

# The Sheik's Desire

by Carolyn Faulkner

## Chapter 1

"Honor?"

Alex's gruffer than usual voice beckoned her from the intercom between the two offices. A pile of folders still tightly clutched in her hand, she responded immediately, using the common door that separated their offices. He was still on the phone, and she stood patiently in her usual place behind the desk next to him, rejoining the usual battle with herself to keep from noticing how damned sexy he was. Now was neither the time nor the place for such frivolity. Alex had gotten a call from one of his father's many aides who relayed that the Sheik was extremely ill. Honor had left his office immediately to give him the privacy he needed, and to begin making the necessary arrangements to free him up to travel half way across the world to Sakira, the small Middle Eastern country his father had ruled for almost fifty years.

When he put the phone down, she spoke quietly and calmly. "I've rearranged all of your meetings for the next two weeks. The limo is downstairs, and I've called Jim and told him to get the jet ready. I called Crystal and cancelled your date for tonight." Honor didn't add that Crystal the Selfish Bitch had complained incessantly and not inquired after Alex once during a good two-minute tirade. He didn't need to know that. As she talked, she straightened things for him, and grabbed the jacket of his suit and held it out, although lifting it up towards his broad shoulders made her balance on her tip toes for a second. "Amalia is packing your bags as we speak . . ." She stopped talking a mile a minute and tapped her front teeth with an unmanicured nail. "Is there anything you can think of that I've forgotten?"

Had the circumstances been different, Alex would have grinned. Honey Walters in caretaker mode was something to watch – though he was probably the least likely person to need caring for. He usually found it extremely amusing to watch the way his little administrative assistant guarded and fussed over him like a mamma lion with her cub – all 5-foot-whatever of slim delicacy to his six-foot four inches of solid muscle. But heaven help anyone who got in her way, especially when she had a purpose.

Alex and Honor had been together since he had been in dire straights one day while his secretary du jour was out and Honor had drawn the short straw in the secretarial pool. The girls there practically had her writing out her last will and testament before she made her way up to his impressively large corner office. Alex ben Said was the head of a soon-to-be Fortune 500

company who had a well-earned reputation for being difficult and unusually hard on his secretaries. They said he went through them like Kleenex, and he held the company record of firing six in one day, four just in the morning.

Before entering his office Honor had decided that, regardless, she wasn't going to lose her job. She liked where she worked, and if he didn't like her, he could lump her. Honey was no spring chicken right out of college. She was newly and devastatingly widowed, and she needed this job. But she also knew some of the women he had dismissed, and, had it been in her own power to get rid of them, she would have done so herself. So, prior to entering the lion's den, she took the time to look over his appointment book and get familiar with his schedule. Honor got herself as organized as possible before she opened the big double doors and walked boldly where no man had gone before – and no woman seemed to last more than ten seconds.

"You took your time getting here, I see," he threw out at her in his customary growl, as if to test her reaction. Uninvited, she sat at one of the chairs in front of his desk.

Honor kept her mouth shut, pasting a blank expression on her face, but leaned forward as she spoke in a very quiet monotone. "It's 10:35. You have an eleven o'clock with Ben Harding about the expansion." As she listed a meeting she placed the folder on his desk, fanning them out for him. "You're penciled in for a working lunch with the planning committee from noon to one; I'm assuming that that's still on. At two and three thirty you have interviews scheduled for potential secretarial candidates. Here are their applications and resumes." Without batting an eyelash, she quipped, "Would you like me to type up their resignations now or later?"

Alex was stunned into laughter. Now here was a potential secretarial candidate! He leaned back in his chair, really looking at her for the first time. Most of the people who had been assigned to him since he had lost his strong right arm to marriage and a move had been bowled over by him. Some were merely young, some incompetent, which he had absolutely no tolerance for. Others had been reduced to tears by one hard stare.

But this one was different. She was small but feisty, and prepared to boot. Obviously cognizant of his reputation for devouring secretaries, she hadn't let it stop her from making a deadpan declaration that by all rights could have gotten her fired right there and then. But Alex didn't want a mousy secretary. What he had in mind for the right person was much more like an administrative assistant. Someone he could count on to back him up when needed, keep track of his schedule, travel and put up with his moods without dissolving into tears when he yelled. This one had potential, maybe.

"The luncheon is still on," his eyes narrowed as he stared at her consideringly. She seemed to be holding herself in, somehow. Letting him see only what she wanted him to see – the perfect secretarial front – cool, calm, collected. "But the interviewees can wait."

"Yes, Sir." She made notes on a steno pad. He shot off several other things and Honor kept pace with him easily. Only when he had stopped talking did she look up at him, disconcerted to find him staring at her but unwilling to let him see how unsettled he made her, she straightened out of her chair, prompting, "Will that be all?"

"For now," he stood. "I don't think you told me your name."

An impish grin split her face that he would swear by her previous demeanor she'd never have been able to pull off. "I'm the Phantom Secretary. If you don't know my name, you can't fire me, can you?"

Her tinkling laugh invited him to join in the joke with her, and, against his better judgement, he smiled. A small hand extended toward him. Alex noted no expensive manicure, no nail polish; not even the fake nails all the women seemed to go for lately. In fact, her nails were so short it looked like she bit them down to the quick. "I'm Honor Walters. Most people call me Honey." Her handshake was firm but not too much so. Just right, in fact.

He smiled again, almost against his will. "Well, I think I'll stick to 'Honor'. Calling you 'Honey' might raise some eyebrows." "I thought that was your job around here," she'd boldly thrown back at him as she walked toward the door.

That first interlude set the tone for their budding relationship. She didn't act like he intimidated her at all, and he came to rely on her to tell him what he should hear rather than what she thought he wanted to hear. Their personalities were very complimentary – she was outgoing and warm with others and he was much cooler and just a little bit dangerous, enough so that most employees would vet things with her before approaching the big man with an idea. Though her political tendencies leaned toward the conservative, Alex never would have guessed it by the causes she championed to him – onsite daycare, employee gym, job sharing.

Despite the fact that they spend about 350 days together a year, though, after three years, he barely knew her true personality. She showed him only maddeningly shallow glimpses of herself – he knew that she preferred Diet Coke and would order water rather than Diet Pepsi in a restaurant. He knew that she rarely, if ever, drank and that any stray animal or person had a home with her automatically. But Honor was as remote personally as he was professionally. To her, distance was a means of protection. If people didn't get too close, they couldn't up and die on her like her husband, Paul, had. She never intended to be hurt that way again.

So, the aloof boss and his outwardly gregarious secretary melded together into a knockout team. He learned he could call on her at all hours to come and help him with something he'd been mulling about overnight. She had winked at him irreverently the first time he'd hauled her out of bed at two in the morning to come and think something through with him, and quipped on her way in the door, "That's one of the advantages to having no life, Boss." They could travel

on the spur of the moment and the only arrangements she had to make regarding someone to take care of the animals.

Alex fully intended to get to know more about her, but he hadn't had the time to devote to peeling away the layers of her personality to get to who she really was. And he knew she really didn't want him to find out anyway, not that that would ever stop him. One thing he was sure of, despite her quiet demeanor, was that there was a deeply hidden river of passion in her eyes. Once things settled down in his life, he intended to find out personally just how deep that river ran.

A sheaf of papers hit him none too gently in the chest, hauling him out of his revelry about how they had formed their unique partnership. "I said, is there anything else you can think of that I've forgotten?"

On impulse, he caught her eye. "Yes. Is your passport up to date?"

Stupid question, but it surprised her. He was always hauling her somewhere, of course it was up to date, and her reply was in her raised eyebrow expression, sarcasm and all.

"Then grab it and some clothes and meet me at the jetport. You're coming with me."

Honor's jaw hit the floor. "HUH?" she hung back while he was striding toward the door.

Alex pulled it open and stood, waiting impatiently for her to catch up. "But – but – but," she sputtered, not usually at such a loss for words. "You always said that if you let me into Sakira I'd cause an international incident!"

"Conservative clothes," he added as if she hadn't spoken. "My father's come a long way, but not quite that long."

They caught an elevator together. "I guess my leather mini skirt and see-through gold lame blouse are out, huh?"

He snorted derisively. "Yeah, right. Like you own either of those two articles of clothing."

"How much would you like to bet, big man?" Honor turned toward him, getting disturbingly close while holding out her hand as if to shake on it.

She was full of surprises, his Honey. If she was gonna bet, she was gonna win. Huh. His eyebrow raised a notch. He'd've never thunk it, although it wasn't as much a surprise as it could have been considering what he'd learned about her a couple of months ago while she was on vacation.

It was company policy that during vacations, the electronic security department tiptoed through everyone's computers. It was something that was disclosed to every employee at the time that they were hired, although most of them promptly forgot it. Alex maintained that the computers his employees used while at work were not theirs and wanted to make sure that there weren't people exploring porn sites on company time using company computers. Not that he had anything against sex, mind you, but it had no place at work.

He glanced briefly at Honor. That was a fact he had had to keep reminding himself of when she was around. Honey was his. At this point, she was just his secretary, but some time in the future, she would be more than that to him. He'd promised himself that daily since she'd come to him, and what he'd learned from Jess McKay, the head of security, had only served to confirm his resolve in that area.

Alex had gotten the report on the file that was contained in Honor's computer by e-mail. Jess had brought it to his attention, which was all that he required. Any further action would be at Alex's discretion. It was the only file of any concern, and as far as Jess could tell, she had never surfed anywhere that could be deemed inappropriate, though the file itself was inappropriate enough. Disappointed that anything had been found at all, Alex had intended only to scan the file quickly enough to get the gist of it then call Honor in to his office and read her the riot act. Jess hadn't told him what information it contained - if Honor had been spying for another company or what, and what he found would determine whether or not he would have to fire her.

When his eyes ran down the first few paragraphs, they widened.

Why, it was a story. A harmless little romance story. He smiled. He had a budding Danielle whats-her-name in his midst! And from the looks of this novella, he'd been right about her deeply hidden passionate nature. With little thought to her expectations of privacy - which he considered to be nil since she'd stored the file on a company computer - he settled himself into his leather office chair and read through it, at times shifting at the uncomfortable tightness the words caused in his pants.

When he was finished, he saved then closed out the file. Christ, he was hard as a rock! Her writing was hot and raw, but at the same time, emotionally engaging. And it featured several shockingly exciting scenes of male dominant spanking and light bondage - just exactly what Alex preferred. He never mentioned to her what security had found. Alex was a patient man. Eventually, the time would be right to bring it up. He could wait.

"I'm not going to bet you."

"Ha! Cause you'd lose and you know it, Alexander Karim. You're a big chicken."

The two of them were quite a pair, and all eyes tended to follow the large muscular boss and his dainty little assistant as they made their way across the lobby and into the waiting car. Everyone she encountered greeted Honey with warmth and enthusiasm, and she knew all their names as well as family situations. While Alex was greeted with the deference befitting his position and demeanor, Honey was greeted with smiles and hugs whenever possible. She made it a point to know people's birthdays, if they had a wedding coming up, or if they'd just had a baby. Making herself popular made her boss a little more palatable by association, and besides, that was the type of person she was.

Honey ended up rushing terribly through all of her preparations. Luckily, her best friend was as much of an animal lover as she was and agreed to take her "babies" – two spoiled rotten Siamese cats – on short notice.

"Going away with Mr. Sexy-and-Powerful again?" Etta asked, waggling her eyebrows. She was the only living person to whom Honor had confessed her steamy sex dreams about her boss.

She stood glaring at the woman she'd known since high school. "It's not that kind of a trip."

Secure in their longtime friendship, Etta shot back right on target. "Only because you won't let it be that kind of trip."

Feeling very self-righteous, Honor informed her friend haughtily, "No, his father is seriously ill, and he's invited me along for moral support."

"Yeah, but it's not his moral you'd like to be supporting . . ." Etta's nasty comment trailed her out the door.

When they were finally in the air, Alex couldn't seem to settle down. He'd loosened his tie and long since divested himself of the suit coat. For a while, he just stared pensively out the window of the plane, chewing on his thumb as he did when he was thinking deeply.

"Are you all right?"

He nodded.

Honor got up to stand next to him by the couch. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"No," he answered, almost too quickly, then shrugged his shoulders and grimaced. He had injured a shoulder playing football in college, and it bothered him sometimes when he was overtired.

Honey bit her lip and decided to go for it – he looked so uncomfortable! She sat gingerly behind him, folding her legs under her. Before he had a chance to question, her small fingers began to knead just the right spot, and he couldn't suppress a moan of absolute ecstasy. She retracted her hands as if he'd burned them. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to hurt you!"

"You didn't, Honor. It feels great. Please, keep doing it." He shinnied himself just a little bit closer to her in invitation, and that was all she needed.

