

Beautiful Trouble Publishing

Nevea Lane

DISTURBING the Fulcrum

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DISTURBING *the* *Yuletide*



www.beautifultroublepublishing.com

Disturbing the Yuletide

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Published by
Beautiful Trouble Publishing, LLC
PO Box 61
Colfax, NC 27235
www.beautifultroublepublishing.com

Cover Art: Les Byerley <http://www.les3photo8.com/>
Editor: Stephanie Parent
Proofreader: Novellette Whyte
<http://proofreadernovellette.blogspot.com/>
Formatter: Savannah J. Frierson, <http://sjfbooks.com/editing/>
E-book Conversion: Jim & Zetta, <http://www.jimandzetta.com/>
ISBN: 978-1-61788-013-1 (e-book)

Dedicated to ER—Thanks for the river rocks that
started this story.

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Chapter One

“What did you do, beat it with the ugly stick?” Topaz Aura Sinclair considered herself an expert on all things ugly. Working as a DJ, she’d seen her fair share of ugly, straight-up ugly, uglier and fugly. Yet the twinkling wreath decorated with Santas in striped underwear and reindeers with party hats had to be one of the ugliest things she’d ever seen.

Her friend Justine just looked at her and tried to cover her snickers. “I know it’s ugly, but it’s what they had in the basement.” Justine began to approach Topaz’s DJ sign with the offensive shrub and a nail gun.

“Hold up—don’t you dare cover up my new sign with that thing. Do you know how much time was spent to get each one of those letters to look like a blue flame?” Topaz stood in front of her DJ table, her stance indicating that she would take down anyone who dared to mess with her DJ Bluefire sign.

“Oh, sorry, T, how is this?” Justine held up the wreath and Topaz nodded in agreement. Topaz knew she was doing a huge favor for her best friend by agreeing to supply the music for the last-minute Christmas party. When Justine practically cried at the idea of having to pay an upcharge to get a DJ

during the holiday season at the last minute, Topaz, as always, stepped in and offered her services.

“Justine, tell me again how you got dumped with taking care of the decorations, the food and the entertainment for this little to-do?” Topaz asked while unwinding her cords and plugging in her MP3 player and mixing table.

“Um, well, I volunteered,” Justine said with a slight smile—a smile that said that was all the info Justine would share. Justine called herself a private person; Topaz couldn’t relate. Everything she thought, she said.

“Yeah, okay. So in this volunteering, did you manage to find someone to cater this event?” Even at the mention of food, Topaz’s stomach growled. She had forgotten to eat lunch in the rush to help her friend. What she wouldn’t give for one of her dad’s famous club sandwiches right about now.

“Yes, I did find a chef willing to take on a last-minute order. And he was cheap too. Either cheap or he was taking pity on me,” Justine said, looking at her handiwork on the corporate cafeteria.

“I opt for pity. You can sound pretty sad when you want to,” Topaz said. Just as she turned to pick up another cable, she got plastered with a face full of silver tinsel. Justine laughed as Topaz picked the silver things out of her jet-black hair.

“You should leave it—it looks great with the leftover blue dye on your tips. I still can’t believe you dyed your hair blue for that one job.”

Topaz shrugged. Her dad had always told her to let nothing or no one stand in the way of her dream. The job required a DJ to look wacky for a water polo event. Dying her hair blue seemed to be the logical course of action.

“You know, I work hard at making my brand known. And I happen to like the blue, thank you very much!”

Justine laughed at her friend and looked at her watch.

“Oh-oh, crap! I have to go and get changed! But the caterer isn’t here yet.”

“Go ahead, I’ll watch for them. I would hope they know what to do.” Waving her friend off, Topaz continued to plug in cables and turn on her equipment.

“Yes, they’re a good crew. Just show them where they can set up the buffet.” Justine grabbed her purse and coat and ran out the double doors.

Topaz was thankful for the time alone—she needed to relax before her gig. Pulling the spare MP3 player from her denim jean pocket, Topaz let herself be taken away by the sounds of Carlos Santana’s

“Black Magic Woman.” It was one of her “mood” songs, and she loved listening to the wailing guitar.

She finished hooking up her equipment and stood back, satisfied. She took a look around the cafeteria and was amazed at what her friend had managed to pull together on one week’s notice. The white chairs were decorated with tinsel and greenery. The large tables each had poinsettia centerpieces complete with holly berries. The string of white Christmas lights twinkled, casting a sensual aura around the room. Mistletoe dangled from the ceiling, twirling as the vents blew air on the plants.

The spirit of the season had taken over the room, and all that good cheer made Topaz sigh. It was her first Christmas alone after her father passed earlier this year. The doctors all said that his heart just gave out, but Topaz believed he’d died of a broken heart. Topaz’s mother, Sapphire, passed just one month before her father. While all her cousins had said it was such a shame she was all alone, Topaz found it hard to be sad. She knew her parents had the kind of never-ending love that couldn’t have been broken even in death. Topaz knew they were inseparable in the afterlife just as they were inseparable in this one. She hoped she would find a love like theirs, but at thirty, she wasn’t so sure she ever would.

Topaz decided to shake off her melancholy state and get her playlist ready for when the partygoers started to arrive. She always thought it was nice to have music playing as people arrived—it tended to set the mood for the evening. Still swaying to Santana, Topaz powered up her laptop and cracked her knuckles. She peppered the playlist with fast-paced songs, slow ballads from Frank Sinatra and Maxwell, and a few Christmas-themed tunes. Feeling slightly mischievous, she even queued up Run DMC's *Rock the Bells*. Snickering at that one, she figured from the looks of the overstocked bar that no one would notice she'd snuck one of her favorite songs into the playlist.

