

*Purple Passion*  
SINDRA VAN YSSEL

Loose Id

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## **Purple Passion**

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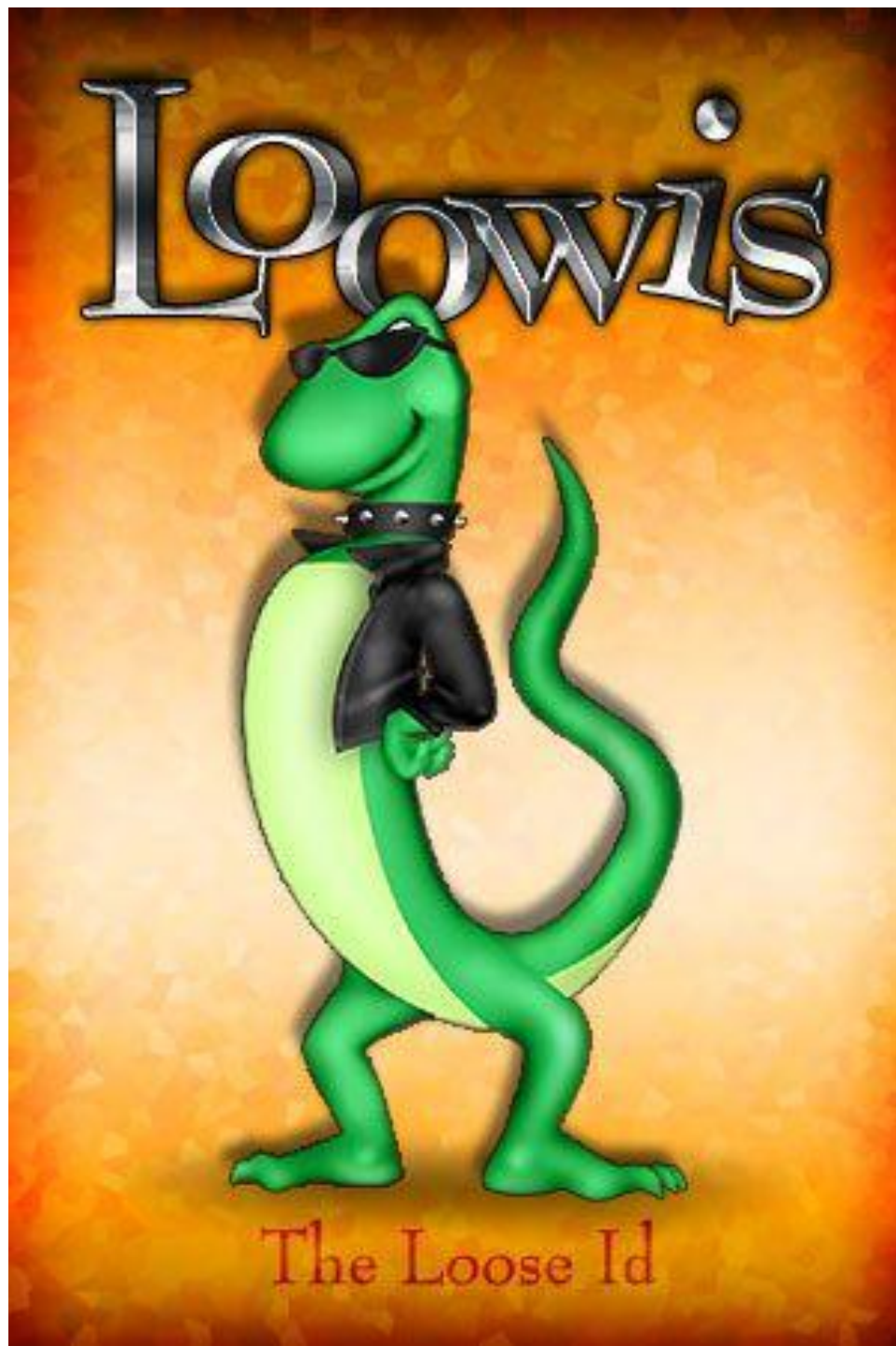
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## Chapter One

Lisa Martinez wasn't looking forward to meeting her ex's friends at Perry's Bar and Grill. But in a moment of weakness, she'd said she would, so there she was. No doubt Brian would have had plenty to say about her appearance, starting with the purple highlights in her hair and continuing on to her snug tie-dyed T-shirt and her choice of black jeans rather than slacks. Dammit, agreeing to show up didn't mean she was going to follow through on Brian's idea for her to open her own business. She'd landed a nice gig at Curls and Colors, a trendy suburban beauty salon, and was starting to get a good client list going after six months. It paid the rent. She'd rather transform someone's appearance than get all caught up with finances and office work, even if the latter was more lucrative. And since the group she was meeting for dinner knew a lot about finances and nothing about hair, no doubt finances would be the subject for the evening.

It was hard to tell if Brian was really trying to help or if he was worried she'd be after his money if she didn't get some of her own. Or maybe he wanted to set her up to fail so he could ride to the rescue. Their divorce settlement had given her enough money to move from Baltimore to Northern Virginia, and that was all she'd needed. It was a fair price for the sacrifices she'd made for his career. She didn't intend to ask for more.

She wondered if he'd mentioned to his associates how frigid she was. Nearly forty years old and he still didn't get that when you said things about people enough times, they usually found out. Maybe he had wanted her to hear. After ten years of marriage, she still wasn't sure if he was her friend or her enemy. Probably both.

“Party of one, Miss?” asked the greeter, a college kid with tousled hair the color of whiskey.

“No, I’m looking to meet some people.” *And since I’m ten minutes late, they’re probably here already. Someday I’ll get used to the traffic. What was the name of that guy again?* “Um, Bunch.” She knew that wasn’t quite right, so she kept her voice low, hoping he’d correct her. *Where’s my brain today?* She knew the answer: the meeting had been stressing her all day, and she wasn’t her best under pressure.

Apparently, she’d gotten close enough, because the greeter’s eyes lit up in recognition. He also gave her the once-over. *Stop it, kid. I’ve got at least a dozen years on you.* Still, she couldn’t suppress a grin. She didn’t get those kinds of speculative looks every day, and it felt good.

He led her over to a long table. A few people were seated there already, as she’d expected, and as she anticipated, they all seemed to know each other. But they weren’t the stuffed suits she’d been dreading. A big, older woman wearing a black T-shirt was at one end. There was an elegant-looking African American woman about her age, in office clothes, and a redhead she thought was probably younger.

Her gaze moved on to the men. A short, athletically built man with a tailored shirt, neatly cut brown hair, and a perfect shave sat with his hands folded in front of him. A nearly bald man sat across from him. Neither of them were her type, but she wasn’t there to find a date.

There were already menus at all the places, and the table seated more people than Lisa had thought were coming. She’d expected three people, maybe four, but she realized she hadn’t asked Brian the number. Fourteen place mats were laid out. She sat down, one place down from the crowd at the end, leaving an empty spot.

“Hello,” said the elegantly dressed woman. “I’m Miss Carter. My boy here”—she indicated the shorter man, who smiled shyly—“is Toby. Malcolm, Starlight, Mistress Madeline.”

*Starlight? Mistress? What strange names.* “Ah. I’m Lisa. Pleased to meet all of you.”

People glanced up, and she got a nod from the redhead who apparently went by Starlight and the bald man named Malcolm, but they went right back to their conversation. Everyone seemed to be paying attention to the older woman, Madeline. Lisa couldn't quite make out what she was saying, and rather than scoot nearer, she decided she'd concentrate on figuring out what she was going to order. Now that she didn't have Brian nagging her about her weight all the time, she felt like being healthy for her own sake. The grilled chicken over penne looked like it would do the job: plenty of protein, enough carbs to make her feel full, and easy on the fats. She'd tried low-carb diets—was that at Brian's suggestion too? She couldn't remember—and they didn't work for her.

"Tightened the rope on his wrists. The poor little..."

She blinked, looked up. Madeline was still talking and getting louder as she got more excited about whatever she was talking about. The grin on her face made Lisa shiver. *The woman's probably someone's grandma, so why does she give me the feeling I don't want to be alone with her in a dark alley?*

"And then I took out the clamps and screwed them tight. Men are so busy thinking about women's nipples I think they forget that theirs are there to be played with." The woman's gaze came to rest on Toby, and Lisa could swear she cackled. *Nice business associates you've got there, Brian.*

"Sorta warms 'em up for the main event, you know?"

"Sex?" asked Malcolm, his muscular arms crossed.

Another cackle. "Heck no. A little CBT."

Malcolm snorted, and Toby and Starlight winced. The black woman patted Toby on the head.

"Madeline gets intense sometimes." She hadn't noticed the speaker sit down, but she noticed him now. Dark hair, blue eyes. Muscles strained the arms of his T-shirt. "Don't let her unnerve you."

"I wasn't unnerved," Lisa lied. She wasn't about to ask what CBT was either. Hopefully the woman would be done bragging about her strange sex life, and she

could get on with explaining she really wasn't going to open her own business, thank everyone for their time, and head home. Brian made it sound like he'd arranged a meeting just for her, but she got the vibe that these people would have gotten together anyway. In fact, from the interest they showed in her, she could probably let them talk about accounting or whatever, when they finally got to it, and wait it out. The eye candy across from her would at least provide some relief from the boredom.

She realized she was staring.

"Good for you," he said, with an upward turn at the corner of his lips.

A couple more people came: a perfectly ordinary-looking man filled the place between her and Toby, and a curvy woman in a very short, tight-fitting black dress sat between Malcolm and the hunk. The leather collar around her throat added to the effect; it was the last thing Lisa would have expected anyone to wear a meeting to discuss business connections. But maybe it helped explain why no one batted an eye at her purple hair. These people might actually be pretty open-minded, and one of them might be a client someday. She smiled.

What she wouldn't give to do the hunk's hair. Dark. Wavy. It wasn't like there was anything wrong with it as it was, but she wanted an excuse to run her hands through it.

"Kiss," said Mr. Average. It was said like an order, and the collared girl responded like it was one, leaning over and kissing him. Lisa stared, transfixed. *That's totally hot.* She didn't know how long it had been since someone had offered to kiss her, much less demanded it of her. Months. Since way before the divorce. Mr. Average reached up as if he was going to hook his finger through the ring dangling from the woman's collar.

"No playing in the restaurant, Adam and Carlotta," said Miss Carter. Her voice was calm, assured, and obviously she was used to being obeyed. Adam tensed the way Brian used to when he was about to start an argument. *Uh-oh.*

“We don’t want to get thrown out,” said the hunk, and his words had a calming effect on Adam. “You two can play anytime, and there’s a party tomorrow night. But the best way not to get invited is to misbehave here.”

Carlotta pouted. Adam nodded slowly. “Nothing more than what I did. We’re cool.” He lowered his voice and turned away. “Hey, Malcolm, did you bring it?”

“You bet, Adam. Best I’ve done yet too. You’ll like it. And so will you, Eve.”

“My name’s Carlotta.” And then Carlotta added, without any more love in her voice, “Sir.”

A plastic bag was passed under the table from Malcolm to Adam. “Thanks, man,” he said, and then he looked around at the rest of the people at the table, although the sweep of his gaze didn’t extend to her. “Don’t worry, guys. I’m not going to be so silly as to open it *here*.”

“Good,” said Madeline, her voice again too loud.

*Were they passing drugs under the table? These people are so weird. Well, some of them are anyway.* Madeline was weird. The redhead seemed normal. And she didn’t think she’d appreciate the “Eve” joke any more than Carlotta did.

Two more people filled in the two seats to the right of her: a couple, it looked like, in T-shirts and jeans. More nods of recognition, and the hunk shook the man’s hand.

Adam got up and headed for the bathroom. The plastic bag sat right next to her chair. She shrugged.

“Are you new to the area or just new to us?” asked the hunk. It took Lisa a moment to realize someone was actually talking to her.

“Um. New, yes, um, to the area, yes.” *Just because he’s gorgeous is no reason to stumble over my words. He’s not going to be interested in me anyway.* She got control. “Six months.”

The blonde who’d sat next to her turned. “My name’s Virginia,” she said with a trace of an English accent. She offered a hand.

Lisa shook it. "Lisa."

"Mike," said the man with Virginia and offered her his hand too. She shook it.

"Darren," said the hunk.

"So," said Carlotta. "Sub or—"

But she didn't complete her sentence, because the waiter arrived. "Drinks for anyone? Anyone want to put an order in?"

"We split the check at the end," Virginia explained in a low voice. "Pay your share, and all is good."

"Don't," added Carlotta, "and we make you spend an evening with Madeline."

*Good thing I came with cash on me.*

Lisa put in an order for her food when Malcolm and Starlight both ordered dishes, and she went with a Diet Coke. She didn't really like to have even one drink when she was going to drive afterward. She would have slowly sipped a beer if everyone else was going with alcohol, but she wasn't the only one having a soda.

Darren was staring at her. It had to be her imagination. A guy who looked like that could get any girl he wanted, and it was only wishful thinking to think he'd be staring at her. She tried to look nice, but she knew she was no knockout. Yet when she looked up at him, he didn't turn away but held her gaze for a moment. Time slowed down.

*Somebody please say something.*

"Have you been to one of these anywhere else, or is this really your first time exploring?" asked Virginia.

*What an odd way to put it.* "Um, first time."

Was it her imagination, or did Darren smile?

Carlotta leaned in toward her from the other side. "Sub or homme?" she asked.

"Huh?"

"Oh, my, you *are* new! Do you like to be in charge, or would you rather be ordered around?"

She frowned. "Are those the only options?" Not wanting to worry about financing and all the business stuff didn't mean she didn't enjoy working independently. "I'm not really into being the big boss or anything."

"So that would make you a sub," said Carlotta, leaning back triumphantly. "Welcome aboard, sister. Don't hit on my man."

Past her, Malcolm turned from Madeline's end of the table to look at her. She really didn't want to be the center of attention.

"I don't think she came here to hit on your man, Carlotta," said Darren drily. "And not everyone fits into neat little categories. Don't feel like you have to conform, Lisa."

A few people in business suits walked by the table, looking annoyed about something. Lisa smiled at Darren. "Thank you," she said. "I've never been the conforming type."

"I guessed." Darren grinned at her.

"Are you accusing me of being a conformist?" demanded Carlotta.

"No, not at all." Darren's voice was smooth, unruffled.

"Well, fine."

"So," boomed Madeline from the other end of the table, "another sub! Welcome, Lisa! Anytime you want some pain, feel free to come to Mama Madeline."

How the conversation had been heard over there, especially over Madeline's voice, Lisa had no idea. Was the whole table talking about her now? In a way that was what she was supposed to be here for—to plan out the business she had no intention of running.

"So," she said brightly, "how do you all know Brian anyway?"

Every face went blank. She scanned them, and there was not a single trace of recognition from any of them.

"Sir, do you know a Master Brian?" asked Carlotta as Adam sat down.

"Just plain Brian," Lisa interposed. "Brian Maxwell."

Adam shook his head and then looked at Lisa as if she'd said something out of turn or had pizza sauce on her nose. "No. I don't."

Virginia murmured into her ear, "We don't usually use last names, dear."

A feeling of dread passed over her. Those people in business suits—they had looked exactly like she'd expected the folks she was supposed to meet. And these people weren't right at all. "Oh my God. I sat at the wrong table."

"You didn't want the Munch group?" asked Darren.

"Munch?" No, that definitely wasn't the name Brian had given her. She was sure it started with a B. If they didn't use last names, Munch wasn't anyone's name. Curiosity got a hold of her. "Who, what, or where is munch?"

"Oh my God, she doesn't know what a munch is," babbled Carlotta.

Lisa was sure her cheeks were bright red by now.

"A munch," explained Darren, "is a get-together for kinky people—people into BDSM—to chat, meet new people, and make connections in a safe public space."

Sub or femme, Carlotta had asked her. She would have understood the question if she had known the context.

"Darren, if she didn't know, she doesn't belong here." Malcolm then turned to her. "Sorry about the mistake, but we're not here to be quizzed. I'm sure the waiter can find you another table."

Her cheeks were still burning. But she was determined to deal with this with some kind of dignity. "I do seem to be at the wrong table, don't I?" The waiter placed her chicken penne in front of her. For the first time that evening, the timing seemed perfect. She turned to the waiter. "Was there another party here? Something like Bunch, Belch, Bitch..." *No way that was it. So much for dignity.* The word set off giggles up and down the table.

"Birch?" asked the waiter helpfully.

"Yeah, that was it."

"They were here, and they left. I'm sorry, madam."

*Damn. Damn. Damn.*

“Why don’t you stay, Lisa,” Darren said. “You’ll at least have an interesting evening, and I promise you we don’t bite.”

“Unless asked,” said Carlotta.

“Nicely,” added Adam.

“I’ll make sure they behave,” Virginia said, and the word “behave” in her British accent instantly made Lisa think of some naughty schoolboy being lined up for six of the best.

“Please stay,” added Mike.

Either she stayed or sat alone. She kept looking at the waiter, who had delivered the last plates of food and was waiting for her response. She watched him rather than look at the table. Doms and subs, hmm? The people who came as couples were clear enough, and Madeline was obviously a *domme*. What about Darren? All dom. He had to be. Those eyes, that build, the confidence he projected. She stood, not sure whether she was fleeing or just making an awkward exit.

“Sit down, Lisa,” Darren said.

She turned and sat down. The waiter moved on. Somehow the flame of embarrassment in her cheeks faded or was less painful. Then she realized he’d given her an order, and she’d obeyed. *Just like that.*

*Time to get things back my terms.*

“I’m not a sub. I’m not a *domme*. I’m just...curious is all, really. So. Why do you guys meet in a restaurant rather than some dark dungeon somewhere?”

Darren took charge of the question. “It’s simple really, Lisa. Sometimes we do meet in some dark dungeon somewhere, or more likely a bedroom or a club or someone’s house. But before you invite someone to a party, you want to get to know them or have someone vouch for them. Not everyone comes into the scene knowing someone. Lots of people have read books, or played on the Internet, and they want

to find out what the reality is like. A few people attracted to BDSM are creepy and predatory. Not most, but a few. This is a place to meet on neutral ground.”

“So it’s where you filter people out.”

“Yes, but we don’t come here expecting to filter someone out, as you put it. We come here hoping to meet new people and help them start a journey to find their innermost desires. And because we’re friends, many of us, and we enjoy each other’s company whether anyone new shows up at all.”

Carlotta leaned forward. “You’ve caught Darren’s eye. Fair warning, between us girls: he’s the love-them-and-leave-them type, but from what I understand, the loving is worth the leaving.”

She hadn’t said it loud, but for a *between us girls* comment she was pretty sure Darren and Adam could catch it fine. “I’m only here by accident,” she said. “I’m not looking to hook up with anyone.”

“Taken?” Carlotta looked pleased.

“Not interested.”

Darren was looking at her curiously. *But I could make exceptions for particularly hunky guys.* She couldn’t say it, and if she had any chance with him at all, she’d blown it. She couldn’t even claim she was scaring some other guy away; they were all attached except Malcolm and Darren. She knew what she was doing: she was taking herself off the market so she wouldn’t be hurt when no one was interested.

“Do you like girls?” asked Miss Carter.

*Okay, that backfired even worse than I thought.* “No. I like boys. I mean men.”

“There is such a difference, isn’t there?” Miss Carter smiled and turned away as the waiter approached her.

Darren leaned forward. “So, Lisa, what are your fantasies?”

*Tell me, and I’ll make them true,* those eyes seemed to promise. But he couldn’t make her a princess whose favor was proudly displayed on her hero’s lance. She

wasn't going to become a movie star either. Those were her fantasies, right? Not the part where the winning hero claimed his lawful prize—her—in bed. Not the casting couch of the handsome actor-turned-producer who would give her the part if only she promised to do anything he asked of her. Those were just little twists, verisimilitude to make the fantasies seem more real.

"I'm just a hair stylist. Nothing special about me."

"That's not what I asked." His voice was calm. But his words said she'd disappointed him. She wasn't going to, couldn't, tell him about the deep dark thoughts she had late at night. The way she'd start off imagining she was Nancy Drew and ended up tied to a chair. Helpless. Naked. Wet.

He had the look on his face she'd seen in her dreams, the look of someone she didn't dare disappoint. "Sometimes," she said in a small voice, "I dream of being cared for." It was true too. The producer always fell in love with her. The knight-errant adored her. The criminal with ropes flew to Buenos Aires with her, and they both lived happily ever after.

"And?"

"And of not being in control." Brian had usually been willing to take care of that part everywhere but in bed, where she wanted it from him the most. She'd tried to go along for a while, then fought against it when she realized his vision had nothing to do with what she wanted for herself.

"I see. And what sort of things happen to you when you're not in control?"

She stared into his eyes. Everyone was chattering around her. Virginia and Mike had started up a conversation on the left; Madeline was getting her two cents in, and other voices too were speaking to her right. But there was still a sense she was alone with Darren.

"My world gets turned upside down, and I get terribly unhappy." It was the truth. Even if a part of her wanted it, she knew better.

"But that's not how it works in your fantasies." It wasn't a question, but a statement.

“No, it’s not.”

A clever little tune sounded. She didn’t know the tune, but she could guess the source. Cell phone. Sure enough Darren fished a phone out of his pocket and pushed a button to quiet it. He put it next to his plate, turned back to Lisa, and smiled. “Sometimes you can have your fantasies, Lisa. Why not give it a try?”

Why not? How was a bigger question. Was he offering or pushing the kinky gospel? “Sometimes fantasies are meant to stay fantasies,” she said, nibbling at her noodles. It was decent pasta, in a smooth white sauce, but the chicken was overcooked. Safety first, she supposed.

The phone rang again. Darren scowled as he looked at it and sighed. “I really have to take this. I’m sorry, Lisa.” He pushed the Talk button. “I’ll call you back in a minute,” he said into the phone, pushing another button. He stood up and reached in his wallet. He took out a card and set it next to Lisa’s plate. “Party. Tomorrow night, eight o’clock. You’re invited. Be there or I’ll be horribly disappointed.” He flashed her a smile, set a twenty-dollar bill next to his plate, and walked away before she could say anything.

Lisa looked at the card. There was an address, nothing else. *Party, huh?*

Virginia smiled at her. “It’ll be a wonderful time. And you’re in safe hands with Darren. He’s a real gentleman. He gives the best parties too, and he doesn’t invite just anyone.”

*Yeah. A real gentleman. “Be there or I’ll be horribly disappointed.”* She didn’t know if he was being sweet or bossy. Maybe both.

Carlotta smiled. “So happy to have another sister there!” Apparently, since she’d mentally paired her off with the hunky Darren, Carlotta didn’t see her as a threat to steal “her man” anymore.

She smiled and ate her food. There wasn’t anything to say really. She busied herself with bits of half-burned chicken and soda, and the others began their conversations again, leaving her out of them. Darren hadn’t come back by the time she finished her meal.

Twenty should cover it and more, she thought. She took a twenty out of her wallet—she didn't always carry lots of cash, but she'd gotten a nice tip from a young woman whose hair she'd done in scarlet. That was why Darren put his twenty there too, she supposed; he didn't think he'd be back before everyone else was done, and the waiter needed to pick up the check. Pity his food was going to go cold.

She set the twenty on the table.

"Leaving us already?" asked Virginia.

