her chest, panting, trying to focus through the curtain of water.

John grabbed a snow white towel and rubbed it roughly over his head and face. He looked into the wide mirror above the sink and spotted her slumped. "Get up," he said with a frown.

"I...I..." Kat squeaked out. "I will in a minute."

"I knew you wouldn't be able to handle it."

Kat felt the first pop of fury burst in her gut. She had handled it; she'd handled it just fine. And if there was one failing she couldn't tolerate it was being thought of as weak. With effort, she pushed up from the damp floor and switched off the shower. On shaky legs, she slunk from the cubicle. "Hand me my dressing gown." She indicated a chenille powder blue robe hanging on the back of the door.

John reached for it.

"Thanks," she said, sarcasm dripping from the word like syrup.

He snorted and turned to leave the confines of the bathroom. "We need to talk." He threw over his sodden shoulder. "You have something I want and..."

As he stepped onto the carpeted floor, Kat aimed a hard, sharp blow at his right temple.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

Whack! The middle knuckle of her left hand, with her entire weight behind it, blasted into his skull.

John spun and just lifted his arm in time to block a second blow heading straight for his nose. "Damn it, woman!"

Kat stepped back into a balanced stance and aimed a side kick at his groin, trying to confuse him by striking out with her left fist towards his head at the same time.

John blocked the groin strike as if swatting a fly and took a step towards her, batting down her right fist that was now heading for his solar plexus. "Jesus Christ, lady, what the fuck are you doing? I told you I only want to talk."

Kat wasn't interested in talking, she wanted him down. This brute who'd followed her and broken into her apartment had to be taken out. But John was immune to her expertise, trying to rationalise with her at the same time as blocking and defending as though she were a mere irritation. She aimed another side kick at his groin, curled her quad up into a cannon about to go off, but he was too close, and as she fired forward, she caught his left knee cap with the ball of her foot, hard—really hard.

An expression of complete and utter agony twisted his face. He opened his mouth, but no sound came out as he lunged towards her arms wide.

Kat's split second of triumph lasted exactly that—a split second—because then she was flat on her back with John's weight crushing down on her. She couldn't breathe, her ribs were cracking and her lungs bursting as she strained for scraps of oxygen.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

With her last reserve of air, she went for a head butt, but his head was buried safely into the carpet, and all she hit was tough shoulder muscle, hurting her own head more than his. A row of marching black ants invaded her vision, tiny specks floating around. The swell of panic grew like a mushroom cloud in her mind. She was going to suffocate, all alone in her flat with this animal on top of her.

"Get...off..." she managed in a last gasping whisper.

After several minutes, John hoisted to his elbows. "No more head butts, Pussy Cat," he said gruffly. "Or kicks. If you still feel the need to kick like a mule, I'll stop being polite real quick. Got it?"

Kat was swamped with relief as his weight finally released. She dragged in big, greedy gulps of free air, re-inflated her lungs and re-oxygenated her system.

"Bastard," she managed breathily.

"Whore."

He pushed to his feet and limped in his soggy clothes towards her living room.

Kat lay for a moment looking at the ceiling, watching the ants march away. Then she dragged to her feet and followed him, pulling her dressing gown tight and rubbing at her poor, aching ribs. They would hurt like crazy for a few days.

She paused in the doorway and leant her shoulder against the frame. John was stretched lengthways on her sofa, legs out straight and arms folded across his bare chest. His soaked clothes were dumped in a pile on the floor and the white towel around his waist looked all the more brilliant against his dark trail of body hair.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

Kat would have felt uncomfortable having anyone else in her flat, but John's imposing male presence filled more than physical space. His aura filled the every room and completely changed the flow of energy. It didn't feel like her safe, feminine sanctuary anymore. The sight of him was strangulating and completely invasive.

"Got any whisky?" he grunted, rubbing at a red zigzag scar on his knee.

Kat's eyes fell to his sopping clothes on her cream carpet. With her fist clamped around the top of her dressing gown, she walked over, picked up the offending garments and moved to a long, white radiator. She spread everything out to dry and upturned his dripping trainers along the top. "You want anything with it?"

"No." John's curious eyes followed her around the room. "Just make it a triple."

Kat pulled open a door on a sleek unit next to the television. Her hand landed on a bottle of Bells, and she poured three generous fingers into a crystal glass.

"Here you go," she said walking to the sofa and holding it out at arm's length.

John grasped it, knocked back half, then pressed the glass against a rising bruise on his right temple. "Sit."

There was nowhere else to sit. Kat only had one sofa and no armchairs. "I'll stand."

"Suit yourself." John shrugged. "As long as you tell me where my Porsche is I couldn't give a damn what you do."

"I told you I don't know. It's gone." She re-twisted her damp hair into its clip.



Thief  
by Lily Harlem

"It can't just be gone. You must have some idea where Shrek took it."

"No, I have no idea. What does it matter now anyway?"

John took another slug of his drink. "Because in the boot is something worth considerably more than a car."

"What are you talking about?"

"Diamonds." He paused, waiting to see the effect his words would have on her. "That's what I'm talking about, Pussy Cat, lots and lots of diamonds."

Kat turned away, moved to the drinks cabinet and poured herself a whisky. "Tell me," she said with a disbelieving tone, "why a guy like you would have diamonds lying about his car?" She sloshed more whisky into his now empty glass.

"Because, like you, I'm a thief." John slugged away at his refreshed drink. "And tomorrow... No, make that *today*," he indicated out the patio doors at the lightening sky, "I was going to get the hell out of this God forsaken country and set up a new life somewhere sunny, get myself some high class living...a bit like you've done here. So you'll forgive me for being pissed, but you took considerably more than a car last night." His nostrils flared and his eyes narrowed. "And I need you to tell me where I can find it. Then I can get on with my life and you can get on with yours. Simple. Everyone happy."

She looked into his eyes. Was he telling the truth or was it some weird game he was playing? She didn't trust him not to play games, not after jumping her in the shower. "I told you, I don't know where it is."

"Just tell me who drove off in it, and I'll be out of your way... I'm guessing that's what you want."

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"Of course that's what I want, but all I can tell you is I handed the key to a guy I know as Carlos, but I can't see how that's going to help, because I don't know where he is and don't I have any way of contacting him."

John's face paled. He rubbed at his eyes with his thumb and index finger. "You'd better tell me what you do know."

Kat's body was still but her mind raced. If only she'd known there was a stash of diamonds in the boot. She could have stopped on her way to the handover. Hunted them out and popped them in her purse. No one would have been any the wiser and she would have been rich. Never again would she have to worry about having a financially secure future or panic about what would happen if her work dried up with Carlos if she lost her touch at getting men drunk and stealing their cars. She was haunted with memories of being poor and hungry, of having absolutely no one to turn to. The diamonds could have been her ticket away from those nightmares. Perhaps they still could be.

"What's in it for me?" she heard herself saying.

John flicked his attention up. "Un-bloody-believable!"

She shrugged, put a hand on her hip and took a sip of her drink.

His voice lowered. "You've got more attitude than is safe to be chucking around in front of me tonight, Pussy Cat."

"If I help you, I'm entitled to a cut." She pouted. "Fair's fair."

"Five hundred. You can have five hundred thousand if you help me get them back." He smirked and a snort came down his nose. "Then you won't have to work for this Carlos guy

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

anymore. Imagine it, no more spreading your legs to nick cars."

A wave of intense irritation washed through her. She hated him for what he'd just said, even though it was true. She couldn't deny it, but she didn't like to hear it said aloud...especially by him. But instead of hitting him with a comeback about thinking with his dick, she mulled over her options. She did want a share of the diamonds. Perhaps she could help him, and maybe if she was careful, real careful, Carlos would never find out they even existed. "One million," she said. "I want one million if I help you."

John smiled. "What thief doesn't always want more?" he said. "Okay, deal. One million it is; that's exactly half." He swung his legs to the floor and sat forward. "Tell me everything, right from the very beginning. I need to know all about this Carlos guy. Starting with when you're going to see him next."

Kat perched at the far end of the leather sofa. Acutely aware of her lack of underwear, she kept her knees squeezed together. "I won't see Carlos until next Thursday or Friday. He'll post the details of the hit, and I'll see him when I hand over the keys later that night."

"You can't be serious!" John groaned. "Next week! Damn it!"

"I only do hits at the end of the week and usually only one. Two this weekend has been busy for me."

"Lucky me to be your overtime."

She shrugged.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

He looked up at her with a puzzled frown. "Why doesn't he just hotwire the cars like the good old days, why does he need you?"

"Elite, sporty cars—the ones he takes orders for—are well beyond hotwiring. Without the key there's no way you can get into them, let alone start them."

"He doesn't look beyond roughing someone up to get their keys."

Kat laughed without humour. "He's not, but he prefers the cars reported stolen the next day, that gives him longer to hide them and start transforming them for their new owners."

John nodded slowly. "But I presume you get paid. How do you get your share if you don't see Carlos until the following week?"

"Bank transfer. I've got an offshore account he wires my percentage to each Monday morning."

"And you trust him to be fair about your percentage?"

"I'm hardly going to argue with twenty stone of brute strength, am I?" She huffed.

"Well you sure as hell tried with me." He took another mouthful of whisky and furrowed his brow. "There's only one thing we can do. I'll follow you out on your next 'hit', watch you take a car from some, poor, unsuspecting guy and then trail Carlos. With a bit of luck, he'll lead us to my Porsche."

She nodded slowly.

"It's risky." He frowned. "We'll have to pray a week isn't leaving it too long and hope no one else finds the diamonds."

"What are they just in a bag or something?"

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"No, they're tucked in the lining of the boot, well out of sight of inquisitive customs officers at Dover or Calais."

"Should be okay then."

"The main problem now..." he chewed the inside of his cheek as he studied her, "is what to do with you until that time?"

"What do you mean, 'what to do with me'?"

"Well, I don't fancy my chances of finding you again if I let you out my sight." He raised one thick brow. "There's only one thing for it, I'll have to shack up here with you."

"You're joking! I'm not having you here all week." She stood and banged her drink on the low coffee table. "This is my home! No one else ever steps foot in here but me." She pointed to the hallway. "You have to go. I'll meet you, take you to the hit. Why wouldn't I? I'm getting half of the diamonds. I can't stand you here. I can't breathe with you here. It won't work."

John stood, tested his weight through his left leg then stepped up to her. "The thought of me hanging around repulses you, does it?"

"Yes."

He loomed down, lowered his face and pushed in so close their whisky breaths mixed. "Get used to me being around, Pussy Cat. You made your bed, now you gotta lie in it."

He chuckled, straightened and hobbled out of the living room into the kitchen, adjusting the towel around his waist.

Kat glared after him. What could she do? It wasn't as if she could physically throw him out. Perhaps she could give him the slip at some point. But where would she go? She had

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

nowhere to run and no one to run to. Besides, she did ultimately want her share of the diamonds. Now she knew about them she could visualise them all pretty and twinkling, nestled deep in the palm of her hand, each tiny, perfect gem worth thousands and thousands of pounds. If hanging around with this big, irritating guy for a week was the only way, she'd have to somehow cope with his intrusion into her solitary existence.

She stomped after him and watched as he pulled open the fridge door and studied the contents. There were half a dozen microwave meals for one, all from Marks and Spencer, several bottles of unopened chardonnay lay on the top shelf and one open, half full, stood in the door next to a pint of skimmed milk. Other than that the only other inhabitants were a bag of green seedless grapes and two strawberry yogurts.

"Jeez!" he said blowing out his breath. "Is this all you eat?"

"What's the matter with it?"

John swung the fridge door shut in disgust and leaned his behind against the counter. "It's not real food, that's what's wrong. Microwave meals, no wonder you're so small." He paused and let his eyes slide down her body—all the way to her red toenails— then just as slowly all the way back up again.

She pursed her lips in irritation and tightened her dressing gown farther.

He yawned and pushed away from the counter. "Get some rest," he said as he brushed past her. "We're going shopping in a few hours."

Thief  
by Lily Harlem

"Shopping, what for?" she asked his back.

"I can't eat this girly shit all week. I need proper food, and in case it escaped your notice, we need some kind of wheels to follow Carlos. That is unless you have a car stashed away somewhere?"

Kat trailed behind him. "I only use taxis."

"Well, you better cough up some cash to replace my car." John sank onto the sofa, folded his arms behind his head and exposed dark shadows of underarm hair. "I've got a few grand on me but we'll need another ten to get something decent."

"As long as I keep it after we get the diamonds back."

"Whatever." John adjusted the cushion behind his head and closed his eyes. "Turn off the light on your way out, will you, and don't bother trying any funny business. I'm knackered."

"As if!" she spat then headed into her bedroom and slammed the door.

She didn't turn off the light.

\* \* \* \*

Six hours later, Kat and John were browsing around a vast Kawasaki garage. John fingered the hard cash folded in thick wads in his front, jeans pocket. The ten thousand Kat had produced from a mug in her kitchen cupboard should buy them something reasonable.

"I like this one," Kat said, sliding her denim clad bum onto a lime green Kawasaki Ninja ZX. She grabbed hold of the

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

handles and leant forward, twisted the throttle and made a low purring noise.

"You just like the colour," John said then nodded to the hovering sales assistant. "We'll take this one." He pointed to the one Kat was straddling. "Now, for cash."

"No problem, sir. Just give us a few minutes, and you can collect it from the forecourt."

John reached for Kat's elbow, tugged her off the bike and steered her towards the adjoining accessory shop. "We need to get you something more suitable to wear."

"Hey, what's the matter with what I've got on?" She tottered alongside him to keep up with his long strides. "These are Rock Republic, you know."

John paused and looked over his shoulder at her butt in her impossibly tight jeans. "I'm not complaining, but I don't fancy you having your perfect honeyed flesh peeled from your bones if we go skidding along the tarmac."

Kat frowned and jerked from his grip.

"You haven't been on a bike before, have you?" he said, marching down a short ramp towards the rails of biker gear.

"No. But there can't be much to it. If you can do it, then I'm sure I can."

He reached for a pair of size sixteen leather biker trousers and a matching jacket from the first rail they came to. "Go put this on," he said as he thrust them at her.

Kat raised her eyebrows, ignored the hangers he held. She reached for size tens in the exact same style.

John watched her turn and walk towards the changing room, nose in the air and little ass wiggling.



Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

He selected some leathers for himself and, without bothering to try them on, paid for them and the bike and waited for Kat to come out the changing room.

After ten minutes of hanging about he'd changed into his own new stuff and browsed all the accessories. Impatience began to bubble and he called through the curtain of the changing cubicle tucked in the corner of the shop. "Hurry the hell up, will you?"

"Hang on," she shouted back. "Nearly done."

John rolled his eyes in apology to the young cashier idly scratching at a spot on his forehead with a pencil. It didn't matter to him how long she took, but John was keen to get going. He was hungry, real hungry, and he hated having an empty stomach almost as much as he hated not having a whisky on board.

Finally, she appeared from behind the thick navy curtain. "Well," she asked, giving a jaunty tip of her hip. "What do you think?"

Both John and the young cashier froze, and their eyes widened.

Tight black leather really, really worked on Kat's hour glass figure, and to top it off, she'd teamed the outfit with knee-length black laced boots. She'd left the jacket zip undone far enough to expose her impressive cleavage supporting her usual diamond necklace.

It was all John could do not to let his jaw hit the floor. He stared adolescent like. Kat looked stunning in the shiny, black outfit. Every curve of her body accentuated and squeezed.

Thief  
by Lily Harlem

She strutted over, her hips rolling with each step, not stopping until she stood as close to him as she could get. "What do you think? Are these too tight?" she said sweetly, her eyes sparkling. "Does it suit me?"

"You know damn well it does," John said irritably.

A satisfied smile tickled her glossed red lips as she flicked her hair over her shoulders. "You like it then?"

John's nostrils flared. He opened his mouth to speak but glanced at the cashier and shut it again. Lightning fast he reached down and grabbed her tight round behind and pulled her to the balls of her feet. Pressed her against his hard body so she'd be in no doubt he liked her, liked her a lot, in skin tight leather.

He leant his head and spoke into her hair. "Be careful, Pussy Cat, 'cause if you're going to play sexy little games with me, your nine lives will get used up pretty damn quick." He jerked her harder into his erection. "In fact, I reckon two have gone already."

"I'm not playing games." She kept pressed against him, un-intimidated and still smiling.

"You're teasing me because you know it's safe in here," He whispered and nodded at their captive audience, the gangly youth. "There's nothing I can do about it."

"Now who's scared?" She flicked her brows up.

"What are you talking about?"

"There is something *I* can do about it." She licked her lips. "If you want me to, that is."

John's forehead furrowed. What the hell was she on about? Kat twisted out of his grip.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"I might need a hand," she said "getting out of this tight gear." She gave John a loaded look before turning and strutting back to the changing cubicle.

She went to pull the curtain across but his hand was already on it. He wrenched it from her hands.

She looked up at him and swept her tongue over her bottom lip. "Come in."

"You're playing with fire," he snarled. His erection was ready to burst out of its confines. The way her butt wiggled as she walked in that leather had him boiling with lust.

"Shut the curtain behind yourself," Kat said smoothly.

John stepped inside and pulled the curtain tight. "What are you up to? You want me to take you in here?"

"No." She placed small hands on his chest and pushed him against the flimsy side wall. It rattled ominously under his weight. "I'm going to take you."

John pulled at the leather around his groin, trying to ease the blood congestion. "What the hell are you on about, little girl?"

"This." She dragged a battered upholstered stool behind herself and sat directly in front of his groin. "You reckon you can handle it, John?" She reached for the silver zip of his leather trousers and tugged it down a couple of notches.

He glared down at her as a mixture of fury, lust and arrogance washed through him.

Kat raised her brows and pulled the zipper to reveal the waistband of his boxers. He let out a groan.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

Suddenly, an anxious voice came from the other side of the curtain. "Only one person in the cubicle at a time...please."

John dragged his attention from Kat's shining mouth and the downward journey of his fly. He flicked the curtain back an inch and stared out at the hovering assistant who was wringing his hands and shifting from one foot to the other.

"Piss off," he growled.

"Only one person at a time, that's the rule and if the manag...ughh." His words were cut short as John's hand shot from the curtain and wrapped around his long, pale neck. The young man's eyes saucered, and his fingers curled around the concrete, unmovable wrist blocking his airflow.

"If you like anything about your life, piss off and make sure no one else needs to try anything on." John tightened his grip farther and pulled the lad to his toes. "Got it?"

The youth squeaked and nodded.

"Good." John released him as suddenly as he'd grabbed him, slid his hand back into the cubicle and secured the curtain.

Rapid footsteps faded across the shop floor.

Kat had his flies all the way down now and sizzling heat was radiating out of his tented boxers onto her cheek. She sucked in much needed air as she pulled his cock out. He was straining forward and as hard as a rock. He wasn't just mildly excited, he looked ready to come right now.

His thick fingers slid around her neck and cupped her nape. "I can handle it, Pussy Cat. The question is can you?"

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

A shiver of goose bumps charged across her flesh at his touch. A cocktail of emotions—lust, fear and anger—surged through her. She'd never done this before but how hard could it be? It was certainly worth a go when it gave her back so much control. The lust dripping from John's eyes was more intense than anything she'd ever witnessed before.

She tapped her fingers over the lower muscles of his abdomen, making his stomach contract and his engorged dick twitch from his black forest of pubic hair. She was fascinated by the glorious sight of his angry red flesh so close to her mouth, and pouted in anticipation. She wanted to taste him, wanted to know what all that silken flesh on a steel rod would feel like on her tongue, on the roof of her mouth, down her throat.

She yanked the leather farther to release his balls. He jerked as his legs braced to support himself and the hand at the back of her neck tightened. "Get on with it..." he said in a low, grating voice.

Kat reached underneath his shaft and took his testicles into her palm, rolled them like two snooker balls being played with in a bag. They were cool and the hair was sparser. She inhaled his wild maleness and the sweetness of new leather. He was an overdose of pheromones, and her female hormones leapt to wicked attention.

John clenched his teeth and his head tipped back on the thin wall. "Jeez," he grunted. "Just do it. We haven't got all day."

Kat flicked her eyes up at his contorted face then slackened her jaw and aimed the stretched 'o' of her mouth

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

over his shining head. She dragged in a deep breath and slid her lips down the long shaft. Felt the slit of his tip glide over her palate, tasted the salty hint of pre-come on her tongue and pulled her teeth away from the pulsating veins jutting from his flesh. She kept on going, farther and farther until he hit the back of her throat. Filled with his thickness, she struggled to control her gag reflex. Tightening her resolve to handle him, she successfully beat down the choking sensation and pulled air through her nose.

He slid right down her throat like a stick of honey.

His fingers clenched in her hair and an animal groan ruptured from his lips. "God, yes...fuck yes..."

She backed up from his hardness and dropped down again. A spark flew to her clit as she took him even deeper than before, the gag reflex no longer an issue. She curled her tongue like a deep duvet around his shaft, rippling it along the base with her pointed tip. She pushed her hand between her own legs and applied pressure through the leathers straight onto her swollen sex. She wanted to come too. She might in a minute.

Both his hands gripped the back of her head now, and his harsh gasps swirled around the changing room. She heard voices through the curtain, a woman speaking to the assistant about a present for her husband. She ignored them. The thought of John about to pound into mouth was her overriding thought. But he didn't, instead he lifted his hands and left her free to move as she pleased. Kat felt powerful, in control. She created a hot suction and bobbed her head all the way down to the base with a soft sucking noise she hoped

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

wouldn't carry. She wanted to make him come, make him as desperate for her as she'd been for him. Over and over, she slipped down and sucked up. Her lips felt swollen around his cock and her tongue danced over his domed glans.

"Get ready, I'm gonna come," he said as the first drip of silky fluid spilt from him. His hands were back, tangled in her hair, keeping her in place. His hips thrust forward, and he forged in. Kat took him, loving it. Why had she never done this before? Her tongue found an extra thick vein at the base of his dick and she laved at it as his pubes tickled her nose. Her clit hummed, about to fly like a rocket.

John's cock suddenly went thick and rigid. Suspended in time, it froze butting the very depth of her throat. She reached for his balls which had retreated into the base of his shaft, let them nestle in her palm as her fingertips stroked the ridge of skin she found between his sack and his anus.

"Fuck, yes..." He ground out as his thighs went taut. "So good, you feel so...damn...good." Like a popped cork, semen flooded down her throat. She barely had to swallow he was so deep anyway. One hand fisted her hair back into a rough ponytail, and his other cupped her chin, his thumb just touching her bottom lip and at the same time pressing on the base of his penis. He continued to spill his seed, pulsing and jerking in her mouth, greedily massaging the base of her tongue.

Kat hadn't orgasmed but it sure felt like it. She eked every sizzling drip of pleasure from John and committed it to a memory she would get off on when she was alone. Her

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

nipples strained and her pussy was wet; she had a job to catch her breath around his flesh.

His spent cock pulled out of her mouth, still hard but nothing left to give it lay against the zip of his leathers.

Cupping her chin, he urged her to her feet. Kat looked into his glazed eyes, her throat salty and empty and her lips stretched and moist. She knew her red lipstick would be smeared.

"A virgin mouth," he said huskily.

She scowled. How had he known? It'd sounded like she was doing it right. How could he have possibly guessed?

"Only a virgin mouth would go straight for a deep throat fuck." He traced the contours of her lips with the pad of his thumb, dipped into her little cupid's bow and wiped at a milky drip in the left hand corner. "Not that I'm complaining." A ghost of a smile tipped his mouth. "It was fucking fabulous." He bent his head and pressed a hard kiss to her tender lips.

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## Chapter Four

\* \* \* \*

John appeared through the shop door, the new set of keys swinging from his index finger and his eyes peering from the slash of a glossy black helmet. He handed Kat a smaller version of his helmet and swung his leg over the bike. His thick thighs hugged the seat and his gloved hands covered the handles. He looked anonymous and dangerous, a force to be reckoned with.

"What you waiting for?" he barked as he flicked down his visor, revved the engine to life and let the bike shift forward on the tarmac.

Kat rammed on her helmet and threw herself behind him, her stomach in a spin of excitement and nerves. The bike lurched and she clamped her knees against his hips and slipped her arms around his stomach, then held on for all she was worth as they shot into the heaving traffic.

Within minutes, they came to stop and she saw they were back outside his flat. "What are we doing here?" she asked, unlinking her fingers.

"I need some stuff," he mumbled.

Kat slid off and pulled at her helmet.

John kicked down the stand, threw his leg over the back and jerked the key from the ignition. "Come on."

"I'll wait with the bike."

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

He flicked up his visor and stared at her with untrusting eyes. "Yeah right."

"Why not? You've got the keys where can I go. I'll stay here and keep an eye on the bike while you go and get...I don't know, whatever you need."

"I said no. You're coming up with me."

"I'll wait here."

He dragged in a deep breath. "I'm hungry and tired and beyond pissed off I'm not half way across the English Channel."

She scowled.

"You're my ticket outta here, Pussy Cat, and I don't trust you not to slink that sexy little arse of your into a back alley, so wherever I go, you go."

Kat tutted but trailed after him anyway. She'd pick her battles. It would be a much better way of winning. What was the point in arguing about going up to his stupid flat anyway?

Hanging around as he gathered bits from his bathroom, Kat wandered down the corridor and stepped into his bedroom. The bed was dishevelled, the duvet a knot of creases and the pillows squint from their lovemaking. The window revealed the sleeping street lamp that had flooded the room with its flaming glow.

She glanced around. There was very little else in the room—a stack of six drawers with a barren surface, a built in wardrobe with a chipped doorframe and a solitary chair with a pair of jeans precisely folded over the laddered back.

"Happy memories?" John's deep voice came over her shoulder.

Thief  
by Lily Harlem

She startled and pushed her palm to her chest as she turned. "Why the hell do you do that?" she asked.

"Because I can."

"It's irritating."

"I know." He moved over to the bed and shook out the duvet.

"And why are you so neat?"

"A lifelong habit." He smoothed the cotton straight with his palms and aligned the pillows. "You're the only woman to sleep in this bed with me," he said matter-of-factly as he captured her eyes. "Although technically that's not true, because I'm guessing you didn't sleep at all."

Kat scowled.

"You were just waiting for me to fall asleep," he went on, "so you could sneak off."

"If I'd fallen asleep, I wouldn't be here now."

"How do you mean?"

"Carlos isn't someone to keep waiting." Or disappoint, she thought with a shiver.

"Perhaps you'd still be here, maybe I wouldn't have let you leave at all."

"Except for the fact you were planning to start your new life the next day. You know, cruising the English Channel and all that."

"Ahh, yes, there is that minor detail." He stepped up to her, reached out and tucked a stray strand of hair over her ear. He dropped his head low to hers, and she wondered if he was going to kiss her again like he had in the changing cubicle.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

He didn't.

She was glad.

"Time to go," he said straightening. "All this sex has given me a raging appetite."

During the next hour and a half Kat discovered a new way to achieve a serious high.

Motor bikes.

The rush was amazing and her adrenalin flowed big time.

John was an expert rider, cutting through traffic and speeding down back streets. Leaning this way and that and searching out a path through obstacles and other vehicles. She leant her helmet against his stooped back as he took the bike to sixty in a thirty. The rapid acceleration slid her back on the seat, and she sealed her grasp around his middle all the tighter.

It crossed her mind as they weaved between two double-deckers that she'd never trusted anyone with her physical safety so much. Once again she was handing herself over to John in a way she never had before—with anyone.

They rolled to a halt in the underground parking of her apartment block. "How'd you like the bike?" John asked, pulling off his helmet.

"It's awesome!" she said a broad grin rounding her flushed cheeks. "I'm going to get lessons so I can ride like that, because after you're gone, this will be my bike. So much better than a cab for getting around London. I can definitely see why you went for it." She fluffed her hair, and it fell around the leather on her shoulders like a river of treacle.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

John was about to speak but stopped himself. He didn't want to burst her bubble by telling her he'd had specialist training handling bikes in a host of terrains. If she thought she'd be able to have a few lessons and ride like a pro, then he'd let her have her delusion. What difference did one more make to the grand total of her many weird assumptions about life?

But her enthusiasm was contagious, and like her, he forgot to be hostile as they wandered into Marks and Spencer. Kat talked animatedly about future trips on the Ninja, the places she'd go and the speeds she'd travel at. John went along with her fantasy, chipped in advice and even laughed out loud when she claimed she'd soon be the female version of Evil Knievil.

His face darkened and his brows pulled low as they stepped through the automatic door of the shop. As a couple, they were hugely conspicuous in their creakingly tight leathers. His tall, looming frame and her curvy little one had caused several sets of eyes to turn in their direction and remain settled there.

Actually, it wasn't the leathers drawing attention, he soon deduced, or even him. It was the way Kat moved in her gear, the way she worked her body around people, up the aisles and past displays.

He grabbed a basket and negotiated through dairy a few paces behind her. She seemed oblivious to the alluring roll of her hips and the swish of her hair as she turned and threw random items into the basket. Couldn't she just tone down

the wiggle? Keep that smoothly rounded arse just a bit under control?

He scanned the place and spotted two guys checking her out from behind. One of them with a woman of his own. John's hackles rose, and he glared him down, satisfied when it only took a split second of eye contact to send the man scampering away with his basket of muesli, yogurt and Quorn. John spun and saw the other salivating at Kat's rear as she bent into the freezer. He took one big step towards him. The guy looked up, panic flicked over his features, and he backtracked into the cereal aisle, his mouth a tight line of anxiety as he stumbled into another shopper.

John swept his gaze about for any other creeps who needed taking out, moved closer to Kat as if in a silent warning to the men around her. She wasn't for general consumption.

Kat looked casual, but every step and flick of her hair was carefully orchestrated. Jealousy was a powerful emotion, and she could do with it on her side. John thought he was so clever, but as usual, his emotions were woefully transparent. It was hardly as if they were an item, but his reaction just went to show no man liked other guys looking at their woman—no matter what the circumstances, even the weirdest ones imaginable.

But it didn't escape her notice that John too was drawing admiring glances. Women in the shop were floating their gaze up and down his leather clad body as openly as men were appraising hers. The only differences being John was ignorant to the effect he had on the females around him.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

She watched him drop three packs of rump steaks and a bottle of whisky into the basket. She had to give it to him—he did look like most women's idea of perfection. Broad square shoulders, slim hips and long muscular legs all wrapped up in tight black leather which left little to the imagination. His handsome, yet undeniably sullen face was in desperate need of a shave, but the designer stubble look just added to the dark, moody maleness of him. Without a hint of vanity, he looked effortlessly good, a seriously hot combination for any passing woman to admire. And admire they did.

Back in the apartment, hostility seeped between them once more. Kat watched John slug on whisky and move about her kitchen as if he owned the place. He was grating on her now they were back on her territory, and what was it with the damn whisky all the time?

"You want a steak?" he asked, pulling a pristine frying pan from a cupboard.

"Let's not play at being a happily married couple," she replied curtly. "It really doesn't suit us."

John didn't answer. He simply threw a single steak into the pan and turned his back.

Kat stalked to her room and only appeared twice during the rest of the day; once to use the bathroom and once to cook a microwave meal.

\* \* \* \*

The next morning, Kat tapped out of her bedroom in a short denim skirt and high heeled boots, walked to the front

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

door and slipped out before John could even pull up from the sofa where he'd slept fully dressed.

With a violent curse, he lunged after her, slamming the apartment door and reaching the lift doors just before they shut. He shoved his hand into the small gap and forced them open again. "What the hell are you doing?" he barked, his painful knee making his morning mood much worse than usual.

"I've got an appointment."

"Yeah right, who with, your bank manager?" He stepped inside and leant his shoulder against the lift wall, rubbed a palm over his bristly face in an effort to wake up.

Kat glared at him. "If you must know it's a hair appointment. I always get my hair done the first Monday of the month. I don't see why I should have to miss out just because you're hanging around."

John let his eyes roam over her glossy straight hair hanging perfectly neat over her shoulders and her heavy fringe just skimming the lower line of her brows. "You're forgetting something I thought I'd been pretty clear about," he said with a frown. "Where you go, I go."