It was at that moment that Topaz's stomach began to growl once again. Damn! She wondered if there was anything in the kitchen she could make a quick sandwich with. In her house, they had sandwich nights, and her dad always told her that even in their darkest days, a sandwich would always do. Topaz remembered being so poor that the only thing they had to put on bread was butter, so her dad and mom made it fun for her by telling her that they were "golden" sandwiches. Topaz had a lot of good memories from this time of year.

Those memories of laughter and music during the holidays were part of the reasons she became a DJ. When her family went through hard times, her mom

would always hum and sing, and her dad would tap out a beat on their heavy oak dining-room table. There was always music flowing in the house, and her mother would always sing her name even when Topaz got in trouble. She certainly was missing her family severely. Maybe she would make the trip to Mississippi to visit her cousins after all, she thought as she made her way to the kitchen.

As Topaz looked in the huge stainless steel fridge, she hummed to herself along with the sounds of Sade, letting her hips sway with the music, her jean-clad derriere all that was visible as she began to reach in the back of the refrigerator.

“Damn, this thing is bigger than my closet,” Topaz muttered as she reached for a jar of pimentos. Her prize found, Topaz backed out of the refrigerator and closed it with a click. As she brushed her hair out of her face, she didn’t bother to look around to see if she was still alone. She frowned as she saw two feet standing in what could only be described as striking position. The high polish on the black shoes shone so bright she could almost see her reflection in them.

As her gaze traveled up, Topaz noticed that the feet belonged to a very, *very* large man. The black dress slacks did nothing to hide the tone of his muscled legs, or the slight bulge in the zipper area. Topaz only let her eyes linger there for a moment, as

the man hadn't made a sound yet. She perused the tight fit of his maroon t-shirt tucked into the band of his slacks. Her vision traveled farther up the torso, past the bulging biceps that were crossed in front of the muscled chest, past the thick corded neck, past the square set jaw, past the full lips, past the aquiline nose, and right into the purest green eyes she had ever seen. Whoever the giant was, his chocolate eyebrow quirked at an odd upward angle that made Topaz want to hand over her birth certificate. It was an unspoken question, but his body language said it all. *Who the hell are you?*

* * *

Topaz was only partially right. Sebastian Rosser had been staring at the swaying back half of the dark-skinned beauty the entire time she had been in the refrigerator. His years in the The Det , a special forces unit of the British Army, made him walk silently, and today was one of those days when he was grateful for the stealth.

Sebastian watched the tall woman dance with her head in the refrigerator for some time. There was a part of him that wanted to smile at her announcement that the large stainless steel appliance was bigger than her closet. He'd known times like

that. That was before he spent eighteen years serving Her Majesty. After the wave of bombings in London and the shooting incident at Stockwell, Sebastian knew he'd had enough of the long days and nights of a special military operative.

When he turned thirty-six, Sebastian decided to pursue his other passion: cooking. He finished his final mission with the special reconnaissance unit in Stockwell and requested his discharge. With his military background, it only took him three years to finish his culinary degree. From all of his training, Sebastian knew the woman looking at him with her inquisitive cat-like eyes would run if he took a step forward. He also knew from her slow perusal of his rather large six-foot-five-inch frame that she liked what she saw. Good.

"Sorry, I didn't hear you come in. Are you lost or here for the party?" Topaz clutched the jar of pimentos and held out her free hand. Sebastian could hear the last notes of the "The Sweetest Taboo" playing from the dangling earbuds around her neck. He smiled; it was one of his favorite songs to listen to when he was wound up.

"I'm here for the party, miss. I'm the caterer." Sebastian tried to mask his distinct British accent, but knew he had failed when he saw her ear twitch. He reached for her extended hand, making sure to clasp

her long fingers in both of his hands and giving it a good squeeze. He wanted her to get the impression that he was not to be feared.

His eyes zeroed in on the way her pink tongue darted out and licked the corner of her mouth. She was such a nice little thing. She had to be tall, at least five foot ten, because he didn't feel like a giant around her. He noticed her straight black hair, but what caught his attention was the splattering of royal blue dye at the tips. *Who does something like that?* Her inquisitive round eyes made him think of a feisty housecat he had when he was a kid.

"Great! Justine will be so happy. Sorry, I'm being rude. DJ Bluefire," she said and gave his hand a good shake, but he still didn't release her hand from his grasp.

"And your real name is?" Sebastian wasn't going to let go that easy. Her easy smile had jumpstarted something in him that had lain dormant far too long. She smirked and tried pulling her hand away again. When he wouldn't let go, she lifted an eyebrow and he watched her clutch the jar of pimentos like a weapon. He was going to have to rethink his strategy. He finally released her hand, only to put his hands in his pockets.

"Topaz Sinclair, and you could return the favor by telling me more than that you're the caterer."

“Sebastian Rosser. I’m sorry, did I keep you from something?” Sebastian relaxed his stance and released a breath.

“No. In fact, you can help me. Where’s the sandwich fixin’s?” Topaz said, miming a huge sandwich. Sebastian almost laughed, but he never laughed, not out loud.

“I’ve got a huge buffet planned, if you would like to wait...” Sebastian stopped as she started to shake her head slowly.

“I need food now, Chef. So I’m gonna dub you the Earl of Sandwich so you can help me find my fixings.” Topaz smiled and began to move to the cabinets, opening them and peeking inside. He’d been trained to observe even the slightest of movements, and he noticed as, for a moment, her expressive pouty mouth turned into a frown. Sebastian didn’t need another second to think about what he was going to do.