For Honor, touching him in any way was like heaven. She had lusted after her boss since she'd first seen him in the company hallways, looking all too sexy and darkly masculine. Every woman within a ten-mile radius felt the same way, she knew, and when he'd offered her a job as his permanent secretary she knew she'd have to bury that attraction deep within her. Sometimes it was hell being so close to him and yet so far from what she wanted from him. But, for now, it was enough that she saw him daily, traveled with him, was his confident and advisor. Honor took care of him not because she got paid for it but because she loved him, but he didn't know that. He thought it was just her being fantastic at her job. The few times she'd been sick, and the one time she'd needed him as a friend – when her father died years ago – Alex'd been there for her without question.

The worst part of loving him silently had been the parade of women through his life. Alex had a rapacious sexual appetite, and each new woman was another arrow to her heart, especially when she thought they were truly undeserving, like Crystal Harris. She almost wished she'd fall in love with someone else, someone who would sweep her off her feet and away from hopelessly beating her heart against the immovable rock that was Alex ben Said.

"Your father will be fine, you know. He's a tough old bird," she murmured, continuing to rub his sore muscles.

"You've never met him, have you?"

"No, but I know enough about him from listening to you, and what I've read. He's done a wonderful job of trying to ease Sakira into the twenty-first century."

Honor felt his muscles tense as he drew a deep breath. "In some ways, yes. But things are still very different there, especially for women, so you need to be on your best behavior."

God, how she wanted to run her fingers through that thatch of dark black hair! Instead, she laced them tightly together and eased away from him, removing herself from temptation. Alex yawned loudly and lay back on the couch as Honor covered him with a warm blanket. He must've dreamed that brush of cool fingers on his brow as he slid into sleep.

A half an hour before they landed, Honor went into the bedroom at the back of the plane and

changed into a very conservative navy blue suit with a long, almost ankle length skirt. The collar of her plain white blouse was schoolmarm high, her shoes were unremarkable low-heeled pumps, and as the finishing touch, she wrapped a drab navy silk scarf around her hair and face. Looking in the mirror, she gazed a makeup-less face, and thought she might pass for a woman of Middle Eastern descent, then she smiled - except for the mahogany red hair!

Alex was up when she came out, and he nodded approvingly at her attire. The security as they rode to the Palace was incomprehensible – there were guards with machine guns everywhere. Mindful of the different rules of this society, and anxious to conform so as not to embarrass Alex, Honor kept her mouth shut but her eyes open. Her head swiveled around so much she thought it might fall off. Although she doubted it was necessary, and Alex had never mentioned it, she made sure she stayed a few steps behind him. Kind of like Prince Phillip behind Queen Elizabeth, she reasoned within her radical feminist mind. Alex was the royal one, not her, even if he wasn't in direct line for the throne.

They were separated once inside the gorgeous Palace and despite a momentary panic at the idea of losing sight of the only person she knew in this country, Honor knew that Alex would take care of her, and she let herself be lead away to a positively sumptuous room by a woman dressed in a black chador that only revealed her eyes. Once inside the room, however, where there were no men, she removed the heavy, unbecoming garment and introduced herself. "I am your servant. My name is Nala."

"It's nice to meet you, Nala. You speak English very well." Honey smiled widely and sat down on the bed.

"Thank you, Miss."

"Please, call me Honey."

Honey and Nala talked for a while, and Nala assisted her in undressing for an afternoon nap after such a long trip. Although she acquiesced when Nala mentioned that it was the custom to sleep in the hot afternoon, Honey was a little unsettled as Nala disrobed her completely and put a roomy champagne colored silk caftan over her head, then popped her into bed. Much to her disgust, she was asleep before her head hit the pillows.

Although it seemed like days later when Nala touched her shoulder gently, in truth it was only a few hours. Alex's servant had given Nala a message that Honey was to be present at dinner this evening – with Alex's father.

"But I thought the Sheik was seriously ill?"

Nala tsked at the clothes in Honor's closet while she responded to her question. "He was quite



sick at the beginning of the week. But he seems to have recovered now that Karim is with him again." Honey had forgotten that in Sakira, Alex went by his given name of Karim.

Honey had a thought. "Nala, is there something you could find me to wear that would be traditional Sakiran clothing for a woman my age?"

Nala smiled delightedly.

"Do you think it would be appropriate? I don't want to overstep my bounds, but I would like to honor the Sheik and Al – Karim, who brought me here."

What Nala produced was a beautiful but demure dress of greens and golds that set off Honor's hair and coloring wonderfully, with matching slippers and veils for her hair and face. Once dressed, Honor looked in the mirror, deciding that she looked like something that stepped out of the Arabian Nights. The dress hid everything, but hinted at it just the same.

While Nala helped her dress, Honey made her pronounce several phrases in her native language, just so that she could murmur the polite niceties if necessary. "You will not have to worry about that, my lady. Nearly everyone here, including the Master speaks English."

It would not have been proper decorum for Alex to collect her at her door, so Nala walked her to the entrance to the Sheik's private dining area and ushered her in, closing the door behind her. Fraught with nerves, Honey almost fainted when all conversation amongst the ten or so guests stopped at her appearance and everyone stared. Alex started towards her with a warm smile, but his sprightly father beat him to her.

"My dear, you honor me with your presence and your dress."

"Your Highness," Honey greeted, curtsying low.

Alex's father raised her from her awkward position with a warm hand on her elbow, then held her two hands to his lips, kissing them.

Honey couldn't miss the rueful tone in Alex's voice, "Father, this is Honoria Ophelia Walters, or Honey, as she prefers to be called."

"A beautiful name for a beautiful woman," the older gentleman guided his catch to a seat at his left while Alex took the chair on his right.

"Thank you, Your Highness," she murmured, not quite knowing what to make of the situation. She hoped she hadn't bungled things too much.

He patted her hand gently. "You must call me Said."

Alex smiled wryly behind his water glass. His father was such a lech.

Dinner seemed to be going very well, as far as he was concerned. Like everyone else, his father was predictably charmed by Honey's ingenuousness and her ability to laugh, although Alex knew she was trying to be as demure as possible. His father gave him pause, though, when he commented to Honey, "I see you're wearing a wedding ring, my dear. Does your husband let you travel so far away without him?"

Alex knew that, in her own surroundings, all things being equal, Honey would have handed his father his head on a platter for the mere suggestion that any man "let" a woman do anything – husband or not. He could almost see her teeth clench as she quietly answered, "I am a widow, Your – Said."

All concern and warm sympathy, the aging ruler patted her hand comfortingly, "I am so sorry, Honey. I am a widower, also. But surely you have children to comfort you?"

If her teeth ground any more she was going to have to get dentures, he knew. "No, no children."

The Sheik was taken aback. "Oh, I'm sorry."

Honey couldn't resist patting his hand back a little condescendingly. "Don't be, I'm not. If I'd had children I couldn't have come here. A woman's place is with her children."

It was all Alex could do to keep from choking on his water at her pronouncement. It couldn't have been more unexpected from Honey than if she'd declared she was Joan of Arc.

Said, however, latched onto that statement, and delighted to have someone to debate with, engaged Honey in one good-natured argument after another for the rest of the dinner. She totally monopolized his father, beguiling him with her intelligence and humor, much the same way she'd beguiled him, although he was loath to admit it.

The dinner party broke up, and as it was entirely family members, they adjourned to the Sheik's private quarters to sit and talk. Alex couldn't get Honey away from his father for long enough to tell her how proud of her he was. He'd have to convey that later.

When he finally rejoined them, his father clapped him on the back, saying to a flabbergasted Honey, "You should marry Karim. He needs a wife, you need a husband, and I've heard that he's very virile. Perhaps he could give you some sons."

It was Honey's turn to choke on her fruit juice. "Al – Karim is my boss."

Said could be stubborn when he thought something was right. And the two of them fit together perfectly, as far as he was concerned. It was high time Karim settled down and took a wife. "He should be your husband."

"Father, you're embarrassing her," Karim scolded gently, noting the rosy blush of Honey's cheeks. He guided Said away from her with talk of business, but Honey could hear Said's occasional rant that she was a fine woman still young enough to breed and how Karim should heed his father's advice.

No one could leave until the Sheik did, so Said left earlier than everyone else did, but not before stopping to again kiss Honey's hands. "You would make a fine daughter-in-law," he stage-whispered.

She whispered right back at him coquettishly, "And any woman would be proud to have you as a father-in-law, Said."

Alex sauntered over to her with a refill of her fruit juice. His father permitted no alcohol in his house. "I'd say you made a conquest. If he were twenty years younger, I'd fear for your virtue."

"He's a wonderful man. I can see a lot of him in you – autocratic, arrogant, chauvinistic . . ." she listed, grinning while batting her eyes up at him in playful innocence.

"Grrrr," he leaned toward her and growled playfully. Honey just smiled, but Alex became serious for a moment. "I am very proud of you – your behavior was perfect this evening. I must admit I had my doubts when I invited you." He raised his mineral water to her in a toast. "It was a very ingenuous thing to wear a native dress. My father was quite honored."

"I'm glad. That was my intention."

Alex's brother, Crown Prince Ahmed came over just then, asking to be formally introduced to Alex's enchanting lady. Ahmed had the same dark good looks as the other men in the family, but he was already attached – to three wives. He winked boldly at Honey. "Karim, our father's suggestion was a valid one. You should snatch this young woman up before someone else throws her over their shoulder and carries her off in to the desert."

It was Alex's turn to attempt to destroy his expensive dental work. "And I suppose, brother, that that man might be you?"

Ahmed's eyes shone as he teased Karim. "I have but three wives. The Koran allows four." He reached for Honor's hand and kissed it warmly. "Perhaps I will develop a taste for American women, if they are at all like Honey."

"Thank you, Your Highness," Honor blushed and delicately removed her hand from Ahmed's clasp.

Alex turned to her abruptly. "Aren't you exhausted? I know I am."

All of a sudden, she realized was. Jet lag hit her like a ton of bricks. "Yes, I think I will retire."

He guided her carefully away from his brother to the hallway, where Nala waited patiently. "Sleep well, Honey." On impulse, Alex kissed her chastely on the forehead, making Honor stumble back from the unexpected intimacy. Alex watched the two women disappear around one of the mazelike corridors of the Palace.

## Chapter 2

The rest of Honey's stay with Alex's father was a complete success. The old man had a one track mind, though, and kept repeating to the both of them – individually and as a pair - that they should be married. Alex and Honey would nod indulgently and change the subject. But Said was a wily old fox and intent on having his own way in this, one way or another. He had had his servant call his wayward youngest son home from America when he truly wasn't very sick, just lonely for his son. The family had always been very close, and Said found it hard to understand why Karim preferred to live in the United States, so far away from everyone he knew and loved. After meeting Honey, though, the older man thought he could probably see at least one good reason why he seemed in no hurry to resume his place within the family. Hadn't he fallen in love with a foreigner himself, Karim's beloved mother?

Said's wife had been an Englishwoman who had been passing through his small kingdom with her father, who was a mildly famous archeologist. Claire Hubbard was a spitfire, much like Honey, though Said knew each woman had mistakenly tried to suppress her true personality so as not to offend him. He liked a woman with brains and courage, as long as she knew and acknowledged her true master. In Claire's case, he had goaded the forward thinking woman into many arguments, such as he had with Karim's Honey. Society having progressed as it had, Honey was much more outspoken than she would ever dreamed of having been, but Claire had managed to hold her own nicely, regardless.

Harold, Claire's father, had expressed an interest in exploring some old ruins within Sakira's borders, and Said graciously extended an invitation for them to stay at the Palace as long as they wanted, then set about wooing the vivacious young woman.

In his day, Said was much like Karim – strong, virile, and extremely attractive, used to having his way with whatever woman caught his eye. Claire, on the other hand, despite having been brought up by her widowed father and dragged from pillar to post around the world in pursuit

of new and interesting archeological sites, was still fresh and innocent. Her golden blonde hair, bright intelligent eyes, and shy sense of humor intrigued him. He'd wanted her since he first laid eyes on her, and he got what he wanted. Not one to beat around the bush, Said had visited Harold within a few days of their meeting and asked what price he would accept for his daughter. Harold had been taken aback, spouting some sort of nonsense about how he would allow his daughter the choice of whom she married, hoping that she would, as he had, marry for love.

Said had a hard time not scoffing in the man's face at his foolishness. Daughters were to be loved and indulged, as one could not a son – spoiled and pampered, but disciplined firmly when necessary. A daughter would do exactly what her father told her to do, nothing more, nothing less. But the English had strange ideas about such things as this, and Harold's ideas were stranger than most. As her father had refused to do the honorable thing and would not set a bride price, Said decided to take what he wanted. He had already been Sheik for three years and had not yet taken a wife, although he had several hundred concubines in the old Women's Palace, deep in the desert stronghold of his country.

