



Loose Id

DOMS  
*of*  
DARK  
HAVEN 2  
WESTERN NIGHT

SIERRA CARTWRIGHT  
CHERISE SINCLAIR  
BELINDA MCBRIDE

*Doms of Dark Haven 2:  
Western Night*

*Sierra Cartwright,  
Belinda McBride, and Cherise Sinclair*



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## **Doms of Dark Haven 2: Western Night**

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*A Good sub Would...*

*Sierra Cartwright*

## Chapter One

“It’s your bet, Master David.”

Silence hung over Dark Haven’s makeshift poker room as everyone waited for Shelby’s sometimes-dom to answer Master Trevor’s challenge.

From her peripheral gaze, she noticed one of the dungeon monitors head for the door, presumably to fetch Master Xavier, the club’s owner. The friendly game of poker to benefit a children’s charity had just taken an interesting turn.

Shelby continued to kneel on the floor next to David’s chair and told herself a good sub would keep her gaze on the floor. A good sub would mind her business while the doms conducted their wager.

A good sub would school her mind and focus on her dom’s wishes. And David’s wish was for her to behave so he’d look good.

Earlier, after he’d picked her up from her hotel, he’d told her he intended to play Master Trevor in tonight’s charity Texas Hold’em tournament at San Francisco’s Dark Haven. In fact, if all went according to his plan, the evening would end in a showdown between Trevor and David.

Shelby knew that her friend, David, had a complex relationship with Master Trevor, and six months ago, he’d lost a sub to other man. According to the story, David had been at Dark Haven with Janine, a fun but fickle sub who changed doms like others changed shoes. After seeing that Master Trevor was alone, she’d unfastened David’s collar and tossed it over her shoulder before kissing Master Trevor’s boots.

Although Master Trevor hadn’t accepted Janine as his sub, hadn’t even played with her that night, David’s ego had still been battered.

And now that everyone else had folded or busted, the last hand of Hold’em had, indeed, come down to the two of them.

At the beginning of the evening, David had made a charitable contribution of a thousand dollars in exchange for poker chips. Earlier, he’d been up substantially. But over the last half hour, his pile had diminished rapidly. His bets had become more and more reckless, and it seemed as if he was barely looking at his cards, let alone the flop, before raising the stakes. If she’d noticed that, so had his opponent.

Tension rippled across the room.

Each man had already been dealt their first two—hole—cards. And only moments before, the dealer had turned over the flop, the first three of five potential community cards.

She had no idea what either man was holding in the pocket, but a surreptitious glance had told her the flop’s high card was a king of spades. There were no pairs, no other face cards. A heart and a diamond meant a flush was unlikely, possible but not probable.

“Master David?” Master Trevor prompted a second time.

Shelby noticed David's hand form a fist alongside his right thigh, betraying his agitation. He'd run through his first thousand dollars. He was a lawyer in an area of town with a high crime rate. It was a decent job, she knew. It paid the bills, but David all but ran a nonprofit. He took on significant amounts of pro bono cases. His offices were run-down and beat-up, and he'd never met a sob story that didn't tug his heartstrings or hurt his wallet. His wages definitely didn't finance a luxury lifestyle.

Time dragged, and she shifted. Being a good sub, she was learning, wasn't as easy in real life as it was in her fantasies. She knew stealing a glance at either man—especially Master Trevor—might earn her a spanking from an angry David, but out of boredom mixed with healthy curiosity, she was contemplating the risk.

Even though she lived in Denver and only visited Dark Haven a few times a year, she knew of Master Trevor's stern reputation. Other subs dreamily whispered about him, wanting to experience his lash.

He stood well over six feet tall and commanded respect just by walking into a room. His broad shoulders, dark hair, unyielding jaw, and purposeful stride were the stuff of fantasies. Factor in his sexy, gravelly voice and she'd been a goner from the start.

If she were honest, she'd admit the other subs weren't the only ones to fantasize about him. Ever since she'd first seen him last fall, she'd masturbated to images of him, and she hadn't felt guilty doing so. *He* was exactly the type of man she wanted to dominate her.

She and David had known each other since college, and their friendship was more of a companionship than a relationship. Truth was, they were too good of friends to be fabulous lovers. Even their BDSM scenes had become a bit boring. She might not have a lot of experience, but she suspected he allowed her to get away with too much; being with him was nothing like her fantasies, nothing like the books she read or the videos she watched.

The last time she'd been with him in San Francisco, she'd tried to hide yawns she'd blamed on jetlag. She'd initially declined his most recent invitation, but when he'd mentioned that Dark Haven and its Western-themed night were on the agenda, she'd rearranged her client load so she could fly in and attend.

Even though she had been kneeling on the floor for at least an hour, seeing Master Trevor with a replica six-shooter strapped to his thigh made everything bearable.

A cowboy hat sat jaggedly atop his head, partially shadowing his steely, electric blue eyes.

He'd wrapped a dark blue bandanna around his throat, and a tailored Western shirt hugged his upper body.

Because she'd been placed on the floor like a good little sub, she knew his brown cowboy boots were authentic, marred and scratched by the years. He also wore a pair of spurs. The silver had dulled, but they had made a forceful sound when he'd walked across the floor earlier.

The dark color of his jeans had faded slightly, and he'd obviously worn them a number of times, long enough that the denim had broken in to hug his strong thighs.

Master Trevor sat easily in his chair, his shoulders relaxed. He toyed with several high denomination chips, turning them over between his thumb and forefinger.

Last night, after she'd packed her suitcase for the trip to the West Coast, she'd drizzled lube onto her bullet vibrator and lay down on her bed with her legs spread. She'd imagined him drawing her across a room and tying her to a spanking bench, her ass upturned for his hand or a flogger, whatever *he* chose. After tonight, though, and seeing the well-worn belt circling his waist, she knew future fantasies would include that supple leather against her backside.

Unable to help herself as the minutes dragged on, she sneaked a glance at the object of her desire. He looked at her—apparently sensing her perusal—and held her gaze captive.

A shiver of fear mixed with desire raced up her spine as they made eye contact.

In that brief second, his steel blue eyes promised one thing: punishment. If she were his sub, her out-of-bounds behavior wouldn't be tolerated. He'd expect, and demand, perfect submission.

Her breaths threatened to strangle her.

She wanted him. She craved his dominance. And her raw need scared her.

He raised a brow commandingly and nodded toward the floor.

Even though he wasn't her dom, she immediately dropped her gaze to stare at the wooden floor.

BDSM wasn't a way of life for her. Rather it was something she occasionally enjoyed, much like having dessert after a celebratory dinner. The weekends a few times a year satisfied her needs. Or they had, until right now, until this powerful reaction to Master Trevor's unspoken command.

She heard the echo of footsteps, and she dared another surreptitious look. This time, though, she didn't look up. She glanced sideways so it wasn't immediately noticeable that she was deliberately disobeying both Master Trevor and David.

Destiny, the club's receptionist who seemed to know everything and everyone, and Master Xavier had entered the room.

The club's enigmatic owner came in without saying anything. He didn't need to. Master Xavier electrified the air. An alpha among alphas, he was dressed in black trousers and a burgundy vest. His long black hair hung down in back in an oh-so-sexy braid. As if comfortable with his legendary status, he folded his arms across his chest, lord and master of all he surveyed. Everyone knew it; everyone respected his authority.

"Having trouble with your sub?" Master Trevor asked David, looking across the table and inclining his head in her direction.

*Oh God. Oh God.*

Startled, fearful, she looked at him.

This wasn't a man to be trifled with. He was as unyielding as his reputation suggested.



David dug his fingers into her hair and forced her head down. For long seconds he kept his hand painfully on her scalp. Her eyes watered, but she kept her mouth shut.

After his experience with Janine, she knew what her disobedience meant to David, especially in front of Master Trevor. More than ever, she wished she could behave better. In her mind, she was a much better sub than in reality.

Silence seemed to drag.

“What do we have here?” Master Xavier asked finally.

“We’re waiting, My Liege,” the dealer said. “It’s Master David’s turn to place his bet.”

True to the club’s theme night, the man looked every bit the part of an Old West poker dealer. He wore a long-sleeved striped shirt with a garter around his biceps. A knotted bow tie, gold brocade vest, jeans, and a hat completed his outfit.

David glanced across the table.

She knew they each saw the same thing. Master Trevor had the resources to call any bet he could make.

Pulling his money clip from his front pocket, David said, “Another thousand dollars in chips.”

Shelby gasped. *Another thousand dollars? Was he crazy?* He’d be willing to bet that on two potential turns of the cards?

“While the children’s charity will appreciate your thoughtfulness,” Master Xavier said, “the evening has already been a huge success.”

Shelby admired the owner’s tact. He was offering a dom an easy and graceful way to back out of his aggressive wager. No wonder the man was so respected in San Francisco’s BDSM circles.

“A thousand dollars,” David repeated, peeling off bills and tossing them onto the felt-covered table.

Shelby had never known David to be reckless. Suddenly she was questioning everything she knew about him. Surely the experience with Janine had stung, but no way did the woman matter that much to him. So what the hell was he thinking and doing?

As the moments stretched, Shelby concentrated on her breathing and keeping her body still and being a good sub instead of shifting uncomfortably. Her entire body was fatigued, and she wanted this ridiculous display of David’s masculine ego to be over.

Kneeling for several hours while the men played and she was ignored had not been what she was anticipating when she boarded the flight early this morning at Denver International Airport.

“My Liege?” the dealer asked.

Technically, this was against the rules. Chips needed to “purchased” up front, from the club’s receptionist, Destiny. David was behaving more like he was at a casino than at a charity event.

The quiet conversation that had hummed through the poker room abruptly died as people eavesdropped, waiting for Master Xavier's decision.

"The children's charity is the beneficiary," Master Xavier said with a nod.

The dealer exchanged the cash for poker chips and then gave the money to Destiny for safekeeping.

For a minute, David sat there, as if considering his bet. "Five hundred," he said finally, pushing a pile of chips into the middle of the table.

Someone whistled.

That was an aggressive bet considering his remaining funds.

Master Trevor studied the flop, but he never glanced at his two cards. Then he thumbed back the brim of his hat. He allowed thirty seconds to pass before he said, "Call." He matched the other man's bet.

Master Trevor had more than enough funds to raise the bet. It seemed that, since he hadn't raised, he might be playing a bit of cat-and-mouse. Either that or the flop hadn't helped him.

The dealer burned the next card. As each player watched intently, the man then flipped up the next one, known as *the turn*. Ten of spades.

David reached for her and put his hand lightly on the top of her head. He all but petted her. His touch telegraphed confidence. Maybe he did know what he was doing. She hoped he had spades in the hole.

Master Trevor waited for David's bet.

"One hundred dollars," he said, adding the chips to the pot.

The bet was at odds with the way he was stroking her. Either his bet was a bluff or his relaxed behavior was.

"Raise," Master Trevor said. "Four hundred."

The other dom apparently had a better hand, or he was trying to force David's hand.

David was almost out of options. If he wanted to raise, he needed more chips. At this point, he had to fold or go *all in*.

Over the past few seconds, David's hand had tightened on her scalp. He might have a good hand, but he didn't have the funds to back it.

He reached for his money clip again.

*Was he crazy?*

Before peeling off the few remaining bills, he sat back and said, "Let's make it more interesting."

Master Xavier raised a brow.

Other doms, with their subs trailing behind, wandered over and formed a circle around

the table.

“If I win, Lawton International remodels the Northwest Community law offices.”

Shelby gasped. She’d been thinking this might be about Janine and a grudge. And it had nothing to do with that.

He’d maneuvered this entire evening to manipulate Master Trevor into donating his time to David’s cause?

Master Trevor sat back in his chair. “You’re asking me to put up something close to half a million dollars?”

“I’ll buy materials.”

“Generous,” Master Trevor said.

For long moments he sat there quietly, a study in self-mastery.

Finally, Master Trevor nodded. “If I win, I want the sub.”

Shelby’s heart stopped.

“Wait a fucking—”

“Master David,” Master Xavier admonished quietly. “I’ll thank you to be more respectful in my club.”

Despite the fact David’s fingers were digging into her scalp, she looked directly at Master Trevor.

His gaze was pinned on her, hot, hard, as if he’d been waiting for and anticipating her inability to keep looking at the ground.

“Can’t get your own subs, Trevor?” David demanded.

Master Trevor didn’t respond. Rather, he continued to look at her.

She knew she should look down, show him the respect he demanded, but she didn’t; she couldn’t.

She felt scorched as his gaze trailed from her face, down her body, lingering for a few seconds on her chest. In keeping with the Western-themed night, she’d selected a white shelf bra and a fringed leather vest. She’s spent a week shopping for a beautiful sterling bolo tie. It had cost a lot more money than she wanted to pay, but the way it caught the light when she moved made it worth every penny.

He continued his perusal and paused again at her pelvis. Unlike some of the other subs who were almost completely naked, her mound was covered by a pink thong. Still, she had felt completely exposed to him.

As if they were alone, he slowly took in her white leather chaps.

She knew he wouldn’t be able to appreciate the sexy pair of heeled boots that completed her outfit. But his slow smile told her he found plenty he liked.

He’d taken his time looking at her, considering her. Suddenly she wanted nothing more

than to be his sub and have his complete attention on her.

His gaze left her body, and he looked directly at David. "Do we have a bet?"

"This is an outrage," David said. He slumped in his chair.

"Does that mean you're not confident in that next card?" Master Trevor asked.

David sat up straighter and then leaned forward, glaring. "I accept your terms."

Shelby gave up all pretense of minding her business.

"Let's ask the sub if she agrees, as well," Master Trevor said to Master Xavier. "I'm not willing to force the woman to do anything she doesn't want to. But I think she'll be willing."

Was she that transparent?

Master Xavier folded his arms across his chest and nodded toward her. "Excellent suggestion."

All eyes were on her. Her heart thundered. How the hell was she supposed to deal with this?

Instinctively she looked to David for guidance. He'd already agreed she'd be his stakes, but she had the opportunity to call off this ridiculousness.

She and David had been friends since college. They'd hooked up a few times in the last decade, but they hadn't been exclusive for at least eight years. Despite their best efforts, their relationship was closer to companionship than spark and sizzle.

Still, she liked him, and she knew Janine's defection had burned, at least a little. She felt torn. She didn't want to cause his bruised ego any more damage, and her leaving tonight with Master Trevor would definitely batter David. On the other hand, the law center needed serious work. "Sir?" she asked David softly.

David drummed his fingers along his thigh. After a few seconds, he nodded without looking at her.

Master Xavier took control.

He walked over to her. He placed his finger under her chin and gently tipped her head back. "I don't know you."

"No, My Liege," she said quietly. She could hardly hear above the racing of her heart, and her tongue didn't want to form around any words. Now, of all times, she wanted to look at the floor.

"Tell me about yourself."

"I..." She blinked. "I'm afraid I don't understand the question." Belatedly she added, "My Liege."

"Your name."

"Shelby. Shelby Salazar, My Liege."

"And Shelby Salazar, I don't see a collar around your neck."

“No, My Liege. I don’t belong to anyone. I mean, I’m not a lifestyle sub. I...” She sought for the best explanation.

“She’s more of a dabbler,” David supplied.

“But she’s been here before,” Destiny said, walking over with a digital pad.

Shelby had been introduced to the club’s receptionist before. Destiny. Always outrageous, always welcoming, always on top of things. Nothing happened at Dark Haven that Destiny didn’t know about.

“Tonight is the sub’s fifth visit, My Liege,” Destiny said. “Always with Master David.”

Shelby nodded, confirming what Destiny said. “I live in Denver, My Liege, and I’m visiting San Francisco for the week.”

“Are you staying with Master David?”

“No, My Liege. I have a hotel,” she said.

“Do you know Master Trevor?”

“Only by reputation, My Liege.”

“I’ll amend my bet to say I’ll take the sub for the week she’s in town,” Master Trevor said.

“Generous bastard,” David muttered.

Master Xavier shot David a quelling glance. The other man shrugged and played with the few chips on the table. “Do you understand the stakes as Master Trevor has outlined them?”

She nodded.

“Tell me what you understand the stakes to be,” Master Xavier said.

“I understand that Master Trevor...” She trailed off and looked over at the dom. This was the opportunity of a lifetime. He was unyielding, uncompromising, and attractive as sin in a pair of jeans. This was the opportunity she’d dreamed of, with a man she had a crush on.

Hormones flooded her body. She wanted him, but suddenly nerves swamped her. Was she really going to agree to this? She looked back at Master Xavier. “Master Trevor wants me to be his sub for the week that I’m in town.”

“That means staying at my place,” he added.

Being cut off from her regular life, from David?

“Are you willing to agree to the terms, Shelby?” Master Xavier asked.

“If Master David says so, My Liege.”

“She does know how to behave,” Master Trevor said. “I’d wondered.”

Heat chased across her face. She wanted to show this man she could behave like a proper sub.

“I’ve already said I agree,” David said.

“Winner take all,” Master Trevor said.

“You’re not being coerced, sub?” Master Xavier asked.

“No, Sir.”

Master Xavier released her chin and stood. He nodded toward the dealer, and the man reached for the deck of cards.

The pot of money now a moot point, the dealer burned the next card before turning over the river, the fifth and final community card.

She held her breath, torn.

The jack of spades.

Several people in the room whispered. There were three spades showing. Definitely the potential for a flush. With the jack, a straight was a possibility.

She looked at David. His eyes were wide, and he nodded. Her friend definitely didn’t have a poker face. He squeezed her shoulder. She released her breath. As much as she wanted the opportunity to play with Master Trevor, she wanted David to win. His work meant everything to him.

His thinking had been brilliant. He’d spent six months fundraising, and he was at least another year away from being able to afford the much-needed building renovations.

Time for the showdown.

The dealer nodded to David. He turned over his pocket cards. The eight and nine of spades.

She schooled herself not to smile. But that flush was likely unbeatable.

She looked at Master Trevor. Unlike David, his face was set in unreadable lines.

The dealer signaled for Master Trevor to show his pocket cards. He turned over the two cards lying facedown on the felt.

Ace and queen of spades.

Royal flush.

David shoved back from the table and stood. Then, seeming to draw on the same reserve he used in the courtroom, he extended his hand toward Master Trevor.

The other man stood.

She was aware of the contrast between them. Master Trevor was a couple of inches taller than David. The other man’s shoulders were broader, his arms much more muscular, his thighs more powerful.

Soon, she would be alone with him.

Her heart beat impossibly fast in her chest.

“Congratulations,” David said as the two shook hands. His tone held no warmth. “I’ll leave you two to get to know each other.”

“She’s in safe hands,” Master Trevor promised.

“She means a lot to me,” David said.

Master Trevor nodded. As if she were a true sub, he didn’t address his comments to her. She was alternately thrilled and annoyed.

David crouched in front of her. “Behave yourself, sub.”

“Yes, Sir.” There was so much she wanted to say, needed to say. She ached to touch him, to reassure him.

“You’ve wanted something like this,” he said quietly.

“But—”

“We both know you weren’t getting what you wanted. Try to enjoy it. I’ll see you at the end of the week. I’ll take you back to the airport.”

She nodded.

“Call me if you need anything.” He stood and gave her shoulder a reassuring pat. “Anything.”

He stood. He didn’t touch her again. After nodding to the dealer, to Master Xavier, and ignoring Master Trevor, he left the room.

A few seconds later, Master Xavier said, “Game’s over, everyone. I invite you to enjoy the other pleasures at Dark Haven.”

Destiny signaled to the dungeon monitor stationed near the door. Together, she and the man shepherded subs and Doms toward the exit.

Several people stopped to congratulate her temporary dom before they left the room.

Because Master Trevor had yet to give her any instructions, Shelby remained on her knees, her gaze downcast as the noise in the room diminished.

At this point, she realized it was probably a good thing he hadn’t given any commands. Nervousness raced through her body, and she wondered if she’d be able to follow any direction, no matter how simple, he gave her.

“You’re free to go,” Master Xavier said to Destiny and the dungeon monitor.

Without a word, they left.

Master Xavier came over. “I trust this is only about you wanting to play with Shelby,” he said to Master Trevor.

Time seemed to simultaneously drag and zip by. She wanted to be alone with her new dom, but the prospect also frightened her.

“I told Master David the sub is in good hands. You have my word.”

“I expected nothing less,” Master Xavier said.

“We’d like to use the punishment room.”

“Consider it done.”

“My Liege.”

She heard the tone of respect in Master Trevor’s tone, but also the signal that, as far as Master Trevor was concerned, the conversation was over.

Master Xavier’s steps seemed to echo off the wooden floor as he left the room.

The echoing silence, the realization that they were alone, and that for the next seven days she was his sub, suddenly overwhelmed her.

She remained on her knees, her pulse ringing in her ears.

“I want to know about you,” he said. “How much BDSM experience do you have, sub?”

She kept her gaze cast down. “I... Very...” Her voice cracked. She sounded squeaky, lacking her usual confidence. In her job as a high-powered corporate mediator, she spent her days utilizing all her senses to tune into people’s subtle nuances. Even when she wasn’t feeling confident in her abilities, she squared her shoulders and projected authority.

But being on her knees, mostly naked, in front of this powerful man undid her.

“Go on,” he told her.

She cleared her throat and tried again. “Very little, Sir. A handful of experiences.”

“I could have guessed,” he said. “You were given the choice, and you agreed to be my sub for a week. Does that mean you want more experiences?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“I can’t hear you.”

She swallowed. “Yes,” she said again.

Continuing in his soft, probing way that reassured even as it demanded, he asked, “Do you know what that means?”

She could do nothing but look at his boots and be nearly overwhelmed by his presence. He was so close she breathed in his scent, that of crisp ocean air and raw masculine power. “Truthfully? No.”

“You have ideas.”

Who knew if they were close to reality, though?

“Tell me what you’re expecting. Or what you’re hoping.”

The sound of Master Trevor’s voice intoxicated her. It was deep, well modulated, firm, domineering. “I came to San Francisco because I want even more experiences. I’ve wondered...” She trailed off. She and David hadn’t even had this level of conversation. She just went along with what he wanted.

They’d visited Dark Haven a few times, so she’d seen other subs and Doms interact. She’d seen one sub attached to a collar and leash. The man had crawled behind his master



and seemed happy to do it. Another female sub had walked in front of her master, her head lowered; her dom's hand was fisted in her hair. And she did a fair amount of reading. Clearly no two D/s relationships were the same.

But she knew she wanted to experience more spice than she had with David. Their scenes were more like casual interludes with kinky clothes. At the end of the night, he dropped her at her hotel. What would it be like to wake up in the morning and be expected to continue the role of sub?

Master Trevor waited patiently for her answer.

"I have heard that you are harsh but fair."

"Probably accurate," he said. "And...?"

"If I am staying with you for a week, I understand you'll probably have a set of rules you'll expect me to follow."

"I do. And if you break a rule?"

"I imagine..." Oh God. Oh *yes*. The idea of his supple brown leather belt against her exposed buttocks definitely made her shiver. The fantasy just got better and hotter.

"Tell me what you just imagined."

She stalled.

"I don't tolerate shyness or hiding, sub. Tell me what you just imagined. *Now*."

"I imagined you..." She exhaled a shaky breath. "I imagined you punishing me."

"Sir," he said.

"I imagined you punishing me, Sir."

"Punishing you how, sub?"

"Your belt."

"Good to know," he said. "Shall we begin?"

## Chapter Two

Trevor saw her shoulders shake just a little, whether from fear or excitement he wasn't sure. Maybe it was a combination of both feelings.

Since David had entered the poker room with the sub obediently following, Trevor had been intrigued.

He'd been in the scene a long time. He'd had subs. Twice, he'd even committed to 24-7 lifestyle relationships. But he'd gotten bored. On her way out the door, his last sub had accused him of being jaded.

He'd shrugged. She'd been partially right; he was jaded. But worse than that, he was bored, mind-numbingly, ready-to-change-anything bored.

As far back as high school, he hadn't been interested in conventional relationships. He'd always been a leader, captain of the football team as well as the debate team. He'd had jobs throughout high school and college, but after graduation, he'd started his own company. For the first two years, he'd lived on packaged noodles and slept in his beat-up pickup truck.

Despite the odds, he'd never given up. Even when his family encouraged him to get a real job, he'd continued to live on fast food so he could spend his meager earnings buying the finest tools available to hone his craft.

In work, in life, in his relationships, his standards were exacting. He asked for what he wanted, and he never settled.

The woman kneeling in front of him did so imperfectly. She allowed her gaze to stray, and she wasn't subtle about it. She shifted often, letting everyone know of her discomfort. Over the time that he'd watched her, she'd made little pretense at behaving well. She either didn't know how to suffer for her dom or she'd never had a dom with exacting standards.

Shelby wasn't the type of sub who would generally draw his eye. He played with experienced women who'd been trained by the best, women who knew his moods better than he did, anticipated his needs, and saw to them.

Perhaps, he reflected, that was exactly why she intrigued him. Her lack of expertise combined with an air of innocence was refreshing. Maybe for the next week, he wouldn't be bored. "Stand."

She rose slowly and a bit unsteadily, as if nervous and fighting cramped muscles.

"Do you want me to call you Shelby?"

"Yes," she said.

He cocked his head.

"Shelby is fine, Sir. Thank you."

She was a hot little number, no doubt. Shelby Salazar's dark hair flowed over her shoulders. The vest and bolo tie were sexy, white leather chaps wrapped around her slender

legs. The feminine pink thong she'd added provided a splash of color and a hint of intrigue.

He was man enough to appreciate the way the white and splash of pink complemented her tanned skin, and he was more than man enough to appreciate those sexy, stylish boots. Rather than cowboy boots, she'd chosen soft black leather with a spiky heel. Testosterone surged in his bloodstream. It had been a while since he'd had such a raw reaction to a woman. Master Xavier's Western-themed night had been a brilliant idea. "Turn around."

She did, exposing her bare buttocks. He looked forward to stroking the flesh there and holding her cheeks apart while he took her anally.

"Nice. Spread your legs and bend over."

For a moment, she hesitated. He suddenly looked forward to helping her improve her reaction time.

"Grab your ankles."

"I..."

"Is there a physical reason you can't do what I asked?"

"No...Sir."

"I don't tolerate embarrassment in my subs, Shelby."

She slowly complied.

"Legs farther apart," he said softly but uncompromisingly.

She wiggled on those sexy heels. It took her several seconds to get into position, and he enjoyed every moment spent watching.

Trevor took a few steps toward her. He heard the soft sounds of her rapid breaths.

He crouched behind her and said, "Reach back, sub, and spread your ass cheeks."

It took her so long to respond that he wondered if she actually would. Since she was bent over, he could see her eyes, wide and blinking. A little furrow was buried between her elegantly shaped brows.

Her breaths were even shallower. He wondered if she were on the edge of panic. "You're okay," he told her. "Just listen to me. Stay focused. Know that it's okay to surrender. I'll keep you safe." If she truly panicked, he'd let her go.

Even though Xavier kept the club warm, she shivered.

He gentled his fingertips down her back. "Go for what you want, Shelby." He kept his tone even and reassuring but also uncompromising. "I want you to know that when you do what I tell you, when you push past your comfort zone and do something that you might think is nasty, you'll be pleasing me. Do you understand?"

She nodded.

Then, commandingly, uncompromisingly, he snapped, "Now show me your submissive ass and cunt."

After several seconds and another half dozen shaky exhalations, she closed her eyes and reached back. In the future, he wouldn't permit her to close her eyes.

"Gorgeous," he said. And she was. She'd painted her fingernails a striking red. The sight of the bold color nails against her gorgeous olive skin made his cock throb. He hadn't had a sub, or any woman, in months. Suddenly he wanted to take her fast and hard, possess her, claim her, mark her as his. "Stand up slowly and turn to face me."

She complied, taking her time. Her motions had a bit more elegance to them. She learned quickly. *Beautiful*.

"Look at me," he told her.

She did, but then she instinctively looked down.

*Good*. "When I give you an instruction, it supersedes previous direction." Quietly he repeated, "Look at me, Shelby."

She did. Maybe he'd ask her to do that more often. Her green eyes were lovely, wide, unblinking, no pretence, no artifice. "I want to make a few things clear, Shelby. You are free to leave anytime you wish over the next week. I don't keep submissives against their will. Just say the word and I'll have a driver at your disposal. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir," she said.

"But if you're curious, if you want to experience more, you'll need to push yourself, and you'll need to trust me. That will take time, but I have the patience, if you do. I will take you past every inhibition, every fear. At the end of the week, you'll feel no more embarrassment, and you'll respond perfectly to my commands. By freeing yourself, you'll find out what you really enjoy, what you really want. It's up to you, Shelby. You came to San Francisco for a reason. Go for it, and you may get everything out of your trip that you hope to."

"I..." She trailed off and frowned.

She might be innocent, but she knew at least the basics, whether she normally practiced them or not. "Permission to speak," he said.

"I want it." She licked her lower lip. "I want to have this experience."

He had an image of her tongue against the tip of his cock. His pulse throbbed. He'd told her he had patience. Suddenly he wasn't so sure. "Even if it means you'll be punished as part of your training?"

"Yes. I'm just nervous."

"Nerves, we can work with," he told her. "Lies, lying to yourself, lying to me, won't be tolerated."

She nodded.

"How do you normally deal with fear?"

She exhaled. "By jumping in with both feet, Sir. Like getting in a swimming pool where the water is too cold. I plug my nose and jump."

He appreciated her answer. "We're going to move to one of the punishment rooms." The room had a spanking horse. Definitely fitting for the club's Western night theme. Master Xavier and his team really did think of all details when they put together these events. "You'll follow me there, staying approximately three feet behind me. I want your gaze downcast, but I want you paying complete attention to what I do. If I stop, you stop, staying three feet back. If I point to the floor, I want you to instantly kneel with your knees approximately shoulder-width apart. If I walk faster, you speed up. Any questions?"

She shook her head.

"When I ask a question, Shelby, I expect an answer, unless you are gagged or otherwise instructed not to speak. I demand honest and immediate answers."

A beautiful blush highlighted her cheekbones.

"No questions, Sir."

"Follow me." He led the way to the door and out into a common area of the club. A few curious people turned their direction, and he wondered how his new sub would behave. He probably should have requested a leash and collar for her.

She did well, keeping her eyes downcast and staying behind him.

He stopped once, as a test.

She immediately stopped.

When he pointed to the floor, she knelt.

He left her there, kneeling, for at least thirty seconds before slowly walking around her. Other people walked past and one domme gave Shelby an appreciative glance. He didn't blame the woman. Honestly, he had a difficult time keeping his gaze off her. She was an enchanting woman, with striking outfit and the mass of riotous black hair framing her face and falling over her shoulders.

The next week had definite potential.

She kept her gaze downcast, just like a perfect sub.

"Stand," he told her.

With a lovely elegance, she did.

His cock hardened. Playing with her would be torture for him.

He entered the punishment room, and she followed at exactly the right distance. That shouldn't have pleased him as much as it did.

The punishment horse dominated the space, and he noticed her gaze fixate on it. And no wonder. It was a fierce looking device. It had a tall, thin center beam and two other beams, one on each side, so a sub's knees would be supported, something he appreciated since he enjoyed long scenes.

Red vinyl covered the horse, and it was artfully decorated with two dozen metal rings. There was no limit to the ways a sub could be secured to the contraption.

He pointed to the floor, and she slowly knelt. “Knees farther apart. And clasp your hands at the small of your back.”

While he closed the door, she did as he instructed.

“You’re going to be punished,” he said.

“Yes, Sir,” she whispered.

He was just trying to decide whether or not to have her completely naked before starting. Generally Trevor preferred his subs to be nude when he punished them. Often he had them disrobe symbolically.

He liked that, when naked, his women were unable to hide from him. He didn’t want any skin off-limits to his touch. If he wanted to make a point by landing a stroke against the inside of a thigh, he didn’t want fabric minimizing his blow.

Mostly he just loved the sight of a woman’s body with its tantalizing skin and soft curves. But this vixen, in white leather chaps and hot little boots was making him rethink his strategy.

He stopped behind her and said, “Tell me why you’re going to be punished.”

“Sir, because I didn’t keep my gaze downcast in the poker room.”

“No,” he said. “If you’d been my sub at the time, you’d have been punished swiftly while we were in the poker room. But I would have made my expectations clear beforehand. It’s doubtful you’d have even attempted that kind of disobedience.”

He moved around to stand in front of her. He saw the rapid rise and fall of her chest. “It was Master David’s right and responsibility to ensure your proper behavior before you agreed to submit to me. If he chose not to correct you, that doesn’t concern me.” He crouched. He placed a finger beneath her chin and tipped her head so that she looked at him.

Her eyes were wide, unblinking.

“Tell me why I would choose to punish you.”

“Because you can,” she whispered.

“Sometimes,” he agreed. He traced the pad of his thumb across her upper lip, taking his time, making sure she was as aware of him as he was of her. He admired his own restraint. He wanted to see her strapped to the horse, her body trembling in anticipation. “Keep going. Why else are you being punished?”

“Because it took me so long to grab my ankles when you told me to.”

“And?”

“Because I hesitated before...”

“No embarrassment,” he reminded her.

“I hesitated before I spread my ass cheeks.”

“It’s more about the fact you hesitated at all, no matter what the order. Since you’re unaccustomed to dealing with a dom who has uncompromising expectations, this

punishment will be lenient as far as punishments go...simply a taste of my lash, more instructive than punitive. But make the same mistake a second time and I promise you will not enjoy the experience.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Tell me your understanding of the differences between punishment and discipline.”

“I...” She licked her lower lip. “I’m not sure I know.”

“Punishment is generally swift and in direct proportion to the nature of the infraction.”

“I see.”

“Discipline is something I’ll engage in to ensure your continued good behavior. I’ll guarantee you’ll never climax from my punishments.”

“And from your discipline?”

Cheeky sub. With his thumb he stroked her cheekbone. “Almost always.” He released her chin. He stood and folded his arms across his chest. “Stand. I’m going to cut off your panties.”

Her eyes opened wide. He wondered for a moment if she’d argue with him, but finally she complied, even though her movements were slow and a little jerky. They’d work on that over the next week. He watched and waited with infinite patience. This may have been the best bet he’d ever won.

From a hook on the wall, he grabbed a pair of safety scissors, like the type carried by EMTs. Master Xavier equipped his club well. “Put your hands behind your neck,” he told Shelby.

“The panties...they’re new.”

“And?”

“Yes, Sir. Sorry, Sir.”

She stood still while he crouched to snip the scrap of fabric from her hips.

“Lovely,” he said as the ruined thong dropped to the wooden floor.

She closed her legs. Then, without being instructed, she parted them again.

*Quick learner.*

Trevor allowed himself the pleasure of looking at her, from top to bottom.

Her unruly hair fell over the feminine curve of her shoulders. She had a lovely, kissable neck, and the concha from her bolo tie lay alluringly against her throat. He liked the looks of her in anything that resembled a collar.

The vest, even though it wasn’t fastened, covered far too much, especially since she’d also worn a bra. If she were his sub, he wouldn’t allow her to wear so damn many clothes. Still, he appreciated the tantalizing hint of midriff.

His gaze continued lower, and he appreciated the well-groomed thatch of her pubic hair.

“Lovely,” he said. But he’d ceremoniously remove it later, as a sign of his dominance. “Now remove everything from the waist up.” She could leave the chaps in place, he decided. The white leather against her dark skin looked beautiful, and he particularly liked the way the boot heels emphasized her calf muscles. Naked, he was learning, wasn’t always best.

She shrugged out of the vest and held it by her side.

Her nipples, dark and hardened, peeked out above the lace of her shelf bra.

What the hell had he been thinking choosing celibacy for the past few months?

He took the vest from her and hung it on a peg on the wall.

She took off the bolo, then shook her head. He wanted to have his hands in the riotous mess of her hair, holding her captive while he fucked her from behind. “I’ll take that,” he said, extending his hand for the metal tie.

She handed over the bolo, and he placed it around his wrist. Her breasts spilled out over the top of the shelf bra’s lacy cups. Although her breasts weren’t large, they were firm, beautiful, touchable, and kissable. “Now remove your bra,” he instructed.

Silently she reached back and unfastened the clasp.

“Wait. I changed my mind.” He wanted to touch her, to feel the silkiness of her skin. “I’ll do that.” He drew the bra off her body. Until he’d said that, he hadn’t realized how hungry he was to touch her skin. He might be a dom, but he was a man first.

He skimmed his fingers across her chest. Her skin felt delicate in contrast to his work-roughened fingertips. He stroked the tips of her breasts, watching as her nipples hardened. Her breaths became even more shallow, and her lips were slightly parted. *God*. She was absolutely lovely in her responses.

After mentally reminding himself that he was responsible for this scene going well, for it being everything she hoped it would be, he turned away long enough to hang the bra on the same hook as her vest. “Offer your breasts to me,” he said when he returned to her.

“I...” She blinked. “I’m not quite sure what you mean.”

“Do your best,” he told her.

She cupped her breasts and lifted them up.

“Perfect,” he said. His cock pressed against his zipper. “Squeeze your nipples.”

She did, and she let out a little moan.

“Again,” he said.

As she squeezed those taut brown tips, her hips jerked a little.

“Is your pussy damp, little sub?”

“Yes.”

“Yes?”

“Yes, *Sir*.”



“You like having your nipples played with?”

“Yes, Sir. I do.”

“Show me.”

She released one of her breasts and trailed her fingertips between her legs. Then she held up her fingers.

In the overhead light, he saw the glisten of her feminine juices. “You *are* responsive.”

“To you, Sir.”

He captured Shelby’s hand, his fingers around her wrist. He raised her hand to his mouth and licked the juices off her fingers.

She gasped. “Permission to speak, Sir?”

“Yes.”

“That was hot.”

“Glad you approve.” He’d suspected having her as his sub for a week would be good. He hadn’t known *how* good. He reluctantly let go of her wrist and said, “You may release your nipple, Shelby, then your breast.”

She did, then allowed her arms to dangle at her sides.

“You wanted to feel my belt?”

“Yes, Sir,” she whispered, as if it were a deep, dark secret.

And maybe, he realized, to her, it was. If David hadn’t pushed her, chances were she still had a lot of unexplored territory. He looked forward to uncovering it with her. “Remove it from me.”

Her hands were shaking as she fumbled with the buckle. Finally she managed to get it apart, and she pulled it through the denim loops. “I look forward to you becoming more proficient at that.”

She offered the length of leather to him.

“Kiss it,” he told her.

She gulped, but she did as he instructed. If she continued to be so obedient, he’d have to leave the room and jack off. It had been a long time since he’d been so aroused by being with a woman.

After several seconds, he accepted the belt from her. He held the buckle in one hand and allowed the leather to dangle from his grip.

She remained where she was, and she twisted her hands in front of her while her gaze seemed riveted on the belt.

“In the absence of other instruction, always clasp your hands behind your back.” When she did, he said, “Nice. I like the way that forces your breasts out.” He saw that telltale blush again. “Do you have a safe word?”

“Tangerine.”

“Tangerine? You’ll actually remember it during a scene?”

“I hate tangerines,” she said. “I never forget them during a scene.”

He laughed. “You don’t get to use the word just because you hate something.”

“Oh.”

“You know that, right?”

“I... Uhm. No. That hasn’t been the way it’s worked in the past.”

“Master David allowed you to stop a scene anytime you wanted?”

“Of course.”

“Never pushed your boundaries?”

“Not unless we talked about it beforehand.”

“I see.” Each dom had his own style, but even given that, the man was too relaxed. No wonder she’d been all over the place in the poker room. “Master David is the only one you’ve explored BDSM with?”

“Everything else was strictly vanilla. Strictly boring.”

“You obviously didn’t like that.”

“My job can be intense,” she said. She hesitated, as if contemplating how much to reveal before continuing. “I’m a mediator. I walk, I run, go to the gym, swim, try to avoid too much alcohol. But nothing takes away my stress like sex. Good sex.”

“Define good sex.”

“It’s where I can let go and surrender. There’s...” She exhaled. “Pain involved.”

“You’re a masochist.”

“Maybe a little.”

“But you still like to be in charge.”

“I don’t really see it that way.”

Of course she didn’t; she was a born negotiator. “You want to choose the implement, the time, the place, and, if I don’t miss my guess, decide when you go home.”

“Yes.”

“That’s being in charge,” he said. Slowly he wrapped the belt around his wrist, making sure her gaze was on it. “Telling your dom how to dominate you isn’t supposed to be how it works. And you know that too, otherwise you’d have taken the out when Master Xavier offered it.” Trevor studied her. When he spoke, he dropped his voice. “That’s what you want. That’s why you haven’t bolted, isn’t it? You don’t want to be in charge. You already know I’m not the kind of man who will tolerate any nonsense from you. Things that are definitely outside your comfort zone, we will discuss. And know this, Shelby, I will push

your boundaries; I'll push them hard. And my guess is, you'll like it." He looked her in the eye. "Overuse your safe word and I'll put you on a plane myself. Do you understand?"

Her eyes were wide. She glanced, not at all subtly, over her shoulder at the door.

"Run, little sub. Run like your life depends on it, and run now. Either that or stand up, walk over to that horse, and get on it like a good girl. I want you at the end, not the middle. I want your hot ass sticking up and out. Then ask me to tie you to it." She'd confessed to being a little bit of a pain slut. He suspected she liked to be told what to do and how to do it, until she balked. Having her ask him, beg him, to punish her was likely out of her comfort zone...a place, as he'd told her, that he intended to keep her.

He left his belt on a small table and grabbed restraints from the wall while she hesitated.

She looked from the door to the horse. She stood slowly.

If he was sure of one thing, it was that she wouldn't run. She was scared all right, but as he'd said, she knew, deep down, that she didn't want to be in charge.

"Uhm...do you want me to remove the boots and chaps, Sir?"

"Hell no. The chaps make your ass stick out."

"For punishment," she said.

"Because it looks hot," he corrected. "You've got a nice ass, Shelby. And those chaps frame it perfectly. And you know it."

She climbed up onto the punishment horse and placed a leg on either side of the bar, in kneeling position. She slowly lowered herself onto her belly. Her breasts were loose, which he wanted. Her arms dangled at the sides.

"Scoot back a little," he told her. "I want your ass more accessible."

She took so long he wasn't sure she was going to comply.

"It seems obscene," she said.

"It is."

Despite her small protest, she did as he requested.

He looked at her for a moment. Her position *was* obscene. And sexy as hell. He crossed to her. He fingered her cunt, finding her moist. Slowly he rubbed a finger back and forth over her clit, and she moaned as she became more and more lubricated.

He placed a hand on each of her generous butt cheeks and spread her ass. She gasped, and she squirmed, but she didn't try to get away. "Are you an anal virgin?"

"Except for one time when I was in college. I was dating a guy who stuck a finger up there. I hated it, and I told him never to do it again."

"You've never worn a plug?"

"It's on my 'no' list."

"Was on your 'no' list," he corrected.

She shuddered.

“Not immediately,” he said. “I won’t make you wear a plug tonight, but soon.”

“I...I want to talk about my list.”

“Of course.” He kept his hand on her and leaned in a little closer. “Do you want to talk about it now? Do you want to try and control this scene, or do you want to let go and enjoy this? Do you want to see where it goes?”

Seconds stretched into at least a minute.

She was a tough one. She’d require patience and perseverance in equal measures.

Finally, quietly, she said, “Please, Sir, tie me to the horse.”

“My pleasure, sub.” He wrapped one of the fabric strips around her right ankle, outside her boot. He secured her to one of the hooks.

Without being prompted, she tested the bond.

He’d adjusted the length of the strap so that she’d have a little slack. The bond wasn’t tight enough to cause her a muscle cramp, but she wasn’t going far.

Moving to the other side of the horse, he secured her left ankle. “How are you doing?” he asked when she pulled against the tethers.

“Okay, Sir,” she said.

Her voice shook just a little.

Then she added, “I’m scared. Nervous.”

“You’re allowed to be nervous.” He skimmed his fingers down her tense spine. “Scared, you can leave behind. I won’t do anything to frighten you. Breathe,” he told her. “Concentrate on your breathing. In and out.”

Her first few breaths were shaky; then she seemed to relax into the punishment horse.

“Please, Sir, tie my wrists.”

“You’re being brave.”

“It’s not easy,” she confessed.

He wanted her to enjoy this experience. He’d tied up women and beat them hundreds of times. But since she was so new to this experience, he was determined to ensure the beating would be memorable for Shelby.

He removed his fingers from the small of her back and crouched next to her. Her left cheek rested on the top pad, so she was looking at him.

“Do you want to be blindfolded?”

“Do you want me to be blindfolded, Sir?”

“Correct answer,” he said. In some things, she was a complete innocent. In others, she was delectably experienced. “This time, I’m offering you a choice.”

“I’d like to be able to see, if it’s okay with you, Sir.”

He gently took her right wrist, wrapped it in fabric, and then pulled it back a bit before securing it. The bondage would restrict her forward motion, making it more difficult for her to evade his belt.

He noticed her chest was rising and falling more rapidly than a few seconds before. “Remember to breathe.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Then he took her left wrist and secured it as well.

He stood back to admire her.

She pulled against each restraint, and her eyes widened when she obviously realized how helpless she was.

She truly was lovely in her bondage, with her delectable ass sticking out and emphasized by the chaps. He couldn’t wait to see the tantalizing flesh striped by his belt. “How many strokes do you deserve?”

“Sir?” She squirmed.

“Answer the question, lovely sub.” He fingered her clit, making sure she stayed aroused, despite her fear.

“Uhm... Eight?” Quickly she added, “Sir.”

“Eight it is.” He slid a finger inside her, feeling her vaginal walls tighten.

“Could I have gotten away with six?”

“You’ll never know,” he said. “But if you try too few in the future, I’ll double whatever you suggest.” He found her G-spot.

“Oh! Oh!”

Her response, so honest, so enthusiastic, made his cock harden. She squirmed and moaned. “Do not come,” he told her.

“S...sir?”

“You don’t have permission to come, little sub.”

“But—”

“Do *not* come,” he snapped. He felt her go rigid, saw her hands dig into the side of the horse. She couldn’t be any more responsive, any more perfect. He looked forward to driving her crazy with his hands, his mouth, and his cock. Master David had been an idiot not to tame her, not to give her what she craved.

“Sir, I’m begging.”

Her voice was high-pitched, and her body was shaking. It took all his restraint not to forget he was supposed to be punishing her. Very quietly, he said, “No, Shelby.” Relentlessly he continued the torture, finger-fucking her tight pussy, feeling her getting hotter and hotter.

No matter how hard she was fighting it, he knew she was only moments away from climax.

“Sir! I can’t...”

He abruptly stepped back, removing his hand from her heated cunt.

“Damn it!”

“Another time, you’d be punished for your inappropriate reaction,” he told her. “I expect your gratitude when you’re allowed to orgasm. I expect your patience when you’re not allowed to come.”

“I apologize, Sir.”

“Smart girl.” He placed a palm on her right butt cheek and squeezed firmly, a small, added warning. “You’ll come when I say, Shelby, and only when I say. You’ll come for *my* pleasure. If it pleases me to let you orgasm, I’ll give permission. Otherwise, you’ll deal with it. Am I clear?”

Her whole body shook, but she managed a weak, “Yes.”

“Now, sub,” he said, his hand still on her butt cheek, “beg me to beat you.”

## Chapter Three

Shelby could barely think, let alone speak. Her brain felt scrambled from the sensual onslaught. He'd brought her to the brink of orgasm and denied her any pleasure. She'd been ready to scream when he moved his hand away. This man truly was a master. He knew instinctively how she wanted to be touched. He read her body language perfectly. There would be no hiding from him.

"Beg me," he repeated.

He squeezed her rear tightly. His grip felt like a combination of threat and promise. Her entire body was tingling. She wanted this. She wanted *him*. "Please," she said. "Please beat me with your belt, Sir."

"Eight strokes," he told her.

She curled her right hand into a fist.

The punishment horse supported her torso, and the vinyl beneath her naked body had warmed slightly. Cool air whispered from the overhead vents, but her body still felt overwhelmingly hot.

"We'll start slow by getting blood flow to your ass so you don't bruise."

He rubbed her rear roughly. Despite her efforts to stay still, she moved and squirmed against the horse. Even that small contact made her pussy wet all over again.

"The leather of your chaps will soften the blow from the tip of my belt. You can thank me for that later."

*Later.* The reminder that there was way more than this ahead of them made her tremble.

She watched as he walked to the table to collect his belt. Maybe she should have been blindfolded.

A dozen feelings warred inside her. Pleasure and anticipation combusted and drowned in the face of her fear. He'd given her repeated reassurances. He'd proven his adeptness at reading and responding to her body's cues. And he'd been tolerant of the missteps she'd already made. But she was still apprehensive.

"Count every stroke aloud," he told her. "And thank me for each."

He moved behind her and stood there for several long seconds.

She thought she was ready for the first blow, but nothing could have prepared her for the blazing, searing sensation that bit her tender flesh when the leather cracked simultaneously across both butt cheeks. "Fuck!" she screamed. She gasped and pulled against the restraints.

"This is punishment, Shelby."

*Punishment?* He could bite her. She'd never felt anything like that before. "Bastard!" Anger pushed reason aside. "You said we'd start slow!" She wanted to call him a dozen

more vile names, but she bit her tongue.

“Are you done yet?”

“Fuck,” she said again. “Fuck, fuck, fuck.”

“Would you like to use your safe word?”

As the pain receded, she noticed that her cunt felt damp and her skin felt as if it were hypersensitive. That wasn’t possible.

“Shelby? Do you want to safe word out?”

*Did she?*

“It’s your choice. You’ve only received a single stroke, but if you can’t take it, safe word out.”

He touched her clit and gently rubbed it. Like a naughty girl, she pushed her body back, trying to get him to use a little more pressure.

As she’d known he would, he moved his hand away. She moved her pelvis against the horse, seeking relief that she couldn’t find.

“Safe word out, Shelby, or we start over.”

She gasped. “Start over?”

“I don’t tolerate that type of bad behavior. You’ll take your punishment with grace or not at all. Your choice.”

When she didn’t respond immediately, he laid the belt across her bare back and crouched next to her. His eyes were steely blue. His mouth was set in a grim line. His jaw was tight. And he smelled of masculinity and wind-whipped ocean air.

He unfastened the strap attaching her right wrist to the bench. He rubbed her wrist lightly.

“Wait,” she said.

He met her gaze. She knew she could get lost in the depths of his eyes. Suddenly she didn’t want him to send her away. She wanted to see where this went.

“Make no mistake, Shelby. This is not a game. As far as punishments go, that stroke was pretty tame.”

It hadn’t felt *tame* to her. She gritted her teeth and managed, barely, not to tell him that. The pain had completely vanished, and her entire pussy felt hot. She was needy. Horny. She wanted more, wanted to know how much she could take. “I want to continue. Refasten that bond.” With her cheek on the vinyl padding, she continued to look at him. “Please refasten that tie, Sir.”

“One more outburst like the previous one, Shelby, and your decision will have been made for you.”

“I understand.”

He secured her to the bench again.



“Stick out your ass. Do not grind that hot cunt against the horse without permission.”

She maneuvered her body as best as she could while tied in place.

“Relax into it,” he coached her.

She laughed, and the sound was slightly brittle.

“Fighting it will make the pain worse and lessen your enjoyment. Surrender.”

*As if.*

“Count after each stroke. Dip your ass and get your ass immediately back into position.”

He removed the brown belt from her back. She watched as he doubled it over and secured it in his grip.

Her mouth dried.

He stepped behind her, and she squeezed her eyes shut as she clenched her butt cheeks.

“It’ll hurt more that way,” he cautioned her.

She exhaled and forced herself to relax her buttocks. “I’m ready, Sir.”

She didn’t hear anything.

Instead, she felt the blunt sting of leather against her left ass cheek.

She screamed and dug her fingers into the horse.

She’d been more prepared for this blow, and it didn’t startle her as much as the first had. It still hurt, still burned. In fact it freaking scorched her ass. But she was better able to contain her reaction.

Except for the ragged sound of her breathing, the room was silent. She heard muted noise from outside the door, a muffled yelp, and maybe stilettos against a wood floor.

She suddenly realized he was waiting. “One,” she said. “Thank you.”

Shelby remembered to stick her ass out. Then she forced herself to unclench her muscles so the next hit wouldn’t hurt so bad—at least theoretically.

“Good girl,” he said.

The leather bit into her skin again, on her other butt cheek.

This time, she gasped rather than crying out. “Two. Thank you, Sir.” Her ass well and truly burned. He’d landed a stripe across both cheeks; then he’d landed two more perfectly across the first, one on each side. If the chaps provided any protection from his aggression, you couldn’t prove it by the way her skin felt.

He dug his fingers into her hair and pulled slightly. She wiggled around. The way he was so intimately holding her turned her on.

He stayed there for a few moments, and her pussy became increasingly wet. She had an urge to kiss him, to thank him. She wanted to be in his arms.

He released his grip on her hair.

“Relax,” he told her.

The belt snapped against her rear, catching the outside of her right hip.

“Thank you.” She knew, from her reading, how skilled a disciplinarian he was. His blows were deliberately timed, deliberately placed. There was no rush. He knew what he was doing, and he was delivering the punishment perfectly. She just wished she were able to enjoy it more. “Three.”

By the time he landed the fourth stroke, she had found a rhythm. He’d smack her. She’d respond by clenching, then unclenching her fists, splaying her fingers as she relaxed. Then she’d thank him as she moved back into position.

“Nicely done,” he told her.

He seemed to always give her about thirty seconds to pull herself back together. She liked the pace. Not too fast, but he didn’t keep her waiting so long that nerves had a chance to gather in the pit of her stomach.

She closed her eyes and waited for the fifth.

This time, he allowed a little more time to pass. She wondered if he was looking at her pussy or seeing the red welts across her skin. Either way, the idea oddly excited her.

He landed the fifth harder than the others. She cried out. She clenched her fists several times and dragged in a few ragged breaths. “Five. Thank you.” Because she didn’t want him to start over again, or, worse, send her away, she left out her instinctive *fuck you*.

He skimmed his fingers down her back, and the motion soothed her. He was good; she had to give him that. He pushed her to the edge, and once he had her there, he offered reassurance.

After a few seconds, he left her, and she forced herself to keep her body relaxed.

“This one will be the worst,” he warned her. “But you can take it.”

*Yeah. But with grace?*

He moved off to the side. “Remind me why we’re doing this.”

“Because of my bad manners,” she said.

“No,” he said. “It would have been double if we’d been teaching you manners.”

She ground her back teeth together. Was she really that bad? “Because I hid my ass from you?”

“Scoot back a little more.”

Fear made the sweat on her back turn cold. But his punishments were having their desired effect. She was responding to his commands instantly.

He squatted behind her and spread her ass cheeks.

She felt color spread across her face.

He pressed a finger against that tight whorl. She started to pull away but stopped herself,

even though she did squeeze her eyes tightly shut.

“Beautiful.”

He didn’t try to penetrate her. He just kept his fingertip against the opening.

“You’re being very brave, Shelby.”

She continued to breathe in and out as he’d told her. She focused on nothing else, and she realized it was helping her keep panic at bay.

He moved his finger away, and she sighed in relief.

She heard rather than saw his motion and realized he’d stood.

She only had a few more strokes to go. And now she was torn. She’d never been so exquisitely examined and treated before. She wanted it to end, and she wanted it to never end.

“Take this one for me, Shelby.”

“Yes.”

With one hand on the small of her back, he forced her to stick out her rear even more.

She opened her eyes and saw him standing a little off to one side, rather than directly behind her.

Before her mind could complete the circuit of what he intended to do, he’d raised the belt.

None of the other punishing blows had prepared for the intensity of his sixth stroke. He caught her on the inside of her thigh. It burned in a way that made her howl.

She didn’t breathe; she sucked in air for survival. It took her a few seconds to regain control. “Six,” she managed. She gnawed on her lower lip. Using her manners was all but impossible. Still, she forced out a quiet, “Thank you.”

“You’re lovely, sub.”

His approval was all she needed. She drew strength from his tone. She concentrated on pleasing him. She wriggled around on the horse, taking care not to let her swollen clit rub against the vinyl. Despite the pain, or maybe because of it, she wanted to get off.

She dipped her back and pushed out her hips, presenting her body the way he demanded.

He finished out her punishment quickly, placing the seventh and eighth blows immediately on top of one another without giving her time to catch her breath.

“Seven. Eight!” She shuddered. “Thank you.”

“How close are you to an orgasm?”

She tried to shake her head, but the way she was positioned made it all but impossible. “I’m not thinking about coming,” she said.

He bent behind her and licked her pussy, drawing her tortured clit into his mouth.

She tried to hold on to the horse. "Please? Please, please, please?" She rocked her hips, forgetting everything and reaching for the needed release.

He inserted two fingers into her cunt and slid them back and forth.

"You may come," he told her.

"I..." She was shameless. She all but humped his hand as he licked her, sucked her. Her buttocks burned from her beating. Her entire body felt as if it were on fire. "I'm going to come, Sir!"

He sucked her clit a little harder, then bit gently.

The tiny shock of pain was all it took. She screamed out her orgasm, her body convulsing around his fingers.

She came hard, crying out again as the wave continued.

He released the tiny nib of her clitoris but kept his fingers in place.

"I like the way you climax," he said. "No pretensions, just a hard, fast, honest orgasm."

"Thank you, Sir, for the orgasm."

"I was hoping you'd remember your manners, little one."

She was grateful for the solid support of the horse beneath her.

Shelby wasn't sure how long it took her to recover, and she realized she wanted more, wanted *him*. "I want you inside me, Sir," she said quietly. "Your cock."

"That's my decision."

"Yes, Sir." She was just trying to help it along. Her whole body was aroused, from her spanked ass to her nipples. She just wanted *more*. She arched her back as much as possible given the restraints, in silent invitation.

"You're wanting another beating?"

"If Sir decides it's necessary."

He laughed. "Sometimes I think how innocent you seem. Then you shatter the illusion."

He withdrew his fingers from inside her, and he didn't immediately untie her, so she held out hope that he still intended to take her. Then she heard movement. She strained her head to see what he was doing.

"Clean my fingers," he said, crouching next to her. He held his hand in front of her face.

She sucked his fingers into her mouth and licked her juices from them. The act was unfamiliar and strangely erotic. With the way his jeans strained around his erection, her suckling was working for him too.

He dug his left hand into her hair while she suckled. "You did well," he told her. "Better than I might have hoped. And the way you came, so quickly, like a little pain slut who got off on her punishment. Couldn't have taken you thirty seconds."

She'd admitted to being a bit of a masochist, but the speed at which she orgasmed

surprised even her.

“You’re hot, sub. And I’m looking forward to having you suck other things.”