He nodded at his crew, who were beginning to bring the rest of the equipment. Sebastian trained his staff like he would have trained his operatives, giving them their duties ahead of time and expecting them to be carried out to his exact specifications. At the moment, his mind was focused on making the enchanting Topaz the best sandwich she’d ever tasted.

Sebastian opened some of the steaming trays and began making something he was sure would go along with the pimentos he'd seen in her hand earlier. As he finished, he looked up to see that Topaz had stopped looking in cupboards and was watching him intently. He knew she was staring at his hand wielding the large knife. He couldn't hide the years of training in hand-to-hand combat as he cut and sliced tomatoes and the beef brisket.

When he finished, he added a teaspoon of pimentos to the sandwich, sliced it down the middle and slid it over to her. She looked down at the sandwich, and he could see the spark of interest in her eyes. Sebastian watched her eyes close and her lips move silently as she blessed her food.

The blessing over, Topaz grabbed the sandwich and took a big bite. As she chewed thoughtfully, Sebastian paid attention to the expressions that graced her face. Her chocolate eyes lit up as she swallowed, and he couldn't help but stare at her long, regal neck as she finished her bite. He handed her an ice-cold root beer from the cooler the crew brought in and waited for the verdict. Sebastian was never one to depend on someone telling him he did a good job, yet he found himself waiting on her approval.

"Well done, Chef Sebastian. You are now the Duke of Sandwich," Topaz said around another bite.



Topaz was never one to look a gift horse in the mouth. If a huge hunk of a chef was going to make her a sandwich, she was going to be more than happy to eat it. She had seen her fair share of caterers from various events she had played for, but none of them looked like this specimen of fine man.

There was something about the way he wielded the knife that made Topaz think this man was definitely not one to be fooled around with. His crew seemed well under control and marched like soldiers. As she ate, she watched him with as much interest as he watched her. Why else would he drop whatever he was doing to make her a sandwich? She noticed his mouth twitched at times, as if he was fighting back a smile.

“So tell me, how did Justine rope you into this last-minute job?” Topaz chose her words very carefully. She didn’t want to make the silent giant angry and force her to leave half of that sandwich sitting on the plate.

“I’m new at this, so when she called, I looked at it as a good marketing strategy.” He shrugged his broad shoulders in a nonchalant way that made Topaz want a piggyback ride.

“I see. How new are you?” she asked, looking down and realizing she could actually only eat half of the sandwich. She took a long swallow of her root beer and wiped her mouth.

“I’ve been catering for about a year now. I love it, so far.”

“That’s it? You could’ve fooled me! It looks like a well-oiled machine to me.” Topaz almost groaned out loud at the imagery she’d just put in her own head. “Well oiled” and this man’s muscled form should not have been in the same conversation.

“It works. How long have you been a disc jockey?” Sebastian leaned forward on the stainless steel center island and looked deep into her eyes. His gaze was almost suffocating; it made her feel as though they were the only two people in the massive kitchen.

“Four years. I spent about two years in the corporate world, and it just wasn’t me. Music has always been my passion.” Topaz could feel her skin tingle at the mention of her profession. She loved what she did and when she started to talk about it, she couldn’t keep from getting excited.

“So how did Ms. Bradford get you roped into this last-minute job?” Sebastian said, leaning even closer to her.

Topaz smiled at his knack for returning the question. In her experience with dating, most guys didn't know what to say or how to say it right to keep her interested. The way he twisted her words around let her know that Sebastian was at least paying attention.

"She's my best friend. I would do anything to help her. I didn't have any bookings today, and even if I did, I would've made it work. Even if I'd had to teach her how to work the sound system and MP3 player myself."

"MP3 player? I thought disc jockeys use turntables?"

Topaz could've laughed out loud at the sincere look of confusion on his face.

"That's if I'm doing a mixing and scratching show, or playing a venue that requires a catalog of my vinyl records. Most events like this, you just need a laptop, MP3 player and the queue table. I rarely carry the ones and twos anymore."

"And you haul all that stuff yourself?" Sebastian looked at her arms and back to her face.

"When I have to, I do. Kinda comes with the job. I'm a big girl." Topaz flexed her muscles and laughed in spite of herself. She kept herself in good enough shape, enough to be a size twelve, happy, and eat like a grown woman and not a bird.

Topaz took a look at her watch and knew she should get the rest of her song list pulled up on the laptop. A part of her was longing to stay in the gorgeous knife-wielding chef's company, but she had a job to do. Business was business, and regardless of whether it was a favor to her friend, Topaz vowed to give her friend the perfect soundtrack for the night's festivities. After all, that was DJ Bluefire's motto, *every night needs a soundtrack*.

"Thanks for the sandwich, Chef Rosser," Topaz said as she slid off the stool in the kitchen. She watched as he straightened and walked around to her side of the island. He looked down at her, his gaze intense as he held out his hand.

"It's Sebastian. Thank you for the company." Sebastian took her hand and gave it a good squeeze. It wasn't a shake—it was a squeeze. The feeling of his warm hand engulfing hers made Topaz's heart pitter-patter, and her knees wobbled like gel. The sweet and spicy fragrance of his cologne seductively danced in her nostrils, and Topaz knew she would never forget that scent.

"Right, well, so, see you around." Topaz took her hand back and walked out of the huge swinging double doors.

Sebastian watched Topaz's hips sway as she walked out of the door. There was no way anyone who saw her move would call it just a "walk." The way her hips sashayed back and forth, Topaz could've been a belly dancer. She held her head high; Sebastian could tell she was a tough cookie. He wouldn't let that deter him from finding out more about her.