"I've got someplace I need to be," Lisa lied.

"Well, we will see you at the party, won't we? I can't wait to see you and Darren together."

"Being watched is definitely not one of my fantasies," Lisa said. Except for the one where she was the secretary, and everyone knew she was doing the boss, and he kept leaving the door open. Her cheeks burned again. *Fuck, two lies*. She thought of herself as a basically truthful person.

Virginia grinned at her. "You don't have to play. Just come."

"Oh, if she plays, she'll come all right," Carlotta said.

"Definitely won't be there. But it was lovely to meet you all." They seemed like nice enough people, although she wasn't sure about Madeline or Malcolm, and she'd hardly interacted with the other people over at that end. It wasn't a lie, not really. She got up, smiled, and turned to go.

"See her out, Virginia," said Mike, who'd been pretty quiet.

"Yes, Master." Virginia rose and walked with her as she left the restaurant.

"This really isn't necessary," Lisa said, not slowing down.

"It's late. It's good to have someone with you when you go to your car. Would you let me see your card a second? I don't need to see the address. I have that. I'll be at the party."

Lisa couldn't see the harm in it, so she handed the card to Virginia, who produced a pen and scribbled a phone number on the back of it. "If you ever want to

get in touch with us, that's my number. Or you can come here, any second Friday of the month, and you'll see some familiar faces."

"Oh. Thank you." She really was touched.

"We'd love to see you again. We get a few odd ones, as you might imagine."

Lisa smiled. As far as she was concerned, at least half the table was odd already.

To her relief, Virginia let her walk to her car alone, settling for watching from the doorway. When she looked back, she saw Darren, leaning up against the stucco wall of the restaurant with one foot propped up against it, talking into his phone. He reminded her of James Dean. He didn't seem to notice her. That's good, she told herself, even as a wave of disappointment hit her. She hurried her steps, got into her little hybrid, and drove away.

## Chapter Two

“You’re not going, of course.”

Brian had called her early Saturday morning to harangue her about standing up his friends, so she’d told him a few vague details about the munch. Her sense of mischief had overcome her good judgment. She thought she’d annoy him by mentioning the party, which wasn’t a good idea anyway. Of course she wasn’t going.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said.

“Lisa, I absolutely forbid you to go. It’s not safe, and goodness knows what kind of creep this guy Darren is.”

*He forbids me? What the fuck?* “You can’t stop me, Brian,” she said, anger making her heart feel like a hard knot. Anger was Brian’s game, never hers. She wasn’t good at it. She kept her voice even, in spite of what she felt. “I’m going, and that’s that.”

“We’re barely divorced, and you’re hopping into bed with crazies you meet in restaurants? I can’t believe you’re acting like such a slut, Lisa.”

She’d held back her whole marriage, not wanting to escalate things to the point where someone got hit or said something irrevocable. She didn’t need to now. *Slut, huh?* “At least I waited until we were divorced to go bed-hopping, asshole.”

“At least I wasn’t going after perverts.”

“At least I’m not going after someone with fake boobs.” *This isn’t going to end well.*

“It’s no different than fucking fake fucking purple hair.” His voice was rising. She’d spent what seemed like a lifetime trying to figure out how not to set him off.

He always accused her of pushing his buttons intentionally, but she never had. Until now. *Maybe this is what I need. To hear him yell one last time. To get it all resolved.*

She tried to think of words to say into the silence, something barbed to keep it going. Some story about a sexual exploit, some comment about the size of his dick. But the anger had gone out of her quickly. Her fist unclenched, and her grip on the phone loosened. The silence continued on.

*I don't have to let him yell at me anymore. We're divorced. It is resolved.* "Good-bye, Brian." Her voice was calm, and she didn't wait for his reply, although she heard something loud and incoherent in the split second before she settled the receiver onto the phone.

The phone rang again. She glanced at the LCD display, which told her Brian was the caller. She walked away, picked up her e-reader, settled into her comfiest chair, and let it ring.

The address was in Potomac, Maryland, where the smaller houses cost a million dollars. That didn't daunt Lisa; she might not be rich herself, but she'd done rich people's hair. It was the BDSM aspect that was daunting. She had no idea what to wear to a BDSM party. She supposed it didn't matter. She didn't intend to stay long. An hour maybe, max, enough to be able to say she'd been there and not make it too obvious she was only there to say she'd gone. She didn't need to dress to get attention. *Unless the attention is from Darren.*

*Okay, there.* She admitted it to herself. Darren was hot, and she wouldn't say no to some non-kinky, down-and-dirty sex with him. The comments Brian had made about her being a slut were laughable. She'd practically been a virgin when she met him, and she'd been faithful ever since. But at this point, it wasn't faithfulness anymore; it was abstinence. She'd never thought abstinence particularly attractive, even for priests and nuns.

*What if I freeze up?*

The word “frigid” came back to her mind, as it had before. She shrugged. It wasn’t going to happen. Darren inviting her to a party she didn’t intend to stay at didn’t mean he wanted her in bed. She’d get a chance, sometime, with someone, but there was no sense in getting stressed about it beforehand.

Still, she was thinking of Darren when she chose her clothes. A purple halter top matching the highlights in her hair replaced her T-shirt, which she promptly took off again so she could change into a strapless bra. *It’s been a while.* The top showed off a little cleavage, clung tightly to the curve of her breasts, and covered her tummy. She looked through her selection of skirts—she pushed aside a couple of short ones she never wore and some really long ones that were fun but too conservative. She finally settled on a black pleated skirt with a hem above her knee that flounced when she walked. She added purple fishnet stockings because she hadn’t had a chance to wear them since she’d bought them months ago, and black pumps. *There. I’m even color coordinated.*

She wasn’t the smoothest walker in the heels—she generally went for sneakers when she could get away with it and penny loafers when she couldn’t. But she’d manage not to trip over her feet at least.

She left at eight, figuring the travel time from Falls Church would make her fashionably late, but she’d still get home in time for a nice soak in the tub followed by a couple of hours with a book before falling asleep.

She parked on the street when she got there, ignoring a driveway with a half-dozen cars in it. She hadn’t been invited to park there, so she didn’t. The house, it turned out, was far from small; it had a spacious, flat yard, the lawn neatly kept but with patches of clover and other variation. The neighbors’ yards all had the usual chemically assisted sameness. Interesting.

Still, the hugeness of the yards meant that the houses had some distance between them. As she walked up the long walkway to the two-story brick house—mansion, really—it occurred to her none of the neighbors could hear a scream. She shivered.

*Well, here goes nothing.*

She raised the brass door knocker, an odd-looking thing featuring a soccer player and a soccer ball, and pounded it once, twice, three times.

“Hey,” said the towering hulk of a man who answered the door. His large bare chest was a mass of fur, and leather jeans covered him below. “Who the hell are you?”

The temptation to say she had the wrong house was strong. She resisted. “I’m Lisa. And I have an invitation. From Darren.” She held up the card.

“Oh. Well, get in, then.” The huge man backed up. “There are a few of us here so far. Darren’s late to his own party. You can hang your clothes up in the closet, if you like.”

*Hang my clothes up? Like hell I’m taking off my clothes.*

She wasn’t happy Darren wasn’t there either. She followed the big man to a living room. She recognized the two other people there: Miss Carter was seated on a comfy chair, in a short, low-cut deep brown leather dress a shade darker than her skin, and Starlight had apparently hung up her clothes, as she was wearing red lingerie, kneeling on a cushion on the floor in front of a severe-looking man. A handful of people she didn’t recognize, in various states of dress, lounged on the couch or chairs. A couple stood talking. To her surprise, the big man went and knelt in front of Miss Carter.

*That huge man is a sub?*

“Hello, Lisa,” said Miss Carter. “Did I hear him being rude to you?”

Lisa didn’t want to get him into trouble. “Hi! Don’t worry about it.” She felt awkward calling the woman Miss Carter, so she skipped it.

“Because he’ll provide any service you like, to make up for it, won’t you, Joe?”

“Yes, Miss Carter,” Joe said without turning to look at Lisa.

Her mind boggled. Muscles were nice, but there was such a thing as too big as far as she was concerned. “No, thank you.”

*So she came after all.* Darren McCorvey had seen Lisa drive off Friday night, although he hadn't been able to say anything to her. The red silk peony on the top of the antenna was distinctive, so it was definitely her car parked on the street. How long had she been there? He'd loaned Abby Carter his house keys in case his meeting made him run late, but he definitely had wanted to be there for Lisa's first moments at a play party. It could be pretty daunting for a beginner, and Lisa had told people she wasn't coming anyway, so she was probably skittish. He wondered what had changed her mind.

He drove his black Lexus LS up his driveway, behind the cars of some of his guests, and jogged up the stairs to the side door of the house, ignoring the usual pain in his left knee. He entered the kitchen in time to hear Miss Carter's offer. He knew he didn't have any claim to Lisa, but at the same time, Abby knew he wanted to be the one to show the new sub around. He walked quickly to the living room, then slowed up to make his entrance look casual. He put his hand on Lisa's shoulder.

She jumped.

"Skittish, Lisa?" he asked, outwardly amused at her reaction while he mentally punched himself for startling her.

"Sorry. You startled me." She turned around to face him.

"I can see that." He turned to the others. "Lisa's my guest here this evening. Hands off." He gestured to Lisa. "Come. I'll show you around."

She glared at him. Good. He had no desire to dominate a mouse. But when he turned around and walked away, he heard her footsteps on the carpet following him.

"There's food here," he said as he entered the dining room. "Feel free to snack or even make a meal out of it if you're hungry. Are you hungry?" He turned to face her.

“No, I ate dinner. What do you mean by telling everyone hands off?” She was visibly annoyed.

“Did you want their hands on?”

“Well, no, but—”

“That’s why I told them.”

“Maybe I can tell them myself.”

“I’m sure you can. But that wouldn’t be any fun, would it? Come. I’ll show you the downstairs, where the fun takes place.”

“In the deep, dark dungeon?” She said it mockingly.

“Exactly.”

At the base of the stairs was a door. He kept it locked if he was having business associates or old teammates over, but for parties like this, there was no need. He opened it and held it open for Lisa, gesturing for her to pass him.

She hesitated.

“Would it help if I assured you no harm will come to you, and nothing will be done without your consent?”

She spent a moment to think about it. “Yeah.”

A woman’s moan came from the room, then the snap of a whip. Lisa might not know what the whip sound was, but he suspected she could guess. “I swear on my honor,” he said.

Her eyes darted away. *Not a mouse. But not a tiger either. Fine. Something in between.* He wondered who was playing in the basement already, but Lisa was more important than satisfying his curiosity.

She turned her chin up and walked through the open door, the picture of nonchalance. He smiled to himself and followed.

Mike was lashing Virginia with a heavy-looking flogger, the kind that packed a lot of thud and not much sting. Virginia was chained to an X-frame, and she wore

nothing but cuffs. He'd already gotten her back and buttocks to a rosy pink glow. He watched Lisa stare for a moment, and then put his arm around her waist.

"Bothered? Turned on? Horrified?"

"A little of all those things," Lisa said. He noticed she didn't pull away from him.

"We'll keep our voices soft so as not to disturb them." He steered her forward, past the X-frame, to see the rest of the room. Floggers, canes, and whips hung from hooks on the walls, and cuffs and blindfolds were in an open plastic box below them. His personal collection. Most people brought their own equipment, but he had them out and available for others to borrow if they needed them.

He watched her take it all in, looking at the toys, the spanking bench, the swing, and the bondage chair. Then she looked back to Virginia and Mike. Mike had set down the flogger and was rubbing all the pink areas on Virginia's body. He'd never turned at their entrance, but Darren was pretty sure Mike had heard them. Perhaps their scene would have changed anyway.

"Now that's better," said Lisa.

"Is it? Why?"

"He's...he's acting the way people ought to act, caring for the person he loves. At least I assume they love each other, from what I saw at the munch thingy. I hope she doesn't need to get beat up every time to get TLC."

Darren chuckled. "No, she doesn't. He was caring for the person he loved before too. Virginia enjoys the sensations Mike gives her. I think he'd go vanilla in a heartbeat if she didn't want to play. Sometimes people get married because their sexual tastes match, but I think in their case Mike learned to be a dominant because his wife wanted him to be."

"Mmm-hmm," hummed Virginia loudly.

"Ah, so you are aware of our audience," Mike said. "I wondered. Lisa, if you're worried about Virginia, you can come over here and ask if you like."

Lisa hesitated and then walked forward. "Are you okay, Virginia?"

Virginia turned her head to face Lisa and smiled. "I'm very okay, Lisa. Thank you for asking. And I'm so glad you came."

"We thought we'd grab the dungeon before a crowd developed," Mike said to Darren. "Virginia will be feeling and enjoying this all night long, I think."

"Let's give these two some privacy," Darren called to Lisa. "It's only a matter of time before the hordes descend down here."

He smiled as Lisa hurried to his side, the *click-clack* of her heels uneven, her skirt fluttering. There would be plenty of folks coming in leather, latex, or nothing at all, but she was an island of normality. Come to think of it, he still had on his tie.

There was a small area before the door where Mike, Virginia, and the X-frame were out of view. Darren stopped there and put his hand on Lisa's shoulder. As she turned, he put his other hand on her other shoulder and looked into her deep brown eyes. "You know what I want to do with you? What I've wanted to do ever since the night I first saw you?"

Her eyes darted to the toys and the bondage furniture as he expected them to. But he knew he'd judged her correctly when she turned back to him and said, with a trace of defiance in her voice, "No, what?" She was no mouse.

"This," he said, and her eyes went wide as he pulled her to him and kissed her sweet red lips.

## Chapter Three

Lisa hadn't expected the kiss. Her fantasies may have included her being out of control, but they hadn't usually featured the conventional trappings of leather and the BDSM scene. Not usually. But kisses like the one Darren was giving her—unasked for, with her pulled to his strong chest and his lips hard against hers—oh yes, that was the stuff of dreams.

When his tongue pushed inside her mouth, she didn't resist. She felt like a woman possessed, her tongue moving against his from some instinct. There wasn't any doubt of who was in control, and it wasn't her.

And then, in a moment, it was over. He had a look of smug satisfaction on his face that made her want to slap him, and she lifted her hand to do so. He raised his eyebrows. Her body had betrayed her, and he had to know as well as she did the kiss was not unwanted. Still, she had to put up some kind of front. "I could have slapped you."

"It would have been worth it. Why didn't you?"

His response surprised her. *Worth it, huh?* Now she felt as smug as he looked. But she didn't want to answer the question, so she didn't. The seconds they stared at each other, smirking, seemed like forever.

"If someone's going to do any slapping, it's going to be me on your pert little ass. First lesson in submission: always be honest with your dom."

She couldn't believe how cheeky he was. "And who died and made you my dom?"

He kissed her again, harder this time. After a second of surrender, she fought back, hitting his shoulders with her tiny fists. He broke the kiss off and looked at

her. "All you have to do is say no, Lisa. But if the answer's not no, you can hit me all you like for all the good it will do you."

He paused, giving her a chance to speak. "You bastard," she said.

He smiled, and then she couldn't speak, because his mouth was covering hers again. She could feel her heart thumping and her nipples hardening against his chest. If he could feel it too, there was no telling what he might think he could do. She really, really should have said no. But it felt so good.

"What if I'm not a submissive?" she asked when he let go.

"I don't spend much time worrying about whether fish will sprout wings," he replied.

"What if am but don't want to be yours?"

"Well, then I'll escort you to your car, because I'm sure not going to watch you play with someone else in my own house. Would you like to go?"

Damn him. She knew she ought to say yes. She actually formed her lips around the word, then stopped. This arrogant man was pushing all her buttons, both good and bad. And if she left now, she'd wonder what could have been.

"No," she said. "But it's just a game. Just for this party. This isn't serious, and you don't own me."

"No one can own you but yourself," he said earnestly. "I don't want to own you. But I do want your submission because I think we can make each other very happy for a while."

"So I do whatever you say?" It seemed so simple. So dangerous.

"Unless you say your safe word."

"Safe word, huh?"

"You say the word *orange*, and everything stops."

"Why orange?"

"Because it's not purple."

Lisa blinked.

“And because there aren’t any on the snack table, so you’re unlikely to say the word because you’re suddenly starving. When you say the word, I want it to completely and unambiguously mean *stop*.”

Lisa nodded. *If he thinks he’s going to tie me up and whip me, there won’t be any ambiguity in the way I say stop, and if I have to say “tangerine” to make him get that, I will. But as long as he doesn’t take it too far, I guess I don’t mind following directions. It could even be kind of hot.* “So what about the rest of the tour?”

Darren frowned. “That’s it for party space. The living room, the dining room, kitchen, and dungeon. Everything else is private.”

*Private.* That was where she wanted to be with him, someplace private. Hadn’t she come here just to piss Brian off? She had no business getting involved. But she wasn’t ready to swear off those kisses either.

He was watching her, waiting for her to say something. She should tell him she’d like to go now. She’d had her fun and enjoyed her brush with the BDSM world, but it was time to go back to her normal life. *Thanks for the kisses.* But she didn’t.

“I’ll try, for a couple hours,” she said at last. “But I warn you, you’ve picked the wrong girl. I’m not very obedient. Sometimes I can be downright ornery, and the harder I’m pushed, the harder I push back.” *There. The ball’s in your court. Your chance to reject me.*

Instead he grinned. “No problem. I know what to do with brats. We’ll start with the proper respect. ‘I’ll try, Sir.’ Say it.”

“I’ll try, Sir.”

“Much better. Now follow me.” He opened the door and walked up the stairs, and she hurried to follow him.

“What do you mean by brats anyway?” she asked when she closed the distance between them as they crested the stairs.

He glanced back at her and raised his eyebrows.

“Uh, what do you mean by brats, Sir?” Did he really expect her to keep saying Sir all the time?

“Disobedient little girls, especially those who think disobeying is cute.”

“And what do you do to a brat? Sir.”

“Push me and you’ll find out.” He kept walking, through the kitchen and straight to the dining room. He walked fast, and Lisa found herself running to keep up. On a large glass dining room table were all sorts of snacks: cheese and crackers, grapes and strawberries, veggies with a variety of dips, even a bowl full of miniature candy bars. “Fill a bowl with some food you’d like, and then come to the living room. Don’t be too long.”

He walked away.

A flash of irritation rose up in Lisa. Who did he think he was anyway? Leaving her there and everything, it wasn’t right. She felt strange enough being at a party with a bunch of leather-clad perverts, without being alone. At least his presence made it bearable. But fine, she’d put some snacks in a bowl. She filled it with strawberries. The candy bars were tempting but not the right way to make an impression. She saw a cooler on the ground, and she helped herself to a diet cola. She’d rather have the sugared kind, but rejected it for the same reason she’d passed on the chocolates. She didn’t want Darren or anyone else to think she didn’t care about how she looked. One problem with having a little extra padding was every time you took a sweet, people gave you an “Oh that’s why she’s fat” look.

Darren had to be one of the most arrogant people she’d ever met. He’d kissed her without asking, gave her an ultimatum to submit to him, insisted she call him Sir. He was exactly the sort of man who made her mad. *The sort of man I keep thinking about when I’m alone in bed with my vibrator.* The unwanted thought made her even more pissed off. At least he was no Brian, putting her down to puff himself up. Darren seemed to have a sort of confidence that didn’t require her or anyone else to sustain it.

She stalked into the living room. There were more people there now, and lots of conversations. Darren sat in a leather chair, chatting amiably with Adam, who was standing and showing him a nasty-looking blue whip. It had several dozen leather tails, nearly as long as her arm, and the handle was wrapped in an intricate weave of blue and white.

“This is what Malcolm made me. Pretty cool, huh?”

“He does good stuff. No doubt about that.”

“Best flogger maker on the East Coast.”

Darren smiled. “He keeps getting better.”

There was a cushion in front of Darren’s chair. *If he thinks I’m kneeling there in front of all these people, he’s badly mistaken.* She walked over. “Hi, Adam.” She grinned at Darren and lifted her left hand. “Scored a soda too.”

There was a sudden hush as all the conversations in the room came to a stop at the same time. He took the bowl of strawberries from her and set it down on the coffee table, then took the diet cola and set it down on a coaster next to the bowl.

“What?” *He’s not looking all frosty because I grabbed something extra, is he? Or maybe because I forgot to say Sir.* “Look, I’m not going to remember to say Sir all the time, so you can stop being so hung—”

As easily as he had taken the bowl and the can from her, he grabbed her waist and pulled her upside down over his lap. Her purse slid off her shoulders and onto the floor. She shrieked. She could hear people laughing, the eerie hush broken. She tried to wriggle free and get up, the laughter increasing her desire to escape, but his arm around her waist was about as flexible as a steel bar.

He pulled her skirt up. She felt cool air on the backs of her thighs. “Hey! You can’t—” she protested, but he was already pulling her cotton briefs down with a jerk. There was no sense in worrying about the skirt when he was taking off her underwear. “You can’t do that! Hey! Let me go.”

As if she hadn't yelled a thing, he spoke calmly. "Next time wear a thong or no underwear at all. The more immediate the spanking, the more you associate it with your mistake."

"Like fuck. What next time, ass—"

Pain blossomed from her backside, starting as a sudden sting and then transforming to a warm heat. The sudden collision between his open hand and her ass pushed her forward, and the wind swooshed out of her.

"Count," he said in that eerily calm voice.

*Like hell I will.* She didn't say it aloud. But she didn't count either.

Another stinging slap. He wasn't playing around. She'd have bruises—she was sure of it. And everyone was watching. At least they weren't laughing anymore. She didn't think she could stand that.

"You'll receive six this time, but the ones you don't count don't count."

"Let me go."

"Say your safe word, and I will." It had the sound of a threat, not a promise. And it was punctuated with another swat. "We do this my way, or you're not going to get what you want out of it. What we both know you want. But say the word, and I'll let you walk away, never to come back."

*Fuck.* Oh well, they were halfway there. "Three!" she called. She was dangling over him, and the blood was rushing to her head. She had to push with her hand on the floor to get where she could turn her head to look at his face. "Three, Sir."

"You'll start at one. When you're ready to count properly." Another sting. Her flesh already felt like it was on fire, and sitting down would probably hurt, much less getting spanked more by this strong man.

*Asshole.* But if she walked away, he'd have gotten the better of her. *No way.* It was easier to convince herself she was being stubborn than to admit a part of her enjoyed his touch even when it came as a spanking. "One. One, Sir."

"Much better."

She tried to relax in her position, letting herself hang from his lap. She closed her eyes. Unless she imagined it, the next blow was lighter. “Two, Sir.” The heat from her ass was spreading, up her lower back, down her thighs. To her pussy. She didn’t know what he could see, but the contrast before the wet warmth she was feeling there from the spanking and the cool dry air let her know she was exposed. She tried to clench her thighs together, but it didn’t change much, bent over as she was.

“Three, Sir. Four, Sir.”

She was finding it hard to concentrate. There were so many distractions. His arm holding her still. His hand against her ass, as hard as he chose to swing it. The heat in her core. The dampness of her pussy.

“Five, Sir.”

She felt another blow and wasn’t sure whether it was the fifth one she’d counted or a sixth. She’d get in trouble for counting an extra. She moaned.

