



MIRANDA BAKER
SOLOPLAY


SAMHAIN

It takes two to toy with love.

Come Again, Book 2

When librarian Alisa Mane's boyfriend accuses her of being frigid, she sets out to prove him wrong the only way she knows how—with research.

A visit to the local sex shop uncovers the sizzling sensuality locked beneath her cool façade, and she eagerly accepts the opportunity to test sex toys for SoloPlay Enterprises. Under the code name “Sologirl”, she begins exploring her body on her own terms. After all, no one was ever rejected by a vibrator.

Mark Winters needs his new DoublePlay line of toys to hit big, and there's only one tester for the job—Sologirl. She fires his imagination with playfully erotic reviews and never fails to pick a winner. There's only one problem—Sologirl refuses to test the DoublePlay toys for couples. With his company's success on the line, he decides to make his offer again, up close and in person.

One look at the icy hot Mark and Alisa realizes he's her best chance to discover if any man can satisfy her. A red-hot month of experimentation more than answers that question, but now Alisa has another problem—DoublePlay is almost ready for production and her feelings for Mark have nothing to do with business. Is she brave enough to continue playing...with her heart?

Warning: This book contains a sexy librarian, an icy hot businessman, scandalous emails, scorching male/female and female/female play time, and vibrating, well...everything.

eBooks are *not* transferable.
They cannot be sold, shared or given away as it is an infringement on the copyright of this work.

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locale or organizations is entirely coincidental.

Samhain Publishing, Ltd.
577 Mulberry Street, Suite 1520
Macon GA 31201

SoloPlay
Copyright © 2011 by Miranda Baker
ISBN: 978-1-60928-433-6
Edited by Mary Hamilton
Cover by Scott Carpenter

All Rights Are Reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First Samhain Publishing, Ltd. electronic publication: April 2011
www.samhainpublishing.com

SoloPlay

Miranda Baker

Dedication

This one is for the girls:

Lisa, my inspiration in multiple ways;

Mary, my genius editor, who can see the forest *and* the trees;

and Erin, lifelong wingwoman, friend of my heart.

Thank you does not even *begin* to cover it, ladies.

Chapter One

Alisa hoped the lubricated condom would disguise her lack of arousal as Eric pushed inside her. This part never went well, but shutting her eyes made it easier to fake an expression of rapture until it got better. *If* it got better. Having good sex was nowhere near as easy as the romance books at her library made it sound.

Of course, maybe it just wasn't easy for her. Tears welled up beneath her closed lids but she forced them back. She wasn't giving up yet.

Eric shifted above her. A zing shot up her spine, making her gasp. She tilted her hips to catch the edge of whatever had felt so marvelous and reached down to grasp her knees and pull them high, opening to him completely. She concentrated on the hopeful glimmer between her thighs. Her heart beat loudly in her ears and she felt her pulse in her throat. Excitement surged through her. Was it finally going to happen? Was she going to have an orgasm this time?

Eric's hard thrusts inched her body toward the headboard, so she dropped her feet to the mattress and rocked up to meet him, trying to follow his lead. Unfortunately, her enthusiasm created a trampoline effect, double-bouncing him out of her body and making them both lose their rhythm.

Alisa opened her eyes and bit her lip. "Sorry."

He grunted and reached between them, but instead of his usual blunt entry, she felt him flop against her thigh. What did that mean? Had he lost his erection? Had she hurt him? Her cheeks began to heat. She glanced up, hoping his expression would offer some clue as to what was going on but his face was tight and blank. He avoided her eyes as his hand moved furiously between their bodies.

"Umm...do you want me to..." she offered.

"No—just give me a minute." He tried again, pressing against her, but his knuckles were the hardest things she felt as he attempted to shove his soft cock inside her body. His tousled brown hair fell forward, tickling her face, and from this close angle she noticed that one of his nostrils was significantly narrower than the other, a sure sign of a broken nose at some point in his life. A sports accident or a fight? She opened her mouth to ask but realized that would be a mistake. Later maybe, during the pillow talk, childhood injuries might be an appropriate subject matter, but not now.

"Fuck," he said, sliding wetly against her thigh.

Her stomach began to churn. She held perfectly still beneath him, afraid that any move she made would be the wrong one. Abruptly, he rolled off her and she watched him stalk to the bathroom. He closed the door behind him.

She felt the heat in her cheeks spread to her neck and chest. What on earth was she going to say when he came back to bed? Failing to reach orgasm was bad enough, but not knowing how to make it good for him was humiliating. Clearly she was doing it wrong, but Eric wasn't exactly giving her a lot of information to work with. She was ready, willing and eager to do anything to make him come if he would just tell her what to do.

She heard the door open. Her heart began to race.

You can do this. You want this. Just ask.

Eric entered the bedroom fully dressed.

She sat up. "You're leaving?"

"Sorry to—uh—run, but I've got to get back to the bank." He silently retrieved his keys, wallet, watch and cell from her bedside table.

"Will I see you at the coffee shop tomorrow?"

He shook his head. "I'll be in meetings all day."

"Wednesday, then?" she asked softly, reaching for his hand.

His fingers slid out of hers as he took two halting steps away from the bed. "Mmm. Well, no. I don't think we should see each other again."

"What?" Alisa squeaked, pulling the sheet up to cover her breasts.

He shrugged, then frowned and shook his head, gazing down at her. "I'm surprised you care. You didn't exactly look like you were having a good time a few minutes ago. In fact, you never look like you're having a good time. At least my wife has the courtesy to fake it." A bitter smile twisted his mouth.

"You're married?" She snapped ramrod-straight on the bed.

He looked perplexed. "You didn't know?"

"You're not wearing a ring."

Eric held out his hand. "I got soap under it a while ago and it still itches. I thought you knew. I always had it on before."

Apparently, that was before Alisa had scoped him out as a potential boyfriend. She stared in horror at the back of his hand. Sure enough, there was a shallow red line where a ring must usually rest. How had she made such an elementary mistake? She was a librarian, for God's sake! She did research for a living. She smoothed her straight blond hair behind her ears and lifted her chin, refusing to let him see how badly he had shaken her composure. "I didn't know you were married," she said through gritted teeth. "Why would I want someone's husband? Especially since—" She took a breath, trying to decide how nasty she could be, considering she didn't really know where the fault lay.

Eric glared down at her. “Don’t blame me! No man could keep it up for a statue. God, you’re frigid, Alisa.”

“Frigid! Hardly. I’m not the one who couldn’t...who didn’t...” God, what if he was right? Alisa tried to mask her increasing panic with sarcasm. “Maybe you just don’t inspire me.”

“Ha!” he scoffed. “I don’t think it’s possible to inspire you. You could give a guy some help, you know. If you have a clit, it isn’t anywhere I can find. Have you *ever* had an orgasm?”

She stared at him, fear spreading to the tips of her tingling fingers.

“Orgasm,” Eric said slowly, stressing each syllable. “Climax. Come. You do know what I’m talking about, right? I’ve never seen you do it, but hell, you’re the librarian. Look that one up.”

“I know what an orgasm is.”

He nodded. “Good. Because what’s the point of doing it if you don’t come?”

“Excellent question.” Alisa pointed stiffly at the bedroom door. “Get out.”

She didn’t watch him leave the room this time. Instead, she rolled into a more comfortable position on the bed and buried her face in the pillow, clamping her stinging eyes shut until she heard her front door slam. Apparently, choosing a good lover wasn’t like choosing a good book. If that were the case, then Eric, with his slick haircut, Gucci wing tips and expensive watch would have kept her engaged for hours. It hadn’t even occurred to her that he might be married—but that certainly explained his insistence on afternoon sex.

Oh, God, was he right? Was she actually frigid? What if it really was all her fault?

Alisa kept her eyes tightly closed and slowly slid one hand between her legs. She rubbed, sliding her middle finger this way and that. The invasion of her dry finger burned her flesh, and it felt pretty much the same way it did when she washed herself in the shower. Except for maybe...hmm...right there, something glimmered. It seemed to be centered in the small bump of flesh nestled on top of everything.

She trapped the bump under her finger and felt the glimmer again. A zing shot up her spine, reminding her of how she had felt earlier with Eric, reminding her of her failure. Suddenly she felt like an idiot, facedown on the bed, humping her hand. Naked, frigid and stupid. The total package. She wiped her fingers on the sheet, cheeks burning.

The glimmer was gone.

The shrill ring of the telephone made her jump and she rolled over to check the caller ID. She groaned but reached for the phone. “Hi, Mom.” She was careful to strip the emotion from her voice.

“Alisa, dear, can’t you just pretend you don’t know who it is when I call? You know I hate caller ID.”

Her mother’s plaintive voice provoked an immediate apology. “Sorry, Mom. What’s up?”

“Can’t a mother just call her daughter for no reason?”

A mother could, but hers usually didn’t. “Of course. How are you?”

“I’d be better if you sounded happier to hear from me. You and your father—I swear the both of you treat me like a disease.”

Alisa breathed a silent sigh of resignation and began to dress as quietly as humanly possible. Her mom would be furious if she knew she didn’t have her full attention. She tiptoed into the bathroom and let her thoughts drift while she automatically agreed with everything her mother said. Anything she said could and would be held against her in the court of Mom.

She couldn’t entirely blame her mother, though. Twenty-five years of marriage to a man who treated her exactly like she treated her daughter—as someone in need of repair—had put her permanently on the offensive. Still, it was better not to volunteer information that might give her mother ammunition for future conversations.

“Don’t forget we want to come for a visit,” her mother reminded her sharply.

“Huh?” Now that got Alisa’s attention, so much so that she flushed the toilet without thinking.

“Are you in the bathroom?” her mother accused.

“No,” Alisa said, drying her hands. She leaned into the mirror to reapply her sheer, pink lip gloss. Answering the phone had been a mistake—she had taken enough abuse today. No need to be a masochist. She took a fortifying breath. “It was great talking to you, Mom, but I have to get back to work. I just stopped home for lunch.”

“You’re still working at the library, right?”

“Yes—tell Dad I said hi. Bye, Mom.” She replaced the telephone on its charger and took another deep breath, rolling her shoulders as she released a sigh, wondering if there was anything she could do to dispel her growing anxiety. More yoga? Meditation? Vitamin B?

The display in the window of an adult novelty shop down the street from the library popped into her head, and she banished it. No need to dwell on her shortcomings. A woman who couldn’t masturbate successfully didn’t belong in a sex store.

She slipped into her shoes, grabbed her purse and locked her apartment door, but as she wove through traffic on her way back to work, she couldn’t get *Come Again* out of her head. Hope sparked to life inside of her and, once acknowledged, couldn’t be ignored.

She *had* felt a zing—that was something. She pressed her lips together, wishing she could blame Eric entirely for their failure today, but she couldn’t. She hadn’t known what to do, hadn’t been able to tell him. Hell, she hadn’t even been able to tell herself.

She turned onto Front Street and slowed down as she passed the shop, wondering if she could find the nerve to go in after work. Maybe all she really needed was batteries.

She hated to admit it, but Eric might be right—she needed to do some research.

Chapter Two

Mark Winters pushed away from his desk and stood up to pace around his office. After a whopping big bank loan and several months in production, the SoloPlay Originals line was wired and ready for testing.

It was time to take it into the marketplace, but first he needed some honest feedback. Although he had faith in his designs, he also believed in hedging his bets. If the Originals line tanked, it might drag SoloPlay Enterprises down with it and they had worked too long and too hard to blow it now. But how did one find bodies to test-ride sex toys?

He called up the contacts in his cell phone and began dialing ex-girlfriends alphabetically. The worst thing they could do was say no, and it was as good a plan as any. By the time he hit the letter G he was scowling. His exes were all happy to hear from him at first but pissed as hell by the time he hit the middle of his pitch.

Luckily, he had plenty of numbers to call. He never had trouble getting laid. If he wanted a woman, he looked around whatever room he happened to be in—bar, boardroom or weight room—picked one and propositioned her with exquisite politeness. One girl he picked up had been reading Chaucer while jogging at seven miles per hour on a graded treadmill. He had been beyond impressed with her multitasking abilities, and his hunch had played out. An all-night sixty-nine, and he still got hard whenever he passed the treadmills at the gym.

If a woman wasn't interested, she usually appreciated his honesty and simply declined as politely as she had been asked. Rarely, he got a drink dumped in his lap and once he'd been slapped, but he considered that the price of doing business. His great instincts and direct approach worked well for him, in the boardroom and in the bedroom, providing everyone involved had the same goal. In the boardroom, the goal was to make money. In the bedroom, the goal was to get off.

He purposely kept his personal life simple too. Relationships were complicated and consumed time he didn't have while he was getting his business firmly established. In his opinion, the energy required for tact, persuasion and damage control was better used at work. The subtleties of courtship didn't interest him, and he wasn't going to do the whole flowers and chocolate thing, but there was absolutely nothing he wouldn't do for a woman in bed. That was his calling card—great sex, down and dirty or good clean fun, whatever his woman of the moment desired. After all, he had devoted his career to bringing women pleasure in the most fundamental way possible. He was single-minded in his devotion to the female

orgasm. No woman left his bed unhappy. Therefore, he was becoming increasingly confused by his ex-lovers' refusal to help him test the new SoloPlay products.

Only Victoria, of the all-night sixty-nine, was willing to shed any light on the problem.

"I've made a few calls already, Vicki. I don't understand why I'm getting varying degrees of *fuck off* and *hell no*."

Victoria's laugh reminded him of Chaucer. And treadmills. "How old are you, Mark?"

"Thirty-two. Why?"

"How old do you think I am?"

"Twenty-five," he said, shaving off a few years to be safe.

"Nice. I'm actually thirty-one. I can't speak for anyone else, but I'm looking for more than just great sex. Even sex with you," she added drily. "You didn't call me for a hookup, Mark. You just asked me to play with myself! I think it's kind of amusing, but unless you've got something better to offer, you can put me in the *hell no* category too."

Mark sighed. "Thanks, Vicki."

"Take care, Mark. Good luck."

Strikeout.

He hadn't thought it would be this hard to find willing bodies. Unfortunately, he didn't have the necessary equipment to test everything himself, and he wasn't so naive as to think every product he'd dreamed up would be a sure winner in the competitive marketplace.

Could he put sex toy testers on staff? A plan began to take shape in his mind, but he wasn't sure if it was possible.

Or legal.

Chapter Three

As soon as her shift at the library ended, Alisa walked down the block to Come Again. She pulled the glass door open and a bell tinkled overhead, calling attention to her. She glanced quickly left and right before she stepped inside.

The store was cheery and well-lit. She slipped toward the back, walking swiftly through an aisle lined with small, colorful bottles and skirting a man who was closely examining their labels. As she crossed the middle aisle, she saw a knot of customers clustered around a book rack. She paused. A book might help.

Quit stalling, you big chicken. If you could learn it in a book, you'd already know.

She continued to search the store, ducking around a strappy swing hanging from the ceiling and weaving her way through foam cushions scattered on the floor like kinky bean bag chairs.

Alisa stopped short as she reached the back wall.

Bingo. Her heart began to pound. There was an entire wall of vibrators, stacked to the ceiling, in every shape and size, with every conceivable attachment. Some were double-ended. Others were spiked and wiggly. Some actually did, indeed, look like powerful back massagers. She jerked her eyes away from a particularly lifelike model and scanned the wall, overwhelmed by the sheer number, colors and options available to her. Somewhere in this store, there had to be a device that could turn her glimmer into something significant.

Behind her, Alisa could hear two women chatting about butt plugs. She listened, fascinated. One voice in particular caught her attention. It wasn't loud, exactly, but it carried, probably because Alisa expected the words "butt plug" to be spoken in a whisper, not a chuckle. She sneaked a quick peek over her shoulder.

Wow. The woman was...brave?

Admittedly, she had never been in a sex shop and the girl's outfit might be the norm, but chains and black leather tended to draw the eye no matter the locale. She risked another glance.

The leather-clad girl clasped her companion by the arm and led her to another section. *She must work here*, Alisa thought, watching her slide a plastic case into the other woman's free hand. They laughed, and the girl in leather gave the customer a warm hug as she handed her off to a dreadlocked brunette behind the counter for ring out.

Alisa stepped behind an end cap. *Not me, not me*, she thought and breathed again when she heard the girl's low, sparkly voice near the front of the shop where she must be helping the guy in the personal

lubricant aisle. Clearly, he had discovered that the world held way more options than K-Y Jelly. She could relate.

Since the book-browsing crowd had taken off while she was eavesdropping, she and the lube guy were the only customers in the store now. Unless she wanted a personal sex toy consult from that salesgirl, she'd better get moving. Alisa turned back to the wall of vibrators. God, there must be five hundred of them. Maybe she should just grab one and hope for the best. She closed her eyes and reached blindly for the wall.

Just as her fingers closed around a plastic package, she heard a low chuckle right behind her. Her eyes snapped open and she accidentally knocked the toy off its hook.

"I'm not sure you want to go with the 'lucky pick' approach when choosing a vibrator." Leather girl gave her a friendly smile. "Quite a selection, huh?" the girl—woman, really—continued. She was dressed like the hippest of hip Goth teenagers, but she must be at least Alisa's age, maybe a bit older. Her dark eyes were heavily outlined in deep black and highlighted with gold eye shadow. The rest of her makeup was bold too. The effect was exotic and very pretty at the same time.

Alisa gazed at her, unable to do more than nod. As the salesgirl bent to rescue the toy from the floor, her low-cut bustier dipped dangerously and her short leather skirt rode up to the top of her thighs. She replaced the toy on its hook. "I can help you narrow it down, if you like. Do you like to play with your clit or are you a G-spot girl?" The question was absurdly direct, yet inoffensive, as if she were discussing bananas at the supermarket. Sexual pleasure was all in a day's work for her, after all. Apparently she was good at it too, because lube guy was standing at the counter handing over a small, purple bottle as if he were reluctant to part with it for even a moment.

The salesgirl glanced at the counter too. "Breastfeeding wife. Estrogen issues," she offered. "Oops. I shouldn't have told you that."

"I won't tell," Alisa said.

"Thanks. Now back to you, and I promise, really, I won't tell a soul. How do you like to come?"

Suddenly, Alisa could understand how the man, so intent on the labels, so isolated, could abruptly spill his guts to this beautiful stranger. Something about her made Alisa want to confide in her too. There was no judgment in her eyes. No apparent agenda. Well, except sales, naturally. Could she try to be matter-of-fact about pleasure too? She was in a place where every person who stepped through the door had sex on the brain, after all.

The words broke free in a rush. "No clue. I've never done it." She clapped a hand over her mouth. Had she really just said that? Out loud?

"Really?" Leather girl grinned. "Oh, honey. You are going to be so happy you came here! I can set you up so sweet, you'll never want to leave your house again. I'm Crystal." She held out her hand.

Alisa lowered her hand from her face and took it. She felt sparks shoot up her arm.

Crystal arched an eyebrow and her lips curved slightly. “Hmm.” The noise was a faint hum in her throat. She caressed Alisa’s hand with her thumb before letting her go, making her shiver. Goose bumps broke out on her arms, then her legs.

Crystal turned to the wall. “Not the rabbit. The tiger? Nah. Straight vibrating egg? Maybe. With tickler? Even better. Still, I think we’re missing something. You need...you want...hmm.” Crystal made the noise again.

Alisa knew she was staring, but she couldn’t help herself. Crystal had crossed her arms as she surveyed the vibrators, and her breasts spilled over the top of her bustier. The lush, smooth curves looked real, not fake, and yet they were perfect. Alisa suddenly wondered what they would look like naked.

She shifted back and forth in her shoes. The motion rubbed her thighs together and made her aware of the fact that she was getting wet. She froze. If her feet hadn’t felt nailed to the floor, she would have bolted, stunned and ashamed.

Crystal turned to her and smiled. Her black eyes glowed with triumph. “I’ve got it.” Her arm brushed Alisa’s shoulder as she reached to pluck an item from the shelf, and Alisa shivered. “You’re a butterfly girl.” She held up the pink device for inspection.

The wings were made of translucent plastic, rounded and ribbed to resemble the pattern on a real butterfly’s wings. It looked innocent and shiny, like a child’s teething toy, but the silver bullet at the heart of the butterfly proclaimed its sexual purpose.

Alisa’s breath stuttered in her throat and she could feel a light dew of perspiration break out on her upper lip. Her armpits began to prickle. *Breathe*. In through the nose. Out through the mouth. Yoga breathing. Nothing wrong with being gay. Not that she *was* gay.

“You could go with that model over there too, but I like the antennae on this little guy much better. Nice and flexible.” Crystal leaned closer. Her scent was pure musk, a heady, rich aroma that made Alisa think of mink coats and incense. And sex. “Put one on each side of your clit and you’ll be in heaven. It’s also silent. Totally discreet. You could even take it to work if you’re having one of those days. Where do you work, by the way?” Crystal led her toward the register.

As they walked, Alisa noticed an exotic flower tattoo on Crystal’s shoulder, peeking out from underneath her dark, curling hair. She tried not to notice her perfect ass. That her legs were killer. That her walk was easy with a sexuality and body confidence that made Alisa realize she was missing the boat somewhere. Somewhere important.

It took her a minute to remember the question. “I work at the library,” Alisa finally told her.

“Oh, that’s perfect.” Crystal’s dark eyes laughed at her.

“What do you mean?”

“You know, the whole hot librarian thing. It’s classic.”

“Oh.” Alisa bit her lip. Was Crystal flirting with her?

“Let’s check the batteries.” She casually plucked the butterfly from its plastic enclosure and flipped a switch. “Here—feel.” Crystal reached for her hand.

The buzz was insistent against her palm. Transfixed, Alisa reached out with one finger to stroke the whipping antennae. She imagined how that would feel against her...clit. She practiced thinking the word.

She felt Crystal’s glance sweep over her chest and realized her nipples were visible through her thin blouse, begging for attention. She shifted, trying to make her breasts less noticeable. The slide of herself in her damp panties increased her agitation.

Crystal slid the butterfly into a paper bag. “It comes with stock batteries. Do you want a backup set?”

She shook her head and fumbled for cash as Crystal rang up the sale.

“Here’s my business card.” Crystal handed her a pink card along with her change.

Alisa dropped the change into her purse but held on to the card. She gave Crystal a brief smile, afraid to look at her for too long because she knew she would start staring again.

Crystal chatted on. “You are going to love the butterfly. Of course, when you want something inside you, you’ll have to come back for reinforcements. Ask for me when you do. Or give me a call. Helping people find what turns them on is my specialty.”

Alisa glanced at the business card in her hand. *Crystal LaRusso, Sensual Psychic. Get in Touch and Come Again.* Finally, the librarian in her kick-started her brain and she found her voice. “What’s a sensual psychic?”

Crystal’s eyes met hers. “Don’t freak, sweetie, but I know exactly how you’re feeling right now.”

Alisa inhaled too fast, choked, and began to cough.

Crystal’s bright laugh made her cough harder.

“I block everyone out most of the time.” She stepped around the counter. “Took forever to get the hang of that, but I’m pretty good at it now. I usually don’t snoop unless I’m invited, and I’m really sorry about that. I shouldn’t have touched your hand before, but I couldn’t resist.”

“Are you joking?”

“No.” A small smile curved her lips. “Why don’t we go back to my office and talk about it?”

Alisa took a sharp breath.

Warning bells rang in her head. She was in a downtown porn shop flirting with a woman who claimed to be a psychic—if she were less desperate she would get the hell out of here. On the other hand, she couldn’t deny her curiosity. Psychic or not, there was something about this unusual woman that called to her. What if Crystal *could* help her?

She allowed herself to be drawn away from the register.

Crystal called to her dark-haired co-worker, who was now assisting yet another customer in the lube aisle, that she was going to take her dinner break. She pulled Alisa toward the back of the store, where a

door was camouflaged by the rainbow wall of vibrators. Crystal opened it for her, then led her down a short hallway and into a small room.

Although it held a large desk, the room didn't look like an office. The chaise lounge parked against one wall and the red velvet couch in front of the desk made it feel more like a bedroom, especially when Crystal locked the door behind them. The walls were painted an intimate color, a shade somewhere between brick and burgundy, and swathes of exotic material draped artfully over the furniture and lamps increased the sensual atmosphere. Crystal took her hand and led her to the couch. "What's your name?"

"Alisa Mane."

"You got under my skin, Alisa. Not too many girls do that to me. And almost no men." Crystal's lips curved. She took Alisa's other hand and pulled her down onto the couch facing her. "Let me read you again. I'm dying to. I caught a glimpse of desire, and determination, and...hurt."

Alisa had been hiding the hurt part, even from herself.

"May I?" Crystal pressed.

Alisa shifted on the couch. "I don't understand what you're asking me."

"Let me help you understand yourself. You're in a sex shop, but you don't know how you like to come. You feel totally straight, but you came back here with me," she mused. "You're broadcasting so loud I can barely shut you out, but your eyes don't tell me a thing. You keep it all in your head, don't you? What happened to you? Why are you here?"

Again, Alisa felt bound to confide in her. "I skipped lunch to have sex with my boyfriend, then he dumped me."

"His loss." Crystal stroked her palm.

"Not so much. Apparently, I'm frigid."

Crystal's low chuckle was reassuring. "Every jerk who misfires tries to peddle that line. Did you enjoy the sex?"

Alisa shook her head and tried to reclaim her hand.

"Tell me about the hurt," Crystal demanded softly, holding onto her fingers.

How on earth did she know? Alisa shrugged, attempting to banish the lingering depression and anxiety that had been dogging her since her mother's call. What if she never found the man of her dreams? Or worse—what if, like her mother, she married a man who not only didn't satisfy her but also made her miserable? Still, it was ridiculous to talk about her parents' train wreck of a marriage when there was a hot lesbian holding her hand in the back room of a sex shop, for God's sake. *Although, since I'm frigid, I'm unlikely to do anything else,* she thought hopelessly.

She met Crystal's heavy gaze, unable to give voice to her curiosity or desire. Crystal leaned closer, bringing with her the scent of musk, of sex. Alisa shivered, and Crystal soothed her shudders by stroking

her arm. Her eyes grew mischievous. “Well, at least now I know how one hot librarian in Norton likes to spend her lunch hour. Are the rest of them like you?” she asked lightly, letting her gently off the hook.

Alisa smiled, thinking of Beth, her desk mate at the library. “A few,” she answered.

“God help us all.” Crystal reached toward her to tuck an escaping lock of hair behind her ear. “I can’t resist a frustrated librarian who looks like Barbie’s younger sister.” Alisa wasn’t at all surprised when Crystal tugged the band out of her hair. Released from its loose bun, her long blond hair fell in a wave onto her shoulders, down her back.