She tightened the strap of her handbag over her shoulder and flicked her head away from his intense gaze.

"Next time you need to go out, I get ten minutes warning. I could have used a coffee to kick start the day."

Kat rolled her eyes and muttered, "Whiskey more like."

The lift doors pinged open, and she headed into the lobby before he could think of a quick comeback.



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He followed and tried to control his limp as he went past the security guard. "Morning," he called amiably as they reached the desk, acting for all the world like he'd been invited to stay in the apartment block.

"Good morning, sir," the security guy called back then did a theatrical double take when he saw who John was walking with.

Kat tutted and pushed rapidly through the revolving doors into the spring sunshine. Moving swiftly to the kerb she hailed a passing taxi which screeched to a standstill directly in front of her. She broke away from John and slid in with sudden speed and nimbleness. "Get moving, fast," she hissed at the cab driver.

John grabbed the door handle, swung it wide open and dropped heavily on the backseat just as it pulled off the kerb. Hadn't he made himself perfectly clear about them sticking together? He swore under his breath, stretched out his leg and rubbed at his knee cap. It hurt like hell. He shifted his body and in a low whisper said into her ear, "Just so you know, that's as far as you can push me. You've reached the end of the fucking line. He curled a hand around the back of her neck and forced her face to his. "You're stuck with me for the week. Stop fighting it."

Kat pulled away from his grip, hoisted her chin and barked the salon's address at the driver.

"Now kiss me," he whispered.

"What?" She turned indignant but her lips practically brushed his he was so close.

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*by Lily Harlem*

"Make it look like we've made up." He glanced at the driver who was observing them with suspicion through the rear view mirror. "Quick, Pussy Cat, or I'll kiss you, and you'll have no damn control over it."

Her eyes narrowed and her lips squeezed together.

"It's not like I want you to kiss me," he murmured, taking a strand of her hair in between his fingers. "We just don't need any extra attention this week. We don't want to register in anyone's memories."

Something shifted in her eyes, as if she suddenly remembered the game. She licked her cherry glossed lips, glanced at the driver's dark blue eyes in the mirror and gently pressed her mouth to his. As he absorbed her sweet flavour she reached up and pushed a hand through his bristling hair, let it slide down his jawbone and onto his neck in a loving, tender caress. She twisted and pushed closer, real close, so her breasts were squashed against his T-shirt. Tipped her head and slipped her tongue into his mouth, found his and tried to tease it into a dance.

But he remained passive as he allowed her to act out for the driver. He kept his eyes shut and held perfectly still while she traced the outline of his lips and delved deeper into his barely parted mouth.

Gradually, his breaths got heavier, his tongue eased and turned pliable, tempted by her game. She slid a palm onto his chest, down his sternum and rested it on the waistband of his jeans. She let out an excited little moan which rumbled around the moving cab.

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His spine stiffened, and a previously impassive arm wrapped around her waist. He snapped her closer.

"Is that working, John?" she said onto his now searching, hungry tongue. "Am I doing it right?"

He lifted his hands and cupped her face, pulled away so he could look into her eyes. "I think you've convinced our chauffeur," he said quietly.

"Mmm," Kat hummed, dropping her hand lower onto the creases of his jeans. "I've certainly convinced you." She settled her palm over his hard on and gave the long column of bulging flesh a squeeze and a stroke.

"Don't flatter yourself," he murmured. "I always get a stiffy in the morning. You could be the Wicked Witch of the East and I'd still be hard. Oh, wait, you are the Wicked Witch of the East."

Kat brow furrowed, and she jerked her hand away. "Yeah, well, you've got morning breath." She sat upright and looked out the window. "Which I can assure you doesn't turn me on."

"Something about me turns you on." He nodded down at her chest. Two hard little peaks strained through her thin blouse, her eager nipples traitorous in their response to colliding once more with his chest.

She crossed her arms and frowned.

He chuckled and shifted his position on the seat. "You brought morning breath on yourself. Let it be a lesson—ten minute warning next time, okay?"

"Or else?" She stared out the window.

"Or there'll be no more Mr Nice Guy."

"Call this nice?" She dropped a withering look over him.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"This is me being a saint. Trust me, you really don't want to see my devilish side. I don't think you'd like him at all."

\* \* \* \*

Kat was beyond miserable when they returned home four hours later. Normally, her monthly trip to have her hair coloured and trimmed cheered her up. Made her feel like she was giving herself a treat. But not today. John had spoilt it for her. Sitting there glowering the whole time. Looking like some beefy body guard she'd employed to follow her around town.

The girls at the salon had been quite taken with him. She could tell by their admiring glances and inquisitive questions. Was he her boyfriend? How had they met? What did he do? Kat didn't offer any explanations. Why should she? She felt like telling them he was a pain in the arse. But that would generate more interest, and she could definitely do without that.

She spent the afternoon sprawled out on her bed reading old editions of Vogue and Cosmo with her mp3 plugged in to her ears to drown out the sound of him cooking.

Later into the evening, she listened by the door, all she could hear was the sound of the television so she quietly crept into the kitchen. The aromatic smell of John's meal hung in the air and she wondered what he'd cooked with such fragrant herbs.

She popped a plastic-wrapped lasagne in the microwave, poured a generous glass of wine and sneaked back to her room to eat her small dinner in peace.

\* \* \* \*

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

Nine o'clock the next morning, she decided to ignore John's ten-minute warning and dashed out her room towards the front door. She glanced at the sofa, expecting to see him sprawled out. He wasn't, but she didn't care. She couldn't see him and that suited her fine.

She curled her fingers around the handle, her heart soaring in triumph. She had it open an inch when a big, solid hand appeared by the side of her head.

Bang! The door slammed—her fingers narrowly missed the frame—and a hard body crushed into her forcing her flat against the wood.

"Hey, get off me, you moron," she squealed as her cheek squashed up against the white panel.

"What happened to my ten-minute warning, Pussy Cat?"

His hot breath travelled around her neck and her hair roots spiked to attention. "Get off!" she demanded again, furious he'd managed to surprise her.

"I thought I made myself clear," he continued with a sinister menace rippling through his voice. "Play nice or you'll be locked in your room and bound up until the end of the week."

Kat wriggled and writhed. John pulled back enough to allow her to twist to and face him.

"You wouldn't," she spat, lifting her eyes from his bare chest to his face. "You wouldn't dare."

He kept his palms on the door and his weight pressed against her hips so she couldn't move. "Wanna bet?" His eyes flashed with a hot, daring light.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"I'd scream the place down. The neighbours would come running."

"Not if I gagged that lying little mouth of yours."

She felt a stirring in the groin pressed into her abdomen.

"Get off me, will you?"

"Perhaps a blindfold would be fun too." He bent his head close to hers. "Would you like that? Would you like guessing where I was going to touch you next?"

She scowled, refusing to be intimidated. "At least I wouldn't have to look at your stupid face."

"I wouldn't have to look at yours if I strapped you down on your stomach and hoisted that pretty little arse in the air."

She wriggled some more. "In your dreams, John. Get off me...now."

He sighed and the luminosity drained from his eyes. "So where are you off to now?" He pulled back to take in her outfit.

She wore a neon pink vest top and a pair of tight black Lycra cycling shorts teamed with pink Nike trainers. Her hair was pulled up high on her head, she had an mp3 draped around her neck and a bottle of water had rolled to the floor when the door had slammed shut.

"Harrods," she said.

"Be nice," he rumbled with toothpaste breath.

Kat rolled her eyes in exasperation. "To the gym. Where else would I go looking like this?" She was trying her best to ignore the dangerous undercurrent of his tying up threat and the thrilling tingle it gave her. That was the last idea she wanted to plant in his head—especially when he clearly liked

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*by Lily Harlem*

the thought of it. "There's a gym in the basement for residents to use."

"Wait ten minutes and we'll go together." He pushed back from the door and finally removed his heat from her personal space. "I need coffee first."

\* \* \* \*

The gym was circumferenced by mirrors so anyone using it could admire themselves from all angles. It had no windows, just three television screens silently playing news channels. There were two of everything—two rowing machines, two running machines and two step machines. In the corner stood a bench press with a variety of weights balanced next to it on a rack.

Kat, in a regular routine, set gradients and speeds on one of the treadmills and began pounding away.

John headed to the weights and adjusted the bench. He lay on his back with his feet placed either side on the floor and, within minutes, was heaving the metal bar up and down rhythmically. His bunched up biceps pushed to the max, a slight shake evident as the tension built.

Kat ran for thirty minutes before switching to the much-hated step machine. She was conscious of John behind her at the weights and shot a sneaky look in the mirror to see if he was watching her, but he didn't so much as glance at her Lycra-clad body. He was far too busy fiddling with weights and getting himself all pumped up. Grunting and huffing as he clanked metal on metal like a caveman.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

Finally, after another thirty minutes, Kat came to the end of her tri-weekly routine. John had barely noticed her in the last hour, and she wondered with hindsight if she should have sneaked up to her apartment, locked him out and refused to let him back in. But it was too late for that now, and besides, he'd picked her lock before. Normal rules didn't seem to apply to John when it came to using doors.

"Hey," she said, wiping her damp face with a towel. "I'm done here."

John sat up from the bench. He was wearing shorts and a black T-shirt, both of which showed signs of serious sweating, as did his forehead.

"Yeah, me too." He stood, wiped the bench and pressed a paper towel to his face. "Come on then."

Back in the flat, they filled tumblers of water and noisily quenched their thirsts in the kitchen, then Kat went into the bathroom, shut and locked the door. What she needed now was a nice long soak in the bath.

Extravagant as always, she tipped in a huge quantity of luxurious jasmine bubble bath and turned the hot tap on full, blasting the large white bath with frothing, steaming water—a soup of overflowing bubbles.

"What you doing in there?" John called after a minute of the water running on full.

"Having a bath," Kat shouted through the door then muttered into the gathering steam, "Like it's any of your business."

"I want a shower, so hurry the hell up, will you?"



Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"I won't be long," Kat called sweetly. She would take even longer now she knew he was waiting.

She stripped off her gym gear, shoved it in the corner and, with a blissful sigh, sank into the piping hot, ridiculously deep bath. She breathed in the delicious sweet scent of the bubbles. The water felt so good on her tired, aching muscles. Soothing and caressing, it would soak away the aches of the gym.

She lay for sometime in a state of utter relaxation. When the water started to cool, she used her big toe to flick on the faucet, letting more scorching water pour around her feet. Swirling water lazily with her foot, Kat enjoyed the heat spreading up her body. She would be able to loll happily for some time yet.

"What the hell are you doing?" John barked through the door.

"I told you, having a bath," Kat replied, smiling at her small victory as she heard him groan in frustration.

The groan reminded her of the moaning noises he'd made as she'd sucked his cock. He'd tried to keep it quiet but low, hungry noises had oozed from his lips along with several vibrating grunts as he's poured himself into her mouth. Kat found her hand slipping down between her legs. Her clit was out from its hood, hot and engorged, and felt like a silk button in the bubbles. Gently, she let her index finger trail over it, teasing it, tempting it. Picturing John's cock twitching for her mouth's attentions had her humming with heat that had nothing to do with the hot water. She sent her other hand to her breasts and rolled her pointed nipples into peaks

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*by Lily Harlem*

the way John had that first night. Pinched gently and twisted them to needy stalks.

She fluttered her eyes shut. A lazy orgasm in the bath would be just right after her workout. She rubbed a little harder, circling all the flesh around her clit as her buttocks tightened on the hard base of the bath. Blood rushed to her pussy as her nerve endings climbed that first rung towards satisfaction. She sighed and fretted a little harder, her pelvis lifting to meet her own fingers and the muscles of her thighs contracting.

Suddenly, with a sharp click, the bathroom lock spun, and John strode in.

"Hey... what the hell do you think you're doing?" Kat squealed, pulling her hand out from between her legs.

"Having a shower." John strode to the shower cubicle and jacked the water on. Without even glancing in Kat's direction, he proceeded to strip off his T-shirt, shorts and boxers, kicking them to mix with her pile of clothing.

"You can't have a shower. I'm in the bath!" Kat squeaked, trying to arrange bubbles over her erect nipples.

"Like we haven't already seen what the other's got to offer," John scoffed as he pushed into the blasting shower water. "We've been intimate already, several times, or had you forgotten that minor detail about our relationship?"

Kat scowled. He'd interrupted her plan of a lazy wank; she'd just started to buzz, just started to mix her own juice with the bath. She found herself absorbing the sight of his body as he held his face up to the water and let it beat down on his golden skin. Her gaze drifted down his wide, muscular

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*by Lily Harlem*

back, which tapered into a triangle at his hips. She sent a hand back between her legs and appreciated his perfectly formed butt as she treated her clit to a sneaky rotation. Her eyes slid farther to his legs and the red, worm like scars behind his left knee. Raised and angry, they spoilt what was otherwise a perfect example of the male body.

He reached for her favourite, expensive shampoo and took a liberal squirt. She was about to complain but stopped. It would have let him know she was studying him. He would turn around and see her touching herself as she gorged on the sight of his naked body. She didn't want to give him the satisfaction.

He filled his hair with bubbles and reached for her shower gel. Within seconds, he was covered in a billion suds. He turned to face her with his eyes closed tightly and for a split second, Kat caught his impressive front view. She slid a small finger into her swelling entrance, imagining as she did so it was his cock. It was semi erect and she wondered if that was its permanent state.

As quickly as he'd gotten in the shower, John rinsed off and stepped out. Kat kept her hand where it was—a sudden upward splash would have let him know what she was doing. He wrapped a towel around his waist and, still dripping, wandered out the bathroom. Kat was about to leap up and lock the door when he sauntered back in carrying a razor and shaving gel.

"Can't that wait till later?" she huffed.

"Always best to shave when the pores are open," he said, dropping the plug in the sink.

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*by Lily Harlem*

Kat lay back, thoroughly irritated, but after a few minutes of submergence, carefully circling her clit so as not to generate telltale ripples, she became fascinated watching him shave. First, he lathered his neck, jaw and cheeks until covered in white foam, then he took his razor, ran it under the hot tap and proceeded to drag the blade down his cheek. A rasping noise reached her ears. It sounded scratchy and prickly yet left a perfectly clean trail of stubble free skin behind it.

In the reflection, he caught her staring at him. "What? You never seen someone shave before?"

"No."

"You never watched your dad shave when you were a little girl?"

"I didn't have a dad."

He swept the razor upwards from his Adam's apple and hooked it over his chin. "I thought your parents lived in Cornwall?"

Kat couldn't honestly remember feeling so uncomfortable, so exposed and vulnerable in her entire life. Here she was trapped in her own bath, being asked questions by a brute of a man about the one subject that could twist her heart in two, bulldoze down the very high wall she'd built around herself. "I made that up. I grew up in care. I've never met my parents."

John stretched his mouth downwards as he shaved above his top lip. "No sister either then, living and working as a journalist in New York."

God, he remembered a lot of her fabrications. "No," she confirmed. "No sister. No parents and no friends either. Just

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me. I'm my own family. That's all I've ever needed and it suits me fine."

John said nothing. He rinsed his razor one last time before propping it up against the tiles. He bent low over the sink, cupped his hands and splashed water onto his face. As he patted his face dry with yet another fresh towel, he said, "Sorry about that, must have been pretty rough growing up."

Kat felt her eyes fill at his words. Why was he being nice all of a sudden? She preferred the sarcasm, the bullying. She knew where she stood with that. Could handle it. She didn't want or need his sympathy; she was fine on her own. She'd accepted her lot years ago. There was nothing she could do about her solitary journey through life so what was the point worrying about it? "Get out of here, will you?" she ordered, not wanting him to see the moisture forming on her lower eyelids.

He bent down by the bath, reached forward and gently cupped her cheek with his palm.

"Surely you've finished by now!" she muttered, flicking her head to the tiled wall to remove his hand from her face.

John straightened and left the bathroom, shutting the door quietly.

Kat shoved three angry fingers inside her hot pussy and her other hand flew furiously over her clit. The explosion was almost instantaneous, a great volcano of sensation riding up her flesh and balancing her on a precipice. She pictured John's face, John's cock, John's chest, John's butt in the shower covered in suds. Her neck arched back on the bath and her knees fell wide as her orgasm crashed over her. She

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heard the slaps of the water against the sides and had to bite down on her lip to prevent crying out his name as her cunt clamped around her fingers, pulsing and squeezing. She didn't know why she wanted to say his name. It was just there—again. It was annoying. *He* was annoying.

When she finally emerged, she composed herself and pulled on a pale blue tracksuit. John was whistling and banging pots and pans about.

"Hey," he said when he noticed her standing in the kitchen doorway. "I've made dinner."

"I'll have a microwave meal." She studied him. The shave made him look different. Since she'd met him on Saturday night, she'd gotten used to the increasingly dark stubble growing around his face and down his neck. Now he looked civilised, like a man who'd look seriously good in a suit. It made her feel less threatened. He wasn't such a Neanderthal to have roaming about her home with his clean cut appearance.

"No you won't. I've cooked a chilli." He pulled open the fridge and reached for a bottle of Chardonnay.

"I don't need you to cook for me. I can look after myself. I'm not bloody *Oliver Twist*!"

"I'm not cooking for you." He slid the cork from the Chardonnay. "I'm cooking for me. There just happens to be enough for you as well." He splashed wine into a waiting glass.

Kat clamped her mouth shut. It did smelt divine—tomatoes, oregano and basil with a hint of hot spice.

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by Lily Harlem

John held out the glass. She lifted it to her lips and took a sip. He hovered in front of her, expectant, waiting for some kind of appreciation for his gesture.

Kat remained silent, not meeting his eyes, simply staring past him. She wasn't about to say thank you for anything he did. Not when he'd moved in without being invited.

John looked down at her stubborn little face. She looked small and lost. Defiant and immoral, yes, but also utterly alone. She was nothing but a temptress, a thief, and had ruined the rest of his life, but it was no good. There was something about her that sparked his interest. He wanted to know more about her, find out why she was who she was. How had she managed all these years being so totally alone in the world? It fascinated him that someone could be so self sufficient right from being a child. Especially someone who looked so vulnerable. Although, he thought ruefully, *she* clearly didn't think she was vulnerable, judging by the way she was prepared to put up a fist fight.

He reached for her free hand, fully expecting her to snatch it away. To his surprise, she didn't, so he lifted it to hover in front of his mouth. "Did you think of me?"

"What are you talking about?"

"When you touched yourself in the bath, were you thinking of me?" He pulled her fingertips onto the softness of his lips, sent out the tip of his tongue to lick them.

She locked her green eyes on his, and he saw the gold flecks glint.

"You taste of soap and lotion. I wish you didn't," he murmured around her fingers. His lids dropped to half mast.

"I wish I could taste the essence of you. Find out more about the real Kat."

His tongue formed a tube and pulled her index finger in with a light suction. The finger he knew had just given her an orgasm, the one that had circled her clit so expertly the way he wanted to again.

She pulled out her finger but kept her hand near his face. Slowly, she rubbed his cheek as if feeling the results of the shaving ritual she'd witnessed.

"It would be fair," he said quietly. "You've tasted me."

"I don't play fair," she said. "And I thought only of myself. I find that works best."

Desire and lust grew within him. She must have sensed it because she dropped her hand, turned and strutted into the living room. "Dinner would be good," she threw over her shoulder, leaving him with a raging hard on that would get no attention.

Unlike Kat, John wasn't into doing it for himself.

They sat at opposite ends of the sofa, chilli and rice balanced on their laps, eating in silence. Some obscure TV channel was showing an old war movie. John was in to it and kept adding comments like, "That would never happen!" or "Surely they'd see that coming!"

Kat ate her dinner gratefully; it was surprisingly good. She couldn't remember the last time anyone had cooked for her.

As soon as they'd finished eating, she scooped up both plates and carried them into the kitchen. She loaded the dishwasher and wiped down the kitchen surfaces, rearranged things John had moved so they were back in their correct



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*by Lily Harlem*

positions. Happy everything was as it should be, she pulled open the fridge and splashed more wine into her glass.

She walked down the corridor towards her bedroom and paused by the living room. John was helping himself to another whisky at the drinks cabinet. "Thanks for dinner," she said.

"Like I said, I was making it anyway," he replied as he twisted the lid back on the bottle.

Kat shrugged and left him to it, so much for being less Neanderthal. She went into her room. After shutting the door, she pulled a glossy magazine from the bottom of a towering pile, which sent the balance toppling, and flopped onto her unmade bed. She'd have an early night. The emotional strain of the last few days was finally catching up with her. She was tired of John and tired of his ways. She didn't need him. She could keep herself fed and satisfied.

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## Chapter Five

\* \* \* \*

Kat emerged from her room, dressed and ready to go. She wore an impossibly short black skirt along with a white silk blouse and teetered on pillar box red heels. A chunky matching red necklace fell between her jutting cleavage.

"Ten-minute warning!" she called into the living room.

John, who looked like he was asleep but had been listening to her banging around for over an hour, smiled in triumph. Her submission was only a small victory, but never the less it was a victory.

He swung his feet to the carpet, pushed up and took the first painful steps of the day. He hobbled into the kitchen, checked the kettle for water then flicked the switch. Backing up against the counter, he took the weight off his left leg and waited for his morning dose of caffeine.

Kat was fiddling around in an enormous scarlet handbag. Haphazardly, items clattered onto the kitchen work surface, scattering this way and that, and an escapee lipstick rolled to the floor. Making no move to retrieve the stray item, she continued to sift her jumbled pile. Perfume bottles, bits of make-up, receipts, and oddments of jewellery all fell between her fingers. Then she scooped it like water and splashed it back into her bag, apparently happy with her load.

John watched in curious silence. "Where we going today, Pussy Cat?" he asked, his voice still gruff from his half sleep.

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*by Lily Harlem*

Kat surveyed him from under feathery lashes, bent and reached for the lipstick. "Shopping. I need new clothes."

John raised his eyebrows. Shopping! That sounded as bad as the hairdressers. And new clothes, how could the woman possibly need new clothes? He hadn't seen her in the same thing twice. A different outfit every day, and some days, she changed hour to hour depending on her activity. "Exactly where are we going shopping?" he asked without enthusiasm, spooning coffee granules into two cups.

"I fancy Oxford Street." She took the coffee he offered without thanks.

John groaned. "And what if I said we're not?"

Kat took a sip of her black coffee before saying sweetly. "But I thought you might like some new clothes too." Her red lips turned up at the corners, but the smile went nowhere near her eyes. "You know, ready for your life in the sun."

"Yeah, sure you did," he answered, limping out of the kitchen coffee in hand. "Just like you thought of me last Saturday when you stole my damn Porsche."

\* \* \* \*

Kat refused to ride the bike in her skirt so they sat in stony silence in a cab. Kat sensed John looking at her as if he was about to say something but kept stopping himself. In the end, he leant forward and said a few hushed words to the driver.

When they pulled up, they weren't on Oxford Street as she'd instructed. They were parked in a decidedly seedy looking backstreet. "Hey, why are we here?" Kat demanded with a frown.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"I thought I'd show you my type of shopping." John leant over her bare thighs and swung open her door. "After you."

Kat muttered under her breath but curiosity got the better of her and she stepped out over the foul gutter onto the littered street. "There's no shops around here," she tutted as John unfolded out the cab next to her.

"Over here." He wrapped an arm around her waist and urged her to the left. They passed a row of rancid wheelie bins, a boarded up house covered in graffiti and a deep doorway with a hunched figure cocooned in a ripped sleeping bag. They came to a stop by a steel armoured door. A chipped sign read 'Over 18's only'.

Kat glanced at the window next to it. It was blacked out with rough strokes of thick paint and protected by solid steel railings. "What sort of shop is this?"

"The sort of shop I think you might just like, Pussy Cat." He winked.

It made her mad when he acted all superior, like he knew something she didn't. It was exactly how teachers and social workers had always spoken to her. Like she was missing the point, not grasping life, when she actually did. She got it better than most. Keeping her head above water was the name of the game. She wasn't interested in the rest—hat was superfluous. "Well, if there's no Prada, I can't see how it will appeal," she huffed, feeling her mood tighten.

"Oh, I think it will." He tapped his finger on the end of her nose and pushed open the door. "You just don't know it yet."

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

A tinny bell sounded as he shoed her inside. The air was musty and stale, the lighting subdued and she had to lift her feet over curled orange lino.

"Mornin'." A deep, male voice came directly from her left. She spun and was faced with an enormous middle-aged man. He sat by an ancient malt brown till balanced on a grainy security screen. Sweat droplets hung on his forehead, and his shirt was unbuttoned way down low, revealing flushed red skin splattered with moles and grey curls. His eyes loitered down Kat's shapely, exposed legs, and he swept his fat tongue over his lips.

John nodded at him, a muscle flexed in his jaw, then he tightened the hold on her waist and steered her past shelves stuffed with intriguingly shaped items.

"Twenty percent off lesbian DVDs today," the obese man called in a wheezing voice.

"Bear it in mind," John said through gritted teeth, parting a heavy bamboo curtain and pushing Kat through it.

In the next room, each of the four walls were crammed full of DVDs, all highlighted by spotlights. The spotlights made it far too warm, and Kat felt her cheeks flush. "What are we doing here?" she asked again, finally stopping her forward momentum now John had removed his hand from her lower back.

"I thought we could do with some light entertainment." He flicked his gaze around. "There's not much on TV we both want to watch."

"What are you on about?" she snapped.

"Well, you clearly couldn't stand the war film last night."

Thief  
by Lily Harlem

Kat shook her head incredulously. "You brought me here because of that?"

"No." He lowered his head to hers. "I brought you here because I want to get to know the real Kat, what really turns you on. You choose a DVD and so will I. It will be very revealing about our deepest, darkest desires."

Kat swallowed. He was challenging her again, daring her to pick a subject. Something that would get her hot then he would nag away at it like a fingernail on an insect bite.

"You never know," he went on. "We might choose the same fantasy and then we'll know we were destined to be together."

"Oh, shut up, will you? This is a business arrangement, as well you know."

John shrugged and lifted his brows.

"What's that look for?" Kat demanded.

"Business partners don't usually get quite as intimate as we have." John twitched his brows.

"Have, that's right, have in the past tense."

He winked again, and before she could move away, he pressed a sharp kiss to her lips. "We'll see. I'm going to have a look at the stuff in the front room. You start browsing."

Kat slammed her hands to her hips and tutted. Why was he kissing her, and what the hell did he mean, 'we'll see'? She spun away from his retreating back; she didn't want to look at his perfect, denim-encased rear.

Her eyes peeled over the titles in front of her. *Lesbians lick Lilly*, *Cunts that Beg*, and *The Sailor's Sperm Wails* were just a few. She reached out a finger and touched the frozen face

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of a woman on the cover of a yellow box. She had a similar look to Kat. Long black hair, generous breasts with dark nipples and green almond-shaped eyes topped with neatly arched brows. Kat moved closer. The woman was bent on all fours, and the torso of a dark-skinned man could be made out behind her. He was clutching her hips with curled fingers and was also on his knees. Whatever he was doing had her mouth wide open in a scream of ecstasy crossed with something that looked scarily like agony. Her eyes were wide but glazed, her tongue flat on the base of her mouth, a droplet of sweat perched in the hollow of her neck.

Kat felt a rush of warmth to her pussy. Just looking at the woman's face reminded her of how it had felt when John had fucked her wildly in the shower, when he had shoved his cock up inside her and his fingers into her back side. She beat down a delicious tremble of desire as she read the title of the DVD—*Anal Virgin Takes It All*. That was her. She was an anal virgin. Did fingers count? No, she didn't think so. Suddenly, she wanted that DVD. Not to show John what she'd chosen, but she wanted it for herself, to watch, to see what it would be like—the big taboo of sex.

She moved to the bamboo curtain and peered through a gap created by a missing string. John stood at the till, talking to the cashier. She glanced up at the security camera in the corner. It was facing her, but she reckoned it was worth the risk. The sales guy seemed pretty distracted. She walked back over to the DVD and, with lightning speed, dropped it in her bag. Just as John parted the curtain, she stuck out her hand and reached for another DVD.

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"Found anything?" he asked lightly.

"No, but clearly you did." She nodded at the bulging brown bag in his hand.

"Yeah, just a few essentials." A half smile tipped his lips. "What's that you've got." He loomed next to her and twisted the DVD she gripped in her hand. "*Seven Days and Seven Nights—Bound and Gagged*." His mouth broke into a full wattage grin. "Well, if I'd known that was what you wanted, Pussy Cat, I would've been more than happy to oblige." He pushed a finger to his temple as if in deep thought. "In fact, I think I did suggest it."

"You're all talk and no action, John, so just shut up, will you?" Kat couldn't believe the apt title of the DVD she'd grabbed in haste.

"I think we both know that's not true." His eyes glistened, and his voice deepened an octave. "You know full well I can provide the action, you just got to say the word, baby."

Kat slammed the DVD back on the shelf with a clatter. "Let's just get to Oxford Street. That fat sweaty guy gives me the creeps."

\* \* \* \*

Kat dropped her shopping on the hall floor and flopped exhausted on the sofa. She was tired from battling the crowds, and the images from the adult shop were still rattling around in her head. Her curiosity had been lit like a bonfire, and she couldn't wait for John to leave so she could watch her new DVD.



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As she sank her head back into the cushions, she realised the urge to check the inside of all of her cupboards and behind all the doors for lurking attackers had gone. It was strange, the absence of her ritual. She hadn't even noticed she'd given it up until now.

She glanced towards John standing at the drinks cabinet, pouring his first whisky of the day.

The obsessive compulsion had disappeared because her fears had finally been realised. John. Here he was, her imagined attacker, no longer imagined, standing in front of her and making himself well and truly at home. Her nightmare had moved in.

It was him she'd always imagined lurking about in the dark corners of her home, and he'd finally shown himself. Absently, she wondered if he was a figment of her imagination and she had a hallucination confused with reality. Maybe she'd spent too many years alone and sent herself completely round the bend. Maybe the hunk of man she saw before her was no more than an illusion. A trick of the light her lonely soul had played.

She was about to pinch the flesh of her forearm when she felt the sofa sag as John sank himself down. *No*, she thought as her body moved on the cushions, *he's real*. An imagined house guest wouldn't make the sofa sink like that or take up over half of it.

She studied John's chiselled profile as he took a deep mouthful of the fiery liquid. His eyes screwed up as the first mouthful hit the back of his throat.

"Is your knee bad today?"

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"It's been worse."

"My feet ache after Oxford Street. They always do." She flipped off her heels. "Maybe one day, I'll learn to wear walking shoes for shopping. It would be more comfortable." She reached for the cream suede cushion and embraced it like a shield.

John bent to put his drink on the table, and as he straightened, he grabbed her ankles and lifted her bare feet onto his lap.

"Hey! What are you doing?" Kat exclaimed, twisting her ankles as her body slid down the slippery leather. "Get off me, will you!"

"Stop wriggling," he ordered. "You said your feet ached, didn't you?"

Kat stilled as big, cool hands engulfed her throbbing left foot and applied a strong, steady pressure to the aching ball.

She was transported to heaven.

He rubbed his thumb in a circle over the sole and flexed her stiff toes, first one way then the other with the palm of his hand. She let out a sigh and dropped her head sideways against the sofa, still hugging the cushion to her chest. It felt good, more than good. What he was doing felt great. All those times her feet had felt fit to burst after she'd been shopping and this was all she'd needed, a man to rub and knead them back to life. Revive them with strength and gentleness combined.

She found herself lazily studying the snake tattoo on his lower arm. She hadn't taken much notice of it before, but with all the muscles tensing and flexing, it looked as if the

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reptile had come to life. Its long body rippled and rolled, twitching and flexing in time with his muscles. Its individual scales moved against each other in a fascinating visual effect.

"What type of snake is that?" she asked in a low voice.

"A cobra."

"Any particular reason why you have a cobra on your arm?"

"It was the name of my unit—Cobra One."

"Unit? What do you mean unit?"

"In the military. I was in the army."

Kat nodded and looked down at it again. A blissful tingle travelled all the way up her calf as he worked his fingers deep into the arch of her right foot. "Is that where you hurt your leg?"

"Yep."

"Did you get shot?"

"Yep."