In the middle of the night, he had had Claire kidnapped, brought to the remote palace, and ensconced in the grandest set of rooms available, save his own – those still in use from the last Turkish invasion centuries ago, and reserved for the old Turkish Sultana Valideh (sultan's mother). All of the other women, except for his most trusted servants, had been moved away to give him a more private place in which to tame his little captive. Said's eyes misted as he smiled with the memory. He had been right even then, but had not known it would end in a taming of the both of them.

Just what Karim and his little one needed, he decided, calling out for Abdullah, his closest aide. It would take careful planning, but it just might work.

It was the night before they were leaving, and Said threw a ball in their honor. When Honor mentioned in passing to Karim that she had nothing suitable to wear, he had a beautiful forest green velvet and taffeta gown delivered to her door with matching shoes, in just the right size. She almost refused it, but Nala was so horrified at the prospect that she might insult the Sheik's son by returning his gift that she kept it, rationalizing that she could give it back to him when they got home, or have him take the cost of it out of her pay.

Karim had taken one look at her in all of her finery and monopolized her all evening, much to Said's delight, dancing and chatting with her, introducing her to more and more extended members of the Royal Family as well as old family friends.

Somehow, he found a way to get them some time to themselves by carefully whisking her away right under Said's nose to a quiet library a few doors down. Honey was floating on air she was enjoying herself so much. Alex couldn't resist dancing her around the room a little, although

they could barely make out the strains of the waltz playing in the ballroom.

He swung her around one last time, then clasped her tightly to him, taking her mouth with his as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Alex felt her quick gasp and the gentle insistence of her hands as she tried to push him away, but he ignored her obvious discomfort in favor of deepening the kiss, his tongue probing boldly between her pale red lips. It was like holding liquid fire in his arms, and he came to full attention when, slowly, she abandoned her attempts to free herself and relaxed against him, kissing him back a little hesitantly at first, then more confidently.

When Karim finally loosened his hold, Honor skittered nervously away from him, obviously agitated at the unexpected turn their relationship was taking. But Alex didn't miss a trick – she had definitely responded to him – he'd felt the little spikes of her nipples even through the layers of fabric separating them. Her lips had been soft and warm on his, and oh, so welcoming.

Honor was staring intently anywhere but at Alex, biting her lip and twirling a long strand of hair, and he could tell she was withdrawing from him. Well, he wasn't going to allow it. Alex stalked her carefully while she was lost in thought, coming up behind her to lock his strong arms around her waist and pull her back against him. "What are you thinking, Honey-girl?"

Unbidden tears flooded her eyes along with pain from the thoughts she could not reveal. I wish we hadn't done that. I wish Paul had never died. I wish I didn't love you!

Firm, masculine lips nibbled at the bare juncture of neck to shoulder. "Mmmmmm. You taste wonderful, Honor," he smiled rakishly. "Makes me wonder why I haven't tasted you sooner?"

When she would have fluttered away nervously, he held her tight against him.

"You're not going anywhere just yet, Madam. It's the first time in three years that you've allowed me to hold you in my arms, and I want you to know that it won't be the last."

Again, he claimed her mouth, almost roughly, wanting to drive the haunted shadows from where they lurked in the depths of those emerald green eyes. For once, for this one moment, she yielded to his passion, unable to deny either of them the response he sought.

Fortunately, Alex kept his head and kissing was all they indulged in, though it was very early in the morning when he delivered her into Nala's care with a gentle kiss on the forehead.

Nala assisted her out of the dress and into a cool cotton nightgown, then offered her a glass of fruit juice before she retired. Honey hadn't realize how thirsty she was until she started to drink the white grape juice, and she downed the entire glass almost in one gulp, then was tucked under the covers and asleep in seconds.

Honey rolled over and shivered, pulling the covers further up under her chin, reaching convulsively to clutch the collar of her nightgown closer around her neck. Finding nothing, she frowned in light sleep. Fingers sought down her soft skin for cotton fabric, and down and down and down. Naked, Honor sat bolt upright in a bed she suddenly realized wasn't the one she'd occupied for the past seven days. She looked around at the most gorgeous room she'd ever seen – definitely designed with a woman in mind, decorated opulently in pale Wedgwood blues, creams, and gold patterns accented here and there with a spring green pillow or curtain.

But the luxurious appointments of the room did nothing to assuage her fear at awakening in a strange place. "Nala!" she tried to keep the edge of panic from her voice, but wasn't very successful. Looking down at her nakedness made her regret having called out at all. So she quickly got up from the bed and jury-rigged a toga style dress out of a jewel blue silk sheet seconds before a plump little woman came into the room carrying a tray overloaded with food and a carafe of her favorite white grape juice.

She set the tray on the small low table that was surrounded by pillows and motioned for Honor to sit. "Do you speak English?" Honey inquired hopefully.

The woman wore a blank face. No response. She turned away and bustled about the room, straightening the bed and chattering in one of the few languages Honor didn't speak. Sounded like Russian, or some sort of Russian dialect. Dammit! She knew she should have taken that Beginning Russian class in college!

Afraid that the food might have been drugged, she didn't touch it or make any move to sit at the table. Instead she walked directly to the bay window and knelt on the thickly padded seat. The room had a fantastic view of a gorgeous garden, but not much else. Visions of white slavery rings danced horrifically in her head, and she vowed that as soon as she could, she'd find a way out of here, even if it killed her.

The serving woman held out a piece of what looked like chicken to her, but she shook her head. Finally, after trying to entice her to eat some of the other things, she departed. Honor had expected to hear the door lock after her, but it didn't. Well, if she absolutely had to, she could go out in her makeshift toga, but she wouldn't be happy about it.

Suddenly, she heard determined footsteps in the corridor outside, and, as she had no idea who it might be, Honor hid herself in the furthest corner of the room, where she had a good view of the door and the intruder was less likely to see her, at least at first. To her tremendous relief, it was Alex who burst into the room.

"Honey?"

"Alex!" Forgetting any pretense of dignity, she launched herself into his open arms and promptly dissolved into tears, much to her own disgust.

"Are you ok?" he asked, lifting her into his arms to cradle her on his lap on the bed.

Feeling embarrassed at the display, she only nodded, tucking her face into the curve of his strong neck.

"Are you hurt?" his voice was husky as he ran his hands over her not too carefully. It was so unusual for his calm, competent secretary to dissolve into tears that he was concerned. Alex knew she was practically naked in his arms, though, and a man could only stand so much temptation.

Again, she only shook her head.

"That's good."

Abruptly remembering that she was wearing only the barest of coverings, Honor sat up and tried to gather what was left of her dignity around her, along with as much of the sheet as she could. She stood, keeping her covered side towards him. "Where are we? What are we doing here? How do we get out?"

Alex's teeth set at her almost bratty tone. It was very unlike Honor to whine, and but he attributed it to fear. Calmly, he replied, "I would bet that our drinks last night were spiked with something. We're in the Women's Palace."

"Which is?"

Deciding to be entirely truthful about what he suspected, he answered, "It's the place where the Sheiks before my father kept their wives and concubines – cloistered and sequestered for his pleasure only. It's where my father kept his own harem before he met my mother."

Honor frowned deeply while Alex forged ahead with his makeshift explanation. "It's also the place my father kidnapped my mother to when he wanted to take her as his wife and her father wouldn't tell him what price he had set for her."

Her jaw dropped. "You're kidding me?"

He shook his head, watching her intently.

She snorted. "A harem. That sounds like something right out of the Arabian Nights."



"It's the truth. If I were to hazard a guess, I would say that my father has taken the choice about us getting married away from us, and has brought us here to give us a private place to seal our vows – a place that has very good memories for him, where he and my mother fell in love – "

"But we haven't taken any fucking vows! We are NOT married, Alex!" Honor very rarely lost her temper, but apparently the idea of marrying him was distasteful enough to send her over the edge.

He positioned himself very deliberately at the edge of the bed, the quietness of his voice a warning in itself. "Watch your language! I will do everything I can to get us out of here as fast as possible. But you must let me figure it out the right way. My father is the supreme ruler of this country. If it suits him, he can keep us here forever."

Honor had never been so angry in all her life. She felt completely out of control, and he wasn't doing a thing to help them, as far as she could see. He was wimping out totally. "Bullshit. Don't you have a goddamn cell phone? What about getting the servants to help us? A fax machine? A computer? Have you done ANYTHING to try to get us out of here or are you enjoying the idea of playing the Sheik with a harem of one?"

Truth be told, it would not be a hardship as far as he was concerned, once he adjusted her attitude a bit. She was in a rare fury, all but stomping her foot like a bratty little girl in the midst of a temper tantrum.

Alex said nothing while she stood there at the end of the bed, bosom heaving against the enticing drape of blue silk, and his silence in itself should have been a warning to her. Then, as if he had come to a decision in his mind, he leaned back just enough to grab her arm and pull her over his lap. "What the hell do you think you're doing?!" she screamed in outrage as Alex pulled back the fabric to reveal her creamy rounded bottom.

Alex maintained his silence while he laid down a fiery rhythm of slaps onto her upturned cheeks, replacing the peaches and cream complexion with one that more closely resembled cherries and rose. His hand was so big it stung both tender globes in one fierce SWACK, and it didn't take long before he had reduced her to broken sobs and apologies.

"Stop – please – I'm ssssss-sssssoooooorrrrrry!" Tears flooded her eyes at the pain and humiliation of her position; virtually naked over his lap being spanked relentlessly like she was a naughty little girl.

Still he spanked on, and Honor thought her bottom would burst into flames any minute. Each swift SLAP seemed to land harder than the last.

"Ahhhhh . . . nooooooooo moooooooooree . . . plllllleeeeeaaaassseeee!"

There was absolutely no respite from his terrible, punishing rhythm, and she didn't know how much more she could take. Finally, she broke down and blurted out the reason behind her bad behavior. "I w-was so s-scared, Aleeeeeeeeex!"

Instantly, he gathered her up, safe within his strong arms to hold and rock her, stroking her hair as she burrowed her tear dampened face into the hollow of his neck. "I know, baby. But we have to do this my way. You must follow my lead, do you understand?"

She shook her head eagerly, hiccupping back sobs.

Alex held and stroked her for a while, making her calm down before he would let her up.

When Honor stood and rearranged her "clothing" she frowned down at him. "Why do you still have your clothes?" she asked, trying consciously not to sound like a shrew.

A decidedly wry grin appeared on his darkly handsome face. "I would imagine that leaving you naked was my father's way of enticing me to consummate the marriage that much faster."

"Oh, God." She bit her lip worriedly. "Do you think we're really married?"

Her tone of utter despair made his jaw clench. And what would be so horrible if they were married? What was he, chopped liver? "I don't know. I would guess so. My father could have had us married by proxy without either of our consent."

"Ugh." Honor sank down on the side of the bed in defeat. It had been the stuff of daydreams, but the reality hurt. A lot. It felt like a betrayal of Paul, to say nothing of the fact that Alex, too, seemed less than enthused.

"Well, thanks a lot!" he grinned while pretending to be hurt.

Honey caught his eye seriously. "I've never thought of you that way," she lied with a completely straight face.

"Ouch."

"Alex, you're my boss not my boyfriend."

His eyebrow rose.

She flounced away as much as was possible while one was only wearing a sheet. "Besides, I've never been much for joining a crowd."

Honor thought she saw him actually wince. "Double ouch."

"Well, I'm the one who makes and breaks dates for you. I've seen the parade of models and rock stars and beauty queens pass right by my desk and into your office. You must have to shake them out of your bed at night."

"Jealous?"

Not about to answer truthfully, she hid her expression by turning her back and wandering over to the window. "I've already told you I've never thought of you that way."

His response was husky and deep and disturbingly . . . near. "Well, maybe you should," Alex put his arm around her waist and pulled her back against him gently. "Last night at the ball, we were going at it pretty hot and heavy in the library."

"That was an aberration."

"That was heaven, and you know it."

Although she tried to squirm, it hurt her bottom to rub against him, so she stopped. She wasn't going anywhere until he decided she could. "Let go, Alex."

"Karim."

Honor craned her neck back to look into his eyes questioningly. "Do you have some sort of split personality going on here? Alex, the cool, logical, remote businessman and Karim, the dominant, aggressive kisser and spanker of helpless women? Some how I can't see my boss Alex taking me over his knee – "

Her next words were lost forever in time because he couldn't keep himself from covering those lovely red lips with his. The kiss was firm but gentle – he kept it as non-threatening as he could considering that he was at full attention and a hairs breadth from laying her beneath him on that big inviting bed. She must be right – since coming back to his somewhat less civilized homeland, the more masculine, dominant elements of his personality had won out over his usual rigid control. He liked the fact that she was naked and he was clothed; that she would essentially be available to him at any time for whatever he chose to do to her. Alex had thoroughly enjoyed taking her over his knee and applying a well-deserved spanking to that pert little bottom. Although he didn't like making her cry, he knew that it was a necessary part of a punishment.