“Will you let me help you?” Crystal murmured, threading gentle hands through her hair.

Alisa stared at Crystal, so close, stroking her hair. Her eyes dropped to the soft, pale rectangle of skin above her thigh-high boot, then rose to the curving swell of her breasts in their leather confinement. The sharp desire to touch this beautiful woman was unfamiliar and shocking, exhilarating. If she had felt this way with Eric, everything would have been very different.

It was easier than she would have imagined to say, “Yes.”

Crystal’s hand shaped her skull, angled her head.

Alisa stopped breathing. Her eyes slid shut as she waited.

She felt Crystal’s breath, then the touch of her lips. Soft. Sparks flashed behind her eyelids. Breath rushed into her lungs, and she moved into Crystal’s embrace, seeking a deeper connection. She felt Crystal’s smile against her mouth, felt her hand drift across her collarbone, then pause near her breast. She sighed as Crystal’s hand dropped to her lap.

Paper crinkled. Alisa realized she was still holding her purchase when Crystal tugged the bag out of her stiff fingers.

“Product demonstration?” she asked. One dark eyebrow arched in invitation and a smile tilted her lips. Alisa nodded slowly. Heat and electricity charged her skin and her heart began to race. Crystal rose from the couch and walked to the small sink in the corner of the room. Alisa heard water running and realized she must be washing the butterfly.

She waited, barely breathing, until Crystal returned from the sink and slid to her knees on the floor. Soft hands parted Alisa’s thighs, pushing her khaki skirt up to the top of her legs. She held very still when Crystal’s fingers slipped under the elastic of her panties and began to ease them over her hips.

“Lift up.” Now she was naked under her skirt.

Crystal looked at her there. Alisa felt her cheeks burn.

“So pretty,” she said, slipping one finger through Alisa’s moisture with a sure touch, making her jump. Crystal settled the cold plastic butterfly between Alisa’s legs and rocked it against her wetness before she flipped the switch.

Alisa tried to scoot away from the startling vibration, but Crystal held her still with a strong hand on her thigh. “Hang on.” She wiggled the butterfly, moving it down. “Tell me when it gets good.”

Alisa clamped her eyes shut.

Down, down. A glimmer flashed on the backs of her eyelids. Oh, that felt good. Tiny little nibbles, wiggling, flipping. Oh, oh, she felt...

The butterfly dropped out of range. The glimmer receded. Alisa opened her eyes. Crystal was watching her with a gentle smile, crouched between her thighs, holding the butterfly against her with one hand. The position forced her breasts above the top of the bustier, and Alisa could see the rosy edge of one nipple. She wanted to see more. Just the thought made her—

Crystal moved the butterfly up a bit. Alisa couldn't bite back the cry that flew from her throat when the glimmer returned, full force.

"Feel good?"

Alisa moaned.

"Say it." Crystal turned a knob on the vibrator and the butterfly went wild. "Tell me it feels good."

Higher, higher. Crystal moved the butterfly a tiny bit higher and fireworks burst behind Alisa's eyelids. Everything became much brighter, clearer. She felt as if tiny sparks of light were flowing through her veins and into her extremities, lighting up her fingertips, her feet, her lips. So *this* was an orgasm. Alisa opened her eyes, astonished.

"Say it." Crystal's dark eyes encouraged her.

"Yes," Alisa whispered, and with that admission, the sparks exploded. Her hips arched off the couch. Waves of pleasure raced from her center, through her limbs and back again. Alisa chased the pulsing, rippling, tingling, starburst lights.

Crystal continued to do things with the butterfly, things Alisa didn't understand or care about as long as she kept moving the vibrator into exactly the right place at the right time. Alisa kept her eyes shut, but her thighs were open as wide as they could go. She would let Crystal do anything she wanted as long as it felt like this. A whole world of rapture had existed inside her, untapped, invisible until this moment.

Gradually, the glow began to fade. Alisa felt Crystal pull the butterfly away from her. Cool air made her shiver, and Crystal soothed her with knowing fingers. Alisa wanted her to... Actually, she wasn't sure what she wanted her to do, but she was lonely when Crystal took her hands away.

After a minute, she heard water running from the sink in the corner.

When Alisa dragged her eyelids open, Crystal was sitting next to her on the couch with her legs crossed and the bag was sitting on the coffee table.

"There." Crystal's nod was cheerful, not smug. "Not frigid. Unfortunately for me, not gay either."

Alisa mewled a protest and struggled to sit up.

"No, it's okay. I knew that," Crystal said.

Alisa wasn't so sure. She certainly hadn't felt like *that* with Eric. No fireworks, no sparks, nothing. Being gay explained everything.

Crystal stroked Alisa's thigh, smoothing her skirt back into place. "You are definitely on a journey, sweetie."

"I've never felt like that before," Alisa said.

"That, my friend, was just the tip of the iceberg. There are things your body can do, things you've never dreamed existed." Her easy smile made Alisa tingle. "I guarantee that after spending a few weeks with me, the next man you take to bed will not think you're frigid." Crystal's hand was warm on her hip. Alisa reveled in the way her heart beat faster. "I'd also like to help you understand what you need and why you haven't found it."

Doubt pricked Alisa's euphoria. "Are you asking me to be one of your clients?" she asked.

Crystal laughed as she shook her head. "My techniques are unconventional, but I don't have sex with my clients. Jealousy is bad for business." Her hand moved from Alisa's hip to her knee, then dipped under her skirt. "I'd like to have a lot more sex with you, though." She leaned forward.

Crystal's lips whispered over the uncertain line of her mouth at the same instant her long finger slid inside Alisa's body. Alisa's mouth opened in a gasp. The arch of her hips nearly knocked them both off the wide couch. She felt Crystal's touch everywhere—on her lips, where Crystal's supple mouth skated and slid with such knowing skill, on the bright points of her nipples, burning beneath her bra, and between her legs, where Crystal's fingers were quickly building another inferno. She opened her thighs in invitation.

Crystal filled her with one finger, then two, then three, an impossible fullness that made her groan. She thrust her hips in a short, tight arc that made bright flames flash behind her eyelids.

"That's right. Follow the lights," Crystal encouraged. She continued to press soft kisses on Alisa's lips. Her tongue teased the corners of her mouth, darting inside in a deeper kiss that mimicked Alisa's frantic motions against her hand. "I've got two fingers pressed against your G-spot, by the way. Can you feel that?"

"Yes, yes, I, ohh—" Pleasure rushed through her in a languid wave, lifting her toward another kind of satisfaction.

"Wait." Crystal darted across the room, shedding her bustier as she went. She pulled a plastic container from a small display rack next to her desk. Alisa's brows drew together in question as Crystal extracted a thin, slim-tipped, purple wand from its packaging. She groaned as Crystal paused at the sink.

Finally, she strode back to the couch. Her breasts, now freed from confinement, bounced gently. The high curves were as perfect as Alisa had imagined them, and her mouth watered at the sight of Crystal's dark pink nipples. She swallowed and licked her lips. She felt a blush color her cheeks. She wanted to watch Crystal have an orgasm too.

"After you." Crystal laughed softly.

Psychic, right. Alisa was sure her face was fiery red now.

Crystal slid onto the floor again and pulled Alisa's hips to the edge of the couch. She yanked the skirt off her hips and slid it down her legs, urging her knees apart with one hand. Alisa clenched and wiggled beneath her intent gaze. "Oh, that's hot," Crystal said before she dipped her head and licked the bright spot within her folds.

Alisa screamed. No one had ever done *that* to her before. Dimly, she heard a buzzing, and then felt a cool, hard, tickling slide. It made her skin itch, then sing, with pleasure.

"What is that?" Alisa gasped hoarsely. She watched Crystal move the device ever so slightly side-to-side inside her quivering body.

"G-spot vibe. SoloPlay's finest. Hang on."

Alisa's hands clawed the cushions as the soft waves of pleasure returned with hurricane force. She spread her legs to give Crystal full access, spread so wide that her butt began to spasm, but even the cramping muscles couldn't pull her focus from the insane waves of need pulsing and beckoning between her thighs. She heard a keening sound and knew she was screaming again, but how could she stay silent when it felt like she was going to implode?

"Let it take you, Alisa." Crystal dipped her head.

Alisa climaxed in helpless spasms that flashed radiantly, engulfing her, blinding her. Every new touch, every soft breath sent ripples of ecstasy that lapped at her fingers and toes and then rushed back to her center, where Crystal's tongue still moved against her.

At last, Alisa moaned, "No more." She slumped on the couch.

The vibration left her body, replaced by Crystal's hand as she continued to gently soothe her, to ease her back to sanity.

Alisa cracked her eyelids. The world looked different to her now. "Holy shit," she whispered. Her gaze rested on Crystal's hand as it moved between her thighs, still making her tingle. Gratitude welled up inside her and Alisa suddenly wanted to bring Crystal the joy she was feeling. She struggled to find her voice.

"Show me what to do," Alisa whispered. "Touch yourself. Show me what I look like when I...come." As the words left her mouth, she realized it was the first time she had ever asked for anything during a sexual encounter. Apprehension made her body feel tight and cold. She looked at the floor, the walls, the door, everywhere but at Crystal, who now had the power to deny her. Alisa closed her eyes against the panic. She felt Crystal pull her hand away, sensed her rising from the floor. She blinked away tears, ready to bolt, but when her vision cleared, Crystal stood in front of her.

"Relax, Alisa. I'm glad you asked me to come for you." She inched her leather skirt above her thighs and slid her black g-string over her hips. She was shaved bare, except for a small patch of dark hair above her mound. Her puffy outer lips pouted around the swollen, pink folds. She braced her knees against the couch, on either side of Alisa, who stared open-mouthed as Crystal used one hand to pull her labia taut and

the other to ruthlessly pluck her pink clit as she ground against her fingers. Moisture coated Crystal's finger as she opened to her own touch. "This is going to be quick," she warned.

Alisa couldn't take her eyes off her. *You want to touch her—do it.* Before she lost her nerve, she leaned forward to touch Crystal's wrist. "May I?" she asked tentatively.

Crystal's smile felt like a gift. "Oh God, yes." She pressed her hips forward.

Alisa replaced Crystal's hands with her own and drew her folds apart. She slid one finger, then two, into Crystal's slippery center. It felt wet and tight as Crystal's body made room for her fingers, embracing them with heat, easing their way. She searched for the spot Crystal had been touching and found a bump, similar to her own. She rubbed it. Crystal gasped. She rubbed harder and Crystal began to moan and buck, balancing her weight against Alisa's hands.

Emboldened by the enthusiastic response, Alisa pulled her down to the couch to get a better angle. Crystal hooked one leg over the back of the couch and dropped the other foot to the floor. "Yes, right there. Harder. Yes! That's wonderful."

Every instinct Alisa had was urging her to dig deeper, ask questions, explore. She gained confidence with Crystal's every moan and sigh. Finally, she leaned forward to pull the tip of Crystal's soft breast into her mouth, admitting to herself that she had wanted to do just that from the moment she saw her. She caught her nipple between her lips and tugged. Crystal's body began to tighten around her fingers, and another kind of satisfaction burst within her.

She had found more pleasure with Crystal in one short afternoon than she had ever thought possible. It gave her hope. She wasn't frigid, although she now understood Eric's confusion, if not his insensitivity. She hadn't tried to share her thoughts or feelings with him. Growing up hearing her parents' constant battles had taught her the tactical value of silence. In the long run her silence had done more harm than good, but today she had taken the first step toward sharing herself with a partner. The easy chemistry she felt with Crystal was comfortable and exciting. Somehow she knew that Crystal would not hurt her, even if she could sense every whispered emotion inside Alisa's heart. There would be no lies, no misunderstandings, and Alisa wouldn't have to tell her a thing. She would already know. And maybe, just maybe, Alisa could learn how to tell her too.

Chapter Four

On Monday morning, Mark grabbed a box of freshly printed business cards from his office and headed down the block to Come Again, the first shop on his customer list. It had taken him a solid month of endless meetings with his lawyers, drinking gallons of coffee and trying to sound as rational as possible, but SoloPlay Enterprise's newest division, Product Evaluation, was a go. Now he just needed to find applicants to test the SoloPlay Originals line.

He reached the door of Come Again and opened it. The bell tinkled and he ducked beneath it to enter the store. He scanned the room.

At Come Again, appearances were pleasantly deceiving. The shop itself looked more like an upscale greeting card store than an adult novelty shop, but Mark knew that the shelves didn't hold cards. They held a wide-ranging selection of erotica. The store offered everything from exquisitely crafted, three hundred dollar blown-glass dildos to garden variety handcuffs. A customer could locate an inexpensive pair of edible underwear or a thousand-dollar portable bondage bench, all while enjoying the soft lighting, tasteful signage and plush carpeting of the luxurious store.

He spotted Bonita Pritchard, his favorite client, behind the counter. He liked her not only because she and her assistants, Crystal and Destiny, moved tons of SoloPlay items, but because he admired the classy atmosphere she had created at her store. In fact, if she had sold coffee, he would probably come here to have his frequent brainstorming sessions instead of the coffee shop down the street.

"Hey, Mark. I wasn't expecting you until Friday. The order isn't ready yet." Bonita greeted him with a handshake and a welcoming smile.

He smiled back at her. The homey impression of the sex shop wasn't the only misleading appearance at Come Again. If Mark could believe the rumors, the owner's calm, green eyes and sleek, blond hair disguised a predilection for hard-core bondage. Not that there was anything wrong with that. Mark enjoyed the contradiction between Bonita's tightly controlled, businesslike demeanor and her purported soul of true kink. In fact, he would have gone down that road with her in a minute if she had ever displayed the slightest interest in him.

"I'm not here for the order. I have a favor to ask. Are Crystal and Destiny around?" he asked.

Bonita shook her head. "Crystal has a client and Destiny went to lunch."

"Too bad. I was hoping to talk to all of you." Well, maybe not Crystal. She made him uneasy in a way he couldn't quite define. It felt like she expected something from him and he couldn't figure out what it

was. It wasn't sexual because Crystal liked girls, but it bugged the hell out of him to feel like she knew something he didn't.

"What can I do for you?" Bonita asked.

Mark got down to business. "Willing bodies for pay. SoloPlay is launching an original line of toys, and we need some feedback."

"Congratulations, Mark."

"Thanks." They shared another smile. "Can you help me do some discreet recruiting? I'm looking for dependable, adventurous sex enthusiasts willing to fill out online surveys. The toys are free, and we'll pay monthly. Anonymity guaranteed. All responses will be confidential. My lawyers are going apeshit," he confided.

"I can imagine."

"So, do you think any of your customers would be interested?" he asked her.

She nodded. "I think it sounds like a dream job. Applicants are going to be crashing your server. The girls and I will make sure of it."

"Excellent." Mark handed her a stack of business cards. "Hand these out to anybody you think will be a good match. The url for the application is on the card. Response time will vary, but we'll try to get back to everyone as quickly as possible. Please let everyone know we'll have to collect some personal information to weed out the cranks."

"Of course. Only serious sex toy lovers allowed, got it," Bonita said drily. "Do I get a preview of the new line?"

"Nope, but you're a shoo-in if you'd like to test the products."

"No time for that. How about a hint?"

Mark gave her a smile he usually reserved for women he wanted to sleep with. "Let's just say our new vibrator can do everything but scream."

"Oh my." Bonita's green eyes glowed. "Sounds like a winner to me."

"Sure hope so. Thanks for your help, Bonita. I'll see you at the end of the week."

Mark smiled his thanks and headed for the door, eager to make his next stop.

"Thank you," Alisa murmured to the woman who held the door for her as she entered the shop. For the last month, she had been stopping by Come Again every night on her way home from work to see if Crystal was free for dinner. It had been so slow at the library this afternoon that Irene had been happy to let her go a few hours early. Alisa might be missing a few bucks on payday, but right now playing hooky felt wonderful. "Hi Destiny, Crystal in the back?" she asked.

Destiny looked up from the computer screen. “She’s with a client, but she should be done at 3:30. Last client too. You gonna wait or you want me to give her a message?”

“I’ll wait.” Alisa wandered over to the periodicals. The naked curves on the cover of a book entitled *What Every Bi-Girl Should Know* caught her eyes, so she tugged it from the rack and plopped down onto one of the sex cushions on the floor to read. Destiny laughed.

Alisa returned her grin and tucked another pillow behind her back. She turned her attention to her book and settled down to wait. When Crystal appeared above her sometime later with her purse over her shoulder, Alisa was deeply immersed in a chapter entitled *Fifty Ways to Love Your Lover* and her cheeks felt warm. She held up the book. “Is this even possible?”

Crystal’s slow smile was indulgent. “Sure—wanna try it? I think we’ve got something like that on the back wall.” She was already moving away from her.

Alisa stood and put the book back on the shelf, hurrying after her. “You don’t have to pay for it.”

“My treat, believe me.” Crystal returned carrying a U-shaped double dildo. “Put it on my tab, will you, Des?”

“You bet. Have a good time, you two.” Destiny gave them a cheerful wave.

Crystal held the front door open for her. “I missed lunch today. You want to grab an early dinner or are you too fired up to wait?”

“Hmm. I’m starving too. Let’s get takeout from Wegman’s,” Alisa suggested.

“Perfect.”

They took Alisa’s car to pick up the food and then drove back to her place where they settled themselves in front of the TV to eat. A month ago Alisa never would have believed such easy contentment was possible—but here she was calmly scarfing a sub while Crystal ate her sushi and they both planned to spend the rest of the afternoon having sex. *Good sex.*

Alisa finished first, so she gathered up her trash and flopped on the couch to unwrap the dildo from its plastic packaging. She held it up. “Gonna take some serious pelvic floor control to make this work,” she mused.

Crystal’s lips curved in a mischievous grin. “We might not even get it right the first time,” she warned in a solemn voice. Her dark eyes began to glow in a way that never failed to elicit a spark in Alisa, making her groan softly, deep in her throat, already getting wet in anticipation of their play.

Alisa grinned and flipped a switch. The dildo began to hum. “It vibrates too.” She ran her finger along the smooth ridges that lined each inner curve of the device, already imagining how good it would feel stroking her G-spot and thinking about how tightly she would need to squeeze her inner muscles in order to fuck Crystal with the clever toy.

“Are you done eating yet?” she asked impatiently.

Crystal chuckled. “I’ve created a monster.”

Hurt gathered inside Alisa and Crystal flinched. “Sweetie, I was just kidding. I love your enthusiasm. You know that.” She put her chopsticks down and moved closer to Alisa on the couch.

Alisa accepted her embrace, sighing softly. “I know.” She mentally shook off the insecurity that had threatened to ruin her mood and wrapped her arms around her friend. Her fingers brushed against the laces of Crystal’s tight black corset. Impossible to resist. She tugged at the bow.

Crystal smiled. “That’s better.” She arched one dark eyebrow. “So, you want to be on top or on the bottom?” she asked.

“Top,” Alisa replied instantly. “It was my idea, after all.”

“You got it, kid.” Crystal turned to gather her trash from the end table. She headed for the kitchen, loosening the rest of the laces as she walked.

Alisa quickly pulled her shirt over her head and shucked her bra. As she stood up, she pushed her black pencil skirt over her hips and stepped out of her pumps. “Last one naked has to make the coffee in the morning,” she called over her shoulder as she streaked down the hall toward her bedroom.

The next morning, Alisa awoke to the sound of her coffee grinder. She heard water running in the kitchen sink. Stretching, she rolled onto her back and hoped Crystal would bring a cup of coffee to her in bed. She glanced at the clock, glad it was only seven and she didn’t have to be at work for two hours.

A few minutes later, she heard Crystal padding down the hall. She sat up and greeted her with a smile. “Good morning. Thank you.” She accepted the steaming cup.

“Fair is fair.” Crystal returned her smile, but the expression in her eyes made Alisa pause before she took her first sip of coffee.

“What?” she asked. “You look awfully serious this morning.”

Crystal motioned toward the mug. “Drink up, sweetie. We need to talk.”

Alisa took an obedient sip, but she was suddenly wide awake.

Crystal set her own mug on the bedside table and joined her on the bed. Her bare thigh was warm against Alisa’s hip as she hooked one long leg over Alisa’s knee and pressed close. Crystal gave her a light squeeze. Whatever it was, it couldn’t be that bad.

Crystal sighed. “I think it’s time to call it quits, sweetie,” she said, patting her gently on the hip. “It isn’t fair of me to monopolize you.”

“Are you kidding me?” Alisa struggled to disentangle herself from Crystal without spilling her coffee. Could getting dumped while naked be habit-forming?

Crystal held on. “I’ve had a wonderful time with you. I love your sense of adventure and your openness to, well...everything.” Her wicked grin coaxed a reluctant smile from Alisa. “I’m honored that you began your journey with me, but I think it’s time for you to look for Prince Charming again.”

"I don't want Prince Charming. I want you. I like this," Alisa protested.

"I know, sweetie, I like it too, but I'm holding you back."

"What about you? Why aren't you out there finding *your* handsome prince?"

"One handsome prince was enough for me. Trust me. I'm way more into Cinderella than the ball."

Crystal flicked a dark eyebrow in Alisa's direction. "But I have an interesting opportunity for you." Crystal got out of bed and padded naked across the room. She rummaged in the pocket of her leather pants, discarded on the floor yesterday, and extracted a small card before returning to the bed.

Alisa stared at the black business card and raised an eyebrow. "SoloPlay Enterprises?"

"Mark Winters needs testers for his new line of original sex toys. It's the perfect opportunity for you, sweetie. You can continue to explore your sexuality but you won't have an excuse not to date."

She stared at Crystal, remembering their first time together in the shop, thinking about how shy she had felt. She had been frozen by her desire, terrified to ask for what she wanted. That was certainly not the case now, but that was only with Crystal. What if her new confidence didn't apply to other lovers?

"Exactly," Crystal agreed. "You need to get back out there or you'll be afraid forever. It doesn't have anything to do with you and me. We'll always be friends, good friends, I promise. In fact, if I see a handsome prince roll in the door of Come Again, I'll send him straight to you, but until then, why don't you let SoloPlay Originals pick up where we leave off?" Crystal tossed the business card onto the bedside table and took Alisa's coffee out of her hands before she sat down next to her and wrapped her arms around her. "It's time, sweetie."

Alisa nodded, not convinced, but honest enough to admit that she wasn't entirely miserable that Crystal was ready to set her free. Actually, a small part of her was relieved. The more time they spent together, the more it became clear that Crystal was searching for something too, something that she wasn't finding with Alisa, although she was willing to look for hours on end and to the great satisfaction of them both. "All right," Alisa said reluctantly.

"Good." Crystal ducked her head to kiss her, playfully nipping her bottom lip. "Because I already applied for you." Her lusty laugh took the sting out of the betrayal. "I'll let you know when your first selection arrives at Come Again...Sologirl."

"Huh?"

"Sologirl. I thought you might want to protect your privacy, so I gave you a code name and said you wanted to pick up your deliveries at the shop. It sounds like a great gig, by the way. You play with the toys, fill out an online survey, and they send you a check every month. I bet you won't even miss me, and if you do, well, you know where to find me." Crystal cupped Alisa's cheek with one hand and kissed her. She pressed her down onto the bed and stretched out on top of her, chuckling. "How about one more time since I didn't get to be on top last night?"

Alisa forgot all about SoloPlay until she got to work that morning and found Crystal had tucked the business card into her purse. It was hard not to feel rejected and abandoned, but it helped that Crystal was obviously trying to maintain a connection between them. Their sex this morning had felt different, though—more friendly than hot. She laughed out loud, reminding herself that a month ago even friendly sex would have seemed like a miracle. Now she was a connoisseur?

“What’s so funny?” Her desk mate looked up from the books she was discharging.

“Nothing,” Alisa replied. She casually shifted her monitor so that Beth couldn’t see her screen and typed *Mark Winters SoloPlay Enterprises* into her search engine.

From the numerous links that appeared on her screen, she could tell that SoloPlay got a lot of press. She clicked the first link and learned that Mark Winters was a hometown boy, a graduate of nearby Norton College and the Norton Business School. The second link informed her that he had been spotted at a popular restaurant enjoying paella last week. She snorted and clicked around looking for pictures, without success. Apparently Mr. Winters kept his image, if not his dietary preferences, private. She shrugged and closed her browser, deciding that she would stop by Come Again and talk to Bonita after work.

The day passed quickly. Beth was in the middle of a romantic crisis of her own, so Alisa nodded and sighed, sympathetically listening to her friend’s complaints for most of the day. As she left work that evening and headed down the street, she wondered if Beth would be interested in replacing her loser boyfriend with a nice, dependable vibrator from Come Again. Perhaps she would suggest that tomorrow.

“You spend any more time here, I might try to hire you,” Bonita warned as she entered the shop.

“Funny you should mention that.” Alisa flashed the SoloPlay business card at her.

Bonita’s unusually green eyes lit with pleasure. “How perfect!” she exclaimed.

Alisa cocked her head to the side. “Why do you say that?”

“Because I like Mark and I hope he succeeds. SoloPlay sells excellent products but it’s always risky to try something new.”

Alisa was glad that Bonita approved of Mark Winters, but wasn’t ready to commit to the idea. “I haven’t decided to do it yet.”

“It probably seems a little strange.” Her smile was understanding.

“Like sex for money,” Alisa confided, pursing her lips.

“I suppose that’s one way to look at it, but I would say it’s more like working freelance. They aren’t paying you for sex. It’s the information they want—the dirty details,” she joked.

“I’ll have to think about it,” she said. “Is Crystal in the back?”

Bonita nodded. “She took a late client.”

Alisa wondered how many late clients she had refused over the past month. Had Crystal's defection been more about Alisa holding Crystal back? She turned her attention back to Bonita. "Will you please tell her I stopped by? I think I'll head home to do some research."

"Sure thing."

"Thanks, Bonita."

As she drove home, she worried that the SoloPlay job was just a convenient way for Crystal to get rid of her. Maybe Crystal had gotten bored and was trying to let her down easily. For a moment she gave in to the pity and her eyes began to water, but as she pulled into her apartment parking lot she realized she was being silly. Crystal had reassured her several times this morning that they would still be friends. Good friends, which, if Alisa was honest, was enough for her. She parked the car. Crystal was right—it was time to move on.