He looked back at the half sandwich she'd left and almost smiled again. She liked his favorite sandwich, sliced beef with tomatoes and all the fixings. If any woman could eat even half of the towering sandwich, she would be woman enough for him.

The chef wrapped the rest the sandwich in plastic wrap and put it next to his carryall. He would finish it later if she didn't come back for it. He picked up his cell phone and used the Internet to look up DJ Bluefire. Her website was hypnotic, the various blues weaving and dancing to a soft, melodic instrumental track. He clicked on her calendar and found her next three venue dates.

Chapter Two

Topaz stretched her arms way above her head, sighing, and pulled the last crate out of her closet. She had a huge show coming up this week, and she needed to get her vinyl sorted so she could mix and play everything they would throw at her. She didn't normally play large clubs, or even seedy clubs, but with the holiday season, she had to pick up a few extra gigs to help out her colleagues. Besides, she needed to stay occupied so the maudlin thoughts of not having her parents around this year wouldn't dampen her spirit.

Topaz had avoided Chef Rosser at Justine's party. His demeanor made her feel unreasonably safe. It was unreasonable because she didn't even know the man. She didn't want to jump on the first man who was nice to her just because she was lonely—although his captivating eyes did make her want to know more about the man with the British accent. She looked up his Web site and was amazed at the variety of food he offered. Yet, even in his Web site photo, he wasn't smiling; well, not with his mouth. She could see his smile in his eyes.

Topaz shook her head and focused on the task at hand. She needed to be on her game tonight. The venue she was spinning at was loud, rambunctious

and seedy, and from her experience, Topaz knew she had to be ready for anything.

Arriving at the club, Topaz had the sinking feeling in her stomach that something was off. She tried to let the emotion go as she pulled the old milk crates out of the trunk of her old Ford pickup. Sooner or later she was going to have to get a new car, but the good old truck was her father's, and she was loath to give it up quite yet.

Topaz knocked at the heavy steel door and waited for the bouncer to answer. The eye slot slid open slowly, and a pair of eyes with nuclear hazard contacts peered at her. She struggled not to shiver as the pale man looked at her.

"DJ Bluefire. I'm filling in for Moss tonight," Topaz said, watching the cold air turn her words into steam.

The door opened and the bouncer stepped out of the way. Topaz gave him a quick onceover and decided the large man dressed in all black and chains was not to be messed with. She would say she wouldn't want to meet him in a dark alley but she was already in a dark alley.

She shouldered her heavy bag and walked into the club. Worried that something was just off tonight, Topaz made sure to check out where the fire exits were and where she would be spinning her records. She

was used to the DJ being behind a wall or some sort of enclosure, but this club setup had the DJ booth in the middle of the dance floor. Taking a deep breath, Topaz began to set up for the night.

* * *

Sebastian eagerly looked at the clock in his study. He had finished his work early tonight because tonight he would be going to the Wolves' Den. While he was staking out the place, Sebastian had learned it was a seedy goth club. He wanted to find a spot where his Bluefire wouldn't be able to see him easily as he watched her.

Sebastian knew she hadn't seen him while he'd observed her at her previous shows, and he hadn't introduced himself afterwards. He'd also called one of his friends to ask how to woo this particular woman. His so-called friend had laughed at him when Sebastian told him he had staked out her jobs.

"Seb, women are not missions. You don't stake them out! You take them out, wine them and dine them. Dazzle them with your wit," his friend had barked into the phone after he'd stopped roaring with laughter.

“The last time I said something witty, you took a bullet in the toe, Clark,” Sebastian countered, recalling one mission that had gone awry.

“True. Seb, listen, if she’s as glorious as you say, then just ask her out. To dinner and a movie, not a recon mission, okay?” Clark left the conversation at that. Sebastian knew Clark was right, but he couldn’t just walk up to her and spit some cheesy line. She was more than that; he didn’t know how he was so sure of that, he just was.

The clock in his study chimed ten; Sebastian had to get going. He hadn’t been in the States for long, but he knew this was about the time the clubs started to get packed, and he wanted to get his perch before it was crowded. Grabbing his coat, Sebastian hurried from his home, knowing tonight was the night he was going to ask Topaz for a date.

When Sebastian arrived at the club, he was a little concerned that Topaz would be working in a club like this. At her other venues, the laughter was infectious, and the brightly colored outfits were just as bright as the personalities. At the Wolves’ Den, everyone was dressed in black from head to toe, and there wasn’t one smile. Everyone looked so serious.

At least I look like I belong here, Sebastian thought as he looked down at his black jeans and dark gray turtleneck. He’d opted for the turtleneck so he

could leave his coat off. In places like these, you'd never know when you might need to move unrestricted.

Sebastian shouldered his way past the goth crowd with their heavy black eyeliner—on males as well as females. He took up his perch and watched his beauty keep the party moving with her choices in music. The heavy bass beats of the techno music made Sebastian feel as though it was really his heart pounding. He hadn't been this on edge since the subway bombs in London. That was the reason he'd requested his leave—he couldn't take the stress.

Sebastian tried to shake the thoughts of various missions he'd gone on. His mission now was getting Topaz to notice him and perhaps even like him. He riveted his eyes to the DJ dais in the middle of the dance floor. Topaz kept her head down as she switched from one song to the next, nodding to the beat and trying to hold a smile on her face. Still, Sebastian could tell from the look on her face something was bothering her.

His trained eyes scanned the crowd, trying to find the source of the grimace on her face. That was when Sebastian saw him. Right behind Topaz was a wiry but tall man, his pale features making him blend in with the rest of the emotionless crowd. It was the wild look in his eyes that put Sebastian on guard.