She was grateful she was unable to answer. Giving oral sex wasn’t her favorite thing. It wasn’t on her “no” list. But it definitely wasn’t on her “let’s do it all the time” list.

He slowly drew away his fingers.

She gave a quick, last suck.

Her stomach clenched as she saw him tug off a battered cowboy boot. It landed on the floor with a solid, satisfying *thunk*. It seemed to take him forever to undress.

He moved so that he was in her view as he opened a condom and placed it on his overwhelmingly big erection.

She had a moment of doubt that she’d be able to accommodate him, but as he fingered her pussy and tweaked her nipples, she forgot how to form rational thought.

He put his hands on her hipbones and held her steady as he entered her. He slowly eased forward until he was all the way in.

She closed her eyes, and she tried to breathe as he moved, but the sensation of being taken by someone so big, so powerful, so masterful overwhelmed her.

He rode her hard, keeping her steady and then placing a hand beneath her so that he could tease her clit.

She moved as much as she could, thrashing against the horse as he penetrated her again and again.

Shelby had never been taken so forcefully before. By giving up some control, she was getting exactly what she’d craved. This man, now.

“Come,” he told her quietly.

His permission was all it took to send her over the edge.

Her body bucked as she rode the orgasm, made more powerful by his masculine thrusts.

She felt him inside her, and her vaginal walls gripped him tight. He went rigid; then his orgasm pulsed deep within her.

The way he held her, filled her, triggered another powerful climax. He dug his fingertips into her hips, and she screamed.

“I see our sub is in good hands.”

Oh God. She recognized Master Xavier’s voice. While Master Trevor had been making her come, Master Xavier had been there watching?

She wanted to wiggle away, to run away, to hide. If it were possible to die from embarrassment, she would. She was tied to a punishment horse, almost naked, her ass sticking in the air, with Master Trevor’s still-throbbing cock deep inside her damp pussy while the two doms carried on a conversation as if it were an everyday occurrence while she was losing her dignity.

She was glad, though, that her head was turned to the side and her hair was spilling across her face so that she couldn't see Master Xavier.

Master Trevor rubbed her right thigh, as if he read her mind.

"I think it's safe to say she survived her punishment," her dom said.

"Destiny asked me to check in. She heard the sub's screams and was concerned."

"Good to know she is keeping her eye on things," Master Trevor said. "But I've never misused a submissive. I don't intend to start now."

She didn't hear any anger or defensiveness in the regulated tones of Master Trevor's voice.

Her respect for him increased. He didn't mind the club's personnel watching or checking up on him. It meant he had nothing to hide.

"Despite her vocal capacity, Shelby doesn't seem to be suffering overly much," Master Xavier observed.

She suddenly wanted the floor to swallow her. If she could have hidden, she would have.

"She is a noisy one, My Liege," Master Trevor agreed.

Was it possible to be more embarrassed? But it seemed she didn't need to be. To the men, the doms, this seemed like a normal conversation.

She kept her mouth shut. Truthfully she wasn't sure she could speak around the knot of humiliation about the way she was behaving.

For once, she was grateful the men were talking about her as if she were not there.

"You may want to use a gag next time, Master Trevor."

She wanted to vanish in a small hole.

"I'll consider it," Master Trevor said.

"You'll have her back in a week?" Master Xavier asked.

"Indeed."

"Feel free to take a gag with you."

She hadn't heard the door open, but she heard it close quietly behind the club's owner.

"You handled that very well," Master Trevor told her. He pulled out of her and disposed of the condom before returning to her. "I'm going to unfasten your restraints, and I want you to move slowly until you're sure your circulation is restored."

He released her right wrist and massaged the area with his hand. His touch was gentle and sweet where earlier he'd been firm. The contrast in his personality intrigued her, and, oddly, made her want to please him.

"Now move your arm," he told her.

She shrugged her right shoulder and slowly let her arm dangle.

Then he unfastened her right ankle. "Again, slow movements. A small stretch," he said.

She did as he said while he moved around to her other side to free her left wrist. He rubbed her skin gently again. Within a minute, she was freed from her bondage. He was a considerate dom. David had never taken this kind of care with her.

"Stay there," he said.

He crossed the room and grabbed a small tube. "Arnica," he said, squirting a dollop onto his hand. He rubbed the salve into the areas where his belt had landed.

His touch, as much as the arnica, soothed her.

"I hope you don't behave too well."

She was pretty sure she wouldn't. For all her protesting, the beating had fulfilled something inside her that had, until now, been unacknowledged.

He wiped his hands, then came over to help her from the horse. He held on to her while she regained her equilibrium.

"You really are lovely, Shelby," he told her, smoothing a palm over her hair.

She was tempted to lean into him, but she reminded herself he was her dom, not her lover.

He moved across to the wall and grabbed her vest. He pocketed her bra, saying, "You won't be needing this."

She put on the vest and bolo. He stood in front of her and tightened the bolo as if it were a choker; then he gave a quick, approving nod.

This experience was totally new. After a scene, she and David went back to being friends. If she'd been dressed in a slutty way, he gave her street clothes, and they went out for a drink or a bite to eat.

Clearly, Master Trevor had no interest in that. She wondered how she'd survive the coming week.

"You have a coat?"

"At the front, yes."

He led the way to the front desk. She wondered how red her exposed rear looked after her beating. She kept her hands at her sides and forced herself to focus on following Master Trevor rather than on her humiliated rear end.

At the front desk, Destiny raised a brow in Master Trevor's direction.

"We'll take Ms. Salazar's coat."

"Number seventy-three," Shelby said.

"If you need anything, call me," Destiny told Shelby.

"She'll be fine," Master Trevor said, intercepting the business card the other woman was

offering.

“Master Trevor!”

“I’ll put it in the pocket of her coat.” His tone changed from friendly to uncompromising. “Kindly fetch it for us.”

Destiny rested her hands on her hips for a few moments.

“Unless you’d like a spanking, Destiny?”

If a woman could flounce, Destiny did. She abruptly turned and gave a scantily clad girl instructions on where to find the garment. Shelby hid her smile.

After Destiny handed over the coat, he turned his back to the woman.

With old-world manners that made Shelby feel cared for, he held the coat.

As she slid into the garment, he said, “Fasten the belt only. Leave the buttons undone.”

She opened her mouth to protest but then shut it again. There was no sense starting an argument she couldn’t win. “Yes, Sir.”

He collected his own coat, a beyond-sexy duster to match his Western outfit. With a cowboy hat, he looked every inch the outlaw.

As promised, he put Destiny’s card in Shelby’s pocket.

*An outlaw who kept his promises.*

He draped an arm around her shoulder and pulled her close. She could get accustomed to being treated with such kindness.

He kept a protective arm around her shoulder as he drew her outside and flagged down a taxi.

He helped her into the taxi, then slid in next to her.

Master Trevor gave the driver an address she didn’t recognize. “What about my things?” she asked.

“You won’t be needing much.”

She started to protest, but he held up a hand.

“I’ll send someone to collect your belongings tomorrow.”

“But—”

“Protest, Shelby, and you’ll sleep on the floor at the end of my bed.”

She snapped her mouth shut, and she was aware of the taxi driver watching them in the rearview mirror. She felt slightly embarrassed, but the fact he was uncompromising with her provided a small amount of comfort. She could rely on him, knew what to expect. And if he said she’d be sleeping on the floor, he damn well meant it.

Choosing intelligence rather than valor, she said, “I understand, Sir.”

“Good girl.” Like he had earlier, he draped an arm around her and drew her a little



closer.

She snuggled against his warmth and strength, suddenly glad she'd capitulated. Being held by him was far more pleasant than being punished.

"How does your ass feel?" he asked against her ear.

*It had felt better before he reminded her of the beating* . She shifted a little. "Sore."

"And your muscles? Cramped at all?"

"A little," she admitted.

He nodded. "You can stretch out in the shower."

Within twenty minutes, they arrived at his Delancey Street loft. The building was historic, imposing, commanding, much like the man himself.

When they arrived at his unit, he keyed them in. The elegance of the place stunned her. She expected something rugged. Instead, he'd surprised her with simple sophistication. He'd chosen leather furniture in clean, classic lines. The loft had distressed wood floors, hammered granite countertops, and soaring arched windows. There was a floating, carved wood staircase leading to the second floor. The beauty of the place felt at odds with the plainspoken, jeans-wearing, Marlboro-type man helping to take off her coat.

He hung up her coat and then said, "Strip."

She blinked at the unexpected demand. "I beg your pardon?"

"Strip," he repeated, shrugging out of his duster. "Or I'll cut your clothes off you."

## Chapter Four

The ground seemed to shift beneath her. Not for the first time, she wondered what the hell she'd gotten herself into. She knew, without doubt, he was serious. He wasn't a part-time, when-it-was-convenient-and-if-she-wanted-it dom. He was a 24-7 dominant who expected the same from the woman he'd won for a week.

"Leave the bolo in place until I get you a collar."

*A collar?* Surely he was joking. Surely. But his gaze betrayed nothing.

Her hands shook as she removed her vest. He held out a hand to accept it from her. He hung it near her coat.

Next she toed off her boots and bent to remove her ankle socks.

He folded his arms over his chest and watched as she unfastened the chaps and shimmied out of the leather. She picked up the chaps, and he hung them alongside her other clothing.

He glanced meaningfully at the floor, and she knelt. She spread her legs as he'd instructed, feeling more exposed at his home than she had at the club. Here it was just the two of them. No one to save her, nowhere to run.

She wasn't sure whether to be terrified or thrilled.

"I promised you a shower," he said. "Unless you need something to eat first?"

"I'm fine." If her stomach weren't in knots, she'd accept the offer if only to stall for time.

"Crawl up the stairs to the master bedroom," he instructed.

Looking up at him, she blinked.

"Do I need to repeat myself?"

"No, Sir." She was more than a little afraid of what the punishment would be if he had to repeat himself. She was learning, quickly, that this man would not compromise. She spent her entire working life negotiating deals and settlements. What she wanted—a bath and the opportunity to relax, alone in a luxurious hotel suite that she'd paid a month's salary for—didn't factor into his plans. It rankled. But in a way, it turned her on.

"Upstairs," he said. "Now."

Hyperaware of her role as a submissive—*his* submissive—she crawled. He followed her up the stairs, and she knew exactly how she looked with her pussy exposed as she moved up each stair.

Then, deciding to be a bit of a tease, she played it up. She swayed her hips exaggeratedly and took her time before crawling to the next stair.

"That'll get you fucked hard, little sub."

She wanted exactly that, she realized. The orgasm at the club was incredible. But she had a craving for *him*. She wanted to be fucked—hard—by him.

“I like how red your ass is,” he said. “You look as if you’ve been punished hard by your dom.”

She had been. She’d taken more punishment than she ever had in her life, and she wore the stripes as if they were a badge of honor.

His master bedroom was spacious, and a king-size bed dominated the space. Other than a couple of small accent tables, the room was empty. Three walls were brick. Each held a large, framed print, all black-and-white. The southeast side of the room was dominated by floor-to-ceiling windows. He took his time closing the blinds, seeming unconcerned that she was kneeling, naked, in the middle of the floor.

He went into the closet, and when he returned, he was naked.

At Dark Haven, she hadn’t really had the opportunity to see him this completely. He was well muscled, not an ounce of fat. And his erection was overwhelming. His cock was thick as well as long. Having him inside her sexually was one thing, but in her mouth...? She prayed he’d honor her “I don’t wanna have to suck all of that” list.

But as he moved toward her, she knew she’d have no choice.

“Sir, I...”

“Sucking my cock is on your ‘no’ list?” He asked the question matter-of-factly, as if her answer didn’t matter.

Truthfully it probably didn’t. He was the Dom; she was the sub. She could do what he wanted or suffer the consequences.

“Not exactly.”

“Then what, exactly?”

“It’s just that you’re just so big,” she blurted. “I mean, I knew, of course, I’ve seen you ...but... I’ll gag.”

He laughed. “You’ll manage.”

He moved in closer and cradled the back of her head with his palm. It took all her resolve to stay put.

“Open your mouth.”

It took her a few moments to obey, but finally, she did.

“Wider.”

“I’m not sure I can open it wide enough.”

“Baby, I’ve heard you scream. You can open it wide enough.”

He brought her head forward, and she leaned in, moving toward the tip of his cock, licking the precum from the slit. She liked the taste. Surprisingly, she didn’t hate this as much as she thought she might.

He closed his eyes, and his hips jerked forward.

Emboldened, she took more of him in her mouth, pressing her tongue against that sensitive spot below his cockhead.

She wrapped a hand around his cock and began to stroke his length. He groaned. She took more of him in her mouth.

Abruptly he released her head. "Glad that's not on your 'no way' list."

She returned to her submission pose and wiped her hand across her mouth. "Uhm... Was I doing something wrong?"

"Good God, no. But I'm holding back. Restraint is good for the soul."

He left her for a minute and returned with papers. "Medical records," he told her.

Slightly surprised that he was so matter-of-fact, she took the paper and looked at it. "I don't have papers," she said. "But my medical report looks the same as yours. I practice safe sex."

He nodded. "Agreed."

He went into the bathroom, and she heard the water running. "Get in here," he called.

Unsure what to do, she opted for crawling.

"Right choice," he told her.

The bathroom was as amazing as the rest of the living space. The huge space was dominated by slate and marble, and a glass sink sat on top of the counter. He'd left her a toothbrush and toothpaste.

The shower was the size of her walk-in closet at home, and the unit had two showerheads. Each was on a slide to adjust the height and had a detachable handheld head as well as independent temperature controls. There was a wooden bench in one corner with an assortment of bottles: shampoo, soap, conditioner.

The tub looked large and inviting; it was big enough to host a small party.

So even though she wasn't in her own luxury hotel room, this wasn't exactly suffering.

He adjusted the shower temperature, then placed two huge, fluffy towels over a heater. *Nope. Definitely not suffering.*

He opened the glass door, entered the shower, and said, "Join me, Shelby?"

He might have phrased the words as a question, but there was no mistaking the uncompromising tone.

She crawled across the room, then stood.

"Leave the bolo tie on the counter. I want you to put it back on as soon as you're dry."

She nodded and followed his instruction.

"You're beautiful," he said as she stepped into the warm water.

She wasn't sure of that. Her hair was long, and on the wild and uncontrollably curly side, especially in humidity.

Her breasts were way too small, and her rear was way too big, or so she'd always thought until he'd been so appreciative of it.

Steam billowed around them and settled on the glass.

He surprised her by taking hold of her and drawing her back against him. She expected he'd want her to face him, but she liked the way he held her. His thick cock pressed against her butt. He dispensed soap from one of the bottles on the bench. He lathered the soap, then fondled her breasts, squeezed her nipples, then trailed lower, down her ribs, across her belly. After rinsing the soap from his skin, he moved his hand between her legs.

She was grateful he kept one arm around her waist to support her weight. With the way he was touching her, making her respond, she lost her ability for rational thought. He moved his fingers deftly, plumping her clit, pinching it, pulling it, teasing it, stroking it. He drove her mad with the touches. He inserted a finger deep inside her already wet cunt. "Sir, I think I'm going to come."

"Not yet."

"But—"

"Shelby!"

She concentrated on her breathing, trying to detach from the maddeningly dangerous thoughts of shattering in his arms. Her breaths turned into gasping pants, but still she fought off the orgasm.

Just when she was sure she couldn't take anymore, he stopped.

It was all she could do not to stomp her foot in frustration. Instead, she said, "Thank you, Sir."

"You really are a fast learner," he said.

He turned her to face him.

She watched as he dispensed a small amount of clear gel across his fingertips.

"I'm going to insert one finger into you anally."

Her mouth dried. "I... Uhm... No. That's on my 'not now not ever' list."

"*Was* on your 'not now not ever' list," he corrected.

"Sir..."

"Trust me, Shelby. You took a beating you thought you couldn't. If someone had told you at the beginning of the day that you'd be my sex slave for a week, you wouldn't have believed them."

"Still don't," she admitted.

"You can do anything for three minutes, can't you?"

“Three minutes?” She looked at his eyes, then again at his hand. And she couldn’t help but notice how big his cock looked. This, whatever it was that was happening between them, made him hard. The knowledge that playing with her turned him on was enough to push her past her comfort zone.

She wanted to please this man.

“Give me three minutes,” he said. “If you’re too uncomfortable, we’ll stop. No safe word for three minutes. I will not hurt you, but I will ask for your cooperation. Don’t hold yourself stiff; don’t fight it, me, or yourself.”

Water drizzled over them, and she slowly nodded.

“After three minutes, I’ll ask you if you want to continue.”

“I won’t.”

He smoothed hair back from her face in a tender, loving way.

“Three minutes,” she said before she drowned in his eyes. “Go.”

He laughed, and the sound did strange things to her insides.

“Turn around. Face the back wall and move in a little closer to it.”

She followed his directions.

“Spread your legs a little farther apart.”

She did.

“More.”

“Your time is ticking,” she said.

“My time starts when I say,” he countered.

“How come you always get to be the boss?” she asked, looking over her shoulder.

“Because that’s the way *I* like it. Face the wall.”

He moved in front of her and knelt.

Whatever she’d expected, it certainly wasn’t that.

He moved her back a little and said, “Good. Now move closer to me. Place your hands on the wall above your head.”

Slowly, hesitantly, she did. The tiles had a bumpy texture, and they weren’t slippery.

He placed one hand on the small of her back, effectively imprisoning her.

She wasn’t sure she could take him eating her cunt again. She was only human.

But that’s exactly what he did.

He swirled his tongue around her clit; then he pressed against it. He fingered her pussy as he sucked, licked, and bit her swollen flesh. He was a master at pleasing her, perfectly reading her responses.

She began to move her hips. He continued the pressure, the pleasure. It was exquisite torture.

He maneuvered so that his thumb was inside her pussy, and he had a finger against her tightest hole.

She froze.

“Three minutes,” he said against her. “Starting now.”

He moved his finger away and went back to playing with her cunt. He got her closer and closer to an orgasm; then he gently feathered a touch across her rear entrance.

She froze, but when he moved away, she relaxed again.

On his knees, he continued his relentless assault. His mouth was everywhere, sucking her labia, her clit. He moved his tongue expertly across her clit, into her pussy. The hand that wasn't holding her prisoner seemed to be everywhere: on her butt cheeks, her stomach, parting her folds.

Her orgasm built again, and he seemed to recognize the signs. He brushed lightly against her anal whorl, then continued on without stopping.

She began to relax.

Her knees sagged under his constant movement.

She braced herself more fully on the shower wall, needing the support.

She was quickly getting lost as he built then backed away from her climax.

Even though they were in the shower, she knew she was sweating. Her calf muscles trembled.

He pressed a finger to her anus again, but instead of pulling away, he held it there. “Master Trevor!”

He removed the hand he'd wrapped around her back, leaving her free to pull away. But she was incapable of it with the way he spread her pussy lips and slid three big fingers inside her.

She rocked and jerked, seeking relief.

She looked down, seeing the top of his head as he skillfully licked her cunt.

He found her G-spot, and she jerked, rising onto her tiptoes and silently inviting him deeper as she reached for her orgasm. “Sir!”

He eased his finger into her ass.

She whimpered as the climax engulfed her.

She'd been helpless to resist, despite the fact he hadn't given permission and it meant she might be punished.

But instead of pulling away from her, he continued. Unbelievably a second orgasm built deep inside.

She was lost in a dozen nerve-tingling sensations. Then her body seemed to freeze momentarily. He thrust fingers in and out of her pussy and her rear. She was no longer saying no; she was enjoying the intensity. Being stretched wide by him was amazing. She'd never felt anything like it. Overcome, she squeezed her eyes shut and thrust her hips, setting the pace that she wanted for him to lick her.

She all but fucked his mouth. He pressed his thumb against her clit, and she screamed out the most powerful orgasm of her life.

She lost her grip on the wall, but he was there to hold her, keep her safe. He supported her, and she placed her hands on top of his head.

In that instant she realized she trusted him, trusted him completely. The scene at Dark Haven would have been impossible with any other dom. Anal penetration would have been impossible without him reading her reactions so completely and accurately.

What the hell was she getting herself into? "Thank you," she said, remembering her manners, barely.

He eased his fingers from inside her body and stood. He cupped her buttocks in his palms, digging his fingers into her flesh and holding her so tight she couldn't squirm away.

"Tell me what you're thanking me for."

He'd gone from gentle but insistent lover to dominant, unrelenting male in less than a handful of seconds.

"For the orgasms."

"And?"

"For your patience as you..."

He waited. The man was overwhelming. Tall. Broad. Dark hair damp from the shower's spray. And his gaze was totally focused on her.

She tried again, knowing he wouldn't be satisfied with anything less than her honesty. "For your patience as you put your finger up my ass."

"Tell me about the experience."

Her entire body was heated, and she wanted to change the conversation. She knew better, though, than to refuse to answer. "It was sexy."

He waited.

She sighed. "It made my orgasm more intense."

"You'll beg me to do it again?"

She lowered her head. Wet hair clung to her face. "Yes."

"I didn't hear you."

She tipped back her head. Did he ever show mercy? This experience with him astounded her. Her whole life, she'd been in control of everything. As far back as elementary school, when there had been trouble on the playground, she'd been the peacekeeper, helping all



sides learn to take turns and share. No matter what anyone wanted, she'd always been in the middle, helping everyone get pieces of what they wanted. Now she was questioning her entire approach. This man, with his arms folded, won't-take-no-or-maybe-for-an-answer stance, had given her experiences she would have never otherwise had. "Yes," she admitted, looking at him, refusing to hide. "Yes, I'll beg you to fuck my ass with your finger, Sir."

He nodded. "Not everything is as terrifying as you've made it in your mind. I only have one more thing for you right now."

*More?* A beating and having a finger up her anus wasn't enough? What else did he want? Her unconditional surrender? And if he demanded it, was she capable of giving it?

"Put your right foot on that bench, sub."

\* \* \*

Slowly she moved into position. Christ, she was wonderful.

Since he generally only played with experienced women, he'd never experienced this type of mutual discovery. Seeing her metamorphosis enchanted him. She'd been terrified, but curious, about his punishment. The expression on her face when she'd asked him to refasten her bonds after she'd overreacted to the first stroke of his belt had undone him. Her face had been flushed, her eyes wide open, her lips slightly parted. Despite her fear, her pussy had been wet. She could have run, but she'd chosen not to.

She'd done everything he asked of her, including sucking his cock. He'd admired the way she fought her embarrassment in the cab, as she'd crawled up the stairs, and now, as he forced her to admit she'd liked his finger up her rear.

He lathered soap and spread it across her pubic area.

"Sir?"

"I'm shaving off your pubic hair." He looked at her. "Any objection?" She would shock them both if she didn't voice at least some concern.

She blinked several times as if trying to decide whether to protest or not.

"Why?"

"Because I want to. Because I don't want you hiding. Because it pleases me."

He saw, rather than heard, her exhalation.

"If you say so, Sir."

She'd done it—shocked them both.

He bent and took up a razor. With a few quick strokes, he shaved off the majority of her hair. Then he more carefully held each labia and drew the razor gently across the tender flesh. "Perfect," he said when he was done.

"I—"

"Thank you, Sir," he coached, interrupting.

"Thank you, Sir, for shaving my pussy."

He couldn't resist. He put down the razor, dug his hands into her long hair, and drew her toward him.

He claimed her mouth in a deep, long, passionate kiss, using his tongue to simulate the way he was going to fuck her.

She responded perfectly, leaning into him. He supported her weight, and he reached around them to turn off each showerhead.

He reluctantly ended the kiss and opened the door to grab a towel. He dried her while she stood there, innocently seductive. His cock throbbed incessantly. Trevor had restrained himself for several hours, keeping his libido in check even though he'd brought her off numerous times. He towel dried her hair, then said, "When I enter the bedroom, I want to find you bent over the bed, your breasts on the mattress, with your hands behind you, holding your ass cheeks apart."

"Yes, Sir."

He used the same towel to dry his body as he watched her put the bolo tie back on and then smooth her hair into some semblance of control. She might as well not bother. He intended to have it a mess in under five minutes.

Without being told, she lowered herself to her hands and knees.

He'd made his point about control, and he was more than willing to let her walk. But damn, she looked so sexy with her hips swaying and a few droplets of water clinging to her naked body that he decided to tell her later she no longer had to crawl unless given specific instruction to do so.

He stroked his cock as he watched her. Then, feeling the telltale tightening of his muscles, he squeezed the base of his penis, hard.

A few moments later, he grabbed a condom from a drawer and went into the bedroom.

She had pulled back the comforter and followed his instructions perfectly.

Her ample rear was displayed beautifully, and she held the buttocks apart as he wanted. The splash of crimson paint on her manicured fingernails was a stunning, stark contrast to her dark skin.

As he looked at her, willingly spread and waiting for him and with the bolo tight around her throat, his cock lengthened again. His body definitely wasn't impressed by his attempts to hold back an orgasm.

He loved the sight of her from the back. He might never take her any other way. Earlier she'd been punished for not showing her ass when he demanded. Since then, he'd had a finger inside her, and now she was holding her buttocks apart for him.

Anxious to claim her as his again, he ripped the wrapper from the condom, then rolled the latex down his length.

He knelt behind her and licked her freshly shaved pussy, making sure she was completely aroused before he penetrated her.

“Oh, Sir!”

“Hang on,” he told her. He inserted a finger inside her tightness and found her wet. “You are a good little sub.”

“I want you, Sir.”

After standing, he guided his cockhead to the entrance of her pussy.

She moved back a little to meet him.

He guided her back where he wanted her, tilting her hips forward as he said, “Keep still, sub.”

“But...”

He sighed. “You’re the sub; I’m the Dom, Shelby. Any questions?”

She looked over her shoulder at him through her veil of damp hair. “Will you fuck me? Please?”

If she had any idea how hard it was for him to keep from taking her and ejaculating in a single stroke... “Keep yourself in position. Ass spread.”

He dug one hand into her hair, holding her imprisoned. He used his other hand to guide his cock to her opening. When he was balls-deep, he reached over to a side table and squirted some lube onto his right index finger. “I’m going to put a finger in your ass while I fuck you.”

“Yes, Sir,” she said.

*Perfect. His.*

He held her hair, rode her hard. He not only inserted two fingers, he kept them there. Then when she accommodated him, he withdrew them and reinserted them in simultaneous rhythm with his cock.

“This is the most intense thing I’ve ever felt. You were right.”

If she remembered those words, she’d get herself out of a lot of trouble in the future.

He removed his hand from her hair so he could tease her clit. The woman was utterly responsive.

“Sir...? May I...?” She gasped.

“You may come, sub.” He wanted her to come before him, and truthfully he didn’t know how much longer he could last with the way her internal muscles milked and squeezed him.

Her climax was powerful, and it dragged a response straight from his balls. He ejaculated deep inside her.

He held her for a couple of minutes, because he wanted to. It was nice having a woman—*her*—here. “You’ll sleep in my bed.”

“Not on the floor?” she teased.

“Watch your step, sub.”

He left her long enough to discard the condom and return with a warm, damp washcloth for her.

“May I borrow a shirt?” she asked while he smoothed the cotton cloth between her legs.

“I’ll keep you warm.”

“I’m allowed no clothes?”

He wadded the washcloth and tossed it back into the bathroom. “I’m the dom,” he said.

“And I’m the sub,” she finished. “And you’ll tell me when I can wear clothes. And that’s just the way it is.”

“You’re wanting a spanking?” He’d be more than happy to accommodate her.

“Just trying to be agreeable, Sir.”

He climbed into bed and pulled her against him. He helped her remove the bolo tie and then tucked the sheets around her shoulders. “Tomorrow, sub, a butt plug. And that’s just the way it is. I know how you want to be agreeable.”

## Chapter Five

The whole being-a-good-sub thing wasn't as easy as it seemed.

As she'd snuggled in his arms beneath a pile of blankets last night, safe, secure, and content, behaving seemed simple. She'd wanted nothing more than to be a pleasing submissive.

She'd woken up alone in the huge bed, determined to be agreeable. She knew she was fortunate he'd let her sleep late instead of dragging her from beneath the covers to make his breakfast.

He'd been more than generous as a lover. His aftercare following the beating had been exquisite. And the beating really hadn't been much, she knew, as far as punishments went. He hadn't left behind a single welt, and her skin wasn't red in the least. She'd checked.

And last night had been amazing. She knew he'd been with experienced submissives and had high demands, but he'd been tolerant of her missteps. The way he'd kissed her had made her legs weak. She'd never been with anyone who affected her as he did.

But she found she was feeling rather disagreeable when she entered the master bathroom to find her bolo tie, alongside a note and a stainless steel butt plug on the countertop next to a bottle of lube.

His instructions were straightforward. Replace the bolo, and make it tight. They'd shop for a collar soon. Then lubricate a finger and insert it in her anus. Slide the finger in and out several times until she was slippery. Finally, lubricate the plug and insert it and join him downstairs.

She'd replaced the tie. That was easy. It was sexy. It reminded her she was his sub for the week.

But the plug... That too was a sign of her submission, but it was far more difficult.

For at least the tenth time, she picked up the plug and turned it around. She had to admit that the offending toy was as big as it could have been, and it was beautiful, at least compared to the plastic ones she'd seen at her favorite adult toy store.

Its base was adorned with dozens of sparkling pink crystals. Since it was made of steel, it weighed a fair amount. There'd be no doubt she would know it was inside her.

"Stalling?" he asked.

She startled, dropping the plug. It clattered against the slate countertop. He was lazing against the doorjamb. She wondered how long he'd been there, watching her.

"I... Uh..." She had no excuse.

"Did you try?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Bend over."

*Crap.* But she knew she wouldn't escape him. More stalling would only make it worse.

She grabbed her ankles.

"Bend your knees a bit for balance," he said as he pushed away from the doorjamb.

She knew this couldn't be good.

He smacked her right butt cheek openhandedly. She gasped and forced herself to remain still. The single spank shouldn't have surprised her. Convention more or less required him to punish her when she misbehaved.

"This plug will be in your ass in less than twenty seconds. Any questions?"

"Who's doing it?"

"I am," he said. "And you'll express your gratitude."

She waited, aware of each of his motions as he lubricated a finger and then the plug. He didn't bother with preliminaries. He just slowly and gently entered her with his finger, taking time to stretch her opening slightly. Then, when she was prepared, he inserted the plug, driving it all the way in with a slight *pop*. He pulled back on it slightly before saying, "Done."

He was right; it had taken less than twenty seconds. And she'd spent more than ten minutes fretting.

He turned her so that she was positioned between two mirrors and could see the sparkle from the plug's jewels.

Even she was surprised by how nice it looked, and how she barely noticed it in her. "Thank you for the butt plug, Sir."

"Not everything has to be a struggle," he told her, not for the first time, as he helped her to stand. He dropped a kiss on her forehead. "Shower and meet me downstairs for breakfast. Skip the clothes. No more crawling unless ordered to, because I fancy watching you move."

She nodded.

She showered and did her best to tame her hair with a brush and the hair dryer she found in a cabinet.

She walked down the staircase, appreciating its carved elegance more now in the daylight than she had last night. The color was a luxurious honey brown, and the way it curled around was beautiful.

He'd closed the blinds that were closest to floor level and left the others open. Rain drizzled against the windowpanes, but heated air spilled from the vents in the loft. He'd been busy. A plate of eggs and bacon sat on the table, and, lucky day, there was also fresh-squeezed orange juice in a glass and a steaming cup of coffee on the table.

But it was her dom who made her heart trip.

He wore tight jeans and a black T-shirt that emphasized his chest and muscular arms. Life could be much worse.

He stood when she neared the table. He waited until she was seated before he took his chair again. She thought she might swoon from his old-world manners.

He was right; her life would be much easier, much more pleasant, if she'd stop fighting him.

"Eat up," he told her. "You'll need the sustenance."

As soon as they'd loaded the plates and cutlery in the dishwasher, he ordered her back to bed. "And crawl," he said. "I want to see that butt bling."

He watched from the bottom of the stairs. "Oh, yeah," he said with a low, appreciative whistle.

For the first time in her life, she wasn't self-conscious. She felt secure and confident in her body. If she were honest, she'd also admit she felt sexy as hell each time that small piece of steel moved inside her.

He followed a few steps behind her.

She knew she could stand when she reached the top of the stairs, but she stayed on all fours. If he wanted to appreciate the plug, she'd oblige him. She continued to crawl into his bedroom.

"Lie down on the bed," he told her. "On your back."

Good thing she hadn't wasted time making it earlier.

"Arms above your head, sub."

She curled her fingers around the headboard and watched as he stripped. His muscles were gorgeous; his arms were ripped, his legs solid and strong.

He momentarily vanished into the closet. When he came back, he was wearing a condom and his left hand was closed in a fist.

"I'll be honest; it was all I could do to make it through breakfast," he told her, kneeling on the mattress. "Having you across from me, naked, sitting on a plug. Count yourself lucky you got to eat."

He leaned over her and alternately sucked on each nipple, drawing them one at a time into his mouth and making them into tight little buds.

He raised up and opened his hand, revealing a pair of vicious-looking nipple clamps attached by a length of metal chain.

She pressed her lips together, determined not to ruin the moment by arguing. Her eyes were wide, though, as she watched him, and her stomach tightened into a furious knot of fear.

"You've admitted to being a bit of a masochist," he said.

She decided silence was the better part of valor.

"I'm starting you with tweezer clamps," he said. "We can adjust the pressure so it's not too tight to begin with. And they won't accidentally come off, which could hurt."

*As if putting them on won't?*

He captured her right breast in his left hand and stroked the pad of his thumb over her nipple again until it peaked. "Keep breathing," he told her.

He placed the clamp then adjusted the tension until she inhaled sharply. He tugged on the metal, ensuring it was in place.

"You survived it."

She nodded.

He repeated the process with her other nipple, securing the clamp firmly on the flesh.

Then he wrapped the chain around a finger and tugged.

She arched and gasped, and her insides moistened.

He trailed a finger between her legs. "Definitely a bit of a masochist," he said.

"If you don't screw me hard, I might die." She spread her legs farther apart, arching her back in silent invitation.

He took her in a single thrust.

She gasped, not just from the size of him, but from the exquisite tightness of the fit caused by the plug and the combined pleasure and pain from the nipple clamps. "Oh my God."

"A little more trust, sub."

He released his grip on the chain and cradled her head in his palms. She forced herself to hold on to the headboard as the weight of his powerful chest crushed her breasts. He drove into her again and again, some strokes long and slow, others short and powerful. The variety of his movements made her thoughts crash into each other. The clamps intensified the pressure of his body on hers, and she writhed beneath him.

Her orgasm overtook her unexpectedly, and she moved her hips quickly, greedily taking her pleasure. Lost in sensation, she came without asking permission.

As soon as her internal world stopped spinning, she realized he was braced on his elbows. His palms were still pressed against her cheeks as he looked down at her. His steel blue eyes were darker than normal, maybe because the sky outside was stormy gray. She licked her lower lip. "I'm sorry, Master Trevor. The plug... The clamps... Your cock... I'm afraid I lost control."

"We'll let that one go," he said.

He feathered hair back from her face and began to move inside her again.

She concentrated on his pleasure, what he wanted. She wrapped her arms around his neck. She moved with him, following his unspoken guidance.

She realized she liked this, having him inside her, the way he filled her, the way he dominated her.

His body forced hers deeper into the mattress, and his orgasm rocked her as much as it



did him.

“Rest,” he told her after removing her clamps. “I’ve got some work to do.”

She didn’t think she was sleepy, but the next thing she knew, an hour had passed. The plug was uncomfortable. And she didn’t want to remove it unless he said it was okay.

She noticed that her suitcase stood in the corner of the room. True to his word, he must have sent someone to fetch it.

She was uncertain what to do. She still wasn’t entirely at ease with her nudity, but having her suitcase there didn’t mean she had permission to get dressed. She was vain enough, though, to give up a month’s salary, for access to her makeup kit.

She brushed her teeth and tried to tame her hair in the bathroom mirror before going in search of Master Trevor.

She found him in his first-floor office, his fingers moving across a keyboard. He had two monitors, and one of them was the size of a small movie theater screen. She recognized a picture of David’s law offices.

She knew a good sub would kneel and patiently wait for her dom’s attention. But curiosity overcame her desire to behave.

Silently she moved into the room.

On the smaller monitor, she saw an e-mail he was composing. To someone inside his company? She shamelessly read as he typed out instructions for the recipient to schedule an appointment with David as soon as possible.

He hit Send, then sat back and folded his hands behind his head. “I know you’re there, sub. And you’d better hope you have a good explanation for your inappropriate behavior.”

Her heart thundered in her ears. She knew what she was supposed to do, but she couldn’t force herself to do it. Instead, she walked across the room and kissed the top of his head. “Thank you, Sir.”

“Why are you not on your knees?”

“Because I wanted to thank you.”

“I would have done this regardless of you,” he said, swiveling in his seat.

Their gazes met. Would he have?

“I still... Thank you.”

“It’s a worthy project. Master David does excellent work.”

“So do you, Sir. That’s why he wanted you. I know he tried to get at least one appointment, maybe more. Apparently you’re a difficult man to reach.”

“We get a lot of requests to help. We select several projects a year. This one just happened to reach the top of the list.”

“You are very generous, Sir.”

“And you’re an ill-mannered sub.”

He said the words without any heat.

Deliriously happy, no matter what his motivation, she grinned, her nerves vanquished by his actions. “Yes, Sir. Apparently I am. Very badly behaved.”

He pushed back his chair and said, “Across my lap to accept your punishment for not getting on your knees instantly and for reading my private e-mail.”

“Happily,” she said. She was grateful he hadn’t asked her to apologize or made her promise not to read his e-mail in the future. The truth was, if the situation repeated itself, she would behave exactly the same way again, shamelessly.

“A little bit of Machiavelli in you?” he asked.

“A whole lot,” she admitted, lowering herself across Master Trevor’s lap. If she hadn’t snooped, she wouldn’t have realized how wonderful he was, and she wouldn’t have realized how much she was falling for him.

\* \* \*

Reckless, annoying sub. He sighed as she wriggled her pert little ass and stuck it high for his punishment.

He flattened one palm on the small of her back to hold her in place, not that he needed to. She’d all but asked for this spanking.

With his open hand, he spanked her hard half a dozen times, torturing each of her buttocks and even landing one on her heated pussy.

Vixen. Her pussy was damp from his hand.

She counted the spansks and thanked him for each. She didn’t fight or squirm—well, just enough to turn him on.

He tugged on the plug. She merely groaned and rubbed her pelvis against his thigh.

His hand was going to wear out before her rear ever did. He’d have to remember to always have a belt or flogger handy.

“Is Sir going to use me now?”

His cock was hard. With the way she was spread across his lap, she knew that. This sub, with her honest reactions, brought him to life emotionally in a way no other woman ever had. “That was punishment, sub, not foreplay.”

Suggestively she ground herself against his jean-clad leg. “Are you certain you don’t want to take advantage of your helpless sub?”

Helpless? Hardly. “Keep it up, Shelby, and you won’t get any more beatings.”

“Now Sir is just being mean.”

He laughed and helped her to her feet. “Get dressed. Skirt, shirt, heels. Nothing else.”

“Sir?” She rubbed her delectably reddened rear.

If he couldn't take her out in the chaps she'd worn to Dark Haven, a skirt with no underwear was a good alternative. She had the most perfect, spankable ass, and he wanted access to it. "Ten minutes," he told her. "We're going to buy you a collar." The bolo had been suitable when there was no other option. But she couldn't shower with it or sleep in it. He wanted the mark of his temporary ownership obvious.

"I was going to ask, Sir, if I could remove the plug?"

He arched a brow. "Because?"

"It's uncomfortable."

"Ah. So your comfort is the most important thing?"

She opened her mouth, then wisely shut it again. "I'll leave it in place, Sir."

"Nine minutes, Shelby."

She hurried up the stairs, and he watched her go. The idea of her being totally aware of that plug, that he'd put it there because he wanted it inside her, turned him on.

He'd been a dom for a lot of years, and he'd issued a number of orders before. But he'd never enjoyed it quite as much as he was with the not-so-submissive Shelby. Watching her responses made his gut tighten. She wanted to please him. She was sexy and sensual and completely unaware of her hold on him.

He heard water running, and he heard the sound of her footsteps. Having her in his home—bad behavior and all—made the place seem less vast. He'd bought this place for its wide-open spaces. He'd remodeled it to suit his tastes, masculine lines and textures, but until now, he hadn't realized he had been missing companionship.

He returned to his computer to respond to a couple of e-mails. A picture of a house he'd remodeled was on the main monitor. He'd rather have a picture of her rear, snuggled by those chaps, for a screen saver. Then again, he'd spend all his time jacking off instead of getting work done.

He was waiting by the door when she came down the stairs eleven minutes later. It would be fun to punish her tardiness later.

But as he took a look at her, he couldn't help his long, slow, appreciative whistle.

She'd followed his directions perfectly. She wore a black skirt, a black button-down shirt, and ridiculously high heels.

He'd bet big money she didn't wear *that* skirt to work. It rose well above the knee. It was decent, but barely.

She moved slowly, in deference, he imagined, to the heels and the plug. She probably didn't realize that her ultrafeminine movements were the stuff of fantasy.

When she reached the bottom of the stairs, she smiled before bowing her head. Then she shocked him by kneeling.

*Christ.* Could she be any more perfect?

“Sir?”

“Speak, sub.” If she had any idea what she was doing to his libido...

“Um...”

“No prevarication,” he snapped. “If you have something to say, say it.”

“I’m...” She hesitated. She stammered, licked her lip. “Horny. Sir. The spanking...”

He struggled to suppress his smile. “And you’d like me to do something about that?”

“I thought about doing it myself, but I figured I’d be punished for that.”

“You’re right.” He crossed over to her and crouched. She looked up momentarily before obviously realizing her faux pas and casting her gaze down at the floor.

He reached beneath her scandalously short skirt and slid his index finger between her legs.

Her pussy was warm and wet.

Her hardened nipples pushed against the silkiness of her blouse. He’d love to see those little brown tips squeezed by clamps.

Earlier he’d wondered if she could be any more perfect. He had his answer. *Yes*. She continued to get more and more perfect.

He moved his finger across her swollen clitoris.

She whimpered and moved against his hand.

He slid a couple of fingers inside her.

“Oh, Sir!”

He smelled her soap and lotion and carnal desire. “You can come, little sub,” he told her as he pressed his thumb against her clit.

She moaned and jerked, her shoulders falling forward. She shuddered as she cried out her climax.

He held her until her breathing returned to normal.

Then he removed his hand and offered her his fingers to clean.

She did, sucking his fingers into her mouth. Lovingly. Thoroughly.

If they didn’t get out of the house soon, he would be buried deep inside her.

“You were right, Sir, about the plug. But this constant horniness...”

“I like you that way.” And he’d keep her satisfied.

She licked her lips. “Thank you.”

“I was hoping you’d forget your manners.”

“So you can punish me?”

“Yeah. So I can punish you.”

She shivered delicately.

“Time for your collar.”

He helped her to stand. If they didn’t get out of her soon, they might never leave at all. He opened the door. “Precede me.”

“Sir?”

“Must I repeat my command?”

She exited the loft and led the way to the elevator.

He held the front door for her. While he generally preferred his subs to follow him respectfully, he liked watching the sway of her hips. Or maybe he maybe he was part masochist and enjoyed torturing himself. Why else would he spank her, bring her off, and keep his raging hard-on confined behind denim?

“We’re only a few blocks from the shop. Will your feet be okay if we walk?”

“As long as we don’t walk too fast.”

“You can set the pace.” The slower the better. “Go down to the corner and turn left.”

She led the way; he followed.

His cock pressed against his jeans. Maybe leaving the house without relieving himself hadn’t been such a good idea.

Five excruciating minutes later, they reached the jewelry store. “We’re here,” he said.

“This place?” she asked.

The discreet storefront gave no idea of the treasures inside. Each piece of jewelry was handcrafted, beautiful, and suitable for couples with unique tastes. The boutique carried everything from nipple and scrotum clamps to clitoral jewels to collars to glass and metal butt plugs.

With his fingers pressed against the small of her back, he guided her toward the collars. “Metal,” he told the woman behind the counter. “Sterling, I think.”

The middle-aged woman unlocked a glass cabinet and pulled out a tray.

“Seriously?” Shelby whispered.

“Seriously?”

“You’re picking out a collar, and she acts like it’s an everyday occurrence?”

“It is.” He picked up one and held it near her. He frowned. “Too thick, I think.”

The woman accepted it back, and he selected another one. It wasn’t as thick, but it was ornate, with an etched design. Maybe too much?

“What do you think?” he asked, looking at the clerk.

Shelby opened her mouth. “I think—”

“Not you,” he said, cutting her off. “I wasn’t talking to you.”

“Still a bit much,” the woman said.

He nodded.

“Why don’t you look at these?” She pulled out another tray, this time from the bottom shelf.

He selected a plain silver choker, slim and delicate. This, he was sure, would lie beautifully against her skin. And remind her who she belonged to for the week.

“Much better,” the other woman said.

“You’ll look lovely in this,” he told Shelby. “And nothing else. Well, maybe those stilettos.”

Shelby turned several shades of pink. *Exquisite.*

“Please wrap it up,” he told the clerk. “I’ll put it on you at home, sub.”

“Certainly, sir.” The clerk didn’t even blink.

“But, Sir,” Shelby said, “it costs more than my car payment!”

“And worth every penny.”

Shelby kept glancing at the floor, as if she wished it would swallow her whole.

The walk back home seemed to take twice as long as the walk to the shop. If they didn’t make it soon, he’d have her against the brick wall of one of San Francisco’s gentrified buildings.

Finally, back inside the loft, he locked the door and said, “Strip.”

“Shoes?”

“Leave them on. Seems I have a thing for stilettos.”

She complied but took her sweet time doing so.

His cock was throbbing by the time she was kneeling naked in his entryway. Having to maintain some sort of decorum with her gnawed at the little patience he had.

He removed the collar from the bag and said, “Lift up your hair.”

She did, giving him access to her neck.

“Since we only have a week together, this isn’t an official collaring. It’s just a reminder that you’ll be the perfect sub while we’re together.”

“Yes, Sir.”

He snapped the collar in place and then slipped a finger beneath it to check the fit. He ratcheted it a notch tighter.

He stepped away, and she allowed her dark hair to fall.

He helped her to stand, then drew her to a mirror. “What do you think?”

“I—”

“Do not be critical of yourself,” he said. “Tell me what you think of the collar.”

In the mirror, their gazes met. Her eyes were wide, unblinking, honest. “It’s sexy.”

“Upstairs,” he said, the word hoarse.

“Yes, Sir.”

She crawled up the stairs, exaggerating her movements.

He grinned.

Taking her was going to be a treat.

“Bend over the bed,” he said, following her into the bedroom. “Spread your butt cheeks. I’m going to take out that plug and then fuck your ass.”

\* \* \*

A dozen different feelings warred inside Shelby: desire, fear, want, embarrassment, need.

She’d been out in public in an indecently short skirt and all but ignored as her dom and a stranger selected a collar that she had no say in.

She was completely aware of its metal presence around her neck. It was tight enough that it didn’t move around, but not tight enough to be uncomfortable. There was no doubt it was there, though. He’d chosen well, even though he didn’t consult her.

Her rear was still a bit warm from the spankings he’d given her in his office. And since there was a small amount of fear bubbling inside, her pussy wasn’t as damp as it had been.

She’d gotten over her distaste of having a plug in her anus, but it wasn’t close to the same thing as having a penis—a damn fucking big penis—up there.

She bent over the bed.

He took hold of her torso and repositioned her slightly. “Breasts right there,” he said, his hand between her shoulder blades so there was no doubt where he wanted her body. “Don’t move.”

“Yes, Sir,” she mumbled into the mattress.

“Arch your back.”

He tapped her lower back.

She arched.

“Now spread your butt cheeks.”

Her whole body trembled, and her hands shook as she reached back.

“Turn your feet a bit inward.”

Fighting her instinct to run away, she followed his direction.

“When you return to Dark Haven, I’ll expect you to behave like this. I want you to show David you’ve learned to behave like a proper sub.”

Before she could respond, he pulled out her butt plug.

Her insides clenched, and she yelped.

“And you’ll stop with your overreactions,” he said sharply. He slapped her right thigh.

She bit her lower lip to keep from screaming again.

“Am I clear?”

A good sub would answer quickly and be genuine in her reactions. She was trying to be a good sub...trying. “Yes, Sir.”

It felt good to be empty, but she knew it wouldn’t last long.

She heard movements, and she figured he was undressing. But, damn him, he forced her to remain in position, her body held wide-open for him.

She heard another sound, like the ripping of the condom package, followed a few seconds later by a liquid sound, perhaps the bottle of lube.

Shelby squeezed her eyes shut, imagining him pumping his thick cock in his hand as he lubricated himself to enter her.

Surprisingly, her pussy was starting to moisten, maybe from the slap, maybe from his commanding tone of voice.

She responded to his torture as if born for it.

She felt his cockhead against the entrance to her rear hole. She tensed. He smacked the outside of her left thigh. She gasped, then managed, “Could we just try it a different way? A different time?”

“Not a negotiation,” he said. “Bear down against my cock.”

“I can’t!”

“My cock is going in your ass,” he said with more patience than she expected. “And it can take a few seconds, or it can take an hour with your bad behavior. Your choice. Submit gracefully, Shelby, or I’ll gag you.”

He smacked the outside of her butt hard. She screamed and wiggled, and he took advantage of her distraction to push in completely.

She ground her body into the mattress, desperate to get away.

“Really, Shelby?” He grabbed her hips and dragged her back into position. “Stay still.”

He slid something beneath her clit, and a robust buzzing electrified her.

She moaned and wriggled. “Sir?”

“It’s a shaped vibrator,” he said.

“It’s...” She could barely think. Fantastic. Intense. Fabulous. Sensation after sensation zinging through her.

Her pelvis moved and jerked.

He began to move in her, thrusting in and out.



Once she stopped struggling and relaxed, an amazing orgasm began to build in her. The vibrator buzzed against her pussy as he filled her ass.

Sensations blazed through her. “Sir!”

“Come,” he ordered.

His word was all it took. She shook and pulsed as the vibrator continued to rocket her clit. She shouted his name and rose up onto her toes. Her legs trembled, and moments later, she felt the undeniable pulse of his cock as he ejaculated.

“Please,” she begged. “Can I move the vibrator?” Her entire body buzzed with small aftershocks.

He reached beneath her as his penis began to go flaccid.

“Mercy?” he asked, his voice tender.

“I can’t take much more,” she admitted. “But I have to say I liked your cock in my rear.”

“Lots more you could like if you’d let yourself go.” He kissed the side of her neck, just above the collar.

At that moment she was completely content.

“I’ll send out for lunch. You’ll need your strength.”

Master Trevor—her dom—withdrew his penis. Her ass throbbed from being stretched and abused, but it wasn’t a bad feeling.

Shoes still on, she crawled up on the mattress. She’d about fallen asleep when he returned with a damp washcloth.

If this was submission, it wasn’t all bad. He cared for her, cleaned her, took off her shoes, and then tucked a sheet around her naked body.

Shelby wasn’t sure how she’d deal with her normal life after this. Regular sex would never again be intense enough, she was certain of it. Maybe she could see him on her irregular trips to San Francisco.

That thought didn’t soothe her; it just made her more frustrated.

## Chapter Six

“More training?” she asked. “Now?”

“More whining?” Trevor countered, folding his arms across his chest.

Even though they were in the kitchen, and she was up to her forearms in soapy water, she pulled her hands out of the water and grabbed a dishtowel. She turned to face him, and she was drying her hands even as she sank to her knees.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “That was unforgivable. I deserve to be spanked.”

“You certainly do deserve to be punished.” He stood there, looking at her.

Over the past days, her movements had become more fluid. Because he’d made her rise and kneel repeatedly several dozen times a day, she’d become proficient.

Now if he could just get rid of her momentary rebellions... He’d intentionally bothered her just then, at the end of the day, when she’d had a long day, after he’d used her hard, her cunt, her ass, and her mouth. She needed to respond perfectly, no matter what kind of stress she was feeling. “We’ve talked about this, Shelby. Being a good sub is about how you behave all the time, not just when it suits you.”

“I beg Sir’s pardon.”

“Back to your dishes,” he told her.

To her credit, she didn’t look up; she didn’t argue. She didn’t try to negotiate with him.

They had little time left together. In their remaining days, he wanted her to learn everything she could, wanted her to experience as much as possible. He wanted to show David what a perfect little sub she was, wanted everyone at Dark Haven to see her progress.

She returned to the dishes, and he leaned against a countertop and watched her. That was no hardship. They’d had a lovely dinner with candlelight and wine. She’d worn a skirt and a blouse with only a couple of buttons fastened.

He told her to strip before performing her chores.

Her butt moved enticingly as she used a cloth to wash the inside of the wine goblets.

“How about watching a movie?” he suggested when she’d finished and rinsed and dried the sink.

“Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir.”

She followed him to the great room. He grabbed the TV remote and then pointed at the floor. “You may kneel during the movie.”

She cast her gaze down and lowered herself to the distressed hardwood floor.

He left her there for almost the entire movie, then said, “Go to bed.”

She said nothing, but he sensed her confusion. He knew she’d rather have a spanking, preferably followed by good, down and dirty sex. But he was willing to bet that ignoring her

would be far more effective for her learning than corporal punishment.

He checked e-mail, looked at a couple of proposals his sales staff had put together, poured himself a shot of whiskey, neat, and sipped it as he looked out into the dark San Francisco night.

He was intentionally killing time, staying away from her.

And it wasn't easy. He heard the soft sounds of her movements upstairs, and he wanted her. He too would prefer to spank her and screw her, exhausting both of them. He liked having her in his bed, squirming across his lap as his hand landed on her soft, spankable rear end. The house, his life, would be empty when she left.

He went upstairs about an hour later. She was freshly showered, completely naked, totally appealing, and wide awake, staring at the ceiling.

He joined her on the bed and drew the covers over both of them before reaching for her and pulling her into his arms, her feminine curves fitting against his hardened body.

As he cradled her, he ran a finger over her sterling silver collar...a mark of his temporary domination.

"Lesson learned, Sir. I'm sorry," she said as she snuggled against him.

He kissed the top of her head and said nothing.

\* \* \*

Last night, Master Trevor had uncovered the most effective form of punishment.

Until now, Shelby hadn't realized how much she hated being ignored. Spankings and intense sex, she enjoyed. But being ignored? She'd do almost anything to avoid that.

Today, so far, he'd interrupted her activities half a dozen times. And she had instantly obeyed him. But he'd barely touched her, and it was their last evening together.

She stood in the shower, the steam billowing around her, thinking how desperate she was for sex or a spanking, anything to feel a connection with him. If she were honest, she was moping.

She'd washed her hair, but she hadn't gotten around to shaving yet when he entered the bathroom and opened the shower door. Her heart momentarily stopped. His brows were drawn together in a frown. It didn't appear he planned to join her. "Sir?"

"You're getting out of the shower," he said, "and showing me how nicely groomed your pubic hair is."

She gulped. Surely he realized she'd only been in the shower a few minutes. But, really, she'd had enough time to take care of essentials, if she hadn't been brooding. She turned off the water and exited the shower. She lowered herself, dripping wet, onto a towel he laid on the floor.

"All fours," he said. "Arch your back, spread your ass cheeks."

She complied, but slowly. This wasn't going to go well for her.

He crouched behind her and used his fingers to feel her labia and her anal area. Droplets of water clung to her skin, and her body was cooling fast. Part of that, she knew, was from the sudden onset of nerves.

He took his time running his fingers back and forth. It took all her self-control to remain still and not move her neglected pussy against his hand.

“You haven’t shaved today.”

“No, Sir.”

“Get back in that shower and finish up. I will find you in the bedroom, on all fours with my belt in your mouth in less than five minutes.”

“Yes, Sir.”

She was grinning, not shaking from nerves, as she got back in the shower. She shaved carefully, glad she would finally be getting her spanking, glad he hadn’t decided to put her on her knees and ignore her for the rest of the evening.

She was aware of every passing moment, and it took her less than five minutes to finish up, dry off, towel her hair and fluff her tresses. She was absolutely determined not to annoy him again.

She heard him on the stairs when she entered the bedroom. She hurried to the closet, snatched up his belt and shoved it into her mouth even as she took the doggie-style position on the floor.

She was breathing hard and already turned on when he entered the room. At the club, she’d fantasized about him and that belt, and he gave her instructions that played to her naughtiest dreams.

“Good girl.”

He walked in front of her and took the belt from her mouth.

“How many?” he asked.

“Eight. Sir.”

“Eight it is.”

Maybe she could have gotten away with suggesting six, but truthfully, she wanted more. And his raised brow, acknowledging her bravery, made her heart beat just a little faster.

He landed the first stripe across both buttocks, and she exhaled deeply. “One. Thank you.” Either he wasn’t wielding the belt with as much intensity as he had previously or her rear was getting calloused, because it didn’t hurt as badly as the first time at Dark Haven.

The second blow fell just below the first.

She exhaled again and said, “Thank you. Two.”

He fell into a rhythm, hardly varying the location or intensity of the belt. She responded perfectly to each, her body rocking forward with each stroke, and rocking back for the next one.

She didn't feel the pain. Instead she surrendered to the sensations.

She wasn't sure what was happening, but by the time he landed the eighth stripe across her buttocks, she was shockingly near orgasm. "Thank you," she whispered. "Eight."

He picked her up and placed her on her back on the bed.

She spread her legs in silent invitation.

Their gazes met. She saw desire and something more, something she didn't dare name, in his eyes.

He sheathed himself in a condom and then took her in a single powerful thrust.

He fucked her hard. Her ass rubbed against the bedspread, and the slight sensation of pain made her squirm.

"Come anytime," he told her.

Then he kissed her, intensely, his tongue taking and probing her. She wrapped her arms around his neck, surrendering, offering more, demanding more.

He gently bit her neck, and she writhed beneath him. Her orgasm claimed her from deep inside, and she climaxed.

He rode her slower, seemingly holding back his own climax.

"I want you to come again," he said.

"What are you, superhuman?"

"Just enjoying you, my sub." He pulled back slightly and said, "Play with your pussy while I fuck you."

She put her hand between them and stroked her clit while he moved inside her.

As he moved faster and faster, a second orgasm built in her. "Sir!"

"Go for it," he told her.

Her vaginal muscles clenched, and her abdomen tightened. She had another shuddering orgasm. She was sweaty, and her heart was racing. She'd never been so satisfied, twice in a row.

He smiled down at her. After she moved her hand, he tucked an arm beneath her neck and cradled her head. He supported most of his weight on one elbow, but he moved so that he could drive even deeper into her pussy. "*Mine.*"

With a guttural moan, he ejaculated.