She got out of the car and locked it, wondering if SoloPlay was the right move for her to make. She didn't have to do it just because Crystal had signed her up. She unlocked her apartment, dropped her purse on the couch and sat down at her desk to make a list of pros and cons. When she was finished, she got the business card out of her purse and typed the SoloPlay website address into her browser. She explored the application process Crystal had so helpfully completed for her. After carefully reading the FAQ and the Privacy Policy, every item on her con list had been eliminated, which left her with the pro side—free sex toys and a paycheck.

She had to admit the idea of being the first one to try something new was intriguing. The SoloPlay products she had seen so far were impressive, but other companies sold similar items. Curiosity hummed to life inside her and she decided she didn't have anything to lose by giving it a try, at least once.

What exactly did Mr. Mark Winters have in mind?

Chapter Five

Her question was answered two weeks later when Crystal texted her early in the day to let her know her first SoloPlay item had been delivered to the shop. She and Crystal had stayed in touch with frequent calls and texts and even had dinner a few times since the morning of their breakup. There was no awkwardness between them and her friendships with the Come Again girls continued to grow. Alisa hurried to the shop after work and found Destiny at the counter.

“I hear you’re moonlighting.” Destiny greeted her with a sly smile. She reached under the counter and came up with a medium-sized brown box. It had her name on it in Crystal’s handwriting.

Alisa nodded. “I don’t really know what to expect.”

“Orgasms, I would imagine.” The other woman’s matter-of-fact expression made her laugh. “Crystal will be back in a minute if you want to wait for her. She went down the street to get coffee.”

“I think I’ll head on home,” Alisa replied, tucking the box under her arm.

Destiny gave her a wicked grin. “Can’t say I blame you. Have a good night.”

Alisa grinned back. “Tell Crystal I’ll call her later.”

“Sure thing.”

When Alisa got home, she dropped her purse on the dining room table, wrestled the tape from the top of the box and pried the flaps open. She lifted out the protective packaging and set the paperwork aside. She swallowed hard.

It was big.

A tingle started between her thighs as she examined the hot-pink double dildo. She lifted it from the box and removed the tag, discovering a complicated-looking harness and a single-use tube of lubricant in the bottom of the box. She choked back a nervous giggle and took a deep breath. She was going to have to read the directions.

Alisa carried the dildo to the sink and washed it thoroughly before returning to the table. After a few minutes spent perusing the diagrams, she realized it wasn’t as complicated as it looked. She unbuttoned her khakis and pushed them along with her underwear to the floor. She pulled the black harness out of the box and stepped into it, feeling silly as she realized she needed to insert the dildo first.

She coated the dildo with a generous amount of lubricant and started over.

The device was made out of a flexible material that was designed to adjust to fit the space between her pussy and ass. She had to take several deep breaths in order to relax her anus enough to accept it, but by the

Miranda Baker

time it was halfway inside her, she was incredibly aroused. One more steady push and it filled her completely. She gasped.

Just for fun, she pulled it out and began again, sliding the dildo into her body a little faster, a little harder this time. She groaned aloud. The dildo filled her so snugly, she wondered why it came with a harness. It certainly wasn't in danger of falling out. What would it feel like with vibration? She shivered in pleasure and reached for the directions again.

RE: Vibrating Double Dildo

Thurs, Mar 31, 2011 7:26:36 AM

From: Mark.Winters@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

To: Sologirl@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

Dear Sologirl,

Thank you for completing the Vibrating Double Dildo survey. We thought that the addition of a spring harness to that particular device would be pleasurable. Glad to hear you agree. In fact, marketing would like to know if we can quote you on the package. The phrase "full-body orgasm machine" should move a lot of product. You certainly have a way with words.

Sincerely,

Mark Winters, President and CEO

SoloPlay Enterprises

Alisa hit reply.

To: Mark.Winters@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

Re: Vibrating Double Dildo

Dear Mr. Winters,

Believe me, the pleasure was mine. You may certainly quote me. It's the least I can do to thank you for creating such a lovely device. I may go broke buying batteries, but it will be absolutely worth it.

Yours,

Sologirl

She giggled as she hit send. When she got to work she couldn't resist sneaking into her SoloPlay e-mail account to see if Mr. Winters had replied. Thank goodness Beth was helping out in acquisitions today.

RE: Vibrating Double Dildo

Thurs, Mar 31, 2011 9:15:29 AM

From: Mark.Winters@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

To: Sologirl@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

Dear Sologirl,

We can't have you going broke before you get your first paycheck. I'll tell Shipping to include extra batteries for you. Enjoy.

Mark Winters, President and CEO

SoloPlay Enterprises

Alisa closed out the screen, but she couldn't get rid of the smile on her face. She was already looking forward to the next SoloPlay shipment.

Two weeks passed before Crystal texted to tell her that another delivery had arrived for her at Come Again. Alisa retrieved her package from the shop and raced home. She ripped open the box—the toy was tiny but, as promised, there were several extra batteries included. She grinned and sat down at the computer.

To: Mark.Winters@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

Subj: Batteries

Dear Mr. Winters,

You darling! I haven't tried the Lipstick-Mini yet (and I'm hoping that size doesn't matter) but I wanted to thank you for the extra batteries. How thoughtful!

Yours,

Sologirl

She quickly checked for messages in her other accounts but couldn't resist logging back in to SoloPlay to see if Mr. Winters had sent her an immediate reply. He had. Her heart began to race as she clicked on the new message.

RE: Batteries

Tues, Apr 12, 2011 5:39:14 PM

From: Mark.Winters@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

To: Sologirl@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

Dear Sologirl,

Size matters...but not with vibrators. And you are welcome for the batteries.

All my best,

Mark

She chuckled. Mr. Winters must think quite well of himself. She wondered for a moment whether his partners would agree with him. As Sologirl, she was glad she didn't need to worry about a partner. She'd be up to her ears in sex toys before long and if the rest of the SoloPlay Originals were anything like the Vibrating Double Dildo, that would make her a very happy woman. Filling out the survey had been great fun too, and playing solo also had another huge benefit—she didn't have to wonder if her sex toy was going to dump her while she was naked.

Crystal had been wrong. She wasn't ready for another partner, but she was enjoying this back and forth e-mail exchange with...Mark. In her mind, she pictured him as pale and squishy, with unfashionably framed spectacles—a man so task-oriented that he could ask her to masturbate for hours on end with the clinical detachment of a laboratory technician observing a Petri dish. A man who saw dollar signs in orgasms. A cold but imaginative fish. She got a charge out of sending him flirty little e-mails that might make him sweat beneath his pocket protector and no-iron collar.

She twisted the end of the Lipstick-Mini. Vibrations roared beneath her fingers. Still looking at the computer screen, she slipped her hand beneath her skirt.

Mark sighed as he sent off his response to Sologirl. He was glad someone was getting off. He was working all the time now, interpreting data and crunching numbers, and he didn't have time to find a new partner. Since there was no way he could call any of his ex-girlfriends after the responses he had gotten over his SoloPlay Originals requests, he was forced to take matters in hand several times a week. Every time he jerked off, he pictured Sologirl, naked, upended on a pile of pillows with the Double Dildo rammed to the hilt in her hot body.

At least, that had been the image in his head last week. This week he would probably picture her with the Lipstick-Mini. At work. On her coffee break. He groaned as his dick rose again. Maybe he should get out of here early tonight and get laid.

The idea didn't hold his interest like it should. Instead of leaving, he began an e-mail to Product Development, detailing the order in which he wanted them to ship the rest of the prototypes.

What did he want Sologirl to get next?

Not every product Alisa received from SoloPlay over the last few months had packed the punch of the Vibrating Double Dildo and the Lipstick-Mini; however, she wasn't complaining, especially not this week. The SoloPlay Screamer held the place of honor in her nightstand at the moment and maybe always would. In fact, it had been difficult to tear herself away from the device to complete the survey, and even now she felt compelled to make sure Mark knew just how much she liked it.

To: Mark.Winters@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

Subj: *Still screaming, a week later*

Dear Mr. Winters,

It's Sunday afternoon and I've been screaming in bed, screaming on the couch, screaming in the shower. Waterproof—brilliant! I'm never leaving my apartment again and work is not going to understand. Is there any chance for a raise? I'm going to get fired and it's all SoloPlay's fault.

Yours,

Sologirl

P.S. *What's next, boss?*

Alisa logged off and stood up, knowing she couldn't just sit around and wait for him to reply but seriously tempted to do just that. She looked forward to Mark's e-mails almost as much as she looked forward to the arrival of each new toy. She loved telling him how much she enjoyed his creations in explicit and erotic detail. Lately she had spent more and more time crafting her survey responses, knowing he would be reading them.

She forced herself to go to the gym before she checked her e-mail again. A girl had to have some discipline, after all. To prove that point, she put herself through a punishing workout on the elliptical before she headed home. She logged in and grinned.

RE: *Still screaming, a week later*

Sun, June 26, 2011 3:39:14 PM

From: Mark.Winters@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

To: Sologirl@SoloPlayEnterprises.com

Dear Sologirl,

Boss, huh? I like that.

But don't give up the day job just yet. BodyVibe ships out tomorrow and I guarantee you are going to like it...maybe even more than the Screamer. I don't want to ruin the surprise, but BodyVibe is portable, discreet and can be worn under clothing. Just a suggestion...

Yours,

Mark

Alisa had been tingling in anticipation ever since she read Mark's e-mail, waiting for BodyVibe to arrive at Come Again. Now that she had it in her possession, she couldn't wait to begin. She yanked at the towel she had tucked around her breasts after her post-work shower and caught it as it fell, draping it over her arm as she padded into the dining room to collect BodyVibe and its accoutrement. She tossed everything—box, bodysuit and towel—onto her bed, then arranged her pillows into a luxurious nest. She turned on the light before she sank down, naked, to pull the directions out of the box.

As she read, she absentmindedly combed her fingers through her pale blond pubic hair, enjoying its soft texture, dipping her middle finger into her tangled curls. She was just barely wet. Alisa touched her finger quickly, teasingly to her clit and then brought it to her tongue. Sweet and warm. She wanted to touch herself again, but she forced herself to finish reading the directions.

BodyVibe was a transparent black Lycra mesh bodysuit with five intriguing wire leads attached to an assortment of electrodes. Two of them were flat and reminded her of a stripper's pasties. One was the size of the discreet lipstick-shaped vibrator that Alisa had tested a few weeks ago. The fourth wire led to a small, round ball, roughly the size of a large grape, and the last wire was attached to a two-inch black plastic strip with a small, flexible cup near one end.

Alisa was excited to begin. Her nipples were pretty pink beads, and she knew if she pinched them, sharp pleasure would shoot from her nipples to her clit. If she put her fingers between her legs and explored her soft folds, she would find them slick, velvety, more than ready to accept a dildo or vibrator. Thanks to SoloPlay, she had a drawer full of both from which to choose, but tonight was dedicated to BodyVibe and exploring new territory.

She dropped the directions next to the bed for easy reference, but it wasn't as complicated as it looked. She stood to slip into the stretchy bodysuit. Alisa admired her reflection in the full-length mirror on her closet door. The suit was high-cut on the legs, low-cut across the cleavage, and scandalously see-through. She moistened the round black electrodes with the supplied lubricant and tucked them over her nipples.

BodyVibe was definitely one of SoloPlay's more bizarre items. She wondered if it would sell. It required a little bit of faith to go through all this rigmarole for an orgasm, and SoloPlay products weren't cheap. She double-checked the directions to make sure she understood what was supposed to go where.

Alisa squirted a line of lube along the black plastic cylinder and pulled aside the crotch of the bodysuit. The gel was cool against her vulva as she slid it inside of her.

The most unusual-looking attachment was definitely the black strip. It was a flexible silicone cup, a little smaller than a thimble, mounted to a curved piece of soft, black plastic. Inside the tiny cup, miniature plastic ticklers waited to come to life. She filled the tiny cup with lube and pressed the plastic strip against her pussy. Alisa did a little grind to settle the juicy cup around her clit.

At last, she pulled the smallest vibrator out of its plastic sleeve, coated it with a serious amount of lubricant and pushed the small, round ball slowly into her ass. She bit her lip and shivered as it passed the tight ring of muscle.

All bases covered. She tugged the bodysuit back into place. Almost ready.

Alisa gathered the leads into her hand and eased herself down on the bed. The plastic stimulators warmed against her flesh and became less noticeable. As instructed, she tucked the wires into a metal clip and picked up the wireless remote control.

Since she was unfamiliar with the device, she chose a preprogrammed setting for her first experience, already wondering how she would describe it to Mark. She punched the sequence of buttons for a program named "Shy Virgin" and lay back against her pillows to see what happened.

Chapter Six

Mark leaned back in his desk chair and read it again, just for pleasure.

Sologirl's BodyVibe review affected him in the usual way—like a punch in the gut and a cattle prod slightly lower. The way she described her adventures with each prototype gave him an instant hard-on every time. Like him, she was serious about her sexual adventures. He admired her tight focus on pleasure and the lengths to which she was willing to go to find satisfaction. This one began, *I'm no shy virgin, but it was fun to pretend...*

He shuddered in reaction.

His cell phone rang and he picked it up off his desk. "Hey, buddy," he greeted his financial advisor, best friend and college fraternity brother.

"What's up, bro?" Ryan asked.

"My dick. I'm reading product reviews for BodyVibe."

"Shoot 'em over here. I could use a thrill."

Mark chuckled. "How are the numbers looking?"

"Solid for the first quarter. Definitely high enough to launch the rest of the Originals line, but not high enough for DoublePlay. You need cash, my friend," Ryan informed him.

"Bullshit. BodyVibe was the last prototype. We're ready to rock."

"It'll cost twice as much to test your DoublePlay designs."

"Damn."

"Let me give you the money." Ryan's voice sounded serious, for him. "Your designs are fucking awesome, and so far the testing has been smooth sailing. Let me throw a million into SoloPlay—we'll make a killing. There's nothing like your Originals on the market, but if you screw around, somebody will leak something about DoublePlay. Patents or not, you'll lose your golden ticket. Time is money."

"You've got better things to do with your trust fund, my friend, but thanks. I'll figure it out. It's what I do best."

"Don't make me fly back to New York to kick your ass."

"Go right ahead. I'm bigger than you are, and let's not forget that, technically, you work for me. I'm not taking your money." Ryan might be his financial consultant, but Mark was no slouch in the numbers department, himself. "I've got it under control, but I appreciate the offer. Was that all you wanted to tell me?"

“Yeah,” Ryan grumbled.

“Then I better get back to work.” Mark ended the call with his friend’s curses in his ear and turned his attention back to his computer where Sologirl’s review was still glowing on the screen.

Speaking of golden tickets, statistical analysis showed that Sologirl could pick a winner. If she liked a product, then so did the rest of the toy testers. Every single one. It was uncanny. The customers seemed to agree with her too. SoloPlay had already released the Vibrating Double Dildo in the U.S. market and it had sold out overnight in the stores and gone top ten on the website within three days. Would her other favorites do that well too?

An idea popped into his head. If Sologirl and her partner could test all of the products for DoublePlay, he wouldn’t need a product evaluation department. He’d save a bundle of cash right there. Maybe even enough to launch the DoublePlay line early. With the money he would save on testing, he could leverage the slowly rising SoloPlay Originals profits against the cost of producing the DoublePlay products and come out on top. All he had to do was convince Sologirl to test DoublePlay.

Excitement made his fingers tremble as he began to compose the e-mail.

Alisa logged into her e-mail account when she got home from work, excited to see a message from SoloPlay Enterprises. Mark must have really liked her survey.

She read the e-mail. Frowning, she read it again with disappointment.

The SoloPlay Originals testing was finished but Mark Winters wanted her to test sex toys designed for two? She thought of Crystal with a flash of longing. Crystal would have been more than game for such an adventure. Another woman? She sighed. Try as she might, she could not seem to spark an attraction to any other woman. Crystal had been special.

Of course, if she really wanted to test the DoublePlay products, she could give men another try. There must be a man on earth capable of eliciting a response from her. They couldn’t all be like Eric.

She hit reply and stared at the screen, stretching her lean arms above her head until her spine popped. Her long blond hair, released from its twist, fell about her bare shoulders when she shook her head.

It wouldn’t be worth it, she decided, rolling her neck to lessen the tension in her shoulders. Too complicated. Too risky. No matter what Crystal said, she wasn’t ready to get back out there again. She was happy with her life as it was. In fact, as soon as she composed a suitable reply to Mr. Winters, she was going to slide into BodyVibe, crawl into bed and forget all about DoublePlay. Why bother with men or women when she had a whole drawer full of toys and a stockpile of batteries?

Mark scooted his leather chair closer to his desk and stared at Sologirl's polite refusal. He felt a headache start to pound between his eyes as he concentrated on the screen. Nothing in the text gave him a clue as to why she had refused. He had tripled the money, after all. Even if she was as ugly as a post, a woman as sensual as Sologirl must have a dozen lovers willing to play with her. What was her problem?

He double-clicked into her file and scanned her information, most of which was useless. He knew she had been referred to the company by Crystal at Come Again, but he had no other real contact information. It was wildly frustrating to think that he knew her favorite way to make herself orgasm was facedown, with her ass raised by three pillows and the Vibrating Double Dildo strapped between her thighs, but he didn't know her name or have any way to find her.

He scrubbed his hands over his face. This opportunity was too perfect. He couldn't let it go just because she said no. Sologirl was ideal for DoublePlay, and he would do anything necessary to convince her. First he would talk to Crystal. If that didn't work, he would stake out Come Again if he had to. With that decided, he jerked his suit jacket off the back of his chair and headed down the street.

Mark reached the shop door and ducked through the doorway. He made a beeline for the counter where he was glad to see Crystal, basking in the morning sunshine.

"Hello, Mark, what brings you in here today?" Her smile was silky as she leaned across the glass display case. "Are you looking for some nipple rings to match that adjustable leather cock ring I sold you last month?"

A female customer, browsing in the bondage aisle, glanced up with interest. Mark scowled. "I sold *you* the cock rings, Crystal."

She returned his glare with a benign smile and a gentle pat on the arm. Mark's skin tingled from her touch. She reached toward him again to smooth the prickles from his arm. Crystal's jet-black hair, full lips and exotic makeup weren't motherly in the least, but the look she was giving him reminded him of the way his mom used to look at him when he skulked in the door five minutes after curfew—reproving, yet indulgent. Her vaguely maternal manner was completely at odds with the spiked leather bustier she was modeling, the popular favorite from his Hellcat line. It fit her as if it had been designed with her breasts in mind, lovingly gripping her firm curves with just enough give in the material to bare them almost, but not quite, all the way to the nipple as she leaned toward him. It was impossible not to look, and as he did, something jogged loose in his memory. Mark filed it away to examine later.

Crystal pulled a product off the display shelf and set it in front of him on the counter. She nudged the box toward him.

"What's that?"

"Something new. Condoms, lubricated with the highest grade silicone available on the market."

"I know what they are, Crystal. I sold them to you. Why are you giving them to me?"

"Alisa loves silicone. I guarantee she hasn't seen these yet." Crystal smiled slightly.

“Who’s Alisa?”

She frowned. “Please don’t be coy, Mark. It doesn’t suit you.”

He stared, comprehension dawning.

“Alisa Mane,” Crystal repeated. “She works at the central library.”

“How do you know why I’m here?” Mark demanded.

“I’m psychic.” Crystal dropped the condoms into a bag and handed it to him. “She’s ready for you, Mark. Make sure you tell her I sent you, okay?”

“You’re really freaky, Crystal,” he said.

“Yes, dear, I know that.” She swept around the counter to kiss his cheek. Her firm, leather-encased breasts pressed against his arm. He forced himself not to look down this time. “Too bad for you, I’m not your kind of freak.”

Chapter Seven

Alisa toyed with her mouse, watching the cursor dart across her screen, unable to concentrate on the actual data. Ever since Mark Winters' DoublePlay e-mail had arrived, she couldn't stop thinking about sex with a partner. But which kind? On the one hand, her fantasies were always about men. On the other hand, no man had ever managed to give her an orgasm, so maybe she should stick with women.

Crystal had been able to make her come. Of course, she was also psychic, totally tuned in to what Alisa was feeling at every moment. With her, she had never *had* to say a word. Crystal had insisted on drawing the words out of her, but there had been no real risk. That was really the crux of the problem, wasn't it? Sex with a partner required communication, and Alisa didn't like to volunteer information. Still, unless she wanted to spend the rest of her life communing with silicone, plastic, metal and rubber, she should probably try dating again. She giggled as the image of entertaining her visiting parents at a fancy restaurant while she held hands with a vibrating dildo popped into her head. She had been dodging her mother's calls, but inevitably, they would have to set a date.

"Hey, Beth?" Alisa swiveled to face her desk mate's chair. "Do you know any nice guys?"

Beth muttered something incomprehensible. She appeared to be on the search for an elusive title, and unless someone dropped a bomb on her keyboard, she wouldn't give up the hunt any time soon.

Alisa kicked her chair. "I need a date."

No response.

She sighed.

The first set of automatic doors swung open in the foyer and Alisa glanced up at the security gate to see who was coming in. Sunlight bounced off the second set of glass doors into her eyes, momentarily blinding her. When the spots cleared, she saw a man. And not one of the old guys who liked to read the free newspapers in the armchairs by the windows, either. This was a tall, blond iceberg of a man wearing a dark suit with a white shirt. His tie was pulled away from his neck, as if he had loosened the knot as soon as he'd pushed away from his desk. His hard features looked carved from cold stone. Alisa shuddered, her breath rushing out of her body.

His pale blue eyes zeroed in on the reference desk, and Beth finally glanced up from her screen. "Check him out," she said under her breath. "Hot date, twelve o'clock."

"I thought you weren't paying attention," Alisa accused.

"Well, I am now."

Alisa felt frozen to her wooden chair as the man's eyes dropped to her nameplate. He began to walk toward them with measured strides.

"May I help you?" Beth asked, flipping her shiny red hair over her shoulders and giving him a smile that showcased every one of her perfect, white teeth.

"I'm looking for Ms. Mane." His slight smile barely thawed his features.

Alisa eyed him cautiously. "How can I help you?"

"I hope you can help me find Sologirl."

Her eyes widened, then shot over to Beth.

"I've never heard of Sologirl," Beth chirped. "Is it fiction or nonfiction?"

"I've got this one." Alisa jumped up from her chair and raced around the desk, ignoring Beth's surprised look. She took the stranger's arm and pulled him firmly toward the stacks. "I think I've seen it in the graphic novels."

When they reached the cover of the tall shelves, Alisa dropped his arm. "Who are you?"

"Mark Winters," he said, holding out his hand. "SoloPlay Enterprises."

"Holy shit," she whispered.

His laugh was loud in the quiet room, but not as loud as her thudding heart.

Alisa shushed him. "Nobody knows about SoloPlay here, and I want to keep it that way." Her whisper was sharp. "You shouldn't have come here."

"Well, you shouldn't have said no," he replied, taking her hand.

Mark watched the creep of red on her pale skin. His blood was rising in his veins too. Crystal's cryptic comments and Sologirl's sexy e-mails notwithstanding, he hadn't expected Sologirl to be so hot. Alisa Mane looked like a delicate china doll, all pink and white and blue-eyed, her long, dark lashes blinking furiously against her rosy cheeks as she tugged her warm hand out of his grasp.

"Is it a question of money?" he asked.

"No! Don't talk about that here! This is a library—" He watched her lips move as she searched for the right words and imagined them parted, showing even, white teeth as she pleased herself with a SoloPlay toy.

"That's such a stereotype." Mark ignored her fierce glare. "I've definitely seen a few movies where the staid librarian whips off her glasses, takes down her hair—"

"Shut up!"

"What's the matter, Sologirl, can't take the heat?" he challenged.

Mark knew what kind of a woman was hiding out under the hands-off librarian outfit. The low heels, modest neckline and the skirt cut precisely at the knee did not fool him. Alisa whirled and beckoned him

deeper into the stacks. As she turned, he saw a quick flash of bare flesh above her knee and maybe the hint of a garter. His cock jumped. Nope, not perfectly prim and proper at all. He thought of the money he would have to shell out to multiple DoublePlay testers until his cock finally cooperated and he could follow her without embarrassing himself.

When they reached the back wall of the library, Sologirl stopped and whirled to face him. “You aren’t supposed to know who I am! What about SoloPlay’s privacy policy? Identity protection? How dare you come here! If anyone overhears us—” she hissed.

“What are you afraid of?” he asked. “No one will guess what we’re talking about.”

“I’m afraid one of my very perceptive colleagues will figure it out! Librarians are information specialists, and the library world is not exactly a hotbed of liberal sexual politics, either. One keyword search on the Internet and I can kiss my job goodbye. If I hear you say the words,” she lowered her voice, “Sologirl or SoloPlay again, this conversation is over.”

“Fine. Can I say DoublePlay?”

“No.”

“That makes my pitch a little difficult.”

“You chose to come here, buddy.” She crossed her arms.

“It was the only address I had.”

Sologirl’s gaze pinned him to the stacks. “How did you get it?”

He hesitated. “Crystal said to tell you she sent me.”

He watched emotions play across her features. Shock. Then anger. The idea that if Crystal knew what sort of lube Sologirl preferred then they might have been lovers raced through his mind. Just as swiftly, he rejected it and repressed the stab of accompanying jealousy. Mark would stake his life, his health and the success of the DoublePlay line on the fact that Sologirl liked men.

“You liked BodyVibe,” he began.

Alisa’s blue eyes flashed, darkened. He continued before he could determine if her reaction was due to remembered pleasure or his temerity at bringing it up. He kept his voice just below a library whisper, not quite loud enough for her to easily hear. She edged closer, and he caught a whiff of flowery shampoo and the scent of sunshine and clean grass rising from her skin. He inhaled another deep breath of her sweet scent before he continued.

“I also know you tested it here, in the library. In fact, your report opened up a whole new approach to the marketing department. They think it belongs in the...new product line. Since you’re already comfortable with BodyVibe, why don’t you try it out over dinner with your partner? Give up the remote control, let someone else take charge this time.”

Sologirl's eyebrows lifted. Her mouth opened the slightest bit and the tip of her tongue darted out to moisten her full, pink lips. Mark pressed his advantage. "Do you know how erotic it is to give someone else complete control over your pleasure?" he asked quietly.

He began to spin the fantasy for her. "Imagine what it would feel like to be sitting at a table in a nice restaurant. You're wearing BodyVibe and your partner has the remote in his jacket pocket. You are completely under his control. You won't know when your nipples will begin to buzz, or when he will allow you to feel a short burst of pleasure in your pussy. You might be surprised by a tiny, tingling vibration on your clit or a throbbing rhythm in your ass. You will wonder when he will begin to pleasure you and how many times you will come before the end of the meal. I bet you'll be aroused before he even touches the remote." She was standing so close now that he had to look straight down to meet her eyes, so close that he could feel the heat of her summer-warmed skin.