Sebastian's eyes narrowed as he saw the man's hand slide to Topaz's jean-clad calf. With quiet anger, he observed Topaz trying to shake her leg without losing her footing on the dais. The lanky man kept pulling at her leg, ignoring Topaz shaking him off. Sebastian furiously watched as Topaz stomped on his hand with her heeled boot—and that's when Sebastian moved.

The scene unfolded in slow motion before Sebastian's eyes. Years of training told him that things were about to get ugly. He didn't think, he just reacted. Slicing through the crowd with sickening proficiency, he reached the dais before the stranger made it onto the platform and made another grab for his woman.

* * *

Topaz couldn't believe that pervert wouldn't let go of her leg. This was why she hated wide open venues. She wanted to feel safe behind the DJ booth, but she owed Moss a huge favor. Before she could kick the man in his jaw, he had started to climb up the dais. It was then that Topaz saw him.

With the agility of a jungle cat, Sebastian weaved his way through the crowd and to her side. *When had he gotten there?* Topaz was sure she would've seen

him in the crowd of goths milling around. Topaz's eyes went wide as he saw Sebastian grab the weird man by his leg and drag him off the dais with one arm. The stranger's chin hit the dais with a thud, but that didn't stop her hero from pulling back and knocking the man out cold in one punch. In his downward spiral, the man grabbed on to someone else. The second man looked angrily at Sebastian and threw a punch at his head. Topaz could only gawk as Sebastian grabbed the man's fist in midair with one hand and followed through with an uppercut that would've made her daddy cringe.

Topaz didn't know whether to cheer or be scared shitless. The look in Sebastian's eyes was dangerous, dark—and she liked it. The crowd began to break into small fights across the dance floor. Topaz didn't hesitate to grab Sebastian's outstretched hand. The wild, animalistic gleam in his eye told Topaz that arguing would be pointless.

She held on as Sebastian wrapped her in his arms, clutching her body to his chest, and walked toward the alley where she'd parked. As he worked through the fighting crowd, a few people bumped into him, but he quickly kicked and shouldered his way out of the packed club without dropping his cargo.

When they finally made it outside, their breaths were puffs of smoke in the air. Sebastian held her up

against the wall, getting his breathing under control. His forehead dipped, touching hers, and it seemed to her that he was refusing to make eye contact.

At that moment, Topaz thought, Sebastian deserved to know that everything was all right. She touched his cheek, roughened by his five o'clock shadow. His long eyelashes flickered, yet he didn't look up. She shrugged her other arm and cupped his face with both of her hands, causing him to press her farther into the brick wall. It was biting cold outside, but Topaz could only feel Sebastian's body heat seeping into her body as if it was hers.

She waited for him to grunt, groan, or do something. She felt merely his warm breath, coming in slow exhales, the smell of peppermint on his breath. When he finally did meet her gaze, his was steady, unflinching, but wide open. The realization hit Topaz like the first ray of sun in the morning; Sebastian had been scared.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that Sebastian Rosser wasn't merely a chef. Topaz knew that from his knife-handling skills. The precise slices and swift motions told Topaz that much. Yet it was his stealthy movements through the crowd, a crowd she had surveyed more than once, that told Topaz Sebastian was definitely more than meets the eye.

“Hey,” she said, tilting his chin up so she could fully see him in the dim lighting of the alley. “Hey, we’re okay. I don’t know about my equipment, but we’re okay.” Topaz’s voice was soft, as if she were trying to soothe a frightened child.

Sebastian swallowed and nodded, but he still didn’t step back from her. She wrapped her arms around him and gave him a hug, trying to further reassure the big man that she was fine. “Why don’t we go get some coffee? It’s kinda late, but I need to unwind,” she offered with a smile.

Sebastian nodded and grabbed her hand, leading her to his car. Topaz didn’t give another thought to her truck or equipment. She would sort all of it out in the morning. Topaz worked the seatbelt into place and settled into Sebastian’s comfortable Audi. The cream seats were heated, and she settled back into the buttery leather, relishing the luxury. She watched as Sebastian started the car and drove to the only coffee shop that was quiet enough for both of their frazzled nerves.

Sebastian drove in silence, and she knew he was probably trying to relax. Topaz hesitantly reached over the middle console and rested her hand on Sebastian’s thigh. She felt his muscles coil at first, but smiled as she felt them relax under her lazy strokes.

Pulling into the coffee shop parking lot, Topaz waited as he came around to let her out of the car. She liked the fact that he was a genuine gentleman, with a British accent, no less. He held her hand as they stood at the counter, both of them ordering the same: coffee with extra cream. They smiled at each other but still hadn't spoken until they sat in a quiet corner of the café. The speakers piped out Michael Buble's "Home," and Topaz smiled. It was one of the songs her dad would sing to her mother when he came home from work.

"You like this song?" Sebastian asked, the first words he'd spoken all night. His voice sounded hoarse, as if he'd swallowed lemon water.

Topaz nodded and began to sing the last verse in a low, husky tone, her voice catching on the jazz musician's lyrics about feeling alone and wanting to come home. When she finished the last verse, she wiped a stray tear from her eyes. Sebastian reached across the table and grabbed her hands. He held them until Topaz's emotions passed. She smirked a little, thinking they were both running high on emotions at this point.

"So Sebastian, are you going to tell me what you were doing at the Den tonight?" Topaz asked, her voice surprisingly level.

"I was looking for you," Sebastian said plainly.

“So you found me, and I’m glad you did,” Topaz said, finally releasing his hand and leaning back to sip her coffee.

“Yes, me too. I wanted to ask you for a date, but I wasn’t sure how to go about it,” Sebastian admitted, a hint of embarrassment in his voice.