She lay there, trapped and protected while his breathing returned to normal. If she'd ever been happier, she didn't remember when.

He held her for a long time before moving off her. He climbed from bed, then scooped her up into his arms. She squealed.

"You need another shower," he said.

“So do you.” Then she added a more impish than serious, “Sir.”

“You can wash my back.”

She grinned. “Of course, Sir. Can you wash mine?”

“Insolent wench.”

Surprising her, he shampooed her hair, then lathered and rinsed her body. She relaxed into his tender ministrations. Part of her wished this moment could last forever. “Sir?”

“Questioning your dom?”

“No. No, Sir.”

He wiped droplets of water from her forehead. “I’m doing it because I want to.”

“No further questions,” she said.

“Double insolence?”

He smiled. Her stomach took a dive. She’d do almost anything to have the wattage of his smile directed at her.

He never asked her to wash his back. Instead, he turned off the water and grabbed a towel to dry her while they were still in the shower stall. He grabbed a second one and gently rubbed her hair.

She’d never been cared for like this, and she realized she liked it. Compared to him, all men left her cold.

“Part your legs,” he said, then knelt to pat her tender parts.

That was it. She was done. Toast. In love. Not just a little, but totally, completely, head-over-heels for the first time in her life.

It wasn’t just the sweet ministrations tonight, but the constant attention to her wants and needs. And mostly, it had been the way he’d supported David’s law center. Inside this supersuccessful, dominating man was a gentle soul.

Still, the thought of being in love with anyone, especially him, scared her witless.

She realized it didn’t matter what her feelings were toward him. She and Master Trevor had a finite agreement. Nothing else, nothing more. He would return her to David soon. Shortly after that, she’d be back home in Denver, back in her real, boring, life.

Maybe she could see him from time to time, but that thought didn’t help. Saying good-bye would always hurt.

“Turn around.”

She did, and he rubbed her rear. She winced.

“Does that hurt?”

“Just a little,” she said, determined not to focus on the ridiculousness of being in love with her dom. “That beating was different.”

With his hands on her shoulders, he turned her back to face him. He was devastatingly handsome, with water clinging to his dark hair. His strong jaw was shadowed because it was the end of the day, and that just made him appear somewhat more dangerous. His shoulders were impossibly broad, and his narrow hips and semierect cock made her want him again.

“Different, how?” he asked.

She knew better than to refuse to answer or be embarrassed, even though she wasn’t entirely sure what was different about it. “I was able to let go, if that makes sense. I really enjoyed it. Like the experiences I read about.”

“It was discipline rather than punishment,” he told her. “That’s what I was talking about at Dark Haven. The beating was erotic, designed to turn you on. There wasn’t a lot of variety in terms of intensity or placement of the strokes. That was to allow your subconscious to know what to expect so you were more relaxed.”

His eyes were intense blue, seeming to read her every thought. It was as if he knew things about her that even she didn’t know. “It worked. I feel drugged.”

“That was the sex.”

*All men thought that.* “Uh-huh.” Regardless, she felt somewhat lethargic. Her muscles were relaxed, from the beating, from the shower. “Feel free to do that anytime.”

“Behave yourself, and I will.”

Their gazes met. They both knew this may never happen again.

He grabbed a towel for himself and wrapped it around his waist.

Emboldened by the knowledge they had only hours remaining together, she gave in to the temptation of running her fingers down his chest. She watched his reactions, waiting to see if he’d stop her.

He looked down at her, but he didn’t stop her.

After drawing in a deep breath, she slid her hand lower and took hold of his cock.

He closed his hand around hers, silently showing her the pressure he liked.

She began to masturbate him to a second erection.

“You sure you know what you’re getting yourself into?” he asked.

“I’m a little sore, but not too sore to take you again, Sir.”

“You really are a wanton wench.”

She sank her knees and closed her mouth around him.

“Shelby…”

She glanced up at him. Her pulse was pounding with the feeling of imminent loss, but she was determined to enjoy every moment of being with him rather than worrying about what life would be like after she left. She told herself being in love was supposed to be exhilarating and fun. It wasn’t supposed to cause a feeling of hopelessness.

She sucked him even deeper into her mouth and pressed her tongue against the spot below his cockhead.

He fisted his hands in her hair.

She surrendered to the thrust of his hips and fought her gag reflex. This man, at least temporarily, was her dom, and she wanted to please.

Suddenly his hands were around her upper arms. He pulled her to her feet.

Within moments, he had her against the shower wall, his hand between her legs, making sure she was ready for him. Her eyes widened from shock, from excitement.

“I’m going to take you like the sub you are.”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“I’ll be right back.”

She was impatient for him to return. Naughtily she continued to play with her clit as he sheathed himself in a condom.

“Finally,” she said when he returned.

“Patience is a virtue in a submissive.”

“I’m not virtuous.”

He grinned. “So much the better.”

She was still ready for him. “Now, Sir. Please.” She stood on her tiptoes as he tilted his hips to penetrate her.

As he filled her, she clutched his shoulders for support.

Effortlessly he held her body, supporting her as he filled her again and again. Damn, but she’d miss this—miss him—when she was alone with her trusty vibrator.

He placed a hand beneath her buttocks, tilting her pelvis a bit so that the head of him rubbed against her G-spot. She dug her fingers into his strong shoulders as she rocked her hips and climaxed.

She’d never had sex like this before. And now that she knew what she was missing, she definitely wanted more.

The clenching of her internal muscles evidently spurred his orgasm.

“Now,” she said a few minutes later, “I really am exhausted.” Standing there, pressed up against the wall, on her tiptoes, after an exquisite fucking and beating drained her.

He moved hair back from her face. “Told you it was the sex.”

Back in bed, curled in his arms, she said, “David knows we’re meeting him tomorrow?”

“Master David,” he corrected. “You’ll be showing proper respect when you see him.”

She nodded, chastened.

“He knows we’re meeting him just after lunchtime at Dark Haven. You’ll show him you



can behave, and you'll show Master Xavier that you have had no ill effects from the week. Master David will return you to the airport."

She wished she could be as calm, as matter-of-fact as he seemed to be. Her insides were in knots, and every hour seemed like only minutes.

She woke early the next morning, restless and unable to sleep. Her fidgeting woke Master Trevor.

"I could tie you to the bed."

She hadn't known he was awake. "But I'd like that."

"Yeah. With you, I have to be careful that my punishment is really punishment and doesn't lead to more bad behavior."

"There is that."

"Dress in a skirt, shoes, and shirt that you can travel in," he told her.

Her heart momentarily stopped with the realization that they were so close to the end of their time together.

She packed while he made breakfast, and she joined him for coffee in the sun-drenched breakfast nook. She couldn't eat more than a few bites.

He poured coffee from a carafe into a porcelain mug and added the exact amount of creamer she liked. He'd clearly been paying attention to little details. The way he watched for subtle nuances made him good at what he did, including driving her to orgasm.

"Nervous about seeing Master David?"

"Yes," she lied. Lying, she figured, was better than letting him know she was sad about leaving. Master Trevor hadn't revealed any of his thoughts, and he hadn't hinted that he'd like her to stay, so her feelings were likely one-sided. He was single by choice, she knew. He turned down plenty of opportunities to play with subs. She took a drink of coffee to occupy herself and to disguise the fact her lower lip trembled. While the week had turned her world upside down, to him it had likely been nothing more than a fun diversion.

After breakfast, he took her into his home office to show her the initial designs for David's law offices.

He brought up a slide show on the large monitor.

In the conceptual pictures, the building had a lovely new sign, along with a new door, sturdy but elegant wood.

"Stunning," she said, standing behind him.

He went to the next slide.

"You're adding a few windows."

He zoomed in to show detail.

"Arched windows? I love them. Reminds me of this place."

“We’re not doing much to the existing windows. He’ll still want plenty of privacy. But these fit the building and will add plenty of natural light.”

Which inspired optimism, she supposed.

He moved to pictures of the interior, including a conference room, several offices, a child’s playroom, file room, and a small break room, complete with refrigerator and small stove.

“You’ve thought of everything. The only thing it needs is a place to sleep on those nights when David refuses to go home.”

He skipped ahead and then said, “Right here.”

“Clever.” The room was small and tucked into a corner with no windows.

“A good place for him to spank a naughty sub.” He looked over his shoulder at her.

“You’re always thinking.”

“A place should always have a place to spank a misbehaved woman.”

“Of course.” Too bad she wouldn’t get the chance to be his misbehaved woman. She gave in to her sadness and impulse and kissed the side of his neck. “You’re an amazing man, Master Trevor.”

He turned to her, captured her around the waist, and pulled her onto his lap.

“You’re quite an inspiration, sub.” He kissed her long and slow. He tasted of coffee and sin and the impossible promise of tomorrow. For a moment she fantasized about truly being with him.

But then an alarm rang on his phone. He slowly ended the kiss. But he held on to her for a few seconds before brushing his thumb across her lips. “Behave this afternoon.”

She reluctantly left his lap and gathered their coffee cups for the last time.

While he grabbed her suitcase from upstairs, she rinsed their coffee cups and the coffee carafe, and after confirming that she was ready to go, he called for a cab.

As they got closer to Dark Haven, adrenaline began to build. Seeing David, saying good-bye to Master Trevor, wondering what he had in store for their last event.

She twisted her hands in her lap, and Master Trevor placed a hand over them, stilling her movements.

“I promise it won’t hurt a bit,” he told her with a wolfish grin.

Destiny met them inside the club. She gave Master Trevor a scowl, then looked Shelby over from head to foot.

“I didn’t harm her one little bit,” he promised the woman, holding up his hands.

“So why does she look so unhappy?” Destiny asked, narrowing her eyes.

“Unhappy?” Master Trevor asked, looking at Shelby.

“I’m just nervous,” Shelby said, the lie slipping out as easily as it had at Master Trevor’s

loft.

“I reserved the punishment room and the horse,” he said to Destiny.

She hesitated, and Shelby wondered if Destiny would refuse. When she’d met the other woman on previous visits, she’d been friendly and outgoing. Obviously she was protective of subs, though. Master Xavier had done well hiring her. Nothing got past the woman.

“This way,” Destiny said with a toss of her hair.

“Sir?” Shelby asked.

“Follow me,” he said.

Wanting to behave, wanting him to be happy with her, she trailed him, the requisite three feet behind. The odd thing was, she was happy to do so.

“I’ll send Master Xavier by,” Destiny said.

Shelby wasn’t sure if that was a warning or promise.

“And Master David, when he arrives, if you will.”

She stuck her tongue behind her lip, pushing out her lip piercing.

Shelby liked the woman more and more.

Master Trevor shut the door to the all-too-familiar room.

She recognized the horse, but now it didn’t seem so intimidating. She knew Master Trevor, trusted him. As long as she could control her mind and surrender rather than fight, she’d get through this.

“Seems you have more than one protector,” he told her.

“Or you’re an ogre.”

“Clearly. And there’s a reason you’re standing?” He folded his arms across his chest.

The temperature in the room plummeted. She hadn’t lied to Destiny. She was well and truly nervous now, knowing David and Master Xavier would be joining them. “Shall I undress?”

“Did I order you to strip?”

She gulped and cast her gaze down. “No, Sir.”

“Do what you’re supposed to do, Shelby.”

Quickly she lowered herself to her knees.

He walked over to her and crouched in front of her. With his finger, he lifted her chin. “You’re lovely, sub.”

She blinked. “Sir?”

He moved the pad of his thumb gently down her jawbone.

She could get lost in his eyes. Suddenly she wanted to stay. Unfortunately subs didn’t get to make that decision.

“Thank you for being my sub for the past week. It was a novel experience. I’m glad I got to know you.”

Her heart raced. She didn’t dare hope he’d say more, but desperately she wished he would. “Thank you, Sir.”

Abruptly he changed the subject. “Master David will be here shortly. Master Xavier may or may not pop in.”

She nodded, never wanting him to let her go.

“I will give you a symbolic beating before releasing you back to Master David.”

She stopped breathing.

“I expect you to take it with grace. Make me proud, little sub.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“I’m greedy. I won’t let anyone else touch you while you wear my collar. After that, it’s your choice.”

“Thank you.”

Their gazes were locked. It seemed as if a thousand things remained unspoken.

After several seconds of silence, he said, “I hope that sometime in the future we can—”

The door banged open.

“Good afternoon. Shelby’s actually kneeling? And she stayed there?”

*Crap.*

David’s arrival interrupted Master Trevor’s words...words she hoped she’d hear, promises of the future and, of course, his undying devotion.

If it had been possible to stamp her foot, she would have.

Instead, she stayed exactly where she was with Master Trevor’s hand holding her chin, despite the fact her friend and sometimes-dom was in the room, looking at her, studying her, maybe judging her.

After tenderly stroking her jawbone one last time, he released her and stood to greet Master David.

“I received the preliminary ideas for the law center,” David said. “I’m beyond impressed. Honored. We’ll do a fundraiser right away. Thank you.”

“I would have done it anyway,” Master Trevor said. “But Shelby’s involvement convinced me to do it immediately.”

Her heart pumped faster. Part of it had been about her.

“Stand, sub,” Master Trevor said.

Keeping her gaze on the floor, she rose with more grace than would have been possible a week ago. Practicing hundreds of times a day led to mastery.

She stood there quietly and waited for further instruction. She wanted to please Master Trevor. She knew that by focusing on him—and only him—she would stay grounded.

“I want you naked, and I want Master David to see how well you behave.”

She didn’t respond. She didn’t need to. It was a given that she’d do what he told her.

“Take off your blouse, then remove your skirt. Leave your shoes on,” he said.

He had told her previously that he had a thing for stilettos. She’d remembered and had worn them intentionally.

She took her time unfastening the buttons on her silk shirt. She was aware of Trevor watching appreciatively and David looking at her with an intrigued, raised eyebrow.

Trying not to allow her fingers to shake, she shrugged out of the silk shirt.

“Great tits, Shel,” David said.

*She’d actually dated him?*

Trevor extended his hand, and she draped the material over it.

She slowly unzipped her skirt and then shimmied out of it. The fabric pooled onto the floor. She waited for him to tell her to step out of it before she moved.

David sucked in a breath. “You taught her all this *in a week*?”

“She’s a fast learner,” Master Trevor said.

As she stood there, naked except for shoes and his collar, the men talked about her as if she wasn’t there. She really liked some parts of submission. Other pieces were much more difficult to handle...like them talking about her as if she weren’t there.

She supposed that submission was much like a number of other things. There were trade-offs. Like the fact she hated to exercise but enjoyed the results.

Hoping she was disguising her impatience, trying to be a good sub, she waited for further instruction.

“Climb up on the horse, sub, your ass facing us, just like last time.”

“Yes, Sir,” she said.

He swept the skirt from the floor, then hung it and her shirt on a peg on the wall.

She concentrated on her breathing as she climbed onto the horse.

Master Trevor grabbed restraints from the wall and walked over to her. “You’re doing well,” he said quietly. “I’m proud of you.”

He stroked her spine, and she relaxed. She forgot about everything except pleasing him.

She wriggled until she was as comfortable as possible, and she stuck out her ass in a way she knew he expected.

“Good girl,” he said against her ear as he bent to secure her first wrist in place.

She could do this. She *would* do this.

In only minutes, he had her tied to the horse.

“How many, sub?”

“Ten, Sir.”

Silence seemed to echo before he said, “With what implement?”

“Whatever Master chooses.”

“Jesus,” he muttered.

She grinned into the vinyl. She’d never used that term of respect before, and clearly he knew it. She liked shocking him.

She wondered what David thought of her new behavior. They’d played together for years, but nothing like this. She’d always talked, always told him what to do, always refused to let him tie her down, always made him stop.

“The flogger or my belt?” Master Trevor asked. “Choose.”

“The flogger, Sir.”

A good sub would give the answers he expected, but she wasn’t quite as good as he thought.

He trailed the twelve thick leather tips over her back, across her buttocks, and then allowed them to dance on the skin of her thighs.

Suddenly she wasn’t feeling so brave.

They’d never played with a flogger, and she wasn’t sure what its intensity was like. She closed her eyes, quickly praying she wasn’t in too deep.

He shocked her by reaching between her legs and pressing a finger against her clit. She swallowed a gasp and curved her fingers into the horse.

“You’re wet, sub.”

“Master’s touch does that, Sir.”

He gently pinched her clit. “No orgasming.”

“Sir?”

“Do I need to repeat myself?”

“Sorry, Sir.”

He removed his hand and took away the flogger.

She didn’t even have time to tense her muscles in anticipation before the first dull blow landed. “Thank you, Sir. One.” He hadn’t told her to count or express gratitude, but she supposed that was a given.

The second thuddy stripe landed almost on top of the first. She breathed out and thanked him. “Two.”

By the third, they’d found a rhythm. “Three; thank you, Sir.”

He wielded the whip like a master. The differences between this kind of beating and punishment were vast. This was scripted for her enjoyment.

The fourth landed, and she moved with it, then brought her body back into position for the fifth.

Despite his warning, deep inside, an orgasm built. Her pussy was damp. “Four. Thank you, Sir.”

Now she had something else to worry about. If she orgasmed and others were in the room, he’d have no option but to turn this into a punishment.

He landed another stripe, this one blazingly hard. Most of the throngs curled around her thighs instead of her ass and bit into her skin. But one tip landed viciously between her legs and caught the tender flesh of her pussy. She screamed.

Damn it! The single throng seared.

She yanked against her restraints, desperate to get away.

“Shelby?”

Panting, blinking back the sting of tears, she forced herself to say, “Five. Thank you, Sir.”

She expected the next stripe to come immediately, but it didn’t. Obviously he was giving her time to compose herself.

She exhaled shakily.

Shelby had dug her fingers into the horse’s vinyl padding, and as she managed to breathe again, she realized the pain had obliterated her need to come.

Her dom had been watching her carefully, reading her. Over the past week, he’d taken the time to learn about her and her responses. He knew her intimately and had apparently recognized that the rhythm of the beating was bringing her to orgasm.

There was huge emotional comfort in the fact that he was completely in tune with her.

Now that her physical responses were once again under control, she forced her rear out again and waited for him. She might not know what to expect, but she knew, totally, that she could trust him.

As if the sound were from somewhere far away, she heard the slight groan of the door opening.

“Good afternoon, Master Trevor. Master David.”

She recognized the sound of Master Xavier’s voice.

Shelby’s body went rigid.

Having David there watching her beating was bad enough, but having Master Xavier in attendance made it more intense.

“Destiny wanted me to check in,” Master Xavier said.

Shelby heard sounds, as if the men were shaking hands...shaking hands while she lay strapped to the horse, her ass sticking in the air, her pussy exposed.

"We're halfway through the sub's beating," Master Trevor said.

"Please continue."

She'd never get accustomed to being spoken about as if she weren't there.

She uncurled her fingers, knowing the strokes wouldn't feel as intense if her muscles were more relaxed.

He caught her upper thighs, in that tender spot just below her buttocks.

She gasped. She thought she'd been ready, but it seemed she was never completely ready for the first blow. As she wriggled back into the obscene position of exposing her female parts, she said, "Six, Sir. Thank you."

"Good," Master Xavier remarked. "Quite a change from last week. Turns out you don't need a gag after all."

She felt a flush of joy, not only for herself but for Master Trevor. His reputation, even with Destiny, had to go up a notch because of her behavior.

"I'd gag her just because I'd like the sight of a ball in her mouth," David said.

As if he'd ever get that chance.

She liked playing with Master Trevor. In the future, she doubted she would want to play with anyone other than him.

The men were silent while he delivered the next few stripes. She concentrated on the rhythm, on her breathing, of the forward then backward sway of her hips as the flogger rose and fell against her skin.

The tenth and final stroke hit her like magic, a caress, a promise that would remain unfulfilled.

Tears stung her eyes, but it had nothing to do with pain. "Ten. Thank you, Sir."

"Wow," David said. "Impressive. And if she had a gag in her mouth, she wouldn't be able to say thank you. Good choice on leaving her mouth available."

She wasn't sure what Master Trevor had almost said earlier, despite what she wanted to hear. Even if he did want to have a scene later, she wasn't sure she could handle it emotionally. She was in love with the man. Since she was so emotionally invested, she couldn't have a casual hookup on the rare occasions she was in San Francisco.

Even though she was desperate to see him again, it was probably better for her if she never did.

"Maybe I'll send in Destiny to receive a beating," Master Xavier said. "Well done, both of you."

From her peripheral vision, she saw Master Trevor hang the flogger on the wall.

"I agree," David said. "Well done, Master Trevor."



Master Trevor returned to her. Gently he lifted her hair and unfastened the collar.

She was no longer aware of her physical exposure. Compared to her emotional fragility, being tied naked to a punishment horse seemed trivial. Bravely she tried to swallow the sudden knot in her throat.

He held the collar in his left hand and smoothed back her bangs with his right hand.

“Buy you a drink?” Master Xavier asked, the question obviously directed toward Master Trevor.

“Thanks,” Master Trevor said, moving away from her without a backward glance.

Then, suddenly, the room was silent.

Just like that, it was over with Master Trevor.

“Damn. You took that well, Shel. I’m impressed. Never knew you had it in you,” David said, crouching next to her to release her restraints. “I guess I wasn’t the right dom for you.”

She barely heard him, and she wasn’t capable of responding. She wanted to be back home, where she could be alone with her fragile emotions.

Like a good friend, David helped her from the horse and into her coat once she’d managed to dress.

Thankfully he had no need to run his mouth.

He draped an arm around her shoulder as he walked her to the club’s exit door.

She kept her gaze down, not because it was the respectful thing to do but because she wasn’t sure she could keep it together if she saw Master Trevor on her way out.

## Chapter Seven

“Jesus.”

Trevor looked up from the papers he'd been staring at. He'd vaguely been aware of the overhead bell jangling as the front door had opened. But it hadn't been enough to galvanize him into action.

He'd arrived at David's law offices long before dawn, telling himself he wanted to get a jump on the day. But the truth was that seeing his company's progress, studying the checklists, verifying things were on track gave him something to do and got him out of his godforsakenly lonely home.

David stood in front of him, holding a cup of to-go coffee from the local place down the street.

“How long have you been here? It's not even six yet.”

“Just got here. Maybe ten minutes?” Probably more like an hour, but he'd sound pathetic if he admitted that.

“Are you sleeping at all?” David asked.

“If that's your way of saying I look like shit, it wasn't very subtle.”

“I save subtle for court,” he said. “You haven't shaved, maybe in a week. So, yeah,” he said easily, “you look like shit.” He offered the cup to Trevor. “You need this more than I do.”

As a testament to how tired he really was, Trevor accepted the offering without even asking what the beverage was.

He took a sip and gagged. “Christ! What the hell is this? Caramel something-or-other?” Figures the man would order a froufrou drink. “What the fuck happened to real men drinking real coffee?”

“I just gave you a five dollar latte. *My* five dollar latte. With whipped cream. Show a little gratitude.”

“Gratitude for something that tastes like dessert at six o'clock in the morning?”

“It's Shelby's favorite.”

*Fuck.*

Just what he needed, a reminder of the woman he'd let walk out of Dark Haven and California. But what real choice did he have? She had a life and successful career in Denver. He loved San Francisco with its moody weather and sometimes-nasty ocean. He couldn't imagine living anywhere else.

He'd enjoyed his week with her, but it had been little more than a diversion for either of them, albeit a diversion that still knocked him around emotionally.

He'd been to Dark Haven once in the month since she left. There had been a few subs at

the club who were curious and indicated they were available for him. Since they didn't have the protection of a dom, he could have played with any of them. But it turned out he hadn't wanted to. He only wanted a particular olive-skinned, dark-haired, green-eyed beauty with a very round, sexy little butt.

He'd had a drink with Master Xavier, exchanged glares with Destiny—one day he really was going to have to beat her—and then returned home. He'd showered and masturbated to memories of Shelby.

He'd learned, in the week they'd shared, that he no longer wanted a meaningless relationship, no quick fucks.

He wanted someone like Shelby, in his bed, in his collar, twenty-four hours a day. She was more of an I'll-be-a-sub-when-it's-convenient-for-me type of woman. Playing in the scene on weekend visits to Dark Haven wasn't going to work for him.

"She's as miserable as you are," David said casually as he moved toward the office coffeemaker. He measured grounds into the basket, then turned on the tap and filled the carafe.

"Excuse me?" Trevor asked.

"She says she won't play with me ever again. Seems she only wants to play with one dom, and I'm not him."

David's statement shouldn't have mattered. There were numerous reasons a relationship between him and Shelby wouldn't work.

"I tried to call her last week to check up on her. I couldn't reach her by cell phone."

Trevor told himself he wasn't interested in how many times David called her or talked to her. He liked the man, but the sudden feeling of jealousy made him want to catch the other man with an uppercut to the jaw. Nothing serious. But laying him out for several minutes would feel good.

David poured the water into the coffeemaker. "The secretary told me Shelby took a few days off work last week. I guess she went backwoods camping. Said she needed to get away."

"Alone?"

"In the Rocky Mountains, yes. It was evidently just her, a backpack, some food and water, and a tent. I think she had a flashlight."

Trevor's jaw tightened. The woman needed a keeper. Hell, she needed more than a keeper. She needed a Master.

"She'd told me she was thinking of going away. I asked her not to go, especially not alone," David said. "But she wouldn't listen to me. She never listens to me about anything. I kept trying to call, but she either had her phone off or it wasn't getting reception. Are there grizzlies in the Rockies? I forget."

*Grizzlies?*

With that kind of disregard, she'd be better off taking her chances with a grizzly than with him.

David turned on the coffeemaker. "No hard feelings that my women would rather be with you." He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a business card. David studied it for a moment. "I wrote Shelby's home address on the back," he said. "Travel safe."

\* \* \*

A vibrator made a lousy companion. But it was better than nothing, at least most of the time.

With a sigh, Shelby dug through the junk drawer in her kitchen, searching for a fresh battery. This trusty bullet had been more than powerful enough to get her off until she'd met Master Trevor. Now that she'd experienced real sexual satiation, the bullet just didn't provide the kick to get her over the edge.

But since she had no interest in anyone but him tying her up and beating her, she was stuck with toys and batteries.

The weekend loomed. It was only six o'clock on Friday. Who knew two days could feel like eternity?

She'd been back in Denver for a month, but she hadn't settled back into her life. She enjoyed her job, but she hated the rest of her life. She was bored, restless, and lonely.

The few days she'd spent at a remote cabin had dragged. She'd gone up there hoping to find peace, maybe a few answers. She'd gotten little out of the trip except frozen toes from dipping them in an alpine lake.

Half a dozen times, she'd picked up the phone to call Master Trevor. The last time she'd spoken with David, he'd given her Trevor's phone number and said that Trevor wasn't seeing anyone else. He'd evidently visited Dark Haven, but he hadn't played with anyone while he was there.

Part of her was desperate enough to fly to San Francisco to enjoy a scene with him, if he were willing.

She always pushed the End button before the call completed the circuit.

Being with him, playing with him, would be fantastic. But then she'd have to say good-bye all over again. The feelings she had for him right now would only intensify.

No, for better or worse, she was better off trying to get on with her life, as impossible as that seemed.

She inserted the new battery into the bullet and twisted it to the On position.

The intensity seemed better than before, but still, it probably wasn't enough.

She went into her bedroom and stripped, then lay on the bed and parted her thighs. She closed her eyes and remembered that final time in the club with Master Trevor.

She recalled him tying her to the horse and stroking her pussy while she was helpless. David had been there, watching, but she'd been unaware of anything but Master Trevor's

touch. He'd made her wet, and he'd pinched her clit.

With her left hand, she spread her labia. Just as he had, she pinched her clit, making it big and swollen.

She was back at Dark Haven, her ass sticking out as she waited for him to strike her with the flogger.

Finally, aroused, she turned on the vibrator and placed it on her clit.

She began to gyrate as the pulsing sensations went through her.

She wanted his hand, wanted a spanking.

She wanted *him*.

The climax was close, but no matter how sharp and focused her thoughts were, the orgasm loomed just out of reach.

She dug her heels into the mattress, seeking that relief.

A pounding on the door interrupted her.

*"Damn it."* So close.

For a moment, she ignored the pounding and continued pressing the wiggling, pulsing little bullet against her clit. No one she knew would drop by without calling first. Her house was on a quiet semirural street. She had few neighbors, and those she did have mostly kept to themselves.

"Goddamn it, Shelby, open this door!"

She dropped the vibrator. Master Trevor? No. It wasn't possible. What would he be doing here?

"Open it, *now!*"

There was no mistaking that voice or that no-nonsense tone. Master Trevor was here, and he sounded determined.

Shaking from nerves, from excitement, she snatched up the vibrator and turned it off before dropping it back on the bed.

Her whole body suddenly felt alive.

She grabbed a short robe and pulled it on as she headed to the door.

"Three spankings for every second you make me wait."

"Coming, Sir!" She finally managed to tie the knot of the satiny robe less than a second before she turned the dead bolt.

She opened the door. For a moment she forgot how to breathe.

She'd forgotten how devastatingly handsome he was.

Dark hair, steely blue eyes, firm set to his jaw.

He wore a black T-shirt and black jeans, along with black boots. He smelled of man, of a

cool outdoor evening, of determination. She could drink him in. She had no idea why he was here, and it didn't matter. If he wanted to screw her and leave, right now, she'd allow it. She was suddenly shameless.

"Master David gave me your address. Invite me in."

It was more a demand than a request, and they both knew it.

"Yes, Sir." She stepped back, and he entered.

His presence overwhelmed her small home. Hell, he overwhelmed *her*.

Her pulse raced. Without thinking, she threw herself at him.

He grabbed her, dragging her onto her toes and imprisoning her shoulders. "Open your mouth, little sub."

A good sub would, and for once, being a good sub was easy. "Please, Sir. Kiss me." She opened her mouth.

He claimed her with passion and dominance, taking her mouth with his tongue the way he took her pussy with his cock.

This felt right and natural, the way it should be.

Finally he set her on her feet and released her shoulders. "On your knees, sub."

It was an order, but this time, she heard the request in his words. He was offering her a choice. She wasn't sure what the choice really was, but he'd made the trip from California to Colorado. That meant *something*.

"I don't know how things will work out," he said. His voice was raw, coarse, scratchy, in a way she'd never heard before. "But I know I want you."

She inhaled deeply. "I want that too."

"Then take off your robe and get on your knees."

Her fingers trembled, and she fumbled with the knot.

He curled a hand over hers, stilling her motions. "Drop your hands to your side."

She did, and he skillfully loosened the belt. He pushed the satin fabric back, off her shoulders.

"Your pussy is still shaved the way *I* like it."

"Yes, Sir."

Shocking her, he placed his hand between her legs. "Your pussy is wet, little sub. What were you doing before I got here?"

She moistened her suddenly dry lips. "Um..." She glanced at his hand. She could say she'd only gotten damp since he arrived. But if they went into her bedroom, which she was willing to bet they would do, he'd see her vibrator on the mattress. And then she'd be in trouble for lying.

"Sub?"

“I was masturbating when you got here.”

“Ah. Don’t let me interrupt.”

A hot blush rushed up her neck to settle on her face. She noticed that his cock had swelled against his jeans. He was turned on.

“Where were you masturbating?”

“The bedroom. Sir.”

“Show me the way.”

Nervous, excited, her pussy getting wetter and wetter, she lowered herself to her knees and began to crawl to the bedroom.

He followed.

Having him here felt right and natural. Like him, she had no idea where this could go, but she wanted to find out.

She was aware of the loudness of his boots against the hardwood floors. He sounded commanding, in charge. She felt feminine and helpless as she crawled down the hallway, her hips gently rocking from side to side with each movement.

Once she was inside the bedroom door, she hesitated.

“Do what you were doing before I got here.”

She crawled up onto the bed and lay on her back.

He moved to the foot of the bed and looked at her. After being tied with her legs apart at the club, this shouldn’t bother her, but here, somehow, it did.

He hooked his thumbs in his belt loops.

She picked up the vibrator and turned it on before shutting her eyes.

Conscious of him watching her, she parted her thighs; then she spread her labia to reveal her clit.

She pressed the nubby tip of the bullet against her clit. Her hips jerked in response. Her earlier response hadn’t been this intense. Earlier, her dom hadn’t been here, watching.

She felt the beginning tendrils of an orgasm. A climax had hidden, out of reach, for the month they’d been apart, and now she was only moments away from coming.

“This is hotter than hell,” he said. “I’ll have you masturbate more often.”

The promise of a future made her heart do a somersault. She hadn’t thought she was strong enough to have occasional hookups with this man, but now she knew the truth. It was better than nothing.

“Pull back the hood of your clit,” he said.

She did.

“Press that vibrator against it, harder, but don’t come.”

She was going out-of-her-mind mad.

“Your nipples are hard, as well,” he said.

She heard him move, then felt the mattress sink down. She opened her eyes to see him kneeling on the side of the bed.

“Keep masturbating.”

He took both of her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers and squeezed tightly.

Who knew she liked that much pain?

She screamed, arching her back, coming without permission. He’d given her no choice. That exquisite torment had pushed her over the edge as he’d clearly known it would.

He’d wanted her to come, probably so he could punish her.

She dragged in several rapid breaths.

“Stay where you are,” he said.

As if she could move.

He left the bedroom, and when he returned, he was naked. She blinked. What a delicious-looking man.

His cock jutted out demandingly. He had already sheathed himself in a condom. Even though she’d just come, she was wet and ready again.

But when he held out his hand, her body froze.

He held her collar. “Maybe you could move to San Francisco,” he said. “But if you’re unwilling to do that, we’ll work something out. I’ll spend time here; you can spend time there. But I know one thing, woman, I want you in my bed, my life, my collar.”

This was all she’d hoped for, more than she dared to dream. She wasn’t sure how they’d work it out, but she knew she was committed to try. “Yes, Sir.”

“We’ll do a formal ceremony later. I want others to see you in perfect submission.”

She nodded.

“For now, lift your hair.”

She did.

Their gazes locked as he knelt over her and fastened the choker in place. The metal momentarily felt cool against her skin, but it warmed quickly.

“I love you, little sub.”

“I’ve been in love with you since you first spanked me, Sir.”

His eyes blazed, the steel becoming molten. “I’m taking you missionary style, pinning you down, making you submit.”

“That’s what I want.”

“Guide my cock inside you.”



A good sub would do exactly that. This time, at least, she was happy to be a good sub.

He moved over her. She curled her hand around his significant girth and stroked his length several times. His penis became even more engorged. She wanted him inside her.

After moving her hand, she arched her back toward him, welcoming his possession. “Please fuck me forever, Master.”

He supported his weight with one arm. He feathered back her bangs with the other. “I thought you’d never ask.”

~ \* ~

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\* \* \*

*Hunting Holly*

*Belinda McBride*

## Chapter One

“Hey guys, hold up a minute!”

Daniel “Tex” Texiera hobbled along the grubby sidewalk, stomping his foot into the snug-fitting cowboy boot on his left foot. Damn wolves were always so impatient! He yanked his jeans down over the top of his fancy snakeskin boot, settled his Stetson onto his head, and scooped up his leather bag. He trotted down the street, catching up in just moments. He moved up next to Hunter and grinned as the other man veered away.

“We could probably have parked closer.”

“And you could have stayed in the shoes you were wearing when we came down.”

Ethan looked back at him, a grin warming his friendly face. He and Kurt exchanged glances and swerved together, their hands brushing.

“Look, you said it was a theme night. Don’t know how you expect to get in when you’re dressed like that.” Ethan wore a dark green T-shirt and black jeans. His green, catlike eyes glowed against the dark skin of his face. Kurt wore a black silk shirt and black trousers. His pale blond hair looked almost silver against the unrelieved darkness of his clothing.

Tex shook his head in mock disgust. “At least Hunter made an effort.”

The man next to him wore black jeans and cowboy boots, with a leather vest over his black shirt. Hunter always wore black. Tex wondered if it was a reflection of his mood or simply a lack of imagination. But then, black looked good on him.

“We aren’t going to Dark Haven to play, Tex. Xavier called Chase and said there’s someone of interest at the club.”

“Holly?” His heart jumped, but then he stifled the surge of excitement and firmly put it down. Dark Haven wasn’t the sort of place they’d find Holly in. Not with her history. They’d simply told him to get ready for a visit to Dark Haven. Now he felt a bit silly carrying his toy kit with him, but at least he’d blend in.

“He didn’t say.” Ethan shrugged one shoulder and kept walking.

Tex caught the scent of anxiety drifting from Hunter. The man had taken it hard when Holly had vanished. Funny thing was, Tex didn’t remember Hunter ever so much as exchanging a word with the girl, even though they’d grown up together. Of course, speaking with Holly was a one-sided proposition at best.

She’d been Tex’s favorite, though he’d never seen what she looked like as a human. He knew Holly as the leggy black she-wolf with soulful blue eyes. Their conversations had been one-sided, but Tex had always felt that she understood him. In a way, he’d felt like he understood her as well. She’d watch the pack members move through their days from the shelter of the porch. She’d watched Hunter in particular, her thoughts a complete and total mystery.

Inwardly Tex sighed. So they were here on business. But still, it was a diversion, and

Lord only knew he needed one. He was reaching the point where worry shifted to despair as far as Holly was concerned. She was most likely not coming back, and it was time to accept that. A play night at Dark Haven would be a step in the right direction.

They walked on in silence. Early evening had settled over San Francisco, and he scented a vampire on the misty air. Technically the city was part of Harte and Eva's Napa pack, but slowly they'd been blending their territory with Chase Montenegro's lands, and their people had started to overlap as well. The vampires were tolerated as long as they behaved.

"I smell vamp." Hunter's voice was low. He always sounded a bit hoarse, as if he rarely used his voice. "More than one. Most likely a mile or so from here."

The group slowed and then stopped. Kurt gazed around, looking into the faces of other pedestrians. His fair skin looked unusually pale. Ethan reached out and touched his hand reassuringly.

"You don't have to go inside."

Kurt was an empath, and the heightened emotions in the club would be painful for him to bear.

Tex shivered. He looked over at Hunter; the quiet wolf faced north, a look of intense concentration on his face. He wasn't as tall as the other shifters, and his face bore the mark of many ethnicities. His dark eyes were upswept and almond shaped, but his smooth skin was brown. Blue-black hair waved back from his handsome face. His lips were full and sensual; high cheekbones gave him an aloof expression. He looked heartless, but Tex knew otherwise. A man didn't kick and punch holes in walls if he had no heart or emotion.

At least he patched them up himself once Tex showed him how to use plaster and drywall. They were gonna have to talk about other means of self-expression soon.

"They're moving away."

Kurt nodded and led them forward. Within minutes they arrived at a simple door in a stark building. The sign over the door read DARK HAVEN.

A pair of young women entered the building; both were dressed as saloon girls. Tex held the door for them, winking at their speculative smiles. He glanced back at his small group. Kurt was breathing deeply, preparing himself. He paused and then nodded, following Ethan through the door. Hunter said nothing as he passed Tex, but the unmistakable scent of heightened arousal wafted to Tex's nostrils.

It was tough not to get excited in a place like this. As they walked into the tiny foyer, the smell of sex, pain, and fear rolled over Tex's senses. He took a moment to let it process and then stepped up to the desk. Ethan and Kurt were the de facto leaders of this evening's business, but Kurt was focused on defending himself against the multilevel barrage of sensation. As always, Ethan was focused on his partner. They were each other's strength as well as weakness.

"Hi, I'm Destiny. Do you have a membership?" The receptionist was cute, perky, and stark naked. Well...except for the boots and cowboy hat. And the toy badges that served as nipple shields. When he saw the plastic six-shooters strapped to her curvy hips, Tex grinned.

She grinned back.

“We’re here to meet Xavier. He’s expecting us.” Ethan’s voice was low and smooth, and to Tex’s amusement, he was having a hard time not staring at those little badges.

She glanced around the desk and apparently located a note confirming his story, because she immediately picked up a phone and placed a call.

“My Liege. The guests you expected are here.” She listened for a moment and then hung up the receiver.

“My Liege?” Hunter muttered sarcastically.

The faint, nearly inaudible growl that reverberated through the air had a feline edge.

“You *will* show respect to your host.”

Hunter bowed his head submissively and nodded at Ethan. The receptionist looked from one man to the other, her eyes wide in surprise. When Ethan’s cat came to the fore, it packed a punch. But then, as the lone feline in a pack of wolves, Ethan had to be tougher than most.

The girl cleared her throat. “You guys can just step inside. Master Xavier will send someone for you in a few minutes.” Rather than looking frightened, the girl looked intrigued. Not good. They really couldn’t afford to blow their cover. Ethan must have been on edge.

Tex gave her a friendly smile and pushed past the curtain, then ushered the other men through. He stood, braced himself, and then grinned in delight. He’d been to Dark Haven before but had never seen it look as it did tonight. Cowboys and gamblers rubbed shoulders with saloon girls and schoolmarms. This being San Francisco, there were a few Chinese beauties in nineteenth-century dress as well.

Country music filled the air, and a mechanical bull was in motion. Over the blare of country music, cheers and laughter rose as the bull started its slow gyrations. As he watched, a seminaked woman slipped from the back of the bull and landed in a spill of white petticoats. As the small crowd cheered, she whooped, slipped out of her lace-up bodice, and gamely climbed back onto the bull. As it began to buck and dip, her bare breasts jiggled and bounced.

“Oh dayum!” Tex dropped the bag he carried and stepped farther into the room, checking out the place from floor to ceiling. There was a stair to his right and private rooms to his left. A small trio of scantily dressed subs performed a line dance for a group of doms. One young woman was topless, wearing only a thong, a hat, and boots.

He laughed again and then went still, the wolf on full alert. There were too many smells bombarding him to make out any single scent, but nevertheless, something suddenly set his nerves on edge. Hunter froze next to him, still and silent. They exchanged glances. He looked back at Kurt and Ethan, but they were focused on each other.

Hunter stood motionless, his cock clearly visible as it pushed against the front of his jeans. His bright gaze skittered from one side of the room to the other. He was conflicted, overwhelmed, and obviously excited. He licked his lips and met Tex’s gaze.

“You okay, Hunter?”

He nodded curtly. Tex turned away to hide the smile in his eyes. It seemed Hunter shared his interest in kink. It wasn't surprising; most shifters had a taste for rough play and domination. It was all part of preparing for the mating process.

“Gentlemen? This way, please.” The spell was broken as a slender blond man approached. He was wearing nothing but chaps and a leather thong. His ass was pale and muscular; red lines showed that he'd been caned recently. Tex checked him out appreciatively, aware of Hunter's sudden tension. Tex sighed and held back the suggestive comment that was on the tip of his tongue. Bisexuality was the norm among the male wolves, but he didn't want to make Hunter uncomfortable. Not here and now, anyway. He'd get some mileage off this evening when they were home and relaxed. Maybe he could even get a laugh out of the quiet man.

They followed the young man through the back corridors of the club and finally arrived at an unmarked door. It was painted black and barely noticeable. The man opened the door and stood back as they entered. When the door closed, the room was hushed and quiet. The contractor in Tex had to admire the soundproofing in the room. The dom appreciated it as well.

A tall man reclined on a leather sofa, his long legs stretched out before him, and he looked utterly at ease. Looks could be deceiving, though, as his scent told a different story. He was tense but under complete control. Something big must have been up to have ruffled the mysterious owner of Dark Haven. He rose gracefully, nearly of a height with Ethan and Kurt, who were the tallest among them.

“Master Xavier.” Kurt extended a hand. If he was still overwhelmed by the atmosphere of the club, he'd hidden it well. “Allow me to introduce my family. This is Ethan, Hunter, and Tex. My name is Kurt.”

They all shook hands and gave one another appraising glances.

The man looked comfortable with the title of master. It suited him well. He was clad in dark Western wear, black trousers, a burgundy vest, and a ribbon tie. A frock coat was thrown over a chair; a low-brimmed hat rested on top of it. His long black hair was arrow straight and dropped down his back in a braid. He looked from one man to the other, but didn't comment on the lack of surnames—or the obvious ethnic differences of the four “brothers.”

“Chase was not able to come into the city today, so we came in his stead. He didn't tell us why you needed us to come.” Kurt's slight accent was another anomaly. One would expect to hear a European tone to his voice. Instead, his was the French-tinged accent of the Caribbean. Xavier hesitated a moment before gesturing for them to take seats. The dom leaned against his desk, taking the higher position as the other men took spots on the sofa and chairs. He gazed at them; his hooded eyes were sharp and appraising.

“Sometimes unusual people drift into Dark Haven.”

Tex smiled to himself. He had no doubt the place drew some oddballs. But he held his tongue.



“It isn’t uncommon for people to wind up here seeking sanctuary.”

Eva, Harte’s mate, had done exactly that. She’d been chased in from the street by Abraxas hunters, their greatest enemy. She’d met the alpha of the local pack that night, leading to a strong and passionate mating.

Xavier looked into their faces. Tex noticed that he didn’t make direct eye contact with the other three men. But he met Tex’s gaze. The man had crazy-good instincts. Of the four, Tex had spent the most time in human environments and was least likely to take the eye contact as challenge.

“I have someone here who might belong to you.”

“A woman?” Hunter was on his feet. He moved toward Xavier until Tex reached out to hold him back. They didn’t need any sort of aggression.

Xavier gave the distressed man a sad gaze. “No, it’s not a woman.” He pushed away from the desk and indicated that the men follow. They left the office through a back door that opened into a break room, complete with food, chairs, and a cot. The room appeared to be empty, but Tex could smell...something. Something not human. Something uncanny and wild.

Hunter surveyed the room, his nostrils flaring. He looked toward the far corner of the room and stepped forward, then peered behind a large recliner.

He went still. Tex’s skin prickled. If he’d been in wolf form, his hackles would be up.

“Kurt. Ethan... You need to come here...”

There wasn’t enough room for all of them, so Hunter shoved the massive chair as though it was a piece of children’s furniture. When Tex saw what he revealed, his insides froze.

A child lay huddled on the floor, curled in a fetal position. His hair was paler than Kurt’s, if that was possible. His face was tucked into his arms, which protected his head. His scent was wild but not wolf. He was most certainly not one of theirs.

And yet...

Ethan stood, looking back toward Xavier. “We’ll take care of him.”

Now he was one of theirs. Tex closed his eyes and silently gave thanks to God that Chase and his men had co-opted the weak, leaderless Truckee Pack. Their new alpha was not only powerful, he was compassionate. His betas followed his example.

“I came in early to do paperwork, and he was here in the break room, exactly like this.” Xavier’s voice was soft and gentle. “The club is locked up tight after closing, and I didn’t find any evidence of a break-in. Nothing showed up on the video feed. He was so frightened that I was barely able to dress him. He hasn’t eaten or had anything to drink all day.” He cleared his throat.

The sharp scent of fear piss filled the air, and Ethan knelt beside the youth, not touching, but leaning close enough to offer comfort.

“Hey, kiddo, no need to be afraid. I’m Ethan, and I am part of Chase’s pack. Did someone send you here? Were you supposed to find us?”

In alarm, Tex glanced back toward Xavier and was relieved to see that he’d left the room. Last year the pack had stolen a youth from Abraxas. He’d been horribly abused, his ears and eyes sealed with glue. Deuce was still impaired visually, but his hearing had returned. All Abraxas had required from him was his sense of smell.

Fortunately this boy hadn’t suffered that particular abuse, though it was clear he’d been traumatized. He was wearing oversize sweats and a T-shirt, probably provided by Xavier.

The boy held out a trembling hand, letting his fingers curl open one by one. A small square of tightly folded paper had been wedged inside. Kurt gently extracted it from his hand and carefully unfolded it.

“He looks just like—” Hunter broke off, aware the boy was listening. The other men nodded, leaving Tex in the dark. Didn’t matter; he’d find out soon enough.

“Smells the same too. But he’s got shifter in him.” Ethan bent closer, peering at the boy’s face. Gingerly he raised the black T-shirt and examined the youth’s skinny torso. Tex swallowed hard. There was a crude tattoo on the kid’s chest. It was similar to the one on Deuce.

“‘W3.’ What does that mean?” Tex squatted, looking down at a face that was too delicate ...too lovely to be of this world. The boy appeared to be in his pre or early teens. His skin was fair and far too pale. When he opened huge eyes, they were as gray as a storm cloud. His hair looped into huge curls that tumbled down into his eyes.

“Wraith. Experiment number three.” Hunter’s voice was choked and tight. “We all have similar marks somewhere on our bodies. Mine is on my neck.”

“Does that mean Wraith conducted the experiment or that he was the donor?” Ethan reached out to stroke the boy’s cheek, but he turned his head away.

Kurt cleared his throat. “Chase, take care of him for me. Please. W.”

He continued to stare at the page. “Never thought of that bastard as a victim before.”

“Who’s Wraith?” Tex reached to the chair where Xavier had left a small stack of clothes. After a moment’s hesitation, he gently pulled off the boy’s pants and replaced them, wincing at his emaciated state. Bruises and scrapes peppered his skin, right down to the genitals. Carefully, he dressed him in fresh clothing. He’d need to visit Doc Briony first thing.

“Wraith is part of Abraxas, but not really.” Ethan stood and moved to the far side of the room. “He never really played their game. Came and went as he pleased. When they found Eva last year, he was part of their hunt squad. He had Eva in his hands and let her go.” He folded his arms across his broad chest and watched the boy. “Wraith isn’t human, and he’s sure as hell not shifter. This kid must be his son.”

“Or maybe they did some sort of gene-splicing.” Hunter stepped away as well, giving Kurt room to lift the boy from the floor. “Whatever the case, Wraith is invested in this one.” Hunter looked at the other men. “You think it’s safe to take him home?”

“Probably not, but we don’t have a choice.” Kurt passed the boy to Ethan, who readily accepted him. Within seconds the boy’s stiff posture began to relax. Whatever it was that Ethan did was working like magic. He stroked the blond curls, lulling the youth into a drowsy state.

“You think there’s a back exit out of here? I don’t want to take him through the club.” Ethan looked over at Tex.

He nodded and led the others down the corridor to a door that led out into an alley. Competent as Chase’s men were, they still weren’t aware of the little things in everyday life, like mandatory fire exits.

Kurt paused outside the door, scanning both directions. He turned to Tex and Hunter. “Did either of you scent something suspicious back there?”

Tex shrugged. “I didn’t, but something made my hair stand on end.”

“Same here. Too many scents to sort through, but there was something. You want us to check it out?”

Kurt nodded. “I felt something. Complex emotion that reacted when we came in. We’ll take the boy home in the sedan. You two check it out, then rent a car or catch a flight to Reno. If you think it’s Abraxas or anything out of the ordinary, call Harte and Eva. They’re closer and can give you a hand if you need it.”

Tex nodded and stood back, watching as the two men walked cautiously down the alley and to the street.

“You think anyone will notice two men carrying an unconscious boy?” Hunter looked up at Tex.

He shook his head. “Nope. This is a neighborhood with money; they watch out for their wallets and purses, not for other people. Besides, the kid looks enough like Kurt that no one will think to question them.”

He waited for Hunter to respond, but he was preoccupied. His eyes were closed and his head was tilted slightly. Like Deuce, Hunter had been valued first for his ability to track by scent and second for his uncanny sense of perception when it came to homing in on his quarry.

“We’ll start outside. Stay near me; my vision tends to narrow when I’m searching for my target.”

Tex nodded and matched strides with the tracker. His own vision was acute, and he allowed the wolf to rise just enough to sharpen his night vision. They’d scouted the block and were moving on when his cell phone vibrated.

“Tex here.”

It was Kurt. His voice was quieter than usual and fraught with tension.

“The note. It just changed.”

*Changed?* Tex stopped, knowing that Hunter could hear both sides of the call. Their eyes

met, and Hunter's were glittery with...what? Fear?

"Okay. Go on."

"There's another line. It says, 'The girl is in danger. Find her fast, and get out.'"

"That's it?"

"That's it. If it's Holly, you two need to find her and bring her home. The last thing our girl needs is to get taken back to the labs."

Kurt ended the call, and Tex tucked the phone back into his pocket. Without another comment, the men trotted back down the street and slipped into the front door of Dark Haven.

## Chapter Two

Hidden by the shadows of the dungeon, Holly pressed the heel of her hand over her chest, struggling to catch her breath. Her heart pounded as though she'd been running for miles, and every nerve in her body fired off conflicting signals.

They were here.

She closed her eyes and counted to ten, gathering her self-control. When she opened her eyes, she glanced down at the handle of the leather strap she clasped and then looked at the rosy ass of the sub she'd been punishing. Slowly she circled him. He waited in a heightened state of expectation and anxiety. His cock was rigid, and his breathing came fast; he was just on the verge of the climax she'd forbidden. If she ran, Holly would draw more than a little attention to herself.

Especially if she left the poor man tied to the St. Andrew's cross, wearing nothing but a blindfold, his cock waving in the air.

She pulled a breath and cast her enhanced senses through the room and then out through the building. They were here, but not in the same space as she. If she was lucky, she could finish the scene and sneak out the dungeon exit.

Holly replaced the strap with a tiny wheel that caused a prickling sensation on the skin. She loosened his bindings and placed his hands on top of his head. "Stay as you are. *Do not move.*" She ran the wheel up his quivering belly to his chest and gently rounded his nipples. In spite of her tension, she smiled as he trembled. She leaned down and trailed her tongue along the path of the wheel. He tasted good, like salt and sex and human. Good, but not what she wanted.

"Anthony, do you want to come?" she whispered into his ear.

He swallowed and nodded. His body was taut with need. A shiny drop of precum welled at the eye of his penis.

"Say it."

"Mistress, I need to come. Please."

"You've done very well, Anthony. You may come. *Now.*"

Without so much as a touch to his flushed, engorged cock, the sub arched his back, crying out in climax. Holly stepped to the side, watching the milky fluid spurt to the floor. She looked up into his face and, as always, was awed by the sheer abandon and ecstasy that came with orgasm. As she'd never before experienced it herself, it always delighted her to watch another carried over that mysterious edge. Someday she'd know what it felt like. Someday the aching in her body would find release.

Once she brought him down from the cross, he thanked her properly—with a kiss on each leather boot. Holly escorted Anthony to a cooldown space. Some needed more aftercare, but Anthony preferred solitude, wrapped in nothing but the wooly bliss of his subspace. He wasn't particularly demanding or needy. He wanted nothing from Holly but

dominance.

That was exactly what she'd needed tonight. Obedience and gratitude. The satisfaction of being the one to push him to complete sexual annihilation.

As she gathered up her belongings, Holly searched with her nose and ears and that other indefinable sense that had been grafted into her DNA. The men were gone, and she stifled a sense of disappointment. After all, she'd run away half expecting to be hunted. She should have known Chase would respect her need to leave the pack and find herself. He'd never hunted the other women who'd left and always accepted them back without question. Why should she be any different?

She had to laugh at her own capriciousness; she'd left in order to find herself, and yet in leaving Truckee, she'd left a good part of herself behind. She was in no position to be angry with the men. She'd gotten exactly what she'd asked for: space and time. Her ego had been bruised, but that certainly wasn't their fault. It was perverse of her to expect them to follow her. But still... She shook that thought away. What were they doing here tonight?

Something must have happened to bring them here.

Of course, they might be here for fun.

Even as the insidious thought crossed her mind, she rejected it. They weren't here to play, not with Kurt along. He was far too sensitive to expose himself to a place like Dark Haven. Ethan would never push him to do something like that.

Anxiety played at her nerves. She should go upstairs and confront the men, assert her independence. And she should find out what was wrong.

But two of the men upstairs were her reason for leaving the Truckee pack in the first place. She'd run away, and they hadn't followed her. She bit her lip, debating what to do.

Step by step, she climbed the stairs, wondering if they would recognize her. Hunter would; he'd been the last person ever to set eyes on her human form. She might be able to slip past the others. And Tex... The thought of her gentle cowboy made her heart ache a little. Sweet as he was, he'd see only a complete stranger, not the wolf he'd grown to know.

As she climbed, the music grew louder. Men's and women's shouts rose above the cries and screams of the subs in the dungeon. It had taken weeks to desensitize herself to the raw emotion from that room. It had taken even longer to find the courage to submerge herself in classes on domination, force herself to pick up the tools of the trade. The ability to unlock a sub went a long way toward salvaging the broken woman. Holly knew she'd never be normal, but at least she could function. She could live a life among humans...hold a job, and maybe she'd be brave enough to love.

Upstairs a crowd had gathered around the mechanical bull, and in spite of her tension, she smiled at the spectacle. A bare-breasted woman rode the bull as it moved in slow motion. When she came off the machine, she fell in a tumble of ruffled skirts and lacy petticoats. Amid shouts and laughter, she cheerfully dropped her skirt and climbed back onto the bull. She wore nothing but a lacy pink thong. Strip bull-riding.

Holly rolled her eyes and laughed.

The rest of the sub's clothing was scattered across the stage. She glanced over to the other stage; a sub was busy handing bundles of short pegging strings to doms while several submissives huddled in a group, waiting for Master Xavier and Master Simon to pair them up with their "cowboys." Holly shook her head ruefully. That old Billy Ray Cyrus song blasted through the sound system, prompting a dozen nearly naked subs to gather in a slightly obscene version of a line dance. Looked like Master Xavier was in the mood for skin tonight!

"Mistress Holly?"

She paused and smiled at the young woman who waited, hands folded and head politely bowed.

"Yes, Jenna?"

The sub kept her eyes lowered. "We're doing calf roping. Would you like to participate?"

Calf roping? Like in the rodeo? As she watched, a young woman darted out onto the stage, followed by a dom who quickly roped her, smoothly dropped her to the floor, and then caught her hands and feet with the short rawhide strips. He jumped up, hands in the air to stop the clock. Holly had never been to the rodeo, but she'd watched when Tex would turn on the television and cheer for his favorites.

Little Summer Aragon was staring wide-eyed at the gigantic dom she'd just been assigned. Holly frowned; the girl seemed a bit fragile for such a huge man, but Xavier was skilled in pairing the right sub to a Dominant. She stifled her concern. In this past year, the greatest thing she'd learned was to give and accept trust. Those two had to work it out together, knowing that Xavier wouldn't mislead them.

"Not tonight, Jenna. But thank you." She smiled a dismissal at the young woman and moved on. She took to the shadows, searching for men who were taller, more beautiful, and more fundamentally alive than the others in the club.

There.

She sensed that Kurt and Ethan were gone, but a tall, golden man sauntered into the room. Her eyes were drawn to Tex Texiera as though he were the sun. His walk was loose and confident, yet he was alert, scanning the crowd. He wore the sort of clothing that she'd frequently seen him in at home: boots and jeans and a cowboy hat. A battered leather vest was worn over his shirt, and a lariat hung from his hip. He carried a leather bag that looked suspiciously like hers. Tex looked comfortable in his skin. Comfortable in this environment.