" – And you are never to do that again," she pronounced the moment his mouth lifted from

hers.

"Do what?" he feigned ignorance

She blushed beautifully, and just the idea of the words stuck in her throat. "S -Spank me. You are not to do that again."

Karim turned her in his arms, catching her chin with his fingers. "Ah, but I will, any time I think you need it. Especially since obeying me when we finally do make our escape from this place could mean the difference between life and death."

"No."

His jaw set when he realized that she was not going to accept this easily, so he laid it out for her in black and white. "Yes. Don't push me on this, or I will spank you again until you agree. I can do it; I'm bigger than you are. If I have to, I'll get out my belt." He fervently hoped that she didn't recognize the dialogue from a scene in her story. He had used it almost word for word because it fit, dammit.

Honor gave into a childish whim and stomped her foot in frustration. "But – "

"Give me your word that you will obey me," he wanted with all his heart to stop right there, but continued, "while we're here. You know I wouldn't ask you if it weren't important."

She made a move to pull away from him, but he tightened the strong band of his arm around her slim waist, holding her still.

"Answer me, Honoria Ophelia Walters. Will you obey me or do I need to go get my belt?"

"Oh, all right," she agreed ungraciously, but Karim was not appeased and did not release her.

"Say the words."

Softly, she responded, "I will obey you – WHILE WE'RE HERE, only."

"Good girl. If you don't do exactly as I say, I will paddle your bottom like I just did, only much more so. Is that understood?" Honey nodded, not meeting his eyes. "Repeat it to me."

An exasperated sigh preceded her parroting his words back to him. "If I don't do exactly what you say, you will paddle my bottom like you just did only much more so." He released her suddenly. "There, did that make you happy?" she quipped brattily. "I'm beginning to wonder how much of this was your father's idea and how much was your own."

Eventually in their relationship, such brattiness would earn her another trip over his lap. But Karim was feeling generous right now, and he knew how hard it had been for her to bend her will to his in this situation. She was afraid and unsure, and like a captive tigress in that situation, unlikely to settle down and accept her loss of freedom quickly.

Wanting to turn her attention away from that little scene, he noticed the full tray of untouched food on the low table.

"Have you eaten at all?"

Honor stared out the window, as if the night sky held the answers to their predicament. "No. I worried that the food might be drugged."

Karim sat down at the low table, popping a grape into his mouth and laughing. "You're already here. What's to drug you for?"

"Who can tell with your father?" came the acerbic comment.

"Come and eat," he motioned her to join him, looking very much the regal prince of all he surveyed as he relaxed against the colorful pillows. "You might need your strength."

Gingerly, she took a seat opposite him. "You don't think he put anything in the food?"

He rose on his elbow and looked at her with a lopsided grin. "He might put Viagra in my food, but why tamper with yours?"

At his insistence and with his assurance that the food had not been adulterated in any way, she picked at some of the fruit. "So what's your plan?"

"Plan?" Karim had almost forgotten that Honor expected him to get them out of this place. He loved this old Palace – his mother had brought him here many times as a child. It was a place he remembered warmly, filled with the lingering scent and memory of her. And now, a woman he had always coveted was occupying it with him, and she was under his complete control. Karim was sure he could get them out. The question was: how quickly did he want to accomplish that goal?

### Chapter 3

After a day of watching Karim do next to nothing, Honor's patience, which was thin at best in the first place since she had been kidnapped, had pretty much dissolved to nothing. As far as she could tell, he hadn't done one blessed thing toward getting them out of here. She had decided

to take matters into her own small hands without telling him anything about it. The big, sexy louse seemed to be in his element. They had dined together last night and this evening he had again settled himself amongst the pillows like some old-world pasha being entertained by his bed slave du jour. The foods they were offered were the best of the best, his and her favorites, but Honey ate very little, and no small detail passed by Karim unnoticed.

His dark eyes narrowed speculatively. "Why aren't you eating? Are you still worried it's been drugged?"

Honor shrugged. "Just not hungry."

Karim's jaw set. "You have to eat and keep your strength up. If we have to trek out of here, you're going to need every ounce of it you can get."

Honor snorted indelicately. If she waited for him to do something about it, they'd die here of old age, for crying out loud.

Alex knew that, for some reason, she was extremely impatient to get out of here. He was interested in getting back to his business, too, but was also enjoying the absolute peace and quiet this place afforded. No phones, no faxes, no meetings . . . He hadn't realized just to what extent he was pulled in forty different directions in the more modern world. And the scenery here . . . His eyes lowered to half-mast as he studied her covertly, watching her delicately lick each small finger free of ginger chicken sauce.

Being the gentleman that he was, he'd offered her a spare shirt – his father had thought of everything for his son and had several of his own outfits put in his rooms but had not done the same for Honor. The long t-shirt hung to her knees, but covered her more securely than the toga-wrapped sheet. Borrowing his pants was impossible, so they both lived with the unsettling knowledge that she was completely bare beneath the thin white cotton undershirt.

Karim decided that he was going to use this opportunity to get closer to her. Now was the perfect time – there were no distractions, he'd discovered that she responded to him when she let herself go, and he intended to explore just exactly what made her tick, especially the thoughts and feelings behind that marvelous story he'd read. He could use the information in that file to his advantage, and intended to do so, scruples be damned.

Blissfully unaware of the machinations going on in the mind of the man a mere three feet from her, Honor took a small sip of juice and looked down at her legs, trying to make sure she was exposed as little as possible, given the lack of clothing Said had deigned to provide. At least Karim has volunteered the use of his shirts, which covered the majority of her skin, but the fact that she had nothing else to wear troubled her to no small extent. Honey felt thoroughly exposed with no underwear and no bra, especially when Karim was so close. She could feel the

heat of his body, and smell his spicy after-shave. More often than not, her nipples pulled tight in his presence, and it was impossible to hide that small betrayal from his hawk-like gaze when she wasn't wearing a business suit. He was so damned sexy that she was constantly on her guard against letting him find out just how attracted she was, but the longer they stayed in this precarious position, the more likely he was to discover that fact for himself.

He was a different person here, very much the Prince and less the remote boss, just as she had accused after he had spanked her. If the servants became any more deferential to him, they would start executing an obeisance upon entering the room, but stopped just short of that, fawning over him unfailingly. His word was law to them, and even she had agreed to obey him until he got them out of this God-forsaken place, which it looked like he was never going to do, dammit.

Honor sighed unhappily. Things between them had changed irrevocably, and she knew that when they returned, she would have to begin looking for another position. Somehow, she couldn't see herself working for a man who had spanked her while she was all but nude over his lap, even if he hadn't quite realized yet that she was both nude and aroused. Neither beauty queen nor rock star nor model, Honey knew she was not his type, and it was a fact that she had accepted when she said "yes" to the job, partly just to be near him.

Alex was every woman's dream of a handsome, high-powered executive, and she knew from overhearing several of his girlfriends talk that he was fantastic in bed. His manners were very gentlemanly and courtly but when he determined that he wanted something or someone, nothing would stand in the way of his goal. He could be utterly charming and utterly ruthless, and the dangerous combination was like a magnet to women, including his plain-jane, middle aged secretary.

Paul had been her best friend, confident, and unfailing champion since high school. They had married once he graduated, and settled down into an uneventful married life, but were supremely happy. Paul was easy going and relaxed, funny and charming. He had none of the inherently dominant tendencies that were so much a part of Karim's personality, and none of the unrelenting intensity. When her husband had looked at her, Honor felt a warm glow in her heart. When Alex's piercing gaze settled on her like a physical weight, it sparked a fire in her lower belly that literally made her ache.

Tears filled her eyes and she rose, turning away from him to look out the window into the dusky night sky. She didn't want to leave, dammit! She liked her job, and she loved taking care of him. Hell, if it came down to it, she loved him, she supposed, but it wasn't something she examined too closely. It was much more comfortable to say she loved her job and her boss than to state baldly, even within her own mind, that she loved Alex ben Said. And his alter-ego was much too damn blatantly sexy for either of their own good! And high-handed, to boot! Why, he'd tipped her over his lap like he'd been doing it for years, for God's sake! And, crap, it had hurt!

Karim watched her carefully, and saw the quick swipe of her hand across her cheek. "What's wrong, Honey?"

"I – " Startled out of her intimate wanderings, she swallowed hard, striving hard to control her runaway emotions. "I just can't believe this is happening! I know I'm being terribly bitchy, but I don't want to be here. I want to go home."

The plaintive, wistful tone of her voice tore at him. Alex made his way to her quickly, pulling her into his arms and cuddling her cheek against his muscular chest. "Shhhhh. We'll leave as soon as I can figure out a way to do it that won't offend my father or get either of us hurt. I'm working as fast as I can," he caught her chin in his fingers. "Until then, couldn't you just think of this as an extended vacation? It's beautiful and quiet here, and if you'd just relax some I'm sure you'd love it. If I'd suggested coming here before, I know you'd've adored it for all it's history and the gardens . . . " A thought struck him, and he grabbed her hand. "C'mon."

Honor had been too upset about their circumstances to do much exploring of the Palace, but Karim knew it well and guided her down corridor after corridor until she was hopelessly lost. Finally, he pushed her ahead of him through a set of pocket doors and out under the night sky, into a place that looked like the perfect setting of an oasis in the desert. There was a small beach with a pool, as well as a hot tub that seemed completely natural to include. Beautiful flowers bloomed everywhere, filling the night air with a heavy floral scent. She smiled for the first time since they'd arrived. "Ooooooooooh, it's gorgeous, Karim!"

He still leaned back on the doors that he had pulled shut, unable to tear his eyes from her as she wandered and wondered through the lush garden like Eve in a t-shirt. A small waterfall gushed down into the clear blue pool, and Honor couldn't resist testing its temperature with her fingertips.

"Oh, it's cool!"

Karim pushed himself away from the entry and walked slowly toward the edge of the faux beach. "It's actually warmish, but not in comparison to the air around it." Impulsively, he shed his shirt, pants, and underwear in an economical motion and waded into the pond to just about waist level. Karim looked up to catch Honor's reaction, but she was nowhere to be found. His ears caught the sound of one of the pocket doors being slid open, and he ordered, "Stop!"

Honey did as she was told, as hard as it was, staying put but facing away from him, her hand still on the door.

"Come here."



Oh, shit, no!

Karim remained with his back to her, also. He let several long seconds pass before warning firmly in a quiet voice, "Are you going to disobey me already?"

There went that little foot again, stomping against the flagstone flooring. It seemed to have a mind of its own. "No," came the softly beseeching reply.

"Then do as you are told, Honey-girl." He was entirely unbending, but well aware of how hard this was for her. She was not the type to give up control easily, and Karim was just learning exactly how much of a control freak she was.

Without another word, she padded to the edge of the pool, her toes getting wet by the ripples caused from the waterfall. Karim turned, instantly revealing how excited he was whether he wanted to or not. It wasn't something he could hide for very long, and it wasn't something he was ashamed of. He wanted her. Any way he could get her.

Sharp, dark eyes caught and held hers by sheer force of his will. His voice was guttural with excitement. "Take off my shirt before you get it wet."

"B- " Reflexively, she crossed her arms over her breasts.

Never letting her look away, he strode confidently towards her, hands out to grasp the bottom of the shirt and pull it over her head. Alex's big hand grabbed hers as he turned and pulled her behind him into the water. Water that was thigh-high on him was waist-high on her. Honor's head was bent; the heavy red curtain of her hair barred her eyes from his, but he noticed that the hand he wasn't holding was valiantly if unsuccessfully attempting to cover her beautiful breasts. She probably didn't realize that all she was succeeding in doing was presenting them more voluptuously to him.

Karim stepped in front of her and pulled both of her wrists into one of his hands, holding them securely in front of her, effectively preventing her from hiding herself from his lustful eyes. With his other hand, he tipped her chin up and took her sweet mouth with his. God, he loved kissing her! If this was just kissing he wondered what the whole enchilada would be like. It would probably burn the two of them up – lover flambé – but what a way to go!

His lips left hers to smack the end of her cute little nose loudly, and it was then that he realized her eyes were screwed tightly shut. But he didn't miss that soft sigh as he gathered her against him. With a somewhat malicious grin, he fell backwards into the water, taking her with him. That opened her eyes! Since he didn't know whether or not she could swim, he merely floated on top of the water, enjoying how her lovely body clung to his, soft and warm in all the right areas. Her thick hair floated all around them while he gently kicked beneath her, gliding them

slowly around the surface of the small pool.

Suddenly, Honor let go of him and dove underwater. So she could swim!

"Yipe!" he squealed, collapsing under the water as she pinched him hard on the bare butt, then surfaced several feet behind him with her tongue out and her thumbs in her ears, wagging her fingers at him in a childish face.