When his hand hit her buttocks, it pulled the skin taut. She could feel it all over but especially between her legs. He did it again. The sting was minor compared to the intensity of the sensation. She knew she’d lost count now. *Eight at least. Shit.* She probably had to count over. “One, Sir,” she murmured.

This time his hand touched her pussy. It was only a curl from his fingers after his palm hit her square in the center of her bottom, but it felt wonderful. She parted her thighs and wiggled against it. She’d lost track of the count again. “One, Sir.”

Another stroke made her moan. She pushed herself up as much as his arm around her would allow, moving her ass to meet his hand, eager for the tips of his fingers.

One entered her, slipping in easily. *Ahh.* He took it almost out and then pushed back in again, hard, the heel of his hand striking the inflamed skin of her ass. She couldn’t tell which was the pleasure and which was the pain anymore. She rocked on his finger, moving in time with it. It got thicker, or maybe it was two

fingers. Maybe it was three. She wanted more. She wanted to be filled. But it didn't matter what she wanted, only what *he* wanted.

A tremor rippled over her, fluttering through her core as her body shuddered. She'd fall if it wasn't for his arm, but he was so strong she didn't have to worry. There was only her and him, his fingers and her pussy. Something rubbed against her clit with each stroke. She squealed as a second wave of pleasure tore through her body, taking possession of her.

Her vibrator had never felt this good. Nothing had ever felt this good. She could go on forever, having—*Oh my God*. The pleasure overcame her again. She felt his arm come away from her, and she whimpered. But it was there again, around her, this time under her, and she was flying. His fingers weren't moving much, but the undulation of her hips kept them sliding inside her.

"Oh yes. Four, Sir," she heard herself say as another orgasm washed over her. She was still flying, through a hallway of some sort, she thought, maybe, but she didn't want to open her eyes to see it.

She woke up lying on a bed. A single table lamp lit the room, but she'd never seen the room before. There was a man with her, sitting cross-legged next to her.

Darren.

The room was neat, and the bed made; she was on top of the smooth burgundy sheets. A few framed letters hung on the off-white wall, but no pictures. The wooden trim matched the sheets. Some trophies stood on the chest of drawers. There was an attached bathroom with yellow furnishings she could spy through a half-open door. He'd managed to bring her purse along too, because it sat next to the phone on the nightstand.

In a flash it all came back to her. The kiss. The agreement on the stairs. Not saying Sir. The spanking, in front of everyone. The orgasms. Also in front of everyone. *Oh my God*. She closed her eyes again, hoping she could pretend to be asleep. She didn't know what her plan was if she succeeded, but slipping

anonymously out of a window and never letting any of these people see her again ranked high on her agenda.

She woke up with a squeak when he tweaked a nipple through the stretch fabric of her tank top. "Sleeping people rarely blush such a deep shade," Darren observed with a twinkle in his eyes and a self-satisfied smile.

"Tell me that didn't happen."

"No can do. Besides, you're not the one who gives the orders. Not out there. And especially not in my bedroom." His hands caressed her breasts, thumbs wandering to rub her nipples too often to be entirely an accident. It was distracting, and worse, each time he moved his hands, it sent ripples all the way down to her core. She'd be putty in his hands if she let this go on.

"You were incredible. I've never known a woman turned on so much by a spanking. You were flying."

"Because you were carrying me."

He grinned. "No, I meant before. 'Flying' means you were floating on the sensations, losing track of your surroundings. Does that describe how you felt?"

"Yeah, that pretty much describes how I felt," she admitted. She batted his hand, trying to push it away, but it didn't budge or even acknowledge the gesture. She expected him to flinch back as if caught with his hand in the cookie jar. Instead he grinned at her and pulled her tank top up.

"Hey!"

"I think I've earned the right to see your breasts. I've seen all the rest of you."

She blushed and glanced down, relieved to see her skirt was at least arrayed modestly over the thighs.

"Don't pretend you didn't enjoy yourself," he told her.

"Of course I enjoyed myself," she snarled back. "I fucking came like a rocket. You pushed my buttons. You've got magic fingers. All right? Happy?"

“Not yet.” He lifted her up long enough to undo the clasp on the back of her bra. He’d had practice; he was quick about it. The strapless came off, and her nipples stood up straight and proud. *Nothing like lying on my back to show off my boobs in the best light.* “You’re still enjoying yourself, I see.” His fingers danced over her areolae, her skin there crinkling even more in response.

“Orange.”

The moment the word was out of her mouth, he withdrew his hands. “As you wish,” he said softly. Was he disappointed? He was trying hard to conceal it if he was, his face completely neutral. She regretted saying it. His fingers had felt so good she was overloaded. As if she might go flying on the sensations again.

He got up and moved from the bed. “I’ll get your knickers for you,” he said. She blushed again, realizing her panties had been left out in the living room. Knickers was such a British thing to call them, but he didn’t have an accent.

“No, wait. Don’t go,” she said, pulling the tank top down and sitting up. A feeling of being trapped had overcome her. Now that she knew he meant it when he said that he’d stop everything when she said her safe word, the trapped feeling receded. She was safe.

*How can I unsay a safe word?*

He stopped and stood between the bed and the door, stoic. The silence stretched.

“Purple.”

He stared at her for a moment. “Is that supposed to be some sort of anti-safe word?”

“Yeah.”

He chuckled and sat back down beside her. “It doesn’t work that way, Lisa. It’s not a switch to turn me off and on at your whim. If something went wrong, we need to know what it was. And I’ll be damned if I could tell what was going wrong.”

“I think I’m not used to things going so very right.”

“Maybe it’s time you got used to it.”

“Make me.” She started to grin at him and then realized she’d stepped out of line. Maybe. She wasn’t sure, looking at his face. She couldn’t read him. *Dammit, say something.*

“Try again.”

“Make me, please.” She knew he wanted her to say the word Sir. She didn’t back down to anyone. And she didn’t beg. But when she saw a trace of a smile, she knew she had to keep going. “Make me, Sir. Sir, please make me.”

“If you really want it.”

She didn’t remember exactly what she was asking for anymore, but she knew she did indeed want it. “Yes, Sir, I do.”

“Take your shirt off.”

She raised the tank top over her head and tossed it aside where it ended up draped on a trophy. Braless, her boobs hung free, gravity less kind than it was when she was on her back.

“Beautiful,” he told her, cupping them. “You have such lovely breasts, Lisa. Your whole body is beautiful. Take off your skirt too. I haven’t seen enough of you yet.”

Nothing he hadn’t seen already. She stood up and unhooked the waist, pulled the little zipper in back down, and let the skirt fall to the floor with a shimmy of her hips.

“Now, lie down. Stretch out. Let me see all of you.”

She spread out on the bed, and he got up even as she did so. She was about to pout at the distance when she realized he was taking his tie off. He hung it up semineatly over the knob of a clothes drawer. He started unbuttoning his shirt. She watched as chest hair appeared on a nicely sculpted torso. He had well-defined pecs, with brown nipples that made her want to suck on them. But she wasn’t in charge. Maybe he’d order her to suck on them. The thought made her whole body warm.

He tossed the shirt aside to reveal six-pack abs. He wasn't an overly big man, although he was taller than most, but it was all muscle.

He put his belt on top of the tie and set his wallet on top of a dresser. He was already barefoot, she realized. Probably took them off when she was still in a daze from the things his hands and fingers had done to her.

His gaze was on her the whole time he undressed, but he was giving her such a show she didn't feel self-conscious. She licked her lips, grinning at him.

He peeled off his underwear and his slacks at the same time. His cock stood out, hard and ready. She wasn't an expert, but she knew he was a good deal bigger than average. She bit back asking if it would fit. Of course it would fit. Fitting was what it was made for. Instead she asked, grinning, "For me? For me, Sir?"

"Oh yeah." His voice was low and husky.

Feeling naughty, she spread her legs in invitation.

## Chapter Four

Darren looked at the beautiful creature spread out on his bed. The dark brown and purple streaks of her hair were beautiful and exotic against the burgundy backdrop. Her creamy flesh made sharp contrast with the brownish pink nipples he'd watched tighten anew as he stripped for her. There was a tan line midway on each upper arm. The way she spread her legs, looking coyly up at him, made his heart beat fast and his cock ache. He wanted to bury himself in her, flesh to flesh, empty himself inside her.

*Easy.*

He wasn't used to feeling such a surge of raw animal heat. He'd been in plenty of women's beds, not to mention taking more than a few on the swing in the basement, but he'd always been firmly in control of himself as well as his date. Lisa was doing something else to him entirely, and while it was an incredible rush, it wasn't exactly feeling the sane part of safe, sane, and consensual. He was definitely wearing a condom, for her sake and his and for the child he was not going to father because he got carried away.

There was another reason not to jump on her and slide right in. While he could tell she wanted him, he wanted her to want him more. He grinned, fished the foil wrapper out of his wallet, tossed it on the bed where it'd be handy later, and knelt between her thighs.

"If I'm the submissive, shouldn't I be doing that to you?" she asked at the first touch of his breath along the rippled flesh of her pussy.

"There's no if, love. And you should do exactly what I tell you to." *Because I'm going to make you as turned on as I am.* He put one hand around each of her ankles,

holding them far apart, and then took one leisurely lick up her slit. The moan was exactly what he wanted. Her trying to kick her feet free of his grip amused him too. She was a wildcat, all right. He licked her again, taking his time, stopping short of where her clit poked eagerly out of its hood.

"Please." The word was music to his ears. "I don't know if I can take you teasing me like that."

He dipped his tongue into her navel and then looked up at her. "I know you don't have any choice." Of course she had a choice. She could use her safe word, and he'd stop again. But he was sure she wasn't going to.

She sucked in her breath as he slid up her belly, skin against skin, and drew her left nipple into his mouth.

"Really. I can't—I'm ready to explode, dammit. I want you inside me."

He grinned at her without releasing the suction, the act of tilting his head up, stretching her. At another time she might have yelped at the sensation, but he was sure she was too far gone now. Her moan wasn't a complaint.

His cock brushed against her thigh. She wasn't the only one being teased as he danced around her most sensitive spots. She knew it too, getting a mischievous smile of her own as she moved her leg back and forth against him. He'd cream on her if he let himself get lost in the movement of her leg. As it was, she forced a grunt from his mouth at the intensity of what he was feeling.

"If you're not going to fuck me, then let me suck you off."

"I'd come in an instant. I'm right on the edge."

"Good. Serves you right. Sir."

He chuckled. *So now she remembers her manners.* "If you're good, I might let you put your mouth around me later, but not right now."

"If I'm good?" Her words were incredulous. "Like it's a reward?"

He smiled. "Yeah." He licked his way down the center line of her body, dancing around her belly button this time. Deliberately, he flicked his tongue across her clit,

then back. He moved back to kneeling between her legs, his knees stopping her knees from closing. At least that got his cock away from her leg.

He didn't hold her down anymore. She wasn't going anyplace anyway. While his tongue paid extra attention to her little pearl of pleasure, his fingers danced along the outer lips of her sex. He reached up and scraped her left nipple.

"Oh my God." Her hips gave a satisfying little jump.

*Got you right where I want you, my purple princess.* He straightened, drawing his head back, and grinned at her.

She tried to sit up, but he put his hands on her chest and didn't let her. It was a nice place for his hands anyway. Her soft, luscious, abundant breasts felt so good to squeeze. He loved the way her hard nipples poked at his palms. They were so responsive. He'd try clamps on them some day. He bet she'd swear at him when he did, but she wouldn't use her safe word.

"Another lick and I would have come, Sir."

"You're not going to come until I let you."

"When?" She tried to roll, but he wasn't about to allow that.

"When I want you to. You wouldn't want to come before I wanted you to, now would you?" He bent down and gave her clit another little lick.

"I guess...Sir." She didn't sound entirely convinced.

"My job is to get you to look past your next orgasm and forward to the next several."

"Cocky bastard, aren't you?"

He grinned. "Yep."

"And sadistic too, Sir. If you knew what it felt like, you wouldn't keep a girl on edge like this."

*Oh trust me. I know what being on edge feels like.* He had himself under enough control he wouldn't spill like a teenager the moment he entered her, but he wasn't about to put off their satisfaction any longer than necessary. He found the

foil wrapper, tore it, and slid the latex sheath over his cock. His hands off her for the procedure, she propped herself up on her elbows to watch him do it. "Nice."

"What?"

"Your cock. The way it looks in your hand when you roll the condom over it. I'd love to watch you jerk off sometime."

He grinned. He wouldn't mind obliging her, but he wanted to be inside her now. Her desire to watch him turned him on. "I'd like to watch you too."

"But not now, please, Sir."

"Not now."

"Good." Her eyes sparkled. "Sir."

He moved so the head of his cock was nestled right against her opening. She reached up to grab his hips, her grip firm. They felt right there. He pushed himself in slowly, feeling her channel widen for him as he inched forward. He saw her eyes change, a wild, hungry look in them, and felt her fingernails dig into his hips. He thrust in the rest of the way, filling her, pushing past all resistance until he was buried to the hilt. Her soft sigh reassured him he hadn't hurt her in his haste.

They found a rhythm quickly together, her hips arching. Thank goodness she had a little padding; a thinner woman would have made bruises on him with each hard thrust and equally enthusiastic push back. She moved like she hadn't sex in months. Stranger still, she made him feel like he hadn't either. Had intercourse maybe. But not had sex.

The bed slammed against the wall. No one would be surprised by the sounds of what they were up to, anyway, unless they'd noticed he never took a woman to his bedroom during any of the parties he'd had here.

It started as a ripple of muscular contractions squeezing his cock all along its length, and then she lost the steady rhythm they'd built, her hips jerking back and forth in wild abandon. If she hadn't been gasping for breath, he would have covered her lips with his and kissed her deeply, but as it was he rocked with her. Then he

couldn't hold back any longer, his cock pulsing as her pussy squeezed and milked him.

Her body shook in his arms as he held her. Regretfully, he pulled himself out. She let out a whimper. Still, the safe thing to do was not to stay until he got soft and the condom got loose. He wasn't anywhere near soft yet. In fact, his cock was suggesting he could definitely enjoy another go.

He rolled onto his back, pulling her with him so her head nestled against his fuzzy chest. "Wow," she murmured.

"Yeah." It didn't seem adequate, but all he could do was agree.

"Wow, Sir," she corrected. She squirmed against him. Then her eyelids began to droop. She'd caught her breath, apparently, as it became soft and regular.

To slide out from under her and go back to the party would be ungentlemanly. Besides, he didn't really want to. He didn't usually take women into his room, because they felt he found it made them think he owned them. Or that they owned him. The more he had a reputation for not letting women in, the more special he'd made it. But Lisa didn't know all that. And she'd told him it was just a game, right from the start, so why was he taking it so seriously, much less worrying she'd take it too seriously?

She'd really gotten to him. Maybe it was the challenge in her eyes saying she was untamable, or the way she responded to his touch as if she was totally under his control. But she'd gotten to him. He didn't know whether that was a good thing or a bad thing, but it was certainly a rush.

He shifted, getting a pillow under his head, and she didn't wake up. He wanted to see her body. Those tan lines indicated she was usually a T-shirt girl and didn't waste a lot of time in a tanning salon. Maybe she didn't like the beach either, or maybe she lacked opportunity. It'd been a few years since he'd taken a date to the beach, a few years filled with black leather and PVC. He hardly ever did anything ordinary with a girl anymore.

*Whoa. Stop.*

It was hard enough to maintain the illusion that was D & s, Dominance and submission, at a party or a club or in private. Mixing it with vanilla activities made it even harder. Why the hell did he want to hang out at the beach with a woman he hardly knew? No, they'd already hinted at a fine agenda. Her mouth on his cock. Her playing with herself in front of him. Her watching him. Sex and D & s.

He relaxed. Since he was going to be there a while, he might as well let himself feel the moment. Her body felt warm and lovely against him. Soft breasts against his side, hair spread over his torso, warm cheek against his chest. He'd close his eyes for a moment to feel it better. It had been a pretty long day, with meetings and all the rest, and Miss Carter and the others could handle the party without him for a while.

Lisa woke up slowly, and her eyes didn't really open until she remembered where she was. *I'm my own person.* She hadn't thought she'd find a sense of independence in submission, but for the first time in a long time, she didn't feel like a wife or an ex-wife, as much as she felt like a woman. Whatever else the evening meant, at least she'd declared her independence from Brian in a way that a mere divorce decree somehow hadn't accomplished.

He was asleep, his chest rising and falling with each breath. His arm was around her shoulder, but he didn't wake up when she moved it and slipped out of his arms. *I should get my clothes on and head for home.* There were a few voices out in the hall. Where her panties were, she remembered with a flush. He'd called them knickers. She'd probably have to skip on collecting those if she wanted to have any dignity at all. She'd walk by the people in the living room as if being spanked and coming in front of people was something she did every day. Heck, maybe it *was* something *they* did every day.

She put on her skirt. Her shoes were on the floor; she didn't think she'd had them on when she was on the bed, so he'd probably taken those off for her at some

point. Fortunate they weren't marking the hallway he'd carried her down, if it was a hallway. Her memory of that part was a blur.

She picked up her bra and put it on. She looked at the trophy it had landed on, now uncovered. BRIGHTON BULLDOGS 2ND PLACE FOOTBALL LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP, said the plaque on it. There was a silver soccer ball held by two arms that came up from the marble. *Must have been his high school or something. Maybe he went to high school in England, because we'd sure call it soccer here. And had learned to call panties knickers in school.* She read the fine print underneath: 2004-2005. *No way was he in high school then. Or even in college.*

The rest of the trophies all seemed to have something to do with soccer too, although she couldn't read most of them because they were in German. The dates were all from the late 1990s or early 2000s, and the English one was the most recent of them.

She glanced over at him. Still asleep. He didn't keep these things out in the living room for anyone to see. He kept them for himself. She wondered what that meant. She wanted to know more about him, yes she did. She'd definitely Google Brighton Bulldogs when she got home.

She walked over to one of the plaques on the wall. Football this, Fußball that. One had a yellow piece of fabric in it, maybe four inches wide, an armband maybe. It looked like it had seen so much dirt it couldn't all be washed out. Odd, for someone who was so fastidious with his room in general. Another plaque held a certificate for the being a coach in the DC Youth Soccer League; the words were nearly obliterated by the scrawled signatures of boys and girls.

"Nosy, aren't we?"

She whirled at the sound of his voice, her hands instinctively covering her chest. *Oh, me? I wasn't looking at anything. Just getting my clothes on, trying to find a mirror to freshen up.* But that wouldn't be the truth. She wasn't good at lying, and besides, she'd undoubtedly flub it up while she stared at his naked body with all

those lovely muscles. He was lounging on the bed, unashamed. And still half-hard, it looked like. "Yes. Yes, Sir."

"Find out anything interesting? And put your arms down. I've seen it, and I'd like to see it again." He didn't look happy, and he didn't smile even when she let her arms rest at her side.

"You played soccer. In England and in Germany or someplace where they speak German. And you probably spent some time taking off women's underwear while you were in England. Sir."

"You really are a smart-ass, aren't you?"

"Yes." She wasn't sure if she should add a Sir or not, but she was afraid it would be sarcastic.

"So how'd you come to the conclusion about women's underwear?"

"You called them knickers earlier."

"Hmm. I was...in a relationship while I was there."

"Was?"

"Was. It didn't end well."

"I've been there."

"It was a long time ago. And it didn't last very long, by most people's standards."

*But not by yours, hmm?* She hoped in five years her marriage to Brian would feel like it was in the distant past. "Mine was pretty recent. And long. Way too long."

"A man would have to be a fool to let you go."

She blinked. *What a nice thing to say.* Then again maybe he said it to every girl whose knickers he got inside. She hoped not.

"Or maybe you let him go," Darren said, sitting up. "None of my business really."

"I was going to go."

“Oh.” He definitely wasn’t happy about that. “We could rejoin the party, if you’d rather.”

She wasn’t sure she wanted to. But following his lead had worked so far. “As you wish, Sir.”

His eyes widened for an instant, and then his face smoothed over to its usual unreadability. Apparently he hadn’t expected that response. *Good.*

“I do wish. Let me get some clothes on, though. Not that work stuff. Jeans, a T-shirt.”

“I should get my top back on too.”

“No,” he said firmly. “You shouldn’t.”

Go out in nothing but a bra and a skirt? “But—”

“That’s not the correct response.”

*Oh my God.* Her heart fluttered. A few seconds ago they’d been exchanging information about themselves, like normal people. Now he was back in control. “Yes, Sir.”

He pulled on dark blue jeans from a closet and a black T-shirt from one of his drawers. No underwear. She smiled. It was sexy, knowing. Then again, she didn’t have any on either.

He didn’t bother with shoes. He was still plenty taller than her. He put his arm around her waist and opened the door. “Come. Maybe there will be someone worth introducing you to.”

She giggled. *Hi. I’m Lisa, and I don’t wear shirts or blouses.* She supposed he could have asked her to take off the bra too. *Would I have said no? Would I have said orange? No, maybe. Orange, not a chance. I’ve gone out of my mind.*

“One more thing. Don’t speak unless spoken to or I give you the nod, and don’t make eye contact with the doms. A few of them take offense, and everything will go more smoothly if you let me lead.”

“Oh.”

“Relax. I’ve got you. I won’t let any harm come to you.”

They walked down the hall to the living room. Virginia and Mike were there, and Virginia was still as naked as she’d been in the dungeon. She was kneeling in front of Mike, who had taken possession of the same comfy chair Darren had been sitting in when he’d spanked her. Virginia’s back was as pink as it would be if she had a sunburn. Lisa was trying to keep her view down, but she couldn’t resist sneaking little peeks upward. She saw Mike turn to Darren. “Darren, hey.”

“Hey, Mike. Got her nice and red, I see.”

“Yep.”

She hoped she wasn’t in for similar treatment. But Virginia looked content. And maybe, maybe it wouldn’t feel as bad as it looked. She remembered the spanking hurting like hell, but she also remembered wanting it. *Definitely out of my mind.*

Miss Carter looked up from where she was sitting on the sofa and smiled at Darren. “She looks lovely on your arm.”

“Thank you.”

“My pleasure,” purred Miss Carter. “By the way, Adriana’s here.”

“What?” Darren exclaimed. “She wasn’t invited!”

“She said she was, so we let her in,” Mike interjected. “Don’t know how she even knew when the party was.”

Whoever Adriana was, her presence sure put Darren off-kilter. “Damn it. I’ll have to throw her out, and there’s no way she’s leaving without a scene.”

“Maybe it’s better to let her stay,” Miss Carter suggested.

“Maybe it is,” said a voice from the doorway leading to the dining room. “You know you want to.”

Lisa looked up. The speaker was tall, blonde, blue-eyed. She wasn’t wearing much: a pink vinyl bra her breasts bulged out of and a black-and-pink vinyl skirt

that barely covered anything. And incredibly high-heeled sandals. She wasn't really that tall, Lisa realized, but those heels had to add about five inches.

Adriana looked at her too, and her eyes were decidedly not friendly.

"Adriana, get out."

"Your slut there made eye contact with me, Darren. You know the rules."

Darren shot her a reproachful glance but then addressed Adriana. "Those rules aren't my rules. And in any case, you're no *domme*."

Lisa tilted her head down but didn't take her eyes off the other woman. Anyone who looked at her like that might try to claw her eyes out.