She swallowed. Tex fit right in here at Dark Haven. She'd never suspected that he might be kinked. She chewed her lip, contemplating Tex topping a sub. In her imagination, the sub looked an awful lot like *her*. She shivered and continued to study her friend.

She knew his eyes were as blue as the sky against his sun-browned skin. She knew that when he smiled, a deep line would cut into the smooth skin of his cheek, and his smile would sparkle like the sun on water. She knew exactly how he smelled and even how he tasted. Her belly gripped, and for a moment, she gave herself to the arousal that washed through her.

A moment later, the second man entered and prowled toward the other side of the room. Hunter moved like a panther, smooth and sleek, not a motion wasted. Smiles were foreign to his face, though when they were young, he'd always had a smile just for her. Hunter was compassion and courage and justice all rolled into one single beautiful package. He was tragic and magnificent and heroic. He was as dark as Tex was bright, and when she saw the feral intensity on his face, she swallowed. He was hunting.

He'd caught her scent.

Holly went still, knowing that if she moved—if she breathed—he'd be on to her. As the men wove between tables and through the crowd, she moved in counterpoint, working her way toward the lobby. It wouldn't be much longer before Hunter sorted her scent from the tangle of bodies and perfumes, particularly if he went downstairs, where she'd been running her scene. It seemed to take forever, but soon enough, she was able to slip into the darkness of the evening. She kicked off her secondhand boots and hid them and her bag behind a Dumpster in the back alley. She paused, scenting the faint trail that Ethan and Kurt had taken as they left the club. There was a third scent with theirs, but she didn't take time to identify it.

Holly jogged down the sidewalk and ducked into another alley, then peered around the corner to see if the men had managed to track her outside the club.

And then she leaned against the brick wall, threw her head back, and laughed in delight. They'd finally come.

\* \* \*

"She was here. *Right here.*"

Hunter's chest felt tight, and his heart pounded. Fear and relief mingled with fierce joy. Her scent was sweet and laced with the edge of arousal. These months that Holly had been gone had been the longest of his life, for he'd loved her for years. It seemed that he'd hurt for her so much longer. Holly had been the one constant in his life since they'd been children who'd been taken by Abraxas and warehoused in its labs. While they'd rarely been given access to each other, he'd always watched for her when he was moved around the facility. They'd formed a relationship that had survived even through her miserable pregnancies and the repeated rounds of torturous abuse they'd both suffered.

It wasn't until that final day of captivity that he'd lost hope of her...for her. That last horrific, miraculous day when Chase's men had raided the foul little lab complex they'd been housed in and had carried them to freedom and safety.

From that day on, Holly had been a wolf, and Hunter had remained a human. He hadn't shifted a single time in the years of their freedom. He'd stood back and watched in impotent fury and painful jealousy as Holly's wolf had turned away from him, going to Tex for comfort and companionship.

He wasn't jealous of the other man for sexual or reproductive reasons, but simply because the big cowboy was so easy with his heart. He shared himself completely. Hunter had seen her falling in love with Tex, but Tex remained oblivious. Time and again, Tex



would spend hours in her company, sometimes shifting and running with her. Time and again, he'd head off to the cities and bars to find sexual companionship. Tex would come home wearing the scents of the men and women he'd slept with, never noticing the devastation in Holly's eyes when he returned.

Even now, Tex was aroused by the open sexuality that surrounded him. A glance at the front of his jeans told Hunter he was erect, half ready to take his pleasure with any one of the willing humans even though Holly was so near.

"She was with a man. I smell his seed mingled with her scent." Tex's voice was gravelly and rough. The wolf was rising. Finally he was showing some emotion. Hunter closed his eyes and focused on the scent of the human. It was stronger, and he was close. They moved through the maze of bondage apparatus and tables and followed the man's scent to a small, dark room at the back of the building.

He saw the man reclining on a sheet-covered sofa. He wasn't sleeping, but rather in a blissful state that reminded Hunter of someone high on drugs.

Holly's scent was all over him.

Hackles rose on his neck, and a low growl rumbled from his throat. Tex reached out to gently restrain him, holding him back. He glared at the other man, and Tex shook his head slightly, leading the way back up the stairs.

"He was with her!" Hunter's fury had him seeing red. Tex hauled him to a small round table and forced him into a chair. When a waitress started in their direction, he shook his head curtly.

"They were together, but not...together. I can't believe I'm saying this, but I think Holly topped him tonight."

Hunter looked up in confusion. He'd blocked some of the more disturbing impressions of the place from his awareness. It surprised him how quickly he'd grown blind to the nudity and deaf to the pleased screams of the subs. He'd even caught the scent of blood, but had set that aside as well. He'd grown up surrounded by sex and blood and screams; this place was confusing in the amount of pleasure that lingered in the air like a haze. He looked around, somewhat surprised by his arousal. The sheer eroticism of the place washed over him, and suddenly, the night was rife with possibility.

"What's that mean?"

Tex leaned forward and smiled. "That means he was her submissive. I'm not sure what's going on with our little wolf, but it looks like she's found a way to take control of her life."

Hunter didn't understand the vernacular of the lifestyle he was navigating tonight, but he understood Tex's meaning.

Holly was exorcising demons.

"That's good, isn't it?"

His companion smiled, and as always, it was an expression that loosened the tight knot in his chest. He might feel jealous of Tex much of the time, yet he also had the unsettling

awareness that his wolf took comfort—pleasure—in his company. He was at ease around the other man. If it hadn't been for Holly, he might have thought of Tex as his friend.

"It's good, but it would have been better if she hadn't tried to do this on her own."

Hunter gazed around the room, seeing but not really observing. Most of his brain was focused on Holly's trail. As always, his vision began to fade around the edges as his gift kicked in, tuning itself to his chosen quarry.

"Maybe the only way she could do it was alone. Maybe we...the men...are too much for her." He glanced up at Tex, taking in the now sober expression. "She wasn't treated well, Tex."

"I know that, Hunter. I know you all suffered in the labs."

Somehow Tex did know that. He hadn't been genetically tampered with like the rest of them, so how could he be so aware of what they felt?

"She had babies. They all died, either at birth or shortly after. One of them was mine."

Tex didn't say anything; he reached out and gently rested his hand over Hunter's clenched fist. Hunter stared down, wanting to flinch away but needing that contact. For whatever reason, he couldn't stop talking.

"At the end...she'd had the baby...my baby. It lived for three days, and then they took it." He bit his lip. "Just before Chase came, they brought it back to her, and it died there in her cell. She screamed. She ripped at her own skin. I was just yards away and couldn't do anything. That's when she shifted and never turned back."

Tex squeezed his hand. Holly had been an incredibly strong woman. She'd taken so much over the years. Only abject, utter despair could have forced her to retreat to her wolf like that.

"You never shifted again either."

Hunter wasn't ready to talk about that. Not now, and not with Tex. He slipped his hand away and removed it from the table. He'd done bad things while in wolf form. Vile things. He'd been released from his cell to fight for his freedom, and he'd wallowed in the blood of his captors. He'd torn through his tormenters as if skin were paper and bones were twigs. He'd taken their lives, and inside, the joy of the hunt had filled his heart. Finally, he was fulfilled. He'd become exactly what Abraxas had made him, and they'd paid the ultimate price.

Hunter remembered waking in the back of a tented truck as it trundled over the sodden road through a jungle, seeing and feeling rusty blood all over his arms and chest...his face. He'd worn the blood of his enemies for days. He'd tasted that blood in his mouth for years. Hunter never wanted to taste old blood again. He'd spent endless nights wide awake, unwilling to replay the carnage in his dreams. Now he hunted, but only in human form. He'd never trust the wolf again.

"She had to have shifted to human form to come here. She must have had help from someone in the pack."

Tex heaved a big sigh. “Maybe Eva. I initially thought Briony might have helped her leave, but Doc Bree would be too worried about her. Eva’s been up at the compound every month visiting her brother Deuce.”

Irritation rose within Hunter. He liked Napa’s alpha female, but she wasn’t Truckee’s alpha, even if her brother was living under Chase’s protection.

“Eva has no business meddling with our pack. But if it *was* her, she’d have kept an eye on Holly.” Hunter rose, feeling back in control. Marginally. For a moment there, he’d been afraid he might take out his anger and jealousy on some innocent human. He closed his eyes and focused on the nearly imperceptible trail that existed only in his mind.

“She’s outside the club. We’ll pick up her scent out there.”

Tex nodded and headed out the door to the lobby, still carrying that small duffel bag of his. Hunter had thought he carried a change of clothing, but now he suspected Tex was more familiar with the BDSM scene than he let on.

To his chagrin, Hunter felt his cock slowly harden at the thought of what might be in that bag. The image of Holly on one of those crosses flashed through his mind, and he shut it down fast.

She’d spent too much of her life being abused by others. And yet when she ran, this was where she’d come. He took a deep breath and let it out, doing his best to focus.

“Hunter. It’s okay to be turned on. We’re wolves. We’re dominant by nature. Sex is our lifeblood. And we’re hunting.”

“But we’re hunting Holly.” He shook his head. “It’s not all right.”

Tex handed the human receptionist his bag and headed out the door to the sidewalk. He grinned. “Somehow I think Holly knows exactly what’s on our minds. And frankly, Hunter, I think this is exactly what she’s been hoping for.”

## Chapter Three

Holly laid her trail carefully, taking a few side trips up rickety fire escapes and onto the roofs of various commercial buildings. The city wasn't like her home in the mountains; she couldn't use running water to mask her trail. But then, she wasn't leaving a visible trail for the men's sharp eyes, so the trade-off was good.

Briefly she considered a run to Golden Gate Park, where they could shift and race, but Hunter would probably stay on two feet. She felt a moment's sadness for him. She'd taken to her wolf these past few years out of survival. He'd locked away his wolf out of fear.

She wondered which of them was more pathetic.

Tex, though, he was healthy. Perhaps that was why she'd always craved his company. They'd spent hours together, often in peaceful silence. Sometimes she'd been privy to his innermost secrets. She knew he'd been afraid for his best friend Rico when the man had fallen in love with the very human Briony. Turned out Briony had some mysterious secrets hidden under her milk chocolate exterior.

She thought about Doc Bree with a pang of loneliness. When she'd run, Briony had been blossoming into early pregnancy. With a jolt, she realized the baby would be born by now.

She didn't even know if it was a boy or a girl. Eva hadn't told her. Tears burned her eyes, and she wiped them away, angry at herself. If she'd stayed within the safe confines of the pack, Holly would never have been able to walk among her friends and family as one of them. She'd never have been able to summon the strength to consider a job or even take a lover. More than anything else in the world, Holly wanted children...children who lived. She wanted a man who cherished her and would keep her fears at bay. She wanted a man who could unlock the mysteries of her body. She wanted a man like Tex, who radiated goodwill and happiness.

To her consternation, she had come to realize that Tex wasn't all that she wanted. She wanted Hunter too. Dark, moody, soul-torn Hunter, who'd been her silent shadow from her earliest memory. But like her, Hunter was damaged and broken, unable to embrace his wolfen nature. She saw it in his eyes: he thought she feared him after that wild, deadly rampage. He didn't understand that any of them were capable of the same thing. He didn't understand he'd been her salvation that horrible last day.

Holly made an agile leap from the roof of an old car and landed on the low rungs of a rusty ladder. From there she ran from landing to landing, jumping gracefully and with uncanny accuracy. Hunter hunted, and Holly could run. The thought made her smile. Perhaps she *should* shift and lead them to a park, or even down to the coast. If she moved fast enough, he'd be forced to change shape just to keep up with her. It offended her wolf that he'd rejected that vital side of himself. It crippled him, and Holly wanted him whole and healthy. She was willing to push him to the edge in a wild mating run. She could force him to shift and heal himself. But she realized he had to do this in his own time. If she forced the issue, she might end up alienating him.

Holly tilted her head, listening for the distant echo of pursuit. It was too late to change her plan; they were already coming.

She grinned and laughed in delight, looping in a giant circle, leading them back to where it had all started. Within minutes, she'd backtracked to Dark Haven.

\* \* \*

"Damn, she's good." Tex's voice showed his admiration. They'd trailed her through alleys until her scent would mysteriously vanish, only to pick it up several blocks away. Eventually Hunter had thought to look up, to seek the trail on another level. That had sped up the pursuit somewhat.

Tex was a pretty good hunter for having no enhancements; he seemed to have a knack for locating the most likely route she might have taken. Once, they found themselves on a fire escape that was so fragile, it barely held both men. Another time they ran swiftly over flat rooftops, leaping from building to building.

As they hunted, Hunter's excitement increased, because, like Tex, he'd finally come to the conclusion that his little Holly was playing a game, leading them on a chase. This was flirtation and courtship, and she was initiating the game. It was the sudden awareness of what came at the end of the chase that had him aroused. Slowly but surely, they were heading back into the neighborhood from where they'd started.

When they arrived back near Dark Haven, the men moved at a silent, deadly pace, swifter than shadows in the darkness. They were only blocks away from the club when he spotted her.

"Is that her?" Tex's voice held amazement as they slowed to a stop. He'd never seen her human form before. Hunter hid a grin at what his companion had in store, because Holly... She was beautiful.

They hadn't caught Holly; she'd finally stopped running. And she now stood poised under the misty light of a street lamp. Wet asphalt glistened under her bare feet. She was waiting. His heart pounded frantically, unable to differentiate between lust and anger and flat-out joy.

There she was, beautiful as he remembered. Her black hair was long and sleek instead of cropped and dull. Instead of ragged bleached cotton, she wore tight denim jeans and a Western-style leather vest with nothing under it but skin and a lacy black bra. Though she was barefoot, he was willing to bet she'd left a pair of cowboy boots somewhere inside.

She saw them, and the wild emotions in her eyes reflected what he was feeling. She looked from one man to the other, and to his chagrin, Hunter realized she was equally drawn to them both. He glanced at his companion, almost amused at how transfixed Tex was.

"Holly?"

He was a goner. Hunter knew Tex had sought out Holly over and over again since they'd come to Truckee. Most likely his promiscuous behavior had been out of confusion—the subconscious knowledge that what he needed most was...somewhere. Never knowing she was right under his nose. Jealousy flared and then died at the dawning realization at what

was happening right there and then. Something he'd never dreamed could happen...

Then she snared Hunter with that fathomless gaze, and likewise, he felt as frozen as a deer in the headlights. He was caught, and so was Tex. The knowledge wasn't as painful as he would have expected. His inner vision of the future shifted, making room for one more.

"I always knew she was my mate. Just didn't figure she'd be yours too." His throat felt so tight, it hurt to talk.

Tex tore his gaze from the woman and looked at Hunter in shock.

"Two of us? I've heard that dominant females will claim more than one mate...but Holly?" He looked back at her in surprise. "Eva's a dominant. She's with Harte only."

"Harte's an alpha. He's at the top of the pyramid in his pack. We're lower in the hierarchy. Dominant, but not alpha."

It made odd sense as the explanation came from his mouth. He'd grown up outside the normal structure of a pack, but it was clear once he was confronted with the reality.

Holly wanted them both.

Immediately his wolf rose in possessive jealousy. In reaction, Holly poised to run, drawing his hostility away from Tex.

"Oh no you don't!" Tex crouched slightly, poised to leap after her.

She was off and running, with Tex only yards behind her. Hunter sprinted to catch up with the other man, leaping over trash cans and debris that littered the alley. They dodged back into the side streets, clambered over a chain-link fence and into a parking lot. She was fast, and she was agile, easily keeping out of their reach.

"Give me space..." Tex grunted, and Hunter drew back, watching in amazement as the cowboy began to loop his lariat through the air. He stopped, braced, and the rope shot out like a snake, then dropped down over her arms. With deft skill, he snapped the rope, pinning her arms to her sides. She jolted to a stop, shock in her expressive eyes.

"Wow. I thought that thing was just for show." Hunter stood next to Tex, grinning as his partner slowly reeled her in.

"How'd you think I got a name like Tex?"

"Thought it was from your last name... Texiera?"

"Spent most of my summers on my grandparents' ranch in Texas. We lived there full-time for years before I moved back to Truckee." He smiled grimly. "Used to ride rodeo. Never went on the big circuits, but I could ride a bronc or rope a calf."

"Or a filly." Hunter couldn't resist the joke, even though Tex shot him a look of surprise.

Holly struggled against the rope that pinned her arms in place. She wanted to laugh, and she wanted to scream. She wanted to rush the men and throw herself into their arms. As Tex hauled her closer, she eagerly examined their faces, wrestling with the conflicting urges that

surged through her body. In seconds she was close enough to touch, but she couldn't. Instead she stared at them boldly, summoning up every ounce of courage that she'd painstakingly cultivated over the year that she'd been on her own.

She tossed her head defiantly and gave them a pugnacious grin.

"Hello, Holly darlin'."

At the sound of Tex's drawl, her urge to struggle faded. All defiance fled when she looked at Hunter and saw the emotions ebbing and flowing in his eyes.

"Tex. Hunter." She lifted her chin and challenged the two men. She knew what she wanted, and now that the men were here, it was so close, just out of reach. And damn it! She didn't know how to ask!

"Why are you here?" She hadn't fully recovered her voice this year. It was still harsh and low. The sound of it embarrassed Holly, but it seemed to light a fire in Tex's eyes.

"Chase sent us on business. We caught scent of you and decided there was something more important to attend to."

She flushed slightly. She didn't ask what the business was; that could wait till later. Explanations could wait as well. Right now Holly had her two chosen mates standing in front of her, fire in their eyes and lust in their bellies. Deliberately she wiggled a bit, watching in satisfaction as their hungry gazes traveled down the length of her body.

This was a fragile moment, and she knew it. They'd both be reluctant to take her, fearing she might still be traumatized by her past. Hunter in particular. He'd seen her at her lowest point and had treated her like fragile china since.

Again she pushed away her doubts. That was the past. She'd wallowed in the past, relived every moment of pain and agony. She'd hidden away within her wolf for years, grappling with pain and loss. This past year, she'd held the wolf at bay, relearning to trust and live among humans again. She was ready. What Hunter didn't recognize was that he'd washed her soul clean with the blood of those men who'd abused her for so long.

He was her hero.

If they'd waited just a little longer, she'd have been in her heat cycle. There'd have been no doubt, no hesitation. They'd have been hers. Now she could only hope that nature would overcome their hesitation. If not, she hoped that *they* could trust *her*.

Hunter broke first. He stepped up and grabbed her roughly by the arms, then examined every inch of her face. He cradled her jaw and then lowered his lips to hers. The kiss was clumsy and inexperienced, drawing tears to her eyes. All these years he'd waited for her, keeping his love—his lust—to himself. She knew he wasn't a virgin; in the labs, virginity was only a state of mind. But if he'd taken a lover, she'd have known. As she'd done with Tex, she'd have scented it on him.

He forced his tongue into her mouth, and she felt his fangs drop slightly. She tasted blood—hers. If her hands had been free, she'd have clasped him close to her body. As it was, their bodies strained together. He held her tightly, as though he drew his life from her

touch. She never wanted it to end.

He broke away with a gasp and staggered back, horror in his eyes. She stared and didn't back down. Slowly she licked the blood from her lips and watched as his expression changed. The guilt ebbed away, leaving triumph in its place.

Cautiously she turned to Tex, who still held the rope that bound her.

This time he didn't grin. He didn't have a clever quip or a silly joke. The smile no longer lurked there in his bright blue eyes. He didn't even reach out to touch her. He moved close to Holly, slowly pushing her in Hunter's direction until she could move no farther. Her back was against Hunter's solid form, her buttocks pressed to his groin. Only when she was securely trapped between the men did he lean down to kiss her.

It was slow and deliberate, yet she sensed that he channeled every bit of his passion into that kiss. It was fierce and intense and incredibly gentle. He dropped the rope, reached around, and drew Hunter's arms forward around her waist. There they stood, in the darkness of an alley, three pieces of a puzzle that had suddenly been solved.



## Chapter Four

Fog was drifting in, and they stood at the outer edges of a streetlight; the weak light gave the scene a sense of timelessness and magic.

Magic. Tex thought of the mysterious Wraith and written message that had suddenly changed. Maybe it was time to move this party inside. A glance at Hunter told him the other man had the same thought. He didn't want to break the spell that held the three of them together; he didn't want her afraid.

"Holly darlin', have you been a bad girl?"

Those dark eyes of hers went wide, and he was snared, unable to look away. He moved forward just a bit more, closing the last bit of space between the three. The air was fragrant with their arousal. It was like perfume...like the ocean and the jungle and the mountains all blended into one.

"Bad?" she repeated. His eyes were drawn to her full lips. In the dim light, he couldn't make out the color, but he thought they were probably the shade of a rose petal. Her eyes simply had to be blue. She reminded him of a flower in the misty light.

"You left without telling anyone where you were going. You never called or wrote. We didn't know if you were dead or alive." Hunter spoke softly. His breath made her hair stir. She licked her lips.

"Eva knew."

"Still. You've been bad. I think you need to be punished. Don't you think she should be punished, Hunter?" He met the other man's gaze and smiled to see the slow awareness come into his face. Hunter might be new to the scene, but he was rapidly catching on to the spirit of play.

"Yeah. Yes, she's been bad." He leaned forward, inhaling her scent. "You played with someone... A human." He pushed her hair aside and nibbled the base of her neck. His sharp teeth held; his eyes were as close to wolf as Tex had ever seen.

Holly gave a slow, low moan. Tex could see the pulse in her throat.

"You've been here all this time, playing in the club, topping humans. Maybe it's time for Holly to learn a lesson about who's on top." Tex tilted his head and nipped her jaw. Her body jerked convulsively between the men. With a shaky breath, Hunter let her loose and nuzzled the spot he'd just bitten. Slowly he ran his tongue down the red spot, soothing and seductive.

Her eyes dropped closed, and Tex shivered in arousal. He was hard...throbbing. She knew it, because his hips were pressed tight against her belly. He whispered his lips along her jaw to her throat, then moved up to nibble at her earlobe. She was a dominant who was aching to switch for them. Only for them. But she was also a woman who'd experienced far too much pain in her life. Tex was going to have to be on top of his game with her.

"You okay, Holly? Is this too much?" He pulled back and stared down into her flushed

face. When she opened her eyes, they were bright with arousal...lust. She nodded.

“Say it, darlin’. We need to hear you say it.”

“I’m good. I’m okay.” She swallowed.

“You know what’s happening here?” He continued to study her face...her beautiful face. He’d never seen her human form before, but he’d have known her anywhere.

“Yes, you’re...you guys...” She looked from one man to the other. “You caught me. You win.” A tiny dimple appeared in the middle of her cheek, and she was suddenly a roguish charmer. Even in the dim light of the alley, her eyes sparkled with mischief.

Tex stepped back and looped the lariat around her a couple more times, making certain she was secured. The rope was soft, not like a working lariat, so it wouldn’t abrade her skin.

He stood in front of her, looking down into her face. “This is what we’re gonna do. We’re going back inside Dark Haven. You may not speak without permission. If someone asks you a direct question, you wait for me or Hunter to give you permission to speak.”

She jerked her chin up in that defiant motion once again. She was fighting against her impulse to submit to him.

“Do you understand?” He whispered the question, his voice low with warning. Her gaze held his and then dropped.

“Yes.”

“Excuse me, darlin’?”

Hunter growled softly in her ear. He probably didn’t know what Tex was fishing for, but instinct told Hunter that she was still rebellious. Hell, she’d been a domme here for months, most likely. Now she was just days away from her heat and had managed to lure not one but two mates to her side. Hunter’s wolf already knew what was happening. If she wasn’t dominated thoroughly, she’d be a holy terror when her fertility was upon her. They could easily lose her to another. It didn’t matter what sort of power dynamics existed outside of sex; during mating, the male had to be dominant, or he’d run the risk of losing his woman.

“I understand...Sir.”

Tex gazed at her, taking in the thick fringe of black eyelashes that rested on her cheek. Her face was smooth and serene. Nope, she wasn’t there yet.

“Not good enough.”

The look she gave him was on the cusp of anger, full of heat.

“What’d that human call you earlier this evening?” Hunter’s voice vibrated with anger. Jealousy.

He’d moved away from her back and now stood side by side with Tex. She looked at them from behind her lashes, anticipation blended with anxiety.

“He called me Mistress.”

“Then you’ll call us Master.” Tex reached out and lifted her chin. “You’ll call us Master,

and you'll mean it."

"Yes...Master."

She said it, but she didn't like saying it. Tex glanced up at Hunter and nodded. They each hooked a hand through an arm and turned her, then moved up toward the street and around the block till they came to the front entrance of the club. Hunter pulled the door open and let Holly and Tex precede him inside.

"Hey, Holly..." Destiny looked from her to the men as she trailed off. "Uh... Everything all right here, Holly?" She bent down to retrieve Tex's toy satchel and handed it over.

Holly looked up at Tex for permission to speak. He nodded.

"I'm fine. These are friends from home."

Suddenly the subby little receptionist became a wary tigress. She looked from Tex to Hunter and then back to Holly. "I was talking to *her*." She stared Tex down. "Now, Holly. Are you all right, or do I need to call a dungeon monitor?"

To everyone's surprise, Holly broke out into a smile—a sudden, tremulous smile. The expression shattered something inside of him; any residual anger that he harbored melted away like ice in the sun.

"It's okay, Destiny. These guys... I've been waiting on them for a while now." Her smile grew even bigger.

"That's enough." Tex tugged her arm, aware of the receptionist watching as they walked Holly into the club. He was grateful they cared for her, but impatient. He needed to get her downstairs. Now. He ignored the trembling of his hands and the racing of his heart.

Hunter followed them through the club and down the stairs, only peripherally aware of the music and dancing that surrounded them. A burst of cheers broke out; he glanced over and saw a poker game in progress. Apparently a dom had just lost his sub to the other player. He saw triumph flare in the expression of the winning player, and Hunter knew exactly how he felt.

Holly had been waiting. For them.

Damn! Why hadn't they come looking for her sooner?

Shame crept through his gut. They hadn't looked for her because once she'd left, he'd had absolutely no clue in which direction she'd gone. For the first time in his memory, his skills had deserted him. He'd always relied on that inner tracker to direct him, to give him the extra edge. With Holly, it had failed. That failure had haunted him, and the more he worried about Holly and his inability to track her, the less faith he had in himself.

Sometimes the only reason he got up and moved through his days was the incessant pushing from Tex. The other man had dragged him out on jobs, teaching him to put up walls and run wire through new buildings for Tex's construction firm. Along with some of the others, he'd painted walls and installed flooring. One by one, Chase's wolves had taken their tests and earned their certifications. Men and women who'd known nothing but fighting and

abuse were now contractors and artisans. When they had time off, Tex pulled them all in to work on the main lodge of the compound, bringing it back to the former glory of its heyday.

If it hadn't been for Tex, this last year would have been hell. The irony was, he treated Hunter no differently than any of the rest of the pack. He wondered if the cowboy had any clue what a difference he'd made in so many of their lives.

They descended the stairs, and the hush of the dungeon enfolded them. The party continued upstairs, yet it was as though they'd entered a different world. Spanking benches, bondage apparatus, and sex swings filled the room. There were small theme rooms for those who wished to play in private, and a giant, suspended bed for those who wished to share. Tex paused and glanced at him over his shoulder, the shadow of a grin starting on his face.

"So many ways to punish a naughty little wolf."

Hunter felt an answering smile begin on his own face. After so many months of not knowing, he felt lighter. Seeing Holly in her human form, healthy and clearly happy to see them? Well, that nearly made his head spin. They approached the big X-shaped frame that held Holly's scent as well as the scent of the human she'd pleased. Hunter clenched his jaw against an angry growl.

He'd fought his wolf for so very long, and up until tonight, he'd been certain that he'd mastered it. Obviously the creature had simply retreated. It was back in full force, eager to claim, to punish, and to romance his mate. He looked around the room, seeing through both aspects of his vision.

The wolf was repulsed by the scent of the other man and wished to leave.

The human wanted to see her bound and punished and well fucked.

Tex took the decision from him, and oddly, his usually dominant wolf didn't object. Hunter had long been one of Chase's betas, standing above most of the other males in the pack's hierarchy. To his surprise, the wolf was willing to allow Tex's animal to take the lead here in Dark Haven.

But then, he'd been looking to Tex as a teacher for some months now. Was the big, easy-going wolf actually dominant to him? He swallowed, putting that thought aside for the moment.

The three of them stood for a long moment in front of the cross. All of them scented the human's semen though it was shrouded under the stench of cleanser. After a minute or two, Holly glanced at them from under that fringe of heavy eyelashes.

"You made him climax." Tex no longer smiled.

Holly swallowed and then lifted her chin defiantly. What was going on in that amazing mind of hers?

"I didn't even have to touch him."

Then Tex gave her a wicked smile. "You're that good, eh?" He reached out and gently stroked her cheek. "Maybe someday you'll show me just how good you are. But not tonight." He let his hand fall away. "How d'you think you'll do at the other end of the whip?"

” He then unwound the lariat, rubbing her arms where the rope had bitten into her skin.

Hunter watched her carefully, expecting her to show anxiety or even fear. Instead she tilted her head and folded her arms over her chest. His wolf growled again in aroused pleasure. She was excited, yes, but having fun as well. When had Holly learned to play? He then remembered the hours she’d spent with Tex, playing chase and tackle on the great lawns at home.

Tex had taught her to play.

“Bend forward; hold on to the cross.” She looked at Tex with a slightly mutinous expression on her pretty face.

“Don’t make him tell you again,” Hunter murmured.

Holly glanced at him and then reluctantly complied. She leaned forward from the waist, her heart-shaped bottom tilting up temptingly. He reached out tentatively, then lightly ran a hand over her jeans. She didn’t protest, nor did he scent much fear. She was excited and maybe a tiny bit afraid. Not in a bad way, though.

“Now there’s a pretty sight.” Tex set down his bag and then squatted to open it. He rummaged around, pulling out soft ropes and a few objects Hunter didn’t recognize. Even so, he had a pretty good idea what some of the items would be used for. Holly looked over her shoulder, her eyes wide.

“So first things first. Our girl ran off without telling us...”

“Chase knew. So did Eva!”

Anger sparked through Hunter. There was nothing he could do about Chase except maybe feel relief that his alpha had a hand in this. But Eva? She’d overstepped her boundaries. Still, he was reluctantly grateful that she’d been keeping an eye on their girl.

Tex brought a big hand down on her ass in a solid, satisfying swat. She bit her lip and turned away.

“Speak when you’re spoken to, sub.” He ran his hand over the place he’d spanked.

“So, Hunter. Our girl ran away without telling us and left us to worry all this time. What do you think her punishment should be?”

Hunter looked from Tex to Holly and back. Her bottom still swayed temptingly, and the entire scenario became crystal clear. Holly and Tex were playing. There might be a sharp, sexual edge to this sort of play, but it drew him as powerfully as it drew his wolf. His arousal surged. There was only one answer.

“Holly needs a spanking. One swat for every month she stayed away from us.” He glanced at Tex, glad to see he’d answered correctly.

“Ten swats, eh? And five more for running us around town, plus another five for talking back just now.” Tex stepped up next to her and gave Holly a searching look. “Twenty swats, Holly. Bare hand to bare ass.”

He nodded, and without comment, Holly stepped back from the cross and waited for one

of them to lead the way. Tex stood, briefly debating between an A-frame apparatus and a spanking bench that reminded Hunter of a padded sawhorse. After a moment, he gestured to the bench.

“You need restraints, or you want to tough this out?”

Hunter had to admire the subtle insight he practiced on Holly. She’d spent plenty of time in restraints throughout her life. Personally, Hunter would have preferred her over his knees, but that might be too much intimacy for her.

“Bare hands?” she asked. Tex nodded. “I can deal. Master.” She reached down to unbuckle her belt. The jeans slipped down, revealing a pair of plain black cotton panties. Not a thong...panties.

Slowly she stepped out of her underwear and climbed up onto the bench. She lowered herself onto it and gripped the hanging leather cuffs. Tex’s big hand stroked, raised, and then he paused.

“Holly, what’s your safe word?”

“Safe word.” She frowned for a moment as though confused. “My subs always have their own.”

“How ’bout ‘bacon’?”

“Bacon?” Hunter and Holly sounded equally surprised.

“Holly always steals the bacon off my plate. And to slow things down, ‘eggs.’”

She turned around and looked at him in amazement. “Only you, Tex—*Master* Tex.” She turned back and rested her forehead against the padded bench. Her shoulders quaked as she laughed quietly.

“Hunter, if she says her safe word, everything stops. Period. If she says ‘eggs,’ that means you need to give her a break.”

Hunter nodded.

“And darlin’, if you’re good to go, it’s...”

“Toast.” She looked at him in mock solemnity.

“Sure. Why not. ‘Toast’ means she’s good to go.”

Hunter nodded in agreement. He swallowed and glanced around the room, noticing that people watched from the perimeter. He stood a bit taller. He wondered if these were Holly’s friends or maybe even her playmates. He wanted them to see. He wanted them to see that she was *theirs*.

“You ready, Holly?” Tex raised a hand over her bottom.

“I’ll start with the first ten. You count them off.”

She took a deep breath.

“Toast.”

## Chapter Five

At first it didn't hurt. Besides, Holly was no stranger to pain. She flinched slightly at the first strike and forced herself to relax. As she did so, heat began to spread, as did an insidious sting. The second blow stung more.

"Count, Holly." Tex's voice was hushed and intent. He smacked her ass a third time.

"Three..." Her voice was not only rough and low, but breathless as well.

"Nope. That was one."

"No, it was the thir—Ow!"

"You didn't count, and now you're sassing me again. Count from one."

The next slap came down, and she growled. "One."

Hunter laughed. He laughed! If she hadn't been so preoccupied with keeping track of Tex's hand on her bottom, she'd have been shocked. What was more, every time his hand came down, her arousal came up. If she hadn't been experiencing it, she'd never have believed it. By the time she reached the count of ten, her skin was hot, her face was flushed, and her cunt felt disconcertingly wet.

She knew some people got off on pain; she'd administered more than one spanking herself. But still, she was a top—a domme. Yes, it was the nature of her wolf to submit to its mates, but she—Holly—should be terrified at the loss of control. She wasn't. As she finished Tex's count, Hunter smoothly moved in.

To her relief, his first blow was tentative, almost gentle.

"No, not like that. Here... Feel this." She heard the sound of skin on skin and knew Tex demonstrated, most likely on Hunter's arm. She rested her head on the bench again, glad for the moment's respite. All too soon it ended with a sharp, stinging blow.

"Twelve!" she shrieked. "Yow!"

"Was that too hard?"

"Did she say her safe word?" She supposed Hunter must have shaken his head in response, because another blow came down, as hard as the one before. When she finally reached twenty, hands came down on her skin, stroking and soothing. She took a breath of relief.

"For such a tough little she-wolf, you sure make a hell of a lot of noise."

Holly almost shot him a dirty look, then pulled it back at the last minute. Tex was more than capable of punishing her, and right now, Holly needed a break.

"Can you see it?"

"What?"

More movement behind her, but she didn't bother to track them.

“She’s wet. Excited. Look, it dribbled down her thigh.”

Holly suddenly caught the scent of her own arousal. She was nearly as gratified as she was embarrassed. She moved her hands to cover her face. She felt...good. A little fuzzy. She rested her head on the padded bench and became peripherally aware of people watching. Spreading her fingers, she peeked. People who knew her...and she didn’t mind at all. Wasn’t that odd? Only a year ago she’d have been quivering in fear at the idea of so many humans. She felt a warm sensation in her belly—pride. This had been an amazing journey.

“Now, Holly, did I tell you to move?”

Crap. She shook her head.

“What was that again?”

She swallowed. “No, Master Tex.” She returned her hands to the straps and gripped them tightly. She bit her lip and then lifted her ass just a bit, knowing what she was doing to the men. She hoped her smile was hidden, because they were both still afraid to touch her. If they knew she was deliberately teasing them, she’d be in for another round of spanking.

On cue, she heard the sharp intake of breath and a muffled curse.

“Off there. Now.”

Hands on her arms steadied her; hands on her waist lifted her carefully and braced her as she caught her balance. Tex looked her over, checking her face, her eyes. Hunter gazed intently, first at Tex and then at Holly.

He was an apt student.

“Limits, Holly. Hard and soft.”

She thought for a moment and then looked up into Tex’s blue eyes. The smile was gone. “I don’t really know. I suppose I’ll know when we get there.”

“That’s not good enough.” He moved away, quickly cleaned up the area, and gathered his belongings.

“I suppose...bondage. Not right away. Maybe later.” Too many bad memories there, but eventually she’d face them head-on.

“Floggers? Single tails?”

“I’m fine with either. I can handle caning. I don’t like to hear whip cracking.” Again, too much of the past there. She’d stood for various whippings as she’d learned to be a domme, but the crack of the whip frightened her. It was a trigger. She’d heard that sound too often in the labs, knowing that one of her friends was suffering. “No humiliation. Please. Master.” She’d almost forgotten.

“Holly, you don’t have to do this. Any of it.” Hunter stepped up and looked at her intently. “But...you want to, don’t you?” He had a look of wonderment on his face.

Briefly Holly considered what she’d want from a sub at a moment like this. Slowly, carefully, she knelt in front of him, both hands behind her back. She wasn’t completely comfortable with the position of subservience, but she glanced up at Hunter and saw the



nearly feral gleam in his eye. And she winked.

“Naughty girl.” Tex reached out and tweaked a lock of her hair. He then stroked her head fondly. She fought the instinct to rest her head against his leg, but then gave in to the impulse, smelling Tex and the warm fragrance of his arousal. He smelled like leather and musk and wood. She looked up at his face, gauged his reaction, and was pleased. Hunter... He wasn’t quite so happy, so she sat back on her heels and gazed up at him. After a moment, his expression softened.

Who’d have thought she could manipulate them this way? A rush of satisfaction surged through her, and she dropped her gaze to the floor. While submitting to the men was natural and comforting, her inner domme grinned at the discovery. Her wolf grinned at the idea that she’d just outflanked the men.

“Very clever.” Tex stepped away, leaving her alone on the floor. “Our little wolf has just figured out how to top from the bottom.”

Hunter looked sharply in Tex’s direction, watching as the other man set his bag on a narrow table against the wall.

“Holly, come here.”

“Yes, Master,” she murmured. Feeling a bit deflated, Holly stood before Tex while Hunter was at her back.

“Tie her wrists in front of her. Not too tight.” He tossed Hunter a length of rope. She watched carefully as Hunter looped the rope around her wrists. Tex examined it and nodded in approval. “There’s more we can do with rope, but maybe another time. Rope is kind of a hobby of mine.”

She was fully aware that he knew how to use that lariat on his hip. A little flurry of alarm ran through her at the thought of what else he could do to her with that rope. Briefly, the memory of being bound to a table broke into her thoughts. She pushed it back, returning to the moment. This was Tex, and she’d always been safe with him.

Upstairs there was a winch for suspension play. She’d never learned much about rope work herself; it made her too uneasy.

“Hunter, there’s a hook up there. Raise her arms and loop the rope over it.” He’d lowered the hook to just the proper height for Holly. She was stretched, but not uncomfortably so. If she needed to, she could slip her hands loose. Her bare feet were planted squarely on the carpeted floor. Tex was starting her easy, challenging her fear of being bound but giving her a path to escape if she needed it.

Slowly tension began to seep out of her, and Holly looked at Tex. His face was neutral, but she sensed that his attention was sharply focused on her. She caught his gaze, nodded briefly, and dropped hers.

“Hunter, why don’t you show me what we’ve been dying to see all evening?” Tex was back at the table, rummaging in the bag. “Unbutton her vest.”

Hunter’s fingers hovered over the leather vest she’d bought for that evening. She’d saved

tips for over a month and had found it at a thrift store on Haight Street. Hunter looked down into her face. “What part of breakfast are we at?” He stroked the top button.

“Toast.”

He lifted a brow.

“Master.”

He smiled at her response, and for a moment her heart stopped and time stood still. She wanted to reach out, stroke her fingers over that tight little smile...into the tiny dimple that played at the corner of his mouth. Had he ever smiled at her like that before? She blinked, looked down, and the first button was open. And then the second. Holly looked to where Tex leaned against the table, watching intently.

Cool air kissed her skin.

“Hunter, does the bra unfasten in the front or back?”

“F...front.”

Holly didn’t look down; she knew what they were seeing—the smooth, white mounds of her breasts, not too large or small. Unmarked and firm. Rosy tips peeked through the black lace of the demi-bra. She hadn’t taken care with her panties, not expecting to display them. Her bra, though, was meant to showcase her breasts behind the leather of her vest.

Hunter’s fingers trembled slightly as he unfastened the bra, but he smoothly peeled it to the sides. She dropped her gaze, suspecting that this was a powerful moment for both men. Closing her eyes, Holly felt her nipples draw up and pebble in the cool air. Her breath came a bit faster.

A warm hand cupped one breast; a warm mouth covered the other. Opening her eyes, she then saw Tex’s golden head and Hunter’s dark hand. Her legs went weak, but her weight was supported by the ropes that bound her wrists.

She groaned at the twin sensations and shivered as Hunter came down to her for a kiss—their second ever. Would she count every kiss in the future? She hoped there’d be too many to keep track of.

He was gentle this time, exploring, learning his way around her lips. He probed gently with his tongue, and she knew he’d been watching and learning from Tex. She hadn’t been kissed often, mostly allowing her subs to show their gratitude with a kiss to her hand or cheek. Never on the lips. That privilege had been reserved for the very rare man who’d appealed to her enough to pique her curiosity. And she’d never before been moved by the embrace. Now the sweetness of Hunter’s kiss brought tears to her eyes even as Tex’s mouth did amazingly carnal things to her breast.

Both men tasted and teased, one making her heart beat faster; the other drawing a twisting arousal to her belly. The heat from her buttocks softened to a seductive warmth that crept between her legs; she throbbed and swelled with excitement.

Before she could comprehend what was happening, their hands left her body, and she was left alone and cold. For the first time in her life, Holly understood sexual frustration.

She nearly screamed with it.

## Chapter Six

She was such a complicated woman.

Tex thought of himself as a simple man, and he found himself nearly paralyzed with the challenges he was facing. He hadn't missed Hunter's involuntary flinch when they'd briefly touched during the first moments of Holly's seduction. In spite of the challenges she presented, Holly was proving to be less problematic than her other mate.

Tex moved back to the bench along the wall to take a few moments to sort out his next move. He watched Hunter, acknowledging that the man was truly beautiful. He was all restrained passion and repressed sexuality. Like Holly, he was scarred to the core. Tex sighed and briefly wished his friend Rico was here. The man had insight and common sense that Tex lacked. Holly's fear was something she'd tackled head-on. She was in tune with her feelings and emotions. Hunter? The man hadn't even been aware of the fact that he'd flinched from Tex.

If Hunter didn't find a way to overcome his fear of being touched by other men, he'd not only split up the three of them before the relationship even got off the ground, he'd also live a life of higher stress and loneliness. Wolves not only liked touch, they needed it. Chase had designed the communal living room in the big resort with generous couches, cushions on the floor, and soft carpeting, all with the idea of puppy piles and casual contact. In the years that Hunter had been with the pack, Tex had never seen him voluntarily touch another person, not even his fellow betas.

He glanced up and saw Hunter looking at him impatiently. Holly was still suspended, her eyes downcast. She'd been watching him, though. And if Tex was right, she was most likely aware of his concern. Going years without speaking had taught her to observe and to listen. She also knew Hunter better than he did. He'd seek her advice, but not tonight.

Tonight was for other things. Tonight they were going to play.

He reached into his kit, deciding it was time to move Holly along. She had limits beyond those she'd stated, though she might not be aware of them herself. She didn't like being bound, and Tex was certain she wouldn't like losing her senses. He tossed a blindfold to Hunter.

"Put that on her." He turned away, calculating how quickly he could push her out of her comfort zone. Most subs he'd played with in the past had clear limits and rules. Holly wasn't afraid of pain, and she had a few true phobias he didn't want to push. At the same time, she was dominant by nature. She wouldn't break easily, so he could take some risks. He pulled a plug and lube from his bag and set it to the side. It was the last thing she'd see before she was blindfolded.

Hunter slipped the soft black mask over her face, and immediately Holly tilted her head, listening and scenting. With a grin, Tex slipped a bottle from his kit. He moved to her side. "Hold still." He opened the small brown bottle and dabbed the roller on her upper lip, just below her nostrils. The scent of lavender floated into the air. It was a gentle way to confuse

her sense of smell.

She sneezed.

He then opened a packet containing soft foam earplugs. He handed one to Hunter and then pushed back her silky black hair, admiring her graceful, slightly pointed ear before stopping it with the plug.

“Can you still hear me?”

She nodded.

“Holly, are you ready for a little more?”

She moved her head, clearly seeking out the sound of his voice. She could hear just enough to listen to his instructions. Her nipples grew tighter, and goose bumps rose along her arms. She shivered, but her scent held no fear.

“Hunter, move to her front; play with her gently.”

The wolf swallowed hard and nodded. Hunter played with her nipples, stroking and then pinching. She flexed and swayed. Her pale body was supple in the dim light.

“Lift her leg. Prop her foot on your knee.”

Tex picked up the plug and lubed it generously. It was slender, just enough to give her a slight stretch. He pressed the tip to her anus. Automatically she tightened against it.

“Relax. You’ve done this to subs before?”

“Yes, Master.”

Good. Then she knew the drill. In fact, if her mentor made her experience flogging, she’d probably worn a plug as well. He stroked the smooth skin of her bottom and started again. This time she worked with him, and Tex was able to insert the plug completely. He set her leg down, smiling as she wiggled a bit, getting the feel of the plug.

Tex breathed deeply. The adrenaline surged through his body, making him a little high. He chose a soft, thuddy flogger and a slender cane, which he tucked into his belt. Aware that Hunter watched, he stepped around and behind Holly again, taking a moment to admire her still-rosy ass.

“Spread your legs.”

After a short pause, she obeyed. He twirled the flogger and then softly swatted her bottom. She jumped. When he whisked her sharply with the cane, she quickly took her position again. Hunter leaned forward, pressing a kiss into her shoulder.

“Be still, Holly.”

She licked her lips nervously and nodded. Beads of sweat rose on her forehead. Tex began again, raising the speed of the heavy flogger, relying on Hunter to give him cues to her emotions.

Smoothly he changed back to the cane and tapped it lightly across her thighs. She went tense. After a series of light blows, he settled one single, stinging strike over the center of

her buttocks. She went rigid but didn't move.

"Good girl." He stroked her skin and reached between her open thighs, smiling at the slick moisture there. "Very nice."

He reached around and rubbed his wet finger over her lips, waiting till she opened her mouth. He slipped his finger into the warmth, nearly losing control as she tentatively tasted herself.

"Touch her."

Hunter hesitated and then ran his hand down her belly, down to the dark curls at the juncture of her thighs. When Holly's body jerked, Tex knew Hunter had found her clit. The wide-eyed expression on his face confirmed Tex's suspicion that it was entirely by accident.

"Gentle there, Hunter. Just stroke softly. Let her body show you what she likes." He reached down, and his fingers met Hunter's hand. He covered the other man's fingers and guided him, letting him explore and discover. After a moment, he let Hunter continue on his own. Clearly he was a quick learner.

Holly's quickened breathing and heightened color confirmed her arousal. The sharp edge to her scent told him she was reaching her limit. Panic was struggling to assert itself. With his free hand, he removed one of the earplugs.

Immediately her tension dropped. He wanted her out of her comfort zone, but not distracted by fear.

"You feel what he's doing to you, darlin'? You like what Hunter's doing to you?"

She nodded rapidly. Sweat trickled down her neck, and Tex slowly licked it off. She whimpered.

"Holly, have you ever had an orgasm before?"

Too quickly, she answered, "Yes."

He swatted her sharply with the cane.

"N-no. Never." Her cheeks flushed red. He ran the base of the cane down her spine, grinning as she shuddered. Between Hunter finger-fucking her, the questioning, and the occasional punishment, she was completely off balance.

"Would you like to come tonight? Now?"

The gasp she gave sounded as though she'd been punched in the gut. He peered over, cupped his hands over her breasts, and watched her supple, muscular belly undulate.

She nodded. Before he could use the cane, she answered properly. "Yes, Master."

"Good girl." He bit lightly into the meat of her shoulder and then kissed her tenderly.

Normally he'd make a sub wait and earn his or her climax, but with Holly, just bringing her to orgasm would be a triumph.

"Hunter. Trade places. Hold her for me."

When he moved to her front, Tex saw a ring of watchers throughout the dungeon.

Possession and pride warred within. He didn't want everyone to see his woman naked and vulnerable, yet he wanted to put his—their—stamp of ownership on her. Meeting Hunter's gaze, the other man nodded. Hunter bent to her, then kissed and nibbled the back of her neck. Once again he played her nipples, pinching and stroking. He moved up behind her so close that he supported her entire weight. He rocked his hips into her ass. Not bad for a novice.

Tex lowered himself to one knee, just level with her lower belly. He ran his hands over her belly before leaning in and kissing her just above the line of her pubic hair.

"Make noise, baby. Tell me if you like it."

She really didn't make much noise, but her gasping breaths told him what he needed to know. Tex stroked her slick folds, running her juice back and forth, making her thoroughly, completely wet. He looked up and watched her face as he slipped his fingers into her channel and quickly found the swollen, raised region of her G-spot. When he pressed, her hips bucked, and the low, rough groan she released sounded more like agony than bliss.

But she didn't object, didn't call out her safe word. Her mouth dropped open, she panted, and her head fell back onto Hunter's broad shoulder.

Without releasing the pressure, Tex bent his head and tasted her, gently played with her, avoiding the hypersensitive head of her clit. He slowly pressed and released, thrusting his fingers into her body.

"Tell him, Holly." Hunter's voice was rough with arousal.

"Good. I'm good. Toast, toast, toast..." For a moment she lost her words. "I need...I need... Oh dear God...faster..." Her voice was louder. She probably couldn't tell how loud with the single earplug in, but Tex wanted to smile anyway.

Hunter held her tightly, not allowing her to move, forcing her to remain completely at Tex's mercy. Her body arched and quivered, her hips shuddered, but he prevented her from thrusting. Tex looked up and saw that Hunter was watching. His eyes had shifted from human to wolf. He was as out of control as Tex had ever seen him, yet he was holding on, anticipating what Tex wanted from the scene.

He pulled at one nipple, and she cried out.

Now. It was time.

Tex burrowed, fluttered his tongue, and his fingers thrust into her and held while Hunter growled in her ear. Their gazes met, and Tex knew he'd found his perfect partner.

"Now, Holly!" Hunter clasped her soft breast hard.

Her scream was strangled. Heat radiated from her body, and Holly came. She climaxed on his fingers, against his mouth. He felt the rhythmic surges of her body, tasted the heightened adrenaline in her fluids. As she peaked, Tex gasped for breath, looking up to watch as she broke into pieces, sweat gleaming on her skin. She screamed again, and the cry tapered off to a sob. There were probably tears as well. She hung from the bonds at her wrists, and Hunter rested his forehead at the crook of her neck, whispering softly into her

ear. Tex rose slowly to his feet. His erection was tight and painfully hard against the denim of his jeans.

He didn't care. As Hunter unbound and lowered her hands, Tex leaned into her, letting her weight drop into his body. He almost lacked the strength to hold her, and they swayed until Hunter's arms came around Holly and held them both upright. She twisted her hands loose of the rope and pulled the mask away, revealing that she'd been crying.

"Aw...darlin'..."

She smiled. *She smiled!* Her face was flushed and damp with tears, but she smiled at him.

Soft applause came from the outskirts of the dungeon.

Tex stifled a laugh.

"Can we maybe move this party somewhere else? I think..." Hunter looked around, glaring at their audience. "I think maybe that bed thing over there?" He gestured to the hanging orgy bed. The large, swinging platform bed was curtained by hanging chains. It would do.

"Take her on over. I've got to pack up."

Hunter lifted Holly into his arms, and as they moved across the room, Tex watched them.

One barrier had fallen. It had been easier than he'd expected. He prayed the next part of his plan would go off equally well. He picked up the flogger he'd set on the floor and unhooked the cane from his belt. As he began to put his toys away, a presence at his back made him go stiff and still.

"I suppose this would be the appropriate time to ask, just what the *hell* do you think you're doing?"



## Chapter Seven

It took Hunter a moment to catch his balance on the bed. He'd lifted Holly up, and she'd crawled up to the fluffy pillows; he awkwardly followed her. When he gingerly settled into place, he was frightened...worried about what they'd just done. Had they pushed her too far? He couldn't pin this one on Tex alone, because he'd fully participated, following along as the other man took the lead.

His thoughts came to a screeching halt when a soft, lavender-fragranced body twined around his and cuddled close. He went stiff, his body protesting the sudden intimacy even as his cock went hard, willing him to take her right then and there. Slowly he forced himself to relax, willing the erection away.

He'd had plenty of practice at doing that.

He licked his dry lips. "How are you?"

Such a huge question in those few words. Holly dragged her head up to look at him, her black hair straggled over her face. He reached up to smooth it away, noting with wonderment that she didn't flinch.

"Right now? High." Her head dropped as though she hadn't the strength to hold it up. "Melly. Empty, but full."

She lay quietly for a moment, and he remembered the man they'd found earlier. Tex had told him the man was cooling down, that he'd reached a mental state called "subspace." Judging by the expression on Tex's face tonight, he'd gone to a similar place in his head as well. Hunter glanced over and could barely see him though the silvery curtain around the bed.

"Overall, I'm doing good." Her voice was sleepy. She almost sounded drunk. "I thought you guys would have found me sooner. Some tracker you are!" She gave an indignant snort.

"Would you have been ready for this if we'd come sooner?"

She sighed gently. "No. No, I wouldn't have. Still, why didn't you come?"

"You left no clues for me. No scent trail. Nothing."

Her hand crept up to his chest, and she played with the edge of his shirt. "I thought...I thought you could track without a trail."

"I don't know... It was like I was head-blind. I needed something. And your trail... It just stopped. You got into a car." He huffed out a breath, his ego still a bit tender regarding that failure. If he could sense the movement of a vampire over a mile away, why had he been unable to follow Holly?

"Chase."

He glanced over at her.

"Nobody seems to be able to keep a secret from Chase. When I ran, he was at the road,

waiting for me. He told me I was on my own but never alone. I guess maybe he blocked you.”

Hunter frowned. Could their alpha do that? Hell, except for the normal, original pack members, they all had something a little extra. So if Ethan and Kurt could tag team on emotions, maybe Chase had been able to suppress Hunter’s skills long enough to let Holly have her time away from the pack.

He should be royally pissed, but looking at her, he simply couldn’t find the anger. If he’d found her and dragged her home, she’d probably still be a wolf sleeping at Tex’s feet.

“What do you think of all this? The club and all?”

He looked around, catching glances of movement, finally paying attention to the moans of the subs, the slapping of leather against skin. In the corner, Xavier stood swathed in shadows, surveying the room.

“I’m not sure what I think, but I get it. My wolf gets it.” He flushed with the confession. His wolf was a near stranger now. Tonight it had come forth as it hadn’t in years. He thought he’d mastered it—broken it and stored it away. When the damn thing had roared back to life tonight, he couldn’t remember the last time he’d felt so alive. But still, the animal was a killer. He couldn’t expose Holly to it. And if they had children someday, would they even be safe?

“I’m not a sub, Hunter.”

“You’re submissive to me.” He glared at her for a moment, satisfied as her gaze dropped. He clasped her chin and forced her to look at him again. “You’ll do what I—what *we*—tell you.”

“Here, maybe,” she conceded. She wasn’t coy. She didn’t play games with her words.

He slid a hand into her hair and tugged till her head tilted back. Her blue eyes burned with anger and arousal. “Tonight. After we’re finished here, we’re going home.”

She sat up in alarm. “No... Hunter, I have a job and roommates! I’m finally learning to be myself!”

He loosened her hand from his arm, looking pointedly at the slightly tapered nails. Tiny spots of red blood began to rise on his skin.

“Chase didn’t send you for me, did he?” There was a tinge of fear to her voice. If Chase called her back, she’d be unable to say no. Seeing her consternation, Hunter took a breath, forcing himself to calm down. She’d left home to learn to be independent and find herself. Under normal circumstances, he’d be willing to move slower, to let her make the decision. Unfortunately times were changing, and not for the better.

“No, we came for another reason. Xavier—”

“Master Xavier,” she interrupted.

“*Master* Xavier called Chase. A kid kinda manifested in his office. He thought we might know something about it.”

True alarm showed on her face. “Abraxas?”

“Don’t know for sure, but we can’t take the risk. You need to come home. Tonight.” His skin prickled, and he looked up, then shivered as Master Xavier stared directly at them. To his mortification, Hunter looked away first. Holly noticed.

“Don’t feel bad. He’s a dominant. A true master. It’s a trait not many humans possess. I certainly can’t stare him down.” She looked over at Xavier, who smiled and nodded, then turned away. He’d been checking up on her.

They were both sitting up now, and Hunter gazed down at her body. She was lithe and beautiful, as comfortable in her skin as she’d been in her pelt. His hard-on hadn’t completely gone away since he’d first stepped into this place, and now arousal slammed into him once again. He swallowed, forced it back.

“If he was a shifter, he’d be an alpha.”

She nodded. “Not like most alphas, though. Like Chase. Someone who masters the other dominants.” Her gaze followed Xavier as he moved through the room in Tex’s direction. She slid back down on the bed and rested her head on Hunter’s thigh.

“So, here’s the big question. How are *you*?” She looked up at him, her eyes dark and intense. “You were close there for a while.”

“Yeah, I was... I am turned on. But that was for you.”

She smiled and reached up to stroke his face. “No, not close to orgasm. Your wolf. He was closer than I’ve sensed in years.”

Hunter moved away abruptly, letting her head slip from his thigh. “It won’t happen again. I promise.”

She reached out and clasped his arm, stopping him from leaving their temporary lair.

“That’s not right, Hunter. You need your wolf. You need to...” She sighed as he turned away. Hunter stared out at the room, seeing nothing.

“I need to stay in control. You know what I did, Holly.” He wanted to sound firm, maybe even angry. Instead he sounded small and pathetic.

“I *saw* what you did. You fought until you passed out.”

He flinched.

“You did what the rest of us wanted to do if we’d been free. Those people... They hurt me. They hurt all of us, Hunter.”

“They didn’t stand a chance.”

“No. They didn’t. But they knew what we were. And you know, we didn’t stand a chance against them. Not when they used control collars and drugs. Not when they killed us casually as though we were...rodents or bugs.”