"Oh, are you going to get it, girl!"

"Thhhhhpppppttt!"

He chased and splashed her, she chased and splashed him back, and they both laughed more than they had in years, collapsing, exhausted, in the shallow end several long minutes later. When Honor realized that she was lying brazenly on her back, practically on display for him, she rolled onto her tummy, not that that was much better, but it wasn't something he hadn't already seen, unfortunately.

Karim rolled on his side toward her, his big hand claiming the area at the small of her back, just above the swell of the bottom he'd roasted not too long ago. His other hand propped up his head as he leaned on a bent elbow. "You know what's going to happen between us, don't you?"

Honor rested her chin on her folded, trying to ignore him completely.

But he was not about to let her get away with that. He needed a verbal acknowledgement that she wanted him as much as he wanted her, as if her blatant responses to him were not enough. "Honor?" Alex prodded while his strong hands gently turned her against him, settling the sensitive peaks of those pretty, full breasts pressing against his chest hair and muscle. His palm remained intimately at the small of her back, holding her still, fingers spread to cover just the start of her bottom cheeks. "Look at me, sweetheart."

Oh, God, she didn't want to obey him. She knew that the depth of her attraction and excitement would be revealed when their eyes met. And she was right. His breath caught, causing rough hair to scrape over the delicate buds of her nipples.

Honor could no more contain the groan that escaped her lips than she could stop the sunrise, but Karim was right there to drink it into his own mouth. His kiss was firm and demanding; claiming the warm wetness between her lips with his tongue just as his fingers boldly dipped into the warm wetness between her legs. Honor tried to jackknife away from those exploring digits, but he wouldn't allow it, pressing her back against his delicately probing fingertips by holding her carefully in place with the hand he had kept at the small of her back.

"Sh-sh-sh," he soothed without relenting an inch. "My God, you are so beautiful, Honey girl. Let me love you a little." Karim unerringly claimed her most sensitive spot and stroked gently, loving the way she arched in his arms and moaned, throwing back her head. His lips descended on that exposed stretch of tender flesh as his fingers reduced her control to nothing in a matter of seconds. My, my, my but his staid little secretary was quite responsive! He thought. Must be all that fiction she's been writing.

Karim probed just a little further with his middle finger, dipping into his Honey's honey pot. She started in his arms again at his first venture, but he kept her still and murmured soothing nothings while carefully pressing the tip of his finger inside her. Dear God, she was tight as a virgin, but wet as could be. His whole hand was being drenched in her cream. Sweat popped out on his forehead when he thought of being gloved so tightly by her with her legs wrapped around his waist.

Before Honor knew what he was doing, he had his pants on and his shirt over her head, then lifted her into his arms and hurried them both to his suite. Opulent didn't adequately cover how beautiful his rooms were, but he was striding so intently to the bed with her that she wasn't about to take the time to look around. When Karim set her down, she scooted off the other side of the bed, and was almost at the door by the time he turned around from divesting himself of his pants.

"Get back here, Honor," came the firm order.

Damn! She thought. Almost made it. Slowly, reluctantly, she did as she was told, knowing full well that if she ran, he would come and get her, and he'd not hesitate to take her even if she had a sore bottom pressed into the silk sheets. And she was right.

Karim met her on the other side of the bed, unwilling to let her make another attempt to escape him. "Why are you always trying to run away from me?" he asked, sweeping the shirt off and laying her down on the bed in one practiced motion. He slipped between her open legs before she had a chance either to protest or to adjust her vulnerable position, his swollen sex resting against the equally swollen entrance to her body, but no further.

Honor bit her lip, hard, but tears filled her eyes anyway and leaked down the sides of her face.

He looked horrified that she was crying, but didn't know what to say. Karim knew she wasn't hurt, just probably uncomfortable with her current situation and the new turn their relationship was taking. Maybe he was the first man to make love to her since her husband. His lips kissed away the tears as his body went about staking his claim. She was his, and no one else's, ever again. Dead husband notwithstanding.

Alex thought he would faint with pleasure as he inched himself slowly inside her, and the fit was

so tight he was sure he'd burst well before seating himself completely within her. Every inch of advancement brought moans of pleasure from her as his good-sized member stretched her sensitive, swollen tissues. Finally, inside her to the hilt, he surprised her by sitting back on his heels and reaching between them to worry that little bundle of fleshy nerves at the top of her sex while rocking himself against her, rasping both delicate areas at the same time, stretching her wide for his repeated invasion and driving her crazy with his incessantly flicking fingers.

Honey thought she was going to explode. He was driving her past the point of control, and she loved it and hated it at the same time. When she came, she was going to go absolutely berserk, and it was so . . . so raw . . . She resisted it until it overpowered her and took away the choice of whether or not to respond.

Karim ended her struggle with herself by putting her legs over his shoulders, making her that much more vulnerable to his thrusts and his tormenting fingers. "Come, Honey," his voice was breathless with his own excitement but held a strong note of warning.

His words of encouraging command were all she needed to send her body into uncontrollably pleasurable convulsions. She dissolved against him in the throes of her own orgasm, which, in milking him, started his own pulsing pleasure. Karim drove himself into her hard and fast, taking her, making her his by sheer force of his will, spilling himself into her in a wonderful explosion of pleasure.

## Chapter 4

Alex was utterly insatiable, and took her to the heights of heaven several more times before collapsing onto the bed beside her. He was a fantastic lover, demanding a response she could not deny. He didn't give her orgasms, he took them from her as his due.

None of what had transpired between them that night, though, had changed what she knew she needed to do to retain her sanity. Honor was quite sure he had no idea she intended to leave despite the fact that he'd damn near made it impossible for her to walk, but she got out of bed gingerly, just in case she woke him. He tended to have ultra-sensitive hearing and she expected him to creep up behind her the whole way back to her own apartments. She had made it a point to make friends – as well as anyone could with someone who didn't speak the same language – with the cook in the kitchens downstairs, who had allowed her to take a six pack of bottled water and some other provisions back to her room. Not having anything that remotely resembled a backpack to store them in, Honor wrapped them in half the bedsheet, then rolled up the blanket tightly under her arm. If all went well, she'd be riding Lord knows how long on one of the Arabians Karim had mentioned his father kept here. She'd do it bareback if she had to, but shuddered at the thought of riding hours with no protection between her nether parts and the horse.

As silently as she could, Honey left the palace building, looking back over her shoulder nervously all the way, and though she hadn't been there before, she just followed her nose to the stables. The walk had given her eyes enough time to adjust to the darkness, but she turned on the pocket flashlight she'd found in a kitchen drawer only long enough to scout out the sturdiest looking horse and hopefully memorize where all the necessary gear was in the tack room.

Honor had just shut off the flashlight and was reaching for a bridle when a very angry voice from directly behind her made her jump out of her skin. "What in hell do you think you're doing, young lady?"

Any other time, she'd've considered that description when she was pushing thirty-five to be a compliment. But she knew the owner of the voice didn't intend it as anything but a warning prelude to a painful trip over his knee.

When in doubt, punt. "I was, uh, just out for a stroll and I saw the stables."

Thick fingers took a cruel hold of her elbow and frog marched her back toward the house. "At three-thirty in the morning? In one of my shirts? In the dark?"

Son of a bitch! Honor decided silence was the better part of valor, so she shut up and "let him" guide her back to his room where he forced her none too gently to sit on the edge of the bed while he paced the length of the room furiously. Honey didn't think she'd ever seen him this angry, even when the Bedford deal fell through and he lost a considerable amount of money. If he'd've been a cartoon, there'd've been a cloud of steam rising from the top of his head, and his face would have been beet red. Well, he'd gotten the beet red part, all right.

Several times, Alex stopped very close to her as if he was going to say something, but it just wouldn't come out. Honor watched as he stopped pacing finally and walked to his closet, reaching in to pull out a long black leather belt. She was no idiot. She knew where this was going, and scrambled to the opposite side of the bed, but that left her completely cornered.

Alex folded the belt in half, holding the buckle and loose end in one hand, then arranged two of the pillows at the edge of the bed. He wouldn't chase her. "Get over here. Now," his voice snapped against her ears like the belt soon would against her bottom.

"P-please don't do this, Al – Karim. I'm sorry." She had to try it, although she knew the after-the-fact apology wouldn't do her any good.

He didn't say a thing, but the muscle jumped in his jaw. Just as he was going to take the first step toward coming to get her, she walked slowly around the end of the bed and stood in front of him. Before she knew it, the shirt was on the floor and she was naked over the pillows, her bottom obscenely displayed way up in the air, a ready target for the descent of his wicked-

looking belt.

This punishment made the earlier spanking look like a bunch of love pats. Each fiery stroke of that strap left her butt feeling like it was going to fall off, and left her wishing that it would do just that and get it over with. Not wanting to make any more of a spectacle of herself than she was already doing, Honor tried to take it quietly. That lasted for about six strokes. Karim was putting every ounce of his strength behind heavy THWACK, raising good-sized welts on her pristine flesh with each SLAP of the leather against her defenseless bottom. Honor had no idea how many times the belt bit into her, but Karim forced himself to count each stroke in his head as his own penance. Fifty full-force strokes. When he was through, her bottom looked just exactly like someone had taken a belt to her. And he was that someone.

Honor had long since gotten past the point of screaming when he finally stopped and threw the belt away from them. When he helped her up, she was still in the process of expelling all her breath in one very long sob, mouth wide open, eyes scrunched tightly closed. Gently, as if she were a little girl, he pulled the shirt back over her head just as she sobbed pitifully and threw herself into his arms. "Oh, baby, I'm so sorry I had to punish you like that – but you would have died out there by yourself!"

He held her to him just as fiercely as he had punished her, taking her weight on top of him to keep her roasted bottom from touching the sheets. Like an injured kitten she lay on his chest, sobbing fit to tear his heart in two. Karim stroked her tear-wet hair and rubbed her back lightly. "Shhhhhh, it's all over."

To his amazement, she fell asleep in that position, worn out from the punishment as well as his vigorous lovemaking throughout the night. After carefully placing her, still asleep, on her tummy, he made a quick judgement call and went into his father's rooms to get some equipment he knew would be there. And he was right.

When Honey awoke hours later, she tried to stretch, but found her hands hampered somehow. Must be caught up in the bedsheets, her sleep muddled mind rationalized. But it was taking all together much too much concentration to become untangled, so she woke herself up to discover that her hands were bound loosely above her head with some sort of locking mechanism. Alarmed, she tested the strength of the leather restraints and found that she could lower her arms only enough to tuck her hands under her cheek, which was the way she usually slept, but the lock wasn't going to give, and she was effectively tied to the bed.

Now it was her turn to turn beet red and have steam coming out of the top of her head, but she didn't have a chance to say anything before Karim covered her lips with his while pulling gently on an aroused nipple.

"Good morning, sunshine," he kissed her nose.

"Bullshit. What the fuck - YEEEEOWWWWW! Stop that right now!! OWWW! THAT HURTS ME!"

Alex efficiently rolled her onto her stomach, administering some very firm love pats to bottom cheeks that were still extremely sore from last night. With her hands kept out of the way by the leather cuffs, there was nothing she could do to defend her poor bruised butt. "I imagine it does. But I've noticed that your attitude as well as your language could use some serious adjustments. And I'm just the man to make those adjustments." He spanked her several more times in the most tender areas of her bottom, then rolled her back over and into his arms.

God, she was gorgeous, all flushed cheeks and spiky eyelashes from crying during her early morning spanking. His lips reached for hers, but drew back quickly when her teeth snapped in warning. "If you bite me, you'll get spanked again. Or maybe paddled or hairbrushed, too. But considering the state of your bottom right now, you might want to reconsider whatever plot you have for revenge." To demonstrate his authority, he deliberately kissed her full on, a long lingering kiss, as if daring her to disobey him. All it would have taken was a slight nip and he would have gone to get the wooden paddle he saw in his father's nightstand. It would probably come in handy later, though, knowing his stubborn Honor.

Out of intense curiosity, he let his hand wander down to the juncture of her thighs while he kissed her, but she had her legs crossed tightly, barring his way. "Open your legs, sweetheart, and let me in," his voice was cajoling but Honey knew there would be awful consequences if she didn't obey him. Sobbing softly against his mouth, she relaxed her formidable leg muscles, but couldn't quite bring herself to truly open herself to him.

"Thank you, Honey. That's a good girl." Alex considered it a victory that she hadn't yet tried to kill him. It frankly amazed him that she had accepted his dominance as well as she had. He moved himself down a little and captured a ripe berry of a nipple with his warm wet lips, suckling strongly while his fingers probed her delicate folds as carefully as he could. He had to see . . . had to find out for himself . . . ahhhhh, yes, she was literally dripping with honey. So despite, or maybe because of, the severity of the punishment, she creamed all over him. Perfect.