"That must have really hurt."

"Yep."

"Is that why you left the army? Because you got shot?"

John gazed out the balcony doors at the London skyline. His hands continued to work gently, but there was a heavy bitterness in his voice. "You can't stay in the army if your leg is so fucked you have to have a whisky to walk."

"Can't they fix it up?"

"They've done their best. I was lucky to keep the leg, although sometimes I wonder if I'd be better off without the damn thing."

"So what happened, who shot you?"

"A son of a bitch who paid for it with his life a split second after he'd fired the gun. But if it hadn't been for my mate, he'd have taken out my other leg. He'd already had a go at my chest."

Kat's eyebrows rose, and John turned back to her.

"I was wearing a vest," he explained.

"Vest?" Kat said with a slight shake of her head.

"Bulletproof."

"Oh."

"We looked out for each other Cobra One. We were a team and a bloody good one at that."

Kat didn't know what it was like to be part of a team, but she nodded encouragingly for him to go on.

"It was like losing my family when I left. Suddenly, I was on my own. No commanding officer telling me what to do or where to go next. No guys to hang out with." He took a deep breath and watched the movements of his hands on her feet. "It was weird when I got out of hospital, being alone in the world. I'd always had company, someone to be with and somewhere to belong. It messed with my head big time."

"What about your parents?"

"Mum left before I was two, I don't remember her at all. Dad, God rest his soul, died of a heart attack a few years back."

"I'm sorry."

"Yeah, me too. I was real pissed about it for a long time. I never got the chance to say goodbye 'cause I was in Bosnia when it happened." John stopped with her feet and reached

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for his drink again, bending over her ankles and pressing them into his lap with the hard muscles of his stomach.

He took a drink and set the glass back down. "He'd turn in his grave if he knew what I was up to with those diamonds. It was him who taught me the trade. He wanted me to have something to fall back on if life got tough. I don't think this was quite what he had in mind." John frowned. "He was so proud of me climbing up the ranks and travelling to trouble hotspots to sort out problems for our country. He would have told everyone if he could."

As he took hold of her left foot again, Kat saw a different man sitting on the other end of her sofa. The John *behind* the macho-ordering-her-about stuff. He had guilt issues about taking the diamonds. He hurt inside about the loss of his father and mates, and he was clearly still haunted by the shooting and was searching for a way to equal the shitty hand life had dealt him. He was alone in the world too now, just like she'd always been—no one to turn to, no people to call his own. He'd lost everyone, everything he once had. At least she'd never had it to lose it. She didn't know what it was like to have love and security then have it ripped away. She reckoned she was better off. "You're doing what you need to do to survive," she said quietly. "You learnt about survival in the army. So what's the difference now you're out?"

"One major difference." He laughed without humour. "I was the good guy back then, now I'm the bad guy. A thief, a liar. The people I've robbed would be real unhappy if they found out their precious stones were cheap cuts of cubic zirconia or, worse still, cuts of glass."

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by Lily Harlem

"Is that how you got the diamonds?"

"Yeah, I just swapped them. Customers needed stuff altered—by me—and I just replaced the diamonds for odd bits I'd picked up cheap. No one noticed."

"How could they not notice?" She would notice if anything of hers wasn't genuine.

"Because people only really study the gems when they're buying them, under the lights of the shop. After that, it's just friends who admire, and who'd comment on clarity and risk offending?" He shrugged. "I've only done it for a year, didn't fancy pushing my luck. Someone would have noticed eventually."

"Sensible. Pushing your luck never works out."

"I learnt how to cope with the guilt, though. I just think of the imbeciles I saved who are happily getting on with their lives. I bet they barely give a passing thought to the guy who saved them and then caught a bullet in the leg. Why would they? They're out, free to go and get in trouble again if that's what they want to do. But it won't be me saving them this time. It will be some other mug lining himself up for a bullet if he lets his guard down for a split second." He frowned and shook his head. "A split second, that's all it takes to have your life taken away in every sense of the word—except, of course, for the fact that your heart is still beating."

"Your heart *is* still beating, exactly, and you're surviving, which is sometimes the best you can hope for." Kat narrowed her eyes. "Do you think I like what I do?"

John didn't offer comment.

"Do you?"

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*by Lily Harlem*

He lifted her feet from his lap and pushed upright, moved without limping to the drinks cabinet. "You want one?" he asked, pulling open the door.

"No." Kat hugged her knees around the cushion. She felt the need to explain to someone for the first time ever about her lifestyle. It was a strange, unfamiliar urge, and she was glad she could speak to his back instead of his face. "I don't like what I do. I don't like it at all, I hate it. Having sex with sad, old creeps just to get their car keys sucks as far as a career goes. Hardly what I had in mind when I left school."

John turned mid-pour. "Thanks a lot," he muttered. Didn't realise I was such a loser."

Kat frowned. She hadn't meant to offend him. "I tried to get by through legal means, really I did. For five years, I tried. But I'd left foster care at seventeen without a backward glance. I had a crappy, damp bed-sit, no money, no food, and absolutely no one to turn to. I was about to get turfed out on the street by my creep of a landlord. I was three months behind on rent. Then, eight months ago, Carlos came along. He was a customer in the restaurant I was working in. He always ate alone and always requested me as his server. One evening, he offered to take me for dinner after my shift."

John shut the drinks cabinet door. "What, like a date? I didn't see much of him the other night, but he hardly looks your type."

"I don't have a type. I've never had a boyfriend, and I don't want one. I only went out with him because I was hungry. It sucks being forced to eat scraps off people's plates."

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*by Lily Harlem*

John sat back on the sofa and reached for her feet again. "So how did you end up using your body to get cars for him? Was it just the money or does he have some other kind of hold on you?"

"It started off the money and, of course, a roof over my head." She pointed to the ceiling above her. "He offered me this place and riches beyond my wildest dreams. Thousands of pounds in one weekend and all for so little effort. A bit of flirting, a bit of flattery, then lay back and pray for it to be over. These days, I get the guys so drunk they pass out before they even get undressed. That way I can help myself to their keys without ever having to get cosy with them. A much better arrangement as far as I'm concerned."

"Lucky for me I can hold my drink, eh?" John smirked as he lifted his glass to his lips.

Kat ignored him. "It was like a dream come true to begin with, living here, having money. I didn't even think much about the moral aspect. I just did it to survive. I was more worried about personal safety than getting caught by the law. Going back to strange men's houses each weekend, I wanted to be able to look after myself if things started to get dicey. You know if I had an oddball to cope with, but karate had been something I'd kept up all through my teenage years. Some busy bee social worker had got me started on it, thought it would keep me out of trouble, so it didn't take long to brush up my skills."

"Except you didn't count on facing someone bigger than you and who could also fight?"



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by Lily Harlem

"I always hoped tactic would outwit brawn and muscle." She scowled, still cross the struggle outside the bathroom hadn't gone her way. "But even so, in spite of what you think of me using my body for money, I've been doing exactly the same as you, surviving, and I'm not going to apologise for that, not to anyone. Surviving is the best I've always hoped for."

John swirled the liquid in his glass. "So why are you still doing it? You must have enough dough by now."

"I'm in too deep with Carlos. It's not the sort of job you can just hand in your notice."

"You think he'll hurt you—physically?"

"I don't *think*. I *know*. He's got another flat downstairs. The girl there disappeared three months ago, and now, someone else has taken her place."

"You think he's killed her?"

"I don't know and I don't want to. There's a redhead who comes and goes from there now, and I've never seen the blonde again." Kat paused. "Sometimes I wish I'd never gone to dinner with him and taken him up on his proposition, but at the same time, if I hadn't gone along with it, goodness knows where I'd be now. Wages and tips weren't covering the rent, let alone bills. I'd be on the streets. Hell, I'd been only days from that very predicament. It was a scary prospect to be facing, I can tell you." She leant forward and crinkled her brow in earnest, "Survival. That's all this life is about, John, and if you can have a few luxuries along the way," she gestured with her hand around the room, "then why not? It

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makes life an easier pill to swallow, so don't beat yourself up about it. I don't."

"You really don't see a problem with it do you?" he said, tipping his head and studying her. "Most people would condemn me for what I've done, but to you, it's different."

"You have to look out for number one, and apart from anything else you feel you're owed, you gave something up—your leg—and you're taking something back in return."

John looked out the window at the London skyline again.

She interrupted his thoughtfulness. "But I will say sorry for kicking your bad knee the other night."

John raised an eyebrow. "But you're not going to apologise for stealing my car, because in case you hadn't noticed, that's what's really rattled my cage."

"No, that's my job. But...." she paused and treated him to dazzling smile, "I will help you get it back. After all, thieves like us should stick together."

John knocked down the last of his drink.

"Till we've got the loot," she added. "And then you'll leave?"

"That's the deal," he said. "And I've bought you a present to remember me by."

"A present?"

"Yeah," his voice turned gravelly, "but it's a present with a condition."

"I don't know if I like the sound of that." She gave a nervous huff.

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*by Lily Harlem*

"You will, Pussy Cat, trust me, you will." His hand slide up her smooth bare leg, over her knee and came to rest just below the thin hem of her short skirt.

"So what's the condition?"

The tips of his fingers shot streaks of heat to her belly. She considered squirming, but his hand felt strong and sure, and she decided she liked the feel of his warm, hard skin on hers.

"I get first play."

"First play?"

"Yeah."

"What do you mean?"

John reached down the side of the sofa and retrieved the brown bag from the sex shop. The paper crinkled like a crisp packet in the silent room as he reached inside. From it, he pulled a long black vibrator. It was shiny and ridged with wormy veins. The head was thick and over defined, and it had a small attachment near the base, a stalk with two tiny ears. Kat wondered which way round the attachment went. Was it for her anus or her clit? With John, she wasn't sure. A shiver of delight tickled its way up her spine, and she wondered if she might go along with both options.

"Well?" he said.

Kat looked at his profile again. The sun had shifted and was directly behind his head through the patio doors. She couldn't make out his expression, just the hard lines of his jaw and his buzzed hair outlined by the silver white light.

"So I get first go?" he asked quietly.

She swallowed and felt heat pooling between her thighs. The thought of John using the vibrator on her was a massive

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turn on. She was still buzzing at the memory of the DVD titles and the woman's enraptured face on the one she'd stolen.

"Say yes," he murmured in a voice that flowed over her skin like syrup. "I owe you an orgasm after the Kawasaki shop."

Kat bit her lip. She would prefer to take it to her room and experiment on her own. She'd never tried a vibrator before, never had the opportunity.

"You can't have it unless you stick to the condition." John went to put it away again as if reading her thoughts.

"Okay," she said quickly before she changed her mind. She couldn't see his face but sensed his smile of approval.

His exploring fingers travelled the few inches under the hem of her skirt and stroked over the silk gusset of her knickers. "Take these off then."

Kat throbbed at his bold touch and sucked in a nerve steadying breath. She raised her hips and wriggled at the elastic of her thong. As soon as the scrap of material was at her hem line, John reached for it. Big fingers curling, he pulled it over her knees and looped it over her ankles. He held it up to the sunlight. "I can't believe you wore such a tiny pair of knickers with that short skirt."

"Nobody knew."

"If I'd known, I wouldn't have been able to resist a cheeky grope."

Kat pushed her knees together. "Do you think I would have let you?"

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*by Lily Harlem*

"Yes." He slipped his fingers into the slight gap at the bottom of her thighs and exerted a gentle pressure.

"Somehow I think you would have."

Kat gulped in air, the silence and brightness in the room making the moment surreal.

"You gonna have to open up way more than that, Pussy Cat."

Kat relaxed her tense muscles a fraction.

"It's okay. I won't hurt you."

"You said that before."

"And did I hurt you?"

"No."

"There you go then."

He was behaving the same way he had that first night in his apartment, sweet and confident, gently reassuring. She liked it. She trusted him when he was like this. She let her knees fall apart, and he took hold of her ankles and bent her legs up. He pushed one into the back cushion of the couch and held it there with the tip of his shoulder and let the other leg slip to the floor. He dragged the cushion from her chest and, in one smooth scoop, shoved it under her hips, jutting her sex up towards him.

"Damn, I love that bald pussy," he said, his head tipping as he studied her.

Kat squirmed her pelvis. She was laid so open and bare for his scrutiny. She knew the blinding white sunshine was highlighting every tiny crevice of her labia, every wrinkle, fold and, heaven forbid, missed pubic hair. She went to shift her

hips again, but his hand came down on the skirt he'd pushed up like a belt.

"Keep still," he murmured. "You look beautiful."

Kat did as he asked, tried to force away the tremor she could feel tapping on her inner thighs. "You going to use the vibrator or not, soldier?" she said in a shaky voice.

"Yeah, just admiring the view." He shifted slightly and reached his other hand forward. He trailed it down the inside of the thigh bent up the back of the couch. "You're so pretty and pink, silky and shiny. Are you wet?"

She gulped.

The trailing finger dipped towards the entrance of her pussy, just circling it once before moving in a fraction. Kat could sense his eyes lift to hers, watching her reactions. She tugged at her bottom lip and held her gaze steady.

"Good and wet," he said. "You've been working on that for a while. What's been on your mind?"

"Nothing." Certainly not the contents of the DVD she'd stolen.

He pulled his hand away and reached for the vibrator. He held it up to the sunshine, and Kat saw its silhouette by his face. It looked big and hard, scary but exciting. Her internal muscles quivered in anticipation.

It went from her view as he nudged it at her entrance. The head was cold and rigid, and suddenly, she wondered if it really would slide in. The texture felt so different to flesh.

"Relax," John said. She heard the paper bag rustle again.

"What are you doing?" she asked anxiously.

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*by Lily Harlem*

"Just some extra lube. Shhh... Close your eyes and relax, baby."

He nudged it back into place, swirling and mixing the cool lube with her hot juices as he ventured in an inch.

Kat gasped and arched her head into the arm of the sofa. She sent a hand down to wrap around his wrist, needing some kind of control of this new experience.

"Is it sore?"

"No."

"What is it then?"

"It's really cold."

He chuckled. "It'll soon warm up." He eased inside a bit more, pulled out then pushed back. He set a gentle rocking motion that stretched and moulded her to its shape with each increasing thrust. It wasn't as big as his cock, and Kat soon felt herself accommodating it, accepting it. Small, moist noises filled the suddenly sweet air. He pushed further in, her milk coating it, gliding it.

The black cock was fucking her, but she didn't think it was enough to make her come. She needed something on her clit; she needed pressure and stimulation there. She looked at John's dark face. His head was bent as he concentrated on the vibrator penetrating her, his expression indecipherable.

"You ready for the good bit?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. The pull in her lower abdomen where he was pressing with the flat of his other hand had become a nagging need. "Yes, the good bit."

The rocking of the vibrator didn't stop as he parted the slick folds around her clit, spreading them outwards so her

nub was vulnerable and exposed. "God, that's a gorgeous sight," he murmured.

Kat felt the same cold texture wrap around her clit as the ears settled on either side. She bucked upwards, feeling a desperate need for pressure, her patience suddenly running dry. She moaned.

"Wait for it," he chuckled. "Just got to find the right switch." It didn't take long, one tap of a button, and the vibrator took off.

Kat hit the roof. Not only was the thick length whirring against the lining of her vagina, the two little ears were fondling her clit at an alarming pace. She thrashed her head back and jerked her hips off the cushion.

"Easy, baby." John cooed. "Easy does it." He repositioned her hips.

Kat gasped and locked her elbow rigid, her fingers digging into the tendons of his wrist. He plunged it slow and gentle, but that made little difference. It was the insistent whirring and buzzing that was doing it. Her whole body was humming, singing, droning from deep within.

"I'm gonna come," Kat said, and she was. It had built that fast. The machine was wickedly designed. She didn't stand a chance. Her clit had taken off into another dimension. Sweat popped on her brow. She reached for the back of the sofa and fisted the cushion. She was being lifted up dangerously high, dangerously fast. What could she do? She was out of control.

"Oh, God," she said, turning her head to the side and screwing up her eyes. "Please."



"What do you want?" John asked, pushing the vibrator even higher up her vagina—the filling sensation went right up to her chest.

"I...I don't know..."

"Maybe it's this?" He pulled the protective folds of her inner labia farther away from her bulging clit and pressed those sinful ears all the tighter alongside the energised nub.

It was most definitely what she wanted.

She flew apart, sliced into a million little pieces.

A scream left her mouth for the briefest of seconds before he was over her, kissing her, capturing the sound. She didn't kiss him back, she couldn't; she just kept her mouth open in total shock. She convulsed, every muscle charging downwards and clenching the vibrating toy with a strength she didn't know those muscles possessed.

Her clit tried to escape the buzzing ears, tried to lose its tormentor now release had been found. She wriggled and pushed her hand against John's shoulder, but he was a dead weight lying on top of her. Not enough to bash air from her lungs, but enough to keep her trapped, trapped as the vibrator carried on pounding and pulsing at her.

"No," she said desperately into his mouth. "No more..."

"It's all good, stay with it."

"No, it's too much," she gasped, squirming wildly. "It hurts, get it out."

"I promise you'll come again if you ride it through."

"No, I...I can't stand it anymore." She balled his T-shirt with her clawing fingers and tugged. "It's too intense. You said you wouldn't hurt me."

"I'm not hurting you. You're mixing up sensations." His scratchy chin pressed against her cheek, and his hand remained locked between her legs, keeping the vibrator pounding away. Her clitoris was stuck in an explosion of overwhelming awareness, her pussy invaded so totally as her treacherous rings of internal muscles kept on spasming and increasing the torment. "No," she whimpered. "No more. I need to pee."

"No, you don't." He pressed his hand harder over her lower belly. "It's hitting your g-spot. Push through the feeling. You won't pee, I promise."

"I will. Get it out." She tugged at his arms, his wrists, but it was like trying to shift a ton of rubble. "I'll pee on you."

His lips locked onto hers again and his tongue delved deep.

Kat tried to wriggle away, but it was no good. He was so physically overpowering when he decided to be. Her clit was bursting, dragging downwards, and her insides were heating up like live flames. She brought her leg from the floor and curled it around John's hip to try and shift his position.

"Catch it again, don't fight it," he said into her mouth. "That second orgasm is right there, deep inside. Set it free, and you'll fly like a bird, Pussy Cat."

Kat flicked open her eyes and looked straight into his. They were dark and intense. There was no malice there, no hostility, just a desire for her to do as he asked, to find that next tsunami of pleasure. She held herself still and cupped her hand around the nape of his neck. Her fingers dug into the taut tendons, and she concentrated for all she was worth

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*by Lily Harlem*

on the piercing depths of his eyes as she struggled to move past the bladder sensation.

Suddenly, the feeling switched. From being the most intolerable stimulation she'd ever known, it turned a full circle and became an exquisite temptation. So deep and so powerful she curled her pelvis forward for more, hardly believing she could after the way it had felt seconds ago.

"That's it, baby, reach for it—reach for the stars." He kept both his hands between their bodies, one pushed on her stomach his fingers spreading her engorged folds so her clit protruded for the ears and the other holding the vibrator steady and deep within her. He didn't move it; it was moving enough on its own with all that swirling and pulsing on full power.

Her mouth opened in a silent gasp. It was coming again, just like he said it would. She could feel it building. But it was different this time. It was coming from within, stacking up from the inside like a ball about to roll down a mountain. She clenched harder at the vibrator, and the muscles of her inner thighs squeezed against his wrist. "John..." she gasped.

"John..."

"I'm here, baby, Let it take you." He put his mouth to her ear and murmured, "I'll catch you, and then it will all be over, I promise."

"Arghh..." Kat tipped over the edge. She let herself fall. Like a tight elastic band being snipped, her torso twanged upwards but could go nowhere because of the big body spread over hers. Her body clenched from her sternum to her knees, every single fibre contracting around the solid plastic

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treating her so wickedly. This wasn't just her clit having a great time. This was something else, something more. John pressed his hand harder over her mound, and the feeling intensified if that was possible. She screwed up her eyes and felt liquid pouring from them, trails of euphoria seeping down her cheeks.

"You want it out now?" John asked into her hair.

"Yes," she squeaked but made no move to release his wrist from between her contracted thighs, her body was still convulsing in utter bliss.

John chuckled and tipped the vibrator forward a fraction.

That was it. Her whole being slumped like a jelly fish, each muscle gave up, only that one spot existed. It throbbed, it pulsed, it sated itself. Her leg fell dumbly to the floor, her hand released his nape and her head fell sideways with a low gurgle of pleasure.

The room went silent as the vibrator stilled.

John lifted his head to look at her. "You okay?"

She didn't answer.

He watched a tear tracking its way down her cheek, lifted his weight and eased down to the other end of the sofa. The vibrator was still inside her, inert and protruding oddly. Gently, he pulled it out. Her flesh tried to hold on to it. Shiny inner lips, startling pink against the black rubber, grasped and rolled slightly outwards.

She moaned and moved her head but her eyes remained tightly shut, and her bones hung floppy.

With a moist pop, the glistening vibrator returned to the daylight.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

With the tip of his index finger, he gently touched her swollen flesh. He flattened his tongue and drew his finger into his mouth, absorbed the essence of her on his palate. She tasted so good, spicy and hot, feminine and intoxicating. He would like to bury his head between her legs and lap more of her elixir but he knew he couldn't. She'd taken as much as she could—for now.

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## Chapter Six

\* \* \* \*

It was the last full day to pass before the hit. John sprawled on the sofa and waited for Kat to march him off somewhere awful. He groaned inwardly at the thought of more shopping. He didn't think he'd be able to stand it if that was her plan for the day.

But at ten o'clock, Kat still hadn't appeared from her bedroom, and there were no sounds of movement. He began to wonder if she'd snuck past him in the middle of the night, left the apartment without him noticing. It would be highly unlikely, but just the same, he felt the sudden need to check on her.

Silently, he moved to her bedroom door, took hold of the handle and gently pressed. The hinge didn't squeak so he pushed it open far enough to poke his head in.

The room was in semi darkness with only a slither of day light sneaking in through the pink flowery curtains hanging at the window. A large double bed dominated the room, and as his eyes adjusted to the dim light, he peered closer to see if he could make out Kat amongst the tumble of covers.

It was hard to tell from the doorway so he nudged the door farther and took a tentative step inside. It was the first time he'd been in Kat's bedroom. He'd taken over the rest of the house, but he'd left her a sanctuary.

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*by Lily Harlem*

The whole room was an assault on his male senses. He'd never seen anything so utterly feminine in his entire life. Because unlike the rest of Kat's flat, neutral in its decoration, tidy and ordered, everything in this room was either pink, fluffy or flowery. Glossy magazines and clothes lay on every available surface, and he had to watch where he stepped because of the assortment of shoes littering the floor. In the far corner of the room stood a long white dressing table covered with bottles, jars and aerosols, along with several hairbrushes of different shapes and sizes and a mountain of makeup overflowing a large wicker basket. There was an enormous silver mirror hanging above the dressing table with several strings of beads and scarves hanging from the corners and a couple of hats perched on hooks.

A delicate, flowery scent hung in the air, and John pulled a delicious lungful into his chest, appreciating its caress through his airways. He heard a small movement coming from the bed. He peered down and saw a little foot with pale pink toenails appear from underneath the frilly covers. Yep, he thought with a smile. She was there. That was definitely Kat's foot; he'd know it anywhere.

He didn't think she'd appreciate him lurking in her room so decided to back out while the going was good. He reversed through the abandoned shoes and spotted the black vibrator lying on the floor. He grinned. He would've liked to watch her use it, to see if she was brave enough to go for a multiple orgasm without him there to catch her. It made him hard just remembering her body shaking and juddering under him, giving herself up so totally to her climax and to his control.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

He shut the door and took a swift, cold shower. Dampened down his desires and took his horny thoughts in hand. Much as he fancied another ride inside her, he wasn't about to force himself on his flat-mate.

He'd shaved, dressed in his new clothes and even made a pot of coffee before she surfaced from her girly pit.

"Morning," he said from the kitchen as she slunk to the bathroom cocooned in her pale blue dressing gown.

"Mmmm...oh, yeah... Morning." Kat yawned, barely glancing his way.

Typical, John thought. The only morning he'd been up and ready to go, and she was slouching around in a sleepy daze.

He drank coffee and watched TV for a whole hour before Kat emerged from the bathroom. He caught her on her way back to the bedroom wrapped in a fluffy white towel and a pink one perched precariously on her head like a turban.

"Are we going out today?" he asked.

"No. I fancy a lazy day. I'm tired."

"Suits me." John shrugged. He sat back on the sofa and resisted the urge to throw whisky into his coffee. He flicked through the mindless day time TV channels, thoroughly bored, and soon he found himself dwelling on his missing Porsche and the tiny bag of diamonds that held his future. He pondered on the rough plan he'd formed in his head. It was all a bit hit-and-miss, but there wasn't much he could do about it. He was relying on Kat to have a successful hit and steal a car, and then, on his own ability to follow Carlos.

He was realistic enough to know his Porsche was likely to have been sold on by now and the chances of finding it at



Thief  
by Lily Harlem

Carlos's place were slim. But despite the passing days, he was optimistic the diamonds would still be hiding within the lining of the boot. Tucked away, safe and sound and waiting patiently for him to retrieve them. Kat thought she was going to be getting a million quid's worth, but that was ludicrous. That would be handing over the entire stash. There *was* only a million. He'd just promised her what she wanted—no, make that *demand*ed—to get her on board with his plan. He'd let her think there was two million when there was, in fact, only one.

He didn't for a minute think Carlos would be a problem. Kat was scared of him, but John wasn't worried. It took a hell of a lot more than a car thief to scare him. He'd taken on a whole lot more and not even got out of breath.

He thought about logistical needs. It was mainly the motorbike that pulled the plan together, but he also had his Swiss army knife tucked deep in his jeans pocket and plenty of cash in his wallet. So for now, he was resigned to playing the waiting game—he glanced at his watch—for about another thirty-six hours.

Kat was having a lovely start to her day. She'd had a long lie in, the first since John had arrived, another play with the vibrator and a long soak in the bath without being disturbed. She'd carefully blow dried her hair so it hung perfectly straight down her back and covered herself in a luxury jasmine skin softening lotion. She had no plans to go out or get all sweaty in the gym, so she pulled on her softest pale blue jeans and a thin light grey cashmere sweater.

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She wondered idly if she would get to her own remote control first. She hadn't caught any of her soaps all week. John had totally commandeered the television since he'd hunkered down in her living room. It was a shame he couldn't go out for just an hour and leave her alone with *Anal Virgin Takes It All*.

She wandered out of her bedroom into the kitchen and popped a single slice of bread into the toaster. She reached for the full pot of hot coffee John had left sitting in the coffee maker.

As she was pouring, John's deep voice broke into the quiet of the kitchen.

"So, why are you so tired?" he asked from a few feet behind her.

"Bloody hell," she said, spinning round and sloshing black coffee onto the kitchen work surface. "What are you sneaking up on me again for? I told you not to."

"I wasn't," John said affronted. "I just walked in here normally."

Kat frowned. "No, you didn't. You sneaked... and I'm not tired." She reached for the jay cloth and dabbed at the spilt drips.

"You said you were."

"Well, I'm not now." Kat rinsed the cloth and lifted her cup to her lips. At the same time, the toast flew up, and she jumped again, sloshing more hot coffee onto her hand. "God, what is it with me today?" she said, shoving her hand under the tap.

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*by Lily Harlem*

John studied her. He knew he would never understand women, but Kat was a whole new breed. Tired one minute, not the next. So cool and calm about sleeping with strangers for their cars but then jumping out of her bones when toast pops up. And the way one minute she could be scowling at him and the next smiling really threw him. Why couldn't she be consistent with her moods like he was?

"So there's nothing doing today?" he clarified.

"Nope." She flicked off the water and dried her hand.

"Tomorrow, I'll get the details of the hit from Carlos through the post, but until then, no, nothing doing."

She turned and spread a thick layer of butter on her toast, and John found he couldn't help studying her from behind. Her hair looked super soft and shiny today, like a black cloak floating over her slim shoulders. Her pale grey sweater nipped in neatly at her waist, stopping just short of the waistband of her pale blue jeans, giving a hint of the soft flesh he knew lay beneath. Her jeans were not as tight as some of the others she'd worn that week, but still, they fitted her perfectly, touching the roundness of her bottom and the outline of her thighs just right. It was a shame she was such a lying, self-obsessed, delusional thief, he thought with an inward sigh. Otherwise, she could have been his perfect woman.

"Anything you want to do today?" Kat asked as she leant against the counter and crunched her toast.

After his leisurely gaze down her body a few moments ago, several hot and sweaty suggestions came to mind. That would certainly help pass the time. Make the most of an otherwise wasted day. But instead of voicing those thoughts, he found

himself once again shoving down his libido and saying, "Yeah, I'll give you another present. I'll teach you to cook."

Kat choked on her toast. "You'll do what?"

"Teach you to cook, because if all goes to plan tomorrow night, I'll be out of here and you'll be back to your God-awful microwave meals by Saturday." He pulled open the cupboard he'd filled after their trip to Marks and Spencer.

"I like my microwave meals."

"Oh, come on. No one likes the rubbish you eat. Here, look." He pulled down a box of arborio rice. "I'll show you how to make a risotto, real easy...kid's stuff."

"You're not Jamie bloody Oliver, you know?"

John frowned. "Look, I'm offering to show you. It's obvious you haven't a clue in the kitchen, and... well... I do. Take it or leave it, but I'm happy to teach you."

Kat dropped the crust of her toast in the bin and sighed, "Oh, alright then, but only a risotto, nothing else." She shoved her sleeves to her elbows. "Show me where to start."

John let a smile stretch across his face as he snapped the fridge door open. He pulled out chicken breasts, mushrooms, an onion and a block of parmesan cheese, dropped them onto the counter then stuck his hand back in for white wine.

"Bit early for a drink, isn't it?" Kat commented. "It's not even twelve."

"It's for the dish, extra flavour." John ignored her sarcasm and shut the fridge door. He scooped mushrooms and the onions into the palm of his hand and handed them to her. "Here, you start chopping this lot up, and I'll fry the chicken."

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Kat pulled out the immaculate chopping board, a small black-handled knife and went to work on the mushrooms, chopping them into neat halves.

"No, no, not like that." John scooted to her side and took the knife. "Watch, you have to slice the tips of the stalks like this...then tear their little coats off." Expertly, he removed the top strands of white peel. "You try," he said, handing her the knife.

Kat took it and copied him exactly.

"Hey, you're a natural, that's perfect."

"So where did you learn to cook?" she asked. "In the army?"

"God, no. The army fed us well if we were at base, but mainly it was reconstituted rubbish. Tear off the top, add hot water and eat. It all tasted the same in the end no matter what the pack claimed it to be. I guess that's why I can't stand those micro meals you eat, they remind me of years of taste-bud abuse."

"So you learnt to cook where?"

"Mainly self taught. Not having a Mum around meant I was a latch-key kid. I'd get in from school and hang around alone in the house until Dad came back from the jeweller's. By the time I was eleven, I'd got fed up of being hungry and had taken to starting dinner." John flicked the switch on the hob and placed a deep stainless steel pan over it. He smiled at the memories. "It wasn't long before we were in a routine. Dad would come in, and I'd have dinner on the table. We weren't rich by any stretch of the imagination, but we had enough money for me to be experimental with recipes. I even had a

vegetable patch for a few years, grew loads of stuff." He chucked the chicken into the hot pan and it began to spit.

"Sounds like a good way to learn," Kat said, finishing the mushrooms and starting on the large, brown onion.

She was going slowly, so he turned off the heat and rinsed his hands. "When I was in the army, I didn't cook for years, and living alone, it's not much fun cooking." He dried his hands. She was struggling with the onion peel, but he resisted the urge to take over the task. "So how come you can't cook anything other than microwave stuff and toast?"

Kat drew a long breath. "No one has ever offered to show me before." She finished removing the onion's crispy brown shell.

"Not even one of your foster parents?"

"No, I was a royal pain in the arse. They were just grateful if I wasn't causing chaos. They weren't all bad. Most of it was me, my own doing." Kat cut the onion into quarters. Her eyes were beginning to water, and she shifted her shoulders away from John.