Sologirl's pupils were wide. Her breath was quick and soft. He bent, and his lips grazed a wisp of hair near her ear. "I bet you're wet already, just thinking about it," he whispered.

He could sympathize—his cock was so hard that he was having flash fantasies of ripping her skirt up to her waist and taking her against the bookshelf. Maybe she wasn't wearing underwear. The thought paralyzed him.

She cleared her throat with a sharp cough that breezed his chin before she stepped away from him. "You're joking, right? You want me to help you, so you rushed to my workplace to talk dirty to me? Does this approach usually work for you?" Her blue eyes flashed as she slowly shook her head from side to side.

"Actually, yes."

"I find that hard to believe," she said, but the way she was looking at him gave lie to her words. Her eyes played over his body as if she were trying to make a decision. He didn't care what criteria she used, but she had to say yes.

"Please, I'm begging you. DoublePlay needs you. You are the best product evaluator I've got, and without your help, I'm seriously screwed. In fact, I doubt the line will even make it into production without you. I'm running out of time and capital. Tell me what you want. I'll do anything to get you to say yes."

She cocked her head to the side doubtfully. Her small, white teeth dented her lower lip and her eyes narrowed.

He held his breath, waiting for her decision.

After what felt like an eternity, she nodded, and he slowly let air back into his lungs.

Her low laugh sounded nervous. "We'll have to lay some ground rules. I do have a few conditions."

"Anything." Mark was elated, lightheaded with relief and oxygen deprivation. She was going to do it. His mind spun with all the next steps he needed to take. He couldn't wait to receive Sologirl's report of her dinner date. Damn, he was almost jealous of her boyfriend. He was so caught up in his plans that he didn't hear her words the first time.

“I’m sorry, could you repeat that?” he asked.

“I said I hope you have an understanding wife.”

“I don’t have a wife,” he said, confused.

“Good. Then she won’t object to you taking me out to dinner.” Sologirl’s blue eyes were wide and innocent, but her pink lips curved in an impish grin. “It was your idea, buddy.”

She’d tricked him.

His willing body jumped to attention.

He couldn’t be Sologirl’s play partner, but he had to admit the temptation was brutal. Oh, the things he could do to her. He had read her surveys for every product she had tested for SoloPlay. Her responses had been run through complicated data compilation programs, cross-referenced with percentages, ranked in order of preference. He knew what she liked.

Even better than she did.

But that was too fucking bad. He had already broken his own code of ethics and quite possibly a few laws by coming to find her. The last thing he needed was a sexual harassment suit the size of the state of New York. As the owner of the company, he could not bang his employees and pay them for it. His lawyers had been very explicit about that point.

“Alisa—” Her name felt strange on his lips. “It would be unprofessional.” And unethical, immoral and a number of other bad and litigious words.

“Unprofessional? You want to go there with me?” Her delicate jaw dropped. “You tossed professionalism out the window when you came to find me, buddy. I don’t want to know how many people at SoloPlay know my identity, but if any more of you come looking for me, I’m going to sue SoloPlay for every penny it’s ever made.”

Mark’s blood chilled. “Whoa—hold on. Relax. No one is coming after you, but I can’t test DoublePlay products with you. I own the company.”

She shrugged. “Then the boss won’t get upset.”

“Unless you sue him for sexual harassment.”

She put her hands on her hips. “Don’t be ridiculous. I’m not going to sue you. I just propositioned you.”

“Don’t you have a boyfriend who can—”

The slow smile that spread across Alisa’s face made him feel a little desperate. “Nope. No boyfriend. No girlfriend at the moment either, and I have to say that I don’t know whether to be amused or hurt that Crystal sent you to find me.”

The silence swelled between them.

“Just take me out to dinner.” Her blue eyes challenged him to deny her again. “I’ll only help you with DoublePlay if you are willing to work for it.” Her eyes dropped to his crotch. “I’d say you’re up for the job.”

Mark blinked at her. Once. Twice. Shit. “Seven o’clock. E-mail your address.”

He jerked his head in a terse goodbye then escaped the stacks, hoping like hell no one else noticed the bulge in his pants. Taking her out to dinner would give him a second chance to persuade her to test DoublePlay toys with another partner. He wouldn’t actually use the remote on her in the restaurant, he told himself, not believing it for a minute.

When Mark Winters left the library, Alisa locked herself in the ladies room and thrust her hand under her skirt. She opened her mouth wide to muffle the sound of her quick breaths as she rubbed her clit with two hard, merciless fingers. She watched her eyes glaze over in the wide mirror over the sink as she came, one hand braced on the counter, the other buried between her thighs.

Not a cold fish, not even close. Tall, hard, solidly muscled, Mark Winters resembled the new James Bond, but bigger. His pale blue eyes burned with icy heat. His gaze was hot, but remote, as if he was so sure of his effect on women that he didn’t even have to try to look inviting anymore, as if he had the skill to bring a girl to blithering orgasm while, say, checking the stock quotes or sorting through his mail.

She had intended to send him packing with an ass full of verbal buckshot, but all of the blood in her body had descended to her clit when he began whispering in her ear. Oh man, that dinner scenario was hot. Could it actually happen that way? He made it sound simple, so easy. She almost believed he could make it happen for her, and she wasn’t going to get a better opportunity to find out. He was perfect.

As the last wave of her orgasm receded, doubt quickly set in. She swallowed, forcing saliva down her dry throat, and washed her hands.

Oh God. Could she really do it? It had seemed like a brilliant idea ten minutes ago, when her body had been begging for release. Now that she was in a more sane state, she was having second thoughts.

Mark Winters did not look harmless. He was big. The body under that dark suit looked hard and strong. Clearly, he was a little twisted. What if she had just made a dinner date with a psycho killer?

She took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. She tugged her skirt straight. Crystal had sent Mark Winters to her at the exact moment she had been looking for a date, and she didn’t believe in coincidence. Not so long ago, Crystal had promised to find her a Prince Charming. At the time, Alisa had thought she was just trying to let her down easy. Now, here he came, waltzing in the door of the library, talking dirty and making it sound like poetry. If he came with Crystal’s seal of approval, then he wasn’t a psycho killer. Crystal would *know*. Plus, she *had* known Mark for months, albeit only through e-mail.

What did she have to lose? A paycheck? Her dignity? This was the perfect chance to try it on with a man again. If he wanted her to work for DoublePlay bad enough to beg for her help, then he would have a vested interest in her pleasure. She could practice telling him how to please her, and she wouldn't have to worry about how he felt about it or whether the information would come back to haunt her. His interest was professional, not personal. After they both got what they wanted, they'd go their separate ways and she'd know how to tell a man what she needed in bed. Everyone would win.

Alisa returned to her desk, typed in her address and hit send before she could change her mind. A few minutes later Beth dropped into her swivel chair and triumphantly tossed a book onto the desk.

"You found it. Nice work," Alisa said.

"Nice work, yourself. Did you drag that massively hot guy into the stacks and jump on him or what?"

"Of course not." Alisa blushed. "I'm going to make him buy me dinner first."

Beth whooped and then clapped a hand over her mouth. "Seriously?" she whispered. "Tonight?"

Alisa nodded. "I'll give you all the details tomorrow morning."

"You better." Beth grinned, then turned back to her screen.

After work and a long, hot shower, the moment of truth arrived. She pulled BodyVibe out of her underwear drawer. Just the sight of it made her pussy twitch. Could she actually put it on? Hand over the remote? Sit in a restaurant and do things that should get her arrested? With a man who was all but a stranger to her? A familiar heat began to build in the pit of her belly.

Oh, yes.

Definitely.

Chapter Eight

Mark looked at Alisa sitting primly across the table in her classy black dress. Underneath the smooth fabric, he knew she was wearing BodyVibe because she had given him the remote when he picked her up, along with a small smile that all but dared him to use it. He hadn't felt this nervous on a date since prom night when he had employed every bit of the manual dexterity he possessed to avoid sticking that stupid pin with the pearl on it into his finger, or worse, his date's smooth, freckled shoulder. The BodyVibe remote in his pocket felt like a loaded gun.

Just once, he promised himself. Just BodyVibe. And only to see if it could be cross-promoted in the new line. He had spent the afternoon trying to convince himself he was doing this for his company. The success of DoublePlay depended on Sologirl. His employees and his customers depended on him. He was being selfless, a martyr, even.

Yeah, right. More like his cock was depending on him.

He'd been hard from the minute he'd seen her nameplate on the Formica desk in the library, hard the whole time they had been speaking, hard while he downloaded the directions for the BodyVibe remote and refreshed his memory. He was hard now, because her upswept, blond hair, barely there lipstick and modest dress made her look hotter than any fuck-me lingerie he'd ever seen on any woman. Sologirl totally tripped his switch and he wanted her.

Her *help*, he corrected himself.

He needed her help with the DoublePlay line, and maybe after a few BodyVibe-assisted orgasms, she'd be so hooked on the concept that she would be willing to continue testing products with another partner. He could just barely rationalize doing this with her tonight because they had BodyVibe and a table length between them. However, he had two dozen prototypes for the DoublePlay line, and none of the rest of them operated by remote control. Nope, they were all very hands-on, one hundred percent up close and personal, and he couldn't test the rest of the line with her without jeopardizing his company and risking the wrath of his lawyers.

She had to find another partner. That was all there was to it. The thought made his stomach clench, so he took a sip of wine and focused on her. "You look beautiful tonight." He admired the lush curve of her breasts under the high neckline of her dress. Her nipples were visible through the fabric, even through the electrodes he knew she was wearing.

She smiled but said nothing.

“Do you like the wine?” he asked. “They keep a case of this Chardonnay in their wine cellar for me. It’s my favorite.” God, he hated small talk. This was why he didn’t date. Mark kept drinking.

Alisa wasn’t sure whether to roll her eyes or be impressed. The guy was such a player that he kept a case of wine on ice at the most popular restaurant in Norton? Puh-lease. She thought about excusing herself to go to the bathroom and then calling a taxi, but she knew it was just nerves. And arousal. The BodyVibe stimulators were tucked firmly into place and she’d given him the remote in the car.

His prediction this afternoon had been correct. Her pussy was already sweating, swelling, anticipating. Before he even began. It added to her excitement that he was looking at her as if he could read her X-rated thoughts. His ice-blue eyes made her feel deliciously exposed, and his lethal combination of square jaw, hard body and cool expression did things to her body. Her nipples were already hard and her mouth was dry. No man had ever made her feel this way.

He set his menu on the table. “Having second thoughts?”

Alisa shook her head slowly.

“Good.”

The waiter arrived. She had no idea what she ordered.

Mark pulled the remote out of the breast pocket of his jacket and set it on the table in front of him. It looked remarkably like a cell phone, perfectly appropriate on the elegant table.

Alisa’s heart began to pound. She wanted to snatch the remote off the table and use it to quell the ache between her thighs. Instead, she shifted on the banquette, recrossed her legs, wiggled a bit to rub the clit-cup against her mound. The right side of his mouth lifted briefly in a knowing half smile.

“Oh no you don’t, Sologirl. No cheating.”

She froze, amazed by the gush of juice in her pussy that his words caused. She wasn’t sure what turned her on more, sitting here in this quiet restaurant secretly wired for sex or the fact that he knew she wanted it. She loved to delay her pleasure, draw it out, wait until she knew that her orgasm would be spectacular. She liked to control when it happened, how hard, how much, how many. Apparently, she liked to let someone else control her pleasure too, because her body was clearly on board with this kinky scene.

Mark palmed the remote, drew it into his lap. “I’ll give it to you, don’t worry. You’ll get it. You want a little taste?”

He sent one strong vibration straight to her clit. Even though she was primed for it, she jumped. It was hard to keep from crying out. She rocked her hips, grinding into the vibration, ready for more.

His lips curved. “Should I spend the entire meal torturing you? I could start with your nipples, begin on the lowest setting, work up to the max while you enjoy your salad.”

The electrodes began to send small jolts of energy to her nipples—sharp, buzzy hits like small tongues licking one and then the other. Instead of bringing relief, it heightened her frustration.

“Of course, I could get you off immediately and then spend the rest of the meal torturing you.” Mark smiled again. “Relax, Sologirl. The food is very good here. You don’t want to miss it.”

He picked up his fork and began to eat, one-handed. She groaned. The mesclun mix was tough as grass in her mouth and the vinaigrette was sour on her tongue. Alisa tried to remember what she had ordered for her entree. There was no way she was going to be able to concentrate on cutting a steak or a veal chop.

Her nipples felt as big as ripe cherries, straining against the fabric of her dress. This *must* be the maximum setting. “You know, we plan to sell this model with adjustable nipple clips,” he said. Just the thought made her ache even more. Her nipples were throbbing now, in time with her pulse, sending lightning bolts of pleasure to her pussy. Her vulva was swollen, making everything a tighter fit, the wires rubbing tantalizingly against her labia.

She regretted not pulling an extra layer of panties over BodyVibe because she was soaking wet. Should she make a run to the bathroom to towel off? As if he read her mind, or perhaps correctly interpreted her glance around the room, Mark said, “Don’t run away now. It’s just about to get interesting.” He leaned back in his chair to allow the waiter to remove his salad plate. Her own was barely touched.

Alisa stayed in her seat. She didn’t think she would have been able to stand, anyway. She felt languid, boneless. The urgency of the moment before had been replaced with a surety of satisfaction.

She wished she could touch herself, knew her labia would feel glossy and smooth, engorged, silken. Her lips would feel like petals and she would rub them, pluck them, slide her middle finger up and down, in and out, stroke the sensitized path deep into her vagina. This is when she would slow down. Stop to smell the roses, maybe even taste them.

She smiled at the busboy as he refilled her water glass, and there was a telltale hitch in his gait when he moved on to the next table. “If you have any more smiles like that, send them my way,” Mark said.

“Finish what you’ve started, Mr. Winters, and I’ll give you whatever you want.” Her voice was rough. “Promises, promises.”

The waiter returned with their entrees. Penne pasta, thank God. She waved away the freshly grated Parmesan cheese.

Her pussy was buzzing now. Not continuously, never enough to make her numb. Sometimes just long enough to take her up to the next peak, sometimes a few quick bursts in a row, almost enough to get into a rhythm, and then they’d stop. She was moving in her seat, rocking imperceptibly. Mark didn’t chastise her this time. He probably knew she had to do something to keep from screaming.

Alisa glanced over and saw a sixty-ish woman sitting on the same banquette a few tables down the row, look over curiously. Her still-blond bob was immaculate, her eyes wide in her perfectly madeup face.

The woman watched them for a minute. Then her eyes returned to her silver-haired dinner partner. She cocked an eyebrow at him. He took her hand.

Across the room, a heavyset man wearing large gold rings on most of his fingers glanced over at their table. His young, brunette dining companion chatted endlessly.

They must know. How could they not know something was going on?

Alisa knew what she looked like when she was playing with herself—flushed, heavy-lidded, mouth softly open. She'd spent enough time sitting in her bedroom chair at home in front of a full-length mirror with her legs spread and her feet braced on the wall, fingers busy between her legs.

The heavyset, ringed man's eyes glanced off Alisa, skated away, returned to his date.

"Good girl," Mark said.

She cleared her throat, tried to breathe evenly. It would be better if she didn't rush it. She focused on Mark.

His jaw was tight, mouth set, blue eyes blazing. He wasn't looking at the remote in his hand. He was looking at her. Intently. As if she were the meal, not his untouched steak. As if he would like to eat her. She wanted that. She wanted him to eat her. She wanted his mouth on her pussy. She wanted him to suck her, fuck her with his tongue. The hungry, raw look on his face transfixed her.

Alisa's imperceptible rocking motions lodged the small vibrator more deeply in her vagina. Her body arched. A small whimper escaped from her throat. She knew she was going to come any minute. Even if he stopped the vibrations, her own subtle grind would carry her over the edge.

The next blast went on forever. She fought to sit still and silent while her pussy exploded with wave after wave of pleasure. She was coming and he knew it. His desire fed her orgasm. She couldn't look away from his eyes.

Peripherally, she saw Mark do something quick and complicated on the remote. She wasn't coming down. She could barely keep from screaming. What was he doing? A thread of panic heightened the pleasure, took her higher. Alisa felt the murmur of electricity surround her clit, the hum of vibration building inside her body. Again.

Her nostrils flared, teeth clenched against a groan. Mark's eyes were avid, eating up every sign of her arousal as she fought not to betray them. A quick, hard throb in her ass sent her reeling over the top again, higher, harder than before, one single gasp tearing loose from her throat, a guttural groan of swallowed exhilaration.

The waiter was approaching their table. Mark leaned forward. "If we were alone, I would bend you over this table and fuck you. Would you let me to do that?"

"Is everything all right, sir?" The waiter stopped at their table and looked worriedly at their untouched plates.

Mark smiled calmly. "Everything is perfect. Would you wrap these to go? I think we're all done here."

"Certainly, sir." The waiter swept the plates off the table.

They were alone again.

He looked at her expectantly.

Alisa downed the wine in her glass. "I want...I need...excuse me." She fled to the ladies room.

Alisa desperately hoped that the back of her dress was not stained with her own moisture. Thank God she'd worn black. It was a synthetic material, and with the way she was dripping, she was afraid she'd have cream down to her ankles before she made it to a stall.

She needed a moment to regroup, dry off and assess the damage.

Damage to what, she wasn't sure.

Why couldn't she answer his question? Tell him that, yes, she wanted him to bend her over, take her any way he wanted, fuck her hard, make her come, use her until she passed out. Why couldn't she speak the words out loud? What was she afraid of? It wasn't like he was going to say no. He'd asked the question, after all, and he wanted her help with DoublePlay.

Alisa examined herself in the mirror. Her eyes were bright, cheeks flushed, hair tangled in back from where she must have rested her head against the banquette for a moment.

Unbelievable. She was getting wetter just thinking about the way he had looked at her. His gaze had been merciless, like she was a butterfly pinned to a tray. He had looked hungry, like a starving man at a banquet. Crystal had watched her orgasm countless times, but she had never gotten the feeling that Crystal would eat her alive if given the chance or that the space between them served to protect her.

Alisa shivered.

The door to the bathroom opened. She quickly ducked into a stall to dry off BodyVibe.

When Alisa came out, the elegant, older blond woman was washing her hands, her big diamond flashing. "We used to love the drive-in," the woman said, giving her a girlish smile.

Alisa stared at her. The woman's tinkling laugh pealed out in the enclosed space.

"Darling, the look on your face is priceless! Some things never change, you know. Every generation thinks it invented fooling around." She sighed. "I'm going to go home and give my husband the best blow job he's had in years. You should do the same for yours. You owe him one."

"We're not married," Alisa blurted out.

The woman glanced quickly at Alisa's ring finger. "Oh! Sorry. Some things do change, I guess. I shouldn't have assumed. Don't worry, dear, the way he was looking at you, it won't be long before he asks." She patted Alisa's arm. Her hands were cool and very soft. She swept out, leaving a sweet breeze of lilies in her wake.

Alisa stared after her for a split second, shaking her head. She gave herself one last bolstering look in the mirror and pushed away from the counter before she lost her nerve.

Mark tucked his credit card into his wallet, kicking himself for not keeping his mouth shut. He picked up their uneaten meals and decided to wait for Alisa in the lobby. That way she couldn't slip out the front door on him. She had looked ready to bolt and he couldn't blame her. He had gone too far but he hadn't been able to stop himself. Watching her climax had been the most arousing thing he'd ever seen. It had taken him the entire time the check was gone to get his dick under control, and now it was leaping to attention again, just from the memory of the way her mouth had worked while she swayed in her seat, the way her eyes had glazed, the blue getting dark, darker, midnight while she stared helplessly into his eyes as she came.

Sologirl was his fantasy woman, but her reality was far better than any fantasy. She was virtually a stranger, but because he had imagined her so many times, being with her felt completely natural. He knew so many of her secrets already, and he wanted to learn the rest of them. He wanted to discover the color of her nipples and feel how big they were. He wanted to know how long she kept her pubic hair and how it would feel beneath his fingers, his tongue. He wanted to taste her.

But he couldn't, he reminded himself. Not while he was paying her. His heart sank, and he wished his dick would follow suit. He now knew, vividly, that she was the right girl to test the DoublePlay line but he couldn't do it with her, not without opening up SoloPlay Enterprises to all kinds of legal repercussions.

He nodded absently at the hostess and took a seat on the bench next to an overgrown ficus tree. The door to the ladies room was in easy sight. From his side of the table, the BodyVibe experiment had been an unqualified success. He doubted Sologirl had been able to top those orgasms when she had been controlling the remote. Hopefully, she'd feel the same way and, after he abjectly apologized for propositioning her like a horny teenager, she would agree to find another partner to test the rest of the DoublePlay line.

The door to the ladies room opened and his pulse kicked up a notch. An old lady stepped out. He breathed easily again. Immediately, the door swung open a second time and Alisa entered the hall. Her steps down the short hall were slow, and she was scowling. Mark stood to greet her, feeling like a prize jerk. She raised her face to his and opened her mouth, and he braced himself to let her speak first. He deserved whatever she wanted to say to him. He'd been an ass. Her lips trembled, but it was a moment before he heard a sound.

"Yes," she said.

"Yes?" he echoed, confused.

She stepped closer. Her soft, blond hair brushed his chin as she leaned up to whisper in his ear. “If you take me home, I’ll let you fuck me,” she said softly. The rough vibration in her voice made the hair on his arms and legs stand on end, and her breasts, pressed against his chest, made his balls throb.

His apology died on his lips.

The obnoxious sound of a throat clearing made him realize they were blocking the hostess stand. Mark tucked his arm around Alisa and turned to guide her toward the door.

She stopped suddenly, gazing at the man behind them. “Eric?” She frowned.

The throat clearer, a banker type, looked stunned. “Alisa? I didn’t recognize you.” The guy eyed her up and down, like he was trying to remember her naked, and Mark thought about crushing him. “You look different.”

She smiled, but Mark had a feeling she was leaving fingernail dents in his side. “Really? Not so frigid anymore? Maybe I should thank you for dumping me.”

The banker reared back like she’d slugged him. His eyes went wide and his mouth gaped. Then his gaze sharpened and his teeth snapped shut. He turned to Mark. “I didn’t catch your name.”

“Mark Winters,” he supplied, letting a hint of laughter leak into his words. “Um, nice to meet you. Let’s go, darling.” He turned Alisa away from the hostess stand.

“Give my regards to your wife,” she said over her shoulder.

Eric growled, “We’re separating.”

“Shocking,” she retorted sweetly.

“Ouch,” Mark said as he swept her out the door.

She took a deep breath. “I didn’t know he was married when I dated him.”

“You don’t have to explain,” he assured her. “But remind me to stay on your good side.”

“That’s up to you, buddy.” Her laugh was low. She rested her back against his Lexus and gazed up at him, blue eyes darkening. He wanted to see them turn midnight again, wanted it suddenly, powerfully. It was all he could do not to cover her body with his and take her in the parking lot. Of course he would take her home. Hadn’t he already discovered that he couldn’t say no to her?

“Let’s go.” Mark took her hand. It was smaller than his and a perfect fit.

Chapter Nine

Alisa watched Mark's fingers restlessly trace the seam in the seat of his car. The sight of his hand, plucking and caressing the leather, put her on the edge of her seat. His fingers were wide-tipped, blunt and strong-looking. His other hand was graceful and sure on the wheel. Exhilaration coursed through her body, a quick rush of adrenaline.

Anxiety rolled in right behind it.

Seeing Eric had reminded her of what a disaster sex with him had been. What if the easy part had been asking Mark to take her home and the hard part would come later, when she couldn't have an orgasm? What if he fumbled around like Eric, unable to find her clit, rubbing ceaselessly, too fast, too slow, wrong place entirely, while she lay there, silent, arousal waning while Mark played Christopher Columbus, washed up on the wrong continent entirely?

She wasn't going to let that happen tonight, she reminded herself. This was research. Pure research. Crystal's tutoring and hours spent pleasuring herself had helped her map her body. She would force herself to tell him what to do. Fate had delivered her a perfect partner, and she was determined to make the most of him. He must have some knowledge of women, for God's sake—he had the market cornered on good looks and hot sex toys. It was possible that he might be good in bed.

And she wanted him.

In fact, she was heating up just thinking about what would happen when they got to her apartment. A sharp zing of pleasure made her gasp.

"Hey!" Alisa gave him an affronted glare.

"Sorry," Mark said, not looking at all sorry. "I still have the remote and you looked like you were a million miles away. Penny for your thoughts. Or do you want me to zap you again?"

"Maybe you should wear BodyVibe and see how it feels."

"Nope. It wasn't designed with men in mind. We're simple folks. We don't need all that gear to get off."

"And women do?"

"Sometimes. You girls are complicated."

Thinking about what he might know about women made her breath catch in her throat. "You wouldn't have a job if we weren't," she said.

Mark nodded, eyes on the road.

"I'll take that remote now," Alisa said.

"Spoilsport." He pulled up to the curb in front of her building and parked the car. He held out the remote. As she took it, his fingers caught hers and he pulled her forward. She met him halfway and sighed as his lips took hers for the first time.

His kiss was different from Eric's sloppy invasion and Crystal's deft exploration. Mark's lips made a demand. Alisa felt like his mouth was asking her a very basic question. *Do you want to come again?*

Yes. She surged into him. The remote dropped into her lap as she reached up to lay one hand on the taut column of his neck and the other on his chest. Mark deepened the kiss, his mouth moving over her lips, his tongue stroking into her mouth.

"Can I touch you?" he asked, half speaking, half kissing, wholly arousing. "I'm dying to feel your wet heat beneath my fingertips, to stroke inside you, to feel your softness. May I touch you?" he repeated, seducing her with words again, just as he had in the library stacks. Alisa felt hypnotized by the intensity in his eyes. How had she ever thought they looked cold? They were burning into her. She nodded slowly.

His left hand grazed her thigh, pushed her dress up, touched her bare skin. Alisa shut her eyes and offered him her hips. As his finger expertly hooked aside the crotch of BodyVibe, her pussy clenched. She whimpered as he tugged the clit cup out of position.

"That's it, let me hear you." Mark's finger coasted along her folds, slowly slid inside her. He didn't remove the other vibrator and the fullness made her groan. He thrust in and out of her twice, using her own moisture to ease the way. She held her breath as he crooked his finger until its tip rested on her swollen clit. His hand felt as natural as her own.