Hunter sighed and rolled away to lie on his side. When she came up behind him and wrapped her arms around his body, he remained motionless, torn between the peace of the

moment and the confusion of emotions that raced through his mind. He couldn't let the issue die. He didn't turn to look at her as he spoke.

"Did they rape you?"

She was quiet for a long moment, her hand falling still on his chest.

"Not the same way they did some of the men. They'd come for me, knock me unconscious, and then I'd wake up back in my cage. A few weeks later, they'd test me. If I was pregnant, they'd leave me alone. If I wasn't..." He understood what she wasn't saying. Fury raced along his spine, but relief came over him as well. She'd been spared the humiliation of the sort of violation he'd endured.

As though he was unable to refrain from touching a sore spot, he forged on to the next fear that had been preying on him.

"Do you love him?"

"Tex?"

He nodded. He already knew the answer, already knew she'd chosen, and much as he might wish otherwise, she'd chosen them both.

"I initially ran when I realized I loved both of you. My wolf... She'd been growing...possessive. And when he'd come back from a town, I'd scent his lovers. I was furious. I was angry with you too."

"Me? I wasn't doing anything."

"Exactly." She gave a little chuckle. "You weren't doing anything to connect with me. You watched and brooded. When Tex would come home, you'd be angry too, but you'd just turn away like it was none of your business."

He rolled to his back, and his defensive anger faded in the face of her nudity. "*It wasn't* my business, Holly."

She lay there on her side, and the curves of her body mesmerized him. She stretched and then sat up, her face just inches from his.

"Tex was—and is—your business. He's not your mate, and I know that being lovers with him isn't on the table for you. But he's your partner in this. Do you realize that every time he touches you, you flinch away?"

Hunter's cheeks grew hot with embarrassment. Anger. He looked away.

"Don't be angry at me, Hunter."

Mutely he shook his head. Swallowed. He simply had no words to address this issue. He hadn't realized he'd been so obvious. When the chain curtain parted, Tex lightly hopped on the bed, grinning as it swayed. Hunter wondered if he'd overheard.

"Kinda like being in a tree house. In the wind." He lowered himself to sit Indian style. He'd kicked off his boots and socks. Hunter glanced down at his own black cowboy boots. All thoughts of play had fled.

“You two look a bit long in the face.”

Neither volunteered an answer, and as he watched, Tex’s bright eyes dimmed just a bit.

“Had me a nice conversation with that girl from the front. Desiree.”

“Destiny,” Holly corrected.

“Yeah, her. She’s a real nice girl; seems real fond of you, Holly.” He winked at Hunter.

“Threatened to take off my balls with a grapefruit spoon if I messed with you.”

“Ow!” Hunter winced, bringing a laugh from both of them.

“So, little miss. She’s waiting over there for you to come tell her we’re the loves of your life...your knights in black leather. In your own words, of course.”

Holly smiled, leaned forward, and kissed him—once on the forehead, once on the lips. She turned to Hunter and gave him the same embrace. Without so much as a blush, she slipped from the platform.

“Be quick. And don’t forget to bring your clothes back,” Tex reminded her.

Holly ducked her head back through the chains. “Yes, Master.”

He chuckled as she left. When he turned to Hunter, the smile slowly faded. For a few heartbeats, he studied Hunter, and Hunter grew uncomfortable as the moment stretched out. His wolf...his wolf stirred, whined, and settled back down, leaving him with the uneasy feeling of abandonment.

“Hunter, my solemn vow to you: I will never, ever push you into anything you don’t want. I will do my best not to make you uncomfortable, but the reality is, if she shares her bed with us, there will be contact. I won’t initiate anything or do it on purpose, but it will happen.”

Hunter’s eyes stung. He looked away and watched Holly talk to the girl at the other end of the room.

“Do you trust me?”

Hunter looked down; his fingers were entwined. He was completely unaware he’d been wringing his hands.

“I do, Tex. I do. Since we came to your pack, you’ve been there for me...for all of us, but mostly for me.”

Tex nodded in agreement. He propped his arms on his knees, and his hands dangled down. They were tough hands, hardened by countless hours of hard work. Hunter rubbed his fingers together, feeling similar calluses on his own skin. When he’d first come to Truckee, he’d been wild still, shy and fearful. Frankly, he’d been pretty much good for nothing. Unlike Chase’s men, he hadn’t been trained for battle. He knew how to fight...he knew how to take orders. He’d fought his way up to become one of the pack’s betas. He’d fought equally hard to earn his place on one of Tex’s construction crews.

Why? To help the pack, or to bond with the other man?

“You’re bi. You like men.” He kept his gaze low, unwilling to see the expression on Tex’s face.

“I am, and I do like men. But being mated... That’s a big change in the game.”

“How?”

Tex sighed. “Hunter, my entire sexual focus is on her. If you were bi, we might eventually go there, but you aren’t.”

“And it doesn’t bother you?”

“Are you able to have my baby?”

Hunter looked at him in confusion.

“We aren’t human, my friend. At our core, we’re animals. We’re driven by the need to hunt, to stay warm and dry, and to reproduce. Everything else we are springs from that. Sex with you could be fun, but it’s not an issue of survival. To survive as a species, we need food, shelter, and we need to reproduce. My wolf can’t see past Holly. She’s my sexual focus, and you’re my partner.”

He made it sound so logical. And slowly, Hunter began to believe him.

“Are we friends?”

Tex laughed at his question. “Yes, we are friends, Hunter. Maybe not the way Ethan and Kurt are friends, but still, you’re my friend. Given the circumstances, I guess we’d better be, eh? We seem to be in it for life.”

Life. This was all about life and surviving and the next generations of the pack. He looked at Tex. The cowboy leaned back now, braced on his elbows. His eyes were closed. He appeared relaxed, but was undoubtedly in tune with the entire building.

That was when it hit him: Tex made him stronger. And he did the same for Tex. During Holly’s absence, they’d formed a powerful bond. It was something Hunter hadn’t anticipated, and yet it was precious.

“She told me she left because of us. She left because she loved us both.”

“And the two of us weren’t gettin’ with the program, were we?” He didn’t open his eyes as he spoke. “I was out fucking around, trying to figure out how to scratch the itch. You were lost in anger and confusion, and our darlin’ Holly was too afraid to risk taking her human form and claiming us as her mates.”

Hunter gnawed on his lip. “It wasn’t a bad thing, was it? We all came a long way this past year.”

“That we have.” Tex flopped onto his back. “What’s taking that girl? I think it’s time to move this party along.”

Hunter closed his eyes, remembering Holly’s orgasmic cries, and within seconds, blood was filling his shaft. He replayed the interlude, hearing her cries, tasting the salty sweetness of her skin and fluid. Those images segued into things that hadn’t yet happened: plowing deep into her pussy, her arms bound... Holly pinned beneath his weight. He imagined a

bed... Four posters with stout leather bindings for her hands and feet... His skin went warm—and not completely out of embarrassment.

Uncomfortably he glanced at Tex, noting that his jeans were tight with his erection. Had he been having similar fantasies? A lifetime of want and need was coming to a close. A new path opened, and Hunter could barely absorb its meaning. He'd come to accept a future alone, and now he was looking at a mate and children. He was looking at a partner who watched his back and, more important, would help keep their family safe and secure.

His sexual frustration had an edge it lacked before. He was impatient. Knowing that culmination was within his grasp, Hunter felt nearly wild with need.

"Sometimes it's the dominant who suffers the most," Tex murmured, deep dimples showing in his cheeks. He reached down and unfastened the lariat from his hip. "I'm tired of behaving. How 'bout you?"

## Chapter Eight

“Holly, in all the months you’ve been here, you never mentioned a boyfriend. You certainly didn’t mention two boyfriends!”

Destiny stood before her. She should have looked silly wearing nothing but cheap plastic nipple shields and toy six-shooters. She tilted her head, and a tiny diamond flashed on her upper lip. Like Holly, the curvy little woman was completely comfortable in her skin.

Tentatively Holly reached out and rested a hand on the other woman’s arm. She felt a frisson of...something. Destiny started to pull her arm away and then stopped to turn her hand to grip Holly’s arm.

“Really, sweetie, are you okay? You worked so hard to find your inner dommie self. Then these guys show up, rope you, and lead you around the club? It’s just...weird. Sexy as hell, but weird.”

“Not weird.” Holly smiled. “I’ve known Hunter most of my life. Tex...years now. I left home because my wo—I knew we were meant to be together. But they needed to figure it out without me in the way. Now they’re here, and it’s all good.”

She bit her lip, inwardly chiding herself for almost saying the word “wolf.” Hopefully the other woman hadn’t noticed.

Destiny folded her arms, a frown on her pretty face. She’d changed her hair again; the golden curls were spiked with purple. Holly briefly wondered about doing the same thing. Maybe blue...

“And you’re leaving with them?”

Holly looked away, unable to meet her friend’s gaze. San Francisco had opened a new world to her. Not only the club and the scene, but people...thousands of people. Traffic and buildings and gemstones of history hidden between decay and renewal. Music and art and food she’d never before encountered. Dim sum and high tea and a different museum every day.

Uneasiness stirred in her gut. What was the story with the boy who’d appeared out of nowhere?

Abraxas.

“I need to go home, Des. But in a way, this city’s my home too. We live only a few hours away. Near Tahoe. Maybe you could come visit me.”

She bit her lip after offering the invitation but then relaxed. Sometimes Briony had her friends up; one of the betas just ran a flag up the pole in the front yard, warning that there were humans on the grounds.

“Tahoe. That’s like...mountains and snow and wild things.” Destiny wrinkled her nose. “Maybe, but only for you.” She grinned.

Holly glanced back at the men. The silvery chains around the bed partially obscured



them from her view. The bed was toward the back of the room and was barely lit. Her belly jumped, a feeling she was beginning to associate with arousal.

“I’ll call you, Des.” She turned back, noting that her friend’s smile had once again fled.

“What’s your number? Shit. That’s right. No cell. What a barbarian!”

“I’ll get one. Soon.” Feeling bold, Holly leaned forward and gave the shorter woman a brief hug. It felt awkward, but she was certain that with practice, it would become easier.

It was time to go. She felt them both watching...waiting. Neither had reached culmination, and surely they wouldn’t let her forget that. She turned from Destiny, and without looking back, she crossed the room.

“Hey, Holly! Your clothes!” Holly stopped and laughed, and then gasped when a rope settled over her head and torso then snapped tight to pin her arms. Destiny burst out into laughter. “Looks like you’re tied up again, baby!” She set the clothes on a bench near the stairs. “Come and get them when you’re ready.” With that, she started up the stairs.

A tug on the rope brought Holly’s attention back to the bed and the men who were waiting.

The game was back on. She stifled her grin, dropped her gaze, and walked obediently to the swinging platform. She dropped to her knees, waiting for the next command.

“Holly.”

“Yes, Master Hunter.” She didn’t look up but ran the risk of peeking through her lashes. Tex and Hunter reclined on the bed, both looking dangerously relaxed. The men were staring at her. Their comfort was belied by the intense expressions on their faces. She could see the shadow of their erections through the heavy denim of their jeans. Her belly quivered in both fear and arousal. She remembered the orgasm they’d given her, and her head went momentarily light. She’d never dreamed a physical response to stimulation would be so all-encompassing, surging through every cell of her body. She’d never expected it to shatter her emotions, bringing her to both laughter and tears.

“Check and see if any of the rooms are vacant.”

Tex’s voice pulled her back to the moment. She went high on her knees, straining to look over her shoulder. “Yes, Master Tex. The door to the Medieval Room is open.”

“Go there. Close the door and wait for us. We’ll join you shortly.”

She rose to her feet, puzzling over the rope that still pinned her arms. Was she to take it off? Leave it? Since Tex said nothing, Holly left the rope in place and walked to the room. She couldn’t use her arms normally, so she worked the soft rope with her fingers, pulling it into the room so she could get the door closed properly. She fussed with the door for several moments, then finally clasped the handle with her fingers and walked forward to drag it shut. Immediately she was surrounded by the hushed atmosphere of the little room.

She’d been in here a few times, mostly when she was working as dungeon monitor. Holly was more comfortable playing in the open. Too much could happen in privacy. Things could go too far when the lights were dim and the doors were closed. She swallowed. This

time she wanted the privacy. She wanted the two men to herself, with no prying eyes to witness their consummation.

There were peepholes, mostly for safety purposes. This room wasn't set up for voyeurism like the Victorian Room was.

She surveyed the space, finally deciding to wait right in the middle of the stone-paved floor. Would they want her on her feet or on her knees as she waited?

*What would I expect of a sub?*

She kicked a flat silk pillow to her chosen spot and lowered herself to her knees, then sat back on her heels.

There were furs and pillows piled all around the floor, as well as a low platform bed and a thronelike wooden chair. Large silver goblets winked at her in the muted light. A wooden box on a rough table held condoms and lube packets. Bindings and other accoutrements were tucked away in drawers and cubbies around the room.

Holly let out a breath and took in another, feeling as though she hadn't had oxygen in weeks.

She wasn't a virgin—not physically. That part of her had been taken away long ago. But in all the ways that counted, she *was* a virgin. That was something that could only be given, not taken. Her mouth was dry, and she still caught the scent of lavender; it blocked her sense of smell just a bit. When Tex had shut down her senses, she'd been forced inside her head, with only their hands on her skin to let her know where she was and who she was with. Sensory deprivation had allowed Holly to focus on what the men were doing to her. Otherwise she'd never have orgasmed.

Through the cushion, the rocks bit into her knees, but she tuned that out, remembering the sensation of their hands on her body, teasing her then making her come. Her heartbeat accelerated, and fluid began to trickle from her channel. Knowing how she reacted to them excited her more. She slowed her breathing, aware that her nipples had drawn up hard and tight.

Tex had wound her up, brought her to the edge, but it had been Hunter's touch on her breast, his command in her ear that had pushed her over the edge. He was submissive to Tex only because he was learning. Given time, she'd have two men dominating her...taking control of her pleasure.

This time, she wanted to see. She wanted to touch and taste. She had to do everything just right so she could ask for permission to watch. She straightened her back and stretched the kinks from her muscles. As soon as she heard a hand on the doorknob, she bowed her head, checked her stance, and waited.

“You didn't bring back your clothes.”

Tex didn't sound pleased, and inwardly, she cursed. He'd roped her before she had a chance to go back! He entered the room, setting the small pile on the floor by the wall. Should she apologize?

“The sub seeks permission to speak, Master.”

“Permission given.” Hunter answered this time. Good; he was stepping up to his role.

She licked her lips nervously. “The sub made a mistake and wishes to offer her apologies.”

“Does the sub seek forgiveness?”

She thought fast. Is this how her subs worked her? Were they really as manipulative as she was?

“The sub asks forgiveness, but only if it is the masters’ wish.”

“Oh, very good, Holly.” Tex stepped in front of her and used two fingers to gently tilt her head up. “She’s setting us up to negotiate, most likely for something she wants later. What do you suppose our little sub is angling for?”

Damn! Holly slanted her eyes away. “The sub wishes only to please her masters.” Tex let go, and she dropped her head respectfully.

“Apology is accepted. Forgiveness...” Hunter paused. “Forgiveness is pending.”

He wasn’t talking about forgotten clothing or the game they played. Hunter was still angry she’d left them. She glanced quickly at Tex. He wasn’t smiling either. What had they been talking about in those few minutes she’d been gone?

Suddenly the game wasn’t frivolous anymore. For the first time, Holly realized there were dozens of ways she could have handled her situation last year. She could have simply shifted back to human and given them the chance to talk to her. Eva or Briony would have been glad to help her step back into life. Chase had given her his full support, but had warned against this course of action. Running away had not only been cruel and thoughtless, it had been incredibly dangerous. She’d been so proud of herself, had felt triumphant in her progress, that she’d never stopped to consider the effects of her actions on the men she loved.

“I understand.”

Looking down, she felt a tear fall from her eye and watched it drop onto the blue silk pillow under her knees. It made a spot that widened out on the rich fabric.

“The sub is ashamed of her behavior.” She didn’t raise her eyes to look at the men. She wasn’t trying to manipulate them any longer. She simply had to say what she meant.

“I am *so* sorry I left you two like that.” Another tear fell. “I thought it was the only way, but it wasn’t, was it?” She looked up, and the men both shook their heads. Holly couldn’t reach up to wipe the tears away, so they flowed freely down her cheeks. She blinked quickly and sniffed. “I just... Tex, you kept coming home smelling like sex and humans. And Hunter, you were just fading into the woodwork. All you ever did was stare at us and glare. I know there were other things I could have done, but one day, I just had to run.” She looked up at them, praying they’d understand.

“So maybe it was the right thing to do.” Hunter shoved his hands into his pants pockets. “Sure shook me up.”

“Me too.” He looked steadily at her. “I’m not going to ask why you ran. I understand I hurt you. I guess...I just felt so...confused. Needy. I thought it was because of Rico marrying and Briony getting pregnant. I thought I was just lonely. It didn’t occur to me that my mate was right there, waiting for me. It didn’t occur to me that you were the one.”

“I was just floating. Being angry and doing nothing... It was just the easiest path to take.” Hunter sighed. “I don’t know how to do this. I don’t know how to tell you I love you. I don’t know how to tell Tex I need him to show me how to live in this world and love you the way you need.” Hunter ran a hand through his thick hair, pushing it back from his face.

“Well, you just did a pretty good job by yourself, Hunter.” Tex reached out and threw an arm over his shoulder. And Hunter didn’t flinch away. “You know you can trust me and Holly to teach you.”

The men exchanged glances. Their male bonding moment must have been helpful. As her grief ebbed away, Holly felt a surge of triumph. Joy. Her future was standing before her, and it was good. Hell, it was better than good!

## Chapter Nine

The silence in the room stretched out. Outside the walls, Hunter could hear other people in the dungeon—the sounds of sex and pain. More distantly he heard music and laughter. He closed his eyes and swore he heard the sound of three hearts beating in a synchronized rhythm.

“Remain where you are, Holly.” Hunter stepped forward till he was just inches from where she knelt on the floor. Her head was level with his groin, and he ached...ached to feel her touch on his body. Tex moved silently next to him. He was still barefoot; Hunter had also removed his boots. Now he felt the cold stone floor beneath his bare feet. Tex shook the rope loose from Holly. She remained perfectly still.

“Unbuckle my belt. Open my pants. Touch me.” Hunter realized he was no longer playing a game. It was time. And he was so afraid.

Holly reached up, her fingers trembling just a bit. In the small room, he caught the scent of her liquid arousal mixed with lavender. The flower would live forever in his memory. When her hand reached his belt, his belly jerked in response. Hunter shut his eyes, focusing only on the feel of her skin, the sensation of air drifting over the hood of his cock. When she gently slid the foreskin back, his cry was automatic. The years of desolation and denial washed over him. Tex was behind him, supporting his weight.

After a moment he regained control and held himself upright on shaky legs. Again she touched him, brushing along the skin of his shaft and then encircling him with her fingers. She twisted her hand as she stroked his shaft. His jeans slipped down, and he stepped out of them, opening his eyes to watch Holly in gratitude and disbelief.

“Put my cock your mouth. Suck...gently.” He wasn’t ready to come yet; he wanted to savor the experience.

She slipped her hands down and cupped his balls. Hunter panted and once again nearly melted as he was enfolded by her wet, warm mouth. She stroked with her tongue along the bottom of his cock, trailing along the intricate tracery of veins. Her suction was gentle but enough to cause blood to roar through him. He heard only the rush of his pulse in his ears. His entire focus was on that single point of his body where she touched him.

Holly sucked, sliding up and down, squeezing her hand around the base. His hips involuntarily thrust to meet her mouth. It was blissful and beyond what he’d fantasized.

“Stop. Now Tex.”

Hunter ached at the sudden loss of her mouth. Her hand remained, stroking lightly as Holly began to work Tex. She dragged her lips down the length of his erection, and she occasionally looked up at his face, seeking direction.

Tex groaned loudly. He dropped his head back and buried his hand in her dark hair. She was rougher with him, pumping him harder, letting him fuck her mouth freely. Desperately Hunter clasped her fingers where they wrapped around his cock and squeezed hard at the

base.

“Back to me.”

Without pause, she swiveled on her knees and changed position. Hunter shuddered at the entire experience—the sounds, the scents of their bodies, the feel of her mouth on his most sensitive places. She moved faster, keeping her hand on Tex, pumping him at the same pace she went down on Hunter. Automatically he angled his hips, closing the space between himself and Tex.

“Switch.”

At his command, she moved again. Gradually the men drew closer. Hunter leaned against Tex for support, and their cocks bumped against each other's, and he didn't care. No flash of panic ran through him. The other man's entire sexual focus was on the woman who knelt at their feet. Tex's breath was rough and ragged, his tanned skin flushed with arousal. Hunter looked down at Holly. Sweat bloomed over her face; the fair skin over her chest was pink. Her dark blue eyes were huge in her face when she looked up at him.

Tex groaned. “Almost there?”

Hunter nodded. He'd been there since they'd started!

“Holly, bring us both... Use your hands.” Hunter spoke through clenched teeth.

Obediently she pulled her face back and pumped them both in a fast, matching rhythm. Once he'd given himself permission to climax, it came fast, faster than Tex's. His muscles contracted, his back flexed, and through a haze of sexual pleasure, he watched seed spurt from his body to splash Holly's shoulder and chest. He came and he came, and at some point, Tex was coming as well, his pleasure voiced in harsh groans. The men leaned against each other, and somehow they managed to stay upright. Hunter had one hand on Holly's shoulder, the other fisted into Tex's shirt. He opened his eyes and looked down. Holly still held them loosely. She looked from him to Tex. Her eyes sparkled, and her lips were swollen. She was elated.

“You're a mess.” He felt shaky and weak. She glanced down at the milky semen on her skin and then back up into their faces.

“You marked me.” Her voice held wonderment.

“Yeah, I guess we did.” Tex reached out and slid a finger down her chest, leaving a trail through the shining fluid. “Guess that means you're ours.” He offered his finger, and she opened her mouth to lick their mixed seed from his hand.

“I'm yours.”

Shaken, Hunter broke away from the two and slid to the pallet of furs that covered the bed. He knew otherwise. Yes, they'd marked Holly, but she wasn't theirs. They were hers. He watched as Tex cleaned her off and then helped her to her feet. Hunter stretched and grinned, feeling the sumptuous slide of fur against his skin. This time, being owned didn't feel so bad.

They wound around into one another, three naked bodies luxuriating in the animal furs. Holly felt like she was in a den, warm and safe and comfortable. Tex had his head resting on her shoulder, and he skimmed his hand down her body. At her other side, Hunter was propped on his elbow, looking down their bodies. His long leg tangled between hers.

Both men were fully erect, their cocks thick and heavy, gleaming in the dim light. They were as nature created them—uncut, and the sparse hair on their bodies was soft and untrimmed. She'd seen them nude before, but never in this context. Not while they were hungry for her.

Tex was muscular, lean, but bulked up from the heavy work he'd performed for so many years. He moved, and the light played up the golden highs and lows of his body. In keeping with the color scheme that nature had blessed him with, blond hair scattered his chest, trailing down to the nest at his groin.

Hunter was also muscular, but less delineated. He was made for moving swiftly, running and tracking through forests. His body was nearly hairless, his skin brown and rich. She suspected he had a good deal of Native American in his lineage. It showed in the arrogant tilt of his cheekbones and the arch of his nose.

She twined her fingers with theirs and rested them on her belly. So many months of tension—learning to work, to ride the bus, to pay the bills. All that tension was suddenly put to rest. She was loose and happy and content. Her glowing arousal was banked. But not for long.

Tex cupped her breast with his work-roughened hand, and she gasped when he plucked the nipple. Immediately Hunter caught her breath with his kiss. A hand...Hunter's...smoothed the skin between her legs, then gently moved up to delve between her lips.

“So wet.”

“Wet enough?” Tex's voice was lazy and low. “Wet enough for two?” He looked up at her. “Time for that plug to go.”

She rolled to her side, barely stifling a moan when Tex found the base of the plug and pulled it free of her body.

She ached. She was empty. Holly needed to be filled. Her heart stuttered and then raced. It was happening. This morning she'd woken up, gone to work, and then come to the club; her world was as normal as it could get. But tonight she had been hunted and captured, tied up, dominated, and pleased. Now she was about to give herself to the men who had ruled her very existence for so long. Briefly panic flared, but she easily chased it back.

This was where she belonged.

Tex moved away, leaving a cold space at her back. She heard the sounds of a drawer opening.

Hunter gave a slight growl. “We don't need condoms.” The foil packets landed on the bed.

“We don't need them, but the club requires them.” Tex tore the foil, and she turned her

head and watched as he slipped the sheath over his cock. "And believe me, given what we're about to do, you'll be glad for it." His smile showed a bit of fang. His control was at the edge. "Holly, put it on him. Then straddle him."

Her heart jumped; her belly twisted. Holly opened the packet and followed Tex's instructions. Hunter looked a bit angry, and she realized he'd probably never had occasion to use a condom before. She focused on the sheath, easing it over his swollen head as gently as possible. When she was finished, Holly straddled his hips. She glanced at Tex, who had a feral expression on his face. He radiated jealousy and possession, but he was holding himself tightly under control.

"Take him."

Holly clasped his base and eased Hunter's cock into her body. She took a deep breath, stifling her fear. She'd used dildos before, but never, ever had she been penetrated by a man.

He reached up and clasped her arms. Hunter was flushed with his arousal. "God...I don't know...if I can last..."

"That's why we went earlier. The condom will help." Tex was on his knees, reaching out, stroking her back gently. "Take him, darlin'; you're doing good."

She rose, used her fingers to open herself wider, and then lowered herself again. And then again. Every time she lowered herself, he slipped in a bit farther. Tentatively she rode him, feeling her inner walls growing wetter and more relaxed. She experimented with angles, finally discovering that elusive G-spot she'd never located with a vibrator. Beneath her, Hunter's face had gone tight with his pleasure. His hands opened and closed on her arms. He pulled her down, kissing her deeply and completely. She broke away and buried her face in his shoulder.

"Oh...damn..." She felt the orgasm rising swiftly. "Oh...Tex...Hunter...please...*may I?*"

"Hold it." Tex's voice was soft in her ear. "Five...four...three..." He paused, and she made a sound that could only be called a squeak. She felt his fingers at her ass; pressure built as one, then two, and then a third invaded her body. He continued counting. "Three...two...one... Holly, come now!"

It washed over her, just as overwhelming as it had been before. More so since Hunter was deep inside her channel and Tex's slick fingers were buried in her ass.

"Fuuuuckkk..." Every muscle in her body locked, clenching and then releasing. She felt the orgasm deep in her belly, in her womb. She heard voices, felt hands supporting her. She felt...love, and tears ran freely down her face. She opened her eyes to see Hunter watching her, and her heart very nearly shattered. She felt Tex's kisses on her cheek, and she reached back, needing to feel him...to touch him. Maybe this was heaven. She was certainly seeing stars!

When the orgasm released her, she went limp and slid down onto Hunter, gasping as Tex's fingers left her. She listened to the sound of her heart as it slowed, to the breath gusting in and out of her lungs. And yet, there was still a cock filling her pussy, and behind her, she felt the tip of Tex's shaft bumping and sliding along the crack of her ass.



When a cool stream of lube slithered down, she jumped, no longer fatigued, no longer sated. Her heart sped up, and goose bumps spread over her skin.

“Lean forward.” She lay farther down against Hunter, offering her bottom to Tex. “You know how this is done?”

She nodded. “Yeah.” Her voice was a scratchy whisper. Had she screamed?

He pressed, and she pushed out, feeling the shocking sensation of her body accepting the invasion. Unlike the plug he’d inserted, he was warm and pliable, and so very, very large. And she was so full already.

Hunter gave a gasp and a groan, and she knew he was feeling Tex’s cock sliding against his. Her mind reeled with the improbability of the whole thing. If she’d been human, this would have hurt to no end! But she wasn’t human, and it felt...wonderful. He pulled out a bit, and she protested, whimpering when he returned to fuck her deeper and harder.

“Someday, we’ll do this again, but we’ll both be in your pussy. Someday...” His voice went too hoarse to continue.

“Someday, when we want to make a baby...that’s how we’ll do it.” It was Hunter who continued his thought. If she hadn’t been so overwhelmed by the dual penetration, Holly would have been amazed at his words and his willingness. For now, Tex was setting a slow, steady pace, holding the other two captive. When Hunter tried to move, the sensation was nearly too much for her. Ass, G-spot, clit—all were engaged and overstimulated. She cried out.

“You okay, baby?”

She looked down into Hunter’s sweaty face. He looked as wild and overwhelmed as she felt.

“Fine.” She gasped. “Just...faster...”

Tex took her at her word, and the faster he thrust, the deeper, the tighter she felt.

The orgasm started in her belly, then her back. Deep contractions built in her womb. Hands came around, pinching her nipples, making her cry out again. Hunter dug his hands into her hips, moving her in time to Tex’s tempo. She was without words, could only express herself with harsh cries and guttural moans. Deep inside, she grew hotter, wetter, and more desperately coiled.

A hand struck her ass in a sharp slap. She screamed. He slapped, and she screamed again. She heard Hunter’s answering cry. The pain released something deep inside. Tension built till she could barely bear it anymore. Tex’s hand came down in a final, stinging blow.

And then she came. Her vision went dark; stars sparkled and flashed behind her lids. She crashed down on the man beneath her, her teeth sinking into the flesh over his heart. Her hands flexed and claws reached back to score Tex’s bare thigh.

They were coming with her, fierce and savage. Sweat mingled with blood. Scratches stung, nerves hummed with ecstatic pleasure. She forced herself to watch as Hunter came. His eyes had shifted completely; the familiar brown was tinged with gold, the shape slightly

altered. Panic flared and then receded as another wave of the climax crashed through him.

Tex had her in a viselike grip, his hips pounding into hers in a rapid, staccato rhythm. He arched, froze, and moaned harshly. Then he sank his sharp teeth into her shoulder. There was a crescendo of pain and ecstasy and sound as the three of them peaked...and then fell.

They were all limp and boneless, melting down into a pile of bodies, nearly indistinguishable from one another. There was an occasional shudder or sigh. A tongue ran over her sweaty skin. Holly's cheek was sticky with Hunter's sweat and the blood from the bite she'd left just over his nipple. Tex had his face buried in the crook of her neck. She felt him gently licking the wound on her neck. Hunter had left his mark on her collarbone.

"Hot dayum." Tex's voice sounded weak.

She smiled, seconding the sentiment. Hunter began to chuckle. For whatever reason, she joined him. Maybe the happiness just couldn't be contained.

"I love you..." Three voices uttered the sentiment, slightly dissonant, but completely sincere.

Their cocks were finally soft and slipped gently from her body, leaving her empty but far from alone. Holly let her eyes drop closed, and she dozed, confident that she was in the one, single perfect place in the world.

## Chapter Ten

They stood in the lobby of Dark Haven, fully clothed, the sweat and blood washed away from their skin. Yet they smelled like one person—one single entity.

Tex supposed this was the essence of a mating, when one became two. Or three, in their case. Hunter was bickering with Holly, but Tex knew she was simply saving face, allowing herself to be convinced to go home. He gazed out at the late-night street and watched the occasional taxi drive by. The fog was settling in, giving the city a haunted appearance.

“Hunter, I can’t just leave.”

“You can.”

She sighed in exasperation. Tex turned away from the door and looked at the curtained entrance. Destiny was back there listening. She was cute and all, but a little too astute for comfort. He nodded toward the curtain, and the other two ceased their argument.

“Holly. Chase will be expecting us before noon.” Hunter pulled out the big guns.

End of story. He saw her surrender at the mention of their alpha. She hung her head and nodded. The sub who’d tried so hard to please them had vanished, leaving behind a stubborn, very dominant wolf. She bit the corner of her lip.

“Can I go to my apartment and get my stuff?”

“Where is it?”

“Six blocks to the west.”

Tex and Hunter looked at each other, and he waited for Hunter to decide. Another power shift. The dark wolf was one of Chase’s betas; Tex was not.

“Our hotel is just a couple of blocks away. Tex will take you for your clothes. I’ll get a rental car and wait for you there.”

With a plan established, the three stepped out into the darkness, then paused to scent and to listen. Holly went still, her head tilted.

“Anything?” Hunter’s skill was different than hers, and he let her scan.

“There’re a couple of vamps living in the Mission District. They’ve got a few more hours aboveground. That’s it for paranormals.”

Hunter nodded, and they set off down the street. Tex carried both his kit and Holly’s. He surveyed the alleys and side streets while Holly watched the sky. Hunter trailed behind. They moved quietly and swiftly.

“What’s that?” He spotted red lights flashing strobelike in the distance. In moments, the scent of burned rubber and gasoline clogged his nostrils.

“Accident. Probably drunks. The police are there.” At Holly’s words, they veered away into a darkened alley. The wail of sirens announced the arrival of other emergency vehicles. Tex’s ears rang from the commotion. He grinned as Holly and Hunter both covered their

ears.

“Looks like you’d better come along with us!” Tex turned away and headed for another side street. Holly and Hunter were still watching the street behind them. He turned back to wait for them.

Tex’s first realization that something was wrong was a flash of light and then a sting, a jolt, and he was on the ground, completely and utterly immobile.

Laughter carried over the noise of the sirens, and a dark figure bolted off down the alley after Holly and Hunter, who’d vanished into the shadows. Above him stood a man nudging Tex’s leg with the tip of his shoe.

He felt nothing.

“Well, that was easy.” The man was dressed in a dark suit. Expensive sunglasses dangled from the pocket of his starched, white shirt. This close, Tex could smell him—the scent that had hovered over the boy in Chase’s office. Unable to control his reactions, he growled, baring his teeth in impotent fury.

“Take it easy, boy.” The man fished in his pocket and came up with a disposable syringe. He twisted the off cap and flung it away.

“Nighty-night.” The needle was plunged into his neck, and Tex knew no more.

They went absolutely still and completely silent. Nevertheless, the litany ran through his head.

*Shit, shit, shit.* The car wreck had been a diversion. Unable to hear or smell over the sirens and burning rubber, they’d walked right into the trap.

Fear and fury emanated from Holly. She leaned over the edge of the fire escape, clearly planning to leap down onto the man below them. Hunter caught her arm and shook his head. She leaned dangerously far out, peering down the alley.

“They’ve loaded him into a car!” she whispered.

“They won’t leave. Not yet. They want us all.”

“Hunter, we can’t just leave him!”

He clenched his jaw. The city wasn’t his territory. The rules were strange and different here. Noises and smells confused him, and the familiar feeling of helpless impotence flooded him. As they watched, the sinister black sedan began to cruise slowly down the street. A powerful spotlight bathed the rubble and trash of the alley. Fortunately they seemed to have only the one car. Hunter crouched and focused every fiber of his being on Tex. He let the other man’s familiar scent wash over him. He bathed his senses in his partner’s aura—his very essence. He made the connection and held on tight. Even if they were out of reach, he’d be able to track his partner.

When the two men in the alley vanished, Hunter led Holly back down to the ground.

“Follow the car.”

“But—”

“The car, Holly. The men and the car will stay close. We need to stay close too.”

“I’m shifting. I can hunt better that way.”

He nodded, watching dispassionately as she slipped out of her clothing and stashed it behind a cardboard box. She picked up the two kits that Tex had dropped and hid them as well.

“You too.”

He simply shook his head. It wasn’t acceptable. When he shifted, he killed.

*But maybe that’s what needs to happen.*

No. His wolf was simply too dangerous. He couldn’t afford to lose control again. The distant memory of blood rose up, and he forced it back.

“You lead me, Holly.”

“You won’t be able to keep up.” She had her jaw set stubbornly. “You have to shift if you want to keep up with me.”

“Stay close to me, Holly. Do not get separated from me!”

She whirled on him. “Damn it, Hunter! He’s my mate. I’m not going to hang back because you’re afraid!” She moved up close and fisted his shirt. In the night, he heard the dull roar of the sedan’s engine. He swallowed.

“Holly, if I kill while I’m human, at least I’m making the decision. If I kill when I’m the wolf, I have no choice! Don’t you understand?” He stared at her bleakly.

She drew even closer and rested a hand on his cheek. “Hunter, don’t you understand that you *are* the wolf? Don’t you understand that you saved us all? That you’re my hero?”

He could only stare at her. He didn’t understand—not at all.

“We’ll save him, Holly, and we’ll do it without my wolf. But we have to stay together.”

Holly shook her head, dropping her hand from his face. With a single sad look over her shoulder, she shifted and landed smoothly on all fours. Her black fur gleamed under the misty light of the moon, and she melted into the shadows. Without looking back, she moved, and before Hunter could gather his breath, she’d vanished. She was too fast in this form. Too fast for him to follow.

“Damn it, Holly!” He started to run, praying he’d be able to track her by scent. If not, he’d lose them both.

\* \* \*

Tex held very still, though not from a need to disguise the fact that he was awake. Every time he moved the slightest bit, his stomach roiled and pain lanced his head. He was tightly bound, most likely with chains. Some of the more superstitious idiots in Abraxas still believed that shifters were allergic to silver. He tested the bindings on his wrists and bared his teeth in a nasty grin. Silver was softer than many other metals. He felt them give way just

a bit.

He was in the trunk of the car, and as it stopped and started again, his stomach lurched. He was unable to catch any scent outside; the myriad smells in the trunk created a disgusting stench. He smelled fear and illness and death. He smelled his own blood. In the few minutes he'd been unconscious, the man who'd Tasered him had also shaved some skin away from a spot on his arm.

The idea of what Abraxas would do with his DNA horrified Tex.

The car stopped. Doors opened and then slammed shut. Two men had gotten into the backseat.

"Any sign?"

"Nope. They bailed on this one. I reckon they've headed off to their den." He spoke with an accent of some sort. English?

"Shit. Our source said they'd be inseparable."

"Your source was wrong. We may as well head off to the airport. They'll be happy to have this one; he's fresh material for the program."

The car jolted, and Tex gritted his teeth against the pain.

"The woman would be of more use."

The third man snorted in humor. "Yeah, she would, since the bitches keep dying. It's hard to make cubs without mothers to carry them."

Tex growled. They must have heard him, because after a brief silence, all three men laughed.

"That accident was a good idea. Too bad about the bum who staggered in front of that car."

More laughter.

"Hey... What the fuck!"

The car horn blared, and the sound of shattering glass filled the vehicle. More curses, and then complete, utter silence. Over the stench, Tex scented their fear. The car shuddered to a stop, swaying on its wheels. It rocked and groaned, as though something heavy was on top of the roof.

That was when the screaming started.

\* \* \*

Hunter ran.

He ran until his lungs burned and his heart raced, but he couldn't catch her. Her scent faded in and out, drifting on the breeze or obscured by the stench of human waste. He ran, fear and frustration battling with his natural instincts to hunt and chase.

He dodged into an alley, lost her scent completely, and vaulted over a parked car, homing in on something else.

Tex.

The scent was faint, but he locked in on the marker, letting every instinct of the wolf wash over him. If he found Tex, he'd find Holly. Hopefully he'd beat her. The idea of Holly confronting men with Tasers and drugs scared the hell out of him.

In frustration he kicked off his boots and stripped out of his jacket, letting it and his shirt fall to the ground. The chill air felt good on his skin, and fear flowed into determination. Confidence. Somewhere a wolf howled, and he knew she was coming fast. He couldn't let her get there first.

The car was in sight now, just blocks away, prowling through the darkness. It moved a bit faster, picking up speed, and he knew time was running out. They were heading toward the freeway. If they left the surface streets, not even the wolf could keep up.

He ran, his feet pounding the asphalt, his frail human body straining to its limit. He scooped up a rusty pipe from a pile of trash and never lost his pace. He ran until he was behind the car...beside it...and then he gave a mighty leap, sending the pipe through the driver's window. He shifted, twisting and snarling, and a huge brown wolf landed on the roof of the car.

Hunter scrabbled, clawing for his balance as the car careened around a corner and slowed to a stop. When the door opened and the passenger stepped out, gun in hand, he crouched, then attacked. Flesh gave way, bone broke, and he let go of the body to turn to the next. The man was out of the car and running. He'd dropped his gun on the wet ground; it spun and skittered across the asphalt. And then he was on top of the killer, his weight dropping the human to the pavement easily.

He caught sight of Holly; she'd just attacked the driver and was dragging him through the broken window. A scream pierced the night air and then stopped abruptly as her powerful teeth tore into him. A spray of blood rained through the air, black and oily in the darkness.

The man under Hunter scrambled out from beneath him and lunged for the abandoned gun. Hunter let him get just inches away before closing his jaws on the man's wrist, shattering bone and severing arteries. He shrieked, and Hunter clamped his sharp teeth on the man's neck, crushing his trachea.

And then it was over. He stood panting over the man, watching as he died. He snarled, knowing that that was the last thing the killer saw before he died.

Sickened, Hunter shifted back to human, and he swayed with exhaustion and adrenaline. He looked down at his arms and hands, stunned to find them clean. He touched his mouth and felt no blood. He took a deep breath and let it out. He'd done what he needed to do and had kept control of the wolf. He touched his face again, feeling the trail of tears down his cheek.

"Hunter?" Holly was at the back of the car, struggling to open the trunk. He shook his head to clear it and leaned into the driver's seat, where he found the latch that released the trunk. In moments Tex was out, staggering, his hands over his belly. She hovered around him, touching and stroking his arms and his body. She pulled the tattered remains of the

chains from his wrists.

“Oh dayum.” He turned away and placed one hand against a rough brick wall. “Seriously, my head hurts too bad to barf.” He breathed through his mouth, taking deep, gulping breaths. Hunter turned away and looked at the bodies scattered in the alley. He hadn’t realized how tight the space had been when he attacked. It really had been the perfect location for a fight.

But now...

“We need a cleanup.”

Tex and Holly moved to his side, looking at the battered car and its former passengers. Dawn wasn’t long off, and not even Eva and Harte could get there in time to help clear the scene. Fortunately there wasn’t much blood.

With a loud sigh, Tex bent down, hefted a body, and dumped it into the trunk of the car. “Fuck. My head.” He leaned against the car and rested his head on the cool metal.

“Ethan and Kurt usually handle cleanup. Ethan can always talk his way out of trouble with the police.” Hunter pulled out his phone and sent a quick text message. “If we leave now, we can get to I-5 before dawn. They can meet us in Dixon or someplace like that.”

Hunter lifted the second man while Holly dragged the third over. Obviously this model of car was favored by Abraxas for its expansive trunk space. There was plenty of room for three. He slammed the lid.

“Clothes. We need clothes.”

“Can you drive?” Tex eyed him doubtfully. “I’m still seeing double. Maybe triple.” He looked queasy and weak.

Hunter nodded.

“There’s a small bag here.” Holly lifted the case onto the backseat of the car. She opened it and tossed a T-shirt and sweatpants up to Hunter. He hated the stench of the humans but dragged the clothes on anyway. He brushed bits of shattered windshield to the floor, then slid into the driver’s seat. The car was still running. Tex climbed into the passenger side of the car and leaned his head back against the headrest.

“Getting Tasered sucks. I think that thing was loaded for elephant. They gave me drugs too.” He sounded decidedly sorry for himself.

Hunter snorted. He was well familiar with Abraxas’s shock treatments. Holly crawled over the seats and slid onto the bench seat between the men. She was stark naked.

“Put your seat belt on, Tex. You have any idea where you lost your pants, Hunter? We’ll need your wallet if we get pulled over.”

He looked at her in shock.

“And we’ll need money for the bridge tolls. And I’m sort of hungry.”

Tex groaned at the mention of food.



“My stuff is just a block or two from that wreck...”

Over her head, Tex grinned at Hunter. She was already managing their lives.

“My apartment’s not far. Maybe we could stop for a few things... I really liked that vest. And my kit... Yours too, Tex...”

“Holly...” he growled.

She looked up at him, eyes wide. “What?”

She was stark naked, and they had three dead bodies in the trunk of the stolen car. How could she be hungry at a time like this? Hunter jerked off the T-shirt and shoved it over her head. Holly sputtered, struggled, and frowned as her head came through the oversize armhole. He eased the car onto the street, squinting through the fog, looking for signs to the Golden Gate Bridge. The cool night air wafted in the window.

“This isn’t right...” Holly vanished into the shirt, wrestling with the stretchy material.

“The sign said the bridge was that way. Now where the hell are we?” He stared out the window in frustration.

“I can’t get my head loose!”

Tex started laughing, his head now resting against the window glass. “Oh, darlin’, I can’t wait to get you over my knee again!”

To his surprise, Hunter felt the very same way.

## Epilogue

The dark brown wolf crouched in the high grass at the edge of the field, his belly brushing the ground. The woman he stalked froze, searching the trees and brush for the predator. When he burst from cover, she squealed, turning to run. He had her flat on the ground in seconds. She was pinned on her back by the massive wolf, who frantically licked her face.

Holly giggled, wiggled free, and dodged behind the mechanical bull that was being assembled in the middle of the lawn.

“How’d you manage to talk Xavier out of the bull?” Chase Montenegro turned from the porch rail and settled his long body into a wooden Adirondack chair that Tex had built. The cool breeze wafted through his black hair. Instead of his usual suit, he wore jeans and a flannel shirt.

“It was broken. I told him we’d fix it and store it up here till he wanted to use it again.” Tex gave his alpha a lopsided grin. “Told him I’d give some of the club dominants riding lessons if he’d let us use it.”

“But not the subs? That seems a bit unfair.” His words were disapproving, but a dimple played at the corner of Chase’s stern mouth.

“You know how it is, Chase. The sub has all the power. This is just a way to even up the playing field.”

“No, *your* sub has all the power.” He laughed and shook his head. “Does this mean we’ll have a steady flow of dominants visiting Truckee?”

“Nah... I’ll take it back down there before rodeo season in the spring. Gives us an excuse to take Holly back to the dungeon. We owe her a spanking or two.” Just the thought of Holly tied out properly had his cock swelling in interest.

“From what Kurt tells me, she saved your asses there on the highway. If she hadn’t distracted the CHP officer who pulled you guys over, they might have found the bodies in the trunk.”

“Uhh...yeah...” Tex stretched, hiding his discomfort. “I don’t think she meant to flash the police officer, but it worked anyway. By the time she finished explaining about the broken window, the clothing, and the dozen hamburgers, the poor man thought we’d been out partying all night and that Hunter was our designated driver.”

Chase smiled and looked out at the lawn. Several others had joined in the rowdy play.

“There’s something I need to tell you, though. When I was locked inside the trunk, I overheard the men talking. Someone tipped them off. Someone who was watching us at the club. They set up a pretty nasty trap with that car wreck.”

“They killed a pedestrian to do that. Do you have any idea who their source was?”

Tex sighed. “I doubt it was Xavier. If he’d wanted us, he could have set a trap early on.”

Chase nodded.

“There’s a girl that works there. A friend of Holly’s.”

“Destiny.” Chase’s expression was dark. “She’s a friend of Eva’s as well. I don’t like this at all. Even if it’s not her, we’ve got to warn the pack away from Dark Haven. Just in case.”

“Bummer.” Tex sat up in his chair and leaned forward to watch Holly and Hunter on the lawn. Both were in wolf form now, and they were gently teasing Deuce and the new boy. Deuce was mostly blind and hearing impaired, and Trey didn’t speak. Somehow, though, they’d formed a bond. Hunter darted in and nipped at Holly’s tail, and she scooted away, her bottom skidding along the ground. Both boys broke out in laughter.

“You taught them to play, Tex. Hunter and Holly were among the most broken of my wolves, and you fixed them.”

“They aren’t broken, Chase. None of them are. They just need time.”

Chase looked out over the lawn where a cluster of wolves huddled, watching the others play. “You and Briony are the only ones who’ve been able to get through to them.”

“Nah. They’re paying attention. Hunter and Holly know what they want; they just never learned how to recognize it or ask for it.”

“That must be why training as a domme helped Holly. Is it helping Hunter as well?”

“Seems to be. They’ve both learned to switch roles too. Hunter’s not too keen on taking the sub role, but he understands it’s part of his training. They’re both learning to communicate.”

Funny how a relationship could fail because of something as simple as failing to talk. To share. To tell your partner how you feel.

Tex hesitated, knowing his alpha wouldn’t like what he had to say next.

“We need a strong female, Chase. An alpha female. One who can manage the pack. When their heat cycles come, the women hide at that old cabin in the mountains because they’re afraid of the men. They’re afraid of having babies. An alpha female would draw them out and give them strength.”

“We have Eva.”

“Eva’s not ours, Chase. And she doesn’t have the mojo it’s gonna take. Frankly, I’ve only met one or two wolves with the kind of power you have. You need a mate that’s your match.”

He didn’t curse or glower as Tex expected. He simply watched his wolves, a serene mask hiding his feelings. After a painfully long minute, he stirred, rising up out of the chair.

“You may be right. Not about the mate part, but we do need a strong female in the pack.” He smiled sadly. “Guess I’ll be heading out on a hunt too.”

Chase went back into the house. Tex heard him calling his betas together for an impromptu meeting. He lifted a brow.

Chase was taking his advice? Now that was something new.

“Hey, Tex!” He stood and leaned on the sturdy wooden porch rail, looking out at where Hunter was pulling on a ratty pair of jeans. Goodness only knew who they belonged to.

“Get down here! Holly wants to ride the bull!”

“Really?” He started down the stairs, then landed on the ground at a run. “Dayum!”

~ \* ~

Loose Id Titles by Belinda McBride

*An Uncommon Whore*

*Belle Starr*

*Blacque/Bleu*

“Educating Evangeline”

Part of the anthology *Doms of Dark Haven*

With Sierra Cartwright and Cherise Sinclair

“Hunting Holly”

Part of the anthology *Doms of Dark Haven 2: Western Night*

With Sierra Cartwright and Cherise Sinclair

## Belinda McBride

Belinda was born in Inglewood, California, but grew up far to the north in the shadow of Mt. Shasta. While her upbringing seemed pretty normal to her, she was surrounded by a fascinating array of friends and family, including a polyamorous grandmother, a grandfather who is a Native American icon, and various cowboys, hippies, scoundrels and saints.

She has a degree in history and cultural anthropology, but in 2006 made the life-changing decision to quit her job as a public health paraprofessional and stay at home fulltime to care for her severely disabled, autistic niece. This difficult decision gave Belinda the gift of time, which allowed her to return to writing fiction, which she'd abandoned years before.

Belinda's hobbies include soap making, collecting gemstones, travel, and martial arts. She has two daughters, six Siberian Huskies and an array of wild birds that visit the feeders in the front yard.

She supports no-kill animal shelters, and donates platelets twice monthly at her local blood center.

As an author, Belinda loves crossing genres, kicking taboos to the curb, and pulling from world mythology and folklore for inspiration. She is committed to taking her readers on an emotional journey and never forgets that at the end of the day, she's writing about love.

\* \* \*

# *Welcome to the Dark Side*

*Cherise Sinclair*

## Author's Note

*To my readers,*

*This book is fiction, not reality and, as in most romantic fiction, the romance is compressed into a very, very short time period.*

*You, my darlings, live in the real world and I want you to take a little more time than the heroines you read about. Good Doms don't grow on trees and there's some strange people out there. So while you're looking for that special Dom, please, be careful.*

*When you find him, realize he can't read your mind. Yes, frightening as it might be, you're going to have to open up and talk to him. And you listen to him, in return. Share your hopes and fears, what you want from him, what scares you spitless. Okay, he may try to push your boundaries a little—he's a Dom, after all—but you have your safeword. You will have a safeword, am I clear? Use protection. Have a back-up person. Communicate.*

*Remember: safe, sane and consensual.*

*Know that I'm hoping you find that special, loving person who will understand your needs and hold you close. Let me know how you're doing. I worry, you know.*

*Meantime, come and hang out with the Masters of the Shadowlands.*

—Cherise

*cherisesinclair@sbcglobal.net*



## Chapter One

Well, if he turned out to be a pervert, Dark Haven was sure the right place to come. Virgil Masterson tucked his thumbs under his belt and stared around the huge room. It was Western Night at San Francisco's notorious BDSM club, and the combination of fetishwear and cowboy clothing was mindboggling.

When a tiny brunette submissive walked by wearing nipple clamps, a purple thong, and cowboy boots, he could only shake his head and laugh. Amazing. At least with all the jeans and cowboy shirts, he didn't stand out like a redneck from a small mountain town.

As he listened to the country-western music, he tried to decide on a plan of action. By the end of the night, he intended to know if he was just a normal guy turned on by weird sexual shenanigans or something...worse. He'd always liked being in control in the bedroom—didn't most men?—but then his in-laws had introduced him to a whole new level of control. To BDSM. Stunned the hell out of him.

Under the Hunts' direction, he'd dominated a submissive. Tied her up. She'd melted under his hands, his commands, and climaxed from a hard pinch on her nipples. Damn him for ever getting sucked into this, because now...now when he had sex, he knew exactly what was lacking. He wanted—needed—the extra punch of a woman's willing submission.

As he looked around, he spotted the crowd parting to let a man pass. The dom, dressed in a gambler's rig of striped silk shirt, ornate burgundy vest, and arm garters, walked up and extended his hand. "Virgil Masterson, I believe?"

"That's right." Virgil gave him a cop's assessing once-over: six-two, muscular, around two hundred pounds, black hair in a long braid, black eyes, reddish brown coloring. He took the man's hand, noting the powerful grip. The guy did more with his time than sit around the bar.

"The Hunt brothers asked me to watch for you. I am Xavier, the owner."

Virgil gave an amused snort. As the eldest of three sons, he'd never been subjected to a babysitter...until he stepped into the BDSM scene. "Quite a place."

Xavier acknowledged the compliment with a tilt of his head. "The street level is for dancing, drinking, and watching the shows." He gestured to platforms on either side of the long room, one empty, the other with a domme whipping a slender male sub. "They said you're new to the scene?"

"Yes." Virgil studied the stage performance. He'd used a whip on livestock, never on a human, and the thought didn't appeal to him at all. "I've played at a couple parties and gone on their BDSM camp trip. I'm still..." Frowning, he pushed up the brim of his hat. "I have a problem with the idea of bondage, let alone hurting anyone. I was raised to protect women. Hell, it's my job."

Xavier said mildly, "But if bondage and pain is what the submissive wants? Needs?"

Then he was in trouble. "Guess I'll figure out where I draw the line." That's what he'd

come here to do, after all. To observe and investigate in a place well away from Bear Flat. *To figure out if I really am a pervert.*

“If the Hunts worked with you, I assume you know the usual courtesies of observing quietly, not touching another dom’s sub or equipment, and the basics of safe, sane, and consensual play.”

Virgil nodded.

“Then enjoy your evening. The dungeon is downstairs. If you’d care for an introduction to a submissive, please don’t hesitate to ask.” Xavier glanced at Virgil’s well-worn boots and smiled. “Calf roping starts in a bit—sub roping, in this case. You might find it a good way to meet someone.”

Sub roping? He hadn’t planned to participate—well, maybe he’d considered it—but damn. “Sounds like fun.”

After Xavier left, Virgil checked out the upstairs. A bar was located in one corner, surrounded by tables. The giggling submissive riding a mechanical bull held his attention for a while. Line dancing. A poker game tempted him briefly, but a pretty brunette sub kneeling at one man’s feet kept giving her dom concerned glances. Too tense for his mood tonight. *You’re not here to play cards, Masterson.*

He took the stairs down to the dungeon. And stopped. At the Serenity Lodge parties, only a handful of scenes occurred at any one time. Dark Haven had...more. His gaze drifted down the long room: several St. Andrew’s crosses, stocks, and a whipping post. Sets of chains dangled from a low rafter. Cages, spanking benches, sawhorses, bondage tables. Scene after scene. Throaty moans, high screams, whining, whimpering, and groaning. *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.* All his cop instincts shouted for him to get his cuffs out and start arresting people.

Yet the dominant in him noted that the scenes were hot as hell. Like the redhead getting wax poured on her nipples. Glazed eyes. Moaning. Her dom had spread her legs to let everyone view her soaked pussy.

At the next scene, a dark-haired domme ran a device like a pizza cutter with tiny metal spikes around a man’s nipples. Poor guy had a woody so hard a cat couldn’t scratch it.

Unlike the scent of beer, cologne, and perfume upstairs, the dungeon smelled of sweat and leather and so much sex that he could feel testosterone flooding his veins. He stopped at one area to watch a dom with a single-tail delicately lashing a dress from his sub. Fucking fine technique.

Feeling a presence beside him, he looked down to see a pretty little submissive.

“Excuse me,” she said, her melodic voice like a meadowlark in a valley of pain.

He stepped back to let her edge past and gave her a slow once-over. *Very nice.*

A leather skirt barely covered her grabbable, round ass. Heeled cowboy boots showcased bare legs, and her full breasts pushed a laced-up leather vest open so far her nipples almost showed. Golden blonde hair, straight and silky, hung to her midback. When she looked back

to whisper a thank-you, her eyes were as clear and blue as the sky over the Sierras in June.

*Down, boy.*

He sighed as the little sub knelt beside the dom. Apparently she wasn't available. Then again, she sure didn't focus on her dom's every movement as if she wanted to serve him with all her being. With the Hunts and some others he'd seen, their dominance over their subs showed up like heat waves in July. And didn't that sound a tad too woo-woo for a cop?

With a snort, and one last regretful look at the sub, Virgil wandered on.

\* \* \*

Refusing to listen to Mark whine, Summer Aragon dragged him away from the whipping scene to the upstairs stage. The calf roping had started.

Bouncing on her toes, she watched a dom chase after a collared older submissive on the raised platform. Almost to the end, he managed to grab her and toss her down on the well-padded platform. As he tried to bind her ankles and wrists, the crowd roared advice, cheering in yeehaws and whoops and whistles. *God, didn't that look like fun?*

"And another sub bites the dust." Mark slung an arm around her shoulders and pulled her against his lanky frame. "I'm heading home. You gonna come over?"

"Leave now?" After she'd spent all yesterday shopping for just the right leather skirt and vest? She gave him an exasperated stare. When he'd shown up in a T-shirt and jeans instead of western wear, she should have known he'd bow out early. "We haven't been here even an hour."

"Don't care. I had a rough day."

A rough day of programming? *Please.* She thought of her own day as charge nurse for the surgical floor: filling in for the med nurse, transferring a patient to the ICU, wading through reams of doctors' orders, managing a code right at the end of her shift—successful, but God, the paperwork—fixing the diet orders the kitchen had screwed up...and on and on. "Don't you want to join the calf roping?"

"Nah. Jason lent me a new apocalypse movie, and I want to see it."

She considered briefly: a cozy winter evening watching TV or finding someone to play with here. *Play, play, play.* "I'm going to stay a little longer. I've got an urge to be a *calf*."