Topaz laughed and looked at Sebastian. She finally took the moment to really study the man who was before her. He looked delicious and dark in his black slacks and turtleneck. His toned arms seemed about to split the shirt at the seams. The deep green of his eyes gave him a dangerous air and made Topaz shudder. Then she remembered the way he’d gotten her out of the brawling fiasco at the Den.

“What did you do before you became a chef, Sebastian?” He couldn’t possibly have been just a caterer all his life, not with those moves.

“I was in the British Army. I enlisted young, and applied for my discharge about three years ago.”

“I kinda figured you were military. You’re too sharp.”

Sebastian lifted his eyebrow at her. She giggled and took another sip.

“What I mean is that you were cool under pressure. You didn’t seem to mind I was poking around in the kitchen when we met. Most caterers I know aren’t like that—they’re territorial.”

“Oh, I’m territorial, but not about food,” Sebastian countered, his tone serious.

“I see. So what brings you to the States?” Topaz knew the hour was late, but she didn’t want to let him go just yet. It was better than being in her small apartment, lonely and cold. Christmas was merely a week away, and she didn’t want to think about spending it alone.

“Opportunity and a change of pace. Working with The Det, I spent most of my time in Northern Ireland, and London no longer seemed like home after my parents died, so the States seemed logical.”

Topaz could relate to what Sebastian was feeling. She knew what it was like to feel out of place.

“The ‘Det.’ What is that?” Topaz asked.

“It’s a special recon unit. We’re plainclothes operatives, and that’s all I’m telling you,” Sebastian said, his lips playing around with the idea of a smile.

“Oh, it’s like that?” Topaz said, lifting her own eyebrow and staring at him. Sebastian gave a slight nod, and this time he actually did smile.

Topaz gasped at the smile that transformed his face. It seemed to make the hard lines around his mouth disappear, and he looked so human. She felt a lump in her throat, and her words were lost. Sebastian Rosser was one fine man when he smiled.

Sebastian felt the sides of his face ache as he broke into a grin. He was sure he had smiled before he entered the military, but he'd never remembered it feeling so good. He was sure it was because of the company of one Topaz Sinclair.

From his days in the military, Sebastian had used his contacts to dig up important information on Topaz. Even with the little information he could find, he found that she soothed the restlessness he had been plagued with most of his life. He'd always been known as the one to take the first shot, the one to take the lead. With her, he didn't want to jump in too fast, but he felt like he was on a roller coaster of emotions.

"So tell me about you." Sebastian said, knowing her soothing voice would calm the restlessness he was feeling again.

"What do you want to know?" Topaz asked, taking another sip of her coffee.

"Everything. Every last detail." Sebastian didn't mince words, but he didn't think she would mind.

"Well, let's see. I'm an only child. My mom and dad had me late in life, so they didn't get the chance to have other children. They passed away earlier this year."

Sebastian nodded and again grabbed her hands. He was amazed at how small they seemed in his own. His thumbs circled over her palms, mindlessly tracing figure-eights on her warm skin. He looked at her long fingers, nails without polish, the simple silver thumb ring the only jewelry she wore. She was simplicity personified, and he wanted to know everything about her.

“I’m sorry. This time of year must be rough for you.” Sebastian gave his sympathy, but he couldn’t help but wonder if she would mind spending the holiday with him.

“Yeah, that’s why I took on so many extra gigs. I needed to be moving, doing something, anything.”

“So, what are your plans for the holiday then? More shows? Your calendar seemed pretty open.”

Topaz looked at him, and Sebastian could see the scrutiny. He braced himself for the question.

“Was tonight the only night you came looking for me, Sebastian?”

“No. I think I’ve been looking for you all my life.”

* * *

Topaz was floored. What do you say to something like that? Should she be scared? Should

she be concerned that Sebastian was coming off as a stalker?

“Whoa. Sebastian...”

“I know, that was a little strong. Yet I’m not sorry. I don’t believe in beating around the bush, Topaz. I like you; I hope you know that. I’ve gone to two other shows because I just wanted to watch you in your element. I don’t leave anything to chance.”

Topaz didn’t know what to say. Her hands were still in his, and she didn’t feel as though Sebastian was certifiable. Her mother always taught her to grab the brass ring and hold on. This seemed like one of those times. She smiled and gave his hands a squeeze. It was more than just gratitude she was feeling; her thoughts had strayed to memories of his green eyes since their first meeting.

Topaz had to admit to herself that she had thought about stopping by his bistro as if she was just in his neighborhood. So why should him showing up at her shows be any different or strange?

“Okay.”

“Okay as in don’t ever come near me again, or okay as in let’s see where this goes?” Sebastian asked, a hint of skepticism in his voice.

“Okay as in how about some food? I’m starved!”

For the second time in a few minutes, Sebastian smiled again, this time with a bark of laughter that shook the whole table.

“I would love to have supper with you, Topaz.”

“Supper?”

“It’s that snack just before bedtime. We call it supper.” Sebastian laughed. He grabbed her hand, and they left the café. He took her to the only place that would be open at that late hour: his bistro.

Sebastian parked in the back of the long chain of brick buildings. After he let her out of the car this time, he kept his hand on her back, keeping her close to him. Topaz basked in the feeling of being sheltered. She watched as he flicked on a few lights and began to raid the huge walk-in refrigerator.

Topaz kept the conversation light, watching him roll up his sleeves and work around his kitchen. His movements were graceful, and several times she stopped in mid-sentence, just watching him add a piece of fruit to a plate. She sat obediently on the stool and watched as he snipped a lily from a huge vase on the center island and laid it carefully on the plate.