Karim was overjoyed by her responses, both sexual and emotional. He set about giving her a very long, drawn out series orgasms that resulted in several of his own. He wanted to reinforce his dominant position, and took her several times, stretching her deliberately, riding her gently and roughly, and imprinting her with his stamp of ownership. Seeing her in that stables, ready willing and able to ride out in to who knew what in the desert night, where she would surely have perished before too long made him literally see red. Reddening her bottom had been his only alternative, and he had taken it. He would do it again as many times as was necessary, and he would keep her tied to the bed until they got out of here, if necessary.

It did have its advantages, after all.

Eventually, he untied her and massaged her sore shoulders on the way to a shared shower. If his bedroom was opulent, his bathroom was decadent, done in shades of blue in Italian marble and tiles in a subtle checkerboard style. The sunken tub was the size of a small pool, but he steered her toward the separate huge shower stall, big enough for an orgy all its own. Alex turned the water on, making it just a little hotter than was comfortable. He knew her arms would be sore from their bondage, and made sure to rub and massage them while she was under the relaxing hot spray. Honor stood docilely under his tender ministrations, looking almost drugged with pleasure, which was surely his intent.

Having soaped her thoroughly and intimately, he quickly scrubbed himself, then got them both out of the shower. Karim tended to her first, toweling her hair and the rest of her, powdering her with the only talc that was available, his sandalwood scent. Somehow, the masculine perfume on her delicate body only served to enhance her femininity. Honey walked ahead of him through the bathroom door, then, snapping out of her lethargy, she made a mad dash for the door of the bedroom. Where she thought she was going buck naked he would never know, but he caught her well before she could open the door, lifting her around the middle like a rag doll as she fought and kicked to be free. Despite her vicious writhing, he managed to get her secured in the middle of the bed, with a wrist bound at hip level on either side in deference to her sore muscles.

"Let me up, dammit! You can't mean to keep me here like this!" she yelled, pulling against the restraints unrelentingly.

"At least I'll know where you are at all times," he answered wryly while dressing.

"Karim, please, let me go. I promise – "

Fully dressed, he stood next to her bound, naked body and ran a possessive hand down her flank. "No. I like you like this," his fingers unerringly found that special spot between her legs that always seemed to be wetly flushed. He wondered if that was her normal state or if he might, perhaps, be the cause of her excitement. Alex smiled slightly. "And it seems you do too, despite your protestations to the contrary." Just a few strokes and she was near the brink, but he stopped. "I suggest you try to sleep." After covering her with the sheet and blanket, he left without another word.

Alex tied her to his bed at night for several days as part of her punishment for putting herself at such risk. Though she fought him every time, he easily subdued her using his superior strength to both accomplish his goal and keep her from hurting herself or him while she struggled futilely. Honor cried each time she ended up completely at his mercy despite her efforts, though Karim soothed her in the best way he knew how. Being tied naked and completely helpless



against his sensual assaults rankled her militant feminist side, but she had to admit that, deep down, she did trust him not to truly hurt her. Her language got her another several spankings, but he also brought tremendous pleasure at the touch of his fingers, and the slow inexorable invasion of his cock. He took her every way he knew how, wanting to indelibly engrave his ownership on her while he had her at such a disadvantage. Despite the fact that she was broiling mad at him and fought tooth and nail against his sensual invasions unless he caught her while she was just waking up, Honey couldn't keep her body from responding to him. His hands and fingers explored every nook and cranny of her body, as she lay helpless beneath his lips and tongue. At one point, he took her little sensitive bud into his mouth eagerly, then introduced a very long, thick phallus into her tight little pussy, making her arch against the invasion, driving herself that much further into his mouth. As he fucked her hard with the dildo, stretching her, forcing her to accept the pressure and the fullness, he relentlessly flicked that tender morsel of flesh, making her literally scream with pleasure when she came.

When her contractions had subsided, Karim carefully placed her legs over his shoulders, causing her to present herself to him most obscenely, and not allowing her any control over the incredible depths of his thrusts. He took her, there was no other name for it, and he knew he'd never be able to let any other man touch her.

One morning, after having brought her to the heights of ecstasy and ridden her to his own completion while her arms were still kept out of the way by the leather restraints she was becoming so familiar with, he disappeared momentarily, returning with a pile of clothing she recognized as her own. Alex released her and she jumped off the bed and into the clothes. For the first time in over a week, she was completely covered head to toe. Karim mourned the loss whereas Honey reveled in the armor of clothing.

"Does this mean we're going home?"

He nodded, and watched her whirl happily around the room, wondering with a twinge in his heart how he was going to keep her with him when they got back to the States.

Hours later, a completely unrepentant Said saw them off at the jetport, exclaiming how in love they both looked and how their little "honeymoon" had obviously been best for them. Karim squeezed Honey's hand hard in warning, and she wisely said nothing but the polite niceties, until they got onto the plane, where she rounded on him.

"Did your father marry us by proxy?"

Suddenly, his tie seemed a bit too tight. Probably those wonderful days in the Palace wearing next to nothing had softened him. He loosened it as well as the first few buttons of his dress shirt after divesting himself of the suit jacket and seating himself opposite to her on the couch. "Yes, he did."

"Then get us divorced immediately," she ordered in a no-nonsense tone. "Isn't all you have to say 'I divorce thee, I divorce thee, I divorce thee'?"

His smile quirked upwards. "In front of witnesses, one of them hopefully a lawyer, yes, that's it."

"Well . . . ?"

Karim scooted closer to her on the couch. Fingers played with a curl that rested against her full breast. "But I don't want to divorce you. I like you, always have. You and I are explosive in bed, and we like the same things. I adore spanking your pert little bottom when the need arises, and I can see us years from now surrounded by our children . . . "

Nothing he could say would have bowled her over more. It was the last thing she expected her confirmed bachelor boss to say to any woman, much less her. Honor rose and backed away from him, one hand out to ward him off. "No. I want a divorce."

Alex did not pursue her; as in the Palace, there was nowhere for her to go. "And I don't. So there won't be one."

Wisely, she kept her mouth shut. There must be a lawyer somewhere who specialized in international law -. Cripes, what a mess they'd gotten into.

Her silence made him suspicious. "There's one thing you apparently haven't thought of."

Honor's eyebrow quirked up questioningly.

"You could be pregnant. I didn't use anything while we were there."

She honestly hadn't even considered the possibility, but he was right. The pills she would have taken for the past week and a half were still in her makeup bag. Her hand drifted to her lower stomach. Oh, Lord, what if she was pregnant?

Honor collapsed onto the sofa with such a devastated look on her face, as if she'd just lost her best friend.

It was not the reaction Alex would have wanted. His jaw set rock hard. "If you are, you'll have it, by God."

She wasn't looking at him but rather staring at a point somewhere just above his head. "There would never be any question about that. I would never destroy our child."

The serious, quiet tone of her voice calmed his first concern, but the ethereal, fey attitude rekindled other concerns. What was she thinking behind those mysterious green eyes? She was certainly angry enough about being married to him, but how could a possibility so blatant as pregnancy have completely slipped her mind? Would being pregnant make her less interested in getting rid of him? Would she turn to him as a husband just for the child's sake?

The rest of the flight home was quiet, each of them lost in their own thoughts. When they landed, all of their stuff was loaded into the limo by Alex's driver, Kevin. Honor got into the car first, before Alex murmured something to Kevin that she didn't pay attention to, until the car stopped at Alex's building and her things were carried in along with his.

"Kevin, please take me to my apartment," she asked politely.

Kevin looked uncomfortable at having been put in a position between the boss – whom he could take or leave, frankly, but who paid exorbitantly well – and the boss's administrative assistant, who had helped his wife get a good job in the company and he had always liked a lot. "Sorry, Ms. Walters. Boss's orders."

Alex stood by quietly, for a moment, then said, "I want you with me until we're certain. Surely that won't be very long."

Honor clutched the strap of her carryon bag convulsively. "As soon as I can have the drugstore deliver a test." She brushed by both men, knowing now even more than when she had left how futile it was to try to bully Alex in to anything. He would have his own way, one way or the other.

Upon entering the beautiful apartment, she made straight for the phone in the living room, calling the nearest pharmacy to have an early pregnancy test sent over. Unfortunately, they didn't do deliveries until the next morning, and knew of no other pharmacy in the area that delivered in the middle of the night, either. Honor arranged to have the test delivered first thing, knowing from previous experience that it needed to be conducted using the first urine of the morning to be accurate.

And so they would wait. Alex indulgently, Honor resigned.

"Meeeeeoowwww!" Tang, the older of her two cats, liked to announce himself loudly before joining her presence, so that she might be more ready to worship him when he finally appeared.

"Well, hello, sweetie-pie," Honor scratched the sides of his cheeks just as he liked and bent down to rub her nose to his in welcome. "What are you doing here, darlin'?"

"I asked my father to have them moved here early in the negotiations. My father likes cats, and

he liked the idea of them being in ou – my house. Besides, I knew Etta would probably want a break from the Terrible Twins."

Baby, who was just an adolescent at a year and a half, enthusiastically climbed up her pants and into her arms, drooling and mewling all the way. Both hands busy attending to her children, Honor didn't notice where Alex had put the luggage Kevin brought up until later when she went to his spare bedroom and found nothing there. Across the hall, in the vast expanse of his bedroom, her two suitcases were sitting directly in front of what she assumed was his closet.

Well, she thought, marching determinedly in to scoop them up, she was not going to have him assuming that they were going to continue their little fling, supposed marriage or no supposed marriage.

Honor got as far as the doorway, where Alex stood, blocking it with his presence. Whereas before this trip she had never shown any iota of wariness around him, the circumstances of the past ten days had so changed her reactions to him such that she took a step back involuntarily at the smoldering look in his eyes. Honey recognized that look, and the determined set of his jaw as he tucked it down towards his chest to look up at her from beneath hooded lids. "Where do you think you're going, Mrs. ben Said?"

Trust him to remind her that he was, technically at least and only for the shortest time she could manage, her husband. And in much more than name only, dammit. Biting her lip, her feet betrayed her again with another retreating step. But then she straightened her shoulders and moved forward, bags in hand. The only problem was that Alex had also started to move forward, deliberately colliding with her and neatly relieving her of the bags to set them right back where they were in front of the closet. He turned, watching her closely as he shrugged out of his jacket and began to loosen his tie. When he started working on the top buttons of his dress shirt, he growled, "C'mere."

Honey's first thought was to flee, and her eyes betrayed her as they strayed to the door.

"Don't even think it," he warned in a tone that brooked no disobedience. "I'll chase you around the apartment if necessary. But I won't be happy when I catch you, I can assure you of that."

Honor hugged herself tightly, trying to look anywhere but at his rapidly revealed body. She knew only too well what he'd meant when he mentioned that he "wouldn't be happy" if he had to chase her around the place. He would probably never hesitate to spank her any more. One more reason she needed to get away from him, but her feet felt rooted to the floor, her brain suddenly complete mush. It was all just too much for her to handle, and he wasn't helping things any by insisting that they stay married. "You have to let me go, Alex," she said, staring at the plush carpet, her voice small but strong, until Alex startled her by lifting her into his arms and carrying her to the big bed.

"No," he replied rawly, his big hand buried in her hair, cradling her head. "No, I won't let you go." He took her then, subduing any protest by simply overwhelming her, either with her own responsive sexuality or by gentle application of his tremendous strength. Alex controlled her, bending her to his will, bringing her to the brink of a tremendous orgasm just to back off and start again, building and building sensation after sensation. She couldn't avoid his touch, couldn't get away from him; he kept her as bound as if she were back in the harem wearing leather restraints. Every half-hearted attempt to deter him or weakly moaned, "No, please!" was ruthlessly overridden until all she could think about was having him inside her, giving her the release she sought.

When he finally entered her, putting her legs over his shoulders and pressing inexorably into her sweet wetness, he exercised tremendous control over himself and remained perfectly still within her long enough to trap her face between his hands. "You are my wife. I will never let you go."

Honor knew the truth in his words, and a single tear slipped out of the corner of her eye. Alex missed it as he began to move on her, bringing the both of them to the epitome of ecstasy.

Afterwards, he curled up behind her, spoon fashioned, holding her tightly against him and almost immediately went to sleep. Despite jet lag and recent events blurring the edges of her consciousness, Honey lay awake for a long while, wondering just how she was going to get herself divorced from the man she so longed to love.

## Chapter 5

Having not slept well all night, Honor was the first up the next morning, padding out to the living room in his discarded t-shirt to call the drug store and have them rush deliver that early pregnancy test. It would be a half an hour. As she set down the phone, she heard movement in the kitchen, and knew that Alex was up.

"Want some breakfast, Honey?" he called to her. She could almost believe that he was using her name as an endearment, but then it was not a good idea for her to go there, especially since he'd never mentioned anything about having anything other than purely lustful feelings toward her. He certainly had those, but she wanted so much more . . .