"Why were you like that?" John asked. "Why were you a pain for all your foster parents?"

"Because," she sniffed noisily as the onion unleashed its full torment, "because I believed if I was a naughty little girl no one would want to adopt me and I'd be free to go with my parents when they eventually came. I was sure one day they'd discover what a mistake it had been giving me up and they'd want me back in their lives."

John looked her up and down again. But this time, instead of seeing a sexy little figure, he saw the lonely, lost little girl

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she'd once been—that she still was deep down. He found himself wanting to hold her. Comfort her, be the person she'd never had. But he stopped himself; he couldn't be like that with Kat. It was too damn complicated. He had to remember she'd ruined his life, messed up his whole bloody future.

Kat was really struggling. She'd never actually voiced her childish hopes about her parents coming to rescue her from the foster homes. She'd buried them deep for years and couldn't cope with returning dreams to the light of day now they were destined never to be fulfilled. Yet here she was falling to pieces with a few probing questions from this big guy who was trying to teach her to cook. She blamed the onion, of course. It must be that. She'd always controlled her emotions; the onion was the only variable.

She sniffed again and felt a heavy tear roll down her cheek. Cursing inwardly, she let it hover on her chin, refusing to wipe it because that would be admitting its existence, admitting pain still lived within her. It hadn't been fought and defeated like she'd always thought it had. She tensed her jaw and clenched her fingers. She needed to keep her hard outer shell intact. It was her armour against the world.

A sudden shake caught her chest and stuttered her breath. Her shoulders wouldn't keep still despite her best efforts. She hated her bubbling emotions that were spiralling out of control and taking command of her body.

Suddenly, John was behind her. He pressed his chest into her back, wrapped his arms around her upper arms and grabbed a hold of her hands. "It's the onions," he murmured into her hair. "They get me like that too." He peeled her

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fingers from the knife and released the other taut hand from the onion.

Kat nodded in silent agreement. She was too afraid to speak, too afraid to utter even the smallest sound. She knew her voice would wobble, and the last thing she wanted was John to think she was actually crying. She couldn't bear him to know she had a vulnerable spot and he'd hit it. She was hard and tough, inside and out. She didn't cry—ever.

"It'll be alright in a minute. Turn away from the onion."

She spun from the offending vegetable. John didn't move. His body was directly in front of her, and his arms had coiled around her. The next thing Kat knew, he'd pulled her into his warm chest and completely enveloped her in a solid embrace. She went to struggle, shake him off. Who did he think he was? But then she realised she quite liked where she was, being held secure and tight. It felt nice, so she decided to stay—just for a minute.

"It's alright," John soothed over the top of her head as he tightened his arms all the more. "It's alright to feel sad, you know."

His words and actions flicked a switch somewhere deep inside. The emotions Kat had subconsciously kept buried for years bubbled violently to the surface. It was too big to be contained, too raw. Like a salty dam bursting its banks, she cried and cried. Her breathing came in racked, harsh sobs as she buried her face deep into her own palms. Pressed tightly against his hard chest, she used him to support her weak, shaking body as hot, desperate tears containing years of denied pain flowed uncontrollably down her cheeks.



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*by Lily Harlem*

His palm smoothed her hair, over and over, down into her nape and onto her shoulders as he made quiet soothing noises, telling her it was all going to be alright, that he was there. His gentleness made her cry all the more. Being held by someone, not for sex but because they cared, however fleetingly, was not something she was used to.

Eventually her sobs died themselves out. She'd used his T-shirt like a Kleenex, but he didn't seem to care. He still held her tightly, and gradually her breathing returned to a normal, steady rhythm.

"Do you want me to chop the onion?" he asked eventually.

Kat looked up at him. "Bloody onions," she said with a final sniff and a weak smile. "I knew there was a reason I didn't cook!" She was mortified by her outburst, but it was too late to do anything about it now. But he hadn't seemed to mind too much. After all, he was still holding her. and it felt like he had no intention of letting go any time soon.

Kat stared steadily up into John's heavy lidded gaze. As she stayed trapped, looking deeper and deeper into his penetrating eyes, she felt herself falling. Falling into the strong, male darkness that had somehow managed to unlock a place inside her, release the protective bolts she'd kept around her heart and soul for so long. A pent up sorrow had been brought to the surface and soothed back down, reconfigured into a more bearable, less painful form...by him.

It was a warm, comforting, new sensation to have shared her emotions so openly, and she was sure he understood the magnitude of what had happened. She'd been weak and

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vulnerable in his arms, an absolute first. Something she'd never needed to do or allowed herself to be...until now.

Suddenly, he reached behind her and swept the chopping board and the offending onion to one side. He wrapped his hands around her waist and lifted her onto the work surface then stepped between her legs. His thumb and index finger hooked under her chin. She was aware of her face being tipped and softly, so softly as if afraid of breaking her, his warm, barely parted lips pressed down on hers.

She accepted his tender kiss, absorbed the warmth and texture of his gently probing tongue and the delicacy of his pliant lips on hers. There was passion there, a restrained masculine desire. She sensed it mixed in with sweet consideration, but it was restrained, harnessed. Somehow that made the kiss all the more intimate and hot—so damn hot she was in danger of melting into another puddle of emotion.

"John," she said as her hands smoothed his tear damp T-shirt.

"Mmmm..." His head chased in for another soft kiss.

"John," she murmured just before his lips found hers.

"Take me to bed."

He pulled back to study her face.

She gave a hint of a smile, wanting to keep their connection going. She wanted more of him, needed more of the gentle, mushy feeling he'd produced inside her hard, brittle interior. It felt good, like a spring thaw after a long brutal winter.

"I'm not going to say no, what guy would, but can I ask you something first?"

"Sure."

"Did you..." He tugged at his bottom lip and narrowed his eyes. "Did you lose your virginity to Carlos?"

"God, no." Kat screwed up her face in confusion. "Where did that question come from?"

"I don't know. Just curious, I guess."

"No, I wouldn't sleep with Carlos if you paid me." She rolled her eyes. "I guess that's not really a claim I can make, eh?" She tried a tiny smile.

He didn't match her smile. "So who was your first time if you've never had a boyfriend?"

"Why should I tell you?"

"You don't have to." He shrugged. "I just thought we were sharing stuff."

Kat sighed and slid her hands over his hard, wide shoulders, down his thick biceps and brought them to rest on his elbows. Her index finger traced the tongue of the cobra. "His name was Phil." She studied the snake more intently. Its scales were tiny and intricate and seemed to shimmer on his skin. "Phil was fifty-three and owned a successful construction company. His wife had just left him, and Carlos wanted his Bentley."

"Jeez, you gave your first time to a hit?"

"Yes, who else would I have given it to?"

John rubbed his hand over his lips as though stopping a ton of words tumbling from his mouth.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"It was awful." Kat studied his expression. "It was my second hit. He was drunk enough to be rough, but not drunk enough to be comatose."

John's eyes darkened to a dangerous midnight black, and a muscle jumped in his jaw.

"It was quick though—two minutes, maybe less. He slobbered in my hair and withdrew, leaving the condom still inside me he'd deflated so fast."

John took her chin between his thumb and index finger. His eyes flashed. "If I ever find the sick son of a bitch, I'll kill him."

"Why? He thought I was up for it. He did nothing wrong, really, and he did pay for it with his car."

John clenched his teeth. "He was fifty-three and you are what, twenty-four?"

"Twenty-three."

"Jeez, sick bastard."

"Well, how old are you?"

John pressed his forehead gently to hers. "Thirty, the perfect age for you to..." He paused and pulled in a deep, steadying breath.

"Perfect age for me to what?"

He touched his mouth to her lips and spoke onto her tongue. "To lose your virginity to."

"I think it's a bit late for that."

"Do you want to have sex with me?" He stroked a hand over her hair and down into the centre of her back.

"Yes, I just told you that."

Thief  
by Lily Harlem

"Did you want to have sex with *Phil*?" He spat out the name as though it were venom in his mouth. "Or any of the other losers you've put out for?"

"No, not at all, you know that."

"So wipe the slate clean and have your first time with me, now."

"But it's hardly the first time we've done it."

"It will be the first time we've done it honestly. At my place, you were fucking me for my car..."

She interrupted him. "But I did enjoy it."

His face cracked into a grin. "Glad to hear it, but it doesn't count. You were still doing it to gain something."

"And in the shower?"

"In the shower, I was angry. I was punishing you for stealing my life. It was a revenge fuck, not good for a first time either."

"So it doesn't count, even if I came?"

He shook his head. "No, your first time should be sweet and loving and be for one reason only."

"What's that?"

"Because you want to do it with that person more than anyone else in the world, for mutual pleasure." He tipped his head. "Do you feel like that about me?"

Kat pushed her hand over his bristling hair, felt the raw essence of his masculinity beneath her palms. She could hear her own heartbeat pounding in her ears. "Yes," she said pulling his head down. "Yes, I do." She felt a familiar, hungry sensation shiver between her legs, a pull, a demanding desire. Only John was going to be able to satisfy it, and oh

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

God, she wanted him to. "This will be my first time," she murmured into his mouth, her voice thick as treacle. "Take my virginity, John. It's yours to have."

He ran his hand down the cloud of her cashmere sweater, shifted his palms under her backside and scooped her up. Like a clinging limpet, she wrapped her arms around his neck and locked legs around his waist. She felt weightless in his big arms.

Their kisses plunged deeper. He turned and strode blindly towards the bedroom, kicked open the door and stepped inside. The curtains were un-drawn, the duvet a bundled pile in the middle of the bed, a huge assortment of clothes and shoes littered the floor along with magazines, plates and empty water bottles.

Halting by the bed, John unwound her lower limbs from his hips, crashed his behind down and pulled her between his thighs. Kat watched him stretch out his bad leg, then with her heart fluttering, she lifted up her sweater to expose her creamy breasts encased in a white lace bra.

"Take it off," John murmured, reaching to help it on its way.

She tugged the jumper over her head and dropped it on the floor. With dexterous fingers, he undid the tiny front clip of her bra so it sprung open. The heavy weight of her breasts spilt into his waiting palms. "God, you have the best tits ever," he said as he brushed his thumbs in sync across her taught nipples. Like hard bullets, they pressed forward for his touch as though they'd missed him, as though they wanted him.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

Letting her breasts hang loose, his hands rode the gentle slopes of her waist to her low rise jeans. His hard fingertips stroked over her skin's silken texture, igniting a fire deep within her. His eyes were hungry and hooded, but she wondered why she was the only one stripping off. She wanted to see his body again, too. She wanted to get flesh on flesh, share the warmth of their skin and search out the connection she hoped she'd find. She tugged ineffectively at the front of his T-shirt, tried to pull it upwards but not quite reaching at the right angle for success. "John...I can't..."

He bunched the material between his shoulder blades and pulled. It slid over his head and was discarded.

Kat took a stride backwards, let her bra straps slide down her arms to add to the garments on the floor. She began to undo the buttons of her jeans and as she did so studied his brooding face. He was concentrating on her with flaming intensity. His brows were heavy and practically met over the bridge of his nose. His wide, dark chest shifted with each deep breath he took.

She shimmied her hips and allowed her jeans and knickers to drift south before stepping out of them and flicking them aside with her toes.

She stood stock still—utterly naked.

Dappled in the fractured pink light of the still drawn curtains she inhaled a deep, nervous breath. He looked so damn big, so powerfully male. She was unsure what his next move would be. He'd seen it all before. Would he still like it or would he flatten her with a snide remark and stalk from the room? His predatory expression could go either way. Her

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heart raced. Her breath hitched. There was more at stake now. She wanted to please him in ways other than physically, wanted him to feel like he was giving her something she'd missed out on. He seemed so angry about her first experience, murderous almost.

"I'm nervous," she said, coiling her fingers together.

"Why?" His eyes darted up to hers.

"It's my first time."

A smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. "Don't be scared. I'll show you what to do."

"But what if you don't like me? What if I do it all wrong?"

"Baby, you're one sexy woman. Even if you lay like a sack of potatoes, I would still get off."

Kat stepped back between his legs and felt her nerves retreat. "Sack of potatoes, that's an odd fantasy."

"Oh, I have much stranger fantasies than that." He tipped his brow and licked his lips. His eyes glittered with a mountain of need. "But I think we'll keep them locked away for your first time."

"I'm curious now."

He wound his hands round to her fleshy buttocks and smoothed over them. "Be careful. Don't you know curiosity killed the cat."

She tipped his head up with her finger. "Lucky I have lots of lives left then." She bent to kiss him, slow and hot to leave him in no doubt it was him she wanted.

His feather light fingers ran over her back, up to her neck then down to the sensitive skin behind her knees. She shuddered at his sweet, delicate touch, which felt like a



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million popping bubbles on her skin. It felt so good the way he caressed her. Big hands that could be so damn gentle. She moaned low in her throat and buckled her knees, her legs felt weak.

Suddenly, solid arms surrounded her thighs and waist, and the next thing she knew, she was being lifted onto the bed, relieving her feeble legs. Lifted around like a doll again—but this time she didn't mind.

"Lay back, Pussy Cat. I'm gonna return the favour."

Her gaze was questioning, but she soon saw what he meant. He was kissing down from her naval as his hands reached for her ankles and pulled her legs apart. There was no resistance.

"John..." she gasped, the pulse in her throat beating a wild tempo.

"What?" He glanced up.

"Nobody has ever...before."

"I guessed as much." He smiled briefly then returned his attention to the bare pink folds of her feminine sex. He dipped a finger into the dewy warmth of her hole and pushed up to the first knuckle.

She gave a voluptuous sigh and squirmed her tightness farther onto his finger. Sweat broke out on her brow. What would it be like to be kissed down there, to feel John's tongue on her intimate flesh? Suddenly desperate to know, she pushed her hand on the crown of his head and tilted her pelvis towards him.

Taking the hint, he used his free hand to separate her vulva so her clit was exposed then pressed his open mouth

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*by Lily Harlem*

over the shining button. Giving her no time to adjust to the new sensation, he simply sucked long and hard.

She cried out and arched off the bed like a bowstring ready to fire, pushing down onto him and at the same time fighting away from him. He dropped a forearm over her stomach and held her still, kept his mouth firmly on her erect clit. He drew all of her in with his soft suction as the tip of his tongue gently ringed her supersensitive bud. It was the only part of her body she was aware of, the only part of her universe that existed.

The pressure released, and he circled his tongue down to her opening. He withdrew his finger from her pussy, only to replace it with the inquisitive tip of his tongue. He swiped and whirled higher and higher, sending more scalding pleasure ricocheting through her body.

"Oh God," she moaned through tight lips. A rush of wetness flooded from her core, and soft, clicking noises filled the bedroom as he licked all around, in and out, up and down, leaving no piece of pussy undiscovered.

She could feel the smooth skin of his chin tapping on her butt cheeks and summoned the strength to lift onto her elbows to look down at him. He had his eyes closed, and his mouth was hidden from view, but his nose sat over her bare lips, and his head bobbed in time with her wild sensations.

"Oh, that's too good." Her voice was hollow and desperate, and she reached for her nipples to swirl and peak, drag them to pain. She watched him move his tongue back up to her quivering clitoris, felt him slide two fingers deep inside her.

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*by Lily Harlem*

She dropped her head back to the pillow with her eyes shut, her strength used up.

The small ridged spot on her front vaginal wall became the focus of his internal attentions. She snapped her breath out as his fingers worked it, and the breath didn't return in any form other than short, sharp gasps. He began to lave harder at her tight button, fretting and lapping until her body stiffened with tension, signalling the imminence of her climax. He thrust against her g-spot harder, rubbing that hidden corduroy with his finger pads, giving it what it needed.

She tightened her internal muscles like steel hoops, froze as every fibre and nerve she possessed celebrated existence, then his teeth caught her clit in the tiniest bite imaginable, and her whole body jerked. She screamed, losing her battle to keep noise levels down, and bucked against him as her entire world exploded like a nuclear detonation. Her face contorted and she curled forward, eyes flying open at the myriad of divine sensations. The only intelligible sound coming from her mouth his name.

"It's okay. It's okay, baby," he said, rising above her and shucking down his jeans and boxers with one hand. "Stay up there." He kept his fingers inside her and the heel of his hand pressing on her clit, absorbing the powerful contractions of her pelvic muscles as he continued a deep circular motion. She tried to pull his hand away, but he settled his hips over it, pressing her farther into the bed.

"John," she groaned, reaching frantically for him.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

He finally withdrew his fingers and grabbed for her small, scrabbling wrists. Taking them prisoner, he hoisted them above her head, rendering her at his mercy.

She whimpered.

"That was just the warm up. Remember? Like yesterday, come again, come with me How many virgins get multiple orgasms on their first go?"

She answered with a moan indiscernible between pleasure and pain and bowed the bones of her spine into the mattress.

"It'll be real good," he grunted. "Stay with me." He let go of her wrists and looped his forearms under her drawn up legs. Spread them wide and raised her knees in line with her chest, tilting her upwards and as stretched open as she could possibly be. He balanced high above her, the broad head of his penis pressing at her saturated entrance.

"John, please..." she groaned. Her body was frantic. Every fibre quivered. She needed him inside, needed to be filled to bursting point. She understood the rollercoaster ride now. She'd had the first thrill, and there was more to come. "Just fuck me..."

"Never could deny a lady," he ground out through gritted teeth.

Then he was gliding in, sending sensations arcing through her body. Her deep groan wept into the air as he buried to the hilt on the first thrust. He was so smooth, so huge, and the way he invaded her was so consuming.

"Kat..." he whispered at the end of his own entry moan and found a hard, primitive and deliciously satisfying rhythm. "Kat..."

She ignored him, her eyes were closed and her head thrown to the side, lost to everything except her body's reaction to his hip movements. She could feel another stunning climax building deep in her womb as he massaged her core.

"Kat, look at me." He dropped his weight onto his elbows, and immediately, she wrapped her legs tightly around his waist, jabbing her heels into his lower back, urging him on and in. "Kat, look at me!" When she still didn't respond, he cupped her face between his hands. "Open your eyes, damn it, and look at me. I want you to know it's me making you feel this way. Me making love to you... You're not with some God damn hit now... Open your bloody eyes!"

Kat lifted heavy lids and looked into his face. She could see his brow shining with sweat and his face stretched with the effort of holding back.

"Can you see me?" he scratched out.

"Yes...yes...I see you." She nodded, biting her lip savagely. "Oh God, I see you, I see you. Just...don't, don't stop...ughhh!" She clenched around him in helpless spasms, gave herself up to the heavenly waves of the second deeply satisfying orgasm pounding her body. She sucked in a long breath and released a cry of ecstasy. Her eyes rolled shut again. It was as if she'd taken the most powerful drug imaginable, and she didn't want its relentless pummelling to stop... ever.

She was aware of something in John snapping—self control. Suddenly, he was pounding in and out of her like a jackhammer.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

He grunted, "Holy shit", "Jesus Christ" and "Oh fuck" as his coccyx curled hard under to meet her pelvis with each thrust. His muscles turned to stone, and he froze for a few long, out-of-this-world seconds, which then culminated in his own moment of climax. She flicked her eyes open and looked at his face. It was contorted with ecstasy, his neat white teeth bared animal like and his eyes shut into tight creases. Warm jets of cum rushed inside, filling her, owning her.

He collapsed, barely supporting his weight and with his face turned away on the pillow. Kat pulled in long breaths and pushed her hot cheek into his short hair. It was prickly and damp with sweat. She had an unfamiliar rush of emotion, affection. He was a generous lover. She got two orgasms to his one. He was so intent on pleasuring her, even when he'd been fucking her out of temper, he'd made sure she was ready to come before he had. She ran her fingernails over his broad, clammy shoulder blades; a light scratching that generated a minute shudder in his powerful muscles. "Thank you," she whispered.

"For what," he muttered without moving.

"For being my first."

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## Chapter Seven

\* \* \* \*

John sat out on Kat's balcony in the afternoon sunshine with Carlos's innocuous looking white envelope in his hand. Within its paper seal lay the name and probable location of tonight's unsuspecting victim. Someone who owned a very expensive car and deemed suitable for Kat to approach, seduce and steal from.

Kat hovered behind him since there was only one chair on the balcony, looking out at the city view. The morning sun had burnt off the grey haze that had rested like an oppressive blanket when they'd breakfasted together, and now, she took the time to let her eyes drift over the staggered roofs and jagged chimney pots down towards the muddy Thames glinting in the sunlight.

Lifting her hands to shield her eyes from the dazzling glare, she peered into the distance. She could just make out St Paul's Cathedral seated majestically on the horizon. She loved looking at London from here. It made her feel like she'd made it after all of those years of poverty. All those years of being a no one.

Her mood was flitting about today. It had been a strange, new experience to share not just her body but her also emotions with another person so totally, and to actually fall asleep with someone had been another first. But waking up surrounded by John's solid arms had felt good. Even better, in

fact, when he'd gently made love to her all over again before she'd even opened her eyes to the day.

But now the contemplation of what they had lined up for that evening was making her nerves tense and jumpy. She knew John would try and take over the bit she was good at, and she couldn't relax into the day the way she normally would. It was all so different from her normal existence. Different...but in a good way.

She was shaken from her thoughts by John huffing. "Did you get one like this for me?"

"Yes, only it wasn't in the post. Carlos handed it to me the night before when I dropped off a set of Ferrari keys."

"Have you still got it?" He turned to face her.

"No, I memorise the information then destroy the evidence."

John said nothing, but his silence was as loud as words. For some reason, his mood was getting heavier by the minute. Kat wasn't sure why, couldn't see what had changed between them since the letter had been delivered.

He tore open the envelope and shook the contents onto the table. The usual photo and small slip of paper covered in Carlos's scrawling, childish handwriting fell in front of him.

Kat leant across, picked up the paper and read aloud. "Nick Turnbull. The Bakers Arms, Amersham. Drop off point Lloyds Bank, Amersham High Street." She turned to John, cocked her head and said lightly, "Apparently Nick has a nice new Mercedes Carlos wants to get his hands on."

"Lucky Nick," grunted John, studying the photo of the unsuspecting victim. It had been taken as he was mid-step,



Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

hand outstretched, walking into a bar, probably The Bakers Arms. Early forties, reasonably fit, he wore suit trousers and a loose white shirt. He had a pleasant enough face and short blond hair, or maybe it was grey, it was hard to tell from the photo Carlos had sent.

Kat set down the paper and snatched the photo from his hand. She studied the man closely, trying to memorise his facial features and his general appearance. When she finished, she raised her eyebrows and nodded.

"What the hell does that look mean?" John snapped.

"What does what look mean?" Kat shifted her eyes to his, surprised at the sudden angry tone in his voice.

"Oh, come on, you know what I'm talking about. That little smile and nod. Are you looking forward to getting together with him or something?"

"Oh, don't be so bloody ridiculous." Now she understood the reason for the sullen mood, the reason he'd been spiralling downwards into a full-blown male sulk—he was jealous.

Jealous of Nick Turnbull.

She'd known all along John had a green-eyed monster lurking, right from that first day in the supermarket. She thought she might use it to her advantage back then, but now, she couldn't see how it would work. In fact, it could be a hindrance.

John scraped the wooden chair on the balcony floor and stormed through the patio doors.

She hadn't even bothered to deny it.

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*by Lily Harlem*

He walked straight to the drinks cabinet and reached for the whisky bottle even though he'd told himself he wouldn't drink today. He needed to be on full alert tonight, no hazy glows. No gaps in his thought processes. His reactions need to be sharp and precise.

But right now, he needed a drink. Not for his knee, but because Kat was winding him up on purpose, getting under his skin for the sheer hell of it. Why she felt the need to do that he had no damn idea.

He'd taken his first sharp mouthful when he felt her arms slide around his waist and her soft breasts press against his back. "Don't be like this, John. You knew the score all week... It was even your idea."

"Yeah, well, I feel different now that we...we...you know." He paused, threw another mouthful of drink back. "I don't want you jumping into bed with Nick bloody Turnbull tonight, not after you were in bed with me last night. It's not right, and I won't let you do it."

"But it's business. My business, the same as usual. No, make that a more lucrative business than usual." John could have sworn she purred as she spoke onto his shoulder blades. "Sex means nothing to me when it's with a hit, nothing at all. I completely switch off. I thought you understood that." She went on, "But I probably won't have to sleep with him anyway. I'll just get him drunk and help myself to his keys. I've done that loads of times."

Tightening her hold, she rubbed her hands from his abdominals up to his chest, gently reminding him of her touch as she whispered over his shoulder, "Don't forget, when I get

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the keys to Nick's car they'll be our ticket to the diamonds, and for you, John, your ticket to paradise. The life you're dreaming of, far, far away."

He banged his drink on the cabinet, turned and scooped her into his arms. He looked deep into her eyes. "Without those diamonds, I'm screwed, Kat. Totally screwed. I need them so badly."

He bent to kiss her.

Kat melted. Forgetting everything else, she simply gave herself up to the soul searching kiss. It felt so wonderful she could live in it. Strong, masculine and protective. She would get lost forever in this safe new world if she wasn't careful.

When their kiss broke, he held her in silence, his chin resting on her crown and looking out at the balcony. Wrapped in his tight arms with her head on his chest, she found herself wondering how she'd feel tomorrow if all went as planned. When she had her cut of the diamonds, they'd go separate ways, and she'd be alone in her flat.

That was the plan.

That was what she wanted.

But she'd got used to him hanging around the place, and the last twenty four hours... Well, the last twenty four hours had been sensational. She'd flown higher than she'd ever thought possible. She wasn't looking forward to coming down. She was afraid she'd crash land.

\* \* \* \*

At five o'clock, Kat went into the bathroom and locked the door. John heard the shower running and paced the living

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room, resisting the urge to drink whisky. Lots of it. He strode onto the balcony, taking in lungfuls of not particularly fresh air. Battled to steady his mind and focus his energy on what was to come.

He looked at the people below, rushing about in the late spring sunshine, oblivious to the criminal underworld going on around them. Even the most up-market, desirable parts of the city were not immune to the darker sides of the capital. If only they knew thieves lived amongst them.

When Kat eventually appeared from the bathroom, she was wrapped in a big white, fluffy towel and moved quickly into her bedroom and shut the door.

John paced after her, but stilled at the living room doorway. He reached up and curled his fingertips over frame, hung frozen, trying desperately to get a grip on his emotions.

It was driving him nuts her getting ready to be with another man. He hadn't thought he was a jealous sort; he was pretty easy going about women. But then, having never been in a long-term relationship, he really had nothing to go on. No bench mark. So the assumption about him not being the jealous type actually had no grounding.

He made coffee and ate ten biscuits, pulled on his bike leathers and fiddled with his Swiss army knife before shoving it deep into his pocket. He counted and checked the wads of money he'd stashed in his wallet. It was all still there despite having spent the week with a light-fingered flat mate. He was about to flip his wallet shut when he spotted the battered, fading photo of Cobra One. For the first time that week, he pulled it out to examine his old mates.

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Cobra One didn't look like an elite fighting team. They looked like a group of six mates having a laugh and enjoying summer sunshine. Each had a bottle of beer in his hand, and their suntanned faces wore wide, happy smiles. Without exception, they were dressed in desert camouflage combat trousers, and their arms were thrown casually over each other's bare, bronzed shoulders.

The men could have been on any beach in the world, but the photo had been taken deep in the Afghan desert, not long after a risky night surveillance mission. Their manic, wide eyes told John they were still on a high from having survived the night. He wished the guys were with him now. A few mates, a gun and a fully functioning knee would be bloody useful. But he was a realist. He was on his own and would have to get on with it.

"Who's that?" John hadn't heard Kat approach behind him. He was about to shoot some sarcastic remark but stopped himself. No point taking his self-pitying mood out on her.

"My unit," he said, handing it over.

"Hey, that's you." she said, pointing. "You look nice when you smile. You should do it more often."

"I haven't had much to smile about lately, have I?" He took the photo out of her hand and placed it back in his wallet, his dark mood deepening.

Kat pouted, but then spotted another picture. "Who's that?" she said, reaching across his arm.

What the heck? John pulled out the photo of his dad.

Kat studied it even more intently than the picture of Cobra One. "You have his eyes."

"You reckon?"

"Yep, and his mouth, definitely his mouth."

"Yeah, I guess."

"He looks like a nice dad," Kat said, handing the photo back.

"He was. The best." John slipped it away and pushed his wallet deep into his pocket. He ran his gaze down her body. "Is that you ready?"

Kat wore her usual little black dress that fell just below the knee. Her hair, soft, shiny and so black it contained a hint of blue hung around her bare upper arms. She'd settled her small diamond necklace above her boosted cleavage to draw attention to the delicious curves disappearing into the material of her dress. Her makeup was flawless. Seductive eyes peered from her precise fringe, accentuated with a line of vibrant green shadow.

His mood suddenly swung to the opposite end of the spectrum. He reached for her hand and kissed the pale underside of her wrist. "You're so damn gorgeous you're making me insane," he murmured, breathing in her sweet, powdery perfume. "Absolutely fucking insane!"

Kat cocked her head and smiled at the spell she'd unwittingly cast. He knew so many of her secrets, her weakness and all about her failed childhood, yet still he looked at her with complete adoration. It made her want to be physically closer to him to celebrate the emotional connection they'd found. Revel in it whilst they still could. Soon, he would be gone. Soon, she would be alone.

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by Lily Harlem

"We've got an hour before we need to leave," she heard herself saying.

His eyebrows shot up, and a spark ignited to a flame in his eyes. "What are you suggesting, thief?"

"Thief." She gave a tinkle of nervous laughter. "That's funny."

"It's what you are," he touched his nose with hers and curled a hand around her waist.

"It's funny because I pinched something yesterday."

"Did you?"

"Yes."

"What, a pair of shoes?"

"No, something from that filthy shop you took me to."

He tugged at his bottom lip. "Risky move. That fella wasn't pleasant."

Kat shrugged. "You want to see it?"

"Will it reveal a fantasy?"

"It might."

"Then what are you waiting for?" He stepped back and spread out his palm for her to lead the way.

"Hang on," she said. A tightening wedged itself like cramp in her thighs. What the hell had she just suggested? She didn't even know herself. She'd planned on waiting until she was alone to watch that DVD. John would think she was hinting at something, and the truth was, she didn't really know if she was or not.

She slipped into her bedroom and retrieved *Anal Virgin Takes It All* from her bedside cabinet and swallowed dryly as she examined the woman's face again. She'd been

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permanently suspended in that second of dirty pleasure for all of time. Kat wondered if maybe just a few seconds would do her.

"Interesting title." John's voice came from directly behind her. She spun with a gasp. She should be used to him sneaking up by now, but it still made her heart stutter.

"Yeah, I..."

"Let's watch it." He shrugged. "No harm in that is there?" He plucked it from her hand and headed back to the living room.

Kat trailed after him and waited as he fiddled around with the TV and the DVD player. She tinkered with her necklace and hovered behind the sofa as if it were some kind of barrier.

John hit play and two stilted actors walked on screen accompanied by cheesy piano music. Their voices were low and muted, their expressions over exaggerated.

"She looks a bit like you," John commented as the anal virgin requested a good seeing to. Her enormous black partner lubed up enthusiastically as she positioned herself on a fur rug in front of a roaring fire. "Same colour hair, same green eyes..." John moved to stand behind the sofa too. "Same great tits."

Kat was going to glance at his face but didn't. She was fascinated. She'd never watched a porn film before and couldn't believe how little attention was put on the storyline.

John moved behind her and slid his hands around her waist. He pulled her back against his chest, and she was



aware of his erection tucking into her lower back. "Why'd you choose this one?" he whispered by her ear.

"I don't know?"

"You've never done that, have you?"

"No."

"Want to try it?"

She registered what he'd said but gave no response. She'd been captivated by her look-a-like's buttocks. They'd been spread apart by big black hands, and her lover's flattened pink tongue was running over her glistening vulva. He moved up to the cleft of her cheeks and ringed the puckered skin of her tightest, darkest hole. Kat felt herself getting wet, and her heart rate increased. She put her hands over John's and realised her palms were clammy.

John's breath hitched by her ear, and his chin pressed into her temple. "Can I fuck you while we watch this?"