Alisa's eyes snapped open.

Mark Winters didn't need a map.

"It's up to you, Sologirl. You're under no obligation. Do you want me to go home? Or do you want me to come in?" It was very hard to concentrate on his words, but she didn't need to. She would have had to be an idiot not to know what he was asking. She was poised on his finger, balanced on the edge of a cliff. She didn't even have to jump—she just had to fall.

"Sologirl?"

Every word was easier. "Please come inside."

"Thank you." He whispered the words against her lips and his finger slipped away from her, deftly tucking her clothing back into place.

Mark threw open the door to the car and was around it in a flash, opening her door, taking her hand, snatching their dinners out of the backseat. He pulled her toward her building.

She had her keys in her hand, and Mark took them. He opened her apartment and ushered her inside. The slam of the door sounded loud. He locked it.

"I need to get out of BodyVibe," she said helplessly.

“Let me.”

Wordlessly, she turned and led him down the hall to her bedroom. With every step, she could feel the BodyVibe wires rubbing against her sex. The room was dim, but moonlight and streetlights lit up the bed.

His hands skimmed her hips. She felt his fingers on the back zipper of her dress, heard it unzip. The dress fell forward, then pooled around her ankles.

“You are so fucking gorgeous.” He cupped her breasts through the transparent spandex, smoothed her hips, reached around to cup her mound and pull her back against his erection. She sagged against him, resting the back of her head on his chest. He slid the straps over her shoulders and pulled BodyVibe down to her waist. She sucked in her breath as he peeled the electrodes off her nipples. Mark used both hands and all his fingers to rub the remaining lubricant into her breasts. Her sensitive nipples, so long deprived of exposure to air, puckered and throbbed.

His hands on her back gently urged her to bend over. He worked BodyVibe over her hips. As it fell to the floor, the wires sprang free and hung between her legs. She reached down to remove them, but Mark caught her hands, put them back on the bed. He knelt behind her.

She felt vulnerable, completely defenseless. The clit cup fell to the floor as his thumbs parted her folds. He tugged firmly on the wire connected to the ball in her ass and it slid out, making her gasp.

His finger dipped between her cheeks, slipping easily around the ring of her anus, soothing, burning. “Oh, oh, ooh!” Alisa made little grunts of pleasure. Her forehead was pressed into the bedspread. When she peeked through her lids, his crisp, white shirt was framed between her thighs.

Mark had his fingers on the last wire lead, the one attached to the vibrator in her vagina. He wiggled the wire. She twitched and bucked under his hands, trying to get something, anything to touch her where she needed to be touched. She pushed her ass up into the air, humping, grinding, asking without using words.

She had never thought a man would know the secrets of her body, never been this hungry for pleasure, so wild she would do anything for fulfillment. Mark seemed to know exactly what to do to her. It was almost as if he could read her mind, so closely was he following her signals, reading her unspoken desires.

The harsh rasp of his five o’clock shadow against the tender inside of her thighs heightened her pleasure. His tongue probed her, licked around the wire as he eased it out. Alisa felt cool air on her pussy and howled when he took his mouth away from her.

He laughed, low in his throat, the air puffing against her thighs.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “I’ll take care of you.”

Alisa muffled a scream against the bedspread as he eased two fingers into her pussy and began a sliding rhythm. The fingers of his other hand joined the dance, opening and closing around her clit. Juice

dripped down her inner thighs. He held her so close she could feel his warm breath against her buttocks. His hands slipped over her flesh easily, worked in and out of her body, met no resistance.

He owned her.

Shameless sobs of pleasure rose from her throat as she fucked his hands. She wanted this moment to go on forever. She was mindless, chasing the lights higher and higher until she began to fear she would never reach the top. Then Mark licked her ass from bottom to top.

Tears slipped from Alisa's eyes as waves of intense pleasure shot between her pussy and her ass, coursed up and down her legs. He laved her ass with the tip of his tongue, then speared her tight ring with short, fierce strokes. She was gone now, completely unhinged as he created a vortex of bright pleasure that carried her over peak after peak of ecstasy until she collapsed on the bed, washed up, facedown, shuddering, her breath coming in short, hoarse gasps.

He released her body until the only point of contact between them was his hand on the small of her back.

"I'm going to fuck you now," he said.

She could barely move, but she spread her legs wide on the bed to let him know he had her permission to enter her. Mark pulled her hips up into the air and stuffed pillows underneath her to hold her in place. She was boneless, yielding.

She heard his pants drop and the sound of foil tearing, thank God. She was so far gone she would have let him fuck her without protection, wouldn't have given it a thought.

She felt his hard cock nudge her pussy lips, throb, press forward.

Unbelievably, her pussy twitched again, aftershocks of her orgasm still coursing through her body.

"That's my girl."

Mark worked himself into her slowly, letting her get used to his size. Her pussy felt stretched to its limits, his cock expanding inside her swollen, aching walls. When he was all the way in, she felt like she was going to explode. It was a supremely tight fit. He began to stroke, building a fire within her. Every thrust dragged across her sweet spot.

He slipped his thumb between her ass cheeks. She was still sensitive there, every nerve ending ramped up to high power. He pressed forward slowly. She burned. The pleasure was too much to bear. She came again, quickly, hard, and completely, pulling him over the edge with her. He grabbed her hips with both hands and pulled her ass tight against his hips. He was buried to the hilt. She felt his cock swell as he shot off inside her. He rocked deeper with each spasm until he was spent.

Alisa's arms and legs felt like they were made out of melted butter. Eyes shut, still facedown, she was splayed across the edge of the bed like a tossed-aside rag doll. "I'll be right back," Mark said. She felt his hand search between their bodies.

Right, the condom. Thank God for condoms. Her brain was buzzing. Her lips were numb. She must have lines on her face from the bedspread by now. She was sure she'd slip onto the floor when he pulled away from her.

Reality returned slowly.

She should really do something hostess-like. Her own throat was parched, and he must be thirsty too. He'd been doing all the work, after all. She wondered if her legs would carry her into the kitchen for two glasses of water. Who was she kidding? She wasn't even sure she could stay awake until he returned from the bathroom.

Alisa heard the toilet flush and the water running in the bathroom as he washed his hands. She heard a cabinet open and shut, more water, then footsteps. She made a gigantic effort to heave herself onto the bed before he returned. She burrowed under the comforter, resisted the urge to pull it over her head.

"I made myself comfortable in your kitchen and I put the food in the fridge." He held out a glass of ice water.

"Thank you." She sat up, took a slow sip and looked at him. It was her first real look at his naked body.

His shoulders were broad but not heavily muscled, beautiful lats, tapered waist, strong thighs, decent calves, not too skinny. The guy had all the right equipment in all the right places, and then some.

Mark stirred under her curious gaze and she dragged her eyes up to his face. He was looking at her like she was dinner again, pale eyes burning, the stark planes of his face outlined in the light from the window.

She set the glass on her bedside table and opened the covers over her naked body.

"Would you mind?" he asked.

Silently she shook her head. He bent to slip another condom from his pants pocket before he took the covers from her grasp and joined her beneath them. His hands shaped her curves, molded them against his own hard flesh. Their joining was slow. She undulated against him, sighing gently into his chest. Her eyes were shut. She let him take command of her body again.

Mark rose above her, filled her. His weight pushed her into the bed. His legs rested alongside hers. His thick forearms pinned her arms to her sides while his hands held her shoulders in a viselike grip. The only movement between them was his hips, making short, slow, gliding thrusts into her.

Alisa had no option but to go with him. He took her slowly, surely back up to the peak and they dropped off together, embraced, her entire body cupped beneath his sheltering frame. When the last wave of pleasure whispered from her limbs, she fell asleep, still cradled beneath him.

Chapter Ten

The next morning, Alisa dropped into her chair at the library, panting.

“Oh my God. You slut!” Beth whispered. “How was it?”

“Is Irene here yet?” She quickly logged into her computer. The head librarian had a thing about punctuality and Alisa had overslept.

Beth shook her head. “Nope. You’re safe. Dentist appointment. Start talking.”

She blinked to focus her thoughts. “It was phenomenal. I don’t know...it was like he totally got me.” She still couldn’t believe it. “We had dinner, and when we went back to my place and—whoa. I didn’t have to say a word, and the room was exploding, and holy shit.” Alisa dropped her head to the desk. “He’s coming back tonight.”

“The operative word there would be coming.” They both dissolved into giggles and had to duck behind their computer screens as the head librarian walked in the front door.

Alisa spent the rest of the day in a sensual daze, glad that the library was busy enough to keep her occupied. Every time she thought of Mark, she tingled. What did he have planned for tonight? She checked her e-mail every fifteen minutes until she got a message from him.

The subject heading was DoublePlay and the body of the message said he was looking forward to working with her. Her stomach lurched. Working? She clicked the hyperlink. It led to another survey for BodyVibe that asked her to describe her experience last night from a couples’ perspective.

She frowned, feelings in free fall, before she remembered that Mark had proposed a business relationship not a personal one. SoloPlay paid per survey and DoublePlay undoubtedly operated the same way. No surveys, no monthly paycheck. Pleasure was only a by-product, but after last night she wanted more. DoublePlay was her chance to leave her inhibitions in the past with a guy who wasn’t going to judge her. The only way this experiment could work was if she kept her emotions out of it and her goal firmly in mind. She nodded resolutely. Right, she could do that.

On her lunch break, she logged onto a computer in the quietest corner of the library and clicked the DoublePlay hyperlink again. She answered the survey questions frankly, as she usually did, but she couldn’t bring herself to make note of one disturbing observation. The most arousing aspect of wearing BodyVibe and playing with a partner *was* her partner. When she thought about dinner last night and her clit swelled and her nipples tightened, she didn’t remember a single throb or vibration she enjoyed via the remote control. She remembered the hot look in Mark’s eyes as he watched her.

And she wanted to see that look in his eyes again.

Mark parked his car in front of Alisa's apartment. His briefcase held a selection of prototypes slated for the DoublePlay line. He hadn't broached the subject of her finding another partner, and he had to admit, at least to himself, that the idea of her playing with another man made him crazy. He wanted to be the one to gauge her reaction to each of his new designs. He didn't want her to have another partner, ever. Every time he thought about that jerk at the restaurant last night and that Alisa must have slept with him at some time or another, he wanted to hit something. He couldn't explain it, but Sologirl was his.

He got out of the car and reached for his briefcase, feeling intoxicated by anticipation. He'd entered the territory where, if he had been drinking, he would have known that another shot was a dangerous idea. And then he would have tossed back another glass because he was drunk and his judgment was gone. Testing more DoublePlay toys with Alisa was the sexual equivalent of one tequila shot too many—and he was going to do it anyway. He didn't have enough blood in his brain anymore to care about the certainty of a killer hangover.

Sologirl was waiting for him.

The knock on the door made Alisa's heart skip a beat.

"Hey," Mark said, stepping forward when she stepped back.

He dropped a kiss on her cheek and the clean smell of soap and fresh cologne made her eyes drift shut for a blink. It stunned her how fast her body was ready for him. She wanted him on top of her, inside of her, entering her. Now.

She swallowed. "Can I get you something to drink?" she asked, pleased that her voice was steady.

He set his briefcase next to the couch. "I thought we could go out for a beer or something. Get to know each other."

Huh? "Sure. I'll just grab my purse."

They walked to her favorite bar, where Mark selected a quiet booth near the back. He sat next to her, not across from her, and she peeked sideways at him over the beer the server brought her. "I thought you'd want to get right to work on DoublePlay." There was no, absolutely no, disappointment in her voice.

He looked sheepish. "You have to promise not to laugh."

Alisa arched one eyebrow.

"I brought a sex game with me tonight," he explained with a small grin.

She burst out laughing. "You mean like spin the bottle or seven minutes in heaven?"

“More like truth or dare crossed with the *Kama Sutra*.” His eyes stroked down the length of her body, striking sparks of sensual memory. “You game?” he asked.

“Always.”

He pulled out a pack of cards and cast a colorful, six-sided die onto the table. The red surface of the die was inscribed with the word *answer*.

“Up to six can play.” He grinned. “We’ll ignore the colors since it’s just us. The concept is simple. The roll determines what the roller has to do. In this case, I rolled *answer* so I have to answer a question.”

“Any question?”

He nodded. “Or you can pick a card if you can’t think of anything. That’s the kinky part. It can be random and impersonal, or it can be very personal, indeed, depending on who is playing. Go ahead, ask me anything,” he urged.

“What’s your favorite movie?” she teased, going for an easy one.

“*Braveheart*.”

“Why?”

“Sorry, you only get one question. Your turn.”

She pouted and rolled the die. It read *suck*. “Suck what? Are you kidding me? I don’t think this game was meant to be played in public.”

Mark shrugged. “Take your pick, but remember, this is a family establishment.”

Alisa took his hand and pressed her cheek to his warm palm. She caught the tip of his pinkie finger between her lips. And sucked.

His eyes dipped briefly shut, then blazed. Alisa smiled against his hand, letting her tongue flash between his fingers. This was fun.

Mark quickly palmed the die and rolled *stroke*.

His hand touched her arm, fingers caressing the length of her biceps, skating over the thin, silky material of her blouse. Casually, he opened his hand and his thumb grazed her nipple, raising it to a peak. He stroked up and down, bumping her nipple on each pass as he smiled into her eyes. Her head fell back against the booth. She swallowed hard.

He placed the die in her hand. She dropped it.

Reveal.

“Unbutton your blouse,” he whispered. His breath fanned her lips. “Just a few buttons. No one else will see.”

She slowly unbuttoned three buttons of her blouse and pulled the placket forward so that he could see her breasts, outlined in her lacy bra, through the gap. Anyone else might assume she’d been careless while dressing, but Mark knew, and his eyes glowed with banked heat.

She leaned forward to grasp the die, allowing her shirt to fall open even more, and he groaned quietly. She handed it to him with a satisfied smile.

He spun it on the table. Now the die read *fantasize*. He smiled wickedly. “Oh, that’s easy. In my fantasy, you take me back to your apartment and let me get you naked. But I don’t stop there because I want to touch you. Taste you. Come inside you. I have plans for you tonight.”

Alisa’s breath stuttered in her throat. The urge to slide into his lap was almost irresistible. Instead, she picked up the die and rolled it across the table.

Ask.

One question came to mind. “What do you have in your briefcase?”

“Vibrating cock rings.”

Alisa leaned around Mark and flagged down their waiter. “Check, please.”

They slid out of the booth.

She let Mark take her keys out of her hand and unlock the door, enjoying his dominance and the way it aroused her. He urged her into her apartment with one hand on the small of her back. His other hand was already unbuttoning her blouse, using the fabric to pull her up to meet his hard kiss as he kicked the door shut.

“I’ve been wanting to do that all day,” he said.

He unfastened the button at her waist and her skirt fell to the floor. She stood in a white thong, a lacy bra and her sandals, dwarfed by his height. She didn’t have a moment to feel uncertain before his hands were on her again, skimming over flesh. He groaned slightly as he found her hard nipples, the slickness beneath her thong. He sank to his knees and pressed his mouth, breath hot, against her mound.

She wanted to feel his tongue inside her too. Could she tell him? Yes, she should, but she lost the moment as his thumb hooked aside the crotch of her panties. She felt the quick graze of teeth, then his entire tongue pressed wetly inside her. She pressed back. Her hips arched, seeking the rasp of his taste buds against her clit.

He replaced his tongue with his wide fingers. “Pinch your nipples for me.”

The lace of the bra heightened the sensation as she squeezed the hard buds between her fingers. He smiled, a frank grin of male appreciation as he watched her touch herself.

He rolled her clit under his thumb, making ever-tightening circles. If he kept that up, he was going to take her right over the edge. Any minute. She bent her knees to get closer to those magic hands. He pressed harder, setting one firm knuckle against her ass, and she came, spasming around his fingers. He pumped them lazily in and out of her channel, making her jump.

“Ah, sexy,” he sighed, standing up. He shucked his clothes unselfconsciously in the middle of her living room and pulled her afghan over the couch. “Is this okay?”

She nodded.

He grabbed his briefcase and sat down on the blanket. “You’ll see why I wanted you turned-on when I show you the toys.”

Alisa hid a frown. Damn, she had thought he’d jumped her because he couldn’t keep his hands off her, not because he was warming her up for the toys. Why couldn’t she seem to remember that this was a job for both of them?

He pulled out three black rubber rings with spider-like protrusions and she waited for him to explain the bizarre objects.

Mark slid one ring down the length of his erect cock, topping it with a condom.

She raised her eyebrows. “What now?” she asked.

He rested his head against the back of the couch and gazed at her through lowered lids. His pale eyes glowed like aqua flames. “Climb on, baby.” Heat shot through her. Suddenly, the stretchy black ring didn’t look silly anymore.

She walked toward the couch, slowly shedding her bra and panties. She placed one knee on each side of his hips. His fingers played around her entrance and his cockhead bumped against her. His hands on her hips eased her down, and she sat, sliding his cock deep inside her. The plastic spider bumped against her clit.

“Ready?” he asked.

“For what?”

“I’m going to fire it up.” He reached between them.

The spider began to crawl.

“Oh my God!” she squealed, shooting straight up.

“Good or bad?” he smiled, hands busy on her skin, catching her, coaxing her back down.

“Umm...”

“Give it a chance.”

It wasn’t a spider, really. The cock ring had an attachment similar to the clit cup on BodyVibe. When she hit it just right, the vibration was amazing, and the added stimulation of a hard cock coasting in and out of her hole as she slid up and down was irresistible.

“Needs to be a different color,” she gasped. “Too creepy.”

“Done.”

Her knees clutched his hips as she hugged the downstroke, pressing her clit against the tickler, trapping it between them. Tension gathered around her like energy during an electrical storm. The pleasure

was so intense that she felt like her hair must be standing on end and that the sparks behind her eyelids should be shooting from her fingertips too.

His hand tangled in her hair, pulling her in for a kiss. She pressed her tongue into his mouth and her pelvis against his cock. She flew over the edge instantly.

She soared above him and he held her tight against his chest until she collapsed. She tucked her face into his neck and tried to stop shaking as the last of the lights disappeared. His hands caressed her trembling back with long, warm strokes and she gave into the temptation to run her hands over his chest, his arms, his broad shoulders.

He was still hard inside her, but he lifted her easily off his lap, spun her around and set her beside him on the blanket. He glanced at his erect cock and frowned. "I'm not sure this ring is going to come off without a fight."

"Isn't that the point?" She giggled at his hectic expression.

"It would be if we didn't have two more of these suckers to try tonight."

"Want some help?"

"Trust me, if you touch me, it isn't going to help."

Warmth grew inside her. "It's stretchy, right?"

He nodded.

"You take the bottom. I'll take the top." Together, they eased the cock ring off his erection. His groan was loud and long. "Grab another one," he said, replacing his condom with a fresh one.

She tossed him a black ring from the floor. This one had soft spikes banding its width. She shivered in anticipation, ready to climb into his lap again.

"Oh, no, Sologirl. My turn this time."

He pulled the blanket to the carpeted floor and tugged her down on top of it.

He had let her set the pace for the first round, and it had just about killed him to hold still and let her take her pleasure with his body. This time, he wanted to give it to her. The cock ring wrapped around him had flexible spikes designed to take the shotgun approach to the female pleasure zones—it hit them all in a wide, round pattern. He knew from her surveys that Sologirl liked to play hit and run with her clit when she was playing alone, so he planned to take that approach with her now.

He lowered his body onto hers, spreading her thighs. Because he couldn't resist, he kissed her, slowly, exploring her lips. This was too good to rush. His cockhead rested securely at the entrance to her body, a promise of what was to come, but he wanted to take his time in spite of the need hammering at his balls.

She followed his lead, opening beneath him, lips, thighs and arms welcoming him. With his weight on his elbows and knees, he sank into her by questing degrees, nibbling, nudging and finally swirling his hips in a slim circle to bring the spikes in contact with her clitoris.

She inhaled sharply and jerked her hips upward.

“If you think that’s good, just wait.” He reached down to start the vibrations and ground his teeth as the hum sent fiery pleasure shooting up his spine. He watched her face and her breathing, admiring the flush that spread across her chest, so captivated by her responses that he was damn glad he had a band wrapped around his cock or he’d explode right now. Her soft whimpers drove him right to the edge of urgency, and he wanted to slam into her body but he held back, painfully waiting until she could make it back up to the ledge with him. He prayed for enough time to make her scream once, maybe twice, before the ticking time bomb lodged in his balls exploded.

Sologirl’s body shifted restlessly under his. She shut her eyes and turned her face sharply to one side, then the other, frowning. She’d already come twice and was probably getting frustrated, poor thing, dying to come again but afraid it wasn’t going to happen. He shifted with her and caught her chin with two fingers to bring her eyes back to his. “Not enough, huh?”

Her eyes snapped open.

“Relax. I’ll get you there.” He held her wary gaze and withdrew his cock from her pussy with a soft popping sound that made his dick jump against his palm. Her cream flowed in a thin, clear channel toward the blanket. She was plenty wet enough for what he had in mind. He dragged his thumb through her moisture and rubbed a gentle circle around the tight ring of her asshole.

Her harsh gasp made him smile in anticipation.

“Relax,” he said again. “You know how to take a cock here.” He’d read all about her solo ass adventures in her surveys.

He breached the tight ring of muscle with his thumb and she pushed toward his hand. “Good girl. You want my cock?” He knew she did, but he wanted to hear her say it. He needed to know she wanted him there.

Her china blue eyes were wide and her body felt stiff beneath him.

“Sologirl?” he pulled back, fearing he had somehow misunderstood.

She reached forward to grab his wrist. “Do it.” Her voice was soft and thready, but there was no fear in her eyes. Just need. “Put your cock in my ass,” she pleaded softly.

“That’s my girl.” He pressed her knees to her shoulders, exposing her asshole completely. Sologirl rested one ankle on his shoulder and held her other knee wide with her hand, freeing him to set his weight on one arm and use the other hand to press his cock to her back entrance. She was tight and hot enough to have him gasping and swearing aloud, but it was her enthusiasm that shredded his control. She took him, pressing into him, wriggling forward, urging him on.

The head of his cock popped into her tight heat and crushing ecstasy nearly blinded him. Operating on instinct, but careful to use the correct hand, he tried to find her clit before her erotic moans and the vibration on his balls made him lose control. She had to be close too. God help him if she wasn't.

Her long, low moan of raw need restored a measure of his sanity. Her pleasure was paramount. He took a deep breath to force some oxygen to his brain and with it came a memory—Sologirl's Vibrating Double Dildo survey. She liked to feel full. He could do that for her.

He leaned sideways and took her with him, quickly rearranging their limbs to give him enough room to reach her pussy, stay in her ass and not turn either of them into a pretzel. Her ankle was under his ear and her other leg was sprawled across the top of his hips, giving him plenty of room to work. He slipped his fingers into her pussy, one, two, then three, braiding them together. He could feel the top of his dick through the thin wall separating her ass from her pussy as he pumped his fingers in and out of her, reaching up to flick her clit with his thumb, hard, on every pass. Neither of them wanted gentle right now. His hips bounced her slowly, then faster, giving her everything he had.

"Oh, God, don't stop. That feels so good. I'm going to... Oh! Yes!" she wailed, almost bending in half as her orgasm hit.

Mark gripped her hips, the only part of her he could reach, as he was nearly unseated by his own helpless spasms. His climax was explosive, spurred on by the vibration against his balls, yet restricted by the cock ring. Every eruption into her body felt like a battle won. He felt connected to her by more than his cock, as if his edges were expanding to include her. He tried to remember how to breathe as his body took over, emptying into her, over and over again.

He must have passed out for a split second because her weak giggle startled him.

"Can you turn that thing off?" Her voice seemed to come from a far distance. His head was now pillowed on her calf and their bodies were perpendicular to each other, forming a T shape, still connected at the hip and by their tangled legs. He chuckled too, releasing his hold, and she fell away from him. He caught the condom and the cock ring before they fell too. The buzzing stopped. "Shower?" he suggested.

She pointed limply down the hall, flat on her back, one arm raised above her head. He was tempted to go back down on the floor with her, pull her soft body into his arms and run his hands over all that silky flesh. The signs of their play were all over her body and he wanted to touch them, erase them, maybe increase them. He didn't want to leave her. "Join me?"

"I can't walk."

"Not a problem. I'll be right back." He disposed of both condoms and returned to find her in the same position. He wrapped the last prototype around his wrist and grabbed another condom. "Give me your hands." He pulled her to her feet and into his arms. She was light and he liked that she didn't ask him to put her down.

“Bath or shower?” he asked, when they reached the bathroom and he lowered her carefully to her feet. The slide of her soft body down his length had him stirring again. He held up the remaining cock ring. “This one’s waterproof.”

Sologirl cocked her head to the side, inspecting the black ring in his hand.

He wondered how she would respond. Would she play coy as so many women would? Claim fatigue? Make him feel like he was asking for too much?

She took it out of his hand and gave it a snap. “It doesn’t look very sturdy.” His heart swelled. Was there no end to Sologirl’s ability to amaze him? She was ready for more.

“It’s single-use,” he explained.

A playful grin stole across her face. “SoloPlay should make them in every color of the rainbow. If these little suckers pack a punch, they’ll replace glow-in-the-dark condoms as party favors. Maybe they can put them on the counter at Come Again in a glass fish bowl.” Laughter shook her small frame and made her breasts bounce.

She caught him looking and stopped laughing but didn’t stop smiling. Her eyebrows lifted as she stared at his rising cock. “The Energizer Bunny has nothing on you, buddy.”

“What can I say? I enjoy my work,” he quipped as she bent to the taps.

Alisa was glad her back was turned. It didn’t feel like work. Somewhere around the second orgasm, it had started to feel like something else, something she didn’t want to examine, especially since he didn’t seem to be as blown away by the sex as she was. The fact that she’d vocalized her needs to him excited her and worried her at the same time.

She took her time adjusting the water temperature, trying to figure out why she felt disappointed. Hadn’t this been her plan all along, to use him to learn how to communicate sexually with a man? Clearly, after a couple more sessions with him, she was going to be an expert. She had just flat-out begged him to put his cock in her ass, and it was only their second night together!

A flush heated her cheeks. How on earth had he known she needed to have her ass fucked to reach orgasm that last time? She had wanted to come so badly that saying the words out loud had been preferable to the alternative. If he had pulled away from her, if he hadn’t been willing to go to those extremes, she would have died from the wanting. Mark made her feel pleasure so intense that she feared she might say anything, do anything, for more. No one had ever made her want it bad enough to ask for it. He had taken total command of her with his confident body, used his hands and his mouth and his cock to drive her up to the top of a cliff and dared her to jump. The bold words he had demanded from her made it even more exciting. They had set her free. She should be grateful, not disappointed.