"Sure I am, Darren." The woman walked toward them, her hips swaying as she put each foot in front of the other as if she was on a catwalk. She looked so graceful.

*No way I could compete with that.*

"If I'm not a *domme*, it must be because I'm someone's sub. Yours, Darren. If I'm your sub, you can order me anywhere. Even out of your house. But you have to admit it first."

"We're done, Adriana. Finished."

"Then I'm a *domme*, and I'm allowed my minute with your uppity sub. You know I'd never look a *domme* in the eye like that. You're playing with someone who doesn't even know how to behave."

Lisa had enough. "Who the hell is this bitch?" And when all eyes turned to her, she added. "Sir."

"Mind your manners," snarled Adriana. "Who is *she* anyway?" Then she glared over at Mike, who had started laughing the moment Lisa had said Sir. Now Virginia was laughing too.

Darren had put his hand in front of his mouth. "She's mine. That's all you need to know, Adriana. Now get out of my house. You weren't invited."

“Oh, but I’ll always be invited. And I’ll always know when and where your parties are. You can’t get rid of me, Darren. And you”—Adriana turned to Lisa—“you’ll regret the day you put your hands on my master.”

She didn’t have an English accent, so Adriana wasn’t the woman Darren had a relationship with in England. It was something more recent, obviously. Something she wanted no part in. “I’d better go.”

Adriana smiled so broadly, Lisa wanted to slap her and knock her smile off. Instead she twisted out of Darren’s grasp and ran back to his bedroom to collect her tank top.

“Stop,” yelled Darren, but she pretended not to hear.

She needed to think. A lot had happened at the party, and she hadn’t intended for anything to happen. *Now this.*

She got a pad of Post-it notes out of her purse and scribbled her phone number on a sheet in her purple pen, sticking it on the base of the lamp on his nightstand, next to his phone. She hesitated, tempted to take the note and stuff it in her purse. If she wanted to find him, she could look for him at one of those munch things, in the restaurant. That might be safer. She turned her back to the phone. It might be safer, but it wasn’t the way she wanted it. She’d see if he called. And if Adriana got to the bedroom and tore the little sheet off—well, if she got to the bedroom at all, Lisa didn’t really want to hear from Darren anyway.

She pulled her top over her head and walked back.

Darren met her in the hallway. “She’s gone,” he said.

“Who is she? Another relationship? Does she call them knickers too?”

“We weren’t in a relationship. She thought playing for a few times meant forever, and she was wrong. She was an error in judgment on my part.”

“And am I an error in judgment too?” She’d pretty much ignored his command not to make eye contact.

“No,” he said firmly. “Rough around the edges, maybe. But maybe I like it rough.” He smiled. “Come back to the party, Lisa.”

“No, I really should leave. I...I don’t feel right here, and I need to think.”

He nodded. “It can be overwhelming sometimes. Give me your number, at least.”

“It’s on your nightstand.”

He smiled. “I’ll call.”

She smiled back. “I might answer.”

“Might?”

“I wouldn’t want to make the mistake of thinking playing means forever, would I?” She slid past him, bumping against him as she did so. Even a little touch of his body felt awfully good, and she cursed her smart-aleck mouth. But she wasn’t going to take it back.

He didn’t stop her as she continued through the living room and out the door.

## Chapter Five

Darren looked at the piece of paper with the phone number on it.

He never mixed his BDSM life with his vanilla one. That was why he'd stashed all his soccer memorabilia in his room and never let a woman he'd played with inside, until now. Playing with Lisa was playing with fire. Giving her a call would make only make things worse. He tried to tell himself he was concerned about his business, the two Soccer Gear stores his name was attached to. Or that the coaching and training he did with the district youth league for some kids who really needed a break in life would be jeopardized. But deep down he knew neither was true.

*You're afraid to let someone else in. Hell, if I can deal with only myself between the best players in the world and my goalie, I should be able to talk to Lisa.*

He picked up the phone and punched in the number.

"Hello?" Her voice. It was easier already.

"Hey. Are you free Sunday?"

"I've got a one o'clock, but otherwise I'm booked. Wait, who are you and how did you get my home number?"

"I take it that's a no." Darren couldn't help but laugh. He realized what he forgot. "This is Darren," he added. "I'm not looking to have my hair done. I just wanted to take up some of your free time."

More silence. For a moment he thought she was going to hang up the phone.

"You scared me. I thought you were a stalker."

"Nope. So you work Sundays?"

“Yeah. It’s a bitch, but it’s true. And you’ve got the youth league thing on Saturdays, so we’re pretty much incompatible weekend-wise.”

*Now how did she know?* “Excuse me?”

“Okay, okay, so I was stalking. But only cyber stalking. A girl needs to know who she’s dealing with. It’s self-protection.”

“You found out I’m busy Saturdays on the Internet?” He felt somehow like his privacy had been invaded, and he wondered how many other people could have figured that out. If Adriana could, she’d probably have been stalking him.

“Sure. Piece of cake. There’s a very nice Wikipedia article on you, but you probably know that.”

“No, I didn’t.” He knew the Web wasn’t his forte, but he had at least a vague idea of what Wikipedia was. “It talks about my involvement with the youth league? And says I’m busy Saturdays?”

“No, I had to go to the youth league homepage to find that out.”

Now he was the one letting the line go silent. Keeping people out of his bedroom was a good idea.

Fortunately he didn’t give up easy. “Well, then. Do you have a day off during the week?”

“Thursday. I was planning on doing laundry.”

“Sadly, you would need clothes for what I have in mind. Maybe I should change my plan.”

She laughed. “Okay, nice line. And what were you planning on, Sir?”

He chuckled. *Sir. Definitely a good sign.* “I was wondering if you’d like to go to the folklife festival on the Mall, actually. And Thursday’s a much better time than Sunday anyway, crowdwise.”

“Folklife festival? No leather, whips, and chains?”

“It’s run by the Smithsonian, so I’m thinking not. The exhibits are on Mexico, and Asian Americans this year, Maybe they’ll do an exhibit on the BDSM community sometime.”

She laughed. “I doubt it. They do this every year?”

“You’re not from around here, are you?”

“Not really. I moved from Baltimore. You?”

“I’m a rarity, the native Washingtonian. But I’ve been out of the country a lot.”

“Playing soccer.”

“Yeah. I don’t usually let that life and BDSM cross.”

“Any woman who was in your bedroom would know. And they could Google for the rest.”

“That’s why I don’t normally take women back into my bedroom.”

Lisa snorted. “I’d gotten the feeling you were quite the playboy, so pardon me if I don’t entirely believe you.”

Darren sighed. “I’m not trying to tell you I’ve been a choirboy, Lisa. But I’ve kept my bedroom off limits. You were so... I don’t know what to call it, but I didn’t want you to come back to awareness in front of all those people. Vulnerable. I didn’t think it would be good for you.”

“Oh my God. No. That would have been awful. But—”

“But what?”

“You broke your rule for me? Why did you think you could trust me?”

*Trust.* He trusted her on some instinctive level, when he took her back to his bedroom. And it had been the right thing to do. Would he have taken her back if his gut hadn’t told him he could trust her? And why? Because she was a BDSM newbie? Not hardly. People with the least experience with BDSM were the people most likely to go over the edge. Like Adriana. It wasn’t the purple hair. He didn’t know what it was. But he’d trusted his instincts on split-second decisions for a long time. He wasn’t inerrant, but he was right more often than not. “I had a hunch.”

A pause, and then she spoke again, her voice full of warmth. "Well. As it happens, I am indeed free Thursday, Sir."

"I can pick you up if you'll give me your address."

The warmth faded, her voice more guarded. "I can meet you downtown, at the metro stop. The Smithsonian stop is on the Mall, so that's close, right?"

"Yeah." Probably. He'd gone alone the last few years, and he'd always parked a few miles away and made the rest of the trip his morning run. This time he didn't want to arrive all sweaty or in running shorts, and parking any closer was a royal pain. He'd have to re-learn how to take the metro by Thursday. "Ten o'clock, before it gets warm?"

"Eleven, to avoid the rush-hour fees?"

*She probably thinks I'm some kind of stuck-up spoiled rich guy by now.*  
"Eleven, then."

"I'll be there. With bells on." She paused. "Sir." The way she said it, he wasn't sure whether she was poking fun of him or trying to be submissive. He hadn't planned to push, but he couldn't resist.

"And Lisa. Wear a skirt. No knickers."

There was a long pause. She was a submissive at heart; he was sure. She'd proven it that night at his house. But the Mall wasn't the best place to push her limits, even in a perfectly safe way, and he couldn't read her expression over the phone.

"Yes, Sir," she said finally.

He smiled. "Excellent. See you then." He clicked the phone off and leaned back, absently watching the squirrels trying to get into the bird feeder. Eventually they'd succeed, despite his attempt to put it out of their reach.

He'd been playing aloof for a long time, even if Adriana thought playing with her had implied some kind of promise. He'd broken one rule, letting Lisa into his bedroom. He was breaking another, going on a vanilla date with her. Maybe those

rules were made to be broken, and their breaking was inevitable, like the squirrels getting into the birdfeeder.

*Or maybe I've wanted something deeper all along and was waiting for the right person.* He shook his head.

*I've met her once, twice, and I'm already calling her the right person? Time to get my head on straight.*

He grinned at the antics of a squirrel suddenly scrambling for balance as it found the greased part of the plastic line holding the birdfeeder up. It probably was possible to prevent squirrels from getting to a feeder entirely. He could do some research. But he liked pitting his wits against them, and some days he enjoyed watching them more than he did the birds. He knew from experience he would smile when one of them finally made it.

*I will not, will not, call Lisa my little squirrel.* He turned from the window, content that today would not be the day for the squirrels, and headed to the kitchen to make himself a late dinner.

He said no knickers, Lisa rationalized. He hadn't said no panties. *He'll learn to speak proper American one of these days. I'll teach him.* She grinned, pleased at her sophistry. She'd worn a purple skirt that came to midthigh and poofed a little, and a yellow blouse with buttons and a violet collar. A warm color and a cold color, but purple and gold had been going with each other for a long time. They were practically married. And she liked being loud. Brian had always been trying to get her in basic black with grays and whites. That wasn't her. He would have never approved of her purple sneakers, but the festival sounded like it was a lot of walking, and they were comfortable.

She'd thought of telling Brian about the party but decided against it. She knew she had to move past reacting against him and start figuring out what it was she wanted. As satisfying as it was to piss him off, she wasn't going to let annoying Brian be her life's ambition.

*Why, then, after escaping a controlling relationship, have I gone and found a dom of all people to go out with?*

It defied common sense. But it wasn't the same either. She'd never had a safe word with Brian. And their problems went way past him telling her what to do.

The train wasn't too full—half the seats were empty—and she'd gotten one to the right of the door, where there were a couple benches all by themselves, facing front. It always felt more natural when the train accelerated that way, and she was pushed into the seat rather than away from it. Two stops in, an older lady in a powder blue business suit sat next to her. Lisa pulled out her e-reader and sat back with a smile on her face. After the party she'd gotten some spicier things. *Frigid, like hell. I just didn't happen to be turned on by you being an ass.* Realizing she was reacting to Brian again, she cut off that train of thought, settled down, and enjoyed her book. It was over the top, the hero too full of himself, but it was still hot. She glanced over at the older woman, but fortunately, the business lady was minding her business.

She looked up. Four stops to go. What seemed so clever didn't seem clever anymore. *Why did I put panties on? Once Darren found out, would he go home?* She didn't want a boyfriend like that. The only problem was, she wasn't sure she wanted a dom who'd shrug his shoulders either.

There wasn't anyone with a clear view of where she was sitting, except for the lady next to her. If it weren't for her, she could slip her panties off and put them in her purse.

McPherson Square. Three stops, and the woman wasn't budging. *Damn.* Even if Darren didn't find out—and she didn't really expect him to grope her right outside the station—she'd know. Her memory of what it felt like when he told her to leave her top behind still sent shivers down her spine. It could be so simple, just doing as he asked. And she trusted him. Heck, she had been egging him on, calling him Sir on the phone and all, although maybe he expected that. And now she'd disobeyed because she had a smart-aleck reaction to him calling her panties knickers. It was

going to be like one of those running jokes, but it didn't seem especially funny anymore.

Metro Center. Two stops to go. She started looking around for another secluded seat, but there weren't really any. There was no chance of hitting a bathroom in the metro station before exiting; you had to have little kids or an emergency and beg your way into the bathrooms at most of the stops. It seemed totally wrong to do that to get her panties off for a date. If she was going to do some begging, she was not going to do it with a train-station attendant.

The train started moving again. The woman fidgeted, and for a moment Lisa thought she was going to get up. People often did before their station came up, wanting to be ready to go. But the lady leaned back in the chair again.

"Next station, Federal Triangle." The woman didn't move.

*Well, I could reach into my skirt and pull them out. I'll never see this woman again. Then again, maybe she'd call the cops on the pervert. Wouldn't that be a lovely way to screw up the first date I've had in years?*

And then, miraculously, the woman got up after the train came to a complete stop, and walked toward the exit. *Someone could always come back here and sit if a new person gets on.* Lisa didn't waste time. She dropped her purse on the ground, arched her butt up, and hooked the waistband of her panties, pulling them down and doing a sidestep to get her feet out of them. They were right next to the purse now, so she picked them up and put them inside, smiling to herself at a job well done.

Then she looked up to see if anyone had watched her and looked straight into some very amused-looking eyes.

"That," Darren said, "has got to be one of the sexiest things I have ever watched."

Lisa felt like her cheeks were on fire. "How'd you get here?"

"I took the train and switched at Metro Center. I noticed you a while ago and came over when the woman who was next to you vacated a seat. Come on. Here's

our stop.” He offered her a hand, holding on to the metal bar above while the train decelerated.

She took his hand and let him pull her up. He was strong. She remembered he’d lifted her and carried her back at his house. “Thank you.” She decided it was best to drop the subject and get on with their day. Was she in trouble for not following directions? She thought she had, actually, both in letter and spirit, even if her conversion had come just in time.

“So why did you wait until then? Wouldn’t it have been easier to leave them off in the first place? Not that I have any complaints, mind you. I might insist you take them off on the train from now on.” He let her precede him through the doors of the train and then took her arm once they were on the platform.

She blanched. “People can hear us!”

“Maybe. But they have no idea what we’re talking about.” He was calm, cool, and he kept his voice at a neutral tone that would have been suitable for discussing the weather.

“I almost chickened out, okay?”

“Yes. Almost is okay. In fact, it’s perfect.”

“Why is it perfect?”

“Because the best sex can use a little friction.”

Again she wanted to protest, but they had gotten away from the crowds, temporarily. They rode the escalator up, and their momentary privacy was gone before she could reply. She thought about what he was saying as they rose up into the sunlight. The hottest sex she could ever remember with Brian was the time when they were in the backseat of their old golden Buick, and they were afraid someone was going to stumble on them at any moment. A little friction indeed. She’d spent the next few months trying to get him to have it on in that car again, and he’d always declined. Too dangerous, he’d said. But sex in a bed with the lights out and the shades drawn wasn’t as good. Well, the lack of foreplay had something

to do with that too. And the fact that he turned the lights off because he didn't want to look at her body.

Darren reached out and interlaced his fingers with hers. "What are you thinking, Lisa?"

She tried to come up with a viable alternative to the truth. The last thing she wanted to do was talk about Brian. But the longer she delayed, the more she felt that Darren would know she was lying. "I was thinking about my ex-husband. He used to accuse me of being frigid."

Darren chuckled. "I think we've demonstrated you're not."

Lisa blushed. "We did, at that, didn't we? I should put him out of my mind when I'm with you."

Darren nodded. "If you need to talk about it, or him, we can stop and talk."

"I don't." To her surprise, she knew it was true. That part of her life was over, and it didn't work. This part of her life was beginning. "I just want to be with you, Sir."

"Come this way, and we'll see if you can learn how to drink tequila properly." He tugged on her hand, steering her toward one of the tents. The cultural exhibits were all set up in temporary tents, their white canvas roofs stretching across the Mall.

"Excuse me?"

"Tequila. I've heard they have an expert!"

"Like in a margarita?"

"No no no," said a man whose dark complexion indicated a mix of American Indian and Spanish ancestry, probably leaning on the Indian side. "Tequila is best drunk straight. You want to taste it without anything getting in the way. First you make a kiss like this." The man pursed his lips as if for an exaggerated smooch and then frowned at her. "Like you are kissing your boyfriend here. You make a kiss." He demonstrated again and glared at her until she made the gesture too.

*My boyfriend, huh? Well, my date, anyway.* She wasn't sure Darren was the boyfriend type. Yes, he'd indicated she was special, but she suspected she was one in a line of conquests stretching from long before her and which would probably stretch long after. No matter, she would enjoy it while it lasted.

He had a grin on his face. If she looked half as silly as the man did making her kissy face, she could understand why. She burst out laughing.

"No no no. You can't laugh in the middle. Now you get your tongue ready. You breathe in the air to waken your taste buds. Now if you really want to get them ready, you get some *sangrita*. Not a sangria but a sangrita!" An audience had begun to form around the man, and he was soaking up the attention enthusiastically. "A sangrita we make from citrus and a little bit of chili pepper! Wakes the tongue right up!"

If it doesn't kill the taste buds first, thought Lisa.

"But if you don't have some sangrita, you breathe right in, get the air flowing...and then you tilt your head back, and down it goes. Special good."

Aware of Darren's eyes on her, she tilted her head back. There were bottles of tequila sitting around the wooden table, but there weren't any cups or shot glasses—the bottles were just part of the show. She sucked in the air, swirled her tongue around an imaginary bottle she held with her hand, and then licked her lips. She had his attention, all right. A feeling of strength surged through her. He might be the dom, but that didn't mean she was without power or that she needed to be passive.

The other people in the small crowd started peppering the loquacious man with questions, and they walked on to the next tent. "Okay, so watching you take your panties off is now the second sexiest thing I've ever seen. If I'd known you were going to be this hot, I'd have taken you straight to my house."

"And miss out on this beautiful weather?"

"It's ninety-five degrees out."

She laughed. "Yeah, it's brutal. But it's not bad in the shade of the tents, Sir."

They walked from place to place, staying at some but a few moments, at others for good parts of an hour. They heard a punk-rock band set traditional Mexican Indian sacred songs to a new beat, trying to preserve their tribal language. There was beautiful beadwork, making pictures as evocative as any painting—some of it actually very erotic—which took months or years to make.

“Not sure all those moms will be happy with their kids seeing the naked ladies made of beads,” she remarked. The tequila audience had been mostly adults, but kids were everywhere else, with school out, asking questions. They were seeing a different side of Mexico, one away from the cities and resorts, where most of the people spoke an indigenous tongue along with Spanish.

He shrugged. “Some folks wouldn’t take their kids to an art museum for the same reason. Nice work, huh?”

“Very nice, Sir.”

She was maddeningly aware of the panties she wasn’t wearing. She had to be imagining the breezes that seemed to caress her sex as they walked along, because the ground was anything but cool. She wanted to talk about something else to stop her heart from pounding.

“My ex-husband thinks I should open my own business.”

She regretted the words the moment they were out of her mouth. She knew why—since moving to DC, she hadn’t really had anyone to talk to. Sure, some of her co-workers had become friends, but letting it get out she was thinking of bolting the salon for one of her own wouldn’t be a good thing unless she was really ready to make it happen. Conversation with her clients started and ended in the shop; a few had hit on her, but she hadn’t been ready, or they hadn’t been appealing.

But she already was frustrated at her ex-husband for sticking his nose in, telling her what to do, and this guy was a dom.

“So what do you think?”

“I think what I like best is helping people look better, look more like what they want to look like, you know? And owning a business is a way to do that on a big

scale, but I'm afraid I'd lose the feeling of doing it personally. I'd get swamped in all the details of paychecks and building maintenance and all those things."

"Some of that stuff can be given to accountants and others to deal with, of course, but when you're in charge, you do need to make a lot of those decisions, for sure."

"So you think I shouldn't? I guess it's not a very sub thing to do."

He chuckled. "I know subs who spend their entire work life giving people orders; they want their lives completely different when they are off duty. It doesn't matter whether it's a sub or a dom thing—is it a Lisa thing?"

"I don't know."

"No one has to live your life but you, so in the end, you'll need to decide. Hungry?"

She hadn't been until he mentioned it. "Yes, starving."

They enjoyed the native food—the burritos weren't quite like any she had before, although she had no idea why—and went double on the semifrozen fruit smoothies. The other side of the exhibits, the Asian American ones, were interesting too—she got to try on a beautiful traditional Sikh dress over everything else she was wearing. Darren went to find them some more drinks while she sat in a chair to have an Indian American woman paint mehndi on her.

"What's your name?" Lisa asked.

"Shakti. You want love with him?" asked the artist. "I can make a wonderful love design."

Lisa fidgeted in her chair. *Is it love I want? Or do I just want to see him take charge and drive me mad with lust?* "Love would be very nice. I'm Lisa, by the way."

"A beautiful name." The woman started painting on her hand an intricate pattern, with little swirls that looked like scrollwork to Lisa's eyes. The patterns were so lovely. She'd never really wanted a tattoo—yes, some were absolutely

beautiful, but she'd want to change it after a few weeks. The henna artwork the Indian American woman was doing on her hand and wrist was perfect.

"What do those little patterns have to do with love?" Lisa asked.

"They represent little scorpions." Shakti looked up at her, mischief in her eyes. She was so covered, by American standards, in her sari and with a scarf over her head, but her grin looked as full of sin as any she had seen.

"Scorpions?" There had to be a good explanation.

"Ah, when you love it's like being bitten by a scorpion. Your eyes glitter, you forget to breathe, and you feel warm all over. You know what I mean, don't you?" Shakti smiled.

She remembered when Darren was spanking her. Warm all over, definitely. Forgetting to breathe? She didn't know. But something had happened, and then she was in ecstasy. She supposed someone could compare it to being drugged, or maybe poisoned, but it was wonderful. And scary.

"That looks beautiful, Lisa," Darren said. A cold lemonade appeared beside her, the plastic frosted from condensation.

"All done," said Shakti. A dazzling pattern of reddish brown swirls covered half her hand and her wrist. She looked up at Darren. "You treat her well. I think you can make her feel a sting."

"What were you telling her anyway?" asked Darren when they had both moved a ways away. "Feel a sting, indeed."

"She wasn't wrong, was she? But I didn't tell her a thing. I think she just knew." *Fine with me if he wants to think it's a BDSM thing.* She was enjoying being at the festival, but the heat was getting to be too much. And she'd been dreaming about having him in bed, figuratively or literally, for days. Not wearing panties wasn't helping keep her mind off sex either.

"Women!" said Darren with mock exasperation. He pulled her toward him, his arm around her waist, and gave her a searing-hot kiss. She yielded to him, sliding

her tongue against his when he entered her mouth. She'd never been much for public displays of affection, but the people milling about vanished from her mind. It wasn't her decision.

She felt her nipples tighten against his chest. She was tempted to wriggle so she could feel if he was hard, but being under his control felt better than satisfying her curiosity.

"Let's go back to my place," he said when he broke off the kiss at last.

"Wow, this love mehndi really works!" She laughed, and he laughed too.

"That must be it." He winked.

"If I may, Sir, may I make an alternate suggestion?"