Kat reached for her dress hem and tugged it upwards. "Yes."

On screen, a big black finger invaded that tense hole, pushing in to the first, second, third knuckle. The woman was moaning. Kat shoved her knickers down to her knees, her pussy alive and demanding attention. Blood rushed to her sex, making it pulse with excitement. She heard John undo the zipper on his leathers.

"Bend over the sofa," he said gruffly. "Keep watching the TV."

Kat did as he asked. It wasn't hard; her eyes were glued.

John shoved the dress farther up her back and let his hand trail down her now trembling spine. His index finger drifted

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*by Lily Harlem*

over her tailbone and down the smooth cleft of her butt crack to the rose bud of her anus. He applied a strong, steady pressure with the wide pad of his finger.

Kat arched, sucked in a breath and snapped away. She remembered the sharp sting of his entry there in the shower. She didn't feel ready for it... not yet.

"Shh," he soothed. His fingers moved farther down to her plumped lips, ripe with moisture and begging for stimulation. "Here first. I'll take you here first."

Kat nodded and pushed back, searching desperately for his thick, magical fingers.

He steadied her with a hand on her hip and rimmed her entrance, spread her own cream for lubrication then slithered two digits inside her heated wetness, bent them forward and rubbed her hot spot.

Kat groaned and dropped to her elbows on the back of the sofa, opened her legs wider for him. How was it he always found the devilish little spot so accurately? He added another finger as a reward for her moan of approval, filled her wider and longer and sent his thumb underneath to tease and fret her clit. She let out a long, low groan and sank onto him. She knew he would take her to heaven and back.

"Wait here," he said, his voice hoarse.

Kat whimpered at the loss of his fingers, but before the noise was out, he was back. The rustle of the paper bag sounded near her left ear.

At her vaginal entrance, she could feel the head of his dick, hot, smooth skin primed and waiting, a steel rod of pleasure.

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"You ready for me?" His voice was like torn, razored silk.

"Yes, yes, just do it," she begged when he didn't move. A tight, hard knot grew at the base of her stomach, spreading down her legs and over her buttocks. She needed him inside her like she needed to breathe.

On screen, the woman was just about to take the big, black cock up her arse. She was crying, "Now, butt fuck me now." The man had his teeth gritted, his eyes didn't blink. Kat stared, equally wide-eyed, as the woman's taut hole was invaded and opened. It twitched and spasmed, clenched and unclenched. The woman tried to push away, but could go nowhere. Strong hands held her firmly as she was forced into with an unimaginable large penis. She let out an ear-splitting scream before whimpering, dropping her head and writhing backwards for further impalement.

Suddenly, John surged into her pussy, filling her to capacity on the first, fast thrust. They groaned in sync, and his forearm looped around her waist to hold her still. He pulled back and shoved in again. She wondered if her expression was like the anal virgin's. Did she have that expression of pain/pleasure? That look of a wild, feral animal sating a base need?

She didn't think so.

Not yet.

John set up a steady rhythm, in and out, in and out, massaging her g-spot, playing with the ribbed muscles of her vaginal walls with the slit of his prick. "I love your arse," he grunted as his palm stroked down her back again and over

the softness of her cheeks. Massaging and kneading, he nipped hard then let the flesh melt between his fingers.

"Mmm," Kat managed, her knees weak. An orgasm build, a delicious, deep one generating from her g-spot.

"It's calling out for me," he murmured. "Your arse, it wants me."

Kat pushed back harder onto his cock. Felt it stab at her internal organs and plug her with such a chock-full sensation it liquefied her insides, and she wondered if she'd be able to walk later. "Oh God, yes," she said, vaguely aware of the paper bag crunching by her ear.

The woman was rocking backwards on the purple-black cock, her lover's hands twisting around her hips and jamming her harder onto him with each thrust. She screamed out a name, a demand of don't stop, she was going to come.

Excitement crackled in Kat as she felt John's attention return to the tight ring of muscles at her back hole. She felt ready to try, her endorphins were running high. She could handle sensual pain whilst she was this close to orgasm.

His finger was cold now, iced with lube. He spread it all around the clenched wrinkles of skin. She bit her lip. She wanted to do this, wanted to look like the woman on the TV. Abandoned, wild, fulfilled.

On a long, slow forward thrust of his cock, John pressed his finger harder against her private hole. It sank inwards, the whole length of it, deep and long. It was fire hot, a lit candle. "Ah, you're so fucking tight," he growled. "You'll squeeze my cock till it bursts." He pulled his finger out, dipped it back into

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*by Lily Harlem*

the lube and pushed in again, gaining even further entry this time.

Kat forced herself to relax. She didn't want to fight the intrusion. This was what she needed. He wiggled around inside her, worked the area, and she felt the burn retreat as the chilled lube spread. She pushed back against him, urging him on. Urging him to do what they both wanted to do. A second finger joined the first, and she blew the air slowly from her lungs, kept concentrating on the cock working in and out of her pussy, building up that explosion of pleasure.

He twisted his fingers, scissoring, and widening her. She squirmed at the new torturing flames, and her hips jutted away in reflex, almost making his cock slip out of her.

"No," he murmured. "Stay with it." His other hand squeezed around her abdomen, keeping her just where he wanted her as he fucked her with his dick and his hand.

Her heart was pounding, stealing her breaths as she opened around the width of his fingers. "John, I don't..."

"You started this, Pussy Cat,"

"I know. I just..." She didn't know what she wanted anymore. The feeling was wicked, carnal. A third finger joined the party. She fisted the cushion on the sofa and groaned in time with the DVD woman. The fierce prick of pain was so on the edge of her pleasure it was like they were twins. She should say no, she should stop this, but she couldn't, she was desperate for it.

"You're nearly ready," he said. "Take it easy, baby." His cock pulled out of her engorged, greedy vagina, and he cradled its length between her butt cheeks. His fingers

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*by Lily Harlem*

finished their assault and withdrew with a soft pop. She heard the squelch of more lube and found herself mewling for his attention. She wanted filling; she needed him back there. Her climax was hovering, waiting to be stolen.

He pushed her hips forward, and his dick slid down her butt crack to her once again tightly puckered hole. It throbbed with terror and excitement. With one hand resting on her shoulder, the other stayed locked around her waist. "Relax," he said, though his own voice sounded far from relaxed. "Try not to scream too loud."

The head of his cock pressed at the elastic band of her anus. Plump, hard and so, so wide. Her senses reeled. What they were about to do was something she'd never before considered, but the last few days, it had wandered in and out of her mind like an unwanted party guest demanding attention.

"Take a deep breath," John said.

Kat did as he asked, and as she filled her lungs, her hole loosened for the briefest of moments. He took full advantage and pushed forward an inch, rasping over nerve endings she didn't even know she possessed. Her head shot up, and her back arched to breaking point. The feeling was a sudden, blinding, furious whack of arousal. She opened her mouth to howl but no sound came out.

"Blow that breath out for me, baby." His hand left her shoulder to massage her tail bone in small, steady circles.

She blew out , felt sweat bead on her brow and between her cleavage.

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by Lily Harlem

He eased forward another inch. So bulky, so rigid, such barely harnessed power in her most delicate, private part. "More," she heard herself say as white hot electricity whipped at her newly found desires. "More, God, please, more..." She resisted the urge to scream like a banshee woman having the time of her life.

He took hold of her hips and, in time with the guy on the TV, pushed in steadily, stretching and widening until he'd eased to the hilt and his balls rested on her vulva. "Oh, yes, that's so fucking deep, so fucking silky, and your asshole is squeezing me so tight you'll snap my dick off, Pussy Cat."

Kat's legs buckled, and she dropped towards the ground. She felt filled farther than she would ever have imagined possible. His arm tightened around her stomach and held her at a ninety degree angle against his impaling cock and his hard thighs.

She wanted to crawl away and get used to the overwhelming heavy sensation of being so intimately invaded, work through her pleasure/pain barriers alone, in private. Figure out what all previous pleasure concepts had meant to her up until that moment. But she couldn't. He was fucking her arse now. Moving slowly in and slowly out. Not all the way out, just enough to get a burning friction going. A black, velvet hunger grew in her back passage. Heated and needy, it demanded more, and she found her hips jerking back to meet his gentle thrust, encouraging him into a more meaty rhythm.

"You're so damn good," he ground out and began to finger her clit. "So good, sweet like honey, hot like chilli. Come for me, baby, 'cause I can't last long. It's too fucking gorgeous in

here." His hips pumped. He pulled out and drove back in past fragile tissue with a desperate groan. "Oh, shit, it's here, too late..."

But Kat was there, too, matching his orgasm. She pushed harder towards his heated cock and sank onto his finger rubbing her clit with near violent energy. Brilliant bursts of light grew in her vision as her orgasm flew her to another level of existence. She exploded; she didn't know if her heart could take it.

His fingers milked her clit with a ruthless squeezing and rubbing motion. It was a realm of ecstasy she could never have previously imagined. John's cock spurting into her colon, filling her with his delicious salty seed as she marooned herself on his hand, every rectal muscle contracting in bunches of wild, hard spasms and grabbing hold of him tighter and tighter.

She wailed, flung open her eyes and saw her reflection in the now black screen of the television. In her face, she saw the same untamed, consumed expression of her look-alike. Sanity and order were a distant memory. Only deeply hidden places existed; only primitive instincts and forbidden fruits were allowed.

"Jesus fucking Christ," John muttered and then said something in a language she didn't recognise. He released her now fulfilled, throbbing clit but continued to pull her onto him by her hips. The hair of his thighs tickled her butt cheeks, and his hanging balls touched the lips of her sex. Harsh breaths flooded down onto her bare lower back, heating her farther. "You still with me, baby?" he panted.



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*by Lily Harlem*

Kat nodded and dropped her head onto her forearms, squeezing her eyes shut.

John stayed deeply embedded, twitching and pulsing out the final stage of his climax. "That was so fucking good I could do it all over again," he said.

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## Chapter Eight

\* \* \* \*

Kat arrived outside the Bakers Arms in Amersham with the sun dipping behind the Chiltern Hills. The traffic was heavy on the journey out of London, and she'd tapped her foot all the way, anxious about missing Nick Turnbull. She paid the driver a hundred and twenty including tip, climbed out, straightened her dress and set her face ready for business.

The pub was an old Tudor style building. Built with heavy grey stones and a thatched roof, it had several entrances surrounded by luxurious spring hanging baskets. Kat chose the entrance nearest the car park and scanned for the Mercedes. With a flutter of nerves, she hoped tonight of all nights Carlo's information would be accurate and her hit would be waiting.

With a breath of relief, she spotted the expensive silver car. It was parked in a corner, huddled by trees as if trying to hide—hide from her.

A satisfied smile spread across her face, and she trip-trapped confidently through the pubs swing door. The plan was ready to go. Soon, she would be rich. Very, very rich.

She sashayed up to the dark wooden bar, perched on a stool and ordered a large glass of white wine from the bearded bartender.

It wasn't until she'd paid and taken a sip she allowed herself to look for her hit. She knew Nick Turnbull was here

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because his car was outside, so she could afford to relax—a fraction.

The place was half full. Couples sat eating at small tables, and a group of girls cackled away in the corner over wine. Kat took a celebratory slug of her drink, and as she did, she spotted a single lone gentleman to her left. He was relaxing in an armchair by a glowing log fire. It was him, Nick. He was easy to recognise from his photo. He was even wearing the same outfit Carlos had snapped him in. Dark suit trousers and a white open shirt. Like John, he was a good-looking guy, and Kat wondered why he was on his own. Why he'd become a target.

To the side of him sat an empty dinner plate with knife and fork crossed, a set of car keys and a half drunk pint of lager. He looked at home, as if sitting in this pub having dinner was very much part of his daily routine.

Nick was engrossed in his Financial Times which ruled out catching his eye and smiling to tempt him over. He called for something else. Something more proactive.

Kat slid off the bar stool, reached for her wine and walked towards his table. He didn't pull his eyes from his newspaper until she stood right in front of him, almost touching him.

"Excuse me," she said in a low voice and letting a shy smile curl her lips.

Nick pulled dazzling blue eyes from his paper and let them float slowly up Kat's body. A flash of appreciation crossed his face, and he smiled and raised his brows.

"Would you mind if I sat in this chair...if it's free, that is?" Kat indicated to the empty arm chair opposite him.

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"Be my guest."

"Thanks." Kat sat and crossed her legs so her dress hitched, showing lace topped stockings. "I'm meeting a friend," she began. "But I forgot my wrap. It's been so sunny today, and I thought I would be warm enough without it." She twisted and held her palms to the fire; the movement lifted her dress another inch. "But it's gotten so cold now, and I'm freezing sitting at the bar." She treated him to killer smile. "Are you sure you don't mind me sitting here until my friend arrives?"

"I don't mind a bit," he said, returning her a smile. "Where is your friend coming from? The traffic is bad tonight."

"Oh, I know." Kat rolled her eyes and avoided the question about her imaginary friend. "I hate Friday night traffic. It's nearly as bad as Monday morning traffic—don't you just hate that?"

She settled back on the plush armchair as he headed off on a conversation about the road systems in and around London, the widening of the M1 and the evils of the congestion charge.

All Kat had to do was sit back, relax and listen. Smiling and nodding in the right places and fiddling with her necklace so he had to keep dragging his eyes back up from her chest if he wanted to maintain some semblance of decency.

She finished her drink and sat for a while with an empty glass, wondering if he would ever notice and offer to refill it for her.

Finally, she made a show of lifting the empty glass to her lips and draining the very last drip.

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"Can I buy you another drink?" he offered.

She reached across the space between them and gently lifted his shirt sleeve with her fingertips. "My friend is so late." She sighed, peering at his watch. "I'd better text her and make sure she's alright." She tickled her finger against his skin as she pulled her hand away.

"You do that, and I'll get us both another drink."

"Well, only if you're sure. Say if I'm keeping you from something."

Nick shook his head as he got to his feet. "You're not keeping me from anything at all. White wine again?"

Kat gave a nod as she reached for her mobile.

Nick returned with wine for her and a coke for himself. "Driving" he explained as he set them down on the table. "Is your friend still coming?"

"No." Kat reached for her drink with a small frown, took a small sip and let the tip of her tongue retrieve the moisture from her lips. "She's had a family crisis poor thing. Not sure what. She'll tell me all about it over the weekend, I expect."

"I'm sorry about that." Nick looked unsure of what to say next.

"But, Nick, if she had turned up, I wouldn't be sitting here with you, would I?" Kat smiled flirtatiously as she crossed her legs.

He started to smile, but instead, his face creased in puzzlement. "I didn't tell you my name."

Kat's heart somersaulted. How could she have made such a stupid slip? Tonight of all nights. He was right, they hadn't

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swapped names yet. She kept her face soft with a smile dancing on her lips, hiding the turmoil going on inside.

Frantically, she searched for a way to smooth over her error. To make it right and charm herself back into his affections. She turned her head to buy thinking time, her eyes falling on the table that held his folded Financial Times and his set of keys.

His keys!

"Lucky guess." She grinned, turning back to his mystified face. "Your key ring. I guess they're yours sitting on the table."

Nick turned to where Kat was gesturing. Sure enough, attached to his keys was a neat gold square with NICK in black lettering embossed across it. His face cracked into a broad smile. "Very clever." He picked up the keys and dropped them into his front trouser pocket. "So," he said, his expression relaxed and light once more, "are you going to tell me your name or do I have to guess? It could be a long night."

Kat laughed and told him her name, leant back in her chair and took a long drink. That had been close. She'd nearly ruined everything with her mistake. She allowed herself a few minutes for her heart rate to return to normal. Then decided it was time to turn up the flirting to full power. Hit him with it between the eyes and everywhere else.

Folding her arms, she sent her cleavage oozing out of the top of her dress as she leant forward to listen to what he was saying. She fiddled with her hair, twisting it around her fingers, showing him how heavenly it was to touch and how

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much she liked to be touched. She crossed and uncrossed her legs far more than was necessary and made a point of licking her lips slowly after every mouthful of wine.

She included physical contact in her assault. Touching his arm to add weight to things she was saying and stretching out her hand to feather his hair when he complained about going grey.

Eventually the barman rang last orders, and she looked at Nick from under feathery lashes and said huskily, "Time to go."

Nick reached out and took her perfectly manicured hand in his. "Would you like to come back to mine for a nightcap? My car is right outside."

Kat glanced down at her purse.

"Just a nightcap, a coffee if you prefer."

"Well...I do think a coffee would be nice after all this wine."

"Great," Nick said, jumping up. "Back in a minute, wait here." He spun lightly and headed towards the gents.

Kat watched his retreating figure and hoped the next part of the evening wouldn't take too long. She just wanted to get the car to Carlos and find the diamonds.

But Nick seemed pliable enough. It was just a shame she hadn't managed to get him drunk. That would have been a much easier end to tonight's hit.

From a distance, John had watched Kat all evening.

He'd seen her walk over to Nick like a damsel in distress, followed Nick's lusty eyes as they'd roamed Kat's tight, black dress taking in her sensual curves. He'd watched then as

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she'd crossed her legs to show off the top of her stockings and saw Nick's eyes nearly pop out his head at the sexy view.

Within minutes, Nick had looked like a lovesick puppy, and John wondered if he'd looked as stupid the week before when Kat had worked her magic on him. But looking at her now, he reckoned he'd fall all over again and could see why Nick was. She looked good enough to eat. Hell, he'd certainly fallen for it again. He was completely off the wagon. So far off the wagon it had driven into the distance and he couldn't even see it.

But, despite his brooding expression, John was doing pretty well. Watching them have a drink and chatting was fine. He could cope with that. He was there and could see what was going on. But when all the touchy feely started, he could sense something like fury growing inside. Except it wasn't fury on its own. It was mixed with possessiveness and nausea, a feeling of being out of control and something of his being taken.

Stolen.

He watched Kat touch Nick's arm and hover her fingers on his knee and his fists had balled. John's jaw had clenched when she took a lock of Nick's blond hair between her fingers and smiled close to his face as if she was really enjoying his company.

But the diamonds stopped him from reacting further. He needed them, tonight, and if watching Kat with Nick was all he had to do, he could manage that. After some of the things he'd endured over the years, it should be effortless.



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But his shoulders were knotting, and his knee throbbed without the benefit of whisky. He wasn't sure how much more he could take.

At the last orders bell, he saw Nick take Kat's hand and ask her something. With a shy smile, she nodded in agreement to his suggestion.

It was the expectant, smug look on Nick's face as he made his way to the gents that finalised John's decision. It wasn't a rational decision, and it deviated from his plans. But damn it, there was no way he'd let Kat even get in a car with that man, let alone into his bed.

Nick had just finished washing and drying his hands, humming a quiet tune, when the gent's door swung open. He looked up and spotted a big guy in leathers, short dark hair and heavy glinting eyes which looked through him without expression.

He thought little of it. His mind was full of Kat, full of what he wanted to do with her once he had her alone in his flat. He could almost picture her naked. She'd shown enough cleavage for him to imagine the weight of her breasts in his hands, and he was sure her skin would smell of petals and taste of sherbet.

"Evening," Nick said as he walked past the stranger and went to open the door.

He never made it.

He didn't stand a chance.

With one hand outstretched for the handle, a sudden crushing force dug into both sides of his neck. He went to turn and fight but was rammed against the chipped wood of

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the door. It took three seconds for the pressure on his carotid arteries to stem the flow of blood to his brain. Darkness travelled inwards from his peripheral vision, and by the time it centralised, he'd given himself over to unconsciousness. Completely helpless in his fight against it.

John felt Nick's slumped body drag downwards, his legs no longer supporting him. But he held the pressure hard on his neck for a few more seconds to be sure he was out cold. Freezing cold.

He kicked open the nearest toilet door and hooked his hands under Nick's armpits. He dragged him into the cubicle and shoved him against the grimy wall. John helped himself to the car keys, stepped backwards out of the cubicle and pulled the door shut with the tips of his fingers. With his knife, he spun the sign to occupied, locking it at the same time.

He didn't feel guilty. The sucker would have a stinking headache when the landlord found him in the morning. But at least he wouldn't remember anything important.

He pulled the gents door open and strolled into the bar area.

"Time to go," he muttered as he reached Kat.

"What are you doing here?" she whispered, snapping shut her compact and glancing at the gents.

"Change of plan." He pulled her up by her elbow.

"What do you mean change of plan? I haven't got the keys yet."

Urging her along, John shouldered the swing door open and pulled her into the cold night air. He whipped the

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Mercedes key from his pocket and swung them from side to side in front of her face. "No, but I have."

"Bloody hell, what have you done with Nick?"

"He's out cold in the gents. No one will hear from him until morning. Now come on, we've a job to do."

Kat stood rooted to the spot. "You hit him?"

"Well, no, not technically. There are other ways to render someone unconscious you know."

"Yes, I know that. But I've never actually left someone unconscious in a toilet. What if he chokes on his own vomit or something?"

"He won't choke." John reached down for her hand and pressed the key into it. "Let's get going. The lecherous Mr Turnbull will be fine."

Kat still didn't move. "I just don't want accessory to murder added to my already impressive list of crimes. We have to tell someone."

John stepped forward, wound his arms around her waist and snapped her close. He looked down at the anxious shadows etched on her face and, in her eyes, caught a hint of stubbornness. "You're playing with the big boys, Pussy Cat. People get hurt. Let's just hope it's not you." He pressed a hard kiss on her mouth. "Now, for fuck's sake, get to the drop off point."

\* \* \* \*

Kat killed the head lights and rolled the Mercedes to a halt directly outside the bank. Fifty yards up the street, she could see Carlos waiting in his red BMW.

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She glanced around the street, looking for John's outline. She had no idea where he was, but he'd be lurking somewhere in the inky shadows.

Pulling her nerves together, she pushed open the door and climbed out. With steady steps, she walked towards Carlos who'd already shifted his bulk out of his car. She noticed someone in the car's passenger seat slide across and start the engine. The headlights clicked back to full beam.

Her heart thudded so loudly she was sure it could be heard externally. Her fingers played with the key as Carlos grew closer. She swallowed hard, but her mouth was dry and her tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth. She tried to keep up a steady pace and walk in a straight line towards him as she usually did. She didn't want anything to be different.

The light of an orange lamp post sent a scatter of shadows as he walked directly under it. His menace was palpable in the cold air as he hulked along, swaying his bulk from side to side. Finally meeting, his shoulder rubbed against her bare arm and she dropped the key into his upturned hand. There was no break in his heavy footsteps, no change in his rhythm. He kept on walking, pounding the pavement towards the Mercedes.

Kat breathed out. She hadn't realised what a big gulp of air she'd been hanging onto.

She braced as a gang of youths spilled from a doorway. Laughing and blowing fragrant smoke from roll ups, they glanced her way and laughed as one of them made a lewd comment.

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She saw Carlos's red BMW drive off, its driver, presumably one of Carlos's lackey's, satisfied his boss had made a successful scoop.

Ten more paces into the darkness, and the Mercedes perfectly tuned engine rumbled to life mixing with the youths' fading cackles.

Shit! Where the hell was John? Was he baling out on her? Had he left her and chased after the jewels alone like he'd wanted to all along? The abandonment thoughts were raining down like bullets when she heard her name whispered from a dark doorway.

"Hurry up, will you!" John thrust her leathers towards her.

Kat didn't hesitate. She was so relieved he hadn't dumped her. Quickly, she shoved her legs into the trousers, hitched her thin dress into the waist band and whacked her arms into the jacket sleeves. The bike's engine fired but the lights stayed off.

"Quicker!" John instructed as the Mercedes glided past them; Carlos's bald head silhouetted in lumpy glory as he sat with his hands casually on the steering wheel.

"I'm going as fast as I can," Kat puffed, dragging up the zip.

"Go faster," John growled. He revved the engine and flicked the stand up.

Kat wriggled her feet back into her high heels and yanked the helmet over her head, by which point John was rolling out the doorway cursing.

"Ready." She threw a leg over the back just as the bike flew off. Linking her fingers at his waist, she leant forward

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and pressed her helmet into his back as they bumped onto the road. The headlights flicked on, and she settled in for the ride.

By the time they'd hit the road, Carlos had turned the corner of the High Street and was out of sight. John whacked the bike to full throttle to reach the end of the street at double the speed limit. He hoped the cops he'd seen patrolling earlier had been called to business elsewhere. They were the last thing he needed right now.

He cursed Kat again for the fact he'd lost sight of Carlos. She'd seriously slowed him down by insisting on coming with him. But the Mercedes was a big noticeable car, and he reckoned Carlos would be heading for the motorway. In anticipation, John skipped the lights and swung to the left. Bombing under a tall brick railway bridge, he opened up the engine for a few hundred yards as he approached a flood lit roundabout.

There he was.

John rammed on the brakes, and their bodies slid forward with deceleration. Carlos turned, as John had predicted, towards the motorway and London. He leaned the bike to the left and floored to the right.

He fell back so they wouldn't get noticed. Ducked and dodged, mingled and became invisible, inconspicuous. John relaxed into the ride, knowing it would take a while. He felt his adrenalin release slow and became aware of Kat's arms tight around him and her helmet pressing against his back. He soon got into a rhythm of staying several cars behind the

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Merc, letting other vehicles swing in and out of the lanes between them and using them as cover.

Carlos, John noticed, kept the car in the slow and middle lanes. Indicating his changes carefully and following lane discipline rules to the letter. He stayed a good distance from the cars in front and was being careful not to draw any unwanted attention to himself.

The street lamps whizzed continually past, and the dazzling headlights on the opposite lanes seemed never ending. But, finally, they hit North London. A few high rises and warehouses later and Carlos exited at the end of the M1. He headed for the North Circular, travelling in an easterly direction.

John followed, keeping a red Royal Mail van between them. The roads got smaller after several sets of traffic lights and an interchange. He continued to keep a generous distance, switching lanes and ducking behind other vehicles when the post van had taken a different route from theirs.

Eventually, he brought the wheels to a quiet roll in a street devoid of lamp posts. Flicking the lights off and plunging the tarmac into deep darkness, they finally came to rest behind an overflowing, rotten smelling skip.

The left side of the street was made up of several small, scruffy warehouse units, all in complete darkness. Dotted amongst them were a couple of abandoned, boarded up shops, and at the end of the street facing them was a short row of two up, two down terraced houses. A dull light shone from only one, an upstairs window with ragged, haphazardly drawn curtains.

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Along the opposite side of the street ran a high corrugated fence propped up with iron girders, and in peeling, white paint, a shaky handwritten sign advised 'Private Property. Keep out!'

John and Kat watched as Carlos brought the Mercedes to a halt beside large metal gates. He kept the engine turning over and the lights on but made no move to climb out and open the gates.

The front door of the end terrace house swung open, spilling a puddle of bright light onto the street. A tall, gangly youth shot down the double front step and into the road. He was dressed in green overalls and had a backwards baseball cap perched above his long, thin face. He took several rushed paces towards Carlos with his hand delving into his baggy overall pocket. He ground to a halt at the gates, fiddled with the padlock then swung them hurriedly open.

Carlos manoeuvred the stolen car through the gates and slunk into blackness as they squeaked shut behind him.

Kat slid off the motorbike.

John followed, pulling at his helmet. "Well, we know where Carlos's yard is. Now, let's go and get my Porsche."

Kat snapped off her helmet and studied the imposing, sharp gates. She didn't fancy going anywhere near Carlos again tonight. She was just about to voice this when she felt John grab her waist. Holding on with hard determination, he dragged her behind the skip and crouched his body over hers.

"Hey!" she said at the rough treatment.

"Shh, someone's coming out."



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Kat froze in her doubled up position. She heard an engine then headlights lit up the street like a floodlight.

"Was it him?" she whispered when the car had gone from view.

"Yeah, but he's switched. He's in the Beemer now." John clicked his tongue in frustration. "Shit, I was about to go in there and fuck him up."

"Shall we follow?"

"No, he'll be back at some point."

Kat reached for her boots from the box on the back of the bike, laced them and stood upright with renewed enthusiasm now Carlos had left the vicinity. "Come on. Your car might still be in there." She turned and trotted across the street, her boots noiseless and her outfit melting into the blackness.

She walked up to the gate and silently pushed the left one with the flat of her hand. The gates parted in the middle around the heavy chain. Then, like an expert contortionist, she put her right leg and right hip through the small space.

"What the hell are you doing?" John said through gritted teeth. .

"I'm going to find your Porsche. Wait here...and be quiet!"

Suddenly, she was on the other side of the gate, standing in Carlos's yard full of stolen cars. Some of them, many of them, products of her own skilful handy work.

Without so much as backward glance, she weaved around several cars, none of which were Porsches, and went on towards a long, low building the size of four double garages. It had blue wooden doors, not quite shut, and she could make out a low window at the side.

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She stooped and ran, her boots carrying her noiselessly on the uneven, concrete surface. She placed her palms on sleeping cars as she moved agilely around them, stopping and starting frequently and checking out her next move.

Her adrenalin was flowing, her breaths rasping and shallow. Every instinct told her to get as far away as possible from anything of Carlos'. But the thought of the diamonds urged her on. She was on a mission, a mission to become very, very rich.

Reaching a vantage point where she could spy through the window, Kat hooked her fingers over the sill and cautiously raised her head. Past a bundle of heavy cobwebs thick with London soot, she could see the inside of the brightly lit garage.

There were two cars side by side, a yellow Lamborghini, nothing to do with her, and the blue Mercedes. Tools were spread around the floor as were tyres, seats, radios and a steering wheel. Only one person was apparent. The man she'd seen opening the gates for Carlos. But he was only just a man, because as Kat studied him, she realised he was probably not even out of his teens. He had a stretched pale face, over sized hooked nose and a wet mouth hanging open formlessly—the whole mishmash of pig ugly features made all the worse by the fact they were surrounded with angry red acne and a greasy tug of hair which poked out his cap.

The new Mercedes was up on jacks. She saw him lean right inside, and suddenly, the air was filled with banging rap music. As the youth's head reappeared, it bobbed around in

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time with the fast beat, making him look even more deranged.

Feeling confident the spotty youth wouldn't pose a problem even if he did see her, Kat scanned the rest of the garage. Surely there was some sort of desk in the building. Somewhere Carlos would keep a record of his illegal business, a tracking system for the cars he shifted through. She strained to see into each corner, looking for any signs of paperwork, a computer, a filing cabinet—anything. But there was nothing other than car parts and oily rags, hundreds of cans of spray paint and bottles of polish—nothing to suggest record keeping.

But there was a door, right at the back, and judging from its position along the wall on which she was leaning, it wasn't flush with the end of the building. It must be a doorway into another room, hopefully an office.

She flicked her eyes back to the youth. He was tucked under the car now, his feet twitching to the booming rap.

Heart racing at the thought of entering deeper into Carlos's domain, she nipped past a pile of rusty old oil drums to the front of the garage and slipped inside.

Her feet floated like feathers, and her breath caught high in her throat as she passed within a few feet of the mechanic's feet.

She reached the door, pushed down the handle and stepped in.

She was greeted with a Formica desk strewn with a great pile of papers. Immediately, she began to rifle through them.

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If Carlos had information on where the Porsche was, it must be on this desk...somewhere.

Scanning familiar scrawling writing, she hunted for the word Porsche. Any word that started with P was treated to scrutiny. She dropped a pile of papers on the floor and bent to sift them back together.

She shoved them onto the desk and flicked through a pad of post its. Pulled at one of the drawers underneath; it was locked. She hunched and put all her weight into it. Heaved with all her might. Willed the little lock to break so the drawer would open and give up its secrets. She needed to get in there.

A cold, hard, sickening pressure was suddenly applied to the right side of her head.

She froze.

Bent over and with her fingers wrapped around the drawer handle, she ceased all movement and, with horror, realised the cold, hard thing pushed against her temple was a gun.

"Well, well, well," Carlos's low, menacing voice rumbled directly behind her, "what a nice surprise to see you here, Kitty Kat."

The end of the gun poked harder, and her neck jerked, sending a bolt of pain to her shoulder blades. But she didn't notice. She was too terrified to notice anything. Her only awareness was cool metal at her temple and the imminence of her death.

"Stand up, bitch," Carlos instructed.