“Viola, Miss Sinclair, supper is served.” Sebastian carefully set a square plate in front of her. Topaz didn’t know where to begin. It was almost too beautiful to eat.

Sebastian, as if sensing her hesitation, picked up a blackberry between his fingers and held it to her lips. It was covered in a spicy cream that exploded on her tongue as she took a bite. Her tongue swirled around Sebastian's fingers, lapping up the juice from the ripe fruit.

"That was insane." Topaz moaned. She held her mouth open for the next piece of fruit, this time getting Sebastian's finger covered in the cream. Her lips curled around his finger, and they made eye contact as he slowly pulled his finger from her mouth.

Sebastian's finger didn't leave her mouth. He used the moistened digit to trace her lips, first her top lip, then the bottom one. Topaz stared in awe as his eye color deepened to a rich hunter green. He traced the line from her chin to the v in her plain blue t-shirt.

* * *

Sebastian didn't know if he should keep going. He didn't want to scare her, but he didn't want to stop either. He waited with pent-up breath for her to stop him when he reached the v of her shirt. As his fingers went deeper into her shirt, he could feel the rise and fall of her heartbeat.

Sebastian took his hand from her chest, and he thought he heard her whimper. Good. While he might

not know a lot about wooing a woman, he knew that if she whimpered at the loss of his touch, they were on good ground. He didn't want to move any further until he kissed her, especially since he'd thought about kissing her since the first time he saw her.

Sebastian stood up, towering over her, and cupped a hand on the back of her head. Slowly, he leaned down and pressed his lips to hers. His tongue took the path that his finger had taken, tracing the outline of her lips. He doubled-back and traced them again, the taste seeping into his senses. The kiss was light, gentle, sweetly seeking entry into her mouth.

Topaz probably had no clue that his gentle kiss was only a precursor to the passion he felt welling inside him. When she opened her mouth, inviting him in with her tongue, Sebastian let passion take control. A low rumble came from his chest as he circled his arms around her, deepening the kiss.

He felt Topaz sigh into his mouth as he curled her into his body and lifted her on the counter. This wasn't what he'd planned, but he was good at improvising. He could feel that he was getting to her, the way she squirmed under his touch. He was beginning to see now why the name Bluefire worked for her. She was hot, and he couldn't wait to get her passionate fire raging into an inferno.

The way her hands slid over his body, as if she was trying to memorize every piece of him, was driving the clarity right out of Sebastian's head. Sebastian didn't want to let her go. He loved the way she folded her long legs around him; he relished the feeling of her thighs clinching him closer to her.

Pulling back just a little, he tilted her head to look into the depths of her beautiful eyes. "I want to say I'm sorry, but I'm not. Tell me if you want me to stop." It was the hardest thing Sebastian had ever uttered, but he would stop if she said the word.

Topaz shook her head no, and Sebastian almost let out a yell, the joy he felt was so overwhelming. Instead he crushed his lips down on hers again for another kiss. Sebastian took her head in his hands and pulled her into him, prodding her mouth open again, letting his tongue taste her, the lingering flavor of the blackberries on her lips.

Topaz moaned and arched beneath him, pressing her heaving breasts into the unyielding muscles of his chest. Her hands were busy pulling his sweater from the waistband of his pants. When her fingers first met Sebastian's heated flesh, he hissed. The touch sent a shockwave of shivers through his body, forcing him to clutch on to Topaz as the passion threatened to erupt.

It was that touch that made Sebastian grab the edge of her shirt and yank it out of her tight jeans. His palms spread wide across her back, and she felt like home to him. Topaz was a combination of all the things he loved about this time of year. She was passionate and spicy, giving, nurturing. Sebastian felt drunk from the desire he felt for her at that moment.

* * *

Topaz couldn't believe she was doing this, but she was going to give in to the feeling in the pit of her stomach. Sebastian's kisses had torn down all of her defenses, and she didn't care; it was about going with the moment.

Sebastian had pulled her t-shirt over her head. He traced the delicate lace of her bra before slipping it down over her nipple and leaning down to feast on her stiffening peak. Her head fell back, and she swallowed a gasp when she felt something cool circling her turgid tip. She looked down and saw that Sebastian had spread some of the prepared cream over her nipple and begun to lick it off as if it was a candied confection made just for him.

He slipped the bra off her shoulders and spread the cream on both of her nipples. He took his large

hands and, holding the chocolate orbs together, he began to feast on her breasts as if it were his last meal.

Topaz couldn't think; she just sunk her fingers into his thick hair and pulled him closer to her body. If he wanted to feast, she would give him the feast his tongue seemed to be begging for. Leaning back, she watched as his tongue traced a path from her cleavage down to her stomach. She shimmied as he unbuttoned her jeans and pulled them down her legs. When her jeans hit the cool marble of the floor, she shivered.

Sebastian pulled his sweater over his head and laid it on the marble counter. He picked her up and placed her on top of his sweater. His thoughtfulness made her smile.

* * *

Sebastian wished he could've slowed down. He wished he'd taken the time to at least take her home and get comfortable on his king-sized bed, or perhaps make a fire in the fireplace. Groaning, he pushed all of those thoughts aside as he knelt in front of her. He could smell her tangy, womanly scent like it was a fresh-picked herb. It was floral, intoxicating, overpowering, and he just had to have a taste.

Sebastian kissed her mound softly, loving the small patch of dark curls at the apex of her sex. He kissed it once more before his tongue snaked out, taking a sample of the already glistening folds. All it took was her sigh to make him dive into her, licking and laving every piece of exposed flesh. His hands held her quivering thighs apart as he partook in his meal. His teeth nibbled, then sucked at her, making her squirm and writhe.