"Of course." His face didn't drop, the way she half-expected it to. He hadn't assumed her suggestion would suck.

"I know you have all these nice things to tie me to," she said, trying to suppress a shudder at the idea and not totally succeeding. She wanted to try his dungeon out, or more to the point, she wanted to let him have his way with her, but she still got goose bumps thinking about the strange pieces of furniture.

"But...?" His face was gentle, and his hand soft as it stroked her cheek.

"But to get to your place we have to transfer once, and then it's a decent drive from the metro, whereas my place is a straight shot on the orange line and two blocks walk."

The corners of his eyes crinkled as he smiled. "And you can't wait?"

"Exactly, Sir."

"Well, normally I would think it's my job to teach you patience. But I'll make a special exception in your case." He winked. He kissed her again, nibbling on her lip. This time she could definitely feel a hardness against her belly.

"Knife in your pocket, Sir?"

“Happy to see you, and I don’t want to wait either. As much as it pains me to say it, though, I got the impression you’d rather I not know where you live. Are you sure now, slave girl?”

*Slave girl.* Was it really only ninety-five out? Because someone had turned up the heat.

If anyone else had called her that, she would have growled at them or slapped them, but for him she melted. *All my defenses are down.* She didn’t know whether to be scared or grateful. “I’m sure, Sir,” she said, knowing she was throwing away her chance to object to him calling her slave girl.

“To us, then.” He raised his lemonade.

She tapped his with hers. They didn’t make a very satisfying clink, but she hadn’t expected them to. “To us.”

He didn’t set the plastic cup down again until he drained it, and she followed his lead. The cool liquid felt good. It was nice not to have to sip at it, the way she normally would a drink on a hot day, making sure it didn’t run out. *That’s what I’ve been doing up till now with my life, isn’t it? Sipping. Never taking it full speed.*

“Now,” he said, taking her hand. “We run for it.”

She giggled, holding on tight as they ran toward the metro station. He was letting her set the pace. She hadn’t run for a long time. She’d been on the cross-country team in high school, had kept running for a while after that, for the sheer pleasure of it. She didn’t know when or why she’d stopped.

She arrived at the train station breathless and laughing. They’d gotten a few stares, and Darren hadn’t broken a sweat. She hadn’t really expected him to. *Later you’ll sweat. Soon.*

## Chapter Six

They didn't run from the metro. Instead they walked close together, holding hands, occasionally bumping hips. It made her feel like she was twenty again.

She led him up the stairs, ignoring her mailbox at the entrance to the apartment. The bills could wait. She fumbled with the key, trying to tell herself it was no big deal. *I'm taking a man into my apartment so we can have sex.*

He sauntered in, his gaze sweeping the place. The one-bedroom apartment was tiny compared to his. And she wasn't the neatest person in the world. *I forgot I'd left my robe on the couch. And, um, two bottles of nail polish and three books of crossword puzzles on the coffee table. And tell me he's not going to get distracted by the Wii.*

"Nice place. Sometimes I miss having an apartment. I kind of rattle around in that big house, all alone."

Relieved, she let out the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. "But you wouldn't have room for a dungeon, Sir."

"There is that." He smiled at her. "Take off your clothes, slave girl."

*He didn't say please. And he isn't taking off his.* But she hurried to comply. *Slave girl.*

"No. Take your time, love. A button at a time." He moved the robe out of his way and sat on the couch as if settling in for a show. Which she supposed he was. She was sure his staring wasn't going to make it any easier.

But it did. She reveled in the fact that he thought she was worth watching. Button by button she opened her shirt and slid it slowly off her shoulders. She reached behind her to undo the buttons of her bra with her chest thrust out proudly,

and then covered her breasts with her arms before letting the bra drop. She spun around, letting her arms drop while she was facing him, only to bring them up again before she finished her spin.

“You’re a wonderful tease, slave girl. And you know what the best part of your teasing is?”

“What?”

“I can end it anytime I like and make you stop.”

It wasn’t a question, but she thought agreement was called for. “Yes, Sir.”

“The two sweetest words in the English language. Show me your breasts, Lisa.”

She let her arms drop slowly, moving her hands to cup the undersides. She let them cover the nipples but pressed her tits together and then held them apart. The look in his eyes was all the reward she needed.

“Take off your shoes,” he said. “But leave your skirt. We both know it’s not really in my way.”

“Yes, Sir.”

She sat on the table. There wasn’t really another chair, and she didn’t want to be too far away from him. She untied her laces and kicked off her sneakers and stripped off her white anklet socks as well. If there was a graceful, seductive way to take tennis shoes off, she didn’t know what it was, so she got on with it.

If he ever asked her to wear a skirt without panties again, his comment about it not being in his way would be stuck in her mind, she knew. Even with only the skirt on, she was more conscious of her nakedness under it than where she was actually bare. He probably planned that. He seemed to know more about her reactions than she did.

She started to get up from the table, but he didn’t let her. He moved forward, kissing her deeply, making her arch her back to accommodate him. She held herself up by planting her hands on the table, but he pushed back more, and she had to go

to elbows. A bottle of nail polish fell, making a *tink* as it hit the edge of the table and then a soft *oosh* as it fell safely on the carpet. *Hopefully safely. If not, I'll worry about a new carpet later.*

He leaned back suddenly, grabbed her ankles, crossed them, and hoisted them skyward. She didn't have the leverage any more to get upright. He held her ankles together in one hand for a moment while he pushed the hem of her skirt up to her waist. The table was cold on her bottom. She felt totally, wonderfully helpless.

*What is he going to do to me? Anything he wants.* The thought made her shiver in anticipation.

The slap of his hand came across her bottom and the backs of her thighs. The sharp sting made her catch her breath. Her legs were closed tight in the position he had her in, and she missed the rush of air along her pussy. Still, it wasn't a bad feeling, once the sting had faded.

*I could get my top leg free if I wanted to.* His hands weren't quite around both her ankles. But she didn't move. She waited for the next blow, but it didn't come. Instead she felt something warm and wet on her bottom. His finger tickled her anus, sliding smoothly around its rim.

"What are you doing?"

"Ever been taken here before, Lisa?" As he said it, his finger pushed inside.

"No." She remembered the girth of his cock. "No way could you put that in me there. No way."

"Yes way, slave girl. I have plenty of lube."

"No." She leaned on the word, letting it linger. He couldn't be serious.

His finger wriggled in farther, past the resistance of her sphincter muscle. His finger was all the way inside. It felt good, in a totally strange way. But there was still no way his cock was going to fit. "I said no."

"You did." He paused a moment. "Do you remember your safe word?"

*Orange.* "Yes."

“Then you’re free to say no all you like without worrying that I’ll stop.” His finger was sliding back and forth now, like a little cock fucking her ass. It was making her wet, and with her legs held closed, she felt horribly frustrated.

*This shouldn’t be turning me on so much. Fuck.* “Why...I figured, without any toys, you’d just... Wouldn’t you like to spank me and fuck me, or I could give you a blowjob, or...”

“We can do those things too.”

She took a deep breath, catching up on some missed air. Like a scorpion’s bite—wasn’t that what Shakti had told her? “Yes, Sir.”

He took his finger out of her and set her ankles back down, letting her go. Had he given up on his idea of anal sex? She surprised herself by hoping he hadn’t.

“Get on the couch, facedown, with your ass up in the air.” He stood.

She scrambled to obey and wiggled her butt once she was in position. Her heart was beating fast. His cock would be so big in such a narrow spot, but clearly he was going to do it. “Please, Sir.”

“Please what?” Behind her, she could hear the sounds of clothes rustling, and she turned her head to the side to see. A small bottle of lube stood with his wallet, keys, and cell phone on the table. He’d planned this all along.

“Please fuck my ass, Sir.” She still wasn’t sure she wanted him to, but she knew she wanted to want it. To be perfectly in tune with him. For his desire to be her desire.

“You need more lube.” He picked up the bottle and poured it into her crack. It wasn’t cold the way she’d expected. It’d been in his pocket all day; he hadn’t any other place to put it. His finger entered her rear again, spreading the lube inside, swirling as he withdrew it and making sure every surface there was smothered in it. “Ah, yes...nice and ready for me.”

She turned her head away. “Why?” *Why are you doing this to me?*

“Because you’re mine.”

Lisa swallowed. *Yours*. His lubed hand withdrew, settling on her hip. She felt the latex-covered head of his cock at her entrance. Lube or no lube, there was no way it was going to fit inside. She could feel him pushing, though.

“Relax, Lisa. It will be easier if you relax.”

“I can’t.”

“You will.” There was perfect assurance in his voice. The one hand still on her hip, she felt the other as it found her slick pearl of pleasure. “So wet for me already.”

“You’d slide right into my p—my sex, Sir.”

“Your pussy?” His fingers glided over her clit, sending jolts of pleasure through her. She wasn’t sure it was making her relax, but it at least replaced her fear with a far more pleasurable attention.

“Yes.”

“Don’t be afraid to use the words. We’re alone together here.”

“My pussy is available to you, Sir.”

“I know. But I prefer a challenge.” He moved a little farther inside her ass, then stopped.

“Can’t take any more.” But oh his fingers felt heavenly. There was one on each side of her clit now, and his other hand slid up from her hip to cup a breast. She couldn’t help but move under the influence of such pleasure.

He squeezed her breast, pulling her toward him. And pushed imperceptibly. She felt him widen her, stretch her. That, too, was pleasure. It all mixed and pulsed in her core, nerve endings from so many sources it was like overload. He pinched her nipple, and the sting surprised her. She jerked back. Straight onto his cock, which slid inside her, past the last squeezing muscles of resistance. She felt the stretching reach deeper and deeper as he kept sliding in. She moaned.

“I told you I’d fit,” he said.

She wanted to come up with something witty to say, but all she managed was, "So full, Sir."

"Mine."

"Yours, totally."

For several long seconds he didn't move inside her, although his hands were busy with her body. Then she felt him move back, slowly. She shook her head, making little noises of protest. But he kept moving back, until only the head of his cock was fully inside.

Then he moved forward, his fingers sliding into her pussy even as his cock filled her ass once more. She pushed back to take him farther in. She wanted to feel all of him. Her butt pressed against his pubic bone, soft flesh giving way to his hard body. When he drew back this time, she knew he was coming back. And she wanted it. Wanted the stretching, too-full feeling, wanted the confusion of her senses. Wanted to be his.

They built up a rhythm she hadn't thought possible a minute before. His fingers hooked to find her G-spot; his thumb rubbed her clit. She held on to the rising wave inside her until he was all the way inside her again, and then the dam burst, her ass and pussy contracting together, squeezing, making her feel even fuller than before. He drew back and slid in again, slower this time because she was locked around him like a vise. She didn't want anything about her to be stopping him. "Fuck me, please!"

"You have a way with words," he murmured. He picked up the pace. She was too out of breath to help him, but she gripped the arm of the couch to stop from being pushed forward by his thrusts. He sought his own pleasure now, she thought, and she wanted it, wanted to feel him explode deep inside her.

*Your fuck toy, Master.*

She felt him tense, his body shuddering as he stopped thrusting and held himself at the deepest point. He moaned as his cock pulsed. That was all it took to

send her over again, her ass squeezing around his cock. *Let me milk out every last drop.*

His arms wrapped around her waist as he bent over to maximize the skin contact between them. She snuggled back as best she could. "Ahh, Master," she purred.

"Mmm, slave girl." He kissed the back of her neck. She could feel the soft hairs standing up as his lips made her tingle. She closed her eyes for a moment, drinking it all in.

She opened them again when he pulled out of her. She looked back at him, saw him looking around. "Wastebasket is in the kitchen," she said and collapsed back against the pillow.

"Thanks. I'll be right back." His rolled off the condom and headed for the kitchen.

She rolled over, stretching out her limbs and sprawling on the couch. From the kitchen she could hear the sound of running water, then off, then on again. How he could maintain the presence of mind after sex to wash his hands was a mystery to her. *I suppose he's had more practice than me.*

He walked back in, and she watched. He moved so gracefully and was so at ease with his nakedness. For a moment she could imagine him naked, moving through the jungle and feeling as home there as he did in his house or in her living room. Would he be picking up his clothes, putting them on, and going home now? She could hardly claim he hadn't satisfied her first.

"Mind if I take you back to the bedroom?"

*Well, that answers that question.* "It's a mess." She felt it was only fair to warn him.

"Doesn't bother me." He lifted her up off the couch easily and carried her down the hall. The door was open—it would have been closed if she'd expected guests, but she hadn't. She waited for him to cringe as he saw the pile of laundry in the corner, but he didn't. He headed straight for the bed, laid her on it, and then climbed on

himself. Lying on his back, he pulled her over so her head was on his chest. “Time to rest up before the next bout.”

“There’s more?”

“You gave me a whole list of things you wanted to do, and I’m going to make sure we get every single last one of them in before I leave. My little fuck toy.”

She blinked. That was a word she used in some of her hottest fantasies, but she was surprised to hear it coming from him. But his smile expressed perfect confidence using the word.

*Oh my God, I said that out loud, didn’t I?*

Which meant he’d heard her say “Master” too. And he wasn’t running away from her. Maybe to him it was just words. Maybe he didn’t know she was becoming attached to him. He’d made her no promises, but she was going to do her best to keep him. *Even if it means doing everything he asks.*

“Whatcha thinking?”

“I was just thinking of what a wonderful master you are.”

“Master, hmm? I—”

She put a finger to her lips. “It’s okay. I know you haven’t made any promises. But right now, right here, I can’t think of a better word to describe what you are to me. You’ll keep me safe, won’t you?”

“Yes, I’ll keep you safe.”

“Then I’m all yours.”

## Chapter Seven

Lisa's mind was on Darren, as it so often was lately, when she opened the door to her apartment. He had stayed late into the night on Thursday, but he'd declined her offer to share a bed until morning. He'd assured her he'd had a wonderful time, but she hadn't heard from him Friday or Saturday so far.

There was a piece of paper on the floor, apparently having been slid in underneath the door. It was folded in fourths. Lisa unfolded it. The paper was plain, the printing in a simple Arial font. She read it:

*Go to Le Petit Mort at 530 Second Street Northeast, arriving promptly at 8:00 p.m. Saturday night. Wear lacy panties, a lacy bra, and the highest heels you have under a black dress or trench coat. Nothing else. When you get there, check your dress or coat with the coat check girl. Explore the club and enjoy yourself however you like, but stay there no matter what. I'll join you later in the evening.*

*D.*

She looked at her watch. It was six forty-five. She could get dressed as requested and get there by eight if she hurried. Who did he think he was, sending her a mere note rather than asking in person? She had his phone number, and she was tempted to give him a piece of her mind. But she wasn't sure she could control her temper, so she didn't dial.

She set the paper down. She knew she was going to obey, although she had all sorts of questions. If he wasn't going to be there the entire time, how could he guarantee her safety? But not knowing how he'd arranged it wasn't going to make her balk. So far, trusting Darren had worked out fine. And she had to admit, there was something very sexy about getting written directions from her master.

Something very scary too. Did he really expect her to walk around in nothing but her underwear? Apparently, he did.

“Yes, Sir.” She said the words aloud, to give her courage, and walked back into her bedroom. She stripped off her white and Day-Glo rainbow T-shirt, her cream-colored bra. Her tight black jeans and panties joined them.

*First he tells me not to wear panties; now he tells me to wear nothing but. I wish he'd make up his mind.*

She searched through her underwear drawer until she found something. She had a black set and a purple one. She hadn't bothered for a while to wear either; the lace was itchy, and underwear like that was made to be seen. She debated which Darren would prefer. I would prefer the purple, she decided at last, and put them on, glancing at the mirror over her dresser.

She bit her lip. Her nipples were pretty obvious under the lace. Probably exactly the effect Darren had intended when he'd specified lacy, but she'd be mortified. She held up the black bra, but if anything, it was even more transparent. She sighed. She'd better put a dress on before she bailed completely.

She had a black dress, knee length, with a neckline that scooped a little but showed only a hint of cleavage. *I'll be exposed plenty at Le Petit Mort. No reason to get gawked at early.* If she'd had a long trench coat, she would have worn it, as it would be less embarrassing to take off, but what she had barely came to her thighs, and there was no way she was going to wear it with nothing but underwear beneath on the subway.

She glanced at her watch. Nearly seven o'clock. Damn him. She wasn't going to have time for dinner. Somehow she didn't think that would be an acceptable excuse for tardiness. Even if he wasn't going to be there, she was pretty sure he'd have some way of knowing if she wasn't on time. She found the high-heeled sandals she'd worn to her sister's wedding and hurried out the door. She'd change into them on the way and hope there was someplace to put her shoes and stockings at the club.

By the time she walked in the door, her nerves were near the breaking point. There was no way she was going to go through with taking her dress off, certainly not before Darren ever got there. *I'm sorry, Sir, but I'm not that brave.*

But the coat-check girl turned out to be Starlight, wearing a short black dress with a plunging V-neck and leather cuffs around each wrist. She smiled at the familiar face, and Starlight smiled back. "Lisa, right? Welcome."

"Thanks." What were the chances Starlight was in on the plot? Certainly, the other woman knew Darren better and for longer than Lisa knew either of them. She screwed her courage up. "I'd like to check some shoes and socks and my dress, if that's possible."

"Of course it's possible. You can check all the clothes you want to here. We're good like that." Starlight winked.

*Lovely. Well, since there's no help for it, might as well get on with it.* She reached back to unzip the dress and then lifted it over her head, handing it to Starlight. "Ooh, doms are gonna eat you up," Starlight cooed.

*Double lovely.* "I'm here for Darren."

Starlight smiled. "You must be special to have hung in for a whole week! He's not here yet. Do you want to wait or keep your dress on until he gets here?"

Both were good ideas, and both would violate what the note said. "No, I have directions."

"Be ready to say no, then. Lots. Good luck!" Starlight gestured through the far door.

Lisa rolled her eyes and nodded. "Thanks. I'll need it"

The room through the door was huge. It was furnished something like Darren's dungeon, but more and bigger. And everywhere she looked, there were people. Naked people, half-dressed people, people in leather and latex and street clothes. At least she wasn't the least-dressed person, although she wore fewer clothes than most.

She took another few steps in, because she didn't want to be blocking the doorway, and looked about for familiar faces. She spotted the bald guy first—Malcolm, that was his name. He was behind a table covered with whips and floggers. She met his eyes for a moment and rued her mistake. He smiled. She turned quickly away.

Mike and Virginia were in a corner, talking. Madeline was sitting alone on a chair, dressed in a tentlike red dress. She noticed Adriana, holding the leash attached to the collar of an overweight man dressed only in boxer shorts. Lisa was careful not to meet anyone's eyes this time, remembering how Adriana had reacted at the party. She walked around carefully, looking up from time to time to see what was going on in the middle of the floor, which seemed to be where the action took place.

There were subs strapped to X-frames getting floggings, subs on benches getting spanked, subs tied to poles, subs serving as footrests for their Mistresses. She tried to pay attention to all the variation, but she barely registered some of the scenes. What stayed was the awareness that she was being watched. Men, and sometimes women, would look up and notice her, and their gazes would follow her. She tried to look away whenever she noticed them, but when she looked back up, all too often they were still watching.

"Hello, little pet," said a voice above her. A man blocked her way, dressed in leather pants with a studded harness crossing his furry chest.

She didn't want to be rude. But she didn't want to be blocked either. "Sorry, not interested," she said without looking up. She moved to the side, and he moved in front of her, forcing a collision.

"Could have fooled me," said the man.

"Apparently so." She turned around and walked quickly the other way. She heard laughter. A woman's voice. She glanced to the side and saw Adriana, and she had no doubt the laughter was directed at her. Her cheeks reddened, and she gritted her teeth. *I can do this.*

She turned around again—and looked right into the eyes of the man who had accosted her earlier.

“Such a bold look for someone who is playing hard to get,” he said. “I think you’re coming with me, little sub.” He seized her wrist with an iron grip.

\* \* \*

Darren stopped pacing and picked up the phone. “Darren speaking.”

“Darren,” said Mike. “I just wanted to ask a question.”

Darren sighed. He could hear the sounds behind Mike, and he could guess where he was on a Saturday night. So why was Mike calling him from Le Petit Mort? He really wasn’t in the mood. “Okay, shoot.”

“It’s about Lisa.”

What the hell? “She’s mine.” The words came out raw and instinctive. He couldn’t remember the last time a woman had affected him quite like Lisa had, with her bratty rebellions and her sweet submission. He’d given himself a couple days off to clear his head, and it hadn’t worked.

“Well, I’m about thirty feet away from her at the moment, and she’s walking around in nothing but some very sexy underwear. I figured you had something set up, at first, but it’s been a half hour, and you haven’t showed. And now I find you at home.”

“She’s at Le Petit Mort? How the hell did she end up there?” The rational part of him said he didn’t need to be the sole source of her knowledge about BDSM, but well, yeah, he was hoping to be her sole something.

“I don’t know how she got here. Somebody told her about the place, not you, I’d guess, and not Virginia or me. She’s getting a lot of attention.”

Even if he got in his car right now, it would take him forty minutes to get there. Plenty of time for bad things to happen. He gritted his teeth. He never wanted a woman to lay a claim on him, and he knew he was being horribly inconsistent to expect Lisa to be faithful to him after a couple of dates.

“Keep her safe, Mike. I’m on my way.”

“You know I can’t interrupt a scene.”

His heart tightened further. “Is she scening with someone?”

“Not yet.”

“I’m on my way,” Darren repeated and clicked the phone off. The woman who was shy enough she had to struggle with his orders about not wearing underwear was suddenly showing up at a bondage club wearing nothing but? And all by herself? He remembered the way she’d almost refused his direction to not put her shirt back on before going out to the living room at the party, and the experience with Adriana right afterward had him figuring he was going to go slow with her in that respect in the future. Was she playing him the whole time? Something didn’t add up.

*So there were rules about looking doms in the eye? So what?* She didn’t hesitate but kicked the man who’d grabbed her arm in the shin, hard. He let go.

“What the fuck, girl?”

“Keep your hands off me, you overgrown ape.”

He blinked. And to her surprise, backed off. “Sorry. I misunderstood. No harm done.” A few people had gathered around them, and his eyes scanned the crowd. “Just a misunderstanding. Nothing to see here.”

Lisa almost felt sorry for kicking him in the shin. Almost.

She recognized a few of the faces of those who’d gathered around. Mike and Virginia. And Adriana, who was smirking. Most everyone moved away when the ape backed off, but not those three. Adriana walked right up to her.

“You’re going to get yourself in trouble here, you know. You don’t know the way things work, and you’re bound to slip up. The next guy you kick will pick you up and do whatever he likes.” Adriana spun around and went back to the man she

was with. He was kneeling, waiting for her with an adoring expression. When Adriana got back to him, she slapped him hard across the face.

She jerked her attention away from Adriana. If someone looked at her like that, she might not like it, but she certainly wouldn't hit him. Spanking was one thing—the slap looked completely different. She shrugged. *Maybe I'm being close-minded. But I don't think so.*

"Lisa," said Virginia softly.

"Uh, hi."

"You okay, honey?"

"Yeah, nothing happened. Just, um, a misunderstanding. I guess."

"We were surprised to see you here."