She straightened and turned to look at his juicy, bloated face. His evil eyes bored into hers for several long seconds.

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Then he swayed backwards and swept his gaze over the leather gear she wore. When he looked back up, there was a lusty glint mixed with the brutish hate in his eyes. It scared her nearly as much as the gun did.

"Looking good tonight," he said the left side of his lip curling up in a disgusting leer.

Kat gagged as his rancid breath hit the back of her throat.

"Not what you were wearing earlier. And you were so early tonight, very unusual. You usually like to spend a few hours getting fucked first." He cackled. "Maybe I could help you out with that, what do you reckon?" His free hand cupped her right breast and squeezed—hard.

Kat clenched her teeth to prevent crying out as a jolt of pain seared through tender tissue.

"Mmm, you're making me horny, I've never had a pussy cat before. Will you purr I wonder or will you yowl?"

"There's a...a...good reason I'm here. Honestly, I'll explain ev...everything if you give me a chance. Please."

"Too fucking right you'll explain, just as soon as I've shown you what happens when you slink into my yard." His yellowing teeth gritted and little drops of his revolting spit landed on her face.

He reached for her zip, snagged it down and pushed his hand inside her jacket. He grabbed her breast and twisted her nipple through her thin dress. His fingers were hard, tight and mean. Kat whimpered and squeezed her eyes shut.

"You like the rough treatment, do you?" He pulled the gun from her temple and shoved it under her chin. The sharp

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movement caused her neck to hyper extend until she was looking directly up at his face.

His hard groin and fat stomach pressed into her abdomen. He yanked down her dress and bra. It tore and revealed bare flesh which oozed, already reddening, over the ripped material.

"No, please, Carlos, no."

"You better change that to 'yes, Carlos, yes'." His lips hovered above hers, and his gold fillings flashed as he contorted his face into a carnal smile. "You'll need to shout yes when I fuck you. Yes, Carlos, oh, yes." He made his voice high and sing-song. "Oh, please don't stop, Carlos. You're the best."

Kat trembled and tried to shift her head away from the gun.

"Keep fucking still." He pulled his hand from her breast with a final hard nip and shoved at the waistband of her trousers. "Take these fucking things off and then bend over my table you seem so damn interested in."

Kat whimpered.

"Now, whore."

With shaking hands, she reached down for her fly buttons. She was about to be raped, about to be taken by the most revolting man she'd ever met, the brute of her nightmares. Her pelvis muscles trembled, her chest wheezed.

She pushed her trousers down an inch, cried out as Carlos spun her around with the nose of the gun and curled his fingers over her waistband. He yanked brutally, and she tensed all her muscles as he shoved her forward, the gun

sinking into the base of her skull as he fumbled with his own zipper.

"I think you've taken enough of what belongs to me." A sudden, deep voice rattled from the doorway.

The gun swung from the back of Kat's head. She seized the opportunity and scrambled to the corner, where she tugged up her trousers, zipped her jacket and grabbed in a shaky breath.

Like a demented ogre, Carlos hulked to the centre of the room. "Who the fuck are you?" he shouted over the thud of the rap music.

With renewed horror, Kat saw the gun aimed directly at John's heart.

John said nothing. He just stared at Carlos, his belligerence palpable.

Kat swayed as she hugged her arms over her chest. Everything moved in slow motion, sheer panic altered her vision. Carlos was more than capable of murder, and he was pointing a loaded gun at John's chest. Her legs buckled in an effort to remain upright. It would go off at any moment. The room would fill with the sound of gunshot, and John would fall to the ground...dead...dead...dead. It would be all her fault. He'd come to her rescue. She primed her ears for the noise, braced for the unimaginable horror. They were at Carlos' non-existent mercy.

"I've seen you somewhere before, asshole," Carlos snarled as he took a step towards John.

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"Yeah, and I've seen you before, you son of a bitch," John growled back. "But like I said, you've something of mine and I want it back."

"Yeah...I do know you." Carlos let a knowing smile form on his lips. "Kat nicked your Porsche last weekend. I trailed you personally, checking out your haunts and where you lived. And you..." he snorted down his big bulbous nose, "are one sad, whisky guzzling cripple, John Taylor. You need to get out more, live a little, get a damn life before you're old." He jerked the gun upwards so it was aimed at John's forehead. "Oops... Guess you won't be making old age after all,"

John took one big step into the office.

Carlos' face twisted. "I swear on my mother's grave, man. One more step and you're blown to smithereens!"

"Been there, done that," John responded keeping solid eye contact and taking yet another step.

Kat clasped her hand to her mouth and slumped several inches down the wall. John's eyes slipped around Carlos's right shoulder and settled on her panic-stricken face.

Carlos swung his head around following John's eye movement. It was all the distraction John needed. With one final big stride, he grabbed the outstretched arm pointing the gun at his head and, with an expert flick of his wrist, twisted the limb up and around Carlos's broad back.

"What the fuck!" Carlos shouted as he was swung around, his own considerable momentum used to his disadvantage.

John peeled the gun out of Carlos's fat hand and slipped it into his back pocket, keeping the tight arm lock on the writhing mass of muscle in front of him.



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*by Lily Harlem*

"You don't know what a mistake you just fucking made." Carlos spat over his shoulder before trying to throw his big, lumpy head back into John's face.

John ducked sideways and rammed a hand into the back of Carlos's short, thick neck. With a sharp forward thrust combined with an ankle sweep, he doubled him over the table. Carlos' chest hit with crashing force, and the air whooshed from his lungs. John leant his weight even harder on the arm twisted up his back.

Carlos yelled out in agony, a deep grunt of a scream that echoed around the office and mixed with the thumping music.

Kat stood motionless, watching with morbid fascination as Carlos' floppy, red cheeks turned a deep shade of puce and his eyes screwed up and disappeared into his skull.

John, still not content with how much pain Carlos was in, leant even harder down on his twisted arm. As his weight sank lower and lower, heavier and heavier, he finally felt a satisfying pop as the ball of Carlos' humerus leapt from its shoulder joint.

The roar of torturous suffering was like that of a lion being castrated.

"Like I said, you have something of mine," John growled into Carlos's ear in a quiet, calm voice.

"Get the fuck off me," Carlos snarled, spraying a shower of saliva onto the papers.

John leant harder onto the dislocated arm, which rewarded him with yet another roar. He then shoved his thumb up and under Carlos's jaw bone, causing his neck to stretch backwards. "Where's my damn Porsche?"

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by Lily Harlem

"Is that what this is about? A fucking Porsche." Carlos spoke in a strangled voice. "I hope it's worth it, 'cause your life won't be worth living after this. Every contact I have will be after you when there's a million pound bounty on your head." He was dribbling now. "You'll be hunted till you're hung drawn and quartered with your pretty fucking head above my front door."

John whipped the gun from the back pocket of his leathers and rammed the barrel into Carlos's right temple. He didn't want Carlos to mistake what it was—the gun about to take his life. He twisted so he could speak into Carlos's puggy red face crumpled on the surface of the table. "Look at me, you son of a bitch."

Carlos kept his eyes shut and puffed wetly through parted lips.

*"I said, look at me!"*

Carlos pried open his beady black eyes. .

"I'll ask you one more time, then your shit for brains hit the desk. Where. Is. My. Porsche?"

Carlos stared straight into John's dark, steady gaze. When he said nothing, he was treated to another sharp dig in the head with the gun.

"I will kill you, do you think I won't?" John said quietly and calmly.

Carlos squeezed his eyes shut. "I'll tell you," he muttered. "I'll tell you alright. Just get the hell off me."

"Talk!"

"West Hampstead." Sticky white spittle clung like a cob web between Carlos's lips. His hand clenched the desk, the

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letters h-a-t-e standing out on his knuckles as the blood drained from the skin.

"Address?"

"I dunno. I...I can't fucking remember."

The trigger on the gun flexed, a deadly click.

"132 Priestly Ave. 132 Priestley."

"Yeah," said John. "And what damn colour is it now?"

"I dunno. I can't fucking know stuff like that that," Carlos whined. "Honest. I got no idea." He banged his fist on the table in frustration, a small, futile act of defiance.

"Would a bullet to your fat leg jog your memory?" John removed the gun from Carlos' temple and shoved it to the back of his thigh, folding it deep into the soft, giving flesh and feeling hugely tempted to pull the trigger anyway. It would feel good to send a bullet ricocheting into the prick who'd had Kat doing his disgusting dirty work.

"B-blue, it's blue. Metallic blue."

John pulled up, leaving a grovelling Carlos slumped on the desk, his arm hanging formlessly towards the floor. He looked at Kat shrinking into the corner with a sheet white face and her wide eyes unblinking.

He shoved the gun in his back pocket and held out a steady hand. "Come on."

She didn't move. Not a muscle.

"Time to go, Pussy Cat," he said in a gentler voice.

Kat kept her eyes fixed on Carlos, who was pushing up from the desk with his one good arm. What was he going to do next? She couldn't tell. He shifted towards her with his right arm hanging at a weird, unnatural angle and the other

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fist clenching and unclenching. His face was contorted with pain, hate, and vengeance—all directed her way.

John took a step towards him and, in an effortless movement, knocked both Carlos's feet out from under him.

Carlos hit the deck, landing flat onto his dislocated arm, the entirety of his own body weight slamming onto the twisted limb. His face puffed up, and he screamed like a wild man.

John leant down to his ugly face. He waited until the scream died to a whimper then continued in a deadly tone. "Stay away from Kat or you'll have me to deal with, and I promise on my mother's grave, if I have to see you again, you're dead. Do you hear me?"

Carlos said nothing.

"*Do you fucking hear me?*" John shouted and lifted his boot ready to slam into Carlos' head.

Carlos nodded frantically.

"Good." John bent down and pulled the gate key from Carlos' left jacket pocket, stepped over to the corner and took Kat's hand. "It's okay now," he said, pulling her towards the doorway. "I'm here. He won't hurt you again."

John wanted out of there fast. It hadn't gone according to plan. Having a gun at Kat's head was worst case scenario, and later on, when he was alone in the dark, he'd replay the sight of her with a gun rammed at the back of her head and Carlos looming over her with his fat, grotesque body preparing to hammer into her soft little sweet one.

Round and round in his mind, like a reel of film, it would go on forever. John would feel the terror and the sickness all

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over again. Want to kill Carlos all over again for putting his perverted, rapist's hands on her.

But there was no time for those thoughts. Emotions had to go on hold. It was how he'd been trained. He had to concentrate on the mission—132 Priestly Ave. He needed to get there fast. He had the information he'd been hungering after all week, and now, he wanted to act on it.

They walked back through the brightly lit garage, not bothering to keep a low profile. Carlos's young mechanic was still underneath the Mercedes, his long, scruffy trainers dancing to loud rapping music. He'd been oblivious to the drama in his boss's office. Hadn't heard or seen a thing.

Reaching the motorbike, John picked up Kat's helmet and passed it to her. Her hands shook as she reached out, and he paused to examine her face.

Even in the dim light, he could see she was ridiculously pale, and her eyes were still wide, like a rabbit caught in headlights. Her pretty, full mouth was set in a straight line and devoid of expression.

"Hey," he said softly and took a step closer. "Carlos can't hurt you now. I've sorted him."

She looked up at his face but didn't change her vacant expression. John wondered if she was in shock. She always acted like such a little hard nut, pretended to handle anything. But he knew she wasn't really tough. Not deep down. She'd shown him over the last few days that at her core she was a lost little girl, alone in the world and fighting for survival.

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*by Lily Harlem*

He cupped her jaw with both hands and looked into her eyes. "Relax, Pussy Cat. I'm here to look after you." He searched her face to make sure she was registering what he was saying. "I won't let anything happen to you. I promise." Then he added with a half smile, "But don't go running off like that again. Just because you can get your slinky body through small gaps doesn't mean you have to."

Kat stared up at him. She believed John would look after her. After all, he'd just rescued her from a hideous rape and quite possibly saved her life. But what she couldn't stop thinking about was how she'd nearly gotten him killed. Because of her foolish stunt, Carlos had swung the gun from her head to John's chest. She'd thought at any second John would be shot. His chest blown apart and lung tissue spread across the office wall.

"He was about to kill you," she whispered.

"Yeah, he was. But he didn't. So don't think about it anymore. It's over with Carlos. Forever, you hear me? Forever. You'll never see him again."

Kat nodded. He was right. She could never go back to working for Carlos now. Their business arrangement was over. That thought was a huge relief. The end of her lucrative, yet questionable career had finally arrived. But it would be alright, especially with her share of the diamonds. They would keep her going for years. She pulled cool air deep into her chest and tried to fix her thoughts back together.

"You know something? John said, still holding her face in his hands and gazing at her intently.

"What?" She locked her eyes with his.

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*by Lily Harlem*

"When I said Carlos had something of mine, I wasn't just talking about the car or the diamonds."

Kat looked into his earnest face. What he'd just said touched a nerve. How did he keep doing that? But she wasn't complaining; she liked it. She liked being his, and it hadn't been said in a jealous, possessive way, simply stated as a fact, like they were a team. Locked together and performing a secret task. Kat and John against the world.

She stood on her tiptoes and pressed her lips to his.

He coiled his hands around her waist and pulled her closer, delved his tongue into her mouth. She groaned at the maleness of his taste and the hardness of his body pressing into hers. It felt so good, so right, so perfect after Carlos's disgusting gropes and soft, fleshy stomach.

He pulled back a fraction. "Are you okay?"

"Yes."

"You know, physically? Did the sick son of a bitch hurt you? I got there in time, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did, and no, I don't think he hurt me. I just feel a bit shaky."

"Sit," he said, glancing around. "There." He pointed through the darkness at a low wall in the shadows behind the skip. He steered her over, taking the helmet from her hands.

Kat sat, thankful to relieve her legs of the job of standing upright.

"Let me see." John stood above her and, with steady fingers, undid the zip of her jacket.

Kat felt the chill hit her burning flesh. She throbbed. It stung. She'd been cruelly handled.

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"It's too dark to see anything," he whispered. "Are you sore?" Tenderly, he rubbed his palm over the top swell of her right breast which hung unsupported.

"It's okay, I think, but he's ripped my dress, my favourite hit dress."

"You don't need a hit dress, any more," he said firmly.

"Oh, yes, I forgot."

He moved his hand to her other exposed breast, also hanging heavy from her leather jacket. His fingertips wandered carefully over her flesh. "This one okay?" His voice was suddenly husky, the way she'd noticed it became when he was thinking of sex. Her breath caught. Surely not here, not now? The image filled her with heady excitement. It was so seedy, so dirty, so silent and murky behind the filthy skip.

"Maybe a little tender here." She reached for his hand and directed it onto her erect nipple.

"Just here?" He lowered his head and followed where his fingers had brushed with his tongue. "I guess I'll have to kiss all the sore spots better then." He pulled her nipple gently onto the roll of his tongue.

"Mmmm."

"And this one?" His fingers swept over her other breast, taking in the nipple and supporting the heavy underside with his palm. "Does it need kissing better?"

"Yes, it needs your kisses, needs you. I need..." Her words tailed off as she buried her hands in his hair and pushed her chest out for his delicious attention. She let out a low groan of desire as memories of Carlos touching her were brushed away.



"I'll tell you what I need," he rasped between kisses, his voice suddenly urgent. "I need to get my cock between your tits." He stood upright and reached for his zipper. "If I don't, I'm gonna burst, baby."

Kat looked up at him through the darkness, excitement raced through her veins, and even more adrenalin was released into her system. Maybe it was the fright she'd just had, maybe it was the way he'd risked himself to protect her. Whatever it was, she was flying on something and needed a release. She wanted to connect with John and explode. Convince herself they'd both survived.

She reached out to help him with his buttons, but he'd already freed his throbbing erection. The sight of it, huge and demanding, outlined against his dark leathers made her pussy melt. He was so gorgeous, so perfect.

"Like this," he said, gently palming the outer orbs of her tits. "Hold like this and let me bury myself in your cleavage."

Kat took over his hand positions, felt the hot weight of her breasts as she moulded them to form a deep channel. John stood straight, and her face was suddenly level with his leather clad abdomen, the wall the perfect height for him to fuck her tits.

He took his cock in one hand, held her shoulder with the other and pushed his hips forward. "You okay to do this?" he whispered hoarsely, thrusting into the soft pillows.

"Yes." She tipped her head down and swept her tongue over the slit of his protruding cock. "More than okay." She was humming all over.

Thief  
by Lily Harlem

"Ah, jeez." He groaned, smoothing a hand over her hair. "Every part of you is so good to fuck." She treated him to another swirl of her tongue as he pushed his length through her breasts and up towards her chin. "You're amazing. I should go back and kill Carlos for even looking at you."

She hooked her knees against his legs to keep him exactly where he was. "No," she said as he bobbed low, ready for another long slide up her cleavage. "Stay right where you are. Its making me feel so much better."

He moaned then released a jagged grunt as she squeezed her breasts even tighter around his straining erection. She could feel his outer skin moving and shifting over the solid, steel interior of his cock, her breasts tugging at his tiny bit of slack and working it like a hand or a pussy or a mouth would.

He pressed a palm over her right hand. She wriggled free, letting him support her breast whilst she shoved her hand down between her own legs. She was so turned on, so damn ready to come it would be dynamite with all those endorphins blasting her system.

She didn't bother to undo her trousers, just pushed two fingers past the waistband, under her knickers elastic and slipped through fleshy, wet lips to her hard clit.

"I'm gonna shoot my load..." John gasped with a sudden desperation in his voice.

"Give me a few seconds," she gasped, head lolling forward as she grabbed that waiting spark. "I'll join you."

"We haven't time for slow and indulgent."

"I know, just..." Kat fed her greed with vigorous, urgent movements, her deft fingertips giving pressure right where

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*by Lily Harlem*

she needed it. Her calf muscles tensed, and her toes lifted off the grimy pavement. Her spine tipped forward from the wall, rocking her harder onto her clit.

"Oh, you're so fucking sweet how you do yourself," John groaned. "One of these days I'm gonna sit back and watch you as I sip on a whisky." She licked the rim of his cock as it popped within reach. "Oh, yes, fuck yes, do that again." He pulled down and shot up fast into her waiting mouth. She sucked him in and licked with the tensed tip of her tongue. He took over holding her chest exactly where he wanted it, and she found his balls with her other fingers and worked them into a rolling frenzy the same way she was rolling herself.

She let her middle finger slide towards his anus, stroking the thin ridge of skin on his perineum and tickling over the clenched hole the way he had hers. She found the very centre and pressed gently, seeing if he would let her in, checking for give in the furrowed band of muscle. There was some, not much, but she found a tiny bit of slack and let the tip of her finger sink into the waiting black heat.

"Oh... fuck..." his voice was strangled, "you filthy little minx..." Semen spurted up towards her mouth, splashed onto her chin and chest in hot milky jets. His balls retracted from her palm, and she pushed her probing finger even higher, curled it forward and pressed on his smooth inside wall. "Mine..." he grunted with a final thrust, his hands releasing her tits to brace her shoulders, ensuring she could take his near violent force. "Fuck it, you're mine."

Kat pulled her finger from his tight butt, and he froze in the darkness like a marble statue.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

It was the way he'd said 'mine' at the exact moment she'd found a secret place inside him that tipped Kat over the edge. Her hand, arm and shoulder jerked against his motionless body as she powered through her intense finale. Her fingers flew across her clit, over and over. She panted, gasped, let her knees drop open. "Oh, God," she said, loving the feeling of absolute control she always got when she pleased herself.

Then her face was caught between his hands, and he was bending over her, supplying her with crazy, hot kisses. His tongue plunging into her and absorbing her wail of satisfaction as the crest of her wave crashed down spectacularly.

It was good to be alive.

It was good to be alive with John.

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## Chapter Nine

\* \* \* \*

Half an hour later, they were driving down Priestley Avenue—an exclusive tree-lined street in West Hampstead with tall white, oversized houses standing to attention. Each house had black, spiked railings separating them from the wide pavement, and neat topiary trees stood like fat butlers on the imposing doorways. All but a few were in complete darkness.

John swung the bike to the end of the street, hoping he would find the garages belonging to the expensive homes. He was in luck. As he killed the engine and came to a roll, a neat row of white garages could be made out discreetly tucked behind the houses. A quick search on the ambling bike soon produced garage number 132 half a dozen doors up.

They both slid silently off the bike.

Kat reached down and pulled at the small, cold handle. It was, of course, firmly locked. "Damn" she said under her breath. "Now what are we going to do?"

John already had his knife out and was unfolding a long, thin gadget from the handle. Bending double in the darkness, he fiddled for fifteen seconds before trying the handle once again. The door pulled upwards.

"Impressive," Kat muttered in mock admiration. "Is that essential military expertise or have you picked it up from somewhere else?"

"It was essential in my line of work," he whispered, lifting the door carefully.

"You never did tell me. What did your unit do in the army?"

"You're right... I didn't tell you." He ducked his head. "result, it's here!"

Kat rushed forward. There was John's Porsche. No longer silver, but a metallic shade of azure blue. Sitting patiently for them to come and find it.

"Excellent." Kat grinned but then her face dropped. "But how are we going to get into it. These cars are useless without their keys, virtually impossible to break into. That's the whole reason Carlos had me, remember?"

The car indicator lights flashed twice, the orange glow lit up the inside of the garage as a quick, high pitched beep echoed rudely into the quiet.

Kat turned to John, puzzled.

"Spare key," he said.

"Well done." She walked up to the boot as John popped it open remotely.

John ducked his head as he came to stand next to her. A weak light bulb showed the boot held a green first aid box and an empty coke can. Neither of which were his. Barely able to contain his apprehension, he reached into the semi-darkness and began to get his bearings within the small space. Trying to remember exactly where he'd cut the hole in the lining and secreted the diamonds away.

Eventually, after what felt like an age, his fingertip poked inwards. "Yes," he said. "I've found the hole."

"And the diamonds?"

His heart went from skipping with elation as his fingers found the hideout to pounding with fury when he found nothing within. "Shit!"

"They're gone," he said.

"No, they can't be. Let me look!" Kat pushed him out the way and shoved her hand into the boot. "Oh God," she said, delving into the empty space. "Now what?" She turned to John with her hands on her hips.

"The valet boy. Carlos's spotty kid who does up the cars. It must be him. I'd bet my life he's got the diamonds."

"You reckon? He didn't look bright enough to find a well-hidden hole like this."

"He wouldn't have to be bright, just thorough in his refit jobs. And let's face it, those cars back there were getting a damn good sort out." John reached up and shut the boot of his car and locked it. "I'm guessing Carlos doesn't get his hands dirty in the garage. He's the organiser, the boss, out hustling up business and looking out for the next car. Which means that dozy kid has my whole damn future stashed away somewhere" He pulled the garage door closed.

"Aren't you going to take your car now you've found it?" Kat asked. "I could drive it for you."

"I know where it is. When I want it back, I'll come and get it." He marched over to the bike, pulled his helmet on, swung his leg over the seat and revved the engine, no longer worried about being quiet. "Are you coming or what?"

"But what's the plan now?"

"We go back to Carlos's garage and ruffle up the kid."

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

Kat stood rooted to the ground.

"Carlos won't be there. He'll be at hospital having his shoulder shoved back into its socket, and it will take a while with all that muscle mass to heave against."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. Now, get on or I'll leave you here."

\* \* \* \*

By the time they returned to Carlos' garage, the sky was turning a lighter shade of blue in the east. Once again, John pulled the bike up behind the skip. Carlos' garage appeared deserted. The lights at the windows were off and the thump, thump of rap music had been replaced with silence.

Kat focused on the row of scruffy, dark terrace houses at the end of the street. "He lives in the end one, doesn't he? You think he's in?"

"I'm guessing he's done his night's work and hit the sack. But not for much longer. I need a chat with his sorry arse." John waited until Kat had climbed off the bike and then hoisted himself off. Without bothering to remove his helmet, he strode towards the front door.

"Wait, wait, let's cover all our bases here."

John kept on walking.

"Let me talk to him," Kat said quickly.

"Why?" John said with a snort as he stopped and turned to look at her. "Why on earth would I do that? I can get more out of him than you can."

Kat put her hands on her hips and raised her eyebrow. "You reckon...soldier?"



Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

A muscle in his jaw twitched and he turned and continued on his way past scruffy front doors.

"John. At least listen to me." Kat did several quick steps and grabbed at his arm. "For crying out loud, stop a minute, will you?"

John blew out a deep sigh and halted.

"Let me go and speak to him while you turn the place over."

"Why the hell would I do that?"

"Because he's a kid. He's much more likely to talk if he is being treated nice than if he's being bullied by a brute like you." She frowned as if he was totally stupid not to see her point. "I'll go and ask him nicely if he knows where they are, and you look around the place. Check under his mattress, behind pictures, that sort of thing. You can't push a kid around, even you know that."

"Alright. But only because I don't want to thump a kid. But if you get nothing out of him, he's all mine...right."

"Great," said Kat with a smile. "Back me up, will you, and make sure you keep the noise down."

He shook his head and ducked into a neighbour's narrow porch. Kat moved to the end house and knocked on the peeling, red door. She turned to look at John, and sent a hint of a smile his way before the door was opened.

"Hi," she said softly to the pimply, sleepy face. But it was only sleepy for a second, because then the opener of the door saw who was addressing him, and the tired eyes grew wide and a nervous twitch tugged at his left nostril.

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

His long neck bobbed forward, and he glanced up and down the street. "Shit, what the hell are *you* doing at my house?" A noticeable lisp played with his s's.

Kat raised her eyebrows, still smiling warmly. "Can I come in? Just for a minute."

He frowned but stepped into the small hallway and made enough room so she could enter on to the frayed carpet. Carefully, she pushed the front door up behind her, being sure not to click the Yale so John would be able to sneak in and hunt around.

Her nerves were cool as ice. Now was the time to do what she was most skilful at, most practiced at. Getting what she wanted by turning on her formidable female charm. Using her strong sexual powers to hypnotise and mesmerise her victims until they were putty in her hands. She could handle this kid. He looked young, sure, but not so young he wouldn't think with his dick.

"What are you doing here?" he asked again, taking in the leather outfit she was wearing with his bulging, roaming eyes.

"What's your name?" Kat strutted into the living room.

"Todd." He followed, and she sensed his gaze on her rear.

"You know who I am Todd, don't you?"

"Of course I know who you are. You get the cars for Carlos."

"Ahh, I see, so where have you seen me before, Todd?" Kat kept her voice smooth but loud enough to cover any noise John might make as he nipped up the stairs.

"I've seen you loads when you drop cars off. Like earlier when you brought the Merc."

Thief  
*by Lily Harlem*

"You were there, tonight?"

Todd flattened his shoulders as if proud of what he was about to say. "I was in the Beamer."

"Are you old enough to drive?"

"Well, I've got my provisional I'm eighteen, you know." He tutted. "What you doing here anyway?"

"I need to talk to you." She smiled and stepped closer to him.

"What about? Not Carlos? "Cause he's not here." His lisp was horrendous, and he sprayed spittle onto her leather jacket.

"Where is he? Carlos?" She suppressed a shudder of disgust.

"Up the hospital. Had a run in with someone, wouldn't say who, but he was in a bad way with his arm when I dropped him at casualty."

Kat held in a sigh of relief that Carlos was out the way. "Todd, I don't want to talk about Carlos. I want to talk about you." She turned up her attack, stepped closer so he backed up against the fireplace wall.

"Why? W-w-w-what do you want to talk to me about?" His speech impediments doubled with her body just inches from his.

"Because," she put her hand on his shoulder and looked up into his eyes, "because, Todd, you have something I want." She let her hand trail slowly over his puny chest. His eyes followed her hand as it flowed over his non-existent abdominal muscles, reached his naval and finally came to a

halt at the waistband of his jeans where her finger hooked onto the fly button.

"Do you know what I want?"

He said nothing.

With her other hand, Kat reached up to the metal zip on her own jacket and began undoing it very, very slowly, pulling it low so her soft cleavage was partially exposed. "Do I have anything you want Todd?" she said licking her lips so her mouth glistened with lingering moisture. "Maybe we could trade?"

"I, er... I, er...don't know," Todd stammered again, unwilling or unable to remove his eyes from the creamy, ripe flesh of her breasts.

Kat made the most of the hypnotic trance. "Diamonds," she whispered, pressing her body against his. "I'm looking for diamonds."

He dragged his attention from her breasts to her eyes.

Kat studied the depths of his pupils, there was definitely something lurking there. Acknowledgement? Deception? No, it was more like comprehension.

A triumphant release of adrenalin spurred her on. He knew exactly what she was talking about. "Where are they, Todd. I know you have them." She put her lips so close to his, practically a kiss. "Tell me where my diamonds are, and I'll give you what you want. Exactly what you want."

He stared at her, clearly not believing his luck that he had an amazingly sexy, ready and willing woman pressed against his hormone ravaged body. He didn't utter a word, didn't

move a muscle. The room was perfectly silent and still as Kat let him fall under her spell.

There was a bang on the floorboard upstairs.

Kat cursed silently as Todd's head jerked upwards. "What was that?" His eyes widened from their previous heavy lidded state.

"I didn't hear anything," she answered, her voice silky and soothing. She lifted her hand and pulled his face down to regain his attention. "Have you got a girlfriend, Todd?"

"Err...no, no...not at the moment." He licked his soggy lips, and his focus returned to Kat's ample chest pressing against his.

She plucked the necklace from her cleavage and swirled it between her fingers like a hypnotist. "Do you want a girlfriend?" Her head cocked to the side. "I would be a really, really good girlfriend." His eyes stayed fixed on the pendant. He looked like he might burst with lust. Kat lifted his oil stained, grimy hand and placed it flat on the leather covering the lower half of her left breast. "I go all the way," she murmured. "Have you ever been all the way?"

He shook his head, his mouth hanging open even farther than before.

"If you give me the diamonds, Todd, I'll be your girlfriend... We'll go all the way." She prepared herself for the final assault and pushed her mouth up to his. She only just controlled the shudder of repulsion as she felt his weak rubbery lips and tasted his sleep stale breath. He started to kiss her back, his wet mouth moving out of sync with hers as

his other hand clamped onto her right breast and squeezed her tender flesh.

She broke the kiss. "You do have the diamonds, don't you?" She stepped back so his hands fell away.

"Yeah." He cleared his throat. "Yeah, I have the diamonds. They was in that Porsche you got last week."

"Are they here?"

"Yep."

Scared she was losing him, Kat treated him to another hot kiss. His hands moved to her buttocks, and he pulled her hard against his excited young body. She allowed it for a moment then, pushing away, said, "Hey, show me the diamonds first, big boy."

He grinned manically and tried to grab her again.

"Ah, ah." Kat held up a finger to his wet lips. "Show me the diamonds, Todd. It will get me even hornier...for you."

He grinned, licked his lips and side-stepped to a low book case next to the fireplace. There were no books, just car magazines precariously balanced on thin shelves. On the very top was a small, rusty tin box with a picture of a red steam train on the lid. Todd poked his dirty thumb nail under the lid, and it pinged open.

Kat hovered next to him. Anticipation killing her. She held her breath as Todd pulled out a small black velvet bag with a drawstring top. It was exactly as John had described. Todd had the diamonds. The kid was even dopier than he looked—millions of pounds worth of diamonds sitting in an old tin on his bookcase.

"Is that them?" she said with a greedy smile. She reached out her hand.

"Not so fast." Todd lifted them high, way out of her reach. "You get the diamonds afterwards."

"But I want to see them first," Kat purred.

"No." Todd sneered. "You'll see them afterwards, like I said. Now come here and give me what I want." He made a lunge for her waist.

Kat dodged to the right, and his open arms closed around thin air. "Don't get silly Todd. A deal is a deal. I want to look at the diamonds, and then we'll do what you want to do."

"That's not the deal anymore. It's my turn to have you after sitting waiting while you screwed all those other pricks." He stepped his long legs forward.

Kat backed up to the opposite side of the room.

He was tall and fast on his feet, not to mention annoying, seriously annoying.

It was late, she was tired and she wanted her diamonds.