The water was perfect and she had no excuse to delay any longer. She turned around.

Mark's pale eyes glowed as he waited for her. He had placed the ring at the base of his penis, which was so erect now that it stood straight out from his body. Professional curiosity made her wonder if the thin rubber ring could deliver the powerful vibrations that the other two toys had thrilled her with tonight.

Relief poured through her tight muscles.

She was being silly. It was the toys, not Mark, causing her to feel so much pleasure. What girl's world wouldn't be rocked by a vibrating cock ring, not to mention two or three? She was being an idiot, anyway. Who cared about the whys when there was a beautiful, naked man within arm's length and he had a ring wrapped around him that guaranteed ecstasy?

His cock leaped again, catching her attention. She pointed at the condom in his hand. "Suit up." It was time for them to get back to work.

Chapter Eleven

Mark pushed away from his computer and rose to pace across his office, scrubbing his hands over his thighs in an attempt to get rid of his raging erection.

Sologirl's latest report was displayed on his screen. As always, his dick had responded immediately to her X-rated descriptions, but this time his reaction was even more intense because he didn't have to depend on his imagination to flesh out the fantasy. He had his memories. Vivid memories. Unforgettable.

What would he bring her tonight? The Jungle Gym? No, ultra-supportive sex cushions were probably too intense for a third date. Leather Cage? Uh, ditto. He wanted to take her something that wouldn't require a warm-up or an "I'm not a deviant" disclaimer.

Shit, thinking about their date tonight wasn't helping him get rid of his boner. He returned to his computer and opened the DoublePlay prototype list. At least if he made his choice now, he might be able to get some work done today.

He found inspiration among the butt plugs.

There were six different models. His cell phone rang while he was deciding which one, or maybe two, he would bring to Alisa's apartment tonight.

"You're interrupting DoublePlay progress," he said when he accepted the call.

"What progress? Did you get a loan I don't know about?" Ryan asked.

"Nope, but I'll have the line ready to go into production next month."

"Not possible. It took us forever to hash out the SoloPlay Originals, and we haven't even screened the applicants for DoublePlay yet."

"Yeah, I kind of took care of that already."

"You did? How?"

"By finding Sologirl," Mark admitted against his better judgment.

"Explain."

Reluctantly, Mark told him about his idea for Sologirl testing the DoublePlay line by herself and how she had initially declined.

"Oh shit. Do you know how much trouble SoloPlay could get into for breaking privacy laws? If your employees think their personal info is public knowledge among the staff, you'll be up to your ears in lawsuits—"

“Cool it. I wrote our privacy policy. As the owner of the company, I have legal access to personal information if I need it to perform a specific job.”

“You are skirting the letter of the law there, buddy, and you know it. Tell me it was just an e-mail. Tell me you didn’t actually talk to her.” Ryan sounded panicked.

His silence answered the question. Ryan groaned. “Oh, man. Did you call her?”

“No, I went to see her at work.” His voice was grim because he knew exactly what Ryan was going to say.

“Oh thank God. So you’ll only be dealing with a sexual harassment lawsuit. Those are easy to win.” The sarcasm stung, and he deserved it more than Ryan knew.

Mark forced a chuckle. “Relax. She said yes. Sologirl and her...partner,” he stumbled over the lie of omission, “will have the DoublePlay line culled down to eight products within a month, maybe a little longer,” he amended, wondering how fast they could really work their way through the prototypes. “Don’t you remember her from the surveys I sent you?” It was impossible for him to believe Ryan didn’t recall Sologirl’s uniquely sensual descriptions.

“The BodyVibe marathon girl, right?”

“Exactly. We don’t need anybody else. She can pick the winners and save us a bundle of money at the same time. She hasn’t been wrong yet, has she?”

“But we’ve had other data to back her up. This makes me nervous. It isn’t like you to do something this extreme without consulting me.”

“You’re my financial adviser, Ryan. Not my business partner.”

“I’m your friend, too, and you’re acting like an idiot. Get more data.”

“I don’t need more data.” Mark dug in his heels.

“Then send me her reports so you’ll have another opinion.”

“I’m not going to do that either, you pervert.” Primarily because he didn’t want Ryan getting off on his sex life. “Trust me. She can do this.”

“So how did you find her?” Ryan’s voice held curiosity and sudden suspicion.

Mark thought of Crystal, and, again, that strange frisson of memory plagued him. “Divine inspiration and good instincts.”

“Fucking great. You’re counting on your instincts and one woman’s opinion to launch a million-dollar line of toys.”

“Gotta go,” Mark said, anxious to get back to his perusal of butt plugs. “I’ll let you know when the new line is ready to roll.”

“You do that. Good luck, buddy.” Ryan hung up first.

Guilt nagged at him. After all, Ryan was having a logical reaction. For all his jokes and his devil-may-care attitude, Ryan was one cautious son of a bitch, and if he knew the full extent of Mark's transgressions, he'd have lawyers pounding down the door just to cover SoloPlay's ass.

Mark banished his misgivings. He was more sure than ever that this was the best and fastest way to bring the line to market. She *would* pick the winners, and he would be with her every step of the way. He couldn't doubt himself now, especially after last night. He knew what Sologirl could do. Her sexual responsiveness was astounding.

After their shower last night, she had heated up their leftovers from the night before so they could chow down in her small dining room. She'd been wearing a short robe that had fallen open in all kinds of interesting ways during dinner. Even after coming twice, he was ready for her again. Unfortunately, he'd only brought the three cock rings with him. He'd been on the verge of asking her if she wanted to give her favorite ring another test ride when she had yawned. Feeling like an ungrateful beast, he had said good night and asked when he could come back. Her assurance that she was free every night this week had elated him, and he had driven home grinning like an idiot.

Realizing he was daydreaming, Mark brought his attention back to the computer screen. He quickly sent a requisition to product development for all six models and called in a massive take-out order to the Italian restaurant on the corner of her street. If he was going to make her work every night, the least he could do was feed her.

Alisa opened the door.

"Ladies' choice," Mark said, striding into her apartment with his briefcase in one hand and a large sack cradled in his other arm. "Food first?" He wagged his eyebrows up and down and held up his briefcase. "Or later?"

"Depends on what's on the menu," she responded slyly.

"Chicken Parmesan, antipasto salad, tiramisu—"

"That wasn't the menu I was talking about." Although the fact that he had brought dessert guaranteed she would do anything he desired.

"Butt plugs," he said easily, reminding her of the first time she had met Crystal. He set the bag of food on her kitchen counter and walked toward her carrying the briefcase. Her heart began to flutter. She had already changed her panties twice since she had gotten home from work and now they were damp again. He took her hand and pulled her over to the couch, drawing her down into his lap.

He smelled like fresh soap and clean male, and she wanted to lick his neck. Heeding a flash of anxiety, she resisted the urge to melt into his large frame. They had only *really* known each other for three

days, unless their e-mails counted as an introduction. Although they had done quite a few intimate acts together, she shouldn't want to cuddle with him.

"Everything okay?" he asked, pulling her astride him on the couch. Her jean skirt rode up her thighs, bringing the wet center of her panties in contact with his erection.

She grinned. "I guess I know where you stand on dinner versus other."

"Not necessarily," he said mysteriously. "I believe in multitasking." His hands slid under the back of her skirt and cupped her ass.

"How do you mean?" she gasped.

His fingers flirted with the rim of her panties and then slid underneath to tease the crack of her ass, sliding up and down, not penetrating, but not tickling either, staying right in the middle, giving her just enough sensation to drive her more firmly into his lap. "We could insert the first plug and then have dinner. Unless you think you'll lose your appetite?" he said.

Her mouth fell open, then shut.

The man was diabolical.

He reached over to open the briefcase. "I brought quite a selection."

"No kidding." They were all bright blue, and there were at least a half dozen of them, in varying sizes. Instantly, she was reliving the memory of last night, with his cock swelling in her ass while she longed for more to fill her.

Her hand was drawn to the smallest one first, although the one with the knobs and ridges looked intriguing. Best to start small, she imagined. She moved to get off his lap and gestured down the hall to the bathroom. "Do you want me to go put it, uh—"

"And ruin my fun?" His pale eyes blazed. "No way, Sologirl. Bottoms up."

He lowered her, face-first, to the couch. She felt she should protest something, but she wasn't sure what. Her undignified position? His high-handed treatment of her body? Before she could decide, he pushed her skirt up around her waist and pulled her panties down around her knees. She felt cool air on her engorged pussy and shuddered, pressing her forehead into the couch.

His cool finger probed between her butt cheeks and she tensed. "Just lube," he reassured her. She tried to focus on the sexy sensation of his slippery finger readying her asshole, but couldn't because her teeth were imbedded in her lower lip. The sharp pain in her lip was distracting.

When the tip of something smooth and hard pressed against her anus, seeking entrance, she flinched automatically. It felt big and she wasn't ready.

"God, your ass is beautiful," he said, running his hands from her waist to her knees. "I'm so hard right now, I'm not sure I'm going to be able to sit across from you without attacking you." She felt his teeth nip her ass and she giggled. His words lit a spark within her and she pressed toward the plug. He groaned louder than she did when it sank into her ass.

His fingers held the plug deep within her while her body involuntarily spasmed around the device, getting used to its girth. His other hand grasped her hip in a bruising grip that aroused her even more than the pressure of the plug. Her pussy began to throb in time with her pulse, and she was certain she would come instantly if he touched her clit, even by accident.

“You have no idea how much I want to flip you over and drive my cock into your pussy,” he said as he pressed his face against her lower back.

“I think you’d better,” she begged. Her breath was escaping in short, panting breaths that did nothing to clear the haze of lights dancing before her eyes. She needed him to fill her, complete her. Now that she knew how much he wanted her, she was ready for anything.

Mark hesitated for a long moment.

Disappointment and frustration shot through her when he dragged her panties over the plug and pulled the hem of her skirt down to her knees. She released her breath with a groan as he raised her slowly to her feet.

Her ass clenched around the plug and her knees buckled. He caught her around the waist with one arm, looking into her face. He tapped his finger gently against her abused lower lip. “Everything okay?”

“Fine, now,” she said breathlessly.

His blue eyes were sober, a little angry. He held her tightly. “You have to tell me if something makes you uncomfortable. I need to know what you are feeling every minute.”

His concern made her heart pound, and that was a dangerous thing. *He’s doing his job*, she reminded herself. *He doesn’t care about me, just the way the toys make me feel.*

Alisa reached up to wrap her arms around his neck, desperate to reassure him quickly. She didn’t want him to know that she was discovering DoublePlay required more than kinky toys and a good supply of batteries. He might want to stop and take notes. She whispered in his ear, “I’m enjoying it, I swear. I just wasn’t sure you were.” Damn, she hadn’t meant to say that last bit.

He pressed closer until she could feel his cock, hard against her belly. “You don’t have to worry about me.” He leaned down to drop a light kiss on her lips, but she held him to her mouth, aching for him to finish what he had started. The plug in her ass made her feel breathless and needy. She reached for his belt.

“Down, girl. Isn’t this part of the fun?” He held her a few inches away from his chest, clever hands spreading heat. It took her a moment to realize that she was actually *enjoying* this crazy state of arousal. Delaying their play was much like delaying her orgasm during masturbation. The eventual satisfaction would be that much sweeter. She was also enjoying his excitement and the way he was looking at her. It made her feel powerful to know that their play was having such an effect on him too.

She allowed him to draw her slowly toward the kitchen, where he washed his hands before taking a seat at her dining room table. He watched her walk back and forth from the kitchen to the table with their dinners. His hot gaze made her feel like *she* was dinner, and she gloried in it.

“Can I help?” he asked.

“No thanks. I’m enjoying myself.” Her panties rubbed wetly between her thighs. Her nipples brushed back and forth beneath her shirt because she hadn’t bothered with a bra. The friction was exquisite, and she hoped he could see the hard points through her thin shirt.

Finally, she sank down across from him and eased back in her chair. She looked at him from under lowered lashes, feeling dreamy, wet and ready.

If she had thought he looked carved from cold stone the first time she saw him, he looked carved from solid lava rock now. His jaw was hard and his eyes were narrow slits of blue. His hands were clenched into fists. Oh, this was fabulous fun. He looked ready to—

“Nope, can’t do it,” he ground out and pulled her into his lap, shoving her skirt up and ripping at her panties.

It took effort to still his wrists. “This was your game, buddy. Eat up.” She leaned down to taste his lips. His tongue dueled with hers as if he could persuade her to change her mind by the sheer force of his hard kiss, but she stuck to her guns, gentling his mouth with her lips, talking him off the ledge. He moaned as her mouth whispered teasingly over his, but he surrendered, quieting under her touch.

She smiled and buried her face in his neck, breathing deeply. Her tongue darted out to taste his skin. “Mmm. I can’t imagine what the bumpy plug is going to feel like,” she sighed.

“Neither can I,” he groaned.

She pulled back to give him a quizzical look.

“I’ll be able to feel the bumps,” he explained, chuckling roughly. “When I’m inside you.”

Holy shit. She hadn’t thought of that. Maybe she should reconsider her position on dinner. He eased her slowly off his lap. She shuddered as his fingers sought out the plug through the fabric of her skirt.

She dropped into her seat, bouncing in surprise as the plug landed more deeply in her ass. He chuckled again. She settled back down more carefully, pulling her skirt high on her thighs and spreading her legs as far as her skirt would allow to give the plug more room. He wasn’t laughing anymore, she noticed, feeling smug. She picked up her fork.

“Eat fast, Sologirl,” he said. “I can’t wait for dessert.”

She had no doubt that he wasn’t talking about the tiramisu.

Chapter Twelve

“You’re late,” Beth whispered urgently. “I logged you in and told Irene you were in the ladies room.”

“Thanks.” This wasn’t the first time Beth had saved her in the past month. Late nights with Mark were taking a definite toll on her, but when his eyes lit up like blue flames and he pulled another toy out of his briefcase, she couldn’t resist him.

Last night, he’d carried a chair-sized, paper-wrapped package into her apartment. Sturdy rubber, leopard-print cushions had emerged from the plain brown wrapping—a naughty adults-only Jungle Gym. He had taken the cushions apart and put them back together in every conceivable combination, using Velcro straps to secure them to each other and her to the cushions as he fucked her frontwards, backwards, upside down and sideways. She must have come a dozen times before he tucked her into bed and left her, weak as a newborn kitten.

She had forgotten to set her alarm, which was why she was late this morning, but the walk from the parking lot had also been slow, due the fact that every muscle from her neck down was feeling the effects of orgasm after orgasm crashing through her system.

“Another late night with Mr. Multiple?” Beth asked, curiosity rampant in her sparkling eyes.

“Yeah.” Alisa bit her lip.

“That good?”

She nodded, sighing.

“Then why do you look so damn depressed?” Beth was joking, but Alisa could see concern in her eyes. She didn’t want Beth worried about her, but it was hard to share her feelings, especially when she didn’t want to examine them too closely herself.

“No, he’s good. Great, actually,” Alisa said slowly. “It’s just complicated.” Beth didn’t know about SoloPlay. Or DoublePlay.

How could she explain that she was depressed because Mark anticipated her every desire and met it unflinching, giving of his hands and lips and cock until she was mute and shaking, unstrung with mind-melting pleasure every night? Most girls would count their blessings if they had a guy who could satisfy their sexual needs so thoroughly. Alisa barely had to shape a thought or a question because Mark was right there with her, reading her body, interpreting her moans, predicting the exact thing that would drive her over the edge of ecstasy. On the rare occasions she had to tell him how to please her, she had discovered it turned her on that much more to give voice to her desires.

With Mark, she'd jumped the hurdle of her reserve like it was nothing more than a crack in the pavement. Every time she thought of him, her pussy began to tingle. She got wet the moment he walked through her apartment door, the moment she *thought* about him walking through her door. She began a slow burn when he looked at her. When he reached for her, she went up in flames. She was halfway to orgasm before she even saw what toys he had in his briefcase.

So much for being an objective tester for DoublePlay toys—Mark could get her hot by rubbing two sticks together and whistling *Dixie*. The whole purpose of the DoublePlay line was to arouse partners, but she had discovered that there was more to it than sexual satisfaction derived from toys built for two. Mark's pleasure increased her own. His erotic responses fueled her arousal in a never-ending synergistic cycle that took her higher and higher each night, and she couldn't pretend any longer that it was the creative toys Mark brought with him that turned her on.

It was him.

And she was totally screwed.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Beth asked.

Alisa was shocked to find herself tempted. More than tempted, actually. She wanted to share her thoughts, for once. "I can't tell you here," she said tentatively.

Beth's eyes widened. "Coffee shop?"

"Definitely not." That's where she had met Eric. "Want to get a drink after work?"

Beth grimaced. "Do we have to wait that long? The curiosity is going to kill me."

"It'll be worth the wait," Alisa promised.

Eight hours later, Beth's mouth hung open over her untouched margarita. "Four months ago, you'd never had an orgasm and now you have orgasms professionally? You're getting a monthly paycheck for banging this guy every night? Remind me not to make fun of your research projects."

Alisa laughed with her. She had thought she'd feel nervous telling Beth about her arrangement with Mark, but it was actually a relief. "So you don't think I'm a freak?"

"What? No! I'm jealous and I want more details, but, no, I don't think you're a freak." Beth looked thoughtful. "I do think you're kidding yourself, though."

"What do you mean?"

"You come in late every day, when you know it drives Irene crazy. You claim you're using this guy for sex, but you're mooning around like Taylor Swift after junior prom." A grin split her lips. "I think you like this guy."

Alisa concentrated on raising her margarita glass to her lips. The steady gleam in Beth's eyes told her that she wasn't going to let this one go. She was on the hunt for information and wouldn't quit until she

found her answer. “Admit it. You like him. How could you not? He’s like Pavlov but with a better buzzer. My God, he’s got you trained to come on command! There’s no way he’s just doing this for his job. Nobody could be that cold. I bet he’s got a thing for you too. You guys have been doing this for how long?”

Alisa did a quick mental calculation. “A month.”

“And you’re seeing him tonight?”

Alisa nodded and glanced at her watch. “In a half an hour.”

Beth nodded decisively. “Tell him how you feel.”

Alisa shook her head. “I can’t. He made it perfectly clear from the very beginning that he didn’t want to test the toys with me, and I forced him. It’s all part of the job to him. He types notes into his laptop while I go to sleep every night. There’s no way I can tell him how I feel about him. It’ll be too depressing when he hands me a paycheck and a pink slip.”

Beth crossed her arms. “What makes you think you get a free pass on crashing and burning? How do you think the rest of us do it? I’ve gone out on a limb plenty of times and gotten the brush-off from a guy I thought was the love of my life. It’s a rite of passage, dearie. What have you got to lose?”

Since that was the kind of thinking that had gotten her into this mess in the first place, Alisa frowned. “My heart? Everything? When we’re together, it’s so fabulous that I can’t think of anything but what he is doing to me and I’ll say anything to get him to keep doing it. Talking about sex is easy now, but feelings? Feelings are a whole different ball game, and I don’t know why—”

“I do,” Beth cut in.

Alisa stared at her. “You do?”

“You’re always talking about how your parents never talk to each other.”

“I am?”

Beth nodded. “It doesn’t sound like they taught you any useful interpersonal communication skills.”

She pursed her lips. “Not so much.”

“Do you really want to follow in their footsteps?”

“No.” Alisa slumped in her seat. “It’s my worst nightmare, but I’m not sure I’m brave enough for the alternative.”

“Sure you are.” Beth’s warm brown eyes encouraged her. “Open up a little. Risk the crash and burn.”

“I was afraid you were going to say that,” she sighed.

Beth gave her a hug. “I’m here if you need me.”

Alisa hugged her back. She put money on the table. “I’ve got to run.”

“Don’t keep Mr. Multiple waiting,” Beth advised.

An hour later, Alisa hung naked, suspended by leather straps, from her thankfully very sturdy bedroom door. Her body was on display, anchored to the door by a secure latticework of tight restraints that crisscrossed her body but left her breasts and pussy bare. Her arms were lashed across a steel suspension bar and fastened at the wrist, and her feet were buckled far apart to another steel bar that hovered six inches off the floor.

“What do you think?” Mark asked. He gave her hips an experimental tug.

She cleared her throat. This was work, she reminded herself, even if the margarita in her empty belly was making it hard to keep her mind on the job. “I’d be a lot more turned-on if I wasn’t afraid the door was going to break. I don’t want to land on my face and break my nose.”

“The door isn’t going to break.”

“Maybe not. But I don’t know that.”

“Hmm. You look turned-on to me,” Mark said. He ran a bold finger through her wet pubic hair and lightly pinched one hard nipple.

“I’m aroused because you’re looking at me,” she said honestly.

“So it’s not the up in the air part that does it for you? It’s someone looking at you?”

You, she thought and nodded.

He adjusted the straps until her feet hit the floor, and she breathed a sigh of relief.

His thick finger invaded her core. “What if I invited a few friends over tonight and left you right here for them to discover? Would that do it for you too?”

Her pussy clenched around his finger.

Mark grinned. “God, I love it when you drench me like that. Okay, so this model is good for display and confinement only. We can downgrade the straps and save SoloPlay a little money,” he said.

She panted and tried to rub her clit against his finger, but he pulled his hand away to make notes on a legal pad.

He glanced at her. “I’m going to make myself a drink and read the paper while you wait here, naked, getting wet for me. I’m not going to touch you until I think you’re ready.”

He quickly thrust and withdrew one wide finger. “You’re not ready yet.” He left the bedroom and she heard ice hitting a glass in the kitchen, paper rustling. Alisa could feel her body swelling, trembling. When he returned to the room, she stared at him breathlessly.

His voice was ultracasual. “By the way, we’re expecting a few of my buddies for cocktails and poker in thirty minutes.” Her eyes shot wide and he chuckled hoarsely. “Yeah, you better hurry. You’re not nearly wet enough yet, and I don’t care if the guys have to wait. They can watch.”

Alisa shivered within the tight leather straps. Was it possible for her pussy to actually drip? If he kept this up, they might find out. Her nipples felt hard enough to shatter, and she couldn’t control the quivering spasms between her legs.

Mark stood in front of her and rubbed his ice-cold, sweating glass over her nipples. Sparks shot through her as he dipped to suck her nipple into his warm mouth. “Do you like the idea? Of being watched by a crowd?” He slid two fingers into her, easily. “I think you do. Good girl.”

Upon arriving at her apartment after work, he had only taken time to remove his suit coat, but not his pants, shirt or tie, and his erection strained against his pants. He unzipped them and took his cock out, then unbuttoned the two bottom buttons of his dress shirt. He rolled a condom down his length.

She couldn’t touch him, couldn’t move a muscle as he pulled the straps to make her feet rise off the floor again. Now, she couldn’t care less about falling. He slid into her body.

Trapped between his rock-hard, fully clothed body and the even harder door, naked, vulnerable and powerless, Alisa was completely focused on the friction between her clit and his cock. Mark ground against her, somehow knowing she wanted it hard and fast, as hard and fast as he could give it to her. Air left her lungs in a whoosh as he crushed her against the door. She came instantly, taking every inch, sobbing with pleasure as he continued to stroke into her. He adjusted the straps so that she hung a bit harder on his cock, and shudders racked her inside and out as a second orgasm took her with him.

Mark slipped away from her and she relaxed, hanging, trusting the straps.

“I think you like the Cage.” His voice was rough. “I’ll be back in a second.”

Alisa nodded weakly, too exhausted to insist that he take her down before he disposed of the condom. She let her eyes drift shut as he left the room.

The doorbell rang and she jumped, struggling to get free.

Had he really invited his friends over to play poker? The renewed pulse between her thighs made her wonder if she wanted him to do just that.

Mark entered the bedroom and chuckled wickedly when he saw her frantic eyes. “Gotcha. You looked like you were going to fall asleep on me. We’re not done yet, not quite.” A shadow flickered in his eyes, like a cloud crossing blue sky.

Her jaw dropped as she realized he had rung the doorbell himself, to continue the fantasy. He closed her mouth with a kiss, ignoring her outraged sputters. “Careful, now, or I’ll leave you dangling.”

She seethed while he untangled her from the door. She was going to make him pay for that little trick. Pay dearly.

Mark guided her to the bed, divesting her of leather straps as they walked. He knelt at her feet and began massaging the red lines where the leather had cut into her flesh. His hands spread warmth through her legs. His fingers played over her hips, her belly and her ribs, erasing the evidence of the straps with his gentle fingers, then his tongue. By the time he reached her breasts, she had almost forgotten she needed to even the score. Her thighs parted. He slid between them.

His eyes glowed. “Ah, Sologirl. You are amazing.”

Disappointment flared, dispelling her arousal. Of course he thought of her as Sologirl. She had no right to expect anything else. He nibbled a path down her body until she felt his breath, hot on her inner thigh.

She gave his broad shoulders a firm shove. “Save it for DoublePlay, Mr. Winters.” The surprise on his face made her feel marginally better, and she swung her legs off the bed. She reached for his leather briefcase and rummaged inside until she found what she sought.

“My turn,” she declared.

“It’s always your turn,” he grumbled.

“Hey, I didn’t design the products—you did.” She looked at the toy in her hand. “What is this? An alien? Or an insect?” She snapped the green latex between her hands and rubbed her thumb over the extra-long clit ticklers.

“Which is more appealing?” he asked.

“Depends on your perspective, I suppose. What’s this for?” she asked, indicating the pointed nub at the bottom of the device.

“Your ass, my dear.” His grin was slow and sizzling.

“Silly me.” Alisa loosened his tie and pulled it out of his collar. She slowly unbuttoned the rest of his shirt. When she reached his waist, Mark was ready for her, and they made short work of his suit pants, boxer briefs and socks.

Alisa bent to take him in her mouth. He groaned, making her smile around his cock. Swiftly, she slid the thick, green ring down to the base of his cock and carefully wrapped the lowest loop of stretchy latex around his balls. With one hand on his chest, she pushed him to the bed. Another quick movement had the condom in place, and she seated herself on his already hard cock. “Ready?” she asked.

At his slow nod, she reached between their bodies to flip the switch. Strong vibrations made them both shiver. “Make it good. It’s the very last one. We’re done, Sologirl. You did it,” he said with a pleased grin.

“This is the last DoublePlay toy?” she asked, heart suddenly in her throat.

He nodded triumphantly.