Where's Darren? She figured if Darren wasn't going to be on time, he'd have someone watching over her. Mike was the most likely candidate, she thought, but Mike and Virginia weren't expecting her. So who? Not Madeline, surely. It could be someone she'd never met before, she realized. Well, if Darren didn't tell them, maybe she shouldn't either. "It's nice to see you," she said.

"You're going to get a lot of attention, dressed like that. Are you sure that's what you want?"

*I'm sure it isn't. But it's what my master ordered. He had to know about the attention I'd attract.* "Just following orders," she said.

Virginia's face fell. And Mike looked downright angry. *Did I say the wrong thing?*

"I hope you know what you're doing," said Virginia. "Darren's a good man and a very good dom."

Lisa nodded, on edge. She figured if she did more than nod, she'd be putting her foot in her mouth. *Adriana was right. I'm totally out of my element. Come on, Darren. Show up.*

Mike hooked Virginia's elbow with his arm and guided her away, leaving Lisa once again alone. She wanted to crawl under a rock somewhere and hide. *This isn't supposed to be fun. It's a test of some sort. The reason Darren hasn't had any long relationships is because the others failed the tests, I bet.* She set her jaw. Malcolm wasn't the only person there selling things. She'd shop.

To her surprise, some of the stuff being sold was perfectly ordinary. One old guy was selling clothespins. "These are the very best ones for nipples. I've tested dozens, and these are the best—better than those fancy clamps you buy in a bondage store. Want to try?"

*Ouch.* "No, thank you," Lisa said and moved on.

She ran her fingers over the floggers Malcolm was selling. The tails of some of them felt seductively soft, and she loved the smell of leather. They came in all kinds of colors. "They're beautiful," she said.

"So are you. But don't tell Darren I said so." Malcolm winked.

She smiled. "I don't think he's that jealous." *Or he wouldn't have me walking around half-naked.*

"Maybe," said Malcolm. He sounded doubtful.

A woman was selling strange leather contraptions with steel rings attached to them. "What are these for?" she asked.

"Cock cages," the woman told her, smirking. "Clap these on, and every time he tries to get hard, it hurts like hell. Then you can tease him to your heart's content."

*Oh-kay.* "Um, I'm not in that kind of relationship."

The woman laughed.

"Perhaps you'd be more interested in a corset?" The man who asked was tall and had a nasty scar on his face, but the garments on his table were beautiful. They were made of silk, but a touch showed her they weren't going to give much.

"What's in them? Whale bone?"

“That’s what they used to use,” said the man. “But whales are overhunted and endangered. So I use steel. It doesn’t give or lose its shape the way plastic does. I’m Brett, by the way.”

Lisa was fascinated. The historical novels she’d read had corseted heroines, naturally, and she wondered what it would be like to wear something so ungiving. “Lisa. I’m interested.”

“I’ll have to get your size.”

“Um, sure.” She looked about for a female assistant. “Do you have someone who does that? We can just nip out to the bathroom and...”

“No need.” For a big man, Brett moved surprisingly fast around his table, tape measure already in his hand. He’d wrapped it around her waist before she thought to resist. “Now breathe in all the way.”

*Might as well go through with it.* She breathed in and then at his direction breathed out. He took another measurement, at her hips, and then wrapped the tape around her chest. The placement of his hands was almost intimate, but his attitude was professional, so she stood still. It was odd getting measured in front of everyone, but she only had to glance around to find people wearing fewer clothes and doing more intimate things. They seemed to be attracting most of the voyeurs. Except Adriana, who was smiling at her again.

*What a bitch.*

With a few more breaths in and out, Brett was finished. “I’ve got something that might fit. But when you’re talking about buying a corset, it’s best to have something perfect. Your best bet would be for me to make one for you, because you’re not quite the match for anything I have.”

“And how much would that cost?”

“Three hundred and twenty.”

Lisa gulped. “And the noncustom ones?”

“Three hundred for the one that would fit you.” He picked up a teal one Lisa thought the least attractive among the array of purple, black, and scarlet silk garments. “But you’ll feel the difference. And as much as I love to make an instant sale, I don’t think there’s much point in spending that kind of money on a corset that won’t mold perfectly to your body.”

“I can’t afford to be spending that kind of money on clothes regardless.” Lisa blushed. “I’m so sorry I wasted your time.”

Brett grinned. “I don’t consider it a waste of time.”

*So maybe he got more fun out of measuring me than I thought.* But he hadn’t done anything wrong, really, and Lisa wasn’t about to slap him for what he probably meant as a compliment. She shrugged apologetically and walked away. She’d done enough shopping. But she didn’t know what else to do.

A tall, thin woman dressed from neck to toe in black shiny latex moved to stand in front of her. “You’re lovely,” she said.

“Thank you.”

“I want to kiss you.”

“Um, no thanks.” If Darren was like most men, he’d like to watch. Maybe he’d even like to hear about her kissing a girl. Maybe. But she was in no mood to do him any favors anymore. She was getting pissed off.

She walked away, toward the door. She was going to get her dress back on, first of all. But she wasn’t going to leave. When Darren got there, she was going to give him a piece of her mind. Test be damned, he had no business doing this to her, and she felt like a fool for going along with it.

It wasn’t Starlight at the counter anymore; it was an older man who leered. She ignored his expression and made him go fetch her dress and her purse. She wasn’t going to put it on in front of him. She’d go to the restroom and put it on in private, even though she had to stalk through the main room carrying it.

But when she got to the restroom, she couldn't hold it back anymore. *I wanted so bad to be a good sub.* Tears streamed down her face, making a mess of the little makeup she wore. She held on to the sink for a while, watching herself in the mirror. A woman came in, ignored her, and went to use the toilet. *I'll be damned if I let him make me cry in public.* She screwed up her courage, dabbed at her face, put the dress back on, and then set about freshening her makeup. She was tempted to buy one of those cage devices. *Your turn for a test, Darren.*

When she came out, there he was. He was across the room, talking to Adriana, who'd left her man kneeling and waiting again. Adriana was showing him her cell phone. Pictures. *She's been taking pictures of me. She was the one watching me for Darren, but he knows she hates me. This was all a game. How could I be such a fool?*

But Darren didn't look amused by what he was seeing. He looked angry. And the look didn't fade when he spotted her. He said something sharply to Adriana and stalked across the room, looking like he had something to say.

*Well, fine. I've got a piece of my mind to give him as well.*

The first words out of his mouth were "Are you okay?"

The concern in his voice, coming through even despite the anger, almost stopped her. Almost. "Hell no, I'm not okay. You've got me prancing around half the night in my underwear and—"

"I have you prancing?" he interrupted, and then a dark cloud came over his face. "That lousy bitch."

"Excuse me?"

"You think I told you to come here?"

"Yes, I got your note..."

"Give it to me."

She fished in her purse. It wasn't there. *Oh no.* She didn't remember taking it out, but she must have. Or maybe it fell out on the train, she'd had it loosely tucked in the side pouch, she was sure. "It wasn't from you?"

"I didn't send you a note."

"So who did?"

"I'll know when I see the note, but I already have a good suspicion."

*He'll never believe me if I can't find the note. Damn damn damn.* But it wasn't there.

"So what did it say?" he asked.

She told him. She knew it almost by heart, she'd read the thing so many times.

"How'd you get it? E-mail, post office?"

"Pushed under the door." *If Darren didn't send it, someone else knows where I live. And if he didn't send it, that someone is definitely not my friend.*

"Come along, my slave girl, and be brave. And trust me." He held her hand and pulled as he walked to the center of the room. She followed, not having any idea of what he had in mind. *He wouldn't say "trust me" if he was going to do something bad, would he? Not unless he's completely evil. And whatever else I may think, I don't think he's evil.*

He'd headed straight for the man who'd grabbed her arm.

"My apologies to you, Gary," he said.

*He's apologizing to him? For me? What?* She opened her mouth to say she'd gladly kick Gary in the other shin. Darren clapped a hand over her mouth.

"For your sub?" Gary asked. "No harm done, man. And hey, I'm sorry too. I didn't know she was yours."

"I'm not apologizing for my sub but for Adriana. She took a picture of you to try to get back at my sub because she's jealous."

"Oh," Gary said, and then his eyes darkened. "She took a picture in here? You can't take pictures in here. Some of these people have wives at home and shit. You don't do that."

"Yeah, that's why I'm apologizing."

But Gary was already gone, headed straight toward Adriana.

“Or husbands,” said Darren and walked over to the woman who’d wanted to kiss her. “Gretchen. Adriana took a picture of you talking to my sub.”

The woman’s face paled. “Thanks for letting me know, Darren,” she said and walked off in a completely different direction. Lisa watched as Gretchen started talking to a man whose leather vest sported a silver star like an old US Marshal’s badge.

“What’s going on, Darren?”

“Adriana kept telling me she’d like instructions. By e-mail. Or a note. She’d obey every one of them, she told me. That’s when I knew it was more than a scene with her, and I never did what she wanted. But she was obsessed with the idea, and so she sent a note to you instead. First thing she did when I walked in was show me pictures of you with other people.”

He nodded over at the kneeling man. “That man there, Vince, is in love with Adriana. Has been for a long time. He’s there for her whenever she finishes a relationship with someone else, and she treats him like shit. I feel kind of sorry for him, but not right at the moment. He’s a cop; my guess is she got him to run your license plates for her, unless there’s some other way for her to have found out where you lived. She could have easily seen you drive past when you left my house; she may have been still in her car.”

Lisa shook her head. “There’s no other way. And she was still in her car. I saw her as I drove off, but it didn’t mean anything to me.”

Gary was yelling at Adriana. The guy with the star had arrived and was holding his hand out as if he expected to be handed something. Adriana looked small and pitiful. Lisa looked over at the kneeling man, the cop. He looked stricken, but he wasn’t moving to protect her.

“Why doesn’t he help her?”

“Probably because he’s been ordered to kneel there until she returns.”

"If you told me to stay still but things changed and I thought you needed my help, I'd get up...and if you wanted to get mad at me later, well, fu—um, I mean, that would be your prerogative of course." She bit her lip.

Darren grinned. "That's part of what I like about you. You think for yourself, and don't expect me to do your thinking for you. And trust me, I'm most happy to give you a spanking whenever you get out of hand."

The man with the star had the Adriana's cell phone and was pushing buttons on it. He'd waved Gary away, and Gary, to Lisa's surprise, had backed off. But he was staying nearby, as was Gretchen.

"She took a few other pictures too, but I think I've fanned the fire enough. That's Marty, and this place is his. He's deleting the pictures, I imagine, and after he finishes, Adriana won't be welcome here anymore."

Marty escorted Adriana out the door. The kneeling man knelt unmoving, looking lost. Marty went back to talk to him.

"If you want to tell Marty about the note slipped under your door and about the address, we could probably get Vince banned as well."

"No, thank you."

"Too messy?"

"No," said Lisa. "If Vince can come here and Adriana can't, it might be the beginning of a whole lack of relationship."

Darren laughed. "You, my love, have an evil streak. Remind me not to cross you."

"Don't cross me."

Darren laughed again.

"One more stop before I take you to my house."

"What makes you think I'm coming?" She regretted saying it. *Of course I'm going. Me and my big mouth.*

Darren grinned. "If you were willing to come here and walk around half-naked just because you thought I'd sent you a note, well, I think you'd do quite a lot actually."

"So what's the stop?"

He walked over to the merchant's area, to the table where Brett hawked his corsets. "Brett!"

"Hey! Darren!" The two high-fived.

"She'll have a corset in purple silk. One that lifts and displays, as it were. Have something I can write my address down on?"

Lisa's jaw dropped. *Lifts and displays, indeed. It's way too much money for him to be spending on me.* "Hey, wait a minute."

Darren shook his head. "I've seen photographic evidence. He's got your measurements, and I know you wanted one, love." Darren scrawled his name down on the receipt Brett pushed toward him.

"It's too much," Lisa insisted.

"It's worth it to see you in it one time. Promise you'll let me see you wearing it?"

"Um, sure, but—"

"Then we have a deal. Value for value. Send me the bill, Brett. We're in a hurry."

"Sure thing," said Brett.

"But—" started Lisa again, but Darren picked her up and carried her.

"Each 'but' is five whacks."

Lisa closed her mouth and didn't open it again until they were right next to his car. "Sir, I have something to say."

Darren smiled. "What is it, love?"

"But. But. But."

The smile turned to a big grin. Lisa laughed nervously. Was that twenty-five now? Still, she wanted his hands on her, anyway he chose.

“I think I’m falling in love,” he said. “Get into the car. And once you’re in, take your dress off. I’m jealous of all those people in the club, getting to see what I’ve had to wait for, and now I have you all to myself.”

“I don’t want to distract your driving,” Lisa protested. *Not to mention the fact people can see in if they look.* She did, however, get in the car, taking note of the tinted windows. He shut the door behind her.

*He’d said falling in love.* It wasn’t quite the words she wanted to hear, but it was close. The realization of what she wanted him to say hit her like a ton of bricks. It was too fast. Too soon. Yet he had trusted her like he’d known her forever, even when she couldn’t produce the note.

*I love you too, Sir.*

He got in the driver’s seat a moment later. “We’re necking first, then driving. And the windows are tinted, so it’s all good. Dress off.”

Lisa took a deep breath and unzipped the back. “Yes, Sir.” It wasn’t as easy to get it off while seated. She felt his hot gaze on her as she wriggled out of it.

He ran his hands over her breasts, the lace rough against her as it shifted on her skin under his touch. His lips touched hers, and then he kissed her deeply, taking her breath away.

*Oh yes, Master.*

## Chapter Eight

Darren managed to keep his eyes on the road while driving back to his place, but he had to admit he enjoyed every stoplight. His eyes were drawn to her pink nipples jutting against the fabric, covered yet revealed by the translucent lace. Her breasts curved beautifully; her shoulders and legs had sleek, touchable skin. He knew if he didn't keep his hands off, he'd find it even harder to drive. As it was, he'd noticed her more than once sneak a peek at his crotch. His cock was so hard it ached.

*So shy little Lisa walked around like that for the last hour in a completely strange place because she thought I'd told her to in a note? Amazing.*

Darren was sure she wasn't the only submissive in the area who might do such a thing; Adriana would probably have done that and more, but then, if there wasn't a dom to top her into it, he suspected she'd invent one. Adriana wasn't a submissive—whether on top or bottom, she specialized in wrapping men around her little finger—and any topping was going to be done her way, at her level of intensity. Darren was happy to give his partner what she wanted, but there was a difference between tending to his sub's needs and being topped from below.

"I want you to know, Lisa, that I appreciate what you did for me. Even if it wasn't really for me, it was in your heart. I'm honored."

"I made a blasted fool of myself," Lisa said, sighing.

"No, you didn't. Adriana made a fool of herself, and she won't be welcome there again or at any other BDSM gathering unless she can find a way to redeem herself. People in the scene value their privacy. Many of them could lose their jobs if the

wrong people found out or find themselves ostracized at church or temple. And yes, a few of them are cheating on their spouses.”

“Have you ever played with someone who was doing that, Sir?”

“Not if I knew.” Darren frowned. “Some people lie to everyone they know. It’s sad. Mostly for them.”

“I wouldn’t think there’d be very many people going to church after a Saturday night at that club.”

Darren smiled. “You’d be surprised. And it’s not all hypocrites either, if that’s what you’re thinking. I’ve met some very sincere and devout religious people in the scene. They may not expect everyone in church to understand, but that doesn’t mean they don’t really believe.”

“It seems there’s a lot I need to know.”

*She’s planning to stick around in the scene, then. Is that only as long as she’s with me?* He knew the answer, though, even if she wouldn’t admit it. Her responses, both physical and emotional, told him she’d found something that resonated with her. Eventually, she’d be back, with or without him. The thought of her calling another man “Master” suddenly wrenched his heart. *No. No.*

“Are you okay?” she asked, touching his knee briefly.

“Um, yeah. I’m fine.”

All he’d ever intended was catch and release. He’d teach her a few things on the way and help her find out more about herself. Give her intense pleasure and then let her go like he had every other woman. Let her find some other man, if she was the settling-down type. She hadn’t made any demands that he do it any differently. But when she thought he had made a demand of her, even though it was frankly unreasonable in a way that didn’t let her immediately argue with it, she’d simply obeyed. She wasn’t naturally subservient, so that must have taken a great deal of bravery. The idea of letting her go, ever, was something he didn’t want to think about.

He pulled up his driveway, then parked the car in the garage. Her actions still mystified him. "Why?"

"Why what, Sir?" asked Lisa.

"Why did you do what was in the note? Why didn't you call me and tell me to go jump in a lake?"

Lisa giggled. "That wouldn't have been very submissive of me, now would it? I may be a novice at this, but I think I know that much."

"It would have been entirely reasonable and sensible."

"You wouldn't have sent me a note if you wanted to have a discussion about it, Sir."

Darren turned to face her. "Was it something you *wanted* to do? That turned you on?"

"No, not something I wanted." She bit her lip. "Turned me on? Some. Not as much as it frightened me. But I knew you. I knew if you asked me to do it, then you had a way to make it safe. You'd have someone watching me, or you'd be watching me from the shadows. I thought it was a test."

Darren felt the muscles in his neck tighten and had to stop himself from clenching his fists. "A test? Tests are bullshit games played by insecure doms. Nothing I do will ever be just to test you."

Lisa smiled. "You know, I've played bullshit games with an insecure man most of my life. I think I recognize the type. If it was you, I knew it would be okay, even if I didn't understand how or why. I'd never be able to do what I did tonight for anyone else. Even though I was mad at you when I thought you'd written the note, I trusted you. I trust you now. And if you wrote down another set of directions, right here and now, I'd follow them. But I have lost trust in one thing, Sir."

"What's that?"

"I'd need you to hand me the directions personally. And they'd have to be handwritten."

"I don't need to write you any notes."

"No, you don't, Sir. How you do things with me is all up to you."

He grinned. "Good girl. What you did was more than I would have ever expected of you." He paused. She was so close, but he wanted her closer. He could have spent all night talking to her, but only at the expense of sexual frustration. It was time to show her what he wanted, rather than talk about it. "Right now I want you."

"You have me."

"Come here."

The driver's seat was the least comfortable spot in the car for two people, but she climbed onto his lap. He leaned the seat back to try to give them more room, but her bottom hit the steering wheel and sounded the horn before he'd gotten it halfway back. She jumped up with a start, hitting her head on the roof, which fortunately was well padded.

Lisa laughed. "I'm a klutz."

"As long as you're *my* klutz, I'm fine." He put his hands on her hips, positioning her so she straddled him right, her crotch against the place where his hard cock made a ridge in his jeans.

"Happy to be yours, Sir, but I'd rather be your slave girl than your klutz." The laugh lines around her eyes crinkled. She moved in small little circles, rubbing herself against his seam. It had to be his imagination, but he felt her dampness all the way through the lace and denim.

"Clothes," he said, too full of lust to form a sentence.

She seemed to understand. He watched as she freed her breasts from the confines of the bra. She moaned when he cupped them. She bumped the horn again, making a little squeak as she rose on her knees to get her panties off, and then fell over trying to get them past one knee at a time. He caught her, enjoying the way

her body fit against his, soft breasts squishing, her bottom fitting perfectly in his hand. She wriggled and kicked until the panties slipped over her shoes.

“Now me.”

“Sir,” she purred. She went straight for the button on his jeans.

He smiled at her eagerness. He was half out of his mind with lust, so he wouldn't keep her waiting for long. Sometime he'd play a teasing game with her or perhaps he already had in the car. He pulled his shirt over his head, tightening his abs to rise off the seat enough to get it up and over. She looked up, watching his stomach tighten. *Like that, do you?*

She freed his cock and fished in his pocket. For a moment he wondered what she was up to, but before he had a chance to protest, she'd found his wallet, stripped the condom out of it, and tossed the wallet into the backseat. She rolled the condom over his cock. She was a little awkward, he thought, knowing what to do but without much experience. He grinned. *I'll give you experience, love. All sorts of experience.*

She hadn't pushed his jeans all the way down, much less gotten them off, but he didn't feel like quibbling. He grabbed her hips and nestled the head of his cock against her pussy.

“Mine,” he told her, not for his sake but for hers.

“All yours.” She breathed ecstasy into the words.

He tightened his abs, arched his back, and entered her. Her channel was slick and giving with enough resistance to add delicious friction as he filled her. Her hips responded, moving in little circles, keeping him buried all the way in. Her eyes closed, and she smiled almost peacefully, like a picture of a saint secure in her holiness but with a hint of sin.

So good. So right. His gaze drifted down from her face to watch her breasts sway, and then he pulled back slowly. It seemed to him as if she was going to sink down with him, not wanting to let him go, but then she grabbed the oh-God handle

in the back seat and kept herself still. Her eyes fluttered open, giving him a look of pure adoration.

*I'm keeping you.*

The thought startled him. He hadn't thought that way about a woman in a long time. Not since England, and he'd been wrong then. He pushed back inside her, hard, pulling back after he was sure he'd gone his deepest. He tried to write it off as a spur-of-the-moment thought, something inspired by his hard, aching cock and not his mind, certainly not his heart. Something that wouldn't last. But he knew better.

*I'm keeping you.*

He moved his hands to her breasts, squeezing roughly, thumbing the hard peaks. She cried out, but it was a cry of pleasure not pain. "I'm keeping you." He thought he saw her smile, the lines creasing around her eyes. He thrust into her again, and she sighed, the smile replaced by a look of hunger, a hunger he shared. He wanted to shoot his seed deep inside her, even though they'd taken precautions. Wanted to claim her as his. *Mine. Mine.*

Their bodies jolted together with each arching of his hips. She leaned forward, dangling her breasts in his face, inviting his touch. He licked around a stiff peak, then sucked it in. He felt her body quiver in response. He knew he could get more than a quiver from her. His cock ached for release, but he wasn't going to give in to it. Not yet.

He increased the pace, her body bouncing on his each time he pushed up into her. He slipped a hand between them, slid his finger over her clit, and she screamed. Thank goodness for a large lot and faraway neighbors, although he wouldn't have shushed her if he'd lived in an apartment. It was a lovely sound, raw and primal. The sudden clenching of her pussy made him gasp, but he thought he could hold on.

"Give it to me," she said, her voice more gentle than the words. "*My* master."

His control vanished. *Yours*. He let go, his eyes squeezing closed as he threw his head back and his body bucked inside her. His cock was on wonderful fire as it spurted inside her. He groaned. "Yes. Yes."

He'd never belonged to anyone before. His partners had always wanted to belong to him, and he'd always made clear there was no claim going in the other direction. Adriana had said she understood, but she hadn't.

He didn't even want Lisa to understand. He sat up, staying inside her while he kissed her hard, possessively. His arms wrapped around her waist, her arms holding him around his shoulders. *Mine. Yours*. In the background someone's car alarm sounded, but he ignored it. His tongue swirled against Lisa's as if he'd never really kissed before.

She tried to push him back, but he didn't want her to. Not yet. He might be hers, but he was still the top. He grinned at her as their lips parted, and they both caught their breath.

The car alarm didn't stop. People who had those things shouldn't be so lazy, he thought, annoyed at being distracted.

"Master," Lisa said softly. "That's the horn."

"Oh!" He lay back down, pulling her with him, and laughed. She laughed too in an impromptu duet of giggles. *God, she has the best laugh. I want to make her laugh, come, scream, over and over again.*

"We'd better get inside before the neighbors investigate," he said. Not that they would. It wasn't the kind of neighborhood where people looked out after each other. The best—or in this case worst—they would do was call the cops, and the station wasn't especially close.