She no longer cared Todd was only eighteen. He was hassling her like a grown man. Clenching her right fist and letting the joint of her middle finger jab outwards, she weighted into a balanced stance, bided the micro-second it took for Todd to reach her, then struck out at his rapidly approaching head.

She made contact with the soft flesh on the indent of his temple. Her one protruding knuckle joint delivered a hard, vicious blow which stopped him in his tracks.

An expression of stunned surprise crossed his face, but only for the time it took for his eyes to blink, then they rolled

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back in his head, and he folded to the floor. His limbs crumbling like a building being demolished.

John peered through the crack in the living room door. He could see Kat backed into the corner and the lanky kid heading straight for her with his arms outstretched. Fast and leery, he looked full of malicious intent and not likely to take no for an answer. John's muscles twitched under his leathers. He would have to go and give the kid a good hiding after all.

What he saw next stopped him.

His muscles buzzed in readiness of action.

But he wasn't needed.

Kat pounced at her attacker, knocking him flat to the floor with one brutal strike to the head. John knew it was brutal because she'd got him like that once. Only he hadn't crumpled in a heap like the kid. John almost felt sorry for him; almost, but not quite.

Kat stooped and took a wonderfully familiar looking velvet bag from kid's clenched fist and slipped it into her jacket pocket. She rolled the kid over, fussed with his neck and leg until he was in a textbook recovery position then straightened, rubbing her palms together as if to rid them of dirt.

Quietly John ducked outside and leant against mossy, brickwork. His heart soared. She had the diamonds. He couldn't wait to be re-united with the bag of gems he'd nurtured and watched grow over the last year. It would be like seeing an old friend. Only this old friend would make him rich. Very rich



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He couldn't wipe the smile of his face as Kat stepped out the house a few seconds later.

"Well," he grinned, hardly able to contain himself, "let's see them."

"See, what?" she replied, not catching his eye but keeping her gaze glued to the end of the street.

"The diamonds, let's see the diamonds."

"Carlos has them. Todd handed them over when he found them last week." She shoved a hand on her hip and glared up at him. "You should have mentioned the bloody diamonds to Carlos when you were in a position to." His voice was full of scorn. "Because he's at the hospital now, getting his messed up arm sorted."

"But..." The smile fell from his face.

Kat's green eyes narrowed, and she looked even more feline than usual. "We may as well go. You can drop me off at my apartment." She turned and strutted towards the bike, her arse wiggling from side to side and her arms swinging.

The little bitch. She had the diamonds and she wasn't going to tell him.

He couldn't believe it.

After all they'd been through. Hell, he'd nearly taken a bullet for her. She'd been grateful enough for that gesture at the time.

But two could play at that game.

He'd show her.

He'd play her double-crossing game and win hands down. She'd picked the wrong opponent this time. He wouldn't be duped by her—not again. And to think he'd even begun to feel

a little guilty that he wasn't giving her as much as she thought she was getting.

He made fast strides to catch up, his knee shouting a reminder it was a long time since medication. "So what's the plan, Pussy Cat?" he asked trying to keep his voice light.

"You take me home, then you go back to your own flat." She flicked her hair over her shoulder. "There's no need to stick with me anymore, John. I've done my part of the deal."

"But don't you want your share of the diamonds? I'm going to speak to our mate Carlos when he's back from hospital. Find out where they are and then we can split them, like we always said we would." He wondered if she might smile and produce the velvet bag from her pocket, kiss him and tell him she'd been teasing.

She didn't.

She remained cool and distant as she slammed her helmet onto her head. "If you find the diamonds, then I'll have my share. If they even exist, that is. For all I know, you made the whole thing up," she paused, "because you wanted to hang out in my apartment all week."

"What?" John's chest felt like it had been slammed into by a truck. "If you really think that, you've gone bloody crazy, woman." His voice was ragged with indignation. "Do you think I've liked hanging out with you all damn week? Hairdressers, shopping, all that crap you've given me. It's hardly been a bloody holiday." He was shouting now. "Why the hell would I put myself through that if I didn't have to?"

"You sure looked as if you were having a good time in my bed," Kat said calmly.

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"You liked having me in your fucking bed," he snarled down at her. "You liked having my cock in every fucking hole you've got." Roughly, he pulled on his own helmet and swung himself on to the bike. Kat slid behind him and curled her arms around his waist. But it didn't feel intimate anymore. Now her arms felt functional, necessary. There was no caress, no sneaky feel of his abs beneath the leather of his jacket, and she didn't press herself up into his back before they'd even moved away.

He revved the engine loud, louder still, not giving a damn who heard them. He pulled off so fast Kat was forced to grip hard. He charged down the narrow back street on the wrong side, stormed faster and faster on to the main roads, not slowing at stop signs and skipping reds.

By the time they hit the North Circular, Kat was terrified. She'd been on the back of the bike lots of times, but John had never driven like this. Reckless, risk taking and with a total disregard for safety. He had a death wish, and he was going to taking her out with him.

Were diamonds worth death?

Doubts seeped into her conscience. Perhaps she was wrong to lie and keep the riches to herself. Perhaps this was one occasion where honesty would have served her better. Their knees skimmed the surface of the road, a tight bend taken way too fast. She caught her breath, prayed for the bike to return to an upright position. Damn him, she thought as the events of the last week flashed before her like a life before death. Damn him for making her care enough to feel guilty.

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She visualised him in her kitchen with ingredients spread on the work surfaces and the pan hissing as he seared steaks. Saw him sprawled on the sofa smiling over at her with heavy eyes as he rubbed her feet, then pictured him in the shower, gloriously naked and covered in frothy, white suds. She remembered him brushing away her tears and making soothing noises as he held her tightly against his hot chest, remembered their delicious feeling of connection which had made her feel safe and wanted for the first time in her life.

But that was in the past. John was in the past. Her fists clenched around his abdomen. She had to erase those emotions and think of the future. Her future. The fact that John had managed to get close, tear down her walls was irrelevant, because without the diamonds, she may as well have taken Carlos' bullet in the head and be dead and buried. Without the money, lots of money, she'd be on the streets, fending for herself, fighting to survive. She didn't think she could go back and be that person again. She hadn't wanted to be that wretched soul the first time round, and the thought of having to dodge an enraged Carlos and his henchmen as well as survive London's dark, cold alleys was so terrifying it made her dizzy and wrung out her heart.

She held her breath as John skipped another red, narrowly missing a car which slammed on the brakes and whacked on the horn. John didn't even slow down, didn't even appear to notice their close shave with the Grim Reaper.

Kat saw Carlos' ugly, swollen face snarling before her mind's eye and shuddered at the foul image. There was no more job with Carlos; she was officially retired from that

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corrupt game, thank goodness. She hoped she'd never see him again. He would rape her and kill her, slowly and painfully. It made her all the more resolute about her decision to keep the diamonds. She had to put her safety and her life above her feelings for John. Survival was her only option, her only choice.

But the little bag of diamonds had felt so light. Was there really two million pounds worth in there? She had no idea about such things but couldn't take the risk that John had lied, that there wasn't as much as he'd said in the little velvet pouch. He'd lied about other things—so had she—so why should she trust him to have told the truth about what a few gems were worth?

She had plenty of money in her bank account. Enough to live comfortably for several years, if not longer. But now, she'd need to buy somewhere to live and that would use up a chunk of the diamonds. Eventually, she'd need more money, and if she wasn't careful, she'd be back to doing a normal job, like a normal person. She didn't want that. Not now she'd gotten used to finer things. She wanted a sweet, lazy life with financial security, food in the fridge and a cupboard full of designer gear.

Kat set her jaw determinedly as she tucked her head tighter between John's shoulder blades. He was accelerating wildly along Park Lane. Yes, the diamonds—*all* the diamonds—would be her ticket to a financially secure future. Since John had effectively ruined her future in one night, it seemed only fair that she should keep them. He could go get

himself some more, whereas she was hardly likely to find another Carlos to work for.

They finally arrived in the basement of her apartment block.

John clicked off the engine and waited for Kat to slide off the bike. "This is all yours now," he said handing her the keys.

"Yep." Kat decided not to have a go at him about his awful driving. What was the point? Soon, he'd be gone forever, and she'd have the loot. Bringing up his death wish handling of the bike might just delay his departure. And after all...they had made it back alive.

He climbed off and stepped up close, his leathers creaking in the silence of the underground car park.

Kat couldn't bring herself to catch his eye. The sooner he was gone the better. Then she could be back on her own again. It was what she was used to. What she preferred. It was so much simpler than having to think of someone else all the time. It was so much simpler than caring.

"So I guess this is goodbye," he said.

"Unless you find the diamonds, then I'd appreciate my share." Kat crossed her arms over her chest. "Some honour among thieves would be a refreshing change, don't you think?"

"Honour among thieves," he repeated with a raise of his brows and a slow nod. "Interesting idea, Pussy Cat."

She pursed her lips and flicked her eyes towards the lift.

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"If I track them down, you'll be the first to know." He bent down and pushed his lips to her cheek. "See you around, Pussy Cat."

Then he was gone, his body heat lost as he stepped past her and headed towards the dawn light of the street.

She turned and watched him stride up the concrete ramp. He was doing his best not to limp, not to look like the broken man she knew he was. She held her fingers to her cheek. She could still feel the press of his lips, the scratch of his chin and the warmth of his breath against her skin.

It was a lousy goodbye, so quick, so impersonal after all they'd been through, but it was all she got—it was more than she deserved.

His silhouette went abruptly from view as he turned the corner. She tugged at her bottom lip and made for the lift, stabbed number thirteen with her fingernail and cracked it way down low. It stung instantly. She swore and shoved the wounded finger between her lips, trying to suck the pain away.

She stepped in and looked at her face in the smoky mirror doors and recalled how he'd just looked at her. It was look full of disappointment. She'd been a tool to retrieve his diamonds, and she'd turned out, as far as he thought, to be useless. Failed to do her job; failed to live up to his expectations.

But what did it matter? Relying on another person's opinion to feel good about herself was never going to work. She was independent; she could fulfil her own needs. She didn't need John to do that.

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She didn't need John full stop.

So why did his sudden absence feel like a gaping hole? An emptiness like falling out of an airplane without a parachute. Why did she feel like a planet knocked off orbit by a cataclysmic meteor strike?

She didn't.

She was fine. She had the diamonds.

She stepped onto level thirteen, ignored an elderly neighbour's polite 'good morning' and barged through her front door. She resisted the urge to check the place out. She was done with her obsessive compulsive disorder. What good had it done her anyway? Instead, she walked straight into the bathroom and flicked on the shower. Sod John, she thought, hurt turning to anger. He'd been using her, but she'd used him too.

She walked into her bedroom and peeled off her leathers. Dropped her tattered dress and ripped bra on the floor. She was desperate to feel the hot jets of water pummelling her tired, aching body. Flaked with semen and alive with John's scent, she needed to wash him away, forget that he'd ever managed to crack her shell and make her feel alive.

She strutted naked down the corridor into the steamy bathroom. If John had managed to slide open the bolts on a place deep in her heart, she'd just have to ram them back in again. Make sure no one else ever got the chance to release them and make her vulnerable and weak.

She slammed the bathroom door and flicked the lock.

John dodged early morning commuters as he headed to the front entrance of Kat's building. He strode through the



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lobby. "Morning," he called to the sleepy security officer, waving a cheery hand in the air.

"Mornin," the man called back with a relaxed smile.

"Gonna be another nice day out there."

"Yep, the sun's feeling warm already," John said lightly as he called the lift.

It had to come down from level thirteen to collect him.

He stepped in, grateful not to be using the stairs. Sharp spikes of pain were nipping the bones in his knee like an annoying terrier snapping. The lift pinged shut, and he couldn't help but stare at his reflection in the dark mirrors. He looked rough. He didn't take much notice of his appearance on a day-to-day basis, but today, he certainly looked like he'd been up all night.

He peered closer. It was something more than tiredness. His shoulders had sagged and tipped sideways because of his nagging knee. His eyes were dull, barely open, and they had no life in their depths.

No fighting spirit left.

John realised, for the first time ever, he looked truly wounded. Like he'd been shot all over again, but this time couldn't drag himself up from the dirt. He'd come to live with the pain in his leg, but this pain was different. These wounds were different. Just when he thought he was healing, he was right back at square one, no, make that minus one.

And it was all Kat's fault. She'd done this. Somehow, she'd made him feel good, like there was someone worth living for. How she'd managed in such a short space of time he had no idea. But she'd touched a place deep within him, and now as

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quickly as that feeling had arrived and settled itself in his chest, she'd snatched it away. She'd shot him down as devastatingly as the Taliban son of a bitch had two years ago.

He should be thrilled their parasitic relationship was over. She was a thief and a liar. He'd been a fool to trust her, and predictably, she'd stabbed him in the back.

He snatched his eyes from his reflection. He'd never had any intention of giving her half the jewels. All along, he'd planned on taking the vast majority for himself. They were his, he'd stolen them. They were for his sweet future.

The lift opened, and he stepped out, glanced at his watch. She'd been in her apartment ten minutes. Her routines were fairly predictable, and he reckoned she'd be in the shower. He slid the lock with his knife and opened the door like he had before. He really should've sorted the security out for her so creeps couldn't sneak into her apartment without her knowing.

He listened.

Yep, the shower was running.

He walked boldly in and headed for the kitchen, reached into the cupboard and grabbed a handful of arborio rice. Then he limped into her bedroom and scanned for her biker jacket. He spotted it hurled on the bed along with her trousers, dress and battered black lace underwear.

He pulled out the small velvet bag he'd witnessed her poking into her inside pocket. It felt wonderfully heavy in his palm, and a slow, wide smile spread across his face. He emptied the diamonds onto the duvet, and they caught the morning sunlight, sparkled as if greeting their true owner. But

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he didn't have time for admiration. He cupped his fist and poured the rice neatly into the bag and, when it was sufficiently heavy, pulled the drawstring tight and returned it to Kat's jacket pocket. He arranged the jacket casually and bent to scoop up every one of his precious stones. After dropping them into his jacket pocket, he pulled the zip tight.

The pipe in the hall clanked, signalling the shower turning off.

John took a backward step into the hallway, stumbling over her discarded biker boots. He cursed as his knee twisted, and he heard the bathroom door pull open. Quickly, he slid into the living room out of view.

He heard Kat pass a metre from him, a soft, padding sound as her small feet skimmed the deep pile of the hallway carpet. A second later, the heavenly scents she'd used in the bathroom wafted around him. They filled his nostrils with memories of her delicate body writhing under his. Her velvet hair brushing his face when she sat astride him and the sweet taste of her mouth, her breasts and her pussy when she was open and hungry for him.

What harm would one last time do?

A well of need opened up in him and his cock stiffened in eager anticipation. One last time, just for the road, felt like a very good idea indeed.

Kat bent double and rubbed her hair vigorously with a towel. Her naked behind was slick with moisturiser and her breasts swung in the stooped position. She felt cleansed of the night's activities, but something still didn't feel right. She hoped a few hours sleep would rid the dull ache from her

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chest. It was probably nothing more than tiredness making her feel so hollow. Nothing more than tiredness, and the fact that soon she'd have to pack and get out of her flat.

Satisfied her hair was sufficiently dry, she twisted the towel into a rough knot, balanced it on her head and turned to hunt out fresh underwear.

Her heart faltered.

Her breath caught.

John.

He stood in her bedroom doorway.

Big shoulder shoved into the frame, weight tipped onto his right leg and one hand shoved in his pocket. His leather jacket was undone, and the impressive bulge in his trousers told her he'd had a good eyeful as she'd bent over in front of him. The expression he wore was unusually dark and arrogant, even for him.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, placing her hands on her naked hips and frowning. She made a point of not looking towards her jacket.

His freshly licked lips tipped into a smile "We deserved a much better goodbye." His voice held that scraping quality she'd come to adore. It sounded as though it had started so low in his chest it was just an echo that grated through his larynx and scratched out of his beautiful mouth

Her nipples tingled and jutted towards him; her pussy became dense and greedy as hot blood pooled. "Why can't you ever knock like a normal person?"

"You and me both know there's not much normal about either of us."

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Kat pulled the towel from her head, tossed it on the floor and reached for an enormous, metal bristled brush. "What did you have in mind?" She began to drag it through her long, tangled tendrils which had plastered to her damp shoulders. "As a better goodbye?"

"A game."

"A game?"

"Yeah, you want to play?"

"Depends on what I have to do."

"Nothing except lie back, baby, lie back and enjoy."

"I like the sound of that."

"I'm gonna take a shower first."

"Whatever." She shrugged and carried on brushing out knots.

He shucked out of his jacket and flung it on the floor. Dragging his T-shirt off in his usual manner, he disappeared down the corridor.

Kat waited for the sound of the door clicking shut, but it didn't come. She glanced at her jacket. She needed to hide the diamonds someplace else. They were too close for comfort.

Reaching quickly into her pocket, she grabbed the tiny bag and pulled on her dressing gown. As she stepped out of her room, she could make out the uneven gush of water, the spray interrupted by his body as it splashed onto the shower tray.

She slipped out onto her balcony and grasped the trunk of the olive tree. Tipping it in its ceramic planter, she poked the black bag safely beneath it.

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She made it back into the bedroom just before John switched off the shower, grabbed her hairbrush and pretended she'd been battling snags the whole time.

"You've got too much on," he said, appearing at her door with a towel wrapped around his lean waist and his hair glistening with droplets of water.

"So have you." She grinned and, despite the nervous fluttering in her chest, went to pull the towel from his waist.

"Not so fast, Pussy Cat. My game, remember." He clasped his fingers around her arm and jerked her away.

Kat pouted. "So play then, soldier."

It was like showing a red rag to a bull. The next thing she knew, she was flung onto the bed and he was over her, his weight pinning her down. He grabbed a green silk scarf from the bedside cabinet and wrapped it around her wrist before she could even blink.

"Hey..." she said.

"You said you wanted to play."

"I do, but you could tell me what we're going to play first."

"That would spoil the fun."

His mouth was on hers. His hands were deft, everywhere at once. He shucked off her dressing gown, and was tying and looping the scarf around the head-board and her other wrist as his tongue was busy, probing and invading.

She felt herself liquefy under his relentless passion. She would forget about the diamonds and give herself over to him this one last time. It would set her up for a lifetime of fantasies. She would make those memories, store them in a

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secret place and revisit them in the dead of the night when she was all alone.

Suddenly, he stopped. She lifted her head from the pillow, chasing for a kiss, and opened her eyes to see where he'd gone. She was greeted with darkness; absolute pitch black, not even the slightest chink of light.

"What the..." she said, reaching for the material wrapped over her eyes which she hadn't even noticed being secured. Her arms yanked downwards, but travelled no farther than an inch before they were jerked up to the headboard by their constraints. She twisted as if to look at her captive hands.

"It's all good, remember," he breathed quietly by her ear. "All good, trust me."

She felt the bed lighten and the mattress even out. "Where are you going?" she said.

No answer.

"John?"

Silence.

"John, you're scaring me."

"Don't be scared, Pussy Cat."

Kat gasped as she felt something sharp and hard on her nipple. "What the hell's that?"

"Just the hair brush... calm down." He swirled it around, and she felt all the hard little points catch on her flesh and twang her extended point. White dots flashed in her vision, and her areola became the centre of her world as he doubled the pressure. She tried to look, she wanted to see her body's reaction to his game, but there wasn't even the tiniest crack

of light to be found through her blindfold, not even down at her nose.

Click. Whirr.

"What's that noise?" she asked, twisting her head directly towards the new sound.

"Nothing."

"Yes, it was. I heard something. John I want to know." Confusion filtered through her veins. "What made that sound?"

"Will you stop wittering? You're spoiling the game." He pushed his mouth to hers, thrust his tongue between her teeth and played with the base of her tongue, silencing all further questions. She arched towards him, greedy for his taste. Greedy for him.

Click. Whirr.

"Whaa..." she mumbled through his deep, penetrating kiss.

"Shh," he breathed into her mouth. "Go with it, trust me." He kissed her again, gentle and sweet, then nuzzled his way down to her breasts. Where the sharpness of the brush had scratched her skin, the warm sponginess of his tongue soothed and laved.

Kat curved into him, pushing concerns from her mind. He'd only ever done good stuff. She did trust him; she knew she did. For a fleeting second, though, she wondered if she'd done the right thing by taking the diamonds. But it was her only option. She had to look after herself. She was just glad he didn't know, because she wasn't sure what he'd do. She'd glimpsed his fury and his power, and she had no intention of



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getting on the receiving end of that; especially when bound and blindfolded and completely surrendered to his will.

"You like this?" he asked, rotating the bristles over her other nipple so they caught and scraped deliciously.

"Mmmm," she managed, feeling her hands tingle from lack of blood. She eased their position slightly, reduced the strain, concentrated once again on her nipple being sweetly tormented. "It feels sharp."

"Sharp, you like sharp?" His voice was a velvety caress, a complete contrast to the exquisite discomfort she was experiencing.

"I like that feeling between pain and pleasure. I guess I shouldn't."

"Why shouldn't you?"

"It's not right, is it?" She moved her head to where she guessed his face was hovering over her chest.

"There's nothing you can do about it—you like what you like." He pressed the spikes harder onto her peaked areola, used his hand to scoop the base of her breast upwards towards the firm attention of the brush and did a giant swirl. "If anyone other than you on this earth had shoved their finger up my backside, I'd have broken their fucking neck." He pressed the brush even harder and pulled it upwards towards her neck, scooping and dragging little waves of skin with it.

Kat caught her breath in. The pricking sensation travelled so deep, so harsh, she knew her soft flesh would bear the tiny marks when she eventually looked. "S-so why didn't you

break my neck?" she stammered, no doubt in her mind he could easily break a person's neck.

"Because for some crazy fucking reason, it got me off when you had me there." The words came from between gritted teeth, like he didn't like uttering them, didn't like admitting to his newly discovered, dark desire.

A sudden, fast flick of his fingers seared across the exposed tip of her nipple. A red hot flame of pain, new and different, mean and tight. "Ow," she cried out.

"What, you don't like it now?"

Kat felt the pain bloom down to her clit. It trilled like a musical note and sent her hidden nub quivering with sexual excitement. "I... No, yes, I..."

She heard John's amused huff. "Make your mind up, baby. I'll stop if you want me to."

"No, it's okay,"

"Good, now open your legs."

Kat swallowed. It sounded like a gulp even to her own ears. She had no idea what his next plan was. She was aware of him moving over her and sitting towards the base of the bed. She tipped her head back on the pillows as she felt his big, determined hands pushing at her sensitive inner thighs, sending them higher and wider, brazenly exposing her intimate flesh. She was trapped, tied down. She could go nowhere.

The brush was back at work, rotating thorns grating over her abdomen, pulling and scratching. It reached her mound, and she bit down on her lip. The pressure was too heavy, it would hurt too much down there, all those mean little sticks

on fragile tissue. "John," she squeaked nervously, twisting at the scarf holding her to the headboard.

"It's okay, baby. I know what you can take."

She pulled in a breath and tried to still the tremble in her thighs. The brush scratched over the bare, plump lips of her pussy. But just as the jagged bristles were about to tear over delicate membrane, the pressure eased right off, and it was just a soft, tugging sensation stroking at her outer lips. She let out the breath but sucked it straight back in again as she felt his fingers on her. Gentle and sensual, he stroked and petted between her legs. He spread out her wetness and exposed the inner lips, teased her clit from its hiding place and danced down to the smooth sheath of skin between her entrance and her anus.

She felt like she was a wet mass of folds and flesh. Open to the elements and vulnerable, she could feel cool air in every nook and crevice. She was totally at his mercy. She loved it and wanted more. She wanted his fingers inside her, filling her. She wanted his mouth sucking her clit, swirling his tongue around her needy nerve endings. "John, please...I." She bore down as far as her constraints would allow.

"My game, remember," he said, his voice oaked and husky. His hands left her. She went to shift her legs back together, tried to get pressure on her nub by clamping her legs.

"No, stay perfectly still." He tutted irritably, and his hands clamped onto her knees, forcing her wider and even more open. He touched her again, as if redoing his handy work, moving her pliable creases of flesh and pushing the skin up

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her mound to reveal her clit. Two thick fingers pushed into her pussy and froze.

Click. Whirr.

His fingers pulled out.

"What was..." She fell silent as something new hovered at the entrance of her vagina, thick and cold. "What's that?"

"Nothing you haven't had before, Pussy Cat."

A familiar whirr filled the room. The vibrator. God, she loved her vibrator. It was so damn reliable. She tugged at her silken manacles, wishing she could free herself and touch John. She wanted to get her hands, her mouth, anything on him. His aroused male scent permeated through his freshly showered smell. She inhaled deeply, and recorded the odour for future reference.

The vibrator pushed halfway in. It slipped through her channel easily, its way well lubricated. "Please," she said when John kept the ears from touching her clit. "Please, let me come."

Suddenly, a blinding light hit her retinas. John had peeled the blindfold up an inch, and as she focused she saw his head hovering right above her. He looked straight down at her.

"What do you prefer, wine or whisky?"

"What?" She blinked rapidly.

"Look at me. Answer the question, what do you prefer, wine or whisky?"

Kat caught his dark gaze. "Wine, you know I do, why?"

The blindfold tugged back down. "All part of the game. We get three questions each, honest answers only."

"But you know I..." Her sentence was cut off as the quivering ears of the vibrator surrounded her clit. She sensed him back down the end of the bed, his hand trailing lazily up her thigh and causing it to shudder with unbearable sensitivity.

"Think of your questions for me, baby, think real carefully."

Kat couldn't think of much. She was rocketing towards instant orgasm. The ears did it every time, and combined with the twirling inside her pussy, she knew it would only be seconds before the explosion.

She arched her back, flung her head to the side, felt herself catapulted upwards, the climax storing itself up like an ocean about to burst through a damn. Her clit shuddered and pushed out for more, her insides wept their fluid around the rubber of the vibrator.

It all stopped.

The room went silent. The vibrator stayed deep but became perfectly still. She wailed in disappointment.

"John...please...no, I was so close..."

The blindfold lifted again, bright light piercing into her eyes. "Where are the diamonds?"

"What," she squeaked. Her eyes flicked up to the left. "How would I know where the diamonds are, for God's sake?"

The blindfold dropped back down. She felt it tighten further behind her head, ridding any streaks of penetrating light. Once more, she was immersed in her own world of deepest, darkest black.

"You gonna ask me a question?"

"What?" Kat pulled at her arms, rolled her wrists, but she was bound up so tightly she had no chance of freedom.

"Ask me anything. We're playing a game, a game of honesty."

"Okay." She shifted her hips, hoping for the pleasure to resume, hoping maybe she could knock that switch. "What did Cobra One do? What was your job in the army?"

"Why do you want to know that?"

"Curious." She wished he would just answer and turn his attentions back to the switches which were in an agonising off position.

"Special ops."

"Explain." Her voice was curt and impatient.

She felt his dense weight looming over her, his naked chest brushing against her taut, eager nipples. "I could tell you..." he whispered by her cheek in a voice that flowed like fine wine, "but then, I'd have to kill you."

"You're killing me anyway," she huffed, refusing to let a spark of alarm ignite in her gut.

He chuckled deep in his throat. "SAS, Pussy Cat, I was SAS until I got shot to pieces."

"Oh..." That explained a lot, his swift, silent movements, his calm authority in the face of danger plus his total lack of social skills.

The vibrator didn't start back up as she'd hoped after her question. Instead, she felt him lift up and move back between her legs. With a sudden upwards scoop, her buttocks landed on his tensed thighs as he folded onto his knees. "Can I ask another question?" she said.

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"Sure, baby." A lubed finger was rubbing her perineum, cool and slippery. She contracted around the vibrator to keep it in place as he tilted her pelvis farther forward and dragged her harder up towards his abdomen. She felt his hard cock jutting into her inner thigh.

"Have you ever killed anyone?" she said, her shoulder joints pulling to the max with the new position.

"What do you think?"

"I don't know. That's why I asked."

"Yes,"

"Yes what?"

"Yes, Pussy Cat, I've killed in the line of duty. But only the bad guys, so you're quite safe whilst you're being a good girl."

She trembled at what may lay beneath his words, but forced herself to beat down the adrenalin, the fear. He didn't know anything about the diamonds, how could he?

A lubed finger slid over her anus, and the muscle tightened. After a moment, it gave way to his persistent push, the way it had the day before, and she allowed him to slide in. A blaze of orange- red light shot across her eyelids. Dazzling and searing, it shot away all coherent thoughts about her predicament.

He added another finger and flexed them into a wide 'v' shape. She cried out at the mean nip of pain slicing through still tender tissue.

"Relax, it'll be awesome, I promise."

She sucked her lips inwards to keep from protesting. Her control over those rigid little bands of muscle was hard to

catch but finally she felt it returning and forced them to ease their protest at his ministrations.

"That's it, good girl, you can take my dick now."

"Yes, now, and the vibrator, too. Switch it on." Her voice was breathless and needy even to her own ears.

"You're getting greedy, very greedy." He pulled the vibrator out altogether, cupped her arse in his hands and shifted her so her anus was directly in line with his cock. He dragged her legs up to his shoulders and stretched out his left leg to the floor so it wouldn't have to flex. "You can have all of it in a minute, my feline friend, as long as we finish the game."

"Game?" Her mind had gone blank. "What game? I want the vibrator." All she could focus on was the longing, the need and the off-the-scale pleasure that hovered only millimetres from her reach.

"You have to answer my last question."

"Okay, okay, okay, what do you want to know now?" Her teeth ground together so hard she feared for their survival.

Once again, the darkness lifted. John's rugged face hovered a few feet above hers, she could see her ankles touching his ears as she balanced upwards against his torso. Her breasts were battling gravity and losing, tipping downwards and bearing the angry red scratches of the brush.

"I want to know..." he said, his voice sounding deeper, wilder and more dangerous than ever before, "if you want me to leave you?"

"No, God, no, don't leave me like this, not until you've made me come. Please don't walk out now, John." She



couldn't bear it if he left her like this, even if there was something in his voice that set every instinct she had on full alert.

"That's not what I meant." The muscle in his jaw beat a wild dance. He nudged the burning hot tip of his penis against her sphincter, pressed slowly, so, so slowly it extended the blissful torture of entry to the max. "I mean after this, after I've fucked you into senseless oblivion, do you still want me to leave, Pussy Cat?" His black eyes bored into hers, searching and exploring with an intensity that caught her breath away almost as much as the dick on the verge of bugging her did.

Her eyes sparkled with moisture, and she flicked them again to the left hand side of the ceiling. "You know I do, that was the deal. You have to leave."

He said something unintelligible, then with a gentle release of her tender ring, she felt him sink all the way in. She moaned deep in her throat at the heated, wonderful spiral of painful pleasure. Like a helter skelter, it flung her upwards to another plane.

The blindfold wasn't replaced, and she absorbed his suddenly soft expression gazing down at her. He stilled at the hilt. Something in his eyes had changed, thawed, calmed, she didn't understand why. Gently, he withdrew so the rim of his cock sat just inside her back passage. He held still and reached down for something at his side.

Kat tried to move her hips to ease him back in but couldn't travel even an inch down the bed, she was trussed up tight

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and the scarf had stretched thin. Suddenly, she saw what had been making the clicking and whirring noise.

In his hands, he held a camera, an old fashioned Polaroid which delivered the photo directly out the base. He held it up to his eyes with both hands and tensed his thighs beneath her buttocks to keep her steady and pressed the button.

Click. Whirr.

The small, square photo rolled out the slit instantly.

"Bloody hell," Kat said. "You just took a photo of your cock in my arse."

"I know."

"Why?"

"Is that my last question?"

Kat frowned. "No, it just would have been nice to be asked, that's all."

"People don't always ask when they take things—you, of all people, should know that." He looked at her with an oddly indulgent smile. "Plus, it would have been a wasted question, because I'm just taking photos because I can. There's no real answer." He wafted the photo in the air then laid it out of reach on the sheet with several others at different stages of development. "So what's your last question for me, baby?"

"Are you ever going to fuck me, damn it?"