“We’ll have to make the most of it,” she said, pressing down on him, determined to enjoy the last ride. She wouldn’t allow herself to feel the thick dismay his words caused—not now. Not yet. Not until she had to.

Alisa began a slow bump and grind, concentrating hard on the touch-and-go sensation of the vibrating ticklers. She took one of his thick forearms in each of her hands and forced his arms above his head. Her breasts brushed his chest as she swayed above him. She smiled into his hot eyes. “I think this is going to take a while.”

“You could increase the vibration,” he said tightly, through clenched teeth.

“No, just bear with me.” She enjoyed his heartfelt groan immensely.

After the doorbell stunt and his obvious glee over the conclusion of their DoublePlay experiments, she had no desire to have mercy on him. Alisa leaned back and increased the angle between their chests to ninety degrees, then more. She rested her weight on her arms and slid her legs in front of her, allowing Mark to support her full weight, until she could brace her feet on the bed next to his shoulders. The tip of the bumpy stimulator pressed deep into her ass, and the supple clit ticklers had plenty of room to fly now.

“Make sure SoloPlay suggests this position in the product description,” she said. Mark’s hands cupped her bottom, helping her to ride him. With the vibrations fore and aft and his cock filling her, she barely needed to move at all to have an intense orgasm. It was a foregone conclusion that she would have more, and the thick green band wrapped around Mark’s cock assured her that he wouldn’t come before she was finished with him, not that he generally had any trouble in that department.

She began to move again.

“Enough,” he growled and tipped her to the bed. He shucked the cock ring in an impatient motion.

“Hey, I wasn’t finished yet!” she protested.

“Neither am I.” He covered her body with his own, sinking deep inside her, deeper than he had been able to get while wearing the green cock ring. She quickened around him, welcoming his impatience.

He’d never ditched the toys before. Except for that first night after their BodyVibe dinner, they’d always had a DoublePlay toy between them somewhere. Alisa gazed at his face, caught by the raw desire that transformed his stark features. Was it possible he wanted her too?

She hooked her arms around her knees and opened for him. His weight crushed her. His heat filled her, and the fire in his eyes raised her own flame even higher when he lowered his head and took her mouth in a searing kiss. His hips commanded her and his body demanded submission. She gave it to him. She let him take her, take everything. This one last time, she pretended it was real.

And that she loved him.

Oh God, the thought made her scream as she came, eyes clamped shut to keep him from guessing her secret.

Mark stiffened in her arms, convulsing with his own release.

After a breathless minute, he rolled to the side, embracing her from behind.

It was now or never. She kept her eyes shut and her body relaxed, faking a sex coma while she tried to figure out what to say. No more DoublePlay toys to test, she reminded herself. He wouldn’t need her anymore, and she might not get another chance to tell him about her feelings unless she sent him an e-mail. Beth was right, she should tell him how she felt. Maybe if she kept it casual and low-key—

She felt Mark slide out of bed and pull the covers over her. She opened her eyes, tensed, prepared to roll over and face him, until she heard his deep voice whisper, “Thank you, Sologirl.”

For what? The sex? *No*, her brain coldly informed her, *thank you for testing DoublePlay toys like a good little SoloPlay Enterprises employee*. Cold spread straight through to her center.

Her heart felt like a block of ice. Every breath she took splintered her chest. Since he thought she was asleep, she remained silent and motionless.

She was glad when she heard him walk away from the bed, although he didn't stay gone for very long. When he returned from the bathroom, she heard clothes hit the floor as he removed them from the armchair in the corner of her room. Then she heard the familiar sound of him typing notes into his laptop. She surreptitiously wiped her eyes on the pillowcase.

Thank God she hadn't said anything. In a twisted way, that made her feel better, even if it didn't help the pain. Taking a risk was acceptable—a suicide mission was not. He'd never offered her anything but a job, and it wasn't his fault it had become more than just work to her. He'd never pretended there was anything but business between them. It was her fault she'd put her heart and soul into DoublePlay. It was up to her to get them back. Somehow. She forced herself to slide into numbing sleep.

Tenderness and gratitude filled Mark as he watched her snooze. In one short month, they had blazed through dozens of DoublePlay items. Each night, he analyzed her sighs and whimpers, screams and moans, intent on her pleasure. Every day he read her surveys and communicated the results to the production department, anticipating the next night with Sologirl. As soon as he received her last two surveys, the DoublePlay line would go into production, ahead of schedule and with money to spare.

He truly could not have done it without her.

Sologirl had exceeded his wildest dreams. There was no limit to her sensuality, no boundary to her capacity for pleasure. She was unlike any woman he had ever met, and he wouldn't have had a prayer of figuring out which items would work for the DoublePlay line without her input. With Alisa, every sex toy worked for him. It was all good. Not good, amazing. Mind-blowing. Cataclysmic. Armageddon-worthy. He went up in flames the very minute he arrived at her apartment with a new supply of DoublePlay contenders, and the fire raged all night. He smiled down at the Jungle Gym survey on the screen in front of him, picturing her splayed over the leopard print cushions.

I was tied up in the jungle last night, defying gravity, held aloft by tight vines wrapped around my wrists and ankles. I felt the drumbeat in my blood. I heard cheetahs screaming—oh, wait, that was me...

Yes, he'd kept her screaming for half the night last night. She'd been wild, willing to try any position, and he had pushed her hard, captivated by her responsiveness. He tried his best to be a gentleman and drag himself out of her bed and go home every night so she could rest, but what he really wanted to do was crawl under the covers with her and cuddle her all night. It was pathetic that he continued to hang out in her apartment, typing notes, hoping she would wake up and ask him to stay with her.

Doubt made him frown. It bugged him that Alisa was completely focused on their physical relationship. Over the last week, Mark had realized that he enjoyed the time he spent with her even when they weren't having sex. He wanted to spend more time with her. Clothed time. Quality time. He wanted to *talk* to her and he had been a little disappointed when she met him at the door half-naked and eager to play tonight. The irony was irritating. What if Sologirl didn't want to see him again now that DoublePlay was finished? What the hell would he do about that?

A familiar creative itch began to play at the edges of his brain. He let it brew while he shut down his laptop.

Mark kissed her on the cheek, careful not to wake her. Her cheek felt soft against his lips, reminding him that her skin was just as soft everywhere. Her blond hair was strewn carelessly over the pillow, begging him to run his fingers through it. The covers outlined the irresistible swell of her hip. Sexy mascara had slipped under her eyes, giving them seductive shadows. Everything about her made him want to touch her. He sighed.

Sologirl was too good to give up.

Chapter Thirteen

Alisa was late to work. Again. A crying jag and time spent trying to disguise the dark circles under her eyes had stolen precious minutes from her. Now that she had finally made it to work, she was torturing herself by checking her e-mail every five seconds. It was almost eleven AM and nothing from Mark. Not even a survey.

Withdrawal was going to be a bitch.

“What happened last night?” Beth asked urgently. “You look like crap.”

Alisa shook her head. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

Beth cleared her throat in warning. “Look busy, here comes Irene.”

She closed out her e-mail just as the head librarian reached their desk.

“Alisa, can I speak to you in my office, please?” Irene asked.

“Yes, ma’am.”

Beth gave her a sympathetic grimace as Alisa slunk into the office after their boss, trying to think of something, anything, that could explain her behavior. How could she defend being late when she didn’t even have to be at work until nine? She sat up straight in the chair across from Irene’s desk and crossed her ankles.

Irene perched on the edge of her desk. She peered over her reading glasses like a kindly grandmother. In fact, she *was* a grandmother. Her office was layered with forty years of family photos.

Unfortunately, the resemblance stopped there. Although Irene was rounded around the edges and wore her gray hair in a small, loose bun, she had a core of steel and a talent for seeing straight to the heart of every matter. She didn’t put up with any bullshit, and her junior librarians alternately loved and hated her for it.

“Do you know why you’re here?” Irene gave her the stern look that was legend among the staff. It made even the boldest employee begin babbling and apologizing.

Alisa nodded miserably, horrified that her chin was beginning to wobble.

“Are you going to be late anymore?” Irene probed.

Alisa shook her head.

“Good.” She pulled her reading glasses off her nose. “What’s his name?”

“Huh?” Alisa’s head was spinning from the effort of controlling her misery.

“The man who is making you late for work. Does he have a name?” Irene reached down to pat her shoulder.

Alisa burst into tears, undone by the kind gesture. “His name is Mark. But it’s over. That’s why I won’t be late anymore,” she sobbed. She grabbed two tissues from the box on the desk and buried her face. Oh God, this was humiliating. She deserved to lose her job for being such an absolute idiot.

“Deep breath, dear.”

Alisa wiped her eyes and blew her nose. When she got herself under control, she looked up but couldn’t quite force herself to meet Irene’s eyes. Instead, she examined the photos on her desk, gaze caught by a framed wedding photo that held the place of honor. It was a black-and-white shot of a groom passionately kissing his bride. The bride was leaning into the kiss, holding a plate of cake in one hand and a fork in the other, looking absolutely joyous. Alisa’s tears started up again.

Irene followed her gaze and winced, turning the wedding photo to face the other way. “Why don’t you take the afternoon off, dear? You’re not getting much done checking your e-mail, anyway.”

Alisa jumped. How did she know?

Irene smiled sympathetically. “Have faith. Sometimes these things just work themselves out, but don’t let him make you late for work anymore. See you in the morning? At nine,” Irene said firmly.

It was better than Alisa deserved. Tears threatened her eyes again. “Yes ma’am. Thank you so much.”

Alisa slipped out of the office. She decided she would risk running into Eric in order to drown her sorrows in a double mocha with whipped cream and a slice of chocolate cheesecake from the coffee shop down the street. Then she’d go home and go straight to bed. It was lack of sleep that was making a mess of her. She hadn’t slept in weeks.

She waved at Beth, who was helping a patron, and gave her a quick thumbs up to let her know she hadn’t been fired. Then she logged out, grabbed her purse from the drawer and left the library. The noon sun warmed her. She walked down the street to the coffee shop and pulled the door open, wincing at the unbelievably long line of customers.

Last night she’d been glad she hadn’t declared her feelings to Mark. Now she wished she had. It would have been a suicide mission, but she should have thrown off the covers, sat up and told him she had fallen in love with him, in spite of the ice in her chest and the certainty of rejection. If she had been honest with him, at least she’d have closure.

The door opened behind her and she automatically edged forward to make room for another customer.

“Slumming?” Eric’s nasal voice sounded behind her.

Crap. She turned around. “I beg your pardon?”

“I figured since you took up with the sex toy king, you’d be having lunch in style every day.”

“How do you know where Mark works?” she asked, too curious to shut Eric down as he so richly deserved. Worm.

“I did a little digging on him since his name sounded familiar.” Eric made a clicking noise with his tongue. “Turns out he got a loan through my office to expand his company last year. A little more digging proved that he’s using the bank’s money to fund product development—at least, that’s what he calls it. He didn’t tell the bank he was paying people to play with themselves. I hope he’s not leaving money on *your* nightstand.”

She glared at him. As a matter of fact, Mark wasn’t leaving money by the bed, but he might as well have been. She was expecting a check any day now.

Eric didn’t notice her dismay. “I told the bank manager, of course. He’s looking into it. Better tell your boyfriend to double-check his loan covenants.”

“Trust me, he’s got nothing to worry about.” Mark probably checked his loan covenants daily—along with his profit margins. She inched forward, weighing the benefits of chocolate cheesecake against the annoyance of standing in line with Eric. God, what had she ever seen in this petty little jerk? She glanced at her watch and thought about her empty fridge. Ten minutes, she decided. Cheesecake was worth ten more minutes.

Mark hit refresh on his computer screen. He had been thinking about Alisa all morning, waiting to receive her reviews for the last two DoublePlay toys. She usually fired them off first thing, but it was almost lunchtime and there was nothing from her in his inbox.

He frowned and checked his sent mail, discovering he had forgotten to send them. God, he was really distracted today.

His stomach growled, so he decided to head down to the coffee shop and grab lunch. Maybe that would help him focus. He could pop his head into the library on the way, just to say hi. Being out of contact with her was making him feel edgy, especially since they had no plans to get together tonight, or any other night for that matter. He needed to do something about that.

As soon as he entered the bright library, he knew she wasn’t there. There was no sexy buzz in the air that told him she was near. Damn, he’d been looking forward to seeing her in one of her precise little skirts and carefully buttoned shirts, her hair piled up on top of her head. Just for fun, he imagined her wearing glasses and almost groaned aloud before he noticed a redhead glaring at him from behind the reference desk. He backed out of the library before he could embarrass himself.

As he continued down the street to the coffee shop, the idea that had been teasing around the edges of his brain suddenly gelled. He could hire her. Not just as a toy tester, but as a full-time employee. Hell, maybe even make her the head of product development, which was basically what she had been doing for him anyway. The idea filled him with exhilaration, and a dozen ideas hit him at once.

She could write a blog for the website. Hell, they could use excerpts from her surveys on the website too. Her toy reviews always made him hard as a rock, and he bet they'd do the same thing for the customers. Sologirl embodied the essence of SoloPlay Enterprises. What could be more perfect? As soon as he got back to the office, he'd call her.

He pulled open the door of the coffee shop and stepped inside. When he spotted Alisa in line ahead of him, for a minute he thought he was imagining her, but his skin began to tingle. Arousal, never far away when she was near, increased his pulse. No, it was definitely her. He stepped forward, shrugging a smiling apology at the people in line ahead of him. His delight dimmed when he reached her and saw she was with that asshole from the restaurant, Eric, the one who had hurt her.

"Hey, if it doesn't work out, give me a call. You look really hot these days, Alisa," Eric said, just as he reached them.

Mark growled and the other guy shrugged unrepentantly. Alisa waved Eric ahead of her in line.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Getting lunch, but I'm so glad you're here." He reached out to stroke her arm. At the first touch of skin on skin, the anxiety he had been feeling all morning disappeared. "Do you have to hurry back to the library?"

She shook her head. "Going home early today. Why are you so glad to see me?"

She drifted closer to him and he could smell the warm scent of her, way better than the scent of the coffee and muffins perfuming the shop. "I had a great idea this morning while I was waiting for your surveys."

"I never got them."

"I know—I forgot to send them. I was going to call you as soon as I got back to the office to set up a time for us to talk." He took her hands in his. Her blue eyes widened. "I don't want to lose you, Alisa. You and SoloPlay are made for each other. I don't have all the details in place yet, but would you consider accepting a full-time position with SoloPlay Enterprises?"

She gasped.

He smiled down at her. "You don't have to say yes now. You can think about it, but—"

She pulled her hands out of his grasp and held them up in front of her. "Wait—I want to make sure I understand. That's why you were excited to see me? Because you wanted to offer me another job?"

"Well, yes," he said. What could he say to convince her? How could she not see the beauty in his plan, the possibilities for her within the company? "You are so perfect for SoloPlay, Alisa. I can't believe I didn't see it earlier. It would be criminal to let all your raw talent go to waste. You are a fantastic beta tester, the best, but you could do so much more for the company in a larger position." She made a strangled sound that was not quite a laugh or a cough. Looking down at her, he noticed that her eyes were red and her face was very pale. Had she been crying?

He reached toward her again, but the line moved forward and she turned to move forward too. He saw her delicate shoulders shake as she chuckled. The sound was much different from her usual lighthearted laughter, and it made him nervous.

“Alisa?” he asked, edging in front of her again. “What do you think of my idea?”

Her head was bent, but as she raised her face to his he knew her answer, even before she spoke. “I think I quit, Mark. SoloPlay and I aren’t good for each other anymore.”

As she said it, Alisa knew it was true. She wanted to do more than just play at love. She wanted to experience it.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Mark said loudly, causing Eric to glance over his shoulder at them. She glared at him until he turned back around.

Alisa slowly shook her head at Mark. “I’m not being ridiculous. I’m being honest. With you and with myself. I just can’t do any more.” He began to protest but she raised her hand. “Don’t worry. You’ll get your last two surveys. I can do that much for you. Your precious DoublePlay line will go into production on time and under budget. In fact, don’t worry about sending me a check for my *work*. After that first night, I would have done it for free just to—” She bit her lip. “Never mind. It doesn’t matter. I’m done with SoloPlay and DoublePlay.” She lifted her chin and met his eyes. “And I’m done with you. Goodbye, Mark.”

Alisa left him standing in the line and made it to the sidewalk before her tears began to fall. For a minute, just a minute there, she’d thought Mark had been going to offer her his heart. The possibilities of a life with him had swirled inside her until she thought her own heart would burst with joy, but she’d been fooling herself. She wasn’t a lover to him, she was an employee.

She walked quickly to her car, unlocked the door and climbed in, shutting the door behind her before she allowed the first sob to break from her throat. She dropped her head into her hand and sat there, crying quietly. She had taken control and said goodbye to Mark, but it still felt like rejection.

It was over.

The sensual tornado that had been spinning around her for months had finally touched down to the ground. She wiped her wet cheeks with her hands and lifted her head, slowly realizing something else—the tornado had picked her up, twirled her around and left her somewhere else entirely. She was neither the same timid doormat who had feared she was frigid nor a shy acolyte exploring another woman’s body, and then her own, with increasing absorption.

So where did that leave her?

Alisa fumbled in her purse for her cell phone, intending to call Crystal for some insight, but she stopped. She didn't need to ask for words of wisdom. Alisa already knew what she had been searching for now, and it wasn't just good sex.

She had set out on a sexual adventure, all right, but what she was aching to find was love. She wanted the kind of connection the woman in the restaurant enjoyed with her silver-haired husband and what Irene celebrated with her husband of forty years. She wanted history, communication, fondness and honesty, the kind of tried-and-true love that was still hot after her hair turned gray and the kids left for college. The kind of love she hadn't thought existed.

She started her car and as she pulled out of the parking lot, she vowed to continue her journey by being honest—with herself and with other people. She didn't want to hide in silence anymore, pretending everything was fine and that she didn't need anyone or anything to be happy. There was no risk involved with living her life silently, but there wasn't enough of a reward, either. Beth was right. If she wanted connection, she was going to have to open her heart and take a few risks, even if it hurt.

Chapter Fourteen

After Alisa left the coffee shop, Mark stood in line in a daze, glad he had checked the impulse to follow her out of the café. Clearly, offering her a job had been a huge mistake. He wanted to figure out why before he spoke with her again or he might compound his error. Unfortunately, his brain felt frozen and his usually reliable powers of reasoning had deserted him. When he finally reached the register after what felt like an hour, he got his lunch to go and headed back to the office. He ate the sandwich at his desk, but he didn't taste it. His cell phone rang and he answered it.

"We've hit a snag with the bank," Ryan said, instead of hello.

Mark groaned.

"It's just a glitch. We haven't done anything wrong. They want documentation on the product development for DoublePlay. Nothing we can't give them, right?"

He heard the questioning edge in his friend's voice. Time to bite the bullet. "Well, actually, no." He took a deep breath, then spilled his guts.

Ryan, to his credit, didn't say a word until Mark was finished. Then he snickered. "You've been a busy boy this month."

Mark let out a deep sigh. "Aren't you going to tear me a new asshole for jeopardizing my company by screwing an employee? Tell me I'm fifty kinds of idiot for lying about it and that it's a lousy idea to try to hire her? Providing I can even get her to talk to me again." Mark had expected all of this abuse and more. He deserved it.

"Nah. Don't have to. You just did. Anyway, hiring her is a great idea. I'll even pay her salary, since I'm pretty sure you'll be screwed if the bank pulls your loan. I've always thought it was stupid to pay interest when I'm dying to loan you money. Don't give me any more of that bullshit about wanting to figure it out on your own, either. How many guys in your position have a filthy rich best friend willing to hand over a blank check?"

Mark knew he was damn lucky to have Ryan's friendship, with or without his money. Even so, the money would help. "Thank you," he said, realizing he didn't want to do this alone anymore.

"Enough!" Ryan bellowed. "You're being a stubborn idiot and I'm totally getting on a plane tonight to fly to Norton and kick your—wait, what?"

The shock in his voice made Mark chuckle in spite of his gloom. "I said thank you. I'll take your money, and if you've got any advice, I'll take that too. I'm fresh out of inspiration."

“Excellent! I’ll move the money right now before you can change your mind. I’m going to enjoy having something to hold over you for the next ten years or so. Hang on. I have to set the phone down.” Mark heard a clunk, then the sound of fingers flying over computer keys, solving his cash flow problems. He wished Ryan could work some easy magic with Alisa. He growled in frustration just as Ryan came back on the line.

“All set, and since you asked, I do have one question.” Ryan paused. “Why exactly did you go hunting for Sologirl?”

“Because I wanted her to test DoublePlay prototypes. Weren’t you listening?” he grumbled.

Ryan snapped back a reply, “Yeah, I was listening, smartass. Every word. Seems pretty simple to me. You broke the law at least twice and risked your company to get this girl. Either you’ve lost your fucking mind or you fell in love with her. Which is it?”

Silence. Urgency built in Mark’s center. Too late, it was too late. Why couldn’t they have had this discussion yesterday? “I’ve got to go now,” he said.

Ryan chuckled. “Yeah, no shit. Let me know how it works out with Sologirl.”

“Fuck off.”

“Always a pleasure, buddy. Good luck.” Ryan was still laughing at him when Mark snapped his phone shut and dashed out of his office.

He had to get to Alisa’s apartment. It was clear to him, thanks to his chronically smug best friend, that all of his visions for Sologirl and SoloPlay Enterprises living together happily ever after were born out of his own desire to be with Alisa. Sologirl was a perfect match for SoloPlay because Alisa was a perfect match for him. Now that he was finished being an idiot, he wondered if he had hidden his feelings for her because he was trying to keep some distance between them. She’d been so focused on DoublePlay. Had he tried to protect his heart by pretending his interest was purely professional?

If so, his interest was becoming more personal by the minute. He didn’t want any more distance between him and Alisa; he couldn’t imagine going back to an e-mail relationship with her. He had dozens of new designs for future SoloPlay products. Jesus, what if she tested toys with another lover and referenced it on a SoloPlay survey? Violence surged through him as he pulled out into downtown traffic.

He held his emotions in check, hoping that her anger proved that she cared for him, at least a little bit. He was banking on the possibility that her fury disguised a different emotion.

He had so many things he wanted to share with her. His business, his life, his heart. They were meant to be together. Now all he had to do was convince her.

Alisa burrowed into bed as soon as she got back to her apartment, only to toss and turn for what felt like an hour. Just as she began to slide into exhausted sleep, the telephone began to ring. Her heart slammed in her chest and she called herself every kind of moron for hoping it was Mark, but she hoped anyway.

It was her mother. Perfect.

“Hi, Mom.” She collapsed back into bed, too tired to keep the emotion out of her voice. Could the day get worse? No double mocha. No chocolate cheesecake. A ruined nap. And now her mother, probably about to launch into a tirade.

“You sound terrible! Have you been out partying so early, Alisa? Your father and I didn’t raise you to burn the candle at both ends, you know...”

Alisa squeezed her eyes shut and braced herself to accept the torrent of negativity pouring out of the telephone. Her head began to throb with an ache that made her feel like it was going to explode and then set off a chain reaction of explosions throughout the rest of her body. The image made her smile a little, and she remembered her vow of honesty.

She was becoming a new woman. A strong, risk-taking, loving woman. This was her chance to begin her journey. Alisa took a deep breath and cut into her mother’s stinging rant. “Mom, I’m having a crappy day and you’re making it worse. You don’t sound so great, either. Is there something that we can talk about that will make us both feel better?”

Her mother fell silent. That was a first, and a definite step in the right direction. *New woman*, Alisa chastised herself. “Are you upset about something, Mom?”

“What makes you think that? Did your father call you?” Suspicion tightened her mother’s voice.

“Of course not!” The thought made them both snort at the same time. Her father did not make phone calls. He had people for that.

“Everything okay?” Alisa asked gently.

Her mother’s reply was lost to renewed pounding. It took a second to figure out that it wasn’t her head. Or her heart. “Mom, there’s someone at the door. Would you like me to call you a little bit later?”

“No, dear, you go. It’s same old, same old around here.” Her mom sounded resigned, but no longer quite so miserable.

“I’ll call you this weekend, then. We need to set a date for your visit,” Alisa promised.

“Thank you, darling.” That was progress, and Alisa felt good about it, even when she looked through the peephole and saw Mark waiting in the hall.

“Go away,” she said loudly, clearly, firmly. She’d made enough progress for one day. To hell with her vow. Every rule had an exception, and Mark was hers. She was on a *new* journey, leaving him behind.

Alisa walked down the hall, ignoring the increasing din at the door.

She halted at the door of her bedroom when she saw three vibrators, clean and ready for duty, laid out on her bedside table. BodyVibe hung half-on, half-off the overstuffed chair in the corner. The Jungle Gym mocked her from the closet. She had nowhere to hide.

Down the length of the entire hall and through the door, she could hear Mark's deep voice shouting, "Open up, Alisa. I brought you a new sex toy. It's even more powerful than the one we tried last night—"

She bolted back down the hall, unlocked the door of her apartment and flung it open. "Be quiet! I have neighbors!" She dragged him inside, slamming the door behind him. He reached over and threw the bolt, as he had every night for the past month. Alisa cursed the heat that swept through her when she saw the look in his eyes. This had to stop. Now.

She grabbed a cardboard box from the hall closet and swept down the hall to her bedroom. If his damn DoublePlay toys were more important to him than people, he could have every single one of them back. She raked the vibrators into the box and emptied her bedside table drawer in on top of them.

"I don't want any more sex toys, Mark. I want you to take them all back. I don't need them anymore."

He raised his eyebrows. "Not even the Screamer?"

"Oh shut up. You better be careful or I'll hit you with that sexual harassment suit you were so worried about."

"Actually, I think I've got a pretty strong harassment case against you."

"Are you kidding me?"

"Well, think about it. I needed your help with DoublePlay and you said you'd only give it to me if I had sex with you. Pretty cut-and-dried, I'd say."

"You egotistical, insufferable—" she spluttered.

"It's not my fault I couldn't resist you."

"You couldn't resist the profit, you mean." Alisa strode across the room to grab BodyVibe. She shoved it into the box, desperate to get him out of the bedroom before she gave in to the "one more for the road" urge that being in the same room with Mark and all those DoublePlay toys was giving her. "Why are you here Mark?"

"To ask you if you would reconsider accepting a position as head of product development. But that's not the only reason—"

Alisa reached her limit. "No. I told you. I quit."