"Do I put on clothes first, Master?"

He considered it for less than a second. "No. You don't." He reached between them to grip the condom.

“Ah.” She nodded. “Well, then.” She pulled the handle and opened the door, her heels making a *clack* when they hit the pavement. He yanked the condom off and pulled up his jeans as he sat up. She looked at him speculatively.

“You get your clothes on, and I don’t?” she asked.

“Not fair, is it?”

“No.”

He climbed out of the car, and they stood there staring at each other. He thought she was going to tell him off or maybe tell him to take his jeans off. He could always point out she hadn’t completed the task of taking them off and that it was her fault, but that would miss the point. Sometimes he’d want her undressed, whether he was or not. A vision of her naked waiting for him at home flitted through his mind. *Our home.*

*What the hell am I thinking?*

“I think I don’t want it to be fair,” she said at last. “But I do need you to unlock the door to the house.”

He smiled and moved past her to unlock the back door. He pushed it open and held it there for her, gesturing her inside. “If you’d protested, I’d have spanked you.”

She walked past him. “Might you spank me even without the protest?”

“Sometimes.” He followed her, shutting the door behind him.

She turned to face him and grinned. “Then I’ll only back talk when I want to make absolutely sure, Master.”

“There are words for subs who act up to get negative attention,” he told her.

“What words are those?”

“Smart-assed masochists. Sometimes abbreviated as SAM. It’s not meant as a compliment. And brat.”

“Am I a brat, Sir?”

“A bit of one, I’m afraid.”

“Whatcha gonna do about it?” He could swear she was laughing at him, although at least she was smart enough not to do it out loud.

Did he like her so much for the challenge?

“Because, you know,” she said, the laughter not totally gone from her eyes as she got more serious, “you can do whatever you want to do to me.”

He still liked her when she wasn’t being any challenge at all. “Yep.” He took a step forward, swept her leg with his, and caught her as she fell into his arms. He lifted her and carried her into the living room before lowering her to the carpet. He let her tumble out of his arms, rather than setting her all the way down, but low enough it wouldn’t hurt her in anything but her dignity.

“Kneel.”

She scrambled to her knees.

“Not like that. Legs farther apart. Back arched. Display yourself.”

She nodded. There wasn’t any laughter in her eyes anymore. He missed it. But her obedience would have to do. Kneeling, her breasts thrust up, her rosy peaks begging for attention, her slit glistening—she was even more beautiful than usual. He brushed a violet lock off her chest; it was cute, but it was getting in the way of his view.

“Stay that way. I’ll come back to you when I come back to you.” He turned and walked toward the kitchen. He needed to get his head straight. And she needed to understand her challenge wouldn’t be taken as mere play. Or did she? He’d been enjoying it as much as she was, but it wasn’t the way things were done. Mere play. He’d been playing all along, he realized, with everyone else, and they’d been playing back. But this was real. It was real for Lisa too. She was playing with him, but she wasn’t playing with his mind; she was being her own effervescent self. The person he wanted to keep. The person he was falling in love with.

*Dammit, that’s going to take some getting used to.*

At least the carpet was soft, thought Lisa. She'd watched Darren go, her heart clenching. She knew she'd never completely suppress her inner smart aleck. She'd hoped making clear to him she didn't feel any less of a desire for him just because she was smarting off, or any less of a desire to submit to him, would make her okay in his eyes. *Does he really like me for me or what he thinks he can change me into?*

It was tempting, for a moment, to decide she didn't care. To slip into the feeling she got when she submitted to his desires and let him do the thinking. But she'd been that route before. Maybe it wasn't called BDSM, but it was still the same thing: a partner who wanted to change her. She sighed. Being Darren's felt so right. And now she was tempted to get up, find Darren wherever he was, and tell him she was going to go home.

*I don't have my car. And I suspect there's not much demand for buses out here.* She was sure he'd drive her home or to a metro stop if she demanded it. *I'm not trapped. If I stay, it's of my free will.*

She stayed on her knees. Her hamstrings were sore, and her knees would be soon. Spreading her legs sure didn't help. Kneeling up straight and arching her back slightly relieved pressure, but it was tiring. *I'm not going to accept another relationship where I have to do all the changing. But I'll wait for hours if I need to before I give up on this one, because he's what I want. What I need.*

She heard Darren in the kitchen. The sound of a cupboard door opening and then shutting. She tried to block it out of her mind. It was tempting to pay attention and try to guess what he was doing, but it was better to let her mind slide into a calm state of meditation. *When he comes, I'll be calm. Not angry. Not rebellious. Not willing to promise more than I can. Just calm.*

*I'm not going to be able to maintain this very long.* That thought too she tried to push from her mind. *Just calm. Just calm, dammit.*

He walked in, carrying two wineglasses with a dark amber liquid inside them. He handed one to her, and she took it, and then he sat down beside her on the floor.

"You have permission to relax. *My* brat," he said with a grin. He raised his glass as if for a toast.

*His* brat. Maybe he didn't need to change her after all. She eyed the liquid skeptically. "What is it?"

"Sherry."

"Good, because if it was whiskey, I think you poured me too much." She clinked her glass against his. "Yours, Master."

"I like you with your wit about you," he told her, then drank.

She sipped, the sweetness pleasing her tongue even as the alcohol startled her. As wine went, it was pretty strong. "My wits, you mean?"

"That too."

She didn't want to ask. It would make her look weak and needy. But maybe she'd finally found someone she could be weak around when she felt weak, as well as strong when she felt strong. "Am I okay, Sir?"

"To put it mildly." He grinned. "You're wonderful. Fun. Smart. You have a good sense of humor. You're wonderful in bed. Or in the car. Or on the—that reminds me, I haven't really shown you the dungeon in the fullest sense."

She felt his gaze sweep over her and became aware again how exposed she was. For a moment she wanted to close her legs. Instead, she spread her knees wider. She could be vulnerable in front of him. She wondered if he knew how wonderful it was to be able to be vulnerable and safe at the same time.

"Sherry is one of my vices, I'm afraid."

"She's probably the only girl I'd be willing to share you with." She waited, wondering how he'd react.

He looked blank and then chuckled. "Sorry, took me a moment. Sherry, a girl's name, got it. It turns out," he said, swirling the wine, "I don't want to share either."

She let out a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. *Good. I'm in way too deep to let you be with someone else. Maybe at first, when it was playing. But not now.* Darren stood and stretched out his hand to her. "Come. Bring the wine."

She reached up for his hand and let him help her to her feet. Still holding hands, they made their way to the dungeon.

Halfway down, she started to feel butterflies. Turning on the light at the bottom of the stairs helped, but the little hairs on the back of her neck were still standing up. He led her to the big X-shaped cross. Cuffs dangled from the rings at the end of each arm of the X. Cuffs that would be going around her wrists and ankles.

He turned toward her, and his face softened. "You okay?" he asked.

"I'm scared of being bound." She hated to admit she was scared of anything. He could overpower her easily enough anyway. It wasn't as if she was any less safe on the cross.

"The sort of scared where you can try, or the sort of scared where you're likely to have a panic attack if you push it?"

"Well, you'll be with me."

"I won't leave your side."

"Then it's the sort of scared where I can try." Her firm voice was more to quell her butterflies than anything else.

He smiled. "Brave girl. Let me show you something, then. Put your back up against the cross. The cuffs will be loose, so you can easily slip out of them."

She nodded. She still wasn't sure, but she did as he asked, leaning her back against the cold wood. The X was at an angle; one could use it for support. That was a good thing, she thought, as she spread her arms and legs. Balance would have been an issue if it hadn't been there to lean on, with her legs spread so far apart.

True to his word, he fastened the Velcro cuffs loosely around her wrists, and she could indeed slip out of them. He bent down to cuff her ankles; her ankle cuffs

would be harder to slip out of, especially without kicking her heels off first, but with her wrists free, she could undo those. She felt a twinge of fear anyway and tried to concentrate on her breathing. She hadn't realized being tied up would frighten her so much. She'd had dreams and fantasies about being restrained, but those were totally under her control. This wasn't, even though she trusted Darren.

He stood up. "Now. Stay still and watch. I won't hurt you. I need you to do one thing."

"What's that?"

"Say the word 'orange.'"

*The safe word.* "I can take it, Sir. I'm okay, really."

"It's not an option, love. Say it."

She gritted her teeth. "Orange."

He was a flurry of motion. The sound of Velcro ripping, one after the other, startled her. But in less than three seconds, she was completely free, and he was pulling her from the cross and into his arms.

"That's how safe you are. One word, and you're free." He held her close, his bare chest warm against her.

"Wow." It took her more time to undo the deadbolt on her apartment when it stuck. She took another breath, then another, and felt her heart's heavy beating settle down. "Thank you, Sir."

"I'll attach them more securely this time. Tell me when you're ready."

She smiled and nodded. "I'm ready."

He let her go, and she spread herself out again. It felt completely different. Her heart didn't beat so hard it was painful, and her lungs didn't feel like they were squeezing too hard to hold air. Instead she felt her nipples tightening into stiff points and thought about how her spread legs made her more accessible to her master. He brushed against her nipples as he fastened the cuffs firmly around her

wrists, sending jolts through her body. He knelt down in front of her to fasten her ankles.

“Now that I have you where I want you, I can do whatever I want.”

She breathed easy, surprised that she wasn’t scared at all anymore. He’d take care of everything. *Nothing for me to do but enjoy the ride.*

He started by drawing little circles with his fingers around her nipples, never quite touching them. She’d thought they were hard before; now they ached. But she trusted him too much to protest. He knew what he was doing, and whether it was for her pleasure or his, he was doing what he wanted.

His fingers wandered, his touch light, exploring the curve of her breasts. They almost tickled as they ventured down her sides. “Your skin is alive,” he said.

*A strange way to put it, but so right.* “Oh yeah.”

“I’m going to get a little toy to help you along,” he told her, a smile glinting in his eyes. “If you say the word, I’ll come running. I can still move pretty fast when I need to, even if I can’t keep up with the forwards anymore.”

“As long as you can keep up with me,” said Lisa. “I wouldn’t want to score without you.”

Darren laughed. “I know you’re okay when you’re telling jokes.” He walked a few feet away, where a black flogger hung from its hook. Its tails were a foot and a half long, the handle rows of tightly wrapped leather with a metal ring at its end. He walked back, swishing it in the air while she watched. *Uh-oh.* But along with the dread came an anticipation she felt deep in her core. *If anyone else walked toward me carrying that thing, I’d be screaming.*

He dangled the long tails across her breasts. They were surprisingly soft. He twirled the flogger in the air, letting her feel a cool whoosh of a breeze when it cut through the air. It only made her nipples ache more.

The first blow was light, barely more than a tickle in the middle of her chest. The second struck the inside of her left thigh, and then a third on her right, each one stinging. She twitched away, but the cuffs held her fast.

“Just feel. Let your body decide how to react.” The sharp caress of the flogger fell on her arms, her shoulders, her breasts. Each touch stung more than the last, but none of it was as sharp as the feel of his hand when he spanked her. It was different, though. Each tail like a tiny pinprick if it struck at its end, and if she caught the middle, it hardly stung at all; it was more like a push really. She never knew what part of her would be lashed. But all the little stings and pushes hit her together, the sensations blurring into one. As the swings came closer and closer together, the flogger whirling through the air in his obviously practiced hands, she couldn’t even be sure of which impressions were from which swing. Every touch sent warmth straight to her pussy, even though the whip never stroked her there at all. The myriad prickles and caresses were transformed into a slow, wet warmth. The rest of her body responded too, stretching forward as much as she could, instinctively trying to reach for the source of her pain and pleasure. She saw his smile before she closed her eyes to focus on the sensations. It stayed with her as she drifted, giving herself totally to the lash and her master.

She whimpered when an expected blow didn’t come, her reverie broken by the loss of pattern. Her pussy was hot and swollen, aching for his touch, but even without it she was on the edge of coming. *Why is he stopping?*

She felt her legs being uncuffed; had she done something wrong? She knew she hadn’t said anything about oranges, even if she didn’t know whether she’d been babbling or not. Concerned, she opened her eyes in time to see the hungry look on his face as he lifted her now free legs and sank his cock deep into her pussy with one forceful thrust.

*Oh my.*

“Please don’t go slow,” she murmured, but he was already moving when the words left her mouth. Each thrust pushed her ass against the wood. His pubic bone

banged against her clit. He fucked her hard and fast, his face contorted by a primal desire. Each slick thrust and withdrawal sent sparks through her.

She screamed as she came, her body thrashing. The cuffs abraded her wrists, but the pain didn't matter to her. The clenching of her pussy seemed to go on forever, building again right when she thought it might fade and she might catch her breath. He kept fucking her hard, his chest against hers, her body held between flesh and wood, escape neither wanted nor available.

He moaned and held himself for a moment longer deep inside her, the rhythm disrupted as his cock swelled and pulsed inside her. He pulled back and then thrust back in, again holding himself in at the deepest reaches of her sex. She squeezed his cock, wanting his pleasure to go on and on.

"I love you," he said softly. She turned her face to hide her smile and pretended not to hear. Her heart wanted to leap for joy, but she wouldn't let it. Wasn't everyone in love at the moment of orgasm? If he meant it, he'd say it again.

He pulled her cuffs open and lifted her, staggering over to a couch in the far corner of the room. He sat down with her in his lap, and she cuddled up against his hot, sweaty chest as he held her tight, kissing her neck, her shoulders, her lips.

"Now was that too scary?" he asked her, his voice soft.

"No Sir," she replied. "It was incredibly hot."

"Would you please spend the night with me?"

She smiled, remembering what he said about not taking women into his bedroom. "Well, only if you let me cuddle up close. In your bed."

"Yes, of course in my bed."

She smiled again, knowing she was going to get herself in trouble. "Now was that too scary?" she asked, trying to imitate his tone. She regretted it the moment she said it, because he had been nothing but concerned and making sure she was okay, and now she was poking fun. She watched him frown, saw the gears going

around in his head, and wondered if she'd pushed it too far. He was giving her a part of him he'd held back, and she sounded like she was laughing at it.

*Shit.*

He laughed, a deep, rumbling sound. "You're poking fun of me. You know, I wasn't afraid of getting too close to someone."

"You weren't?"

"Well, maybe a little. But I was saving myself for the right person."

*Oh.*

"Now flip over," he said, looking suddenly stern except for the twinkle in his eye he couldn't hide. "And be prepared to pay the price for your impertinence."

*Oh my.*

She rolled over until she was face down on the couch, her bottom elevated by being directly over his lap, and waited about half a second before she wiggled her butt at him, looking over her shoulder.

## Chapter Nine

Her bottom stung as she lowered herself into Darren's car. She remembered how he'd rubbed lotion into it after the spanking and how they made love afterward. *Definitely worth it.* In fact, she found herself shifting her butt to exacerbate the sensation. She couldn't believe she was getting wet from the aftereffects of a spanking nine hours before. He'd taken her panties too. She was almost bare-assed against the seat, only the thin layer of her dress between her and it.

Darren glanced over at her. "You doing all right there?"

"Very good, Sir. I only wish I didn't have to go to work so quickly after I get home." She figured she had enough time to get dressed, unless traffic was very cooperative. Even on a Sunday morning, she wasn't going to expect decent traffic in Northern Virginia.

"Our penalty for sleeping in."

"That wasn't all sleeping."

"No, it wasn't." He grinned.

"When do I see you next?" She wasn't going to put him on the spot about his I-love-you, when actions were more concrete anyway. If he gave her a don't-call-me-I'll-call-you, she was going to give him a piece of her mind.

"It's Sunday. I've got nothing to do. You working Monday?"

"At ten."

"Then if you don't object, I'll pick you up from work tonight. We can do dinner and then go back to your place afterward."

She hadn't expected it to be that soon. But she certainly didn't object, although she wondered if he'd be waking up with regrets. "You sure you don't need your space?"

"I'm sure."

"Well, then. You'll have to drop me off at work so you know where it is."

He grinned. "Are you sure you want a master in your life while you're picking out your clothes for the day?"

*What is he going to do, make me wear a skirt with no panties again?* The idea of having him with her, all day long, because her very clothing reminded her of his presence in his life, made her wonder if she could work with the distraction. But what a delicious distraction it would be. "I'm sure I want a master in my life, period. Not just any master will do, however. I think—"

"You think?" he prompted after a good fifteen seconds of silence.

"I think I was waiting for the right one."

"Cheeky little sub, aren't you?"

"That's why you love me," she said, regretting the words the moment she said them. She tried to cover up. "I'm a brat."

"Not just any brat. You're *my* brat. And that's not the only reason I love you."

Her heart beat faster. Those words again, even if they were part of another thought. Should she say it back this time? She wanted to, but something stilled her tongue. She didn't know if she dared. He got on the exit ramp, and she sneaked a peek at her watch. Heck, she'd have twenty minutes with him at home. Time enough to get dressed and maybe even engage in some extracurricular activities. She'd had a shower already—at his place with him.

She didn't know what to say, and he didn't speak again until they were a block from her house. "Oh fuck."

"Was that an order?" she replied spritely before she saw the deadly seriousness on his face. "What is it?"

“The white coupe. Adriana’s car.”

She looked and saw it. Sure enough, it had been the one she’d passed while leaving Darren’s the first time. Then her eyes widened because right in front of it was a familiar metallic baby blue sedan. Brian’s. *Shit*.

“I thought trouble was supposed to come in threes,” she muttered.

“Trouble comes in all sorts of numbers. We knew she had your address. We can face this together.”

“You think she might have a gun?”

“Adriana?” Darren paused, his hand on the door. “No, I don’t. She’s got a whole lot of faults, goodness knows, but I think murder is beyond her. In fact, I’d stake my life on it, and after getting her banned from Le Petit Mort, I’m pretty sure it’s me she’d go after, not you.”

“My ex is here too.”

“What?”

“My ex. His car is parked right in front of Adriana’s. Also *ixnay* on the gun.” She grinned. She could handle getting swatted, and she’d made love more times than she could count in the last twelve hours. She could handle anything. And if not, she was pretty sure Darren could. She put her hand on the door handle. “Come on. I’ll introduce you.”

“So that’s what you meant by trouble coming in twos,” Darren said with a chuckle. “Stay there. I’ll get the door for you.”

She waited while he walked around and opened the door for her. “Shouldn’t I get the door for you? I’m your slave girl, after all.”

“But I’m still a gentleman. Well, mostly.” He gave her a wink. “In any case, you’re only acting or waiting under orders.”

“Good point, Sir.” She smiled and then caught sight of Brian, waiting right on the stoop. He was watching her and Darren. *Good*.

Darren saw where she was looking and smiled. "This is probably the one and only time I'll ask first, but should I give you a kiss now, or should I wait until we have more privacy?"

"A light little kiss, if you don't mind."

"And if I do?"

"Then any kind of kiss you desire, Master."

He leaned over, and his lips brushed against hers for a frustratingly short time. But it was what she asked for. She put her hand in his, and they walked toward the front door of the apartment building. Wherever Adriana was, she was nowhere in sight. Despite Darren's assurances, she found herself looking for places where someone could hide. But more likely Adriana was inside the building.

"Hello, Brian," she said as he stood.

He brushed largely imaginary dirt from his khakis and looked Darren over before saying, "Hello, Lisa."

"What are you doing here?"

"Alice and I broke up, and I called to tell you. I called your house phone, and you didn't answer. You didn't answer your cell. I was worried about you."

*Broke up? So sad. And he was worried?* She'd heard those words before, anytime Brian didn't have a rational reason for why she shouldn't do something she wanted to do. It made him worry.

"I'm a big girl now," she told him. "I've got my own place. I stay where I want to, and if I'm out late at night, it's none of your business."

"And who is this?" Brian sniffed at Darren.

Darren stuck out his hand. "I'm Darren. You must be Brian. Lisa's told me so much about you." The sound of his voice was silken warmth. Brian was sure to think she'd said something good.

Brian shook Darren's hand, although he didn't look happy about it. "You've been sleeping with my wife?"

“Ex-wife,” Lisa interjected quickly.

“Ex-wife. Yeah.”

“Gentlemen don’t kiss and tell,” said Darren.

“You one of those kinky S-and-M types?”

Darren’s face was impassive as the two men stared at each other.

“Darren is my boyfriend,” said Lisa. “Now we’re going to go up to my apartment, and you’re going to stay out here. If you want to talk, you can call, and if I’m not busy, I might answer the phone.”

Brian glared at her and didn’t budge. “He’s one of them, isn’t he? I am not going to let you put your life in danger by—”

“The lady spoke,” said Darren. He walked forward, his shoulder on a collision course with Brian’s, his hand tugging Lisa forward. At the last possible moment, Brian dodged out of the way.

She could hear his footsteps behind them as they climbed the stairs. He was wasting her time. Wasting precious nookie time—no, they’d already used up any time for making out. She had to talk to Brian eventually, but she’d be damned if she’d encourage him to stalk her.

They left the stairs and entered the hallway, and there was Adriana. She was dressed in a short blue dress with lots of cleavage. The dress matched her eyes. Bright pink lipstick completed the pastel picture.

“Lisa,” she said, looking past her for a moment at Darren and then turning her gaze back to Lisa. To Lisa’s surprise, Adriana went to her knees and knelt before her.

“Please forgive this one for her impertinence and her malicious deeds. She has only one thing she can do to make restitution, and that is to offer her humble and inadequate self to you as your slave.”

“Are you, um, talking to me?” Lisa asked.

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“And when you say ‘this one’ and ‘her,’ you’re talking about yourself?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

*Ma’am? That will get annoying very quickly.*

“Some D/s people like to have that sort of conversation as part of their play,” Darren explained.

“Well, I’m not one of them,” said Lisa. “It sounds like a self-esteem problem to me. So you want to be my slave, do you?”

“Damn, she’s hot,” she heard Brian say. “Nothing wrong with a little girl-on-girl action.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” said Adriana. She glanced over at Brian for a second. But rather than mirroring the anger Lisa felt toward him, she actually gave him a grin. One of those “I’m so hot” grins the cheerleaders used to give the football players in high school—and then, of course, it would turn into a “don’t you wish you were special like me?” grin turned at everyone else.

Lisa glanced over at Darren. Was there some kind of protocol she was supposed to use, or was her notion of saying not only no but hell no good enough?

To her surprise, Darren stepped forward. “Adriana, meet my friend, Brian.”

“Oh!” Adriana pretended she was too shy to look Brian’s way, but Lisa wasn’t taken in for a moment. “This one is glad to meet you, Sir.”

“Sir?” said Brian.

“He’s not part of the scene, is he?” Adriana asked.

*His friend?* But Lisa suddenly had a delicious idea. To kill two birds with one stone. “Adriana, there is one very special service you could perform for me, and after that, well, we’re even. Your, er, slavery will be discharged.” Was that debt discharged or slavery ended? Manumitted? Whatever, if she was the top, even for a moment, she would talk as she pleased.

“What’s that, Mistress?” asked Adriana eagerly.

Lisa hesitated. Adriana was creepy, but she hadn't done any actual physical harm, although she'd had opportunities. Lisa leaned over to put her mouth near Adriana's ear. The scent of hair spray was strong. She recognized the brand—not the cheapest but not the best. For a moment she was tempted to tell Adriana she needed to color her hair pink, but she decided to proceed with the original plan instead. She whispered a few words to her and nodded Brian's way.