"Go for it." He frowned. "I don't think Rick or Mike are here though."

Summer bit her lip. No buddies? That wasn't good.

She only scened with a few doms, ones who were just friends outside the club. Lightweight scenes, lightweight doms. She didn't want more. That would mean dealing with a real dominant—like the darkly tanned man watching the whipping downstairs whose slow scrutiny had heated her from the toes up and set her insides to quivering. *Not for me, thank you.*

But if her buddies weren't here, who would she play with? She glanced up, realized

Mark was considering staying...just for her. She smiled at him. "Go home, Mr. Couch Potato."

"That's me." He gave her a relieved look and added, "Sis is having everyone over for Sunday brunch. She said to invite you so you can get your kid fix in."

"I'd love it." She kissed him lightly before he headed for the exit.

A whooping scream pulled her attention to the far corner where a submissive had been thrown off the mechanical bull. Laughing like a loon, the brunette forfeited her bustier and climbed back on. The bull started to buck and twist. Summer winced as the submissive's breasts bounced in conflicting directions.

In another corner, people line danced to Tim McGraw's "I Like It, I Love It." One row held only unattached submissives, both male and female, wearing very few clothes. Tempted to join, she observed for a second. More bouncing breasts—and balls and cocks and butts.

Summer folded her arms over her full chest. Just watching was painful. No, she wanted to be a calf, she really did. But without her safe buddies?

*Hmm.* Recently she'd thought about testing her nerve by playing with other doms...easy ones, of course. Was this a hint from the gods?

*I can do this.* Determinedly, she joined the submissive queue, trying to figure out the rules. To her dismay, Xavier and Simon sat at a table by the stage, matching up each dom and calf. They'd make the choice for her? Her stomach clenched. What if she got a sadist?

But Simon was supervising. He'd been all protective since his party last year where Dirk had hurt her so badly, and he'd surely not choose someone cruel. Besides, if the dom caught her, she could still negotiate what the session afterward would involve. And they'd play here in a public place.

Despite her self-assurances, her heart rate increased as she neared the front.

The audience groaned as a sub managed to evade the chasing dom. The blonde, giggling in a high voice, jumped off the stage. Adjusting her skintight latex dress, she trotted back to the end of the line.

Xavier glanced at the sub in front of Summer and announced, "Jen is next. Gentlemen?"

The contenders raised their hands, and after a moment, Simon pointed to a tall, lanky man. "Aaron. Good luck. She's a fast little critter."

Jen and Aaron took their places.

*My turn.* Summer stepped up to the desk and waited for the two doms to notice her.

With dark hair and dark eyes, Simon and Xavier appeared like a matched set although Xavier looked flashier in his gambler's clothing. In his forties, Simon was older and attired as an 1860's banker. Rich, classy, powerful doms—so not her kind.

"Summer, it's good to see you." Simon motioned her forward and asked quietly, "How are you doing?"

"I'm fine. Thank you, Sir."

“Are you being careful?”

After she'd healed, he'd given her a lecture on safety measures, and she'd listened carefully. One set of scars from a misjudgment was enough. “Yes, Sir. I never play anywhere but here.”

He straightened, a crease forming between his brows. “That's taking prudence a little too far, pet. How can you form a relationship if you won't leave here?”

At the thought of being tied up and alone with a dom—a real dom—she felt as if someone had run a cold hand up her spine. “I'm happy being a sub here.”

Xavier frowned also. “A sub? You're not submitting; you only go through the motions. Playacting.”

*Just team up on me, why don't you? And you're wrong.* Her chin went up. “I believe that's up to me.” When Xavier's eyes turned to black ice, she gulped out a hasty, “My Liege.”

His forefinger tapped the desk for one beat.

She had a vision of being caged and hung from the ceiling like the last sub who'd displeased him.

Another tap.

Or up on the stage being used for flogging practice.

He finally nodded. “That is your choice.”

She took a relieved breath. *Thank you, God.*

Xavier turned to the crowd. “Gentlemen, this is Summer. Who would like to win her submission?”

*Oh great. Make a big deal of the submission part. Thanks, Xavier.* She turned to see an ego-stroking number of hands had gone up. A couple of sadists, some younger doms, and—her gaze was trapped by intent hazel eyes shaded by a black cowboy hat. The rest of the crowd blurred and faded away, leaving only the darkly tanned dominant she'd seen earlier.

He studied her; then his lips curved in a faint smile. He raised his hand to compete.

Her heart gave a nasty thud. *Oh God.*

“Virgil, I believe this little calf is a good one for you. She'll need a steady hand,” Xavier said.

As if she were caught in a dream, she watched the dom—Virgil—move forward through the crowd. He looked appallingly big. A couple of inches over six feet. Dirk's height. Probably about as heavy too, but this dom was as solid as the mechanical bull. He wore a scuffed black hat, faded cowboy shirt, and well-worn boots; she doubted his western outfit was a costume.

As he stopped beside her, his level, assessing eyes met hers, and the floor seemed to shiver like quicksand under her feet.

He glanced at Xavier. “Thank you.” He sounded pleased, thank God, since she really

didn't want to annoy him. Why did he have to be as big as Dirk? He made her feel like a little calf, and she glanced down to make sure she hadn't grown hooves.

The sun lines beside his eyes crinkled. When he took her hand, hard calluses on his fingers scraped her palm. "Nice to meet you, Summer." His rough baritone voice curled around her in a dark embrace.

All the spit in her mouth dried up, yet she wanted to move closer. *Confused much, Summer?*

"Are you ready to play?" Virgil asked, unsnapping his shirt cuffs and shoving his sleeves up to his elbows.

Lord have mercy. Even his heavy-boned wrists were muscular. *But he's not Dirk, and I'm going to be a calf.* Her excitement started to rekindle. *An ornery calf.* "Only if you catch me."

His growling laugh almost made her knees buckle.

"I'm glad to see you here, Virgil," Simon said and added, "By the way, this little sub had a bad experience last year, but it's time for her to move past it."

Summer's jaw dropped. "You... Damn you, that's none of your busi—"

A hand covered her mouth completely, and a voice rumbled in her ear, "I'm new to the club, but I'd say that disrespecting a dom is a piss-poor idea."

*Oh hell.* Xavier came down hard on rudeness.

Seeing the cold stare he gave her, she tried to back away, except Virgil's unmovable, rock-hard body pressed right up against hers. Xavier turned his gaze to Virgil. "Are you still interested?"

"Definitely."

"She will need to be reprimanded for her rude behavior."

Virgil didn't speak for a long moment, then said, "I understand."

"Very good." Xavier tilted his head toward the stage. "You're up."

Summer climbed the steps, way too conscious of the big dom behind her. He'd punish her? The thought of his strong hand coming down on her bottom—of having a real spanking—sent anticipation zinging through her. She glanced over her shoulder.

Such a serious expression, brows together, mouth in a tight line. But as he watched the stage where Aaron had just tossed Jen over his shoulder, laughter appeared in his eyes.

Summer smiled. He had a sense of humor after all. *Oh, this might be totally great.*

On the platform, the male sub directing the roping pointed to a big sack. "Boots and shirt go in there, Sir." He checked her. "Your boots too."

She got one boot off, but then Virgil removed his shirt and, oh Lord, her gaze got stuck on the impressive contours of his chest. With every movement, muscles rippled under his tanned skin. As he pulled his boots off, his biceps bunched, making her fingers tingle with

the need to touch and discover if his muscles were as hard as they looked.

He caught her staring and smiled—not a conceited I-work-out-and-have-a-great-body type smirk, but more of a I’m-a-boy; you’re-a-girl; life-is-good. He nodded at her remaining boot.

*Oh, right.* She yanked it off.

“Okay, Sir and sub.” The sub handed Virgil two pieces of short rope from a box and pointed to a taped line ten feet away. “When she reaches the yellow line, you give chase. If she gets to the far side or you can’t restrain her within the time limit, you lose. No tackling.”

“Got it.” Virgil gave her a slow smile. “I don’t think she’s that fast.”

She eyed him as he put the ropes between his teeth. God, this was too fun. Her competitive spirit ordered, *Run like hell*. Her inner submissive said, *Let him catch me*. The gung ho voice won, and she leaned forward.

The sub yelled, “Go!”

## Chapter Two

Feet slapping on the plastic padding, Summer tore across the stage as fast as she could. She passed the yellow line.

She heard him behind her, the sound of his heavy stride drowning hers out. Closer. Several feet before the end, he grabbed her arm, spinning her around him until she faced the wrong way.

She staggered, tried to regain her balance, and he moved on her like a massive bear. She squeaked and backpedaled.

Grinning, he swung his foot behind her right ankle and tripped her. With a yelp, she fell backward. Her hat went flying.

He caught her on the way down, his hand gently cradling her head as he dropped to one knee beside her. Before her brain had stopped spinning, he'd rolled her onto her stomach.

*No surrender.* She shoved up.

His knee on her butt pinned her to the mat. Despite her flailing and kicking and giggling uncontrollably, he caught one ankle, then the other, and tied them together.

When he reached for her left wrist, she yanked it away, holding her hands above her head and out of his reach. If she used up enough time, he'd lose.

"Stubborn little calf." His deep laugh sent quivers through her. As he slid his knee up to her midback so he could reach her wrists, his weight squished her breasts painfully against the padding. After grabbing her arms, he moved off and far too easily secured her hands behind her back.

She tugged on the ropes, feeling no give. She couldn't break free. No escape. *No escape...* Her breath hitched. Twisting her head, she stared up at him, and his size kept growing until he seemed huge—bigger than Dirk. Nightmarish memories bound her tighter than the ropes. *Tied. Trapped. Agony. Screaming.*

She whimpered.

"Whoa, sweetie." He lifted her to her knees and cupped her chin in his palm. His eyes were steady, not angry, not filled with lust. "You're all right, Summer." His rough croon, like a gravel road under soft tires, flattened out her fears.

She inhaled slowly. *Idiot. This isn't Dirk. I'm on a stage.* Couldn't get much more public or safer than that. "Sorry," she whispered.

He chuckled. "You're not the first calf I've terrorized in my time." He raised his hands in the air—a rodeo gesture—and, as the audience cheered loudly, pulled her to her feet. He hadn't even lost his hat.

She huffed a laugh; she hadn't had a chance against him. Still feeling a little off-balance, she asked, "You did rodeo?"



“In my wayward youth. I never caught such a pretty calf before, though.” His lazy grin turned her insides topsy-turvy—even before he tossed her over his shoulder.

All the blood rushed to her head. A sub scooped up her hat, carefully set it in with the boots, and handed the sack to Virgil.

“Thanks.” Virgil stepped off the stage and sauntered across the room, giving Summer a dizzying upside-down view of the crowd: the receptionist, Destiny, almost naked except for plastic six-shooters. A dom with a lariat on his hip, his stalking gait that of a predator hunting a stray calf.

When Virgil turned, boots, purple suspenders, a leather thong, a chest harness, and a red velvet gown spun around her. She blinked and focused on something closer—the thick, flexing muscles on each side of his spine, the tight fit of his faded jeans over his flat butt.

When he massaged the back of her thigh with a calloused hand, heat streamed through her. She’d carefully stayed away from big men all this year, and now her hormones apparently wanted to make up for lost time.

As Virgil carried her down the stairs to the dungeon, the sounds of sex and pain smothered the country-western music from above. They passed the punishment room, where a dom was using a belt on a strapped-down sub who wore only white chaps.

A tremor ran through Summer. What did Virgil plan to do for her punishment?

He walked halfway through the room, then set her on her feet in front of a chair and steadied her. “Kneel here, please. I want to talk with you before we do anything.” He gripped her upper arms and lowered her until her bottom rested on her feet.

As he took a seat in the leather chair, she glanced around. The nearby spanking bench held a sub, restrained and gagged. *Gagged*. Unable to scream, to yell her safe word, to beg her dom to stop. *God*. The memory of being in that situation chilled her bones. “Untie me.”

He had a hard face, all bone and muscle with a strong jaw, and the slow smile he gave her didn’t transform his appearance into a nice, easy-going man. With his fingertips, he lifted her chin. “Now, Summer, I’m pretty new to BDSM, but even I know you don’t talk to a dom in such a manner.”

New to BDSM? And he made her head spin just from the power in his gaze? His hand held her face tilted up to him, so she couldn’t look away. “I’m sorry,” she muttered. She noticed with a thrill of anxiety—and excitement—that his shoulders were as wide as the chair back.

“Almost adequate. You can call me Virgil.” His fingers loosened as he rubbed his thumb over her lower lip. A glint of humor appeared in his eyes, and his lips quirked. “I don’t like the term *Master*, but I’m used to being called Sir.”

His straight-shouldered posture and easy authority did remind her of military men. “Yes, Sir,” she said. She regarded him for a minute. A tiny, pale scar showed on one cheekbone, another on his chin, making him appear a little battered, and somehow she liked that. His thick eyelashes were darker than his sandy brown hair and the same color as the beard stubble along his jawline. Reassuring smile lines creased the corners of his eyes and

bracketed his mouth.

He released her and rested his thickly muscled forearms on his thighs as he studied her face. “Now tell me what you like and don’t like, Summer.”

Negotiations. She breathed out in relief. “I won’t be gagged. No drawing blood or hard-core pain. No anal.” She eyed him and decided on extra caution. “No bondage.”

When she’d been ten, she’d had a solo in the school play. The spotlight would track her, focus on her, much like his intent gaze did now. One corner of his mouth turned up, and he ran a finger down her cheek. “Now, I don’t particularly like gags. I enjoy the noises a woman makes. We agree on that one. I object to seeing blood or making welts or anything that won’t disappear before the next day. We agree there.”

Something in her relaxed a bit...until he added, “I do like anal play. Is your limit just for my cock buried in your asshole or for everything?”

Like his fingers? Or toys? She actually squirmed and saw him smile. “Um. For anything large?” Her gaze dropped to his crotch, where something very, very large bulged his jeans.

His laugh held a deep rumble. “I’ll take that as a compliment, little sub.” He toyed with her tiny spur earring, then stroked his finger across her shoulder, in the hollow above her collarbone, sensitizing her skin. “As for bondage, seems to me as if you’re already in restraints.”

Her jaw dropped. “Uh...that was to play the roping game.”

“Then I’d say it’s not a very hard limit. Simon said you’d had a bad experience. Anything to do with being tied up?”

*Damn Simon.* “No. Yes.” She scowled. “It’s got nothing to do with our scene.” Because the session would occur here in the club, in public. Her muscles relaxed.

“It’s odd, but I like seeing you in my ropes.” His mouth curved, and his fingers touched her neck, rested on her thudding pulse. “And I get the impression you like being in them, sweetheart. Don’t you?”

“But...” What could she say? He was right. Being tied up excited her. A lot. And worried her. A lot. “Yes. I guess.”

“Then why don’t we see how it goes with you in restraints.”

Simon’s warning had practically guaranteed Virgil would push her, dammit. But he was exerting only a slight amount of pressure...because he could tell she wanted the bondage. And she did. Somehow, she knew he’d be careful. God, she’d gone insane. “Yes, Sir.”

“Good. What’s your safe word?”

“It’s *safe word*.” She’d chosen something anyone involved in BDSM would recognize as a call for help. One more paranoia left over from before.

“Use it if that fear of yours gets to be too much. What about pain?”

How far could she trust him? “I don’t like severe pain.”

His fingers stroking her neck paused. “Then you’re saying you enjoy some.”

Those rugged, powerful hands. What would they feel like on her? Hurting her, pushing her, comforting her. She nodded.

He made a noise as if she’d hit him. “All right.” His eyes focused on the nearby scene, and he muttered, “Fucking-A,” under his breath.

From the sounds of slaps, sobs, and moans, the sub was getting off from the spanking.

His gaze came back to her. “I didn’t hear any limit on sex. Or toys.”

She felt herself flush. She didn’t usually want more than a little domination and a spanking or hand-induced sex. Yet the thought of this...stranger...holding her down and pushing inside her sparked every nerve in her body.

“I...” Why did he have to keep asking for clarifications? Her buddies simply accepted her limits without studying her reactions or questioning her answers. She shifted uncomfortably.

“I know you’re not completely at ease. That’s good to a degree.” He leaned down and dragged her completely between his legs. His thighs closed on her upper arms like iron bars. When he threaded a hand into her long hair and tugged her head back, she stared up at him helplessly, knowing the quivers in her stomach had more to do with anticipation than fear.

“Oh, you’re excited, all right. I can see it,” he murmured. He tossed his hat on the sack of clothing, and his mouth gently settled on hers. He tasted of mint. Clean and heady. His firm hand curved under her chin as he teased and nibbled at her lips

With her hands tied behind her back, head trapped by his grip on her hair, and his fingers on her jaw, she couldn’t fight his assault—didn’t want to fight as heat flooded her veins. Her lips softened, opened.

“That’s right. Let me in.” He took her mouth hard this time, as forceful as a Midwestern twister, rocking her to the foundation.

When he sat back, she wanted to follow him, to crawl into his lap, to feel his hands on her. The way his knees tightened on her shoulders, pinning her in place, showed he knew ...and wouldn’t relinquish control and let her.

The knowledge finished off what his kiss had started. She felt the wetness where her bottom pressed against her legs. Her body was screaming, *Yes, yes, yes. Sex!*

He rested a hand on her shoulder, heavy and warm, and she couldn’t help but remember the sure strength of his hands as he’d tied her wrists. “Well, sex does seem like a good possibility, doesn’t it?” he said in a low tone, watching her with those careful eyes

Odd hazel eyes. Upstairs in the brighter lights, she’d thought they were green. Here, in the dimmer lighting, they appeared slightly lighter than his tanned skin—a brown with mesmerizing golden flecks. And filled with an intimidating self-possession.

“Virgil, could I interrupt?”

Virgil looked up from the pretty little sub to see the Hunt brothers' friend, Simon. They'd talked before at one of the Hunts' parties.

"Xavier mentioned you'd come in with no gear," Simon said.

"I hadn't planned to play tonight." Hell, he hoped he'd walk in, get disgusted, and be done with this problem. Instead he'd had the opposite reaction. So now he had a submissive uncomfortable with bondage—only he could see she wanted it—and who definitely enjoyed pain. How could he possibly give her what she needed?

"About what I thought." The dom dropped a leather bag beside Virgil's chair. "When Jake and Logan mentioned your visit, I gathered a sampling of things you might enjoy. Nothing extreme."

"Thanks, Simon, but—"

"Keep it and put them all to good use." His gaze flicked over Summer, and he smiled. "You can start on this impertinent submissive."

The noise she made sounded like the growl his cousin's coon cat would make, and without looking, Virgil set his hand on top of her head. She quieted, and satisfaction washed through him. They were in tune already, and the way she focused on him, looking at him in a way she hadn't with the other dom, gave him a charge almost like an adrenaline rush. "In that case, I accept."

"Excellent. I'm on dungeon monitor duty, so I'll be around." Simon strolled away.

*With friends like him, who needs enemies?* Virgil frowned at the bag, undoubtedly full of everything needed to render a woman helpless, to keep her restrained. His head said no.

Yet Summer was beautiful, on her knees, bound in his ropes. The desire to please him, to be under his control, showed in her eyes, and something inside him answered to her need.

He nudged his foot against the bag. Undoubtedly it contained equipment to hurt her too. His gut clenched. *But look at her.* Lips parted, cheeks flushed. She'd requested pain, and her wide eyes begged for him to continue.

His cock rose in full agreement, and he sighed. Damned if his dick and a willing sub hadn't outvoted him.

He needed to do this, needed to discover his own limits and try to resolve the conflict. And in the process, he'd damn well be a good dom to her. He rose. "Discussion's over. We've got an available spanking bench right there."

She bit her lip, yet her squirm of anticipation lightened his heart.

He undid the ropes from her wrists and checked the skin. Slightly reddened but no abrasions. He'd taken care when roping her. She had such pretty, smooth skin, and he hadn't done a tie-down of a calf in a while.

After slinging the bag over his shoulder to rest across his back, he lifted her into his arms. Round and soft. He rubbed his chin over her silky hair, breathing the scent in: peaches and vanilla. She smelled edible. Lickable. Fuckable.

Built like a prayer bench, the spanking bench had a padded place to kneel and a higher padded four-by-four for the submissive to bend over. He hadn't used one before, but he'd watched the previous couple. Straightforward enough. Seemed like the proper equipment, since he planned to warm Summer's round ass as part of Xavier's punishment.

A little hurt with no lasting harm. But what if he liked it? Dammit.

He set her down beside the bench, holding her upper arms to help her balance. Although she was average height, she seemed small. Womanly. He smoothed his palms over her curvy body, learning her shape and feel. Her bones were pleasingly padded, her waist curved in nicely, and her full hips begged for the grip of a man's hands.

"Stay right there and don't move." When he reinforced the command with the stern expression he used to intimidate drunks, a tiny shiver ran through her body. *Ah*. Logan had said a dom could often spot a submissive by her reaction to a command. Nice.

She wanted his control—he'd give her what she needed.

Keeping a hand curved around her calf so she wouldn't lose the sense of being restrained, he knelt and opened the bag. Leather cuffs. *Yes*. A telescoping spreader bar. *Oh yeah*. A paddle? His stomach tightened. Then he nodded. *Yes*. Anal toys—*not yet*. The leather belt—hell no.

In fact, part of him insisted he shouldn't use any of this stuff.

But the little sub's arousal hung in the air, a soft fragrance that made him want to hear her whimper and beg for release. He wanted to know everything—her desires, what made her tick. Her voice had caught his attention; her appearance had roused him. Her giggling... Damn, he'd loved that, but the way she'd faced her fears? How could a man resist that combination of submission and courage?

How would she react to the paddle? To his hands? He'd find out how they'd both react. That was why he was here.

She stood quietly as he studied her. He'd scened with some subs at Serenity Lodge, but tonight felt different. He'd take her surrender, yes. He expected to have her squirming under him...but more. This time, he wanted to know the sub. This one. *Summer*.

And to find out about the bad experience Simon had mentioned. Should he have pushed her more? Just how much did restraints really bother her? He'd have to watch her reactions like a hawk.

But right now, the flush in her cheeks and the added pinkness of her lips said she wanted what he had to give. He slid his palm up her thigh to below her pussy, feeling the juices creeping down her leg and the heat of her skin. He left his hand there, enjoying the tiny squirms she gave.

A squirmy soft woman with big blue eyes. He was a dead man.

## Chapter Three

When Virgil removed the rope ties from her ankles, Summer felt more in control. Less nervous. *Less excited*. But she didn't mind. Being unbound was so much safer and—

Something closed around her left ankle. Her gaze shot down. A cuff? He set a spreader bar next to her feet. She stepped back.

“For each time you move, I’m adding an extra SWAT.”

She closed her eyes at the arousing threat. She’d gone past damp and well into really wet. If he kept talking to her in that rough, sexy baritone, she’d never last.

He cuffed her right ankle. “Open your legs.”

She moved her legs apart, and he slapped her inner thighs lightly to make her spread more. God, the tiniest of stings and she almost moaned. Cool air wafted against the wetness of her folds.

As he adjusted the spreader bar, she listened to the sounds around them: the faint beat of country music. A man’s low moan. A woman’s intermittent shrieks of pain. Low instructions from a dom. A woman’s scream of climax. *What would it be like to be so lost in an orgasm as to scream?*

Virgil had made the spreader bar wider than her shoulders. He attached her ankle cuffs to each end. This time when she tried to draw her legs together, she couldn’t. The bar held her ankles apart, keeping her exposed. *Oh Lord*.

Still kneeling, he ran his calloused hands up her thighs.

Her breath stopped as his fingers approached her pussy. Her clit throbbed. She needed to be touched right there. Instead he folded her short leather skirt up and tucked the hem into the waist, and did the same in the front. After undoing the bows of her thong, he pulled it off. When he held the scrap of material to his face and inhaled, her cheeks flared with heat.

“You smell nice, like sunshine and sex.” His hand cupped her exposed pussy, and he gave a pleased *mmm*. “All shaved and bare—nothing in the way of my tongue.”

She hadn’t realized she could grow wetter.

He rose, filling space with his solid presence, as if the world might bump into him and he’d never give ground. “Let’s get your vest off also. In fact, why don’t you undo it for me?”

“Me?” She added quickly, “Yes, Sir.”

He stood, feet braced, arms folded over his bare chest, and waited as she fumbled with the leather strings. Finally she reached the last one, and her vest fell open.

“You, honey, have gorgeous breasts.” He slid the garment off and cupped her full breasts with hands so large she fit without overflowing. His movements as unhurried as his speech, he weighed and molded them.

When his thumbs circled her bunched nipples, streaks of need shot straight to her clit. Seeing the heat and command in his eyes, she felt as if she'd gone wading and stepped off into deep water. She looked down only to see his muscular forearms and corded wrists and the erotic sight of his tanned hands on her pale skin.

"Eyes on me, sweetheart." He put his fingers under her chin and lifted her face up, holding her there as his other hand rolled her nipple. As he pinched it to the edge of pain, then stroked the ache away, he watched her with a penetrating gaze that pierced all the way to her soul.

When finally he stepped back, heat simmered beneath her skin as if she had a sauna inside her...and the thermostat had broken.

"I saw you with someone earlier, you know. You didn't look like your head was in the game at all." His eyebrows lifted. "Was it?"

Her breasts were swollen, her nipples burned, and she needed a moment to process his meaning. Then she winced, remembering how Xavier had said she playacted submission. "Uh. I guess not." Xavier was right, darn him. Her buddies never affected her like this, never shook her confidence, never took the control from her hands. They never made her feel sexy.

Under the warm heat in Virgil's eyes, she felt...beautiful.

He pulled more cuffs from the toy bag. "Give me your wrist, Summer."

A tremor ran through her, shaking her balance. Unable to even step back, she chewed on her lip, wanting to protest that she'd already said no to bondage.

His gaze was level. Steady.

She put her hand in his palm. As he fastened the cool leather snugly around one wrist, then the other, the shaking grew inside, not from fear, but from need.

He ran a finger under each cuff and tested the fit. "Use your safe word if you get scared, honey."

"I'm fine." Her voice came out husky.

"Yes, you are, aren't you?" He kissed her lips lightly, then took a seat on the spanking bench. His firm gaze met hers. "I want those breasts," he said softly. "Bring them to me, please."

Her nipples contracted so hard and tight she wanted to whimper with arousal. But she didn't move, because if she did—if she followed his order—then she gave him even more than he'd taken.

His voice turned dangerously low. "Now, Summer."

Her feet shuffled forward without any intention on her part, and under his authoritative gaze, her hands lifted her breasts, offered them to him.

"That's very nice, sweetheart." He set one hand on her bottom, and his other pressed over where her left palm cupped her breast. His warm breath touched her nipple. One breath

and another. With the subtle stimulation, her head spun, dizzy with need.

The touch of his warm lips on the peak made her jump.

The grip on her butt tightened, holding her firmly as his tongue circled her nipple. “Mmmm.” His deep voice was rich with satisfaction.

When he glanced at her, she tried to back away. “No, Summer. Don’t move.” He paused. “Why don’t you want me to enjoy your breasts?”

No one had ever questioned her so persistently. “Uh.” If she said, *I want you to*, he wouldn’t believe her, since she’d tried to retreat. If she said, *I don’t like it*, he wouldn’t believe her, since a blind man could see the way she responded to him. This man was as far from blind as any dom she’d ever met.

“Summer?” His quiet voice ripped her anchoring away like the current in a fast river.

“I...I’m used to a dom taking what he wants. Offering feels different.”

“I see. Sweetheart, you’re going to offer me a lot more than just your breasts tonight.” His baritone was measured and sure.

Her air hissed out at the dark promise in his eyes.

He lowered his head, his lips enclosing her nipple with heat. He sucked hard and fast, and she gave a tiny scream. Each strong pull of his mouth on her breast somehow squeezed her clit too.

When he straightened, she lowered her hands. “Do not move, baby,” he growled, and she froze, then pushed her breasts back upward.

“Very obedient. Good girl.” His compliment made her float with pleasure.

He touched her between the legs, where her pussy had waited forever for just that. Even so, she jerked at the jolt of exquisite sensation and got a low, “Uh, uh. Stay still, honey.” He traced a finger between her labia, slicking the wetness up and over her clit and back down.

Her eyes closed at the incredible pleasure. Her nipples, wet and swollen from his mouth, bunched tightly and throbbed, and his finger multiplied the sensations streaming through her. When he pushed a slick finger up into her, her knees wobbled. *More*.

She opened her eyes to see him watching her with a narrowed gaze.

A flutter started in her stomach. “I—”

“Shhh.” With his finger deep inside her, he rubbed his thumb over her clit, making little circles on one side until the nub hardened. Then he switched to the other side. The pressure in her groin grew, and his thick finger in her curled, rubbing something—somewhere—and the electrifying friction unraveled her thoughts completely.

He moved away, leaving her close to the edge. Hurting with need. “You’re a beautiful submissive, Summer. I like the way you respond.” With sure hands, he lifted her onto the spanking bench and clipped her cuffs behind her back.

She stiffened. “No. No, I don’t want my hands restrained.”



“Yes. You do.” He squeezed her shoulders, massaging the rigidity away. “Bondage scares you for some reason, but you do want it. Need it. That’s clear, even to me.”

Even to him? She shut her eyes in frustration. He read her more easily than almost anyone in the place.

“Breathe for me, Summer.” She sucked in air. He stroked his hands up and down her arms as she tugged at the cuffs, reassuring her with his touch, letting her relax into his dominance. It had been so long since she could let go, could trust someone to have control. “Okay now?” he asked gently.

“Yes, Sir.” He’d acknowledged her fears but didn’t yield at all. Why did his decisiveness make her feel safer with him than with someone who’d give in to her demands?

He pulled something from the toy bag. “Let’s drive you a little crazier, since Simon was so generous.” He stepped in front of the spanking bench, amusement lightening the heat in his eyes. He opened a package of nipple clamps. “I assume you’ve worn these before?”

Oh God, as aroused as she felt, could she take more? Each beat of her heart sent a pulse of blood to her clit.

“Summer?”

“Yes, Sir,” she whispered.

“I’ve learned I like the way a woman’s breasts look with this kind of jewelry.” With gentle tugs, he shaped her nipple long and taut, fastened on a clamp, and tightened the small screw to the point of pain. She stiffened, staring up in his face.

A muscle flexed in his jaw. “You can take more.” And he advanced it a tiny bit further. She whimpered and tensed.

“Breathe, Summer. Breathe until the pain eases up.”

She knew how, but without that low commanding voice caressing her, she might not have managed. A few seconds and the bite of the clamp dulled to a throb matching the one in her pussy.

“Good girl. Now this one.”

*Uhhh, two make the pain so much worse.* Needing to push him away, rip the clamps off, she jerked at her arms—uselessly. The river of awareness that she could do nothing flooded her, sweeping away her willpower. “Virgil, please...no.”

His hand stroked her hair. “Breathe again for me, baby. Deep breath now. That’s a girl.” He had a line between his brows and his mouth had tightened, but his eyes were level on hers.

The burn eased, and God, she needed to come so badly she shook. She squirmed.

“Be damned. You do like some pain, don’t you.” He wasn’t asking but stating a fact. He touched her cheek. “Bend over now.”

From kneeling upright, she leaned forward. He adjusted her so her ribs rested on the

leather of the four-by-four, and her heavy breasts dangled on the other side. The clamps tugged on her nipples like someone's sharp teeth. And each bite seared straight to her clit.

He sighed, his hand stroking her hair gently. "The pain makes you hotter, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Sir," she said with difficulty. The unstoppable fog of sensation was rolling right over her thoughts.

"Why the hell does watching you take the pain make me hot too?" he muttered. He pulled a wooden paddle from the bag and moved behind her. "I'd make you count, but I'm simply going to continue until I think we're both ready to quit, so there's no point, is there?"

*Oh. My. God.* She'd never been this needy before. Everything inside her shook. The way he treated her, watched her, commanded her, seemed to pull at something deep in her pelvis, an invisible leash of control. No wonder Xavier had said she'd been playacting.

He kneaded her bottom, and his abrasive palms sent goose bumps up her skin. "You have a gorgeous ass, baby. Soft and round." When his fingers slid between her legs, up and over her clit, as if to remind her of how aroused she was, she groaned. And groaned again when he took his hand away.

Something cool and solid rubbed the skin on her ass. The paddle. He gave her several tiny painless pats like a baby hammering on the floor.

What kind of a spanking was that? Disappointment cooling her excitement, she glanced over her shoulder at him.

The muscles in his face were rigid, his jaw set. The cords stood out on the hand gripping the paddle. His erection was very obvious. He saw her looking. His gaze moved over her slowly, and then a corner of his lip turned up. "All right, baby."

He hesitated for a long moment and swung. No baby pat this time; it stung...stung so good. She moaned as the shock blew straight into pleasure. She lowered her head and gave a happy moan.

He grunted as if he'd been the one to get hit, and then settled in. Slowly the blows grew harder. The pressure in her lower half tightened as the stinging changed to burning, and she edged closer to coming.

He stopped to rub his palm over her bottom, soothing the pain. His finger slid between her folds. "You're wet, Summer." He cupped her chin and turned her head toward him. "And in need of more," he said slowly, and his thumb stroked along her jaw. His eyes darkened. "All right, then."

He released her and stepped back. "These are for being rude to Simon and Xavier." The next five were hard enough to bring tears to her eyes. Each jerk of her body made her breasts swing and the clamps bite, sending more sensation streaming through her body.

Her head spun as her surroundings faded.

All her weight leaned on the bench. Nothing mattered anymore except the next slap of the paddle, the burning between her legs, the tugging on her nipples. Sensation after sensation.

He paused and ran his fingers between her folds, turning slick with her wetness. “Fuck, you really love this. I’ve never seen anything so beautiful,” he said just loud enough for her to hear. His slow stroking over her clit increased the fire until the whole area felt like one exquisitely exposed nerve.

When he moved his hand, she groaned. She’d been so close.

He returned to swatting her, light, then hard, from no pain to slaps that sounded horrible and resounded through her body. Between blows, the clamps teased her throbbing nipples, shooting electricity in a constant stream to her pussy.

Closer. *Hit me. Touch me...* Her back arched, and her butt pushed up, waiting...

He stopped—the bastard stopped. He squeezed her bottom, making her squeak as the burn increased. With his other hand, he stroked her pussy, the sure touches turning her clit back to a throbbing hardness.

“Please,” she whimpered, hips wiggling uncontrollably. She wanted to put her thighs together, to rub herself, to do something, but her legs were restrained apart, her hands secured. She could do nothing. “*More.*”

“You’ll get more...but it’ll be my way, not yours.” He resumed spanking her. Each blow forceful, one cheek, the other, and one against the lower curve of her butt. Pain ripped into raw sensation with every slap, first the shock, then the burning, then a wave of pleasure. Her hips rocked back after each as if to beg for more. The humming pulse in her ears grew louder than her moans.

He moved his position forward a step. His free hand brushed down her stomach to settle over her pussy, so that each time he hit her bottom, his finger rubbed directly over her clit.

She keened, her body turning rigid as the pressure inside skyrocketed upward, coiling...

He swatted her ass mercilessly, and the burning pain mingled with the excruciating pleasure of his finger sliding down the side of her clit. Another cruel slap of the wooden paddle. His finger stopped.

“Oh God, oh God, oh God.”

The next swat didn’t come...didn’t come...and then he stroked ever so slowly over the very top of her clit. Her muscles tensed as everything coiled inside.

The paddle struck.

Pain ripped into her; his finger pressed down on the nub of nerves, and it felt as if a tightly wound ball in her groin exploded. Her insides spasmed, sending sensations blazing through her in fiery bursts of pleasure. Her spine arched. His hands closed on her hips, restraining her, as she bucked in place.

He abandoned her clit to press two fingers over her entrance, then thrust them inside her, hard and fast.

The shock sent her over again. “Nooooo.”

He laughed, caressing her stinging bottom. “Oh yes, Summer. God, look at you.” His

jeans rubbed against her leg, the pressure of his thighs comforting as she shook in his grasp. Sweat covered her body, and her heart hammered hard enough to break through her ribs.

“The way you got off...” He stroked her for a minute, letting her catch her breath, murmuring quiet compliments about the pleasure she’d given him, about sharing her response with him.

His words reassured her. Why did an orgasm make her feel as if she’d opened herself to someone she didn’t know? But she didn’t know him, did she? The surge of affection, of need for him to hold her, was false, not true at all.

Emotions twisting, she pulled on the restraints, needing to get free, to get up. To get gone. Only, he’d want his turn now, and...

“Shhh.” To her surprise, he took her face between his big hands and kissed her, not hungrily as she expected, but sweetly, his lips firm, sure, enticing her to want more. “Thank you, sweetheart.”

She sighed when he let her go, and somehow the aching, fearful sensation had eased.

“Better,” he murmured. “Now hold on, baby. I’ve seen what clamps do.” He stepped in front of the bench and removed the clamp from her left breast.

Blood rushed into her nipple, bringing a searing whip of pain. She gasped, pulling back from him.

“One more.” He took the other clamp off, and God, it burned and hurt. Tears filled her eyes, and she jerked frantically at the restraints holding her arms behind her back.

“Easy, Summer.” He unclipped her wrists, and then detached the spreader bar, leaving all the cuffs on.

She held her fingers against her breasts as the fiery pain lessened. How’d she manage to forget how much worse clamps felt coming off than going on?

After a minute or two, a tolerable throbbing replaced the burning. She sighed and realized he stood nearby, keeping an eye on her. Okay, time to play fair. She glanced at his jeans and the very large bulge in front. “Perhaps I can do something in return?”

“Maybe later.” He pulled a soft, thin blanket from the toy bag and wrapped it around her. “Let me clean up a bit. I’m sure they have cleaning supplies.”

“I can help.” To her surprise, her legs wobbled. Then again, she’d never come so hard before. Taking a minute to get stable, she looked around. Near the center of the room, Simon and Xavier talked quietly and watched the scenes. Xavier’s dark gaze met hers, and a faint smile appeared on his hard face.

Had he set her up with Virgil deliberately?

Unsettled, she secured her blanket, got the spray bottle and paper towels and wiped down the equipment while Virgil put everything away.

Might as well get dressed, she thought, and found her clothes. When she started to unfasten the blanket, he gave a deep laugh. “Not so fast, blondie.” He set the clothing in her

hands and scooped her up, making her head spin.

“Put me down.”

“Nope.” He held her snuggled to his bare chest, tipping her up so he could rub his cheek against hers. “I like carrying you.”

He had a clean, crisp masculine scent with hints of soap and an outdoorsy aftershave. Unable to resist, she ran her fingers through his sandy-colored hair. A conservative, short cut—why was she not surprised? Soft, thick, and straight, like the fur on Mark’s Siberian husky, and much more fun to play with. His cheek creased as if he enjoyed her hands on him.

She liked them there too.

He found an isolated spot, dropped the toy bag beside the chair, and tossed her clothes on it, then sat down.

Her tender bottom hit his hard thighs, and she winced. When he settled her on his lap rather than having her kneel, she tensed. She only sat on laps for spankings. “Sir, please, I don’t want a spanking.”

“Good,” he said easily. “I think I’m done beating on your ass for tonight...unless you annoy me.” His brows drew together. “First you figure I want sex, then that I’ll spank you. Summer, don’t you ever *talk* to your doms after a scene?”

“Uh. Not a lot.”

“Whose fault that you don’t?” He didn’t sound as if he were blaming her...or the men. Just curious.

“Well, it’s not like I get all emotional or anything. I usually leave afterward.”

“So your doms don’t have the chance.” He remained silent for a minute. “One of the nicer things with this BDSM business is the way it forces—or should force—people to talk. I never realized how much I assumed about a partner’s perceptions until I started to ask questions. So we’re gonna have a chat now, baby.”

She stared at him. He wasn’t joking. She’d seen couples sitting around after scenes but figured the subs had felt needy. “I’m not upset. I mean, we don’t have to talk.”

“Yeah, we do.” He rubbed his thick knuckles over her cheek. “Damn, you’re soft. I have trouble keeping my hands off you.”

*Okay, serious melty stuff.*

“What did you like about our scene?” he asked.

She flushed.

His hand that had been so gentle closed on her jaw and kept her from looking away.

“Uh. Everything?”

He snorted. “That’s useful. You like breast clamps. Could I have made them tighter?” As if to illustrate, he moved his hand under the blanket and fondled her breast. When he

pinched the nipple, she stiffened at the rush of pain—and pleasure.

“Answer me.”

“I thought they were too tight at first, but then they were okay.” She stopped and sighed when he raised his eyebrow for her to continue. “I liked the paddle, and I guess you could have hit harder, only I...”

He simply gazed at her, not laughing, not unhappy, just listening intently...and watching her. She looked down at her hands and admitted, “I’ve never come so hard before or felt so...” *Fulfilled*. “It was wonderful.” When one of her buddies got her off during a scene, it felt like a pleasant burp. Satisfying enough, but she’d still have a hollow feeling—like receiving presents yet being alone at Christmas.

Firm fingers lifted her chin back up. “Simon knows you, so I figure you’ve played in Dark Haven before. What was the difference from other scenes?”

“How come I haven’t seen you before?”

“I don’t live here.” He repeated, “What was the difference?”

He deserved the truth. “You pushed me.” She stopped.

One cocked eyebrow was the response she got. *More*.

She exhaled and admitted, “You made me take it. I didn’t get a choice, and I don’t... It’s different if I don’t have any control.” And he’d calmed her fears somehow. His overwhelming self-confidence and authority and that easy humor had gotten to her. God, she liked him.

Then again, experience said she’d proven lousy at differentiating a good man from a bad man. Really, she needed to go home now. A shrill scream from a nearby scene sent a chill through her, topping off her resolution.

She tried to slide off his lap, but his hand curved over her hip securing her in place. “Stay put, little sub,” he growled. “What I’m hearing is that you like being pushed...if you feel safe. You like pain to some extent—having your ass paddled and nipple clamps on, and you liked getting off.”

It sounded terrible when said out loud. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

He kissed her nose. “Considering I’ve had my hands all over you and my fingers inside you, how can talking embarrass you?”

She felt her face flame.

“A modest sub who likes to play in public. Interesting.” He didn’t grin often...but when he did, it was devastating. “You have any questions in turn?”

Her body had focused on the way he’d said, “*my fingers inside you*,” and the memory of how that felt; her brain couldn’t concentrate on anything else.

“All right, I’ll answer anyway. I didn’t think I would, but I enjoyed beating on your ass. I enjoyed playing with you and getting you off. And I’d like to do more.” His finger rubbed over her lips, parted them, and slipped inside.

Thick. Calloused. She swirled her tongue around it and sucked, delighted at how his eyes heated.

“I don’t want to make love to you in front of all these people, Summer. Come back to my hotel, and we’ll play there.”

The unexpected request—and surge of fear—tightened her muscles, and she pushed his hand away. “No. I never play anywhere but here. Ever.”

“Ever,” he repeated. “Does this have something to do with the bad experience Simon mentioned?”

She stiffened. “I won’t talk about it.”

“Uh-huh, that would be a yes.” He shifted her closer, making it impossible for her to sit upright. “You’re almost as easy to read as my little cousin.”

“I need to go now.”

“Woman, you’re going to give me a complex if you keep trying to run away.” His voice turned hard. “*Sit. Still.*”

*Oh God.* Why did he have to have such a willpower-destroying, subterranean baritone?

“You had fun—wonderful fun. And you like me.” He paused and waited for her nod. “So although you don’t want to go anywhere with me, you’d probably like to continue?”

## Chapter Four

Virgil waited, striving for patience. Around them, the dungeon pulsed with activity. The atmosphere had grown darker, more serious. Much of the fancy submissive clothing had disappeared; many of the subs were naked.

Seconds ticked away before the little sub nodded again. Satisfaction rolled through Virgil. In his younger days, he'd enjoyed so many women that his father had been disgusted, but he'd learned a few lessons. He damned well knew when a woman felt something for him, and Summer did. They'd had a connection before he'd spanked her, and it had grown stronger. He hadn't realized that would happen. Pain and sex—he had a lot to learn if he continued.

But she trusted him, at least to a degree, this wary little sub who reminded him of a skittish filly, and he had a feeling she didn't trust many men, except maybe the ineffectual dom she'd hung out with earlier. What had happened to her in the past? "If I asked you out to dinner, would you go with me?"

"No."

Now that just hurt. "Do you date at all?"

"Not doms."

Obviously some bastard dom had been to blame. *No dating?* He traced the tiny freckles on her cheeks with a finger. Well, he wasn't looking to start a relationship anyway, especially with someone who lived hours from Bear Flat. He'd come here only for this one night. Tomorrow he'd head home, finish working out the plans for a greenhouse off the barn, and be back at work on Monday. He'd probably never see this little, sweet woman again.

The thought sent a pang of regret through him and increased his resolve to spend time with her now. "All right, then. I want more, and so do you, but you don't want to leave here. Am I hitting all the bases?"

"Yes." She had a seductively melodic voice, not low or husky, but...a little furry, as if she were purring. She could probably read a phone book and get a guy off.

"Then we'll stay put and play some more. Can we find somewhere here a tad more private?"

She bit her lip, which he'd noticed meant she was nervous. And between his kisses and her nervousness, her mouth was swollen. Tempting. He pulled her up and kissed her gently, then took his turn at nibbling on her lower lip. Soft. Velvety. Warm. Seductive as hell. Unable to resist, he took her mouth hard, plunging in and possessing. His cock thickened with his need to plunge into her pussy the same way.

What else would she let him do? What did he want to do?

Fuck, he wanted to do everything...

Her arms were around his neck when he pulled back, and her eyes were hot, dazed with



desire. Why did she have to feel so right? “Find us somewhere to play, Summer. Now.”

She blinked. “Maybe one of the theme rooms? They have windows, but we wouldn’t be on display like this.”

“That’ll do.”

He set her on her feet, and she hesitated. “You won’t gag me, right?”

What the hell had that bastard dom done? “No, baby, I won’t.” He held his hand out, pleased when she set her hand in his. She didn’t have an artist’s long, slender fingers. Her fingers were short, her hand designed for work. He approved.

On the far end of the dungeon, Summer stopped in front of a door and checked the window. “It’s empty.”

An actual room with a door. Amazing. “Seems private enough.”

“Weeell.” She flushed and pointed to small holes in the wall. “It’s the Victorian theme room, so it has peepholes for voyeurs.”

*Jesus.* “Let’s take a look.” He opened the door and guided her in. Eighteen-hundreds’ brothel style. The flowery wallpaper in dark reds blended with deeply colored Oriental carpets. The four-poster bed held definite possibilities, especially with chains hooked up in the canopy frame. The wall sconces put out a soft yellow light. The bed curtains looked promising at first, but they’d been anchored to the posts so a person couldn’t pull them around the mattress. Not that much privacy.

He glanced at Summer and paused. She obviously saw it different. Her color had faded, and her hands had a death grip on the blanket she wore.

“Is this too private for you, Summer?”

She inhaled slowly, looking more brave than excited. “I’m all right.”

He hesitated. Should he continue in here? Perhaps so. She trusted him more than she had earlier...because he’d pushed her limits a little. Something else to remember. Being in here would push her too—as long as her fear didn’t increase.

After setting the toy bag on the edge of the mattress, he smiled at her. “Hop up on the bed, sweetie. I have things I want to do to you.”

Even in the dim room, he could see her eyes dilate, turning the sky blue to indigo. Anticipation...and submission. The knowledge squeezed his balls and sent a jolt of adrenaline through him.

Dropping her blanket, she climbed onto the high bed. Her hair glinted like starlight against the dark blue quilt, and he wanted to gather the silky strands in his hands. Soon. “Lie on your back.”

She turned, propping herself up on her elbows, and his heart simply stuttered. Had he ever seen anyone more lovely? Her hair fell over her softly curved shoulders and upper arms. Beautifully creamy skin with a spattering of freckles across her upper breasts. Her stomach was rounded. His fingers remembered how her hips had felt in his grip.

He took his time. He'd never watched a woman in this way before, with the certainty she was his to look at as long as he wanted. Something inside him shifted with the knowledge.

Her lips were swollen. Her pale pink nipples were rosy from the clamps—her pussy bare. He wanted to taste her, there, where his fingers had stroked. And he didn't plan to wait any longer.

Her eyes met his, and she flushed prettily. He realized that if his inspection had embarrassed her, he didn't mind at all. In fact, he rather enjoyed it. But when he grasped her ankle, she shivered. *Slow down, Masterson.* She was excited but also frightened. How could he control her in the way she needed without terrifying her? He studied her and arrived at a compromise. "I'm not going to tie your hands. That should help with your worries."

She relaxed slightly, yet a little kissable pout indicated disappointment. *Perfect.* This might work. He walked around to the side of the bed. "Your hands will stay free, but I'm going to restrain your legs."

"What?"

How could a tiny tremor in her voice turn him on like someone had dumped a bucket of testosterone over him, yet seeing her truly scared had the opposite effect? And how the hell did he know the difference? But somehow he'd found her wavelength; he seemed to read her thoughts, her body. She was showing anxiety now, not fear.

And he liked her a little nervous.

Had he just thought that? He closed his eyes. *Fucking pervert.* What was he doing here?

*Doing what I've wanted to do all my life.* Looked like he was going to have a hell of a lot of thinking to do once he left Dark Haven. For now, though...

"Virgil?"

He squeezed her ankle and said smoothly, "Oh, you heard me." He unhooked a chain from the overhead canopy frame, raised her left leg, and clipped her ankle cuff to the dangling chain so her leg pointed straight up. She fought him, just the smallest amount, and the feeling of using his strength against her, overcoming her resistance, was heady stuff.

He knew if he didn't see that a little force excited her, he'd not enjoy it at all. But her nipples bunched even tighter. She wet her lips, her breathing fast.

He restrained her right leg so her legs were widely spread in a V shape. Her pussy was exposed—and facing the peepholes, which he didn't particularly like. That soft pink cunt was his and not for display.

"You're a beautiful woman, Summer." She blinked as if startled, then smiled.

He curved her hands around her inner thighs so it appeared as if she held herself open for him. "Keep your hands there and don't let go. No matter what."

Her breathing gave a nice hitch. Her nipples were hard peaks, and he pinched one lightly, making her hips wiggle. Fuck, he loved squirmy women. "Did you understand my instructions?"

She sounded as if she'd just finished a marathon as she said, "Yes, Sir."

The term pleased him more and more. Not only respectful, it was an acknowledgement of the connection between them. With a hand under her lush bottom, he lifted her and pushed a pillow under her hips to raise her pussy—and that little asshole—in the air.

How would she react when he tested that limit? His cock had its own reaction, trying to punch a hole through the front of his jeans.

From a small table, he took a packet of lube and a condom. He scowled at the rough calluses on his fingers, and then grabbed a glove too.

After kneeling on the foot of the bed, he let himself down onto an elbow where he could look at her pussy to his heart's content. The soft light showed her puffy outer lips glistening with her juices. Her legs were wide enough to open her inner folds, exposing her entrance as well. When he touched her, slickness coated his fingers, the finest compliment a man could get.

"You're all swollen and wet, sweetheart," he murmured. When he opened her labia farther, her thighs tensed.

With a finger, he stroked wetness from her entrance upward, making her legs jerk with each light brush over her clit. Her breathing changed, deepened, and he saw the muscles in her forearms tighten as she forced herself not to move.

Fuck, he could play with her all day, and he'd still want more. When she'd climaxed so hard before, it had been better than scoring a tie-breaking touchdown, than making a bull's-eye, than reaching a mountain peak. And he damned well wanted to make her come again. He bent his head and licked her, teasing with his pointed tongue. Under his mouth, her clit engorged, and the hood pulled back, leaving it totally vulnerable to his attentions.

She tasted like a day in July, hot and lightly musky, and when he grazed his lips over the crease between her hip and thigh, he breathed in vanilla and peaches. So very female, making him feel even more male. More dominant. Trapped in his jeans, his rigid cock strained to be free.

"Mmmm, you even taste like summer." He slid his tongue across her entrance and pushed his tongue into her. She half gasped, half moaned, and her legs jerked but were held fast. He'd dreamed of having a woman in this kind of helpless position where he could tease without her trying to distract him. He'd told himself he was a sicko.

But if he was, so was everyone else in this place.

She wanted what he had to offer; she trusted him with her body, her emotions. He'd give her everything he had...but damned if he'd hurry.

He set a hand just above her mound, pinning her down as he thrust his tongue into her cunt, then out to run over her clit. As her breathing turned erratic, the fragrance of her excitement increased. So did that...connection between them. It was like riding a wild mustang, forcing it to go where he wanted; reading its ears, its breathing, its muscles, and shifting his weight in response...enjoying the heady victory when it conceded he was the master. Right now, he could almost feel the sensations she was experiencing—and how her

arousal was spiraling out of her control.

Summer felt as if she'd fallen into an inferno of need. Her fingernails bit into her thighs as she tried to keep from grabbing his hair and yanking him closer. "Please, please don't stop."

"You, little sub, don't have permission to speak, except for your safe word." He idly licked over her clit, then added, "I'm not a cruel man, so you can scream or moan if you must." He thrust his tongue inside her again and wiggled it.

Her eyes rolled back, and she whispered, "Oh God."

He rose up enough to shake his head at her in disapproval, and then studied her for a minute. "Dammit," he said to himself and lightly slapped the top of her mound, just missing her clit.

The abrupt sting shot down into her core, swelling every nerve until her entire pussy throbbed. She barely managed to close her mouth so only an "uhhhh" escaped.

He made a thoughtful noise, and she felt his finger pressing against her opening where her vagina was spasming from the pain...and the pleasure.

"Hell of a response," he muttered. "You got wetter." She heard a packet rip, rustling noises. Then his tongue came down on her clit, just her clit, flickering and circling. Pressure clenched inside her, and her muscles tightened. Every stroke of his tongue, hot and wet and determined, brought her closer...

Something pressed against her anus. *No*. "No. You—"

Another slap to her mound, and the sharp pain almost sent her over. Her head spun. Her pussy seemed caught in a vise of throbbing sensation.

"This won't be my *large* cock, honey." His chuckle was low as he added, "Just my finger." He didn't wait for her answer, but ruthlessly pushed harder until his slick finger slid past the ring of muscle.

He felt huge. A tremor ran through her at the feeling of him inside her, pressing deeper into the forbidden place. "I—"

His head lifted.

She hastily clamped her mouth shut and saw his lips quirk before he resumed.

Nerves sparked to life around the intrusion, joining the ones in her pussy, until her entire core pulsed with sensation.

Slowly his finger moved in and out of her back hole—and his tongue thrust roughly into her pussy in an entirely different rhythm. She trembled, unable to process anything as each touch demanded her attention. His tongue moved upward and onto her clit, stroke after stroke, until she moaned.

He gently tugged at the sensitive nub with his teeth, and sensation blasted through her. She gasped.

A rumble of laughter, and then his finger in her ass drove in deeper, and her hips jerked up, trying for more, trying for less. She had no control anymore.

He kept thrusting, hard and fast, and then closed his mouth over her clit, sucking in the same rhythm.

Every nerve in her body fired at once, and the massive explosion of sensation ripped through her, hot pleasure searing its way upward. She screamed. “Aaaa, aaa, aaah.”

When the waves slowed and she could breathe, he sucked her clit into his mouth again. Her back arched, her pussy clenched harder than a fist. Her anus constricted around his invasive finger.

He didn’t stop, and she moaned and wiggled and then broke into almost hysterical giggles. “Stop. Oh God, please stop.”

*Oh, oh, goddammit.* She’d spoken. He lifted his head, amusement glinting in his eyes as he raised the hand he’d been leaning on.

He smacked her mound sharply, and this time he hit her swollen clit...and at the same moment, he pushed a second finger inside her asshole.

“Nooooooooo.” Everything spasmed into a paroxysm of pleasure, and she came again, brutally intense.

A minute later, when he slid his fingers from her, her body clenched again, and she moaned. As she stared at the canopy above, it seemed to shimmer with every violent heartbeat. Sweat dampened her neck and breasts, and she couldn’t stop gasping.

*Note to self—don’t talk without permission.*

After sitting back on his heels, he disposed of the glove, then opened his jeans and rolled on a condom. Oh Lord, his cock was built like him, solid and big. Nicely long, but thick, thick, thick. He lowered himself between her legs, his body covering hers, his heavy weight erotic. His crisp chest hair teased her still-sensitive nipples to peaks, and she rubbed her breasts against him, wanting more.

He smiled into her eyes. “Every time you squirm, all I want to do is take you hard.” He put his weight on his elbow and set one big hand on her breast. His thumb teased over the nipple and sent streams of sensation to her pussy.

The head of his cock rubbed against her entrance.

What was he waiting for? She tilted her hips up, trying to urge him on. He didn’t move.

She frowned and met his eyes to see heat mixing with determination and authority. He had control.

“When I want to.” He ran his finger over her lips. “You don’t get a vote, honey.”

The knowledge that she didn’t have to try to decide what to do to please him was heady. Freeing. His will surrounded her, his eyes watched her, removing any chance of hiding her response to his touch. “Yes, Sir.” *Take what you will. Take me.*

He smiled approval and leaned down. His hand lightly curved over her throat, not cutting

off her air, but it still sent hot shivers rippling through her. His fingers were strong, warm, and then he took her mouth roughly. His hand on her neck kept her from moving, holding her in a totally submissive space as he dominated the kiss.

He didn't move away until her entire body lay limp under him. He nodded, satisfaction a gold color in his eyes. "Good. Put your hands on my shoulders," he said, his voice lower and rougher, vibrating against her bones. "Don't move them from there, is that clear?"

Oh God, he made her so hot. So wet. "Yes, Sir." Calling him that sounded right. She curled her fingers over his shoulders, feeling how his skin stretched over iron-hard muscles. She ran her hand down his deltoid, over the hollow in his triceps, and around to the curve of his biceps. He could do anything he wanted to her, she realized; he was just that strong. She stiffened, her fingernails digging into him in momentary fear.

His eyes narrowed, and just looking into them—at his face with his determined jaw, the laugh lines beside his mouth—her worry seeped away.

His slow smile warmed her. "Better. Now I want you perfectly still." His eyes crinkled as he whispered, "I'm going to fill you full, and you're not going to move as I do."

Oh God.

Before she had a chance to react, he was pushing into her. The head of his cock breached her entrance, so wide he had to slide in and out in increments before her muscles stretched to accommodate him. "Fuck, you're tight, baby."

The effort of holding still sent tremors up and down her body as he surged in farther. Wonderful, painful, thrilling stretching, more and more until his pelvis finally pressed firmly against hers. Every nerve throbbed, waiting for the delicious friction—

He pulled back, then thrust again, and she groaned at the exhilarating surge of sensation. Her fingers tightened on his shoulders, and he looked at her, eyes glowing with heat—and warning. "Don't move, Summer."