"Let me explain, Alisa—"

"No," she said again, putting her hands on her hips and glaring at him. "Let *me* explain. There's one thing I didn't record on my precious DoublePlay surveys, and you might as well have all the information, since that's what you hired me for. Playing with a partner changes everything. It isn't just the size or the shape of the toy or even the battery power that provides the pleasure. It's sharing it with someone else. Your pleasure became my pleasure. I know you were using me to get DoublePlay off the ground, but it

wasn't just a job to me." Just like that, the dam broke, and it was harder to keep her emotions inside than it was to let them escape. "Last night when you so cheerfully told me we were finished with DoublePlay, I was devastated, and when you thanked me for working with you, you broke my fucking heart. So, yeah, as my last official act as a SoloPlay employee, I'd like to suggest that you design a warning label for the DoublePlay products—*handle with care*, or *hang on to your heart* or something like that."

Mark grinned. "Thank God, I thought you were just using me for sex toys." He took her hands and held them to his heart.

"I *was* using you," she said bitterly, ignoring the warmth that began to curl inside her. "When Eric dumped me, he said I was frigid." Now that the dam had broken, she couldn't seem to stop the flow of words, especially since he seemed to want to hear them. "I went to Come Again to find a way to prove him wrong, and I did, but not in the way I was expecting. I found Crystal and she taught me that communication is the key to sexual pleasure. It was so easy, too easy, to be with her. She knew what I wanted, even when I couldn't tell her."

"Go on," he said. His nostrils flared and he swallowed hard. Evidence of the effect of her words swelled between them.

Her body began to heat in response. She had to finish her story and get him out of here. Fast. "Crystal broke up with me because she thought it was time for me to try out my new communication skills with a man." She paused. "Did she ever tell you she promised to send me a Prince Charming?"

Mark shook his head.

"Well, you were certainly charming." She paused again, remembering the way he had begun seducing her, deep in the library stacks, the fantasies he had shared with her. "When you walked into the library looking for me, it seemed like fate. You wanted my help with DoublePlay and I wanted to try to have sex with a man again. It seemed like a perfect plan, but it backfired." She pulled away from him and picked up the box on the bed. She jammed it into his hands. "You need to go."

"Not until we're done." His eyes flashed.

"We *are* done," Alisa said, gritting her teeth to make the words sound biting instead of breathless. "We were done last night."

Mark shook his head and tossed the box onto the floor. A bright blue butt plug and a handful of cock rings bounced out of the box and landed at their feet. "DoublePlay was done last night. I still have plans for you." He drew close, too close, and she couldn't ignore the desire in his eyes or the heat in his hands as he took her arm. She didn't resist as he pulled her down to sit beside him on the bed, but she fought the pleasure his nearness caused.

"At the coffee shop, you said you would have tested the DoublePlay products with me for free. If you weren't doing it for the cash, why were you doing it?"

"I just told you. I wanted to learn how to have good sex with a man." What the hell, might as well go for broke now that she'd made her damn vow. She took a deep breath. "At least, that's what I thought I wanted. I know better now, thanks to DoublePlay." *And you*, she thought wistfully.

Mark held her gaze. "What do you want now, Alisa?"

"A guy who wants to give me more than a job would be good for starters."

His voice was a low, rough whisper. "I'll give you anything you want."

She looked into his hot-cold eyes and shook her head. "It's too late, Mark. I just want you to leave me alone."

"I don't believe you," he said softly.

The hairs on Alisa's body stood on end, leaned toward him. Even as she tried to push him away, the space between them crackled with electric attraction. Mark bent his head to her neck, to where the pulse beat in her throat, and kissed it. Alisa trembled as his words feathered against her neck.

"If we quit now, you might feel like a failure," he said. "We can't have that. I'm just trying to be fair, sweetheart. It doesn't sound like you got everything you wanted out of this experiment. Let's do it one more time. Just once. Tell me what you want me to do." He was giving her that look again, the devilish one, the one he usually had on his face right before he pulled some outlandish toy out of his briefcase, and she couldn't help but respond.

Alisa's mouth went dry. Her heart skipped a beat. "I think I'm all set, as you well know."

Mark cupped her cheek with his wide palm. She couldn't pull away. "I didn't tell you how I felt about you because I thought you were only interested in DoublePlay. Initially, it was all about the money, but after that first night, everything changed. Sologirl was my dream girl. I think I might have dreamed up the whole DoublePlay idea just to have an excuse to find her. But when I found you, you were more beautiful and more magnificent than my wildest fantasies of Sologirl. I wanted you more than I've ever wanted anyone in my whole life. No other girl has ever come close."

His words heated her, melted her. Alisa wanted to be furious with him, but it was hard to concentrate on anger over the sharp arousal pulsing between her thighs and the slow, grinding ache of her heart. Was it even remotely possible that Mark was looking for more from her than sex and surveys? Could he be looking for love too? Hope began to whisper inside her.

Mark continued, "I want to share more than just wild nights with you, Alisa—I want to share my life with you. Please, will you give me another chance?"

Mark's eyes were pleading, and his lips were tender on her cheek. Alisa's heart felt full. Everything made sense now. No wonder she hadn't been able to respond to Eric. He was a selfish putz. Her affair with Crystal had taught her enough about her body to keep her from closing the door on sex, but it hadn't taught her anything about love.

Alisa had been waiting for Mark.

“There’s one more thing I need to tell you,” Mark admitted. “Sologirl *has* no secrets from me. I know everything about her, and I was using all my secret knowledge to tie you to me with pleasure.” His grin was carnal and delicious. “However, in the interest of your personal growth, I’ll forget everything I know.” His hands slid intimately over her body, pausing in all her important places. “Tell me what you want. Tell me every single thing you want me to do to you. Talk slowly, and in great detail. You spin the fantasy for me this time.”

Mark held on to her shoulders and looked lovingly, laughingly, into her eyes. “I love you, Sologirl. I want to be your Prince Charming, and SoloPlay Enterprises wants you too—as the head of product development or anything else you’d like to be.” His warm eyes dared her, and his mouth curved in wicked promise. “How about it, Sologirl? Are you game?”

Heart soaring, Alisa nodded slowly. Mark might think he knew everything about Sologirl, but he didn’t know everything about Alisa Mane. “On one condition.”

“Anything.”

“Don’t call me Sologirl. I don’t think I’m going to be playing solo anymore.”

His smile thrilled her.

Alisa spotted the game die on the floor and stood to pick it up. She gave it a spin onto the bedside table.

Reveal. Finally, she was ready.

“I love you too,” she said. Relief, then joy filled her as she bent to whisper, slowly and with great detail, into his ear.

About the Author

It makes me chuckle to think about all the romantic short stories I wrote in my rather too literary creative writing classes in college. If only one of my professors had steered me toward popular fiction! On the other hand, if I had discovered my calling back then, I wouldn't have gone to culinary school, I wouldn't have met my husband, we wouldn't have had three children and I wouldn't have turned to erotic romance to get my mojo back during all this hair-raising kid raising.

To learn more about me, please visit www.mirandabaker.com. Send an email to miranda@mirandabaker.com if you want to chat about romance, writing, or recipes!

Look for these titles by Miranda Baker

Now Available:

Bottoms Up

Love is the hardest limit.

Bottoms Up

© 2010 Miranda Baker

Come Again, Book 1

"I'm an Aries. We don't submit."

"I'm a Leo. Wanna bet?"

Destiny Blake senses that her boredom with blond pretty boys is about to come to a flesh-tingling end. Since her first love left her for a more experienced Domme, she's honed her topping skills to a fine edge. Yet the idea of bottoming for the hard-bodied owner of her favorite BDSM club is an erotic challenge she can't resist.

Destiny isn't Johnny Delcorral's type. Tangling with her, even for one night, is a dangerous proposition for a man with good reason for needing his women submissive. But he suspects she's hiding a submissive streak under her dreadlocks and leather, and he hungers to make her obey—and curb her reckless spirit.

The battle is on, both in the bedroom and out. Under Johnny's knowing hands, she is dismayed to discover she's enjoying submission more than she cares to admit. And Johnny finds himself relishing her defiance instead of curbing it—and fighting a growing unease with his inability to find her boundaries.

Until one night he pushes one step too far—and comes hard up against the one boundary he never expected to find.

Warning: This book contains naked power struggles, sexually charged spankings, kink from chains to canes, an Upstairs sex club, a hot m/f/m ménage, and absolutely everything the title promises.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Bottoms Up:

So this is what it feels like to be a sub.

The thought hit her like a bucket of ice water. Her brain rebelled. She was no sub. She wouldn't let this happen. For three years, ever since Damian had left her for that crazy bitch with the snake whip, she had immersed herself in Dominance. She wasn't going to let Johnny Delcorral destroy all of her hard work in one night, damn it, just because she had, once again, done something rash.

Her bustier hit the floor. Johnny pinched her right nipple, hard. She gasped. It felt like he had pinched her clit. The clip gripped her tight flesh with piercing pain. Tears stung her eyes, but she didn't cry out.

"Good girl. Ready for the other one?"

She nodded.

Again she felt the hard pinch of his fingers, the pleasure, the pain, then just the pleasure. She felt her body temperature rising. He gave the chain between the clips a slight tug, and she thrust her breasts forward.

“Tell me how that feels. Do you like it?”

She pressed her lips together.

Johnny smiled. “Stubborn, much?” He ran his finger down her stomach. She watched, hypnotized by the chain swaying between her breasts.

Johnny attached a second chain, then dropped it through the loop between her legs. His fingers were deft as he fastened the end of the delicate chain to her clit ring.

He exerted the tiniest bit of pressure.

She stepped forward.

He grinned. “I think I like you leashed.”

Destiny dropped her eyes, noticing on the way down that his cock was hard again. This passive role felt foreign to her. Yet at the same time, her pussy was so wet, so full, it was impossible to deny that she was enjoying his commands. Her body clamored to meet his demands. Subbing had been a lark, a dare, a new challenge, but now she feared it might become something more. The body was hardwired to the brain, the subconscious, the very essence of her being. And if her being was enjoying this, submitting to Johnny could change her life.

Not going to happen.

He could do his worst, his best, and she would not give up control of her Dominant *self*, not completely. She had agreed to follow his commands, and she would. She would do everything he asked. But she was going to try like hell not to enjoy it. If she failed, then fine, he’d make her orgasm. Whatever. She wasn’t going to let him in her head, though.

Johnny raised his hand in an imperious yet courtly gesture. “Get on the bed. On your back.”

She obeyed, but slowly. The chain tugged her clit and her nipples as she walked, driving her toward the bed even as her conflicted thoughts screamed caution.

Before she could reconcile the two, she found herself stretched out on her back with Johnny standing between her legs. He reached up and caught the end of a retractable rope hanging from a track on the ceiling. He pulled it down to her center. She swallowed hard as he lifted the chain from her belly and carefully attached it to the rope. When he was finished, her small breasts hung by their peaks and her clit stood at attention.

“Don’t move,” he said, diabolical eyes dancing as he stepped off the bed.

As if she could. She was immobilized by the thin chains and ropes attached to her most delicate parts. She had no way to escape, especially when he drew soft, black cords from each corner of the bed and loosely captured her wrists and ankles. The wrist and ankle restraints were purely symbolic, but, boy, did

they do their job well. The Domme part of her appreciated the fact that he left some play in the cords to protect her clit and her nipples, but she was dismayed to discover she liked feeling confined.

Destiny closed her eyes to try to block out some of the disturbing sensory stimulation, but being sightless heightened the sensations coursing through her body. Her mouth felt swollen from his cock, and she could still taste his salt on her tongue. Her nipples swelled under the clips in a constant state of steadily increasing arousal. The thin chains connecting her nipples and clitoris conducted sharp, hot pleasure through her body in a continuous loop.

She arched her back, gasping as the change in position intensified the effect, then almost screaming as she settled back on the bed and discovered that the retractable rope had just enough tension in it to give her clit and nipples a delicious tug. Her thighs fell wide. Her pelvis thrust toward the ceiling. She felt as if he had driven a wedge into a tiny crack in her façade and split her wide open.

The bed slowly dipped. The chains dragged against her. It felt so good. So delicious. *Oh, my God*, she thought. *What have I done?*

Every deal has a loophole.

Restraining the Receptionist

© 2011 Juniper Bell

...the Receptionist, Book 2

Dana Arthur's new job with the firm of Cowell & Dirk is going well. Translation: the occasionally kinky ménage with her two bosses, Ethan and Simon, has been several months of politically incorrect bliss.

Except the relationship feels unbalanced. While Ethan is the undisputed master, the partners' iron-clad agreement stipulates that Simon must be present as she performs her "duties". And she senses there's a subtle, powerful tug-of-war developing for more than just her body.

Simon had agreed to share the firm's fiery, sensually daring receptionist...to a point. With Simon out of town, Ethan plans a feast of erotic temptations designed to have Dana begging him to break the deal. He didn't realize his heart would be a casualty.

Once she surrenders to his wicked demands, Dana realizes there's no going back. It's time for a three-way renegotiation...this time, all or nothing.

Warning: NSFW!! Do Not Try This at Your Job. Contains highly inappropriate workplace behavior including m/f/m, m/m, bondage, creative use of office space and a high-stakes trip to Atlantic City.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Restraining the Receptionist:

My unpredictable number one boss showed up in a new mood the next day. I'd never seen him light-hearted before. Now that I had an idea about his history, not a big surprise. But that's exactly how he seemed when he breezed into the office. He wore casual clothes, blue jeans and a light blue open-collared shirt that made his eyes look like summer without the smog.

"I've got no pesky clients today, luv," he told me, without pausing by my desk to check my outfit, which he usually did. "I'd like you to order us a picnic lunch."

"Huh?"

"Picnic. You have those in America, right? Or are they banned in the great state of New York?"

"We have them, but you can't even spread out a blanket without kicking aside a stray used needle or two." As soon as I said it I remembered the heroin. "I...I'm sorry," I stammered.

But my thoughtless reference didn't make him miss a beat. "A little local color will add to the experience, I'm sure. Handle the details and we'll go around noon."

Did a picnic violate the terms of our deal? Ethan and I would be doing something outside of work, just the two of us, something intimate. Almost like a date. But he hadn't suggested anything physical. It was lunch. We both had to eat, right? It seemed perfectly harmless.

Since I was working from the company petty cash fund, I called up the neighborhood yuppie café where they served giant organic sandwiches. On my budget, I would have gone for a Subway footlong. But Ethan would no doubt demand something better.

We held our picnic on a concrete bench in a sweltering park a few blocks away from the office. Dog walkers and stroller-pushers, listless from the heat, wandered by now and then, but otherwise we were alone. The humid heat pressed on us like a steam iron. My hair stuck to my cheeks as I bit into my upscale sandwich.

Ethan didn't comment on the slabs of free-range chicken that had probably been hand-raised and read bedtime stories before being slaughtered and inserted into a sandwich. He did remove the unruly mound of bean sprouts and toss it to a nearby pigeon. The pigeon pecked at the stuff, clucked scornfully and waddled the other direction.

I couldn't help giggling at Ethan's wounded expression. "I wouldn't take it personally," I told him. "He's a New York pigeon. He's used to eating dog crap."

He chuckled. "Have you lived here your whole life, Dana?"

The sheer ordinariness of the question unnerved me. "Well, except for that semester abroad in Paris, and the year I spent in Fiji with the Peace Corps. I'm joking," I added, when he didn't laugh.

"Oh. Well, I'm certainly familiar with your sense of humor, but I confess I don't understand the joke. You could have done those things."

I let out a spurt of laughter that startled the pigeon. "I had other things to do."

"Like what?"

"Like dodge my father's fists after a drinking binge."

"Ah." Ethan didn't show sympathy or disapproval or anything else. He chewed on his stack of multi-grain goodness. "And your mother?"

"No clue. My father always said she ran away, but for all I know he has her body dismembered in a freezer somewhere."

That earned me a sharp taste of Blue Fury.

"I'm kidding. I have a dark sense of humor. My father's not that bad. And my stepmother would have gone for poison instead."

A crack of laughter from Ethan. "You really are something, you know that? You fascinate me."

I filled my mouth with sandwich so I didn't have to answer that. I was very much afraid the fascination was mutual. We settled into a munching, digesting kind of silence. He had one ankle crossed over the opposite knee, and occasionally his bent leg would brush against mine. Every time it happened, a little jolt of awareness zinged straight to my groin. Did he know it was happening? Was he doing it deliberately?

"Your knee keeps touching me."

“Does it?” He didn’t move away.

“That’s against the rules.”

“So sorry.” But he didn’t look sorry. He looked entirely unconcerned, even though he moved his knee away. “One of these days we must write these rules down. For instance, is all physical contact forbidden while Simon is away, or only that of a sexual nature?”

Lord, why did he have to say “sexual” with that spark in his eyes and that slant of his eyebrow? It wasn’t fair, damn it.

“Another example. I’ve been longing to tell you how delicious you look today and how the shadow of your nipples through the fabric of your blouse keeps drawing my eyes. But is verbal praise also off-limits, since I’d be unable to keep it G-rated, I’m afraid?”

“You can’t see my nipples through my blouse!” I looked down to make sure.

“Oh, yes, I can. I know what they’re doing right now. They’re just beginning to stir to life. You’re probably feeling a pleasant prickling as they become engorged. I’ve realized something about you, you know. The sound of my voice has a powerful effect on you.”

So right he was. I tried to block out his voice. Might as well try to stop the Hudson River.

“In fact, I wouldn’t be surprised if I could bring you to orgasm just with my voice. I wouldn’t have to touch you at all. All I’d have to do is tell you what I wanted to do to you. I’d tell you how much I want to bend you over this bench and take you in the open air. Or how much I’d like to tie you to that birch tree over there, open your blouse and bring you to orgasm with my fist up your cunt. Sure, someone might see. For instance, those three fellows playing Frisbee over there. It’s entirely possible they’d start to notice when I tied your hands behind the tree and ripped off your blouse. Maybe they’d even come running to your rescue.”

His gravelly voice hypnotized me so I could practically picture the scene. My body melted into a shivery puddle of craving.

“And then, of course, I’d have no choice but to invite them to join us, either as witnesses or participants. They look like red-blooded, able-bodied, clean-cut gentlemen, nothing to fear. I’d have to convince them you were willing. More than willing. Eager. I’d have to show them how wet you already were, just from having your breasts exposed. You like being exposed, don’t you?”

“Stop,” I murmured. This was going into an area we’d never touched. Other men had had no place in our games so far.

As soon as I told him to stop, he did. And as soon as he did, I wanted him to start again. After all, what was the harm? He was going there in imagination only.

“Well...” I cleared my throat. “Would you let them touch my breasts?”

“I’d give them a chance, see how they behaved. Not just anyone gets to touch my Dana. Our Dana, I should say.”

I winced at the reminder of the absent Simon. But I was too caught up in Ethan's hypothetical scenario to be bothered for long.

"Our Dana's luscious nipples deserve nothing other than sweet tender care. Long, lingering suckles. Perhaps a man to each nipple, and one to jerk himself off as he watches. That should get you started, I'd say. You'd be making those adorable little whimpering sounds. But perhaps I'd begin to sense that you want more, that you need the grip of cold metal on your flesh."

The image made my belly clench with need. My nipples were as hard as the bench we sat on. I thought I would suffocate if this went on much longer. I turned a pleading look on him. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of nipple clamps.

This was way over the line, totally against our rules, but I banished that thought from my mind. I nodded, biting my lip. I didn't care who watched as he reached inside my blouse and fastened the silver clips to my nipples. The sweet pain of it made me sag against him and sigh. Exquisite relief flooded me. I leaned against him as if he were a boulder. When I looked down, the clips were clearly visible through my blouse. But I didn't care. Ethan would take care of me.

A woman scorned...can be damned delicious!

Burn

© 2008 Anne Rainey

Ally Ryanaldo and Blake Steele were high school sweethearts, in love and inseparable. Ally always assumed she'd be his wife, raise his babies and live happily ever after. Those dreams were shattered the day Blake left her and his small town life for the bright lights of New York City.

Now, ten years later, Blake is back—and wants to pick up where they left off. Ally has other ideas. Naughty ideas. With the help of her kinky girlfriend, Heather, Ally shows Blake her wild side.

When her little plan backfires, though, Ally's very much afraid she may lose the only man she's ever loved—for good.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Burn:

Every touch of his tongue to mine drew moisture to my vagina. There was so much I wanted to do to him. I wanted to taste his cock. To suck on him until he begged for mercy. I wanted to ride him, hard, and drive us both over the edge.

Blake pulled back, his eyes blazing with arousal. "I want you, baby. This has been the longest damn week of my life. Don't send me home."

He sounded so desperate. I understood, because I was just as greedy for him. "I want you, too."

He closed his eyes briefly and let out a deep breath. "Thank God," he muttered. "Where's your bedroom?"

I stepped out of his arms. "First, I want to prepare a few things. You can wait in the living room."

"You're killing me, Ally."

"Please. I'll only be a few minutes."

He sighed, and left the kitchen. I strode to the refrigerator and grabbed a can of whipped cream, before heading to the bedroom.

A few minutes later, I was ready for him. I walked into the living room and held out my hand. He rose to his feet and smiled. When his big, calloused fingers laced through mine, I quickly led him down the hallway. As I reached the bedroom, I went straight to the bed and switched the lamp on its dimmest setting. When I turned around, Blake's eyes were still on me. I trembled at the wild gleam in his gaze.

He'd never been like this before. In a heartbeat, I knew I'd seriously miscalculated. The man standing in front of me was an adult male with an adult's needs and wants. And Heather wasn't here this time as a buffer.

Blake came to me and stroked my arm, bringing gooseflesh to the surface. His gaze touched everywhere at once. "When I saw you touching and playing with Heather it was the most beautiful thing I'd

ever seen. But I'm glad to have you alone. You're so much prettier than I remember." He looked me over, stopping on my breasts. "Your breasts are bigger. Damn, just look at you, baby. I could gobble you up right now."

I didn't know what to say. For a moment, I just stood there and wallowed in his praise. It was good to hear compliments from him. The deep tone of his voice turned my blood to liquid lava.

"Before things get too carried away, I wanted to ask you something."

"Anything, Ally. You can ask me anything you want." He seemed to think about that statement and added, "Except no more threesomes."

"Will you let me experiment a little?"

His eyebrows shot up. "Again?"

Instead of explaining, I reached over and picked up one of the scarves tied to the bedpost closest to me and waved it in the air.

"You want to be tied down?"

I shook my head. "No. I want to tie *you* down."

Blake licked his lips and ran a hand through his hair. He eyed the bed, then pinned me with a suspicious glare. "This isn't some sort of trick, is it?"

It was my turn to frown. "What do you mean?"

"You don't plan to exact some sort of revenge by tying me to your bed and then leaving me there to rot why you go off to have sex with Heather?"

I laughed. "No. Nothing like that. She really is in Florida. No worries there."

Still he hesitated. "You know me. I like to be in control. And I really want to touch you. If I'm tied down, I won't be able to. That would really suck."

I held firm. "This is the way I want it, Blake."

Several seconds passed, before he said, "For you, baby, I'll do it."

I sucked air into my lungs as he started to strip out of his shirt. Some small part of me had hoped he'd say no. I'd be off the hook. But he was submitting. I was so out of my league.

As he pushed his work boots off and unzipped his jeans, my eyes fairly bulged out. His cock was much bigger than I remembered.

Oh, my.

"Undress for me," Blake demanded as he sat on the edge of the mattress.

Staring at his nude body caused moisture to pool in my hot center. It was incredible to watch him sitting there. Waiting for me. I felt a power like never before. I wanted to make him squirm a little first, though. I wasn't about to make this easy on him. Even though it was tempting to swiftly strip out of my shorts and tank and sit on his fat cock, that wasn't the way this was going to play out.

Stepping away a few feet, I turned around and gave him my back. My sandals went first as I slid my feet out of them, then I bent low at the waist, pushing my jean-covered ass in his face. I could hear him hum with pleasure. It urged me on. My fingers trailed from my feet and ankles, then to my calves. I stroked the twin columns of my legs slowly, deliberately. As I straightened, I slipped my fingers beneath my tank and slid it upwards, baring the lower half of my torso.

“More, baby. I need to see you or I’ll go insane.”

I laughed, feeling devilish, then slipped the tank over my head and tossed it to the floor. I cupped my heavy breasts in my palms and flung my head back on a sigh of pleasure. I massaged the aching peaks with great care, my body so keyed up I could barely stand. All my erogenous zones were on full alert.

“Turn around.”

I was tempted. Blake’s voice was a whip of command. The deep sound had me shivering like a schoolgirl. “Not yet,” I managed to say.

“You were never like this before,” he grumbled. “You always gave me what I wanted.”

My fingers plucked at my raspberry nipples as I attempted to answer him coherently. “I know. But I’m a big girl now. This time, it’s not all about you.”

“It was never just about me,” Blake argued. “And the threesome sure as hell wasn’t just for me. You craved it as much as I did. Admit it.”

I turned my head and looked right into his eyes when I answered him. “I did crave it. I wanted you and Heather.”

His smile was predatory. He looked like a tiger ready to pounce. “Then come here. Let me make you feel good, baby.”

It was hard to stand firm, but I was intent on proving my point. “No. Not this time. This time, I’m in control,” I reiterated.

I heard the mattress springs creak, and then he was there. Right in front of me, drinking me in with his gorgeous baby blues.

“You’re being very naughty, baby.” His gaze zeroed in on my hands still playing with my nipples. “Fuck, just look at you. You’re so damn sexy. My sweet angel. I could slip to my knees right now and lick you dry. You’d like it, I know you would.”

I shook my head. “You’re not following the rules. This is my show. You’ll be a good boy and sit back down.”

“Or what?” he taunted as a calloused finger touched my cheek and stroked.

“Or I’ll send you home right now. You won’t get a single taste of my body if you don’t do as I say.”

Blake ran a hand threw his hair and groaned. “Jesus, you’re killing me.”

“No, I’m showing you how a grown up Ally Ryanaldo likes her sex.”

Blake’s gaze shot to mine, all at once furious. “You’ve done this with other men?”

My answer was immediate. Hell, I wanted to torture him with sex, not drive the man into a jealous frenzy. “No. To be honest, my writing takes most of my time. Other than talking to the characters in my books, I’m pretty much a recluse.”

He looked at me for another few seconds, then smiled. “I’ll sit back down and follow your rules.”

As he went back to the bed and sat, I wanted to sigh in relief. I didn’t get the chance.

“But after you’re done proving whatever is you’re trying to prove, it’ll be my turn. And I won’t be slow and gentle either, little Ally.”



SAMHAIN[™]
P U B L I S H I N G