"Oh? Oh!" said Adriana, a smile forming on her face. "I'll be—I mean, this one will be—"

"I will do nicely," Lisa told her drily.

Adriana got to her feet, then murmured, her voice low. "Between you and me, I'm not really all that into girls anyway." Then she looked over at Brian again.

Lisa pulled out her key and opened the door. She didn't want to see the fallout from her order. Darren came in with her and closed the door firmly behind them, throwing the latch.

"So what did you say to her, anyway?"

Lisa smiled. "I said 'seduce him.'"

Darren laughed. "You really are a—my brat, aren't you?"

Lisa grinned. "I guess I am. Now what?"

"I think you can do anything you set your mind to."

Lisa curtsied. "But what does my master wish of me?"

"Oh, all sorts of things," said Darren. "Starting with pinning you against the wall right there and entering you. But you're almost out of time, so I'll have to take a rain check. Off with your clothes."

She smiled. Good thing he was keeping track of time, because she'd forgotten all about it in the mess. The fact that she'd been wet the whole ride over wasn't helping either. "Yes Sir," she said. "Thank you, Sir." She headed for her bedroom, figuring he'd follow.

"Lisa." His voice stopped her and made her turn around.

"I love you. I don't want what we have to be just one night or one week or one month."

"Oh."

*I can't say that was in the heat of passion, now can I? Do I love him too? Yes.*

"I love you too, Master. And we've got a good thing going, don't we?"

"Yes, we do."

Her first client of the day was the sort of distraction Lisa needed, a teenager with lovely brown-black hair who wanted blue streaks. "I don't want to look unnatural," said the girl. "I just want to look like I come from another planet. But like it's perfectly normal where I come from."

"That," Lisa assured her with a knowing smile, "I can do."

The teenager sank into the chair with the visible relief of someone who expects to be rejected and finds acceptance instead. Lisa remembered her own teenage years and how valuable that ever so rare acceptance was. They chatted about their favorite bands while Lisa laid the girl's hair in foils, bleaching it so it would accept the blue dye.

But when the soon-to-be blue-haired girl was under the heat lamp, waiting for the chemicals to do their work, Lisa was alone with her thoughts again. As usual of late, they turned to Darren.

Undressing in front of him had been pure delicious torture. She knew they hadn't had time for anything—and worse, she knew he knew. But that hadn't stopped him from running a knuckle across her nipple or fingers down her thigh. And he wouldn't let her wear panties. Again. At least he didn't mind her wearing her usual working garb of tight jeans and a V-neck T-shirt, but she was turned on by the time she'd finished getting dressed.

It hadn't gone unnoticed by her friends at the salon that a man had dropped her off, either. Shayla had called Darren hunky, and no one had argued.

*Mine, mine, all mine.* Then came the other thought. *His.*

Lisa shivered. He was picking her up, and then she would be his again. She had no idea what he might choose to do. She felt her heart beat faster. It was a good feeling, but she wasn't sure how she was going to get through the day feeling like that.

"Lisa? Sorry to interrupt whatever was making you smile, but I need to talk to you." It was Miguel, the owner of Curls and Colors. He didn't look like he was delivering good news. The fact that he walked to the back room, expecting her to follow, wasn't a good sign either. He had to know she had to be back to her client in ten minutes. Miguel always kept track of things, always knew exactly where everyone was in the whole salon and what they were doing. And he heard at least half the conversations too, no matter how many were going on at once.

There was a desk, but Miguel didn't bother to move around to the other side of it. It was cluttered with papers, receipts mostly, like it usually was. "You do wonderful things with color, Lisa. Your styling, well—almost as good as mine, but your color work—amazing! I want you to know I've come to think a lot of you during the time I've gotten to work with you. It's been a real privilege, *chica*."

There was a but at the end of that, she was sure, and the words themselves barely registered on her as she waited for it.

"I'll write you a glowing recommendation to anywhere you want to go."

*Oh shit. I'm being fired. He won't call it that. Downsized.* None of the pretty words mattered. Miguel was a flatterer anyway, although he was laying it on way thicker than usual. She'd almost thought he meant some of it.

"I'm closing down Colors and Curls. We'll be here three weeks while you girls and Tony find another place to work. My mother, she is sick, and she needs me by her side. I'll open a new salon there. Of course, if you want to move west..." Miguel's voice trailed off. His mother lived in Huntington Beach.

California would be a long move. Before Darren, she might have considered it. It was farther away from Brian, and she didn't have any real roots in DC. She shook

her head. She didn't know how long the thing with Darren would last, but she wanted to find out. "I don't think so, Miguel, sorry. But I'll think about it."

"Anytime you want to come work for me, Lisa, there will always be a place for you."

She nodded and turned away, numb. "Thanks, Miguel," she said softly. Maybe she had more roots than she'd thought. She didn't want to leave and go work someplace else, with new people. Miguel's team was supportive, and they knew their stuff too. The combination wasn't something she'd find anywhere else.

She took three steps and then turned around. "Miguel? Did you mean everything you said?"

"Sí, absolutely."

"Do you think I could run a salon of my own?" As she asked she realized Brian never really thought she could. He thought it was something she should aspire to, but he didn't believe in her. Darren believed in her, she knew. And she believed in herself. But Miguel knew the business, and she trusted she would get an honest answer out of him.

Miguel considered for a moment. "Yes. You know enough to teach and correct."

"Then I'd like you to do some thinking about how much it would cost for me to buy the place rather than have you close it down. I don't know if I can raise the money, but I'd like to try."

Miguel grinned. "Okay, chica. I can give you a week. After that, I really must start to unwind things here. I won't scare off any of your employees until then."

Lisa blinked. "You told me first?"

The corner of Miguel's mouth turned up. "Nobody else."

"Why?"

"Get to your client, Lisa, or she'll be very unhappy."

She had been keeping an eye on the clock on the wall. She had at least two minutes, and she knew it. Miguel knew it too, so apparently he didn't want to

answer. She walked back to the waiting teenager. Three weeks. And he'd given her a week. Two weeks was standard notice. *Two plus one equals three.*

He'd wanted her to take the place over the whole time. But what mattered now was a teenager under a heat lamp.

"Now let's get you shampooed and dried, and then we can start working on those lovely blue streaks!" The teenager grinned. Lisa turned off the heat lamp and unfolded the foils to take a look. *Perfect.*

She pushed all thoughts about the future of the salon and Darren out of her mind, and focused on making her client a lovely alien goddess.

## Chapter Ten

Darren watched Lisa step out of Curls and Colors a few minutes after six. He was thankful they closed early on Sundays. He couldn't wait to see her again. He'd dropped in on his store in Alexandria to pass the time, but she'd been on his mind all afternoon long.

The way her face lit up when she saw his car made his heart jump. He got out of the car, beat her to the passenger door, and opened it for her. Instead of jumping in, she gave him a big kiss, the kind of tongue-swirling juicy kiss he would have given her if he hadn't wanted to be careful to not embarrass her in front of her coworkers. For once, he was happy to follow her lead. Her body was soft and warm against his as she got up on her toes to reach his lips.

When their lips finally parted, she looked down and bit her lip. She looked cuter than ever. Something was on her mind, though. He was flattered her first thought had been to make out on the sidewalk, even so.

"Let's talk about it over dinner," he said.

"Okay," she said, sidling into the passenger seat. "Wait, talk about what?"

"I don't know." He grinned at her. "You'll have to tell me."

She waited until he got behind the wheel. "You're not psychic, are you?"

"Nope. Am I wrong in thinking you have something to talk about?"

She shook her head. "No, you're not wrong. I can tell I'm not going to have any secrets in this relationship."

"I'm rather hoping neither of us *need* to have any secrets in this relationship."

He'd driven a block when she said, "Wow."

"I've got reservations for a little Afghan place. I hope you like Afghan food?"

"I've no idea!" Lisa laughed. Her laugh made him want to tell her every joke he knew to hear it again. If it took finding new cuisines for her to try to get that reaction, he was up for that too.

"You'll like it," he told her.

He saw her smile the first bite she took, and he knew he was right. Over kabobs and basmati rice, she told him about Miguel's announcement. She was looking at him, obviously expecting some response. It was tempting to say he'd buy the place for her; he was sure she'd make a profit. She'd be his, all the time, even at work. He'd enjoy that, and he thought she would too, but he didn't say a thing. The more he listened, the more he knew him taking over wasn't what she needed. He knew it from the way her voice got excited about the possibilities of moving beyond performing her art by training people. The way she talked about ordering the best styling products. It was clear she didn't want to buy the place because she was afraid of looking for a job. She was confident she'd get one almost anywhere she looked. She wanted to buy the place because it was a chance to do something more.

It was like watching a butterfly flap its wings for the first time. He only interrupted her once, to mention a local bank where he'd had a particularly good experience.

"I really want to do this," she told him, leaning forward intently. "I didn't think I would, but I do."

He smiled. "Then do it."

"But I'm nervous. No, not nervous. I'm full-on scared."

He smiled even wider. "I think I've seen you full-on scared before. Definitely nervous. If you really want something, you're not going to let nerves stop you."

"You think I can do it?"

"Yes."

"All by myself?"

“Selfishly, I’d love to support you, if you’ll let me. But I don’t think you need me. Yes, you could do it all by yourself.”

She smiled. “You’ve only known me for a week.”

*So why is she asking me? And why am I so certain she’ll succeed?* “Every couple has a first week. This is ours.” He couldn’t help but smile, despite the fact that he wanted her to take him completely seriously. “Lisa, I can give you what you want—what I know you want. If you’ll let me, I’ll hold you naked in my arms every night, expect you to obey my every whim when we’re together, push you to do things you may not have ever imagined you’d do. But for this? It’s all yours, baby. I just want to be the man behind the very, very successful woman.”

Her jaw dropped open, and she stared at him. He thought he’d blown it, gone too far too fast, but he couldn’t take the words back. It wouldn’t be honest to say he felt any differently, either about her personal life or her professional life.

“Master.” The one word was all she said, and it hung in the air between them until she spoke again. “Every night?”

“Every one.”

One corner of her mouth turned up, and her eyes sparkled. “Every whim?”

He leaned forward. “You’ll keep your safe word. But yes.” He looked into her beautiful brown eyes. “Every one.”

She sighed. “I’d love that. On one condition.”

He raised his eyebrows, biting back the temptation to agree to it even before he heard it.

“If you ever step foot in *my* salon, you are subject to *my* whim.”

“I’ll linger tantalizingly outside the door.”

She laughed. “You would too. Master?”

“Yes?”

“I’d like to do your hair.”

He blinked. Visions of an incongruous afro of red, white, and blue flashed through his head. *She wouldn't do that. Would she?* The purple streaks looked lovely. On her. "That might have to be, um, well—" Fuck, she'd have him stuttering next. He shoveled some rice and a succulent bit of steak and carrot in to shut himself up.

She laughed. And laughed some more. "Scaredy cat!"

He finished chewing and swallowing. "Darn straight."

"I promise, Master, that I will be on my very best behavior. You have lovely hair, and I want to play."

Best behavior sounded good. He wasn't sure about play.

"And you know I'll please you, because if I don't, you'll punish me, right? That will keep me in line."

"Riiight. Brat."

Lisa pouted, but he could tell from her eyes she wasn't serious about it. "I do occasionally do hair without making it red, or purple, or blue, or even the o-word, you know. Pretty colors come only to those who ask. Nicely."

"The o-word?"

"I wouldn't want to be misinterpreted," she said firmly.

"Can't have that," he agreed. "Lisa Martinez, will you wear my collar?"

Her neck rippled as she swallowed, staring at him like a deer caught in the headlights. For a moment she didn't even breathe. He wasn't going to push her. But it wasn't the last time he'd ask if she said no.

"Yes, Master," she said at last, the words tumbling out. "I think one of those big black leather things with the rings in it would stick out at work, though, and so maybe—"

He put a finger to her lips. "I actually had in mind something more discreet." He reached in his pocket and pulled out a box with a delicate golden chain. Lisa

stayed still while he positioned the choker around her lovely tan neck. It fit perfectly; his guess had been correct. "You're mine."

"Yours." Lisa's cheeks dimpled as she beamed at him.

\* \* \*

Lisa fingered the delicate links of the choker around her neck all the way back to her apartment. It was tight enough to let her know it was there without biting into her skin and discreet enough no one would know it was a collar if they didn't have reason to know. Anyone at the munch would know, though, or at Le Petit Mort or at one of Darren's parties. It had a normal clasp in back. She could take it off any moment she wanted. Like her safe word, the clasp would always be available, yet she didn't think she'd need it.

He parked the car and walked around to get her door. Again. Being a pampered slave girl wasn't all work and no fun. She grinned at him as she stepped out and took his hand when he offered it to her. "Thank you, Master."

"My pleasure, slave girl."

She felt like purring. She let him lead her up the stairs to her apartment. This time there was no Brian, no Adriana, no having to get anyplace. Only her and Darren.

"Master," she asked as they reached her door. "Will you still have parties?"

He took the keys from her hands, fitted one into the lock, and opened the door for her. "Yes. I want to show you off."

*Show me off.* Did he mean the fact that she was his? Or did he mean expose her, like she had been at Le Petit Mort? Or perhaps with even less on, nothing but his collar? She opened her mouth to ask for clarification and then closed it again. She would do it all, she knew, if it was what he wanted. She was his. And he was hers too.

He closed the door behind her as she stepped in. "Everything off. Everything but your collar."

She nodded, all worries about the future gone. “Yes, Master.” She loved saying that word. Even “Sir” seemed pale by comparison.

She stripped off her shirt, her bra, her shoes, her socks, and her jeans until nothing else remained but the golden chain.

“Now mine.” His voice had a roughness that promised desire. The bulge in his pants confirmed it. She was tempted to start there, to brush her hands across his magnificent cock and see if she could make him take her before she finished getting his clothes off. Already there was an ache in her core that wouldn’t be satisfied without him filling her.

Instead she worked at his shirt, one button at a time. A stray thought popped in her head, one that had been bothering her all day. She thought of pushing it down, but she was far too curious. “Master? The whole thing with Adriana this morning, do you know what that was about?”

Darren nodded. “I can make some guesses at least. Word travels fast in our community. As far as Le Petit Mort is concerned, she broke the rules about taking pictures. She won’t be welcome back there ever. But most people realize she wasn’t trying to expose the people she took pictures of—it was all about you. Don’t worry. You’re not even being mentioned by name. If she wants to be welcome in the community again, it will be because she makes it up to you. She may not understand submission, but she has a fetish for its outward form at least. I don’t think she can imagine anything worse than being ostracized in the community.”

His shirt now tossed on the kitchen table, she knelt down to work on his pants. The thought of having him in her mouth made her mouth water, and she was at the right level for it. She wasn’t going to ask any more questions. She didn’t want him distracted from what she was doing.

She unzipped his jeans and freed his hard cock. There was a bead of precum on it already, and she couldn’t resist. She leaned forward and swiped it with her tongue.

“Careful,” he told her.

“Hmm?” That was as much an invitation to do it again, so she did, swirling her tongue around his tip, this time looking up at him.

“You’re wicked.” His hand brushed through her hair. It felt lovely.

“Only around you.” She kissed the tip of his cock and then opened her lips to slowly take him inside her mouth. His cock twitched. She slid down it, taking half of it in until the back of it tickled her throat. She wished she could take it all, but her gag reflex simply wouldn’t let her. *There are other ways to do this.* She drew back, wrapping her hand around the shaft as she did, sliding it up in sync with her lips, and then moving it back down as she slid her lips again down his cock.

His hand tightened in her hair. For a moment she thought he was going to pull her off. “You have to keep following directions,” he said.

That was fine; she had two hands. She lifted one foot and pulled the shoe off it, not really looking at what she was doing. She rotated her hand as she moved it up and down, wiggled her tongue against the ridge on the underside of his shaft. His breathing got faster. His cock swelled.

She got the other shoe off, somehow, and pulled his pants down. She listened to his breathing. He was so close. She could back away now, and he’d probably be so desperate he’d do anything she wanted.

Which wasn’t what she wanted at all.

She wanted his pleasure; she wanted to taste him; she wanted his control. His hand in her hair was enough reminder that he was in charge. *He could push me down if he wants. Or pull me back. Or set the pace by doing both. But he likes this just the way I’m doing it.*

Then he was coming, flooding her mouth with thick and salty cum. She swallowed, feeling him trickle all the way down her throat, and still there was more. She wanted it all. *Yours. Yours. Yours.* She sucked at him, single-minded, even after he was spent.

He let go of her hair and picked her up, pulling her off him. She felt like she had when she’d been spanked, utterly and completely relaxed, tingling all over,

blissfully out of control. She wanted to stay like that, with all her cares melted away.

He carried her to the sink, then poured a glass of water and raised it to her lips. She didn't mind the lingering taste, even though if it had been anything else, she probably would have. But it was him. Still, she drank the water as he tilted the glass toward her, appreciating his consideration.

He carried her to her bedroom. He laid her on the bed and spread her legs. He climbed up between them, his cock already hard again. *He wants me.* She smiled. She loved being the object of his desire. She wanted him badly. But he was hesitating.

"I'm on the pill." She knew she was clean. She knew he'd get up to get a condom anyway if he had any doubts about himself, even if it was all the way back near the door with his clothes.

He entered her, filling her up with one hard thrust. Her hips responded automatically, pushing back up at him, skin against skin. It was hot, animalistic, needy. She loved feeling his cock move inside her wet pussy with nothing in between. Her nails dug into the flesh of his shoulder blades, but she didn't stop because he didn't complain. His weight was on her, holding her down. She didn't complain either, because she wanted it. She felt like she couldn't get up, couldn't move except in response to his thrusts. But there was no place she'd rather be, or any person she'd rather surrender to. Being under his control and having him deep inside her body made her pulse race.

The flutters rippled through her core, soft at first, then building. Then she was thrashing on the bed, and he wasn't stopping. Over and over she felt him pushing through her contracting pussy.

"Oh my master." She gave his butt a squeeze and felt him shudder. *Ahh, baby. Join me.* She felt him pulse, hot liquid shooting deep inside. She shook against him, holding him, him holding her.

*Mine. Ours. And yours, Master.*

## Epilogue

Lisa opened the door, stepped inside, and closed it behind her. She removed her clothes, putting them in a small canvas bag next to the door. She put her purse in the bag as well.

Darren walked in to the foyer, and she knelt, her heart beating faster as it always did the first time she saw him after she came home. He wore a T-shirt and sweats. Usually he waited for her in the living room. "If today you would like a break from the routine, you may join me for cake in the kitchen. I baked. And I'll be taking you out to dinner."

Lisa's eyes glittered. "Will I be wearing clothes for dinner?"

Darren raised his eyebrows. "I'm not that unreasonable, Lisa. Of course you'll be wearing clothes for dinner. They're laid out for you on the bed already."

She wondered how much they covered, how much they revealed. And no, he was never unreasonable. She wouldn't put it past him to find a place where he *could* take her naked.

She got up and followed him to the kitchen. The cake on the table was chocolate, her favorite. There were pieces already laid out, on china plates she hadn't seen before, with a shining silver fork next to each plate and a cloth napkin. The rest of the cake was in the center of the table on the bottom of a cake carrier. The plastic dome top was on the kitchen counter. *Odd. It would keep the cake fresher if it were on top of it.* Still, it was all a lovely, beautiful gesture.

She hesitated. She had gotten used to kneeling before him first thing every evening. It turned her on. It turned him on. Most of the time they made it as far as

the bedroom before they made love, but not every time. It was his choice. But he always chose something wonderful.

“Master, should I sit at the table?” she asked.

“Yes, Lisa. I don’t want to stand on ceremony on your big day. How did your first day as the boss go?”

It had gone fine. Wonderfully, in fact. Everyone seemed so happy to have her in charge. Business was booming. She had been nervous in the morning, and the butterflies hadn’t returned until now. She sat down. He sat down next to her.

“We’re having cake? Before dinner? And instead of...?” She felt her cheeks warm. No doubt they were turning pink. *Before sex. Before fucking.*

He leaned forward. He had the half-amused, half-stern look that usually meant she was in for a spanking. “I thought you might need to take a break, but it appears I was wrong.”

“Sorry, Master.” She wasn’t sorry at all. Part of her thought she ought to tell him no, she’d much rather have cake tonight. But the fact was she wanted it all. And she didn’t have to be dishonest with him or cover up for fear of his feelings. The days of dancing around were over. “I was looking forward to our routine tonight, Master, after such a wonderful but crazy day.”

“Is that true?” He reached over and put a hand on her inner thigh, and she parted her legs for him. She felt his finger penetrate her pussy and knew it had found her wet. Her heart beat faster.

“It seems it is true. Well. No sitting on the chair, then.”

“You want me to kneel on the floor, Master?” The kitchen floor was easily the least comfortable floor to kneel on in the house. She thought about how she would feel, eating there from a plate on the floor. *I guess I’m about to find out.*

“No. Sit on the table.”

She blinked but turned and did as he asked. “Like this?”

“No, on the short side, over here.” He got up and stood in front of where he wanted her to sit. She scooted around.

He grinned. “Perfect.”

She reached for her cake and moved it over next to her. By the time she’d turned back to face him, he was naked. Muscular chest, six-pack abs, hard cock—she took it all in, not really processing the why of it.

He touched her inner thigh. It was a conditioned response now to open her legs for him when he did that. *Looks like cake will wait after all.*

He entered her and kissed her at the same time, his tongue swirling inside her even as she felt him push through her tight channel. His hands grabbed her wrists, the way he often did before he tied her down. Her pulse raced even faster. She loved the way he could take her, not asking but knowing she was always his for the taking.

The weight of him bore her down, and she braced for the cool of the table against her back. Instead, what was under her gave under their combined weights, squishing with a strange stickiness that wasn’t really wet.

“Oh my God, the cake!” she yelled. His mouth clamped on hers again, taking her in a hard, wet kiss.

He pulled back. “That’s right. The cake.” He let go of one hand and reached under her, and she could feel it sliding across her back.

“Too late now—oh!”

He stuffed a messy mix of cake and frosting into her mouth. Sugar and chocolate overwhelmed her as she sucked it off his fingers. They were almost clean when he pulled them out of her mouth and reached into the cake again. He smeared frosting over her breasts, then bent to suck on one.

The top of the cake carrier had been off all along. “You planned this, you bas—you Master!”

He laughed. "If you'd only eaten your cake as you were told," he said with mock regret. His voice softened. "I made two cakes, if it makes you feel any better. The other one is safe and sound."

Then his hips moved, and his cock slid all the way inside her again, and neither of them said another word. For her there was only the feeling of her pussy being filled, her breasts being licked and sucked, her wrists being held down, and the sweetness of chocolate on her tongue.

THE END

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## Sindra van Yssel

I live in Northern Virginia with my partner, my teenage son, and a lot of fish. For many years I was active in our local BDSM community. Yes, people really do the things people do in my books!

By day I work in a public library, where I get to meet all kinds of readers. I've a soft spot for happy endings and characters who learn more about themselves, but I enjoy torturing my characters along the way, too. Hopefully you'll enjoy watching them squirm as much as I do.