The need to control herself made everything so much more intense. Holding her breath, keeping so very still...

"That's a girl." His grin flashed.

Supporting himself on one arm, he used the other to lift her ass so he could rub his groin on her pussy with every stroke. The pressure, the brush of his hair over her sensitive clit, and the glide of his erection between her folds drove her mad, pushing her higher and higher until she couldn't help it and tried to grind against him.

"Summer," he warned.

"Oh please," she whispered, the size of him stretching her with each thrust. Her clit tightened, hardened, needing more, until her moans were almost constant.

When her head rolled on the pillow, he moved the hand bearing his weight up higher to tangle his fingers in her hair, trapping her. His weight pinned her body, she couldn't move her head, could only stare at his rugged face, feel his hand under her ass moving her to his own satisfaction.

As if he'd taken away her last barrier, a violent tremor ran through her. And then everything inside her clenched and burst outward. Hot pleasure engulfed her as her core spasmed around his intrusion.

He started a hard, fast rhythm, and the hammering of his shaft kept her orgasm going, drawing out the pleasure until the room lost focus. His hand pulled her hair painfully as he pressed deep, deeper. Under her fingers, his shoulders hardened, and he made a guttural sound. His cock jerked inside her as he came.

After a moment, he rested his forehead against hers, the movement so friendly and intimate that she sighed with happiness. He loosened his hand in her hair and nuzzled the damp strands at her temple. "Thank you, sweetheart," he said, his voice deep with satisfaction. "You'd be a delight in bed in normal circumstances, but when you"—he hesitated, as if uncomfortable with the word—"submit, the pleasure almost takes my head off. You're beautiful, Summer."

"Thank you, Sir," she whispered. As if he knew how comforting his closeness was, he stayed inside her a satisfyingly long time. Stroking his hand over her breasts and stomach, he kissed her now and then, letting her come back to reality surrounded by his warmth.

When she took a long shuddering breath, he gave her his slow smile and moved off, pulling his cock out with a sigh. After disposing of the condom, he released her legs, helping her work the kinks out. Then he lay down and pulled her against his side.

He smelled of sex and man and a hint of outdoorsy aftershave, and she sighed and settled her head in the hollow of his shoulder. She ruffled her fingers through his chest hair, tracing out the indentations of his nipples hidden within, and tried to think when she'd felt so satisfied. So content, as if every empty space in her body and soul had been filled to overflowing.

Eventually he kissed her forehead. "You sure you don't want to go back to my hotel room for a couple of hours?"

*God.* His unexpected question hit her hard, like he'd taken her lungs and squeezed the air out of them. She pushed up on her elbow. When he lifted her hand to his lips, she saw the tiny scars on her forearm where Dirk's cane had split her skin. Other scars decorated her back. Nothing too noticeable—perhaps she should be grateful for having pale skin—but always there. "No. I'm sorry, but no."

"All right." He opened her hand and laid it against his cheek. His light brown stubble scraped her palm, and his cheekbone was hard under her fingertip. Heavy bones, like the man, solid and unmovable. "Then will you meet me for breakfast? You can pick the place. I've got to return home tomorrow, but I want to see you before I leave." His brow creased. "There's...something...between us. I'd like to come back and visit you."

She shook her head.

He gently tucked a lock of hair behind her ear, but his eyes had changed, golden brown to green, and already she knew the signs of his disappointment. Anger too? She tensed and examined his face carefully. He was a dom, used to getting his own way. Her gaze dropped to his hand as an echo of Dirk sounded in her head: "*Fucking bitch, you'll do it my way or*

*else.*”

“I realize you don’t know me well,” Virgil said in an even voice, “but it bothers me when you look at me as if you believe I might hit you.”

Her eyes flashed up to his, and she realized she’d been staring at his hand. Waiting for his anger. “I-I’m sorry, Sir.”

“I think I get it. Did he beat you up more than once?”

“No,” she said without thinking. “I mean—”

“Do not lie to me, Summer.” Under her palm, the muscles of his face turned to steel. “That does piss me off, and considering your lack of clothing and your position, it would be easy to spank your ass again.”

She stiffened, despite the wave of heat.

“Now, just so you know, I punched a girl once.” His eyes narrowed in thought. “We had an all-out brawl, in fact.”

The heat turned cold, and she started to pull away, but he laid his hand over hers, keeping it on his face. “She wanted only her friends on the merry-go-round, and I didn’t think that was right. My brothers and I wanted to play too. She pushed me down and—”

*Wait a minute.* Merry-go-round? “Exactly how old were you?”

“About four.” The sun lines at the corners of his eyes deepened. “Morgan told on me—the rat—and my father had a *discussion* with me about the Masterson philosophy of how a man treats a lady. It didn’t matter how short the man was. Only a few things got Pa riled enough to wallop us, and I’d run square into that one.”

“You were four.” She stared at him, and laughter bubbled up, catching her by surprise. “You’re such a jerk.”

“Very true. But, Summer, that was the last time I hit a woman.” His mouth turned up into a wry smile. “At least until recently.”

Her muscles tightened again, and then she realized what he meant. “For BDSM.”

He nodded. “My cousin fell in love with a dom, so I checked into it to see if I needed to kill him before they got married.”

“And you liked it.”

He sighed. “Yeah. Can’t say I’m comfortable about the notion.”

He massaged her fingers, his thumb rubbing over her knuckles. His hand felt so warm, she knew hers must be icy cold. She felt cold, in fact. *I’m not ready to be with a real dom.* He might be new, but he was damned well dominant.

“Does anything I’ve said change your mind about seeing me, Summer?” he asked softly.

She shook her head, the fear deeper than the unhappiness sweeping through her. *I want to...* “I c-can’t. I’m sorry.”

“And I’m sorry that I can’t convince you to trust me, at least that far.”



A discreet tap on the door made him look up, and he frowned. “We’ve hogged this room long enough, apparently.” He rolled off the bed, picked her up around the waist, and set her on her feet. His strength still stole her breath.

He dressed faster than she did, nudged her hands away, and finished lacing up her vest. The feel of his sure fingers made her nipples harden, and he ran his finger over one, then kissed the top of her head. “Pretty Summer.”

She didn’t have any words to give him back.

After slinging his toy bag over his shoulder, he led the way out of the room. In the dungeon, he stopped. “Thank you for the evening,” he said, his eyes shadowed by his hat. Looming over her, he tilted her chin up and gave her a kiss. A gentle, lingering, good-bye kiss.

She watched him walk away, saw how people automatically moved out of his path. So very dominant...and she wanted him back so badly her chest ached.

## Chapter Five

Virgil's drive home to Bear Flat seemed to last forever. In the quiet of his truck, he couldn't evade the memories of the previous night and the beauty of Summer's responses. He had to face his own reactions and the unsettling realization that he'd known what to do to push her and how to take her further until she was aware of only him and the pain and pleasure he gave her.

With Summer, he'd learned what Logan meant by breaking down a submissive's barriers, opening her to the moment and to sheer pleasure.

He'd felt the joy in the exchange—they'd been so connected that he could almost hear her thoughts and feel the sensations she was experiencing. Knowing she'd willingly given him such power over her had been headier than drinking a bottle of scotch.

It felt good, but did that make it right? *Fucking-A*. He'd tied her up, taken her choices away from her, and dammit, that was wrong. His hands tightened on the steering wheel. He might be a tad overprotective when it came to women, but he damned well believed women were equal to men in everything except pure, dumb muscle. Hell, if he'd thought differently, his little cousin would have kicked his balls into his throat.

But he'd gloried in making Summer defenseless. In using his strength and size to do so. In seeing her try to escape his grip and his ropes.

She'd trusted him enough to let him tie her up even as she shivered, her eyes wide with a hint of fear and hot with lust. He'd watched her responses as he touched her, put cuffs on her, and his dick had been hard as a rock. He'd never been so aroused.

His mouth flattened. And then he'd spanked her...and liked it. Hell yes. It was as if an animal had been unleashed inside him. He'd heard the smack of the paddle hitting her ass, seen the shock of pain traveling through her, the tears puddling in her eyes. And he'd continued. What kind of a monster *was* he?

He'd told her he didn't hit women, even as her ass still glowed red from his actions. What a fucking hypocrite.

But she'd loved it. "*I've never come so hard before or felt so...fulfilled.*" He'd given her what she wanted. More—she *needed* that pain, for whatever reason, and he'd fulfilled her need.

*Hurting a woman isn't right.*

But she'd wanted him to.

Hadn't she? Wasn't that what all rapists said? *She wanted it, your Honor, really she did.*

He turned onto the smaller county road leading to Bear Flat. The engine's hum deepened as the road grew steeper. The scent of pine filled the truck, and the air chilled with the bite of snow from the high peaks.

Home. He belonged here where the Mastersons had settled during the gold rush days and

never left. His family had a reputation of honesty and uprightness. So did he. He took pride in being a cop—a good cop. So what kind of lawman got a rush out of tying up a woman and forcing her into *anything*—even pleasure? His gut tightened as if he'd eaten the lead pellets from a shotgun.

A few minutes later, he drove through his tiny town, nodding at the waves he received from people on the boardwalk. His neighbors. His friends.

Perhaps the Hunts could indulge in BDSM and still live here, but he didn't think he could, so it was best that Summer had turned him down. He'd had his fun, but he was home now. Time to set it aside and pick up a normal life.

\* \* \*

On Sunday evening, Summer finished a long bath and hesitated, then pulled on her pink flannel pajamas. Comfy wear for a body tender and aching from the previous night.

What a shame she had no comfy wear for her emotions. She'd spent the entire day thinking, getting more and more unhappy with herself. *Damn you, Virgil Whatever-your-name-is*. God, she didn't even know his last name. And she'd never see him again.

But because of him, she'd taken a good hard look at herself. Talk about depressing. Needing something to do with her hands, she dropped onto the couch and picked up her quilting hoop. She'd always thought of life as a winding stream...and hers had somehow diverted off into a bog. Gone stagnant.

Like in relationships. Here was Virgil, able to give her everything she'd ever dreamed of...and more. The excitement, the domination, the lust. She'd screamed. God—she'd actually screamed. Nothing had ever come close to what she'd experienced with him.

Could it be because she only played with her buddies—her risk-free dom friends. *You think?*

How long would she cling to the safe instead of going after what she really wanted? Scowling, she rocked the needle through the fabric. She'd turned into a sissy. *This isn't who I am. I'm the one who left everything behind in Nebraska to go to San Francisco*. The one who went to a BDSM club to explore needs which didn't run along a "normal" path.

But it had only taken one lousy—horrible—incident with an abuser to make her hide under the bed like a five-year-old hearing monsters in the closet. She'd sure ruined her chances with Virgil.

She turned the quilt frame and adjusted the material on her lap. Pretty pastels for her niece-to-be. She'd always wanted to have children. *Can't have children if you're afraid to make love with a man outside of a club*.

She snorted. Almost a year had passed since the incident. *You over the problem yet, Summer? Not*. She wasn't finding a cure on her own. After hauling in a long, deep breath, she made her decision. Tomorrow, she'd talk with Simon's submissive, Rona, who worked in hospital administration, and ask for help getting counseling.

That would fix her love life...maybe...but what about everything else? Aside from her

friends, she wasn't happy with anything about her life.

Leaning back, she looked around at her apartment. At one time, she'd loved San Francisco, wondering at the variety of people and diverse little neighborhoods, the amazing ocean and pretty bay. But the excitement had slowly disappeared. Her apartment walls crept inward, crowding her. Despite the sunny color scheme, the wealth of potted plants, and the bright quilts tossed over the chairs, the rooms seemed dreary.

The apartment hadn't changed, though. She had. She glanced out the window, where the dull orange ball of the sun slowly sank behind...another building. Typical city sunset. In Nebraska, you could see just about forever, horizon to horizon—her lips twisted in a wry grin—and all planted in corn.

*Go home?* Her brother could always use more help on the farm, and the big, old farmhouse had room for their mother, him and his family, and Summer too, if she wanted. The nearby towns had hospitals with jobs for an experienced nurse.

*I don't want to live in Nebraska; I like California.* She just needed more space.

She nodded. Yeah. Farm girl needs a small town, one where she might afford a house. Have neighbors. Have a big garden. Have a dog... Just the thought made her yearn.

But this time, she'd be smarter about moving. First find a job, *then* she'd move. Not like before, coming here to live with her lover and getting dumped. She scowled at the ugly memory. The weight of her suitcase had matched that of her despair and fear: no money, no place to live, no job.

She'd never be so idiotic again.

So. First counseling. Then, once cured of the past, on to job hunting and a whole new life.

\* \* \*

January in the Sierras. Not for the weak. Unlike the wet chill of a San Francisco winter, the mountains around Yosemite held a rip-the-air-out-of-your-lungs cold. But the wood stove in the tiny cabin at Serenity Lodge gave off plenty of heat.

Summer's fingers didn't tremble because of the cold.

She shook her head. *I've fallen off the edge into total insanity.* Wasn't her life chaotic enough? Over the past six weeks, she'd gone through counseling and job hunting. Then two days into her week of vacation, she'd interviewed and accepted a job in a Gold Beach hospital. Now she had to drive back to San Francisco, turn in her notice, get an Oregon RN license, pack, and move.

Detouring all the way to Yosemite to spend a weekend in the mountains was just plain stupid.

It was Simon's fault. He'd come to see her before she left for Gold Beach. "*Dark Haven is having a BDSM weekend at a mountain lodge. Since the owners are turning it into a family place, this is the last time the club will party there.*"

She'd said no—like she had time to play? But then he dropped the bombshell: "Did you

know that Virgil Masterson lives near Serenity Lodge?”

*Virgil.* She must have turned all sorts of colors, since Simon had busted out laughing. Then he'd said he'd reserve her a cabin—his treat—and would watch out for her. “*Rona and I both hope you'll come.*”

Virgil. How could she not agree? She hadn't managed to get him out of her head. Not during the day, when every big man reminded her of him, and not during the nights, when she'd dream of how he'd tangled his hand in her hair, pulling her head back so he could take her lips. She'd hear his gravelly voice telling what to do. Quizzing her on how she felt. Rumbling a laugh. Every day, the need to see him hummed in her bones.

During the drive from Gold Beach, her anticipation kept increasing, totally overwhelming the excitement of the job offer.

Unfortunately they said he probably wouldn't attend the party—she needed to call and tell him she was here. And now the time had come, and she felt as if she had butterflies on steroids fluttering inside her chest.

She paced across the cabin. Paced back. Plopped down on the bed and stroked a hand over the handmade quilt. A traditional log cabin pattern. *Nice.* Maybe she'd sell them some of hers.

*Stop stalling.* She picked up the phone. Biting her lip, she dialed the number Simon had obtained from the lodge owner.

Ring. Her hand tightened on the receiver. What if Virgil wasn't even in town? *Courage, girl.*

“Hello?” The man's deep voice was almost right but not rough enough, as if the jagged patches had been sanded out.

“Um. Virgil?”

“No, this is Wyatt. Hold on a sec.” Thumping sounds, like boots, then, “It's for you.”

*Oh God, oh God.* Summer rose to her feet. What if he—

“This is Virgil.”

Her knees went weak, and she thumped back onto the bed. Her mouth opened. All the way here, she'd planned her speech. Not one of the smooth phrases came to mind. The butterflies must have eaten them.

“Hello?” His voice flowed over her in a flood of warmth.

“Um. Virgil.” She swallowed. *You're a woman, not a little girl. Act like it.* “This is Summer. We met at—”

“Dark Haven.”

Silence. As if he hadn't expected to hear from her again. Hadn't *wanted* to hear from her.

*Oh God, this had been such a bad idea.* “I'm sorry. I shouldn't have bothered you.” She set the phone down. Carefully. The flutters in her chest stopped, falling into silence. Dead

and gone.

\* \* \*

“Summer?” Virgil said. *Silence*. Hell, she’d hung up. Cursing himself, Virgil thumbed the off button and checked caller ID. *Serenity Lodge*. Summer was here in Bear Flat?

At the sound of her voice—just her fucking voice—everything in him had surged forward like he’d dropped into first gear and stomped the gas. He throttled the feeling back. Hadn’t he decided he’d avoid that lifestyle completely? Mastersons weren’t perverts, dammit.

*She’s here in Bear Flat.*

“Who called?” Wyatt still stood in the door of the kitchen. “Gorgeous voice.”

“Nobody, so butt out.”

“Yeah? You look kinda like *nobody* kicked you in the nuts,” Wyatt commented. “Is she the brunette you dated last week, or the blonde the week before?”

Fucking small-town gossip. “No.” *She’s the one whose soft ass I reddened with a paddle. Warm Summer, full of laughter and courage, who’s made every woman before and since seem dull and colorless. Damn him for ever walking into Dark Haven.*

“Then go get her, dumb-ass. Maybe if you get your rocks off, you’ll stop being such an asshole,” Wyatt snapped before stomping into his office.

*Maybe so.* His mouth dry as an August wind, Virgil got a glass of water and sipped it, staring out the window over the sink. From their mountain valley, the tall evergreens rolled upward...toward Serenity Lodge. What was she doing there, and how’d she get his number? Why now, after all this time?

His gut tightened. Was she in trouble?

He needed to talk with her. The thought felt right, a movement forward after weeks of spinning his wheels.

Gently, he set his glass down beside the tiny parsley plant Kallie’d left behind. The house had grown too damn quiet since she’d married Jake. She seemed happier than he’d ever seen her, and he bet he’d get a niece or nephew soon, but he missed her.

The plant’s curly leaves drooped, looking a hell of a lot like he’d felt for weeks now, ever since Summer kicked him to the curb. He carefully poured water into the pot. *Live, little guy.*

He knew he’d been acting like the asshole Wyatt called him. And not because of any ego bruising. The problem was she’d been more than just a quick fuck to him.

They’d connected. Everything she’d done had reverberated through him, had felt *right*—like on the target range when form and breathing and vision all came together, and even before he’d pull the trigger, he’d know it was a bull’s-eye. Being with her felt *right*.

The need to see her gnawed at his gut.

He must have hurt her feelings with his flat-footed response to her voice. Not good. He’d

best explain, face-to-face, why he couldn't pursue a kink like BDSM.

What if she'd actually come to see *him*? Wanted to be with him?

His cock stood right up and begged.

*Fucking-A.* He could almost feel her small hands gripping his biceps as he thrust into her, hear her hoarse voice begging him, "*Oh please,*" see her eyes, wide and anxious and wanting to please him. Nothing else and no one else had ever come close to making him feel like that.

*But I'm not a fucking pervert, dammit.* Hadn't he already figured all this out?

Nonetheless. He'd go to her. He'd explain. Maybe they could still see each other. Without the kink.

Without stopping to change out of his uniform, Virgil jumped in his truck and headed up the mountain. Night had fallen; the air had chilled with the sharp scent of snow riding on the wind. As the headlights illumined the road before him, and each mile brought back more memories of Summer, his resolutions started to snap like dry branches in a winter storm.

## Chapter Six

When Summer opened the cabin door, all Virgil could do was stare. Weren't dreams supposed to be better than reality? But the sight of her hit him like a heart-stopping kick to the chest.

She was so beautiful, with the sun-colored hair he wanted to gather into his hands, the little freckles over her creamy skin, the wide blue eyes that matched the color of her fluffy sweater.

"Virgil. What are you doing here?" Her expression blanked, but he'd seen the flash of stunned delight in her eyes.

He stepped forward, forcing her to retreat, and closed the door behind him. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, just seeing her loosened his grip on reality. "I want to talk to you."

"No need. I shouldn't have bothered you—it was a momentary mind-blip." Her voice shivered along his nerves, and he hardened.

"A blip, huh?" Oh, he could tell it was more than that. Her eyes were vulnerable. Needy. She wanted him as fucking much as he did her.

The room held only one chair. He pulled her over to the twin beds, motioned for her to sit on one, and he took the other, trying to forget how she'd squirmed under him last time they'd enjoyed a mattress. "We're going to talk anyway."

"You're married or involved or something, right?"

He stared at her, then snorted. "Now that's just insulting, woman. No, none of those."

"Oh. Well."

How the hell to explain, especially when he kept wanting to cuff her hands behind her back, set her on her knees, and watch the yielding look come into her eyes. "I did a lot of thinking after leaving Dark Haven and again tonight, so let me lay it out for you." He cleared his throat. "Tying up women, beating on them... It just doesn't seem honorable. Coming back from San Francisco, I decided it wasn't a good...hobby...for me."

Her gaze dropped to where his shearling jacket hung open, revealing his uniform. His badge. His weapons belt. "That's not a costume, is it?"

"Fraid not."

She bit her lip, and dammit, he wanted to be the one nibbling. "I can see that would be a problem," she said.

"After you called, I thought about it, figured maybe we could see each other like normal people. Vanilla, right?" He wanted her in a way he hadn't experienced ever. Was this craving what addicts felt—an ache deep inside?

"That's non-BDSM, yes."

"Trouble is"—the words spilled out, his brain definitely disengaged—"I remember too



well how you look when you're restrained, how you pull against the cuffs, how you whimper..."

Pink flushed her cheeks, and the next breath she took was deeper. "Virgil—"

Dammit. Had he really thought he could just kick over the need for more. Did he really want to go through his life having "vanilla" sex, never getting the fullest sense of satisfaction?

No.

Pa had always said, "*If you can't change your mind, why have one ?*" Logical enough, but not particularly comfortable when his mind did a complete one-eighty and left him in the dust. He ran his finger along her jaw, so soft and sweet, and gave her the uncomfortable truth. "I don't think I can be with you and not push for your submission. Might be different if you hated it, but you like—need—it. You liked when I held you in place, when I restrained your wrists. You wanted more."

"Yes." Her voice came out a whisper.

The room had turned hellishly hot. "You called me. You want to play."

She nodded.

He sat back. *Cool down, Masterson.* "Maybe we can compromise. Bear Flat is a small town. The Serenity Lodge parties are an open secret, but no one minds, since the Hunts keep their kinkiness to the Lodge and to outsiders who come here to play—and spend money." He took her hand, curling his fingers over hers, running his thumb over the tiny calluses on her palm. He wanted those hands on him. "But I'm not an outsider. And I'm supposed to enforce the law, not indulge in what people figure are orgies."

"Orgies and cops. Not a good combination." She tried to tug her hand away.

"Summer, I would very much like to play again. But not publicly." If he kept touching her, he'd be on top of her. He rose and paced across the room. "In all reality, honey, I don't like the exhibition stuff. What I do with and to you is private. I don't want to share any of it. I don't want others to see you naked, to see how you glow when you're aroused, to hear you when you come. That's mine."

Summer stared at him as his words shook something deep inside her. She started to nod, and then the meaning of what he said registered. She'd be alone with him—she *was* alone with him. Fear rose, crested, and broke over her. The cabin chilled as if a wind had blown out the fire in the stove. "No."

"No?"

"No. I can't." So big, he was too big. Dear God, no one knew he was here. She rose, trapped between the two beds.

"Summer, look at me."

Her back hit the wall of the cabin. She stared at his hands, his huge hands. He could beat

her. He could—

“Eyes. On. Me.” He snapped. “Now.”

Her gaze shot to his.

“You’re seeing the past, honey, not me,” he said gently, not moving at all. “Have I ever hurt you”—his smile flickered—“in a way you didn’t like?”

She swallowed, and her heart rate slowed. “No.”

“Do you really think I would?”

“I—” Her hands clenched in front of her. “I didn’t think he would either.”

“Ah.” Virgil sighed and leaned back against the door, obviously assuming a relaxed posture. “So he not only hurt you, but now you don’t trust your own judgment either?”

“Just go. Please, Virgil. This will never work.”

He hesitated like he’d argue, then nodded and left.

As he walked out, Summer choked on a sob. *No. Come back!* Fear drained out of her, leaving only emptiness behind. He’d wanted a compromise, to try, had talked honestly, and she’d panicked. Counseling hadn’t done her any good at all. She’d been so hopeful. So sure she was cured.

She stared at the door, wishing with everything in her for him to walk back in...and knowing she couldn’t function if he did.

*Why am I even here?*

The cabin resonated with loneliness, and her eyes filled. She’d failed. Why bother staying any longer? She had things to do, an apartment to pack, a move to make. Tears dripped on her clothing as she tossed the few items she’d unpacked into the suitcase. After her voice steadied, she’d call Rona so she and Simon wouldn’t worry.

She stepped out the door. Snowflakes flitted through the air, invisible in the dark night, but glittering in the lantern lights marking the path. By morning, the mountains would be dusted with white. What would it be like to lie in bed with Virgil, watching the snow come down?

She’d never know. Hefting the suitcase, she trudged to her car. *Stupid. Such a coward. I should have tried harder. But a relationship never would have worked. But how would—*

“You always run when you’re nervous?” Virgil’s gentle deep voice stopped her. Her head jerked up.

He rested his hip against a big pickup in the parking area, arms folded over his chest.

Her heart did a painful somersault. “What are you doing here?”

His slow smile creased his face. “Considering all your muttering, probably the same as you. Wanting to stay, telling myself to leave.”

“To stay? Why?”

“Well, I figured once I got home, I’d call and talk you into an early supper tomorrow. But I changed my mind.” After tugging her case away, he set a hand in the small of her back and guided her toward her cabin. “We’ll play here tonight in the lodge so you’ll have people around you. Tomorrow we’ll see where we’re at.”

“But...your reputation.”

His mouth tightened. “Will have to take care of itself.” He looked down at her, pulling her closer until her hips rubbed against his. “We’ve got more between us than a night of screwing around, so I guess I can handle being called a pervert, if need be. You know, even after this long, I still wake up thinking of you and go to sleep thinking of you.”

*Oh God.* Her eyes prickled with tears. She’d considered herself silly, like a love-struck teenager, but he felt the same way. How many men would have admitted that?

But she needed to stop the hope rising in her. “Virgil, I had counseling after we—after I wanted to leave Dark Haven with you and couldn’t. I thought I was cured, but I still panicked in the cabin. I don’t see how this could work.”

“Well now, appears I turned your life as upside down as you did mine,” he said softly. His knuckles rubbed across her cheek in a gentle caress, his fingers warm against her cold skin. “Did your counselor say you were all fixed when you were done?”

“Uh.” She blinked, remembering the last session. A glimmer of hope lightened her heart. “I forgot. She said the panic attacks might still happen, but they’d get better, especially if I keep working through them.”

“Ah-huh. Would you like help working through them?” His eyes challenged her.

He’d risk his reputation for her? Could she give less? Her spine straightened. “Yes.”

“There we go, then.”

At the cabin, he opened the door. When she stepped in, he smiled and ran a finger over her lips. “I’ll wait in the lodge. If you have one of those corset things, I’d like to see you wear it. No underwear, please.”

After setting her suitcase on the floor, he closed the door behind him.

She stood, a little stunned. He was like a river current, cradling her gently until she tried to break free, only to realize it inexorably carried her downstream. Here she was, back at the cabin, ready to change into what he’d told her to wear.

Why did that feel so exactly right?

\* \* \*

When Summer entered the lodge, the party was in full swing. She stopped to gawk. Sometime since she registered, the owners had transformed the rustic main room into a shadowy dungeon. Heavy iron chains dangled from bolts in the log walls and dark rafters. Bulbs flickered redly in the wall sconces. Two X-shaped St. Andrew’s crosses held submissives. Another sub hung in suspension in the center of the room. Closer to the end wall, a dom was using his sub in a leather swing...quite vigorously. A flogger kept time to the music of Type O Negative’s erotic “Love You to Death.”

Wow. Simon's party last year was the only private play she'd ever attended, and this was as different from his stately mansion as anyone could imagine.

Near the door, one of the lodge owners, Logan Hunt had his arm around a lushly curved redhead while he spoke with a man and woman in street clothing. Summer frowned. With dark brown hair, strong features, and intensely blue eyes, the two men must be brothers. But why did they seem familiar? Come to think of it, so did Logan's woman.

He motioned her over. "Summer, this is my wife, Rebecca."

The redhead smiled. "Nice to meet you. I like your corset."

Summer grinned. Aside from the color, there was no difference between her blue corset and Rebecca's green one. "Yours too."

Logan set his hand on his wife's stomach. "This is the last time she gets to wear it—she needs room for other things."

A baby? No wonder the owners planned to turn Serenity into a family lodge. As Rebecca flushed, Summer felt a squeeze of envy. "Congratulations."

"And this is my brother Jake, and his wife Kallie," Logan said.

The tiny brunette smiled, and Jake said, "It's good to see you looking so well, pet."

That voice, those blue eyes... "Have we met before?"

"Ha. Like I said—you're totally forgettable." Logan grinned at his brother.

Jake scowled back, then took her hand gently. "We met at Simon's party last year. I held you after your bastard date caned you."

She flinched and tried to pull her hand away.

His eyes narrowed. "Simon said you're doing better."

One slow breath and she'd regained her equilibrium. *Nice reaction, Ms. I've-been-cured.* Well, no wonder he seemed familiar. She remembered how he'd wrapped her in a blanket, cuddled her, and made her drink tea until she'd stopped shaking. "Sorry, you took me by surprise. That night isn't a fond memory."

"I'd say not," Rebecca spit out. "I wanted to hit the guy so bad, but these two wouldn't let me." She gave Logan a dirty look, then added, "But if no one told you, they each took a punch—that's after Simon broke his nose—then threw him out the front door so hard he bypassed the sidewalk and landed in the street."

*What a lovely image.* Summer realized she was smiling. "Thank you. Thank you all."

"Wish I'd been there," Kallie muttered. Her dark eyes snapped with anger. "I hate bullies."  
,,

"Easy there, sprite," Jake said. He grinned at Summer. "We won't be here this weekend, but I wanted to make sure Simon wasn't lying." He touched her cheek gently. "You look good. Some dom will be a lucky guy."

She flushed. "Thank you."

“Simon says Virgil’s got his eye on her,” Logan said casually.

Kallie’s mouth dropped open. “Virgil? Really?”

“Good job, asshole,” Jake said to Logan and slung his wife over his shoulder. “We’re out of here, little snoopy person.”

“Wait, dammit. I want to—” The door closed behind them, Kallie still protesting. A man’s shout of anger came through the door.

Logan snorted. “I think she bit him.” Rebecca buried her face in his shirt, giggling her head off.

“Ah...am I missing something?” Summer asked.

“Small town,” Logan said. From the dom’s uninviting expression, he wouldn’t explain further. “Off with you. Virgil went upstairs to change clothes. I don’t know if he’s come down yet.”

“Right.”

Virgil wasn’t in the dungeon area.

In the kitchen, MaryAnn stood by a munchie-loaded counter, nibbling and singing along with Peter Steele’s dark voice: “Am I good enough...for you.” She gave Summer a happy smile. “Bout time you got here. I thought I’d have to freeze my ass off to go pry you out of your cabin.”

“A friend stopped by.”

“Really? Master or slave?” MaryAnn picked up a sugar cookie and took a bite.

*Kallie isn’t the only snoopy person.* “A dom I met in Dark Haven last month.”

MaryAnn’s eyes widened. “You’re seeing someone besides those buddies of yours? About time, girl.”

*Jeez.* “What’s wrong with my friends?”

“Nothin’, but you got no buzz with them.” MaryAnn toasted her with the bottle. “So who’s this other dude? Are you dating him? Is he nice?”

“He’s nice.” *Wonderful, exciting, awesome.*

“Sounds like a *but* coming.”

“But he doesn’t want to scene in public. And I don’t—I can’t—I won’t play in private.” She picked up a bottle of water and unscrewed the top. “It’s hopeless.”

“Girlfriend, if you figure he’s such a jerk in private, why would you play with him at all?”

“I don’t think that. I just don’t know.” The swallow of water stuck halfway down, and Summer coughed. “It’s like, even if a guy’s all sweet in public, he could go off on you when you’re alone together. How can you know?”

“Not easy. Course, I like ’em nasty, and I’ve got one waiting in there now.” MaryAnn

headed out, squeezing past Simon and Rona, who stood in the doorway. From their concerned expressions, they'd heard Summer's worries.

"I spoke with Logan about your cop." Simon walked over to squeeze her shoulder reassuringly. "He was raised here, and he's well-respected. His cousin married Jake Hunt. According to Kallie, he's honest, caring, blunt, and overprotective."

Kallie was his cousin? No wonder she'd been curious. "Information helps. Thank you, Sir."

Rona put an arm around her waist. "It helps intellectually, but until you know he's safe at gut level, nothing will ease your fears, right?"

"No." Summer sighed. "But—"

"There you are." Virgil walked into the kitchen, dressed in jeans and a black T-shirt that appeared sprayed over his muscular chest. His biceps stretched the sleeves in such a way she wanted to take a little bite. Oh, she definitely wanted to play with him.

He nodded at Simon and Rona, then leaned a hip against a counter. His gaze traveled from her loose hair, her mouth, lingered on the cleavage created by the corset, dropped to her thighs displayed by her short latex hoop skirt, and down to her bare feet. His brow creased. "You didn't walk here barefoot, did you?"

Rona laughed and whispered in Summer's ear, "He's definitely a protective one," then dragged Simon out of the room.

"No, I have snow boots," Summer answered. God, just looking at him made her shake inside.

"You know, you haven't kissed me yet." He pulled her forward into his arms. Iron-hard arms, a rock wall of a chest. Why such an embrace seemed warm and soft and wonderful was one of life's great mysteries. She pressed her face into his neck, inhaling the lingering scent of the leather jacket he'd worn, his light, woody aftershave, and his own masculine fragrance.

With a rumble of pleasure, he pulled her between his legs. Her pelvis bumped his thick erection, and she rocked into it, mesmerized by the feel, wanting him inside her.

## Chapter Seven

Why did she feel so fucking right? Virgil wondered. He threaded his hands through her sunshine-and-silk hair and kissed her lips lightly, breathing in peaches and vanilla and woman. His cock throbbed, demanding action. “We’re going to go play, but first, let me run over your limits. No blood sports, no severe pain.”

“No anal.”

He shook his head and smiled when her eyes widened. “You liked my fingers in your ass, honey. Why do you think you wouldn’t like my cock there?”

“I just know.”

“No, you don’t.” From the way her body had reacted to that slight amount of anal play, he figured she’d love more. If not, he wouldn’t either—perhaps she didn’t understand that.

She bit her lip, but her eyes had turned the color of larkspur blooming in the mountain meadows. His mother had loved larkspur. And laughter and courage. She’d have approved of this tough, joyous woman.

He ran his hands over Summer’s smooth, bare shoulders, down her tightly laced corset, and curved his fingers under her soft, soft ass cheeks. If he got any harder, he’d toss her onto the huge oak table in the center of the kitchen and take her right there. “You’re going to try anal once, and if you don’t like it, then you’ll have a reason to say no.”

The way her body melted under his touch said she’d accept his will; the heat in her eyes said she wanted to.

When she whispered, “Yes, Sir,” pleasure and power flooded his veins. He had to face it—his need to dominate equaled her need to submit.

\* \* \*

An hour later, Summer considered kicking Virgil somewhere painful. *Frustrated much, Summer?* She’d expected him to drag her off and do a scene. Instead, they’d strolled around the room and watched the various sessions. After the third one, she caught the way he was studying her reactions.

At a heavy flogging scene, she’d tensed up, and he’d pulled her closer. “Not your thing, I know. Not mine, either.”

When watching a threesome, he’d smiled at her and run a finger down her cheek. “Doesn’t do anything for you, does it? Me either. I’m too possessive.”

Near the center of the room, he deliberately stopped to watch a dom taking his sub from behind—in the ass.

The woman moaned and wiggled as her dom pushed deeper. Summer felt her nipples bunch into peaks, and her pussy grow damper. She glanced up.

Virgil’s focused gaze rested on her, not the scene. “You’re flushed, sweetheart,” he

murmured. “Are you thinking about being in that position tomorrow? Taking your master’s cock in a very, very private place.”

Her asshole tightened, making her quiver. And making her even wetter.

He smiled slowly. “Oh, you are. You’ll take it, and I won’t stop until you come.”

*God.* Her skin seemed to shimmer with heat. She looked away and spotted MaryAnn.

The submissive swaggered up to Virgil. “Hey, Master, are you looking for a fun sub?” She ran a finger over his biceps and batted her thick, black lashes.

His brows drew together in displeasure. “Thank you, no.” He turned back to Summer.

“But—” MaryAnn moved closer and rubbed her breasts against his arm.

Summer stared. MaryAnn never came on to the doms. What was she doing?

Virgil’s voice was colder than the mountain air as he snapped, “Leave.”

MaryAnn stepped back hastily. After shooting Summer a bemused look, she walked away.

Virgil shook his head. “I thought Dark Haven’s submissives were better behaved.” He put his arm around Summer. “Let’s see if you have a liking for anything else.”

“I already told you what I’m into.”

“No, honey, you only gave me what you don’t like.” He took her mouth for a long, thorough kiss.

*More, more, more.* She set a hand on her stomach, trying to control her breathing. “Do I get to know your preferences?”

He chuckled. “I’m male. I like sex. I’m a dom—although it still feels wrong to say that—so I like control.” He put his hands around her waist and lifted her to stand on a low coffee table. Her eyes were even with his.

“Virgil!”

“I like your taste...everywhere. I like the heat of your cunt around my cock or around my fingers.” He slid his hand under her skirt and between her thighs, and when his finger pushed up into her, she moaned.

He gave a satisfied rumble. “I like the sounds you make.” His teeth closed on her shoulder. The small bite of pain rippled through her, and her pussy clenched around his finger. She inhaled sharply.

“Yeah, that sound.” His breath bathed her ear. “Whimpers. Moans. Screams. Little panting noises and sighs. You have the most beautiful voice I’ve ever heard.”

The hot flush rolled up her neck to her face. She tried to edge away.

His hand fisted in her hair, tugging her head back so her eyes met his. He held her in place as he slid another finger inside her entrance, thrusting gently as his thumb pressed on her clit. *Oh God.*



“That sound right there,” he said in the rough, devastating voice she still heard in her dreams. “Give me more.”

His thumb circled her clit.

They stood right out in the middle of the room. A dom walking past paused to watch for a second. Summer shook her head. “Virgil, no.”

His eyes drew her in, swept her willpower away. Without answering, he lifted his knee and used his boot to nudge her feet farther apart on the low coffee table, spreading her more open. “Personally, I like privacy,” he said softly. “I prefer that I’m the only one to hear those little sounds you make—but if you like to share, then you will.”

With his fingers in her, his hand in her hair, she couldn’t move as he mercilessly aroused her. His thumb pressed harder, teasing the hood over her engorged clit. Her toes curled and her hands fisted as the pressure in her center tightened, as each slow thrust increased the sensations. He bent his fingers, moving to a new spot with each penetration until they rubbed against a...*place*.

One that sent her senses spiraling away. She could feel the climax advancing toward her. “Oh, please. God, please.” She grabbed his upper arms, and his rock-hard biceps flexed under her grip.

“Let it happen,” he murmured. His fingers pulled out and drove in forcefully. Once. Twice. His thumb brushed over the very top of her clit.

The dam broke, and scalding pleasure flooded her system in a massive rush of sensation. Her back arched as she went up on tiptoes. He released her hair, setting his hard hand against her bottom, holding her so the fingers of his other hand could continue.

Each slow, slick stroke made her clench inside, sending more surging pleasure through her.

As her knees started to give, she let out a long moan that lightened his eyes with satisfaction.

“Very pretty. I hadn’t heard that one before.” Taking pity on her, he lifted her off the table and wrapped his arms around her, holding her against his solid body, a mountain no force would move.

She rested her forehead on his chest. She had gotten off so thoroughly her fingertips still tingled...and she craved doing it again. “I want you inside me,” she whispered. She wanted the intimacy—him giving and her giving and...

“I’m not one to fuck a woman in public, Summer.” The coarse words hurt, but then he added, “And when it’s more...more special...it’s even more difficult.”

“Oh.” He’d given her a wonderful orgasm, held her so sweetly now. She’d never wanted to please a dom so much, and instead she kept letting him down. The guilt grated against her soul. “I’m sorry. I didn’t—”

“Shhh.” He nuzzled her cheek, his jaw scratchy with a man’s heavy stubble. “It’s not your fault. We’ll figure something out, baby.” He tucked her hair back, exposing her face.

“You are so pretty when you’re all pink.”

As relief eased the remorse, she kissed him, willing him to understand how much it meant he didn’t blame her. “Thank you.”

He snorted. “I intend to take my annoyance out of your hide one way or another.”

Somehow his threat didn’t worry her at all. She snickered.

“Brat.” When he let her go, her legs wobbled like an old woman’s. With a huffed laugh, he sat her on a couch. “Stay here while I get you some water.”

As Virgil disappeared into the kitchen, Simon appeared and pulled Summer to her feet. “Don’t talk. Just come with me.” He stopped right outside the kitchen and positioned Summer where she could see inside.

With his back to the door, Virgil faced MaryAnn in the otherwise empty kitchen.

“Oooh, it’s the big dom,” MaryAnn cooed.

“Find someone else, girl.” The cold, rough voice should have sent any submissive fleeing.

Not MaryAnn. The brunette ran her fingers down Virgil’s chest.

He gave a grunt of exasperation and brushed her hands away. “You trying to get in trouble?”

“I like trouble.” MaryAnn actually moved closer and rubbed his crotch.

Summer scowled at the bite of jealousy. *That’s mine.*

With an irritated snort, Virgil pulled handcuffs from his pocket, spun MaryAnn around, and cuffed her wrists behind her back. Oh yeah, the man was definitely a cop.

He fisted MaryAnn’s braids tightly enough to make her squeak and frowned down at her.

Summer crammed her hand into her mouth. What if he hit her? She pushed at Simon. “Go help.”

Simon shook his head and gripped the back of her neck. “Stay put, pet.”

She hesitated.

Before Summer could decide what to do, Virgil pushed the handcuff key between MaryAnn’s lips. “Ask Simon or Logan to free you and return my cuffs.” As if the sub no longer existed in his universe, he pulled the refrigerator door open.

Simon chuckled. “Rona said you needed to see to believe. Now get back to the couch.”

Summer stared at him. Had Simon told MaryAnn to deliberately provoke Virgil?

MaryAnn appeared in the door, snickering under her breath.

“You sneaks,” Summer whispered, and the two conspirators grinned.

Simon jerked his head, and Summer ran for the couch.

She dropped onto it, and a second later, Virgil reentered the room. His gaze found her

with palpable warmth, before he walked over to where Simon was uncuffing MaryAnn.

As she waited, Summer curled into a corner of the couch to think. MaryAnn had made Virgil mad, and he'd merely sent her to Simon. He could easily have lost his temper and gotten very rough. Some doms would have.

"Earth to Summer." Virgil's amused voice came from a foot away.

"Oh!" Her head jerked up, and she put her hand over her heart to make sure it hadn't stopped. "Sorry."

He tore off the plastic seal and opened the water bottle with that ingrained courtesy of his. Well, when he wasn't holding her immobile and driving her into an uncontrollable orgasm. In the center of the room.

After handing her the water, he picked her up and sat down on the couch with her in his lap. She shifted to get settled, felt his thick, very hard cock, and squirmed more, until he growled and held her hips still.

"Oh sorry." She couldn't suppress her giggle.

"Evil girl." He drank some of her water and then leaned back with a sigh.

His arm around her was firm, holding her against his big chest, making her feel safe ...and...and *wanted*. But she hadn't given him anything in return except doubts and fears. And he didn't know if he even liked being a dom. Another twinge of guilt assaulted her. "Does it bother you to...to make me do things?"

"Some." From the underlying grimness in his voice, he definitely felt uncomfortable. "How about you? Does it bother you when I force you into something?"

"Well, I didn't want to stand on a coffee table. But you made me, and that turned me on even more." She took a breath. How could she explain? "Sometimes there's an empty place inside me. Cold. When you take charge, it seems to fill that up. Warms me—even if what we're doing has nothing to do with sex."

His arms tightened, pulling her so close his heartbeat thudded through his ribs to hers. "Well. That's a bit of how I feel when I know I've satisfied you and know you're happy because of me."

*Thank God*. If he hadn't liked being in control, she couldn't have gone on. She had a thought. "You started because of your cousin, but before—did you ever think about bondage or domination?"

"Oh yeah." The corner of his mouth turned up. "When I tied you up during the calf roping, you definitely fulfilled a fantasy. And we knocked off a few more later."

That felt good. "Uh, would it help to know I've always wanted this?" She ran her hand over his strong jaw and saw, as usual, he was giving her all his attention.

"Always?"

"Pretty much. My Ken doll used to tie Barbie up and spank her for being bad."

He choked.

She grinned and whispered, "I had a Bondage Barbie."

When his growling laughter burst out, she snuggled closer in perfect contentment.

\* \* \*

"*Bondage Barbie*." Virgil would never look at the damn doll the same way again.

He made Summer finish her water, although when she sat up, he'd swear she intentionally squirmed her ass on his cock.

If she kept teasing him, he'd fuck her here on the couch, privacy or not.

But during their tour of the room, he'd spotted a likely place. "Up you go." After rising, he curved his fingers over her nape, his hand big enough to get a good grip. Not a bad technique, although he'd noticed a collar like Rebecca wore gave even more control.

He guided his pretty little sub to the back corner. Two overstuffed chairs faced a tall couch that screened the area. He stopped Summer in front of one chair. "Kneel here."

She gave him a startled look, and then gracefully sank to her knees. She assumed the eyes-down, knees-apart, hands-on-thighs position he'd seen other subs use.

She hadn't knelt like that in the club, he realized. A dark satisfaction filled him, the knowledge she wanted to please him even more now than then. "Sweet Summer," he murmured.

Although her gaze stayed on the floor, a happy smile flickered over her lips.

By unscrewing the light bulb in a wall sconce, he plunged the area into shadowy darkness. *Much better*. In the center of the room, Logan frowned and turned to look. When Virgil raised his hand, the lodge owner nodded acknowledgement.

Virgil returned to Summer and noted the difference the change of lighting had accomplished. She was quivering with excitement and nerves. He knew just how to up the tension some more. "Strip, please."

"Yes, Sir," she whispered. When she rose and started to unhook her corset, his cock felt as if someone had closed a hot fist around it. He dropped into the chair and watched silently as her mouth-watering breasts came into view, then her softly rounded stomach. Fuck, she was beautiful.

All too soon, she set her clothing on a chair and stood before him, eyes cast down, shifting her weight from one foot to another. Adorably uncertain.

The small amount of light glinted off her blonde hair and brushed over her smooth skin. It shadowed beneath her full breasts and created a tempting darkness between her thighs. "Present yourself. Feet shoulder-width apart, hands behind your back."

Unfortunately, the dim lighting meant he couldn't see the flush rising into her face, although he could almost feel it. The position opened her legs nicely and raised her breasts—no wonder doms liked it so much. Her nipples had peaked into tiny spears. He pulled her forward until her toes touched his. "Bend and hold on to my shoulders."

Her small hands closed on his shoulders, sending a punch of lust straight to his crotch.

As he'd figured, her position dangled her breasts in front of him like hanging fruit. He took one nipple in his mouth, teased the point to even greater hardness, and sucked strongly. Her breath caught.

When he gently closed his teeth on the tender tip, a shudder ran through her. Yes, she liked that. Not releasing her breast, he grasped her arms and kept her in place, then laved the peak and bit down again. Carefully. Firmly.

She moaned, her eyes half-closed, her skin hot under his hands.

He blew air over the wet nipple. "You have beautiful breasts, honey. I remember how they look when they're swollen and red." His voice came out rough with his need.

Her whisper was only hint of sound. "Yes, Sir."

"I'm not going to tie you down. I expect you to stand perfectly, completely still...no matter what I do." He released his grip on her arms and took her left nipple in his mouth. So velvety soft with tantalizing bumps surrounding the slightly rough tip. He teased and sucked, and it swelled under his attention. With his fingers, he played with her other breast, teeth on the left, lightly pinching the right.

Her grip tightened on his shoulders. When he bit down, he heard a whimper of mingled pain and need. Her whole body shook, but she didn't move, didn't try to pull away. "You're such a good little sub," he murmured. "Open your legs for me."

The helpless sound she made increased the hum in his veins and the pressure in his already rock-hard cock. As she moved her feet apart, he inhaled the scent of aroused female. He brushed his knuckles down her soft stomach to her mound, then ran one finger over her bare pussy. Very, very smooth. "Did you think of me when you shaved today?"

A hesitation. "Yes, Sir."

Why did her whispered answer remind him of the last shoplifter he'd arrested? She sounded...guilty. He took a guess. "Did you come?"

She swallowed audibly. "Yes, Sir."

He smothered a laugh. His dom brain said *bad sub*; his guy brain gloated that she'd gotten off thinking of him. "I see. While you're here, Summer, I'll take charge of those orgasms."

## Chapter Eight

Summer heard the amusement overlaying the steel in his voice, and relief ran through her. “Yes, Sir.” Summer concentrated on not moving. Her pussy throbbed with the need to be touched, and all her senses focused on his finger resting on her outer folds.

“I have big hands, Summer, so open your legs until your feet are wider than the chair.”

Heat seared her skin as she imagined those big hands on her. Touching her intimately. She put more weight on her arms and edged her feet out.

“Now bend your knees a little.”

As she complied, her pussy opened wider, the puffy, wet folds peeling apart, exposing her core.

“That’s right, honey.” Virgil slid his hands between her legs, curved his palms under her ass cheeks, and lifted her. Leaning back, he lowered her until the backs of her thighs rested on the chair arms, and her feet dangled on the outside.

Her bottom bounced a few inches above his thighs, and she tightened her grip on his shoulders. He’d spread her so widely that she had no leverage to move. In fact, she probably couldn’t get out of this position without help.

“That’ll do,” he said. Tilting his head, he licked one breast, then the other, starting the current sizzling up her center. He rested his thumbs in the creases between her hips and pelvis. So close to where she wanted him. *Oh God*. She quivered, needing his touch.

She closed her eyes and tried to regain her senses. To be fair. “It’s your turn. You don’t need to...to play with me or anything.”

“You think?” A crease appeared in his cheek. Damn, when he looked at her like that, so amused and hot, she purely melted. “Summer. Whether I play or not is totally up to me. You don’t get a vote.”

He ran a finger around her slick entrance and pushed inside. His finger felt huge, wonderfully thick as he slid it slowly between her swollen tissues. “You’re nice and wet for me, I see.”

When he moved his hand away, she gritted her teeth. *Don’t move, don’t move*.

He unzipped his jeans. Commando. *Oh my*. She’d forgotten his size until his erection bobbed up and bounced against her pussy. Pleasure zinged up her spine.

She really, really wanted him inside her. Even more than getting off, her body cried out to be possessed. Filled. What would it feel like to be taken anally? As the thought shivered across her nerves, the muscles back there clenched.

After pulling a condom from his pocket, Virgil unpackaged something else—a pink circle with four nubby things around the sides.

“What is that?”

He gave her a narrow look. "Did I give you permission to speak?"

*Oops.*

He sheathed himself with the condom, then touched a side of the toy, and she heard buzzing. Another side. Increased buzzing. He worked the circle over his shaft. A cock ring *and* a vibrator?

She stared. If he was fully seated in her, those four sides of nubby humming things would press against her pussy, all around her entrance. Her legs flexed involuntarily, bouncing her bottom.

"That won't do." He put a hand under her butt, lifting her slightly. "Move your legs forward, honey."

She edged her knees along the chair until her calves brushed against his upper arms, and her legs no longer held her up. All her weight rested on his hand. With her grip on his shoulders barely keeping her balanced, and her legs over the chair arms, she could no longer lift or move her ass. He'd taken the last inch or so of control from her, and from the satisfied look in his eyes, he knew it.

Watching her closely, he fitted his cock to her entrance, and then lowered her. The big head pushed into her, and she opened around it. It felt so good.

But as she dropped farther, his thickness stretched her, more and more, until she hovered right at the edge of pain. She tried to lift up and couldn't. The knowledge of her helplessness swept through her, making her head spin. A whimper escaped.

He stopped immediately, although she could tell he wasn't completely in yet. She opened her eyes and met his intense gaze.

"You'll take all of me, but we can go slower." He lifted her bottom up and down in tiny increments, lubricating his shaft with her wetness. As the burning from being stretched subsided, she could feel the hum from the cock ring. God, he felt good.

*More.* She squirmed.

"Keep your hands on my shoulders," he warned.

Her fingers tightened. He chuckled. "And down you go." He pulled his hand out from under her.

She dropped the last few inches, gasping at the overwhelming fullness as he penetrated her completely. "Virgil!" Her insides clenched around him, over and over, and then the vibrations from the cock ring hit her clit, her labia and—holy heaven—another one pressed on her asshole.

He didn't move, keeping himself fully inside her, keeping her pussy resting right there on the vibrator.

"Oh my God." She started to pant as her clit tightened, hardened.

His laugh rumbled, and then his hands covered her breasts, adding to the stimulation as he tugged on her nipples. Down below, the vibrations hit not just her clit, but every part of

her pussy. His massive cock filled her completely. She lost herself in the overwhelming sensations. She clenched his shoulders as her insides started to tighten. The need to come built higher, an unfightable urge.

“You’re damned gorgeous when you get all excited, but I don’t want you getting off just yet.” He gripped her hips and lifted her up. As he pulled her off his cock, the vibrations disappeared.

Her excitement slowed, leaving her clit aching and throbbing. When she whined, amusement joined the heat in his eyes.

Then he released her. Her pussy slid onto his shaft and pressed up against the buzzing ring. Her clit tightened, neared...

Before she could come, he yanked her up. Up until the head remained barely in her, then he let her drop. His cock stretched her, taking her breath, and she hit the vibrators. She squirmed, trying to get closer, more pressure.

Holding her hips in a bruising grip, he worked her pussy up and down on his cock, grinding his pelvis against her to maximize the vibrations. Each stroke increased her need, increased the pressure, until she teetered on the edge of an orgasm.

“You feel good,” he said as her swollen clit pressed on the nubby vibrator. Her fingernails dug into his arms as her core tightened. Almost...

“I like that tight, hot cunt wrapped around me.” He lifted her again, a second before she could come.

“Please. Oh God, please, Virgil.” Too much. Her whole lower half pulsed with oversensitive nerves, needing more...more, more. When she tried to shake him, the sun lines at the corners of his eyes crinkled.

“More. Please.” Was that her voice? Whining? Everything in her throbbed.

He didn’t move for a moment that seemed to last forever.

“All right.” He held her up with one hand, and the other hand slapped her bottom, damned hard. “Come now, Summer.”

The stinging pain arrowed straight to her clit...and shoved her over. Pleasure fountained through her, exquisite sensations bubbling up against each nerve. Another wave hit, and she heard herself, her voice high and uncontrolled.

Growling his enjoyment, Virgil pumped her up and down, sending the orgasm rippling through all of her. As the sensations started to slow, he yanked her down, holding her there, completely filled and pressing on the cock ring.

The vibrations directly against her clit threw her into another spasm of pleasure. “Ooooooh.” Her hips wiggled uncontrollably in his grip.

His laugh came deep and rough. “Hang on, sweetie.” His face pulled taut as he lifted her, then hammered into her, pistoning her body up and down. Her breasts bounced, and each thrust of his shaft sent more shuddering waves to engulf her until just the feeling of him inside her filled her world.



With a low groan, he pulled her against him so tightly she couldn't move. His cock jerked in her center and the sensation was...incredible.

Her head bowed. He'd cared enough to drive her into a mindless orgasm. And then ...then he'd simply taken her for his own pleasure. Why did that give her the shivers—to be utterly used like that?

She sighed and squirmed as the vibrations from the cock ring started to irritate her swollen clit.

"Sensitive?" he murmured and lifted her up slightly with one hand until she no longer touched the toy. His eyes were heavy-lidded, his breathing rapid. He looked totally satisfied. *I did that*. The knowledge felt wonderful.

He caught her staring at him and smiled, then curved his free hand over her nape to pull her closer. His mouth took hers gently, a confusing contrast to the implacable grip on her neck.

"Mmm." She teased his lips, wondering how they could look so firm and feel so velvety.

He let her play, kissing her back, and then with a grunt, he used both hands to lift her straight up and off his cock. Still holding her up, he leaned forward, got his feet under him to rise. After turning, he put her down on the chair. "Stay here for a minute. I'll be right back."

The nonchalant display of his strength left her speechless. And wondering why all that strength seemed so barbarically sexy.

He returned, jeans zipped, and resumed his seat, this time snuggling her on his lap.

As she laid her head on his shoulder, she saw a couple watching from a few feet away. She stiffened, feeling...exposed, which didn't really make sense. She always played in public.

But this, tonight, had been different. She and Virgil had shared...more. Unsettled, she watched them walk away, feeling as if she finally understood Virgil's dislike of being on exhibit.

"Simon's sub says you're moving soon, out of San Francisco." His arm supported her as he ran his knuckles over her breasts, then lifted her chin up and frowned at her. "Tell me about that."

"Oh." Contentment filled her. He'd gotten off. He could just walk her to her cabin and leave. Instead, he started a conversation. The feel of his arm around her, his fingers against her face, and his focused attention bathed her with warmth. "Well. I realized I wanted more ..."

She rambled, tucking her head back on his shoulder. Her limbs felt heavy, and she curled against him, feeling small and feminine. She could have easily fallen asleep, but he kept asking questions. About San Francisco. Her apartment. Her work.

As she talked, she realized again the emptiness of her life. "Anyway, I took the job in Gold Beach and start in a couple of weeks. My lease is up in four days, so I'm on a tight

schedule.”

He was silent. Too silent. She tried to sit up to look at his face—

“Gold Beach is in Oregon?” he asked.

“Um-hmm. On the coast.”

“About an entire day’s drive. Farther away than San Francisco.” His voice was even. Emotionless. He sat quietly for a minute and then said, “I’ve got to get going. I work tomorrow morning.”

“Oh.” Disappointment seemed to dim the light in the room. “Okay.” She rose reluctantly and started pulling on her clothes.

He stepped behind her and laced her corset with firm tugs. Chuckling, he turned her around. “Looks like I have my very own Bondage Barbie to play with and dress.”

Her laugh turned into a gasp when he slid his fingers into the cups to adjust her left breast.

“What time do you leave?” he asked. He settled her other breast, his calloused fingers brushing against her nipple. As a hum ran through her system, she unconsciously leaned into his touch.

“Uh. What?” She looked up, caught his smile, and remembered his question. “Sunday around noon.”

“I see.” He kissed her, taking his time, his palm still curved around her breast. “I get off work at two tomorrow and then have a couple of errands to run. Do you want to test your courage and let me show you some of the area?”