Her stomach growled loudly, and she joined him in the kitchen. "You can cook?" the disbelief in her voice was rampant.

He paused in the act of cracking an egg into a frying pan and glared at her. "Don't be such a female chauvinist. Yes, I can cook. I'm no Julia Childs – "

Despite herself, she grinned at the thought, and he grinned back.

"But I enjoy cooking."

"So do I, when I get the chance."

Alex made her a big breakfast, which consisted of bacon, eggs, toast, and home fries, then proceeded to eat two-thirds of it himself. "Did you get enough to eat?" he inquired a little shamefacedly after the fact, pausing in the act of dishing out the last portion of home fries to himself.

Honey chuckled. "Damn good thing I did, huh?"

"Well, you could be eating for two – "

Her shudder at that pronouncement was interrupted by the doorbell. As if to ensure the results she wanted, Honey tipped the delivery boy a ridiculous amount, then went into the hall bathroom and closed the door.

While she was waiting the required five minutes for the test to work, she heard a firm tapping on the door. "I'm coming in."

His size made the small bathroom seem even smaller. An eyebrow raised, she quipped sarcastically, "Do feel free to join me, Alex,"

Unflappably, he leaned against the wall with his arms crossed over his chest. "The outcome affects me, too, you know. What happens? Does it turn pink for a girl, blue for a boy?" he asked, having had no previous experience with pregnancy tests.

"It'll only change if I am p-pregnant. It'll turn pink. If I'm not, then it'll stay white." She explained, then returned to staring at the stick in the cup as if it held the answer to the meaning of life, until the beeper on her watch went off. With a shaking hand, she held the stick in front of her face.

Pink. She was pregnant. Sonofabitch. As she sank down onto the toilet lid before her knees gave out, Alex grabbed the test and examined it himself, giving a whooping war cry when he saw what it read.

"Yes!" He was absolutely ecstatic at the thought of her having his baby. Absolutely and completely happy. There truly was no one else in this world he could think of that he would rather have bear his children. Honor, however, didn't seem to share his glee. She remained sitting on the toilet, worrying her lip and frowning off into space. Instantly, he was at her side,

hugging her as best he could in the cramped quarters, then, deciding that was nowhere near enough for him, he bent down and lifted her into his arms. Mechanically, Honey locked her arms around his neck, but she seemed entirely lost in thought, even when he placed her carefully on the bed and followed her down to stretch out beside her. Alex pushed his t-shirt up her bare legs to reveal the enticing cleft between them, then further up to bare her belly. His bronzed hand lay directly over their child's safe harbor until he leaned down and kissed her there, laying his cheek against her warm tummy.

Suddenly, she rolled out from under him and grabbed a suitcase, opening it to pull out some slacks and a cotton shirt.

"What are you doing?"

Almost dressed, she said calmly, "Going to work. There must stuff piled around my desk by now. I need to get at it."

Alex caught her wrist just before she left the bedroom and wouldn't let go. As usual. "I'm hadn't planned on going in just yet. And I'm not sure I want you working while you're pregnant."

Honor snorted derisively. "So?"

He took a deep breath, realizing that her pregnancy would probably test his patience a lot more than this in the future. "So there's no need for you to go running out of here to the office."

Honey pulled against his hold, but he tightened his grip. "I want to go. That's all that's necessary."

"Honey – " no one would ever say that patience was his strong point, and she was pushing what little he had to the limit.

Honor caught his eyes, then glanced at the wrist he had imprisoned with his strong fingers. "You're hurting me," she said solemnly, and he immediately let her go.

Seconds later, the front door slammed shut and he sunk down onto the bed, running an angry hand through his hair. What the hell was he going to do with her?

The first thing that Honor did when she got to the office was type up her resignation and put it on Alex's desk, then she let the head of the secretarial pool know that she would be interviewing candidates to fill her own position during the next week, and would train the selectee herself during her last week with the company. Helen had been flabbergasted at the idea that Honey was leaving, but wisely kept her comments to herself while she wondered how

many people she was going to lose in the process of trying to find a replacement for Honor.

Alex did finally show up, almost colliding with her in the lobby. She seemed to be in a hurry so he didn't keep her, merely pressing a key to his place into her palm and letting her know that he'd be home shortly, that he just wanted to check in on things. As she drove towards Alex's apartment, Honor marveled at the gall it took him to assume that she was going to be in his apartment waiting for him like a good little wifey.

Well, he had another thing coming.

Before she even got there, the cell phone in her car began to ring, but she let the voicemail catch it, knowing full well who it was and not willing to let him ream her out just now. The phone in his apartment rang the whole time she was there, collecting her suitcases and the cats, leaving the key he had given her on the kitchen table. She had almost closed the door behind her when the sound of his voice scraped over her ears as he left a message.

"Don't run from me, Honor. There's no place you can hide."

Softly, finally, she closed the door and walked away.

She knew there was nowhere she could go that he wouldn't be able to find her. He had the money and the resources to have whole fleets of detectives hot on her trail. Honor had already decided that she wasn't going to let him drive her out of a town she loved just by being a jackass. So, she went home and set about pretending nothing out of the ordinary had happened – except the little problems of a job and a baby. But the job truly wasn't a problem. Her reputation was golden and there was only one call she needed to make.

There were two messages on her machine, which she deleted without listening to before placing her call.

"Davis?"

"Honey Walters, as I live and breathe, how the hell are ya'?"

He could always make her smile. "Oh, let's see. One, I'm unemployed. Two, I'm pregnant. Three, I'm about to have a nervous breakdown."

Davis sat forward in his chair, not quite believing what he was hearing. "You wanna run that by me again, Sweetheart?" She and Davis had known each other since Noah was a pup. He had been Paul's best man at their wedding, and a rock of support when he died.

Suddenly a little concerned that she might have assumed too much, Honey asked, "You



mentioned that if I ever wanted a job – "

"Oh, the job is here for you, Hon. Don't you worry your pretty little head about that. I was more concerned about the second part – you're pregnant?"

"Yup."

In her mind, she could see him scratching his bald head in bemusement. "Okay. I'm not going to ask how it happened – "

She had to chuckle. "C'mon, Davis, you taught me about the birds and the bees in the second grade."

"Yes, and I've regretted it ever since. Are you ok?"

"I haven't been to a doctor yet, I just found out this morning. But I'm assuming that I'm fine."

"Good. Well, you can start here whenever you like. There's tons of work to go around, you know. You can set your own hours once the baby's here, if you like." Davis owned an Internet startup company that was well past its infancy and was always desperate for help. He'd been trying to lure her away from Alex for years.

Honor sighed and stretched. "You should be canonized, Davis Frasier."

"Yeah," he responded blandly. "With a real cannon."

The rest of what he said was blanked out by a call waiting beep.

"Sounds like you have an incoming, Hon. Call me later at home and we'll talk."

"Thanks so much, Dave!"

"Are you kidding? You're doing me a favor! Get some rest. You sound beat."

"Night."

"Night."

The minute she put the phone down, it began to ring. She let the machine pick up the call, and turned up the volume in time to hear a click, then a dial tone. Then Honor did something she hadn't done since Paul died. She disconnected the blasted thing, letting Alex stew for a while.

She knew he would come, it was as inevitable as the famous death and taxes, so in the mean time, she got all the stupid things done that had piled up while they were gone – mail, laundry, a certain amount of cleaning. Honey had just settled down in front of the TV with some toast to watch a special on the British Royal Family when someone pounded on her door fit to break it off its hinges.

Now, I wonder who that could be? She thought sarcastically. "Come in, Alex, it's open."

He stormed in looking like he was ready to fight the 3rd Army, Honey sat there calmly with her feet up on the coffee table, eating toast with jam and watching the story of Edward VIII's abdication for love of Wallis Simpson. Scowling, Alex loomed expectantly by the couch for a long moment, somewhat unsure of what to do next. It was an unusual feeling for him, and he didn't like it. Not at all.

"I won't let you leave town."

Honor never took her eyes from the screen, but shrugged. "I don't plan on leaving town. I just can't work for you any more - it wouldn't be the same for us. I'll work out my notice and train my replacement."

She'd stolen his thunder and his scowl deepened. Alex had been sure that her resignation and removal from his apartment had meant that she intended to disappear – with his baby. "I'm your husband, you belong with me."

Another bite of toast disappeared as she ticked off completely valid reasons why she considered the marriage to be null and void. "I was married against my will and against my knowledge in a country of which I am not a citizen, in a religion to which I do not belong. I think any good international law attorney can have that annulled without too much fuss." Frankly, Honey had no idea whether or not that was true, but it sounded damned good.

He was growling now, and that was truly not good. "Then marry me for real." That got her attention. Gracefully, Alex dropped to one knee and took her hand. To her complete amazement, he had produced a huge diamond solitaire in a Tiffany's box in the other hand. Damn the man for being so prepared for every instance!

"Honor Walters, will you marry me?" It was the gruff vulnerability of his voice that startled her, and she had to reach up with her other hand and cup his cheek gently.

Tears brimmed in her eyes, as she answered softly, "No."

"Why the hell not?" he practically yelled, and she had to laugh, he looked so outraged, like he couldn't have foreseen that she'd turn him down.

Honey clicked the TV off with the remote, then faced him squarely. "You're doing this because of the baby. You seem to think that I'm going to try to run away from you. Well, I'm not. I like living here, and I have no interest in trying to keep you from your child."

"I'm doing this," he growled from between clenched teeth, "because I want you as my wife – child or no child. Even if my father hadn't taken the choice away from us like he did, after what we went through and what I learned about you while we were at the Women's Palace, I would have proposed to you anyway when we got home."

Her snort was full of sarcasm. "Yeah, right."

Suddenly, she found herself in his lap, held intimately against him, where, despite her protestations to the contrary, she felt like she belonged. "I was already majorly attracted to you – you're smart and funny and gregarious – "

"Yeah, all the things you're not, especially the smart part." Honey piped up.

Alex pressed her cheek back onto his chest with a scowl. "I would've asked you out right after you appeared in my office and stood up to me like no one else had, but there was the fact that I'm your boss, and the whole work thing. Even then, I could have gotten you transferred somewhere else and pursued you. You were so damned remote, though. I knew you were recently widowed, so I realized you'd need some time to recover. But you don't let anyone else get close, either. Still haven't. You're little Mary sunshine, but it's just a front to keep you from getting involved enough with someone to get hurt again."

Christ, how well he knew her!

"I think, besides the time in Sakira, the time I was able to get the closest to you was when your Dad died. But right afterwards, when you came back to work, all your shields were up and your photon torpedoes were armed, just in case someone tried to actually get to know the real you."

The Star Trek references made her smile, but his assessment was uncomfortably dead on. "Then we ended up spending some wonderful time together – just the two of us." He shook his head in amazement. "If I'd known we were going to be that explosive together I'd've laid you back on my desk that first day and taken you right there!" His warm lips found her temple.

"So you want to fuck me," she stated, her voice somewhat muffled by the fact that her closed eyes were pressed against the side of his neck.

Alex drew a long breath. "Until the day I die. Early in the morning, at lunch, during dinner and at two in the morning, yes."

She giggled. "Should I pencil you in for those times?"

A big hand stroked up and down her arm soothingly. "Yes, and probably more often than that. But it's more than that. I like to talk to you and hold you and learn all your little idiosyncrasies. I want to make sure that you're healthy and happy and," his voice dipped low and soft, "I want to love you."

It was the first time either of them had mentioned any sort of emotional ties. Trust Alex to beat her to it. Honor couldn't have been more overwhelmed. It must've been the baby, because her eyes filled immediately and she was so choked up she couldn't say a word.

"Hey," he jostled her carefully. "I just said 'I love you'. Don't you want to say something back to me?"

Honey sat back a little and gave him a watery grin. "I love you too, you arrogant bastard."

His arms tightened around her gently, as if she was made of spun glass. From that point on, Honor barely got a chance to make any decisions. Alex proceeded to carry her out to his car. The next morning, he arranged for her to move in with him, though she reminded him that she hadn't said she was going to stay married to him.

His grin was evil. Wicked, even, and while he spouted something that sounded very loving and husband-like, such as while she was making up her mind one way or the other, he wanted to make sure she was getting the best of care, and the best way to do that was to have her live with him - he was driving himself into her, teasing her little clitty and suckling on her nipples between sentences. Her orgasms with him were so intense that most of the time she could barely scrape together a coherent thought afterwards, and he liked that. Gave her less time to consider leaving him.

Alex found the best ob/gyn in the state and got her in to see him immediately. Of course, he accompanied her. The doctor said that everything looked ok so far, gave her some prenatal vitamins, weighed and measured her to within an inch of her life. She ready to leave and halfway down the hall when she realized he had hung back, and she could hear him talking to the doctor, who chuckled a little and answered him back.