He chuckled. "Oh, yes, and that's another wasted question. Think again." He reached for the glistening black vibrator. Kat managed to shift her hips the tiniest bit, and his dick slid into her arse a fraction farther. He caught his breath, and she saw beads of sweat balancing in the coils of his chest hair. He was having as hard a time holding back as she was; he was just

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pretending it was easy for him. She needed to think of a question quick. What had he asked her? Something about staying.

"Do you want to leave here...me? Do you want to leave me?"

His eyes flashed and held hers steadily. His fingers worked to slip the vibrator into her wet folds. "I don't want to go anywhere," he said quietly. "I like it right here, with you." And with that, he lifted off the bed and plunged his cock into arse at the same time as he flicked on the vibrator and shot it up her pussy. The blissful ears caught onto her clit, his hands expertly leading them to the right place for maximum stimulation.

Kat could barely register what he'd said about wanting to stay. Her brain had dissolved into a pile of mush, her thoughts scattered as if exploded by a hundred pounds of dynamite.

His pelvis pressed even farther into her buttocks, and the rock solid muscles beyond his pubes pushed at the flat base of the vibrator tunnelling it into her delighted flesh. She couldn't move, was totally at his mercy. He had ultimate control over pace and depth. Her entire body shook, quivered and convulsed, and she hadn't even reached orgasm yet.

She'd felt full to capacity with just his penis in her rear, but having the big black vibrator pounding and circling in her pussy was simply too much, overload. She would burst; the bite of erotic pain was heady. She struggled to accept him and expand already taut muscles. But she was lost to it,

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consumed by it. Currents of fire scorched her body like bolts of lightning, whipping and slashing.

"Fuck, I can feel the damn vibrator on my dick," John grunted as his hands reached to tweak her flopped breasts, slick with sweat. "It's massaging and rubbing me through your thin wall. Those beads are fucking wicked."

She fisted the straining scarf, forced her eyes to look up at his face. He'd taken photos but she'd have to rely on memory.

His broad chest was high above her, damp and flexed, his neck tendons were strained like ropes holding an anchor in a storm, his jaw was clenched and his stubble a deep black shadow. The sensual mouth she'd come to know so well was half open in a slack, awed pose. And his eyes, his endlessly deep eyes, were looking at her face with such tenderness that it threw her over the edge.

Her clitoris could hold back no more, her vagina had taken its limit of stimulation and her rear was a minefield of sinful delights.

"Come, baby," John grunted. "I want to watch you explode around me." His words sent her into freefall, and she allowed the glorious abyss to claim her. She shut her eyes as her body was dragged into a hundred different directions. Splashes of colour tormented her vision, and her fingernails dug deep into her own flesh.

There was a sudden tight pinch in her perineum as he shoved in harder and faster, increasing his ride to a gallop. She revelled in it, seized the knife's edge. The wonderful pressure just kept building, she thought she'd reached the

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top, but it was there, more and more for the taking. She bucked and writhed as much as her position would allow. Couldn't even pull in a breath for the pace at which he was hammering, spiralling her to an ecstasy so magnificent she would have sobbed if she could have found the energy.

His hands left her breasts and curled around her hip bones, pounding her more forcefully than ever before. The pain was now a whole bloom of cascading gratification. She had never felt so complete, so in tune with what she needed.

"God, you fit so well around me..." John groaned as his dick swelled inside her. "But I want to come in your pussy, I want to come around those sweet, hot female muscles that beg for me, that crave me, that want me to stay."

Kat's head was flung to the side, her muscles contracting and releasing every object invading her.

The vibrator switched off.

Silence except for the hungry panting of two sets of lungs.

He pulled the toy out, dropped her legs from his shoulders and moved swiftly off the bed.

"Where are you going?" Kat whimpered, still in a state of ecstasy.

She sensed him leave the room.

"John," she cried desperately. Surely he wasn't leaving her now.

She strained her ears and heard water running in the bathroom.

Then he was back, the scent of soap mixed with the scent of their sex. Kat sighed as he settled between her legs into missionary and slipped his damp cock into her vagina like the

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perfect jigsaw puzzle, thick and hot, so much better than the artificialness of the vibrator. His pubis landed on her still pulsating clit, and she instinctively wrapped her legs around his waist to pull him deeper, grab hold of his concrete length.

"Hang on, baby, let me untie you." He reached up and loosened the fraught knots, then carefully lifted her numb arms over her head. Kat puffed out as his full weight crushed her for several seconds. She barely had enough oxygen circulating anyway, and it sent those crazy ants racing through her brain, delighting in her hypoxia.

"Shit," he said, quickly pushing onto his elbows. "Breathe, will you, Pussy Cat? You're using your lives up too damn quick this week."

She pulled in a breath and looked at him, eyes dazed and glassy. "John," she groaned. "I think I've got stuck on a permanent orgasm." Her pelvic muscles still shuddered, seizing John's cock, blasting down from his glans to his balls, carrying on of their own accord, relentless, in another world, another level of space and time.

"It sure feels like it," he moaned into her open mouth.

Then he kissed her softly and sweetly. He licked her teeth, the tip of her tongue and the inside of her lips. And while he invaded her mouth, his rich, hot semen poured into her, wave after wave, flowing straight into her partying womb and swept up all the more efficiently by her sublimely powerful, extended orgasm.

Gradually, her convulsions stopped, the pressure eased, and they became small judders, the gaps between each one lengthening from micro seconds to whole seconds to several

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seconds. John's mouth left hers, and he murmured something into her ear in a musical language.

Eventually, he slipped out of her, rolled to his side and cradled her against his hot chest. She tucked her head under his chin and, he let another string of foreign words spill over her. She didn't know what he was saying in his post-coital moment of bliss, but it sure sounded like it was coming from the heart, and it poured straight into hers.

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## Chapter Ten

\* \* \* \*

*Dear Broken Soldier,*

*There's so much to say, though I, as you know, suffer from gross ineloquence. I thought for one tiny blink of time—foolish of me, really—that maybe I would overcome this emotional dyslexia, that I would have forever to heal, forever to become fluent in your foreign language*

*That thought was so brief it barely existed. It seeped into my head when your arms encased me and your heart beat against my cheek. It was the first time I'd ever felt safe, like I belonged. I know I'll never feel it again, though this fact doesn't scare me—what else is there to fear after love and treachery?*

*Awful things happened, greed, deception, jealousy. Innocents were hurt; we cannot deny that truth. We did it. We caused their pain. I did it for material gain, yet all along, the one thing I truly needed—if only I had known—was nothing I could steal with my light fingers. It was something which needed to be given freely—something you gave without me ever forming a devious plan. You gave me your heart, trusted the true me when no one else had, and I, being me, shattered that trust into a million tiny pieces when I saw those gems cradled in my palm*

*It was a path of self destruction I had no choice but to travel. I accept my guilt. I am who I am. I would do the same*



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*again. I would not be able to help it. Breaking things before they break me is the easiest way—it gives me control over when it's going to happen.*

*But I ask just one thing of you now, In that moment before you wake from your tormented slumber, because I know that's all it ever is, in those few seconds between dreaming and consciousness, if you think of me then, please, I beg you, grant me the innocence of a woman who is not bad to the core.*

*Because I'm yours, and I always will be. I have no capacity to entertain another in my life; there was only ever going to be one person, and that happened to be you. Physically, you've gone but the void was filled. For a thin slice of time, the door was open; now, its shut but stuffed full of memories, images and feelings, piled high with what once was.*

*You took my heart, you took my soul. At least someone did in this solitary existence I have been dealt.*

*I hope you find your peace my love.*

*Thief xxx*

### **Six weeks later**

Sprawled on a luxurious cushioned sun bed in St Tropez, Kat revelled in the solar warmth seeping into every pore of her body. Stretching languidly, she woke from yet another doze and pointed her toes towards the stone wall of her balcony, beyond which the Mediterranean lapped. She flopped her arms over her head towards the lounge of her exclusive five-star, top floor suite.

Mr. R. W. Robinson had been a Godsend. Who'd have thought he'd have gone so long without noticing the American

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Express at the back of his wallet was missing? He'd seemed pretty dozy when she'd had a drink with him at the airport, but now, she knew how really dense he'd been. But she'd take a leaf from John's book and wouldn't push her luck. Another few days and she'd find another credit card, another hotel, maybe even another town.

But for now, she'd enjoy. Perhaps she'd even take a dip in the crystal clear pool later, leave the sanctuary of her private balcony and wander through the lush gardens and tropical vegetation. Meander over the bamboo bridges spanning ponds heaving with giant goldfish and cool off before the evening began and she searched out a fresh fish for supper in the beach side restaurant.

She reached for a tall glass and slurped through the curled straw. It tasted heavenly, fresh and sweetly sharp. She'd acquired a real taste for it lately. Lemon iced tea. She set it back down on the table, reached for her mp3 player and the photo she'd found herself increasingly drawn to over the last week. She couldn't make out much of him, just the underside of his jaw with his bottom lip covering hers and the stubble on his cheek the colour of volcanic sand. His blurred forearm holding the camera blocked most of the view, but there was something about the way his lip was pressed a fraction below hers, devouring, owning, and the way her neck had arched eagerly to greet his mouth. It was a highly erotic, sensual picture if you happened to have been there when it was taken.

It was the only one he'd left her.

He'd taken the others.

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She placed it by her side and dropped her plus size shades over her eyes.

When she'd awoken alone in her apartment and found the diamonds replaced with rice, she'd accepted her fate with less anger than she'd expected. She'd quickly packed her bags and headed for Heathrow, catching the first flight she could to somewhere hot, which happened to be St Tropez.

She'd written John a letter as her heart had torn in two on the plane. Sent it to his home address as soon as she'd landed before she changed her mind about posting her frightening new emotions. But she didn't think John would have ventured back to his minimalist flat. He would have used the diamonds to get a fabulous lifestyle somewhere else. The millionaire extravagances he'd talked about. He'd be in the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean being handfed grapes by a gaggle of gorgeous girls. She could picture him now, a contented smile on his face, a large whisky in his hand and a week's worth of growth on his chin.

Slotting miniscule black headphones into her ears, she hit her favourite tune and reached for the coconut sun block to apply to her exposed nipples. She teased them to hard, balmed points and nestled into the soft white towel at her head. Her palm ran over her flat, bronzed belly and a ghost of a smile caught her lips.

The first member of her family she would ever meet was at this moment no bigger than a tadpole. Buried deep and safe, growing and developing each day.

It had been a shock a week ago when eating in the restaurant to realise she was late. She was normally like

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clockwork, and the pregnancy test the hotel reception had found for her only confirmed what she already knew. Feeling faint with shock and delirious with happiness, she'd been unable to stop the bubbles of excitement and anticipation popping through her body ever since.

Without a doubt, it was John's baby. It was the only possibility. The dates were perfect. She'd always been careful to use condoms in her professional life, but that week, that magical week when she was not alone in her life, for some reason, all thoughts of contraception had gone out the window. Completely. Neither of them had even mentioned it. Lust and desire had taken over. She'd been so intoxicated by the incredible feelings she was experiencing there'd been plenty of opportunities for a new life to be created totally unhindered by the presence of a condom.

For the first time ever, she had a piece of news she didn't want to keep to herself. It would feel more real if she told John. Whether or not he'd be pleased, indifferent or furious, she had no idea. But just the same, she wanted him to know about their baby.

But going back to John's flat now to tell him was impossible. London was Carlos' territory. She recalled what he'd said about John having a bounty on his head. There'd be one on hers too—a pretty hefty one—and it wasn't a gamble she was prepared to take. Carlos wasn't an issue for John, but for her, it was too much of a risk, especially now she was responsible for another life.

She closed her eyes to the glare of the sun and, once again, re-enacted their last wild session of sex. It had been so

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intimate, so full of trust. So frenzied one minute and so magical and gentle the next. She wondered if that was when their baby had been conceived.

She liked to think so.

Suddenly, a cool shadow clouded the skin on her cheeks. A big hand clasped over her face covering her sunglasses and forehead, keeping her held tight against the sun lounger. "What the..." Desperately, she flicked her eyes open but could see only a tiny crack of light through the gaps of huge fingers over the lenses.

"Hi, Pussy Cat," came a whisky rough voice.

She gasped and pushed forward through the resistance. The hand fell away as soon as she moved.

"John!" she blurted, amazed to be looking at his real face when she'd been visualising him in front of her. "What are you doing here?" She tugged the headphones from her ears.

He rose from his crouch, fought a grimace, rubbed his knee and pulled up a lounger parallel to hers. "Surprised?" he said.

"Just a little." She frowned. How had he known where to find her?

"You got a mini bar in there?" He nodded towards the sliding doors of her suite.

"Yeah, but just ring for a whisky." She handed him a white cordless phone balance by her iced tea.

He took it, hit zero. "Whiskey, *s'il vous-plait*," he said when it answered immediately.

His voice was lined with even more gravel than she remembered, and she cocked her head and studied him as he

made it a double. He looked obscenely handsome with a deep golden tan. His hair was longer than when she'd last seen him and slightly mussed over the top. He wore brown leather slippers and a pair of cream chino shorts teamed with his usual, plain black T-shirt.

She was just about to ask what he was doing in St Tropez when his eyes travelled slowly over her body, naked except for tiny bikini bottoms. An approving smile played on his lips which he then licked. His face softened, and his charcoal eyes became leaden as he took in the fullness of her breasts, resting heavy on her chest, tanned and swollen, her nipples hard little points jutting towards the sun.

With a flush of female power, she stretched her legs out and wiggled her French manicured toenails. She was glad she had on her favourite bright yellow bikini bottoms. They looked fabulous against her deep tan.

The waiter knocked on the door and Kat shouted her usual permission for entry. He appeared on the balcony with a double whisky on a small silver tray. John took the drink with a gruff, "*Merci*," and knocked back a hefty mouthful.

He brought his attention back to Kat, flexed and un-flexed his knee, his palm pressed on the angry scars.

Kat finally found her tongue. "What are you doing here? I thought you'd be off spending your millions."

He grinned. "Well, it's only one million if I'm honest."

"Honesty, huh? Now there is a refreshing change." She lolled her head back onto the lounge and shut her eyes as if the whole conversation bored her; as though the fact he was there held no interest.

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John raised one eyebrow and knocked back the rest of his drink. He might look chilled, but he wasn't in the mood for games. He knew what he wanted, and he'd come to get it.

He'd decided as he'd stepped into the lobby of her apartment building with a pocket full of diamonds what he wanted, and by the time, he'd smiled a final goodbye to the old security guard he knew exactly *how* he was going to get it.

The whole plan had just taken a couple of weeks longer to come together than he'd anticipated. But he was in St Tropez now, his newly re-sprayed Porsche sat in the hotel car park after having driven across France via Amsterdam and Switzerland, and his London flat was sold with the equity, along with the money he'd got for the diamonds, sitting in a high earning Alpine account.

Now, finally, the time had come to get the one last thing he wanted—no, make that needed. So, as far as games went... No, John wasn't in the mood, not one little bit.

"Tell me something," he said in a low voice that demanded attention. "Did you mean what you put in your letter?"

"You got that?" She turned and beneath her glasses he saw her eyes open. "I presumed that had drifted into infinity, it's been so long since I sent it. It was all airy, fairy crap anyway."

"Crap eh? What was crap was that you didn't put a damn address on the top. It would have been a hell of a lot easier to find you."

Kat shrugged. "Didn't want to leave a paper trail."

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"Maybe subconsciously you didn't want me to find you." He tugged at his bottom lip as he studied her full, glossed mouth covered in startling red lipstick. "You're too scared to care and let someone else care, despite your words?"

"Actually, I was thinking about you just now, so that must count for something."

"Good thoughts, I hope."

She removed her glasses, and her features melted in a way he was unfamiliar with. "Well...I think so." She hesitated over the words, and it tweaked his curiosity all the more.

He waited for her to elaborate.

She didn't. Instead, she looked down at her reclined body and flicked an imagined bug from her stomach.

He took hold of her wafting hand and sighed. "I couldn't have given you what you thought was your share and had any left for myself if that's what you were thinking about."

"You could have just told me that to begin with."

"Yeah, and you could have just told me the first night we met at The Fox and Goose you were going to nick my car."

She shrugged, her slender tanned shoulders moved up and down against the white of her towel, causing her breasts to jiggle.

"Kat," he said, forcing his eyes to stay on her face. "You're a pain in the arse to shop with, and you really are a terrible cook, but I've missed being around you." He wondered if she would add the same sentiment to the conversation.

She didn't.



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He continued, "I know you didn't want me to leave you that last time in your flat, and I knew you had the diamonds, or at least you thought you had the diamonds."

Kat glared at him through narrowed eyes. "How could you possibly have known what I wanted or about the damn diamonds?"

"Because, baby, you're so easy to read." He smiled. "You, like millions of other people, flick your eyes up to the left when you lie—tap into the imagination part of your brain. I hadn't bothered to look for it before, but the minute I did, you became a book, especially when so delightfully physically distracted."

Kat scowled and reached for her drink.

"You didn't want me to leave, even though you said you did, and that made me so happy, so damn content, and I realised with you is where I want to be. It's all I've been able to think about these last six weeks." He knocked back another slug of his drink. "And when I read that letter, well, I knew you were hurting as much as I was."

She turned to face him, her mouth open to speak but he chipped in. "I came looking for you, because I want to be with you all day, every day... I've no one else to be with." He frowned, his heavy brows pulling together in frustration. "No, that came out wrong. I want to be with you... no one else. That's what I'm saying, or trying to say...but not very well. All this money, all the stuff I can buy. All I really want is you." He swallowed, hard. "I'm sure we could make it work if we start being honest with each other. We just need to quit with the lies and grow some trust."

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He let go of her hand and dug deep into his shorts pocket. When he withdrew it, between his thumb and index finger he swung a thin gold necklace with a large diamond set in a pendent.

"It's just like the one I already have." She lifted her hands to finger her favourite piece of jewellery.

"You bought it from Mickel, Taylor, Smith on Park Lane, didn't you?"

"Yes, but, but...how do you know that?"

"It's where I worked. I'm guessing you paid about four grand for it, what it's really worth is about fifty quid. The night we met at The Fox and Goose wasn't the first time we stole from one another."

Kat sat forward and fumbled behind her neck for the clasp. Her breasts swung voluptuously, and John eyed the sun darkened nipples with appreciation. He let his gaze drift to the small roll of flesh in her stomach. It was also tanned and she had a tiny darker brown line travelling from her naval to the citrus yellow of her bikini bottoms. She looked good enough to eat. He would in a minute if it went his way.

"Here, I don't want this one anymore." She handed him the fake necklace and pinched up the new one he offered. Within seconds, it was around her neck and nestling at the top of her cleavage.

"That's much better," he said, his fingers itching to reach out and touch her dewy skin. "It bugged me constantly when I saw you wearing it."

"Hmpf..."

"And..." he cleared his throat, "if my knee wasn't playing me up so fucking bad, I would get down on it to give you the rest of your share of the diamonds."

"What are you on about?"

"This." He rooted in his pocket for a second time.

"You're talking in riddles, John, it irritates me."

Between his thumb and index finger, he pulled out an enormous diamond set in a white gold ring. "Marry me."

Kat's mouth caught in a perfect circle of shock.

The man was a loon.

Ten minutes ago, she'd been sunning herself peacefully, and now, if she'd heard right, she was getting a marriage proposal. Something she never thought she'd receive in her life. But then again, she'd also never thought she'd have a baby.

She took a steadying breath and pulled her gaze from the exquisite diamond being offered. "Put that away." She experienced a flash of guilt as she saw his hopeful face fall. "I need to tell you something important. That's why I was thinking about you."

John didn't put the ring away. He wrapped his fingers around it and held it in a clenched fist. "Fire away," he said, his voice sharp, and his face suddenly as dark as a thunder cloud.

Kat reached for her drink and let the cool liquid dampen the fire burning in her chest. Much as she'd wanted to tell John about the baby, now he was sitting in front of her, she wasn't so sure. What if he denied paternity, accused her of

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trying to trap him, or worse, tried to take custody of the child once it was born.

She placed her drink down and could feel his eyes busy searching for hers. He'd just asked her to marry him so surely he felt something for her. Perhaps he'd be thrilled, delighted even at the thought of a child.

Either way, she couldn't back out now. She couldn't accept or refuse his proposal without handing over the facts. She had to be honest. It was a weird, unnatural sensation, she wasn't sure if she'd ever get used to it.

Unconsciously spreading her palm across her stomach, she said quietly. "I'm going to have a baby, John, I'm six weeks pregnant." She snagged in her breath and waited for his reaction.

His gaze flicked to her hand resting protectively over a non-existent bump.

"Are you sure?" he said quietly.

"Sure I'm pregnant or sure it's yours?"

"Both." He set his determined gaze back on hers.

"I'm sure to both." She held his eye contact, not even wanting to flick her eyes up to the left. "It's your baby, John. We didn't use any contraception, and there was no one for a while before you and certainly not since."

He leant forward and hovered his hand over hers as if not daring to exert even the slightest pressure on her abdomen. His face hardened, and a muscle flexed in his cheek.

Kat's heart plummeted.

He didn't believe her.

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*by Lily Harlem*

If he did, he would have said something, he would have made some kind of comment. Instead, he was just staring at her belly, not saying a word. It was her own fault, all her own doing, she could only blame herself. Why should he believe her? She'd done nothing but lie since the first night they'd met. The man must be a fool to ask her to marry him after the way she'd behaved. Drop dead gorgeous but nevertheless, a fool.

But if she had only one chance in her life to be believed, she would gladly use that chance now. Because it was the truth. She'd even secretly hoped the baby would have his deepest, darkest shade of eyes. If it was a boy, she'd already imagined he would grow super tall and have his father's wide shoulders and broad, solid chest.

"Don't play games with me," John finally said as he rubbed his forehead. His jaw was so tight it could have been carved from marble.

"No more games." She tried out a tentative smile. "Just honesty."

He didn't smile back. Instead he scooped up her hand, bent double and placed a lingering kiss on the flat of her lower stomach, a tender caress of a kiss. It sent a river of contentment flowing through her body. All those bolts around her heart slammed wide open. She let him in, completely and unreservedly, and prayed he wouldn't back out and split her open now—because that would finish her off forever.

He kept his face over her body, and she placed a hand on the top of his head. His inch long hair felt burning hot, and

she revelled in being able to touch him again. He was really here.

When he lifted his head, a twinkle in the centre of her stomach caught her attention. It was the diamond ring. He'd placed it neatly in the cleft of her naval.

"We met in a pretty unusual way," he said, a grin stretching across his face. "But I'm a traditionalist at heart and soon as you're, well you know, in a delicate condition, we should get married as soon as possible." He sat with his elbows resting on his knees and his hands knotted together. "Let's be a family. I know we could do this. We're a great team you and me."

"Marriage," she played with the word in her mouth. "Husband...wife?"

"Yes, no more need for lies and deceit, not with me. Lie to whoever else you want, give a false name on the marriage certificate if you're so worried about paper trails, but with me, just the truth. Nothing but the truth. Can you manage honesty with just one other person on the planet?"

She reached for the ring and slid it onto her finger. "Yes," she said, nodding. "Yes, always the truth for you, and the truth is, I want to be a family. I want to be your family."

The next thing, she knew he was kissing her. Soft and gentle, he covered her lips with his and swept his malty tongue into her mouth. His broad palms pressed into the bare flesh of her back and squashed her breasts up against his T-shirt. She melted, gave herself up. Everything she didn't know she needed was right there in his mouth. She could live off his kisses alone.

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"I love you, Pussy Cat," he murmured onto her lips.

She pulled back to look at him, opened her mouth to speak—words wouldn't form.

He cocked his head.

"I..." She tried again.

"It's okay." He shrugged, and his eyelids shifted down. "I didn't say it to hear it back."

"I..." She paused, swallowed.

"Don't," he said softly. "I hope one day you'll feel as strongly for me as I feel for you and then you'll be able to say it."

"I..." She pushed a finger to his lips. "I love you," she said for the first time in her life. "Now, right this minute, I love you. You don't have to wait."

He grinned, cupped her face with his hands and moved to kiss her again.

"I love you, John Taylor," she mumbled rapidly. "I love you, I love you." Suddenly, she lunged forward with an uncontainable surge of excitement. Her movements so fast and jubilant she rocked him back onto his lounge.

He laughed as she wiggled on top of him. She drew her knees up at his sides as he lay out straight. His hands slid around to her rear as she bent and peppered kisses onto his jaw line and around his neck.

"Hey, baby," he said through her mass of tumbling hair, "should we take this reunion inside?"

"Who can see?" She sat bolt upright and made a show of looking around. His erection prodded at the gusset of her

bikini and she squirmed all the more just to hear him groan.  
"It's perfectly secluded up here."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," he said in the husky voice she loved. He reached out and gently rolled her nipples between his fingers. "What about the baby, will we hurt him?"

"Him?"

He shrugged. "I come from a long line of males."

"Well, I have no idea about my genealogy so we'll just have to wait and see what we're given."

"But will we, you know, hurt him...or her, if we, you know, make love?"

"No, don't be silly." She tugged at his flies. "Your dick's big, but not that big, soldier."

"You'll pay for that," he mumbled, pulling her down so he could wrap his lips around her nipple. "Mmm, you taste tropical, like coconut or something." He swirled his tongue and pulled her nipple into a long branch of pleasure with his tongue.

She moaned at the sensation of his mouth suctioning onto her newly, super sensitive areola. The pain/pleasure thing was there again. She adored it. She'd missed it.

"Did I hurt you?" He snapped his head away, his face creasing with concern. "I don't want to hurt you, I never would, and..." His face became serious. "I was worried you may have been scared. Driving all this way, I kept thinking about the stuff we'd done, that I'd done to you, you know, real intimate stuff. I'd hate it if you'd been scared of me when it was all just to get a buzz."

"Scared of you?"



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"Yeah. If you'd said stop, you know I would have, that still applies, will always apply, no matter what we get up to in the future."

"The only thing that ever really scared me was losing you." She pictured the gun aimed at his chest and shook her head to rid the memory. "So don't mess around with guns and don't disappear whilst I'm asleep again, okay?" She pulled down the zipper of his flies.

"We're about even on that one, but no, I won't, I promise..." An animal-like growl rumbled from his throat as she caught his protruding cock in her hand. "Oh, fuck, I've missed you, Pussy Cat."

"I bet you have," she said, crawling down the lounge on her hands and knees, her butt high in the air. "And I bet you've missed this, too." She couldn't help it. She just wanted him in her mouth. She adored giving him oral sex, had replayed each encounter in her mind over and over. And now, she couldn't wait to do it for real again. Her palate was watering for his musky taste and desperate for the steel length of him rutting against the roof of her mouth.

Hastily, he dragged his T-shirt over his shoulders and flopped backwards. "If you're going to do what I think you are, I've died and gone to heaven, baby."

She took him in her mouth and dropped all the way down.

"Ahhh...fuck yes."

Ignoring her gag reflex, she pulled a breath through her nose and absorbed his delicious, slightly salty, masculine taste. He hit the very back of her throat and the base of her

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tongue enveloped his shape, undulating and rolling the thick throbbing vein she found there.

His entire body shook with sudden tension, his muscles clenched and his cock jerked. "Jeez, you do that the best." His fingers sank into her hair and massaged her scalp, moving in time with her dipping and rising head.

She strained her eyes up to his face with her heart racing. Knowing the effect she had on him increased the strong pulses of desire shaking her own insides. She could come just from giving him head. She would one day; she would just let it happen.

"Turn around, baby," he grunted. "I want you to sit on my face."

She hesitated. Sucking his cock was something she preferred to do without distraction, like enjoying a good book with no interruptions. She wanted to concentrate her efforts, finely tune her skill. She was more than happy with the current position.

"Come on, let me taste your sweet pussy again." His voice was ragged, desperate.

She heard voices passing below her balcony.

"I need you," he whispered urgently.

She clenched her pelvic muscles. The thought of him kissing her there, sucking her clit was such a temptation. Not only that he was beginning to pick her up and physically turn her, treating her like a doll the way he was prone to doing. She actually had no choice in the matter.

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The next thing she knew, her favourite yellow bikini bottoms were discarded, and her kneeling position now included his tongue lapping between her legs.

She groaned around his cock as heat from his mouth seeped onto her bare lips. It was a deep guttural sound even to her own ears, and she hoped it didn't carry too far. She could feel him sliding the tip of his tongue from her wet entrance to the tip of her clit. He began circling expertly. A needy tremor shivered through her pelvis. An orgasm would soon be there for the taking.

"Ahh, baby, I've missed your flavour," he mumbled between licks. "So fucking delicious, I'm gonna taste you every day for the rest of our lives." He added a probing finger into her pussy, searched out her g-spot and began to fret with a wickedly fast rhythm.

She collapsed on top of him, her elbows giving way and forcing him even farther into her mouth. She spooned her tongue and sucked with a force she knew would send him reeling then withdrew and flicked at the smooth ring of skin underneath his head with the tip of her tongue.

"Jeez, woman, you want me to embarrass myself?" He moaned, his hips jerking away from her mouth. "It's been six weeks since I had a release, you probably don't want that down your sweet little throat."

Kat groaned as he pulled farther away and took his attentions from her quivering pussy. "John, no, I can take it, please. Let me suck your dick. I want it, I want it all."

He chuckled, an oddly strained sound, then turned her to face him again and straddled her over his hips. "Plenty of

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time for that. Right now, I just need to be inside you more than I've ever needed anything else in my whole damn life."

She flattened her palms on his chest and allowed his penis to nudge at her entrance. He was right. There was only one way to celebrate being back together, and that was joining as one, reaching for that unimaginable high and exploding. They would have the rest of their lives for fun stuff. Right now, they just needed to get down the serious business of a really good fuck.

She sank down, her pussy rejoicing in his invasion. She threw her head up to the dazzling sun as he filled her heated channel to the max. Finally, after all the years of self-imposed solitary confinement, she opened up completely. The feeling was euphoric. Letting John into her heart, body and soul for the rest of time felt good. More than good, it felt warm and safe, passionate and exciting.

The first wave of an almighty orgasm careered into her stomach and chest with all the grace of a steam train, stepping up through the levels and freezing her on that perfect plateau of bliss.

She gasped. "John, I'm...c..."

His cock solidified and stilled, his breath snagged in.

Her neck remained tipped and her back arched. She squeezed her eyes to the harsh light of the sun and was invaded by laser bright lights flashing and searing. His fingers circled over her clit, and the plateau extended to the size of a continent. The tight pinch of release just a nano second away.

"I'm coming, baby," he groaned.

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Then she felt him pulsate, first one huge surge, then faster, shorter ones as he shot out his burning desire. Her plateau ended, and she fell off the edge with him. Hurtled downwards and upwards, left and right. She called out his name as her internal muscles conducted a wild dance with his penis. No longer caring who on the hotel grounds could hear her happiness.

He sat bolt upright and gathered her trembling, convulsing body in his arms. "You're mine forever," he said through his own severe breathlessness. The words mixed with the orchestral sound of her orgasm rushing through her ears. "I would die for you and our child." He caught her mouth in a hungry kiss, thrusting his tongue into her groan of pleasure. "You'll never be alone again."

Kat's climax culminated in tears of happiness, another first. She'd been alone her entire life, but now, with John it was all going to change. Her childhood dreams of having a family, of living happily ever after were about to be realised, and soon, she'd have not just one person to love and hold—but two.

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## About the Author

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Lily Harlem lives in beautiful rural Wales, UK with an ever increasing menagerie of rescued pets. Before starting a writing career two years ago, Lily studied at Oxford University and went on to become an Accident and Emergency nurse. Now with a desk overlooking rolling hills and farm land—and not a hospital gown in sight—her overactive imagination has been allowed to run wild and free. Lily's stories are made up of colourful characters exploring their sexuality and sensuality in a safe, consensual way—her plots usually turn kinky, three is definitely not considered a crowd, and the pain/pleasure relationship is often explored. With the bedroom door left wide open, the reader can hang on for the ride, and Lily hopes by reading sensual romance people will be brave enough to try something new themselves—after all, life's too short to be anything other than fully satisfied.

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Lily loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at [www.total-e-bound.com](http://www.total-e-bound.com)

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\* \* \* \*

Also by Lily Harlem

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Christmas Crackers: Candy Canes and Coal Dust

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