“I—” Courage.

Before she could answer, he lifted her chin, forcing her to meet his eyes, his level, honest eyes. “No sex, no bondage. Just talking and maybe a kiss or two. You have my word.”

Anxiety warred with the sheer desire to be with him. Desire won. *I will do this.* “Yes.”

\* \* \*

The sun sparkled on the light dusting of snow as Virgil pulled up to the lodge the next day. He spotted Summer waiting in front of her tiny cabin. Wearing a bright red parka, she looked like a very fuckable cardinal. His spirits rose.

He’d had a hell of a time sleeping last night. The bed had felt empty. He’d wanted her in his arms, wanted to breathe her peaches-and-vanilla scent, wanted to hear her lilting voice. Dammit, he hadn’t known her long enough to miss her so much.

But he did. As she started down the path toward him, his anticipation rose. Fuck, she’d been beautiful, squirming on his shaft, jolting as the vibrations hit her clit. Hell of a toy, that cock ring.

*Thank you, Angie.* Of all the women he’d enjoyed, one had possessed the guts to show him how much fun toys could be. Shy creatures, females. They owned vibrators and dildos,

liked using them, but hell would freeze over before they'd mention them to a man. These days, he'd insist on seeing a woman's collection—and might even pin her down while he used them. He snorted. Guess he'd been more of a dom than he'd realized.

Tapping his fingers on the steering wheel, he watched Summer cross the clearing and stifled his urge to escort her. Damn that fear of hers. Today, he intended to hear exactly what had happened to her. And then—he frowned. Tomorrow she'd leave for San Francisco to pack up and move.

His mood dropped like a boulder tumbling off a cliff. How could he pursue a relationship with her if it took two days just to drive there and back? And with the distance to the nearest airport, flight connections, and security precautions, taking a plane wasn't much better. His schedule didn't give him much time off—three day weekends were rare. Would she ever have the courage to visit him here without all her friends around?

As she approached the pickup, her blonde hair shone against the bright jacket, and her smile was contagious. He slid out to open the passenger side door for her.

"Thank you." She looked up at him, her blue eyes shining with pleasure...at seeing him.

He pulled her close, curving his hands under her lush ass, and took her mouth. Her lips were stiff, then soft and sweet. As he kissed her, he felt her body melt against his.

"I'd like to drag you into the lodge and fuck you speechless," he growled and watched her cheeks redden.

"Uh." Then she grinned. "We could do that."

He choked a laugh. How could he want her even more than he had five minutes ago? Leaning his forehead against hers, he said, "I can't skip my errands today. And maybe away from the lodge, I can talk to you without wondering how many times I can make you come."

"God, you're blunt," she muttered, making him laugh again.

"Let's go." He picked her up and set her into his truck, enjoying the simple pleasure of touching her. It would have to do for him...until tonight.

As they drove up the mountain, she sat forward, watching everything, her interest as appealing as hell. He slowed off and on, pointing out a herd of deer, the various cabins that normally couldn't be seen from the road, then a cardinal that matched her jacket.

At the end of a rutted road, he parked in front of Laurette Mann's stone and log home. "Ms. Laurette, it's Virgil," he called as he swung out of the truck. Not waiting for his help, Summer jumped out. As she petted the ancient gray cat, Virgil grabbed the box of groceries from the pickup bed.

The elderly widow opened the door, her cheeks pink with excitement. "Virgil, come in, dear. I have tea on."

He stepped aside to let Summer precede him into the living room. "Ms. Laurette, this is Summer. She's visiting from San Francisco. Summer, Ms. Laurette and her husband designed and built this place—oh, about thirty years ago."

Summer turned in a circle, eyes wide. "It's beautiful," she said sincerely.

“Why, thank you.” Laurette beamed at her. “Let me show you around.”

*Perfect.* “I’ll tuck your groceries away and join you in a minute.” And Laurette wouldn’t argue about the extras he’d added to her order.

## Chapter Nine

After a pleasant tea with Laurette, Virgil took a service road deep into the forest, parking at one of his favorite spots. “We’re here.” Near the half-frozen creek, he spread a thick pad and blanket on a bare patch of ground.

Frowning, Summer followed with the basket. “It’s the dead of winter, Virgil. Not picnic season.”

Damn, she was pretty. He sat and pulled her down, then wrapped a blanket around them to keep in their body heat. And it made a good excuse to have her soft curves pressed against his. He handed her a fat ham sandwich from the basket and a thermos of tomato soup.

“Eat, sweetheart.” He kissed her cheek before starting on his own.

“You know, Midwesterners are smart enough to save picnics for summertime.” Still looking a little bemused, she took a bite of the sandwich.

“Only because they’re too wimpy to stand the cold.”

Her elbow jabbed his ribs in reprisal, and he barked a laugh.

Ignoring him, she smiled at the snowy branches of the pines and tilted her head to listen to the cheerful gurgle of the creek. “It’s sure beautiful here.” She didn’t say anything else, didn’t try to fill the silence with empty conversation. Along with the warmth from her body, contentment seeped into him. They weren’t immersed in any sex-charged atmosphere now, and he still liked being with her more than anyone else he’d ever known.

During the afternoon, he’d gotten a better handle on her personality. In the truck she’d listed off things, like shower rails and grab bars, that he and his brothers could install to keep Laurette safe. And if he hadn’t promised to follow through, she’d undoubtedly dig up the supplies and return on her own. A warm, caring—and determined—woman.

As she leaned against his shoulder, he knew he’d be happy just sitting with her... forever.

A rustling sounded in the undergrowth. He whispered, “Shhhh.” Twilight arrived early in the winter mountains, and he’d deliberately chosen this site. He pointed and watched her eyes widen as three deer came down to the stream to drink.

When they’d finished and bounded up the slope, she sighed. “They’re beautiful. There’s good hiking around Gold Beach, they said. I’d like to get into the forests more often.”

Dammit, how the hell could he stand having her live so far away? He cleared his throat. “You going to get homesick for San Francisco?”

“A bit. Not for the city, but for my friends and their families.”

“Ah.” Yes, she was a sociable person. He ran a hand down her hair, playing with the silky strands. A whiff of vanilla made him want to open her clothes and nuzzle her skin. “Where’s your own family?”

“Nebraska. My brother and mom are still on the farm. I love them, but I wanted to see more of the world.”

“A farm to San Francisco? That’s a jump.” He eyed her. “You got a job and moved?”

“Unfortunately, no.” She gave a short...bitter...laugh. “Innocent me—I fell for a guy visiting Nebraska, and he asked me to come here and live with him.”

“Something went wrong?”

“The usual. He discovered he liked someone better and showed me the door.” She scowled at her hands. “God, I was stupid.”

“Risking something for love isn’t stupid, honey.” Her unhappy expression squeezed his chest and pissed him off. A shame the guy wasn’t around to have his face rearranged. “What happened after you broke up?”

“Mom and Andy were strapped for money at the time, so I was stuck with no friends and no job. I didn’t have my RN license for California yet. I finally got work as a waitress. It was just one of those life lessons in survival.” Her voice sounded light, but he saw the shadows in her eyes.

He pulled her closer, although there was no protecting someone from her past.

After a second, she shrugged and smiled slightly. “Then again, I’d gotten out of Nebraska to San Francisco. I’d never have dreamed of moving so far on my own. There’s always a bright side.”

“And you’re the type who’d find it.” He tipped her face up and kissed her. Everything he learned seemed to slide her farther into his heart. A kiss only, he reminded himself. More would frighten her. Time to find out why.

She’d be happy kissing him forever, Summer decided.

He nipped her lower lip and pulled back. “Now tell me about the incident Simon mentioned.” His voice had deepened and roughened—not a request, but an order.

Her breath fled. “That—”

“Summer, I need to know what happened. Not only because you mean something to me”—he kissed her palm—“but also because I’m your dom.” His eyes pinned her. “Now tell me.”

He was right...and she didn’t want to think about it, especially now in the sweetness of the afternoon with him.

He waited, as immovable as the mountains around them.

“Fine.” She tried to pull her hand back...unsuccessfully. No retreat, physical or emotional. “I’d met a dom at Dark Haven. The party at Simon’s house was our first date outside of the club.” God, she’d acted so recklessly.

“Sounds like it should have been safe,” he said mildly, his tone nonjudgmental.

“I’m only grateful I didn’t go to his apartment instead.” She stared at her hand, enclosed within his warm fingers. “When we arrived, he wanted a private spot to play.” She didn’t think about the similarity to Virgil’s complaint until she felt his fingers tighten. *Oh God*. An apology would make it worse, so she forged on. “He found an isolated place under the stairs and chained me to a post there. And gagged me.”

She swallowed against the memory of the taste of the rubber ball-gag. *Drool running down my chin, so humiliating. Choking on the gag*. She’d shaken her head, used her safe word. He’d understood her. Ignored her. *The blooming of fear. Horror*.

“Go on.” Virgil brought her back.

“He used a cane.” Each strike had sent bladelike pain all the way to the bone. “He heard me use my safe word, over and over, but the gag kept anyone else from hearing me.” *Agonizing blow after blow, as if my skin was being sliced to pieces*. The whole world red with pain. She screamed, pulled at the restraints, tearing her wrists, an animal, mindless. “He laughed...and kept hitting me.”

Silence.

She looked up. He’d closed his eyes, his face like stone. “Virgil?” His eyes opened, so green and cold with anger that she flinched.

She saw his effort to calm, to force his muscles to relax before he said quietly, “I’m sorry, baby, but the thought of you hurt and helpless makes me...unhappy.” He put his arm around her, pulling her close. “So what happened?”

His arm was heavy. Warm. His controlled strength pushed her memories back, clearing a space for thoughts. “Rona, Simon’s sub, happened. She walked past and realized I was saying ‘red.’ Her yelling brought Simon and everyone else.” She rubbed her head against his chest. “The Hunt brothers were there too.”

“Logan, Jake, *and* Simon?” The almost palpable vibration of his anger diminished. “Is the son-of-a-bitch dom still alive?”

She tried to laugh through the tightness of her throat. “I found out yesterday Simon broke his nose, and the Hunts walloped him before they tossed him out.”

“Not nearly enough,” Virgil muttered. “How badly beat up were you?”

Waves of pain filling her until even the air seemed edged in fire. She shuddered and yanked herself from the memory. Thank God the post had protected her front. “I hurt for a while,” she said lightly.

“Don’t hand me bullshit, Summer. If I ask, I want a truthful answer.”

“Fine then, I hurt like hell,” she snapped. “I had welts pretty much everywhere. Bruises over the bones, places where my skin had split, and I peed blood for two days.”

“Jesus.” He yanked her onto his lap, holding her so tightly her ribs creaked. “No wonder you have problems. You have a couple scars on your back. Are they...?”

“Yeah.” He’d seen them. Hadn’t said anything. “A friend—another nurse—took me home with her. I had good care.”

“I’m surprised you even considered BDSM after that.” The respect in his voice was heartening.

She rubbed her cheek on his chest. “I hadn’t planned to, but Simon dragged me back.”

Virgil snarled under his breath, and she realized her error. *Dragged*. “No, I said that wrong. Rona’s in admin at my hospital, and after I returned to work, she recognized me from the party. One day, Simon showed up, bought me coffee in the cafeteria, and quizzed me about my experience, what I wanted, what I’d liked. I guess he could tell I…” *Want it. Need it*. “Anyway, he and Rona talked me into going back with them. They babysat me. He kept introducing me to experienced doms, but they scared me. I preferred…easier ones.”

“I understand.” His chin rested on the top of her head. “I’m glad I came along when you were finally ready, baby,” he said.

She hesitated, but his warmth somehow opened her like a springtime flower. “I don’t think I’d have ever been ready,” she admitted. “I don’t know why, but I trust you. Even when you scare me.”

“Mmm.” His arms tightened. “Then we’ll go on from here.”

\* \* \*

Night had fallen by the time they got back to the lodge. On the porch, Summer turned to say good night and tripped over Logan’s scarred-up dog that sprawled in front of the door. Sitting beside him, a giant cat watched with unblinking eyes.

“Have you met Thor and Mufasa, Summer?” Virgil performed the introductions with as much formality as he had with Laurette.

After the dog lifted a paw for her to shake, the cat padded over.

“You really are a beauty, even if you’re huge,” Summer said and offered her finger.

Mufasa sniffed the digit carefully, then politely nudged it with her cheek. *Accepted. You may pet me*.

Grinning, Summer complied. The tabby-colored hair was soft and thick with the winter’s undercoat. How had she gone so long without an animal to love? “I want a dog.”

“Why not have one?” Virgil gave Thor a full-body scratch that had the dog shivering in delight.

“I could barely afford my tiny apartment, definitely not one allowing pets. Maybe I can get one once I’m settled.” Longing filled her heart. A dog to love. Something that needed her.

“I hope you do.” Virgil bent to give her a warm kiss. “I’ll get back here by nine. Be in the lodge, dressed and ready to play.” He drew his finger slowly along her jaw. “I’m looking forward to having my hands on your body again. To hear the sounds you make when I suck your nipples. To feel you coming around my cock.”

At his words and the flammable look in his eyes, her insides melted like ice under a hot sun.



The corner of his mouth turned up with satisfaction. He set something in her hand—a package and a packet of lube. “This is to prepare that little asshole of yours. Put it in now and remove it before you come to the lodge.”

She frowned at the anal plug. He’d touch her there, hold her hips as he pushed into her. He’d hurt her—and please her. She shivered as he held her gaze. Self-assured. Firm. She nodded, her mouth too dry to form a word.

“That’s my girl,” he said so softly it was like a brush of wind against her heart.

## Chapter Ten

A little before nine, Summer shrugged out of her coat and left her boots in the row by the door. She grinned at the music Logan had selected to start off the night. The snapping whip in Lambert's *For Your Entertainment* was echoed by a real one farther down the room. In the glow of wall sconces and firelight, Doms and subs set up for their play, laying out toys to use, checking tools and restraints. Nearby, a naked sub stood patiently while her dom wrapped her in rope for a suspension scene.

Off to one side, Logan had his arm around Rebecca, supervising. He gave Summer a once-over. "Very sexy, sugar."

She smiled, heartened by his compliment and Rebecca's subtle thumbs-up. Maybe she hadn't wasted her time with an hour of primping. She'd copied MaryAnn and braided a few locks of hair, adding in dark blue beads that matched her bustier and leather skirt. She'd gone heavier with her makeup, so her eyes looked bigger. With luck, her glossy lipstick would have Virgil demanding a blowjob.

She'd like to give him a blowjob. *Oh yeah*. Two nights now and she still hadn't had a chance to play with his cock. Maybe start by running her tongue over the head. Just as a tease. Maybe he'd wrap her hair around his hand and—

The door opened to a blast of frigid air and swirling snowflakes, and a bear-sized man stepped in. *Virgil*. Every nerve in her body turned happy handsprings.

He tossed his coat in the heap on a couch and stomped the snow off. Typical BDSM attire of black jeans and boots. But what kind of dom wore a flannel shirt, even if it was black? She shook her head. The man sure did things his own way.

His gaze moved down her body, pausing on her breasts, her thighs and legs, and fire lit his eyes, igniting a matching flame inside her. He tilted his head. "You are the sexiest, prettiest woman I've seen in just about forever."

The sincerity in his voice staggered her. Sure, she'd thought she looked good, but somehow when he said it, the impact was entirely different. "Thank you, Sir."

Virgil nodded at Logan, then set an arm over her shoulder. "Let's get some water, and we'll talk about tonight."

Halfway to the kitchen, Simon called Virgil over to the fireplace. "Rona wants to ski while we're here. Can you recommend a place?"

"A couple of them are good. Do you have a pen?" Virgil asked.

Looked like they'd be at it for a few minutes. "I'll get the water and come back," Summer said.

"Thank you, sweetie." Virgil squeezed her arm gratefully. "We won't talk long, I promise."

She entered the kitchen, feeling appreciated. And sexy.

A hefty, potbellied man stood by the counter. “Hey there, hottie,” he said with a leer and waggled his beer at her.

Maybe there were times sexy wasn’t so good. “Hi.” She gave him a politely cool smile.

Stepping past him to get to the refrigerator, she noticed that instead of the popular cop or military fetwear, he wore a gas company uniform. How odd.

When he took a long pull of the beer, she frowned. Dark Haven had strict rules about no alcohol before BDSM play. “Quite a party,” he said, jerking his chin at the doorway.

“Uh-huh.” She started to pull open the refrigerator door.

She felt a hand run down her butt to between her legs. Dammit! She spun around and glared at him.

He snorted. “Don’t give me that pure and innocent expression. I saw what’s going on in there. One big orgy. So we’re going to have one out here, just you and me.” His gaze traveled down her body like a wash of slime.

*What a creep.* “Not interested.”

His face reddened, his expression changing until it had nothing to do with domination and everything to do with violence and rape. “Cunt. No cunt talks to me that way.” His words echoed in the kitchen...the very empty kitchen.

Uneasiness skittered across her nerves as she realized he had her cornered between the massive table and the wall of appliances.

She retreated a step and stopped. Jaw tight, she shook off the encroaching panic. *I’m not restrained, not gagged. Not helpless.* Straightening her back, she gave him a steady stare. “Leave now, before this goes any further.”

He rubbed his crotch, his piggy eyes on her. “You’re giving it away free; I’m going to get me some snatch too.” She could smell the alcohol on his breath.

*A drunk. That’s very bad.* Her heart began to hammer against her tightening chest. Summer planted her feet, her hands fisting. Then, not being stupid, she yelled, “Help!”

“Fucking bitch!” He grabbed at her.

Smothering a squeak, she knocked his arm aside. With all her strength, she punched him in the jaw. Pain burst in her knuckles.

He staggered back—right into Virgil. Virgil stepped in front of him, set a hand on his chest, and casually shoved. The creep hit the refrigerator door with a horrible thump, and his eyes went unfocused.

Virgil studied Summer for a moment, then gave her a fleeting smile that did nothing to warm the ice in his eyes.

*Well. Talk about a timely rescue.* She realized her hands were still fisted and uncurled her fingers.

“Not a good plan, buddy.” Virgil’s voice was mild. “Supposedly the last poor fucker here

who tried rape was given to the femdommes who whipped all the skin off his back...and his dick.”

It took a minute for the man to figure it out. Then his face paled. “Hey, don’t—nothin’ happened.” He gave Summer a pleading look. “I got carried away.”

He edged sideways to avoid Virgil. Once free, he staggered toward the back door. Catching sight of Logan and Simon in the doorway, he shrank another inch and sped up.

Logan’s face looked like stone when he glanced at Summer. “I’m sorry, sugar. His gas truck broke down. Since the tow truck can’t get out here until morning, I gave him a cabin. He wasn’t supposed to leave it.”

Her throat was almost too dry for the words to get past. “Not your fault he didn’t obey.” She hugged herself, feeling as if her bones were covered in ice.

“Summer.” Virgil’s deep voice drew her gaze. He held out his hand. She hesitated only a second, then flew into his arms.

He enclosed her in safety and warmth, rocking her gently. “Good punch, slugger,” he said against her ear. “You okay?”

She nodded, knowing the way she’d attached herself to his waist might tell him differently. He didn’t call her on it, just held her firmly. His flannel shirt felt soft under her cheek, with a homelike scent of laundry detergent.

Around her, the men talked quietly. Logan growled that he’d make sure the man never worked anywhere around Yosemite again, then started grumbling about Virgil’s tall tale. “Whip-cracking dommes?”

Virgil chuckled. “Gullible bastard believed it.”

“I rather enjoyed the story,” Simon said. “I was afraid you’d mop the floor with him instead of terrifying him with femdommes.”

Virgil shrugged. “Summer nailed him good, I’d say. And I’ve had my fill of violence. I’ll bust somebody’s chops if that’s what it takes, but there’s usually a better choice.”

Summer lifted her head and met Simon’s gaze. He smiled slightly, and she realized he was still trying to help her.

But she’d started to think she knew Virgil Masterson. She rubbed her cheek against his hard chest, then pulled back. “How’d you get to the kitchen so fast?”

“I was almost here. I don’t like leaving you alone for long, not at this kind of party.” He ran a finger across her jaw.

“Oh.” Like having her own guardian angel. Why did she find that so comforting? “Thanks for the protection.”

“Part of the job description,” he murmured.

She tilted her head. “Which job?”

His eyes crinkled. “All of them, baby. All of them.” From the wry humor in his smile, he

meant it too. “Let me grab some water, and we’ll find a place to talk a bit.”

He was willing to play here even when he didn’t want to...just because she was a coward. How could she think he’d ever hurt her? And how long would she let Dirk sabotage her life? “Actually”—all the air seemed to have been sucked out of the room, so she took a second to find some—“I’d just as soon talk at your place, if it’s still an option.”

She’d surprised him. His eyes sharpened, and he studied her face for a long, long moment. Then his gaze flickered over her shoulders, her hands. A cop’s stare. A dom’s assessment. Finally he nodded with a fleeting smile. “It’s definitely an option. Do you want to grab anything from your cabin, or should I tuck you in the truck while you still have the courage?”

*Oh. Very good point.* “Let’s make a run for it.”

His growly laugh filled the room. “Then that’s what we’ll do.”

\* \* \*

When Virgil turned the truck down a tiny road, Summer worked on controlling her breathing. Almost there. The dirt road widened into a small open valley. A barn and stockades sat off to the right, and farther out, snowy pastures glowed in the moonlight. The headlights showed the dark forest flowing up the mountain on the left and then illumined a massive two-story log house.

He took her in through a side door. After removing her boots, he led the way up the stairs and opened one of the two doors, flipping on the light.

She smiled at his warm and cozy living room. Cushy chairs of brown and tan plaid flanked a huge dark green sofa. A newspaper lay discarded on a leather ottoman. Across the room, an open door revealed a large bedroom. *Well, damn.* The man had himself a second floor suite that was as big as her apartment.

As he went to hang her coat up, she curled and uncurled her toes in the thick brown carpet. *I’m not scared. Uh-uh.*

“I’ll get a fire lit.” He set his toy bag down on a chair next to the couch and knelt in front of a stone fireplace. A herd of carved horses galloped across the mantel. Paperbacks stuffed the built-in bookcases. He liked to read. She hadn’t known.

What else don’t I know? she wondered with an ugly tinge of worry.

On her right was a flat-screen TV with theater system and a wealth of movies in more shelves. Creamy-colored walls lightened the room and showcased Remington prints. She smiled, remembering his so-worn-looking western clothing in Dark Haven. It definitely hadn’t been a costume.

After closing the glass fireplace door, he flicked off the overhead lights so the only illumination came from firelight. He picked up a remote and punched something in, and the low tones of Enya filled the room.

Setting the scene. Her skin chilled.

“Summer.” He held out his hand.

She crossed the room, wishing she wore jeans and a flannel shirt instead of fetwear.

“Can I get you something to drink?”

She shook her head, mouth dry.

“All nerves, aren’t you,” he said softly. His hands curled around her upper arms. He pulled her up on tiptoes as he kissed her, no longer sweetly but with pent-up desire, demanding a response as he possessed her mouth. Her senses whirled like fallen leaves in a storm.

When he finally released her, she wanted him with every fiber in her being.

“There now, that’s the look I like to see on your face.” His voice had turned husky; his golden-brown eyes were filled with heat.

She swallowed and rubbed her damp hands on her skirt.

The sun lines at the corners of his eyes crinkled. “You know, every time you put on these sexy clothes, all I can think about is getting you out of them.” He undid the hooks on her bustier. Despite the cold outside, his hands were warm. His calloused fingers scraped lightly over her nipples, teasing them into hard peaks.

She wanted—needed—to touch him, and she ran her palms up his forearms. The corded tendons and muscles under the light brown hair made her clench inside. He was so strong.

He tossed her bustier onto a chair, her leather skirt followed, and she stood naked in the center of the room. Exposed and vulnerable. Deep in her belly, excitement flickered to life.

When she shivered despite the heat under her skin, he set her on the padded arm of the couch and dragged it closer to the fireplace.

She could feel the warmth radiating from the blazing fire, hear the muted pops of the burning wood. What was there about a fire that satisfied a primitive need? She shook her head. Probably the same one that craved a man’s strength.

When Virgil stroked her hair, she looked up and frowned. “You’re still dressed.”

“Yep.” He smiled and pushed her over backward.

“Hey!” Her shoulders hit the cushions, but he’d held on to her hips, so her bottom remained up high on the arm of the couch. Her legs dangled over the side. She struggled to sit up.

He jerked her hips, flattening her again. “Stay right there, Summer.” His eyes narrowed. “If you don’t move, I won’t restrain you.”

Her thumping heart dented the inside of her ribs.

“Do you understand, little sub?” he asked softly. “I want a polite answer.”

When he used that authoritative tone... The flood of excitement swept her willpower away. “Yes, Sir.”

“Good. Put your arms over your head.”

She did, then frowned. With her butt up so high, she couldn't move without using her arms.

"Very nice." He set her left foot on the tall back cushions, exposing the apex of her thighs. She saw him smile and realized he'd positioned the couch so the firelight glowed right on her pussy. The warmth from the fire, from his body, bathed her legs.

His finger traced down her lower stomach, over her mound to between her legs. "It's damned sexy how you're always nice and wet for me," he rumbled in approval. His fingers opened her more, and he ran a finger around her entrance to over her clit. Her hips jolted upward.

"Virgil." How could he make her feel so exposed and so aroused at the same time. She moved her leg down.

"Mmmm?" Without even looking, he pinned her leg against the back cushions with his right side, keeping her spread open. He pushed her other leg outward, so she ended up wider than before.

He bent, and his lips touched the place just below her mound where her folds started.

Too far from her clit, yet she almost groaned with the way everything tightened. Swelled.

He teased the spot, his tongue so hot and wet. She tried to lift her hips up to him, and he flattened her butt on the arm of the couch. "If you move again, I'll spank you first. And then start over."

*Oh God.*

With his tongue, he delicately traced circles around her core until her hands fisted. "Virgil, I can't..."

His eyes had never left her face, and she realized the position let him watch her reactions to everything he did with his mouth. He lifted his head, and his breath brushed over her sensitized skin. "No, you can't do a thing." He smiled slightly, then licked upward from her entrance and over the ball of nerves, his hands tightening on her hips when she jerked uncontrollably.

God, with every touch of his tongue, her clit swelled until it felt ten times larger than normal. Tight and hot. "I need more. Sir. I want you inside me."

"You can have this for now, baby." He reached into his bag, and she heard a slight buzz. Then he slowly pushed something between her puffy tissues. Long and thin, it vibrated in her, ratcheting up her arousal.

"Not quite there. Need more curve," he said, and removed the device. A click and when he put it back in, the vibrations hit right on the oh-so-sensitive spot at her core. *Oh God, yes.* It felt as if her nerves had expanded inward, so when he rocked the toy, the buzzing hit her clit from the inside. Her hands fisted as her need shot into urgency.

"Mmm, that's the right spot," he murmured.

She clenched and moaned, tilting up her hips until he set his forearm across her pelvis,

pinning her down—and his ruthless control somehow shot the pressure to the boiling point.

The slow rocking and the deep-seated vibrations drove her upward. She was going to die. And then he took her clit between his lips and sucked, each strong pull of his mouth coinciding with his pushing the vibrator onto that...spot inside. Her hips strained against his arm as every nerve tightened, and she teetered at the brink, unable to even breathe, as if the universe had stopped.

He sucked harder, his tongue swirled roughly over her clit, and her senses exploded into engulfing pleasure, sweeping everything before it in a tornado of sensation, flattening every thought in its path until only feeling remained.

When her body went limp, when her eyes focused again, she realized the room had definitely warmed up. Her heart still hammered so hard—God, she could have had a heart attack. She wet her lips. “That was...wonderful.”

“Mmm, it was fun.”

Fun? She’d almost *died*, and he thought it was just fun?

He removed the toy and ran his hands over her thighs before kissing each one. “You have such soft skin,” he murmured.

She sighed like a kitten in a basketful of wool, all warm and cozy.

His smile flashed. “Don’t get comfortable, slugger. We’re not done yet.” He took her hands and pulled her up to stand by the couch. “Kneel, please. I want those shiny lips of yours around my cock.”



## Chapter Eleven

As Virgil gave the order, he realized they'd never discussed blowjobs. Maybe this was too much for—

Delight flashed in her eyes. "Yes, Sir." She dropped to her knees. After putting a hand on his waistband, she glanced up as if to make sure she did what he wanted, then unzipped and freed him from his jeans. The firelight flickered over her hair, like a pale waterfall down her back. Dark beads swung from the tiny braids.

She curled her fingers around the base of his shaft, her hand so small her thumb didn't meet her fingers. Her lips closed over the head, and he tensed, anticipating the heat. She gave him a wicked look and instead ran her tongue up his length, teasing the winding veins and the dent under the head.

He muffled a groan and forced himself to gently stroke her silky hair. After licking up the precum, she swirled her hot little tongue over and around the head. Fuck, maybe this wasn't the best idea. If he got any harder, the skin on his cock would rip apart. "Enough teasing, brat," he muttered and fisted his hand in her hair.

She giggled. Hell, she sounded cute—and delighted she could threaten his control. Although he saw her ass wiggle as if the idea of being punished appealed to her, she obeyed. She closed her mouth around him, rubbing her tongue down the underside as her lips slid almost to the base. Up and down. Slowly.

Dammit. He pulled her hair, pushing his hips forward, going deeper, faster. Her mouth tightened as she sucked forcefully. Pulling back, she circled the head with her tongue and took him in so fast that his eyes almost rolled back. She worked her free hand into his jeans to fondle his balls. The pressure at the bottom of his spine built.

With a hum that vibrated through his cock, she took him deeper until he hit the back of her throat. "Jesus, you're going to kill me." His leg muscles tightened as he fought for control. Her glossy lips left shiny trails on his shaft. Hot, wet, the suction unbelievable.

*No.*

"Stop, sweetheart." He gripped her shoulders and moved her back, although he fucking well wanted to grab her hair and pump himself in and out of that devastatingly soft mouth. He caressed her face, wiping the saliva from her cheek. "You are frighteningly good at that."

"But you want me to stop?" Her big eyes held heat and confusion.

"I'm going to come in a different place tonight."

Although a tiny tremor ran through her, she didn't scream and flee. Progress.

Without giving her time to get nervous, he set her on the leather ottoman, positioning her on forearms and knees. He wound two scarves from the toy bag around her wrists, tying them to the ottoman legs.

Her breathing hitched, and the muscles in her shoulders tensed.

*Go slow, Masterson.* He knelt in front of her and lifted her face, forcing her to look at him. “Summer, breathe.”

Wide blue eyes met his, and her obvious trust squeezed his heart. She inhaled slowly and nodded.

He studied her for another minute, running his thumb over her chin. Not shaking, hands open, eyes focused. “Good.” He kissed her lightly and nibbled the tempting lower lip before whispering, “Don’t tell Simon, since I’m probably breaking some dominant rule, but the scarves are loose enough you can escape if you have to.”

She blinked in surprise, pulled up on her right hand, then whispered back, “Thank you.”

He stroked her cheek. “Just remember I’ll be disappointed if you do take them off. It will please me if you stay put, honey.”

When she looked at him, no panic showed, only the expression he’d seen a time or two. Determination and joy. She wanted to please him. It went both ways—he hoped to take her on the finest journey of her submissive life. “That’s my girl.” *And you are, whether you know it or not.*

He looped scarves around her knees, securing them to the sides of the ottoman so her legs were spread wide. He’d never used his ottoman like this before, but it damned well seemed as if someone had designed it for bondage.

Keeping his touch easy, he slid his hand over her pussy. Very wet and slick, and as he fingered her clit, it hardened. She gave a small moan. There would be more moans before he finished tonight.

He pinched the swollen nub of nerves lightly, and she jumped, pulling at the scarves. Then she recalled her instructions and quieted, but her breathing increased. She grew wetter, obviously turned on by restraints, verbal or physical.

*Submissive. And mine.* As he teased the hood of her clit, he reminded her, “Your safe word is *safe word*, Summer.” He ran his hand over her soft, round bottom, warming the skin, waking the nerves. “I’m going to take your ass, honey. I’ll go slow, but I will be in you before we’re done. And you will come for me while I’m inside you.”

Summer felt Virgil’s calloused hand rubbing her bottom. His deep, firm voice held no doubts of what would happen, and she shivered. She bit her lips and waited, every nerve on her skin alive and tingling.

When he sheathed himself with a condom, her breathing hitched. She shut her eyes. *I don’t want to see any more.*

A second later, he pulled her buttocks apart, and cold lube drizzled onto her asshole, making her squeak. His finger pressed against her, uncomfortable for a second, then breached the muscle and slid in.

Her fingernails dug into the ottoman at the impossible feelings shooting through her.

“You’re more relaxed,” he murmured. “You used the plug. Good girl.”

The momentary rush of pleasure from his words was followed by a mewl of surprise as his second finger joined the first. *Ohhhh*. Unfamiliar sensations ran through her, discomfort mingling with excitement. He was really going to do this. *Oh God*.

He stroked her clit with his free hand, his fingers in her ass moved slowly in and out, and the combination started to push her upward to total arousal.

After a minute, he pulled out, and she felt his heavy cock press on her asshole. The head slid slickly over her puckered rim. "Push back against me, Summer."

She bit her lip, hands clenching into fists, and tried to comply. He mercilessly gripped her hip, keeping her from moving away, as he steadily pushed in.

"Oh God," she whimpered, as the ring of muscle stretched and burned. Her body shook uncontrollably.

And then with a pop, the head of his cock was in. He didn't move as she panted. Trapped. Impaled. Hurting.

"You're still tight," he said. "Breathe, honey. Deep breath."

The pressure eased as her body adjusted. He rubbed her bottom, and more cold liquid trickled between her buttocks. More lube. A second later, he pressed forward, in and out in tiny increments, working deeper, gradually stretching her.

Her back hole felt on fire, as if he'd grown much, much bigger than before—huge—the size of a house. She moaned as he advanced farther and farther. Eons later, the warm skin and coarse hair on his thighs finally pressed on her buttocks. "There we go, baby. All in."

She felt totally penetrated, pinned by his hard cock inside her. Her head whirled as she pulled on her restraints, struggled against his hands, knowing she couldn't go anywhere, knowing he'd taken her most private place. The rush of heat shook her, scared her. He had all the control, she had none.

He didn't move. "Easy, baby. Shhh."

After a minute, she stilled, gasping for air. Exhausted.

He slid out a little and back in.

It didn't feel good—it hurt. She whined, trying not to use her safe word. Wanting to please him. Wanting it to stop.

A hum sounded, and he pressed something soft against her clit. A vibrator. She stiffened with surprise, reflexively started to pull away.

With a huff of amusement, he yanked her back, embedding him even deeper, and she yelped.

Intense vibrations surged into her throbbing clit and collided with the burning, stretching pain from her ass. Not comfortable or sweet but strange and overwhelming.

"You're a good girl," he said, his voice low and rough. He wrapped straps around her thighs, securing the vibrator against her clit. Then his powerful hands gripped her hips, and

he pulled back, slow at first. He added even more lube until his shaft grew slick.

He'd filled her completely, then withdrew, then pushed in again. The friction of his cock against the wealth of sensitive nerves was incredible. She shook, unable to move, to think, to do anything except suffer the painful, wonderful, thrilling feel of him sliding in and out, and the demanding vibrations against her clit. The pressure, the need to come, coiled her insides with urgency, until she teetered on the edge of orgasm.

And stayed there forever. Her body froze. She panted for air. "Oh God, oh God, oh God, I can't."

He rumbled a laugh and reached around her to jam the vibrator against her clit as he shoved his cock deeper.

She broke completely, as everything inside her—everything—exploded into brutal, terrifying waves of pleasure. The uncontrollable sensations racked her body, and a high scream tore out of her. His hard hands controlled her bucking as he hammered into her, pushing her deeper into the overwhelming lake of sensation.

He couldn't last, Virgil knew, not with her softness all around his cock and the tight ring of muscle circling the base. More...a little more.

And then the muscles of his legs turned rigid. The pressure at the base of his spine expanded, clenching his balls until they drew up tight against his groin, and a second later, fiery pleasure blasted into his cock. His release jerked up through his shaft and shot out in heart-stopping spasms.

He thrust hard, driving as deep as he could, until his eyes tried to roll back in his head from sheer pleasure.

Sweat trickled down the hollow of his back as he hauled in a long breath. He'd happily have stood there forever, enjoying the glory of being inside her, but she'd started to wilt.

He flicked the thigh straps open, and the vibrator dropped away. She shuddered. Her head drooped, only the scarves keeping her from flattening into a pancake on the ottoman. "Sweetie, hold on a minute longer," he said, running his hands over her smooth back.

His withdrawal made her moan, and he grinned.

After removing the condom, he cleaned her off with baby wipes. Her pussy reacted to the touch of the cool cloth with small spasms that made him want to fuck her again. And again and again.

Instead, he untied her. Lifting her in his arms, he shoved a chair closer to the fire and settled into it. She curled up in his lap, her head against his chest. She looked confused. Lost. Little tremors shook her.

"Pretty Summer. You were very brave." He stroked her, warming her skin with his hands, holding her firmly. Grounding her. He kissed her cheek, wanting nothing more than to hold her, keep her in his life forever. "God, I love you."

"Mmm." She lifted her hand and touched his jaw, then stiffened. "Huh?"

“You heard me.” He nuzzled her hair. Would he ever smell vanilla again without getting an erection? “I learned a harsh lesson this year—that I should never assume someone knows how I feel.” His cousin Kallie had suffered, and he bore part of the blame. He’d bear the guilt to his grave. He’d not hesitate to speak again. “You’ll never have to guess what I feel for you. I love you, Summer.”

Her lips opened...then closed tightly. She shook her head. “No, no you don’t. It’s just because we had sex. We barely met. You can’t think you l-love me.”

His hopes started to disappear under a cold mudslide of disappointment, and then his jaw tightened. She did have a point. They didn’t know each other well, which also meant she had no idea how fucking stubborn he could be.

“Can’t I?” He rubbed his cheek against hers. “I haven’t learned everything about your past, but I know you, baby. How you react when you’re frightened or you want something, how much it means to you to help people, what you do when you get angry.” His lips curved as he remembered her punching the bastard. He tilted her chin up, forcing her to meet his eyes. “I understand how much you need me, how much you care.”

“I...” Her voice shook. “It’s too soon, Virgil.”

Now look at that—she hadn’t denied either the need or the caring. “You think?”

“Okay, maybe I...care. That doesn’t matter.” She turned her face away. “I don’t see any way this could work for us.”

The exhilaration sheered through him, and it took a minute to hear the second part. “You don’t want to continue what we started?”

Her tear-filled eyes were like a lake reflecting the blue sky. “I do,” she whispered. “But...but, Virgil, there’s nothing for me here. I have a career that I can’t abandon. And I won’t be dependent on someone, not even you.”

He took a long, slow breath. He shouldn’t push her. But her plans would put her so far away. He played with the silky hair spilling over her breasts. “Do you want me to move to Gold Beach with you?”

She stared at him. “You can’t leave here. You have people who depend on you. A job. Your mountain. I... You mustn’t.”

“Mmmmh.” *Back off, Masterson.* He tightened his arms around her like he could force her to stay. Not happening.

He considered for a second how he’d feel about not having a job, being dependent on her. *Fuck no.* Especially at this point in their relationship. “I think we can figure something out, sweetheart.”

“I want... If only...” She blew out an exasperated huff. “You don’t even have a hospital here.”

She wanted to stay. Hope flickered like a candle and died. No hospital. Only one doctor in town—in the whole area within decent driving distance—and hell would freeze over before Abe’d hire a nurse. His mouth tightened.

Her hand sliding up his chest distracted him. She tried to smile for him. “So since we don’t have much time, how about some shower sex?”

A distraction? Good choice. He rose with her still in his arms. “We can do that.”

He made love to her in the shower and then his bed. Over and over. Somehow his cock kept rising as if it knew this was all the time left with her.

In the wee hours of the night, she’d finally given him the words he’d wanted to hear: “I love you, Virgil.” She fell asleep curled against him, a warm, fragrant, soft—obstinately independent—woman.

He watched, heart aching. Surely he could figure out a way to make this work.

## Chapter Twelve

Morning sunlight streaming through the window and across the quilt awakened Summer. She blinked and frowned. The quilt was the wrong color. *Not my bed*. But the pillow held an appealing scent of mountain and man. And the whole room smelled of sex. Virgil's room. She wiggled in pleasure and winced at her aching inner thigh muscles, sore nipples and pussy.

Her butt definitely felt abused.

Why did the memory of him taking her there, somewhere so private—so forbidden—make her want to beg for his use again? *Who have I turned into?* Something at her core trembled. He'd controlled her last night. Completely. Physically and emotionally. In the bed, holding her hands over her head, deep inside her, demanding that she tell him how she felt. Rumbling his satisfaction when she'd gasped out, "I love you, Virgil." He'd made her scream it again as she came.

He'd held her so sweetly she wanted to be back in his arms. Forever.

The ache of loss threatened to grow, and she sat up. The room was empty. "Virgil?"

Shoving her tangled hair out of her face, she looked around. A nice comfy bedroom with no clutter. More cream-colored walls, heavy, dark wood dresser and tables, rich brown carpeting. The colors matched those of his mountain, she realized. He had a store-bought quilt in deep greens and blues. *Maybe I should make him a real one.*

On the bedside stand, she spotted a note:

*Slugger*

She grinned and glanced at her bruised knuckles.

*Got called in to work—hopefully will be back this morning. I left some clothes on a chair for you. Coffee is in kitchen downstairs. Use the door in the corner of the bedroom. Make yourself at home.*

*Love you, V*

Oh God. She tried to quell the warmth engulfing her. "*Love you.*" How easily he used the L word. She sighed. Thank God he snored, or she might think he was perfect.

After her shower, she found clothes on the bedroom chair. One faded pair of jeans fit despite being tight in the butt. She donned a T-shirt, then pulled on a huge flannel shirt. It had to be Virgil's. She rolled the sleeves up and felt engulfed in softness.

*Must have caffeine.* With single-minded need, she headed downstairs, through a rustic living room big as her apartment, and into an oversize country kitchen with brick-colored walls.

Coffeemaker, check. Coffee, check.

As the magnificent scent of brewing coffee filled the room, she considered the coming

day. She had a dreary drive to get back to San Francisco, then an orgy of packing and moving. Funny how her sense of anticipation at starting a new job had diminished so much—because Virgil wouldn't be there. The feeling of loss made an uncomfortable lump in her chest. She shook her head. *Reality check, Summer.* No work, can't stay.

Boots thumped on the stairs, and Summer glanced up. *He's back.* Happy excitement tingled along her nerves. Only...that sounded like more than one pair of footsteps.

"Thank fuck Virg made coffee. I might—" A man stepped into the kitchen and halted at the sight of her. Another man thumped into him. Both had shaggy brown hair, leathery tans, flannel shirts, and jeans. Big guys.

*Oh hell.* A thin trickle of fear slid through her. She rose and took a step back. "Um. I—"

"Hey, you must be Summer." The man in the door stepped forward, holding out a hand. "I talked to you on the phone. I'm Wyatt, Virg's brother."

Virgil had brothers? He'd never mentioned anyone except a cousin. *Well, I didn't ask him about his family, now did I?* She winced. No, she'd spent the time talking about herself. *Pitiful, Summer. How self-centered can you get?*

*His brothers.* Her hair still hung in wet tangles from the shower; she wore Virgil's shirt, and had obviously spent the night. Heat flamed her cheeks. Of course, it could be worse—she could be sitting here in fetishwear.

The two men looked like Virgil. Open rugged faces. Friendly. She shook Wyatt's hand firmly and said, "It's nice to meet you."

"Morgan." The leaner one smiled. "He called, said he's stuck in town booking some drunken bikers. We're supposed to feed you. Then if he's not back, I'll run you up to the lodge."

The sense of disappointment dulled the morning even further. She watched Morgan fill mugs with coffee and tried to find her wits. "Do you guys live here too?"

"Yep." Morgan handed her a mug. "Me and Wyatt and Kallie run a wilderness guide business, so there's livestock. Virgil tends the veggie gardens. It's easier to manage everything if we're here on the property."

Wyatt winked at her. "Downstairs is common territory; upstairs we got our own apartments."

So her Virgil lived in a gorgeous area, had a job, a family, a community. Even a garden. She gave a silent sigh of envy. "Sounds wonderful."

"Works pretty good." Wyatt stuck his head in the magnet-covered refrigerator. "What'd you like for breakfast?"

"Nothing. I need to get going." She'd run back to the lodge and pack, then swing into town. Say good-bye. The thought sliced deep, the pain arriving a second later. *Good-bye.*

"You sure?" Morgan frowned. "You look a little peaked. You should eat."

She shook her head. "It's a long drive. Where's the police station?"



“Midway through town. On the left,” Morgan said. “Next to the medical clinic, across from the grocery.

“You have a medical clinic?” Laurette needed a prescription for some of the equipment. Summer could stop by there too. And then she had another thought, and her hands tightened on the coffee mug. “I don’t suppose they’d need a nurse?”

Wyatt snorted. “Hell no. Doc hates nurses, hasn’t had one for a year or so. He hired some college guy.”

“Abe’s wife worked for him. Ugly divorce,” Morgan said. “He drove a couple nurses off after that. Good doctor, but he’s got a temper.”

Her spirits sank.

\* \* \*

After Morgan had dropped her off at the lodge, she’d started to pack, then driven to the tiny town instead. *I want Virgil*. Not that seeing him would solve anything.

She drove slowly down the Main Street. Dammit, why did Bear Flat have to be so pretty? She scowled at the picturesque stores with colorful hanging signs. A nineteenth-century-style boardwalk. All surrounded by breathtaking, snow-covered mountains. She’d have liked living here. “This isn’t helping.”

After parking in front of the police department, she sat for a minute, trying to contain the pain in her chest. Virgil didn’t need to see her in tears. And she saw no point in a drawn-out good-bye. She couldn’t live on someone else’s charity. She had an occupation that she loved.

Maybe he’d come and see her. And she could visit him here—after she worked long enough to have some days off.

But why even try to draw it out? He belonged here, and unless they built a hospital in the area, she never would. They had no future.

Throat tight, eyes burning, she pulled open the door to the police station. One uniformed officer sat at a table in the center of the room, another at a desk in the corner. “Is Virgil here?” she asked when they looked over.

“Should return in a bit.” He shook his head. “Hopefully he’ll be in a better mood by then.”

Guilt hit low and deep. It was because of her.

Her thought must have shown, since the cop grinned. “He and the doc got into it. Masterson was royally piss—” He broke off with an embarrassed glance at her. “Very angry at Abe. Could hear them shouting from in here.”

The gray-haired cop in the corner barked a laugh. “Never heard Masterson yell like that afore.”

“Okay. Well, thanks.” Her unhappiness deepened as she stepped back onto the street. She’d bet that Virgil had tried to find her a job. She scowled at the next-door building,

where the black window lettering proclaimed: BEAR FLAT MEDICAL CLINIC. Her next stop.

*Wonderful.* A doctor who hated nurses and made Virgil lose his temper. She'd just give the receptionist the list for Laurette and get the heck out of Dodge.

In the clinic, the small waiting room stood empty. No one sat at the receptionist's desk. Summer tapped her fingers on the desk impatiently.

Noise filtered through the door leading to the exam rooms. Someone vomiting. A man shouting, "Dammit, get over here. I need—" Cursing. Sounded more like an emergency room than a clinic. An ominous amount of blood had splattered across the tile floor.

Well, it appeared Doctor Prima Donna had problems. *Leave?* Summer glanced at the front door, sighed, squirted handwash from the dispenser on her hands, and headed to the back.

One empty room, another, then...chaos.

A woman, dead-white, sat on the floor in a corner, shaking and crying. Across the room, a young man knelt in a pool of vomit. Lovely.

A beefy male lay on the exam table, covered in blood. Something—maybe an axe—had laid his upper chest open right down to the ribs. Probably the gory sight had toppled the woman and, at a guess, the med tech.

Standing over the patient, the gray-haired doctor was cursing—very inventively—and plainly needed another set of hands. *I'd rather kick you. Really hard.* Summer sighed again, tossed her coat on a chair, and grabbed a pair of gloves from a box on the counter. "You got an ambulance called?" she asked as she pulled them on.

His head jerked up. Gray hair, drawn face, sharp blue eyes behind glasses. "About an hour out," he snapped. "I need some help if you could keep from puking and—"

Summer snorted and glanced at his supplies. The pile of four-by-four sponges he'd used for direct pressure was almost gone. Looked like he might need to tie off a spurter too. The cupboards along the wall were well stocked, and she grabbed a dressing set, absorbable sutures, more gauze four-by-fours, and set up a sterile field on the tray table.

The doctor grunted and set to work.

Summer smiled down into the patient's dazed, pain-ridden eyes. "We'll get some of the bleeding stopped. Then I can give you something for pain. Hang in there a little longer."

He managed a nod.

The doc stared at her for a second. Then his attention returned to the wound. She silently assisted. Once the doc had gotten the bleeding under adequate control, he irrigated, then worked on packing the wound.

With a bare minimum of talk, Summer started an IV and gave the patient some morphine, pleased when the lines of pain on his face eased. She tucked blankets around him, reassured the woman whose color was returning, and set the med tech to cleaning up his mess and the blood.

She ignored the doctor whenever possible. Truly competent, she'd noticed, and surprisingly sweet with the patient—now that he wasn't cursing—but the narrow-minded jerk didn't hire nurses, and he'd made Virgil mad enough to yell. She still wanted to kick him.

After the ambulance crew finally arrived and took the patient away, Summer washed her hands and turned to see the doctor watching her.

"You're the nurse Virgil told me about," he muttered. "I don't like nurses."

God, why did she ever choose a career where she had to deal with doctors? "So I've heard," she said, cold but polite. Fighting never accomplished anything...although right now, it sure sounded tempting. "I brought in a list of things Ms. Laurette needs. Virgil will see to the installation, but some equipment requires a prescription for Medicare to cover it." She dug in her pocket and set the paper on the counter. Two points to her for not throwing it at him.

His scowl deepened. "You're a hospital nurse. What do you know about home medical equipment?"

"I worked closely with the discharge planner." She picked up her coat.

"Hold up," he barked.

She glanced at her watch. She needed to find Virgil, wherever the heck he'd gone, and get her butt on the road. "You're welcome." She pulled open the door of the exam room.

He slapped the door shut. "Jesus, you're as stubborn as Masterson."

*Yeah, look who's talking.* She folded her hands in front of her and assumed an I'm-being-extremely-patient expression.

He blinked as if in disbelief, then said, "I haven't had good luck with nurses. After my... Well, after one nurse didn't work out, I went through two more." He eyed her, then removed his hand from the door. "One handled the patients well, but she had the judgment of a stump, and the other bawled like a baby every time I snapped at her."

He frowned at the med tech, who still looked green. "I thought I might train someone, but maybe not."

Well, at least the guy could admit he made a mistake. Good for him. Nonetheless, she was running late. She gave him another long-suffering look.

To her surprise, he barked a laugh. "No wonder you impressed Masterson."

When she edged toward the door, he wedged his foot against it and continued talking. "You're experienced, coolheaded, and excellent with people." He glanced at the paper on the counter where she'd listed the equipment she recommended and had starred the ones needing prescriptions. "You're organized."

He crossed his arms over his chest. "Want a job?"

\* \* \*

From the porch swing of the lodge, Virgil waited as Summer parked her car and stepped out. Smiling a little, she arched her back and stretched, as if reaching for the sky.

Fucking-A, the woman simply took his breath away—like after a winter storm, when sunlight would spill onto the untouched white of the mountains, casting the world into brilliance. And all a man could do was thank God for the gift of that moment.

He leaned forward, elbows on knees, and watched her cross the clearing. When she spotted him, joy lit her eyes. *Thanks, God.*

“Virgil!” Her pace quickened.

Just the sound of her voice made him smile. Made him harden. Made him hurt to think she’d leave.

But he’d go with her. As she trotted up the steps, his resolve firmed. *I can’t give her up.* He’d find a job in her town up north. He could live without the Sierras.

“Logan said you hadn’t checked out, so I waited here.” Virgil rose and pulled her against him, rubbing his cheek in her hair. She responded as she always did, softening in his arms. Offering herself. Sexiest woman he’d ever known.

“You jerk. I went nuts trying to find you.” When she frowned up at him, he captured her lips for a long, gratifying kiss. He slid his hands down, discovering that the jeans he’d loaned her were well past skintight. With a hum of pleasure, he curved his fingers under her round ass and murmured, “Be very polite right now, sweetheart. After last night, you’re too tender to fuck senseless.”

Pink flooded her cheeks, and then she wiggled her hips. “I’m not that sore.” Mischief turned her eyes sky blue.

His cock responded as if she’d raised the starting gate, and he almost groaned. Dammit. Now he’d suffer with a massive hard-on while they loaded her car.

She grinned at him, tilting her hips against his dick.

Hell with it, they’d just get a later start. Before he could scoop her up, she stepped back. “I’d... I want to talk first.”

Fucking-A, he might have a stroke right then and there. Good thing she was a nurse. He pulled in a slow breath. “All right.”

Summer had felt his erection, seen the heat in his gaze. Now she heard the strained patience in his voice. How many men would back off without making a production of it? God, she loved him.

He pulled her down to sit beside him on the porch swing. After putting an arm over her shoulders, he picked up a strand of her hair, curling it around his hand. He really did like to touch. It seemed strange that someone the size of a truck could be so affectionate. She glanced up.

The corners of his eyes crinkled, and he touched her cheek lightly with his finger. “I love

you.”

Oh God. In the clear mountain light, his eyes were golden and filled with such warmth that it was like a force pulling her toward him. Dammit, she’d wanted to have a rational discussion. One not involving emotions. “Virgil…”

“Say it, slugger.” He was as unstoppable as spring back home—melting the snow, exposing the tender new grass, flooding the streams and tearing away obstacles. Pushing her off-balance.

“I love you too.” And she did, and her feelings for him kept growing, sending out leaves, rooting deep in her soul. She blinked back tears. “I love you so much.”

“There we go.” He kissed her gently, then said, “I took the week off. I’m going to help you move and get settled in…if that doesn’t frighten you too much. I can do a little job-hunting myself.” He ran his finger down her cheek, smiling at her startled look. “I daresay I can find work somewhere close to you.”

“I’m staying.”

“But we’d best get started and…” He started to rise, then froze. “Wait… What did you say?”

Bubbles of joy rising inside her were as heady as champagne, and she giggled, then gave him a stern look and repeated his own words back to him, “Oh, you heard me.”

When he still just stared at her, she wrapped an arm around his neck, pulling him down to whisper, “I’ll stay.”

“Thank you, God.” His arms tightened until her ribs creaked, and then he kissed the breath right out of her. He was going to kill her dead—and she wouldn’t want to be anywhere else in the world.

He cupped her head, holding her against him for a moment, and she heard his heart pounding under her ear. “What about your career?” he finally asked.

“The doctor in town hired me.”

“Well damn.” He pushed her back to stare into her face in disbelief. “How the hell did you do that? I—uh—”

“Yeah, I know you yelled at him.” She touched his hard jaw with fingers that trembled slightly. He’d lost his temper, not at her but to help her. How could she not love him? “So I’m staying. But… I’m going to get my own place.”

His eyes narrowed ominously. “You won’t move in with me?”

“No.” *Firm. Be firm, Summer.* “It’s too soon. We need to see how it goes. So I’ll get an apartment or—”

“Not an apartment. Hell, I almost forgot.” He rose and strode into the lodge in big ground-covering strides.

She stared after him.

A minute later, he returned, a small quilt bundled in his arms.

She frowned. “You wanted a blanket?”

“Didn’t want him to get cold,” he muttered and opened the quilt to drop something in her lap. Something that squirmed with soft, soft fur, long drooping ears, big brown eyes.

The spaniel puppy bounced up to frantically lick her chin, wiggling in joy.

“Oh, look at you... You’re so cute.” Laughing, Summer glanced up at Virgil. “You got a puppy?”

“Nope. *You* got a puppy.” He smiled at her, and the love in his eyes filled her heart to overflowing. “I planned to come with you, but if you refused and left without me”—his jaw tightened as he repeated—“if you left alone, you’d be hurting almost as much as me, and you’d need something to love.”

As he took his seat beside her, she buried her face in the puppy’s soft fur, trying not to cry. He’d have tried to make her happy even if she left him. How could her heart keep expanding without bursting? Still holding the squirmy puppy, she stood and plopped down on Virgil’s lap.

He rumbled a laugh, and his arms came around her and the pup, offering a warm shelter of protection. Here was everything she ever wanted.

He’d said, “*I learned a harsh lesson this year that I should never assume someone knows how I feel.*” That applied to her too. “I love you, Virgil.”

“Now that’s exactly what I wanted to hear,” he said softly. He cupped her cheek. “I will always do my best to fill your needs.” It sounded like a vow. The sun lines at the corners of his eyes crinkled, and his voice deepened with controlled power. “Since it appears I’m a fucking pervert...a *dom*”—his smile flickered—“that means you will fill all of mine.”

At the undeniable command, a wave of heat surged over her, melting every single bone. He lifted an eyebrow, waiting for her answer.

“Yes, Sir,” she whispered. Then she raised her chin. “But I’m still going to have my own place. At least six months.” Surely she could hold out for that long, just to make sure they really were suited.

As he studied her face, she realized he was reading her like an open book...and he’d only been a dom a little while. The memory of last night came to her—his powerful hands and hard voice controlling her. A tremor ran through her. What would happen as he grew more experienced? She lifted her gaze.

Watchful intelligence burned in his level eyes...and then he gave her a slow, utterly confident smile.

Oh God, she’d be lucky to last a month.

 THE END 

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## Cherise Sinclair

Now everyone thinks summer romances never go anywhere, right? Well...that's not always true.

I met my dearheart when vacationing in the Caribbean. Now I won't say it was love at first sight. Actually, since he was standing over me, enjoying the view down my swimsuit top, I might even have been a tad peeved—as well as attracted. But although our time together there was less than two days, and although we lived in opposite sides of the country, love can't be corralled by time or space.

We've now been married for many, many years. (And he still looks down my swimsuit tops.)

Nowadays, I live in the west with this obnoxious, beloved husband, two children, and various animals, including three cats who rule the household. I'm a gardener, and I love nurturing small plants until they're big and healthy and productive...and ripping defenseless weeds out by the roots when I'm angry. I enjoy thunderstorms, playing Scrabble and Risk, and being a soccer mom. My favorite way to spend an evening is curled up on a couch next to the master of my heart, watching the fire, reading, and...well...if you're reading this book, you obviously know what else happens in front of fires. :)

*Cherise*

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