As her fingers entwined in his hair, Sebastian kept licking, pulling at her tender clit, licking the pearl until it was taut and tense. He knew she was on the edge, and he wanted to bring her to the pinnacle to watch her explode on his tongue. Her long eyelashes fluttered, and her eyes squeezed shut.

“Sebastian, please, I’m going to...” Her breathy pleas turned into a long moan as her juices flowed freely, bathing his face with her orgasm.

Sebastian slowly blew on her quaking mound, bringing her down from the spellbinding orgasm. He stood up and pulled her t-shirt over her head. He could’ve laughed at the confused expression on her face.

“Oh believe me, I want to. Just not here. You’re far more special than a quick romp on a kitchen counter,” Sebastian said as he watched her put her

jeans back on. He slipped on his turtleneck and quickly dispensed of their half-eaten supper.

He didn't want to seem pushy as he hurried her into his car, but he took it as a good sign that she was giggling the entire time. She was still giggling as he pulled in front of his townhome and carried her over the threshold into his warm and inviting home.

Once inside, he unraveled the scarf from her neck and led her into his den. With the flick of a switch, the fireplace started and cast the room in an amber glow. Sebastian could tell by the way she clasped her hands in front of her that she was a little intimidated. Knowing that music called to her, he grabbed his remote and hit play. The soothing sounds of smooth jazz filled the wood-paneled room with a mystical saxophone solo.

"Are you okay?" Sebastian asked, not sure if he wanted to continue his seduction.

"Right as rain, guvnah," Topaz said, the smile evident in her eyes. Sebastian felt a hard pang in his gut. He knew at that moment he had fallen irrevocably hard for the beautiful creature in front of him. Her chocolate skin glowed in the firelight, making her appear like a dream.

He crossed the room and pulled her close, enveloping her in another intoxicating kiss. Her opening her mouth and dueling with his tongue broke

the last bit of control Sebastian had. He tore at her clothes, and she tore at his. They were naked without much fuss. They stared at each other and embraced again, this time skin to skin. The impact of her soft curves pressing against his body drove the wild beast that had lain dormant for so long.

Sebastian picked her up, her legs circling his waist, and laid her down in front of the raging fire. He barely noticed the heat from the fire, as the heat rising from Topaz's body had all of his attention. He reached up for the condoms he had grabbed from his adjacent bathroom and tore one open with his teeth. His manhood lined up with Topaz's wet sheath, he looked her deep in her eyes. Her deep swallow was all the encouragement he needed as he pressed forward and buried himself in her with one stroke.

* * *

Topaz moaned as she felt Sebastian's thick shaft slide inside of her. Her body felt full as he held still. She knew he was taking it easy on her, but she didn't want it easy, nor did she want to be treated like she was glass.

Lifting her legs, she settled the arches of her feet on his waist before grabbing his shoulders and arching her back into him. His guttural groan alerted her that

it felt good. She did it again, this time working her hips in a hula fashion and grinding herself onto his cock.

“Keep that up and you will get the beast in me,” Sebastian growled in her ear, his hands on her hips, stilling her movements.

“Show me,” Topaz breathed and arched up some more.

Sebastian growled and clamped onto her hips. He pulled back slightly and then slammed home. Topaz could feel his depth in her throat. But she had asked for it, so she welcomed it, bathed in it.

Sebastian’s thrusts became harder and harder, pushing her feverishly over the edge. She could feel the shiver begin in her spine. The muscles in her pulsating moistness rippled around Sebastian’s throbbing cock.

The more Sebastian pushed, the more he growled, the more she wanted. Topaz wanted everything that he had, with nothing left out. She clutched at his back, her nails digging in deep, trying to find the release her body craved.

Sebastian dipped his head and pulled her sensitive nipple in his mouth. It was his wet tongue on her hot flesh that sent her over the edge. Her scream was engulfed by Sebastian’s lips as her orgasm overtook her. She felt Sebastian tense as he gathered

her in close. He groaned in her mouth as his body let go, spilling his seed.

Sebastian still didn't let her go as he laid them down in front of the fire. He traced small circles on her back as their breathing returned to normal. They sat in silence for a while, listening to the crackling of the logs and the soft sounds of a violin flowing from the speakers.

"Sebastian," Topaz breathed, her face still buried in his chest.

"Mmm-hmm," Sebastian murmured.

"Would you like to spend Christmas with me? I mean, I know we just met, but..."

Sebastian pressed his finger against her lips, silencing her. "No, I've been following you since the start of the yuletide," he said huskily.

"Huh? Yuletide?"

"The party was at the beginning of December. That was the start of the yuletide. It's four days before Christmas now, so we didn't just meet."

"So it's like that?" Topaz couldn't hide the huge grin on her face.

"Oh yeah, it's like that, and then some." Sebastian leaned down and kissed her deep. Topaz had never known anything about yuletide, but she was glad that Sebastian had disturbed hers.

Nevea Lane

Nevea Lane currently resides in the Midwest, where she lives the life of a hermit. Her life has taken her on many travels and adventures, including: the tops of the Swiss Alps, *le Metro* of Paris, the busy street of Adams Morgan in Washington, D.C., and the quiet mystery of the Silver Lake mountain ranges of the Treasure State (Montana). She has called herself a geographic mutt, and believes that your home is where your heart takes you for the moment. Right now, her heart has led her to the rolling plains of Minnesota, where she'll remain until her characters have decided to stop chatting, or the muse leaves to pester someone else. She has received many marriage proposals, but has not yet decided to make that leap. She is looking for more than just a spark, she is looking for a forest fire...until she finds it, let her entertain you.

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