When he rejoined her, her eyebrow was raised quizzically, but he merely helped her into her coat, saying, "Just checking on something."

You would have thought no other woman in the world had ever had a baby. Well, no other woman had ever had his baby, and Alex intended that she have as easy a time of it as he could manage. Although he grumbled a lot, she went to work for Davis Frasier, but only part time at

Alex's request. The worst part of the pregnancy so far was that it wore her out. Davis, having been through three pregnancies with his wife of ten years, was extremely understanding, especially when he received a call from a man who announced that he was Alex's husband, and he wanted to talk to him about the demands of her job.

Despite some reservations on his side, Dave found himself liking Alex ben Said. He was just what Honey needed – someone to watch over her who wasn't afraid to tell her "no" when she needed it, and enforce it when necessary. Honor had the maddening tendency to agree with everything you were telling her as if she were subscribing to whatever course of action you were recommending, but would then proceed to go out and do exactly whatever it was she chose to do, disregarding hours of arguments against it. That type of woman ended up with one of two types of men: either an easygoing person, like Paul, who just let her have at it, or a firmer, more no-nonsense type like Alex, who would hold her accountable for her behavior. This was going to be an interesting relationship to watch from the sidelines.

He tried not to let on to Honey that he had spoken to Alex, but he, too, was too easygoing, and she became suspicious when he suggested that she go part time and telecommute as much as possible. Of course, she dragged it out of him, and departed with murder in her eye.

Davis did the only honorable thing he could – called Alex and warned him that she'd made him spill his guts.

Alex was working at home himself, and laughed when Davis called him back to make his confession. He absolved his new friend of any culpability, knowing what Honor was like when she got a bone between her teeth. He had just hung up the phone when he heard the door slam. Good thing he hadn't gone with the stained glass one he'd liked, or it'd've been all over the carpet by now.

Leaning against the office door, he smiled broadly, greeting, "Good morning, sunshine!"

"Up yours, you son of a bitch," she returned without batting an eyelash, marching up to him and getting directly into his face. "Alexander Karim ben Said, you keep your big nose out of my place of employment! Do you understand me? Am I making myself completely clear?"

Despite her pregnancy, his patience would only extend so far. In a quiet, controlled voice, he warned, "First of all, watch your language. Secondly, if you don't watch your tone of voice you're going to find yourself over my knee in about two seconds." His hand snaked out and captured her wrist in a firm, unbreakable grasp. "Am I making myself perfectly clear?"

Damning the instantaneous tears that always seemed to be just below the surface lately, she spat, "Fuck off!" at him and whirled around, completely ignoring the fact that she was tethered at one hand. No matter how hard she pulled or twisted, he would not let go. In fact, he started

to walk, taking her with him regardless, into their bedroom, where he sank down onto the bed and quickly divested her of her dress slacks and amethyst silk panties, using the same captive wrist to pull her over his lap.

"You're hurting me!" she yelled, meaning her wrist, which he released immediately to begin WHACKing her bottom mercilessly.

"I'm going to do a lot more than that, little girl." And he proceeded to prove himself as good as his word. Before he stopped, she was sobbing her heart out and promising much better behavior in the future - not that he listened to what she said while he was tanning her hide. Alex knew she'd say pretty much anything to avoid the good, sound spanking he'd just delivered and intended on delivering whenever necessary from now on, as long as her pregnancy didn't get in the way. He'd cleared it with the doctor, even.

When he finished, he tucked her naked into bed, still sniffing pathetically, for a short nap. An hour later, he checked on her and she was still asleep. Alex took his usual position behind her, curving his big body around hers protectively, as if he could ward off any evil just by holding her within the curve of himself. She awoke just enough to snuggled her bottom back against his rampant hard on, and he drew a ragged breath, knowing sleep would be a little while in coming, but she needed her rest, and he wouldn't put her health or the baby's health at risk for anything.

Later, Alex kissed her awake, loving it when she cuddled deeper into his arms, rubbing her sleepy face against his chest hair. "Are you hungry, love?"

"Mumph," came the articulate reply, then a surlier, "No, I'm still mad at you, but now it's for two big things, not just one."

Muscular arms caged her against him, with no hope of escape while he planted a loud wet kiss on her forehead. "Because I called and spoke to Davis, and what was the other one?"

"You spanked me!" she yelled, not believing that he didn't see that as a problem.

He batted his eyelashes innocently. "When you act like a disrespectful brat around me, you can expect a spanking. I would have thought you'd've gotten that idea in Sakira."

Honor whispered carefully, almost afraid to say the words out loud, "But what about the baby?"

Alex gave her a look that said he was insulted that she thought he wouldn't have taken that into consideration. Then a thought struck her.

"That was what you were talking to the doctor about!" She hit him hard on the arm, but only

succeeded in hurting her palm. "Damn! There's one OB down!"

"Why?" She was starting to wiggle, but he held her fast.

"Because I can't face that man now that he knows you've spanked me – oooooohhhhh!" Alex had rolled them over and slid himself inside her in one smooth motion, making her moan with pleasure as his penis rasped her sensitive flesh. He bent and nipped an earlobe.

"And I intend to spank you whenever you need it, wife." His movements made her completely mindless, especially when he reached beneath her and cupped her sore bottom as a reminder. Honor couldn't even articulate a response. Couldn't even defend herself against his sensual onslaught. It was always that way with him. She practically came in her pants whenever he was in the room. When he touched her, it was all over but the sweating and the moaning . . . and the screaming and the begging.

## Chapter 6

Despite his delicate care of her, she had some spotting about a month later, and several weeks after that, when she was about ten weeks along, he got a call at the office that she had been taken to the hospital. The OB met him on the floor and gave him the news that she had miscarried, and after that his only thought was to be with her. He burst into the room and shoved nurses aside to get to her, holding her and rocking her gently while they both cried. From that point on, he was never away from her side, holding her hand though all of the poking and prodding, and even the internal exam. His only question had been whether or not they would have problems having any more children, and the doctor assured them that there would be no permanent problems, adding that, when a miscarriage happened, it usually happened for a reason – that even with all of their sophisticated medical technology, Nature usually knew best, and if the embryo didn't survive, it was probably because it wasn't meant to survive.

Alex brought her home and installed her like a queen in their bedroom, but she refused to remain there, wandering around the house like a lost soul. His heart ached every time he looked at her sad little face, and he was completely at a loss about how to help her with this. All he could do was be there, and he took time off of work to do just that, holding her when she needed to cry, encouraging her to eat, helping her get back to work, but most of all, just loving her.

Finally, more than a month after the death, she seemed to be coming around, and occasionally even smiled at him. Her body had fully recovered, but he knew she was taking the pill to prevent another pregnancy. Alex was more than anxious to make love to her, but he didn't want to impose himself on her if she wasn't ready. As highly sexual as Honor was, she was at least that emotional a person. If it was too soon for her, it was too soon.

It was Davis who helped him see what was the best course of action. "Romance her. From what you've told me, and what I've seen, you guys didn't have much of a courtship. It was right into bed. Take her out, buy her flowers, let her know you love her and want to make another baby that will be fine."

He did just that, and Honor blossomed under his undivided attention and the sensual touch of his hands. God, she was beautiful. He became rock hard every time she was near. When they made love for the first time afterwards, he was so gentle he made her cry with it. They settled into a routine that worked for the both of them – Honey still only worked part time but only because Alex found out what a little June Cleaver she was, and how much she liked to cook for and take care of him, and encouraged it. When he got home at night they ate dinner, then settled for the evening in the living room or the office, depending on whether or not he had brought work home with him. Usually, she would look up from whatever TV program she was watching or book she was reading to see him giving her a smoldering look, and Honor would get up and go get ready for bed. He was never very far behind her.

His addiction to her never seemed to subside – Alex wanted her as much if not more now than when they had first come together in Sakira. Sometimes he was at her all night, but he tried to confine those times to weekends so they both weren't exhausted. He was never more truly at home than when seated inside her to the hilt, with her delicate tissues stretched around him, pulsing with her own pleasure.

He spanked her regularly and thoroughly, knowing she enjoyed it as much as he did though perhaps not at that exact time. Alex knew his punishments hurt her. He also knew that they positively affected her behavior and attitude. Honey was much less bitchy in general, used fewer swear words, and was happier overall when she knew that he would hold her bottom accountable for her actions.

Although Alex did want another child with her, he was hesitant to bring up the subject, not wanting to cause her any more hurt. But every time she renewed that damn prescription he wanted to flush the pills down the toilet. The idea of watching her belly expand with his child and her breasts fill with milk was incredibly exciting to him, and somehow, Honor being pregnant inspired a very male, very protective side to him. Even moreso than usual, that is.

One night, he came home and there was no dinner ready and no one but the cats greeted him at the door. He wandered through the house quietly, and heard the tapping of computer keys coming from inside the office. Stealthily, he pushed the door open and saw her huddled over her laptop, typing furiously, oblivious to his presence. He snuck up behind her, and began reading out loud over her shoulder.

" – His strong, thick fingers began to pull gently at her – "



Honor jumped up so quickly he thought she was going to dump the laptop right off onto the floor, then, just as quickly, she turned and smacked his arm as she lay the computer onto the sofa next to where she had been sitting. "Don't you ever do that to me again, you idiot!"

Alex laughed and lunged for the computer, walking around with it in his hand as he read what was on the screen. Honey tried unsuccessfully to take it away from him several times, until he sat down on the edge of his desk and gave her one of those looks. Those looks were usually a warning that if she pushed much more, she'd end up with a well-warmed bottom. So instead, she stood next to him and fidgeted nervously as he read every word in the file.

"So you're writing another spanking story, huh?" he commented, knowing he was opening the door to trouble.

"Yes, I – " Honor stopped there, realizing that there was something wrong with what he had said. "What do you mean, another spanking story?"

He had the grace to look sheepish. "I've read one other of yours."

She looked horrified, and gulped, "You've what?" Did he know whom she posted her stories as? Did he read SSS? Had he – shudder – been to her web page?

Since she was starting to back away from him, he reached out and snatched her close to him, positioning her between his legs, close enough that he could smell her excitement and she could feel the bulge of his cock against his pants. She always felt so damned good in his arms! Alex buried his face at the base of her neck, almost like a vampire, breathing deeply of the potent combination of her scent du jour (she changed perfumes daily) and pure, unadulterated Honor. Stilling her struggles to be free by folding her arms behind her back, he kissed his way up the cream column of her neck. "I've read one other story."

"How?" she shot back at him, trying to remember if she'd ever left anything she'd printed out inadvertently lying around the office.

"Jess McKay found it."

The head of security? How had he – oh, shit! She'd been audited, and hadn't been smart enough to even try to cover her tracks . . . not that she'd've been successful anyway. Jess knew his stuff. Well, she had only herself to blame for being bored and letting her imagination run wild at work . . .

"Sonofabitch!" The vulgar phrase earned her a solid smack on the bottom. Alex did not like his woman to swear. This she had discovered the hard way. A painfully hard way.

"You write well."

Honor arched back and looked him in the eye to measure whether he was telling her the truth. Not that he ever lied, but he could be sugar coating it somewhat to spare her feelings. "Really?" She was inordinately pleased that he liked her work. If it earned her money, she'd be content doing it for a living. But she had these terrible unbreakable habits – like eating and making car payments.

In answer, he pulled her even closer, opening her legs and settling her hot little pussy against his rampant cock. "Yes," he growled.

"That much, huh, big man?"

"That much," he repeated, and he barely had time to clear off his desk before he stormed her gates. Once he had her spread naked beneath him, he leaned forward, pressing his lips to her ear. "Let's make a baby," he whispered as he joined his body with hers.

Because Honor seemed to still have the idea that their marriage was temporary or tenuous at best and she functioned under the misguided notion that she had a choice about whether or not she lived with him, he made her go down to City Hall with her and make things legal in this country, then they had a very nice reception at a cabin he owned in the mountains. When the last of the guests left, they were alone, and Alex took her into his arms.

"I have a present for you," she murmured shyly, before he got too involved in kissing his way up her arm to stop.

Alex straightened and looked her firmly in the eye. "You are enough of a present for me."

"Thank you." Honey kissed him playfully, then ran and got a box she'd hidden in the closet. It was wrapped in pale blue wedding paper with a blue bow. He pulled the top off, and there was a tiny little baseball mitt, along with a tiny cap and baby baseball uniform.

The box and all its contents spilled onto the floor as he lifted her into his arms and swung her around. "Does this mean what I think it means?"

Honor was nodding her head so hard she thought it would fall off. "Yes, yes, yes, and we're past the third month, and it's a boy."

He would have swung her around some more, but he was starting to get dizzy, and since he was holding his whole world in his arms, there was no way he was going to stumble now.

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