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my
obsession

— CLUB DESIRE —

CASSIE RYAN

My Obsession

Club Desire

Cassie Ryan



Loveswept
New York

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Chapter 1

Sandra's blood raced through her veins as she approached the large double doors of the very elite Club Desire, set high on Camelback Mountain in Paradise Valley, Arizona.

Her old dungeon in New York had looked like an office building compared to this semi-gothic castle that had seemingly erupted out of the desert mountainside. The explosions of stars scattered across the dark sky behind it only added to the effect.

Even the energy surrounding this place exuded sex and kink like musky perfume lacing through the tang of creosote and desert night. If she hadn't come here willingly, she might feel like a fairy princess being lured to her doom. If she were very lucky, it would be an erotic doom.

She smiled at the thought and forced her attention to the man standing just to the side of the large double doors. As she approached, he gave her the same head-to-toe perusal that most men did.

She mentally shrugged. After all, this was a sex club, not a YMCA. *Here* it wasn't rude to peruse a stranger like that.

The man was attractive and well muscled, but from the way he carried himself she could tell he wasn't a Dom. Maybe an employee who was a kink enthusiast?

"Good evening. How may I help you?" His voice confirmed her opinion. Not that he wasn't masculine; he definitely was. But Doms had a certain air about them, a certain underlying arrogance and presence that laced their every word and action, in or out of the dungeon. A description that most Doms would balk at. And something that this man lacked.

Sandra rolled her eyes at her inner monologue and gripped the envelope in her hand a little tighter until the sound of the crumpling paper made her stop. She hesitated for a long moment, trying to find something coherent to say. She finally settled on, "I'm here to petition for membership?" She held up the crumpled envelope, locking her knees against the urge to leave.

She'd just run from New York to the familiar city where she'd grown up. She'd risked dredging up old, painful memories to come here, so she refused to run again.

She would rebuild her life here, and wouldn't let anyone tell her otherwise. Now she had to figure out how to make that happen, and how to keep her resolve strong while she did.

The man held out his hand and she placed the envelope on his open palm. She'd never even broken the seal, so she wasn't sure what her old Dungeon Master had written. He'd only told her that if she ever wished to join this particular dungeon he knew the owner, and he had given her a written recommendation.

Now that she'd handed it over, curiosity burned inside her to know what he'd said about her. But it was too late to ask for it back now.

"Please, come inside." The man opened one of the large doors, and a welcome wall of

cold air hit them. “We’re a few months from when the summer nights are nearly as hot as the days, but it’s still a bit warm out here.”

He motioned her inside and down a hallway to a comfortable waiting area surrounded by large windows that looked out over the main floor of the dungeon. Or at least she assumed this was the main floor. There were few basement levels in Phoenix.

Sandra took a chair that gave her the best view of the floor and the play currently in progress. She was alone in the waiting area, so she shamelessly leaned closer to the glass to soak up all the erotic details of the scenes before her.

Wet heat flooded her core. She definitely missed this.

Sandra had discovered she liked to watch—especially the things she was too much of a coward to try for herself, which seemed to encompass a lot so far. She hadn’t really explored too many of the different kinks. At the New York club, she had made friends with the other subs and gotten comfortable with the idea of the overall lifestyle. From there it had been easy to meet a Dom she liked and begin to explore the lifestyle that way.

The play session directly in front of her involved a short, curvy woman wearing only a red thong with a matching red rope wrapped around her torso so that it lifted and plumped her full breasts—a push-up bra, bondage-style. Her arms were stretched high over her head, her wrists bound in the same red rope and attached to large rings, strategically placed for a myriad of kinks and purposes. She stood barefoot, balanced on the balls of her feet since her arms were stretched so high, but the way she moved conveyed arousal and sensuality—anything but discomfort.

The skin of her shapely ass was already striped with red marks from the leather straps of the flogger her Dom currently wielded.

The man stood with the confident stance of a Dom, dressed in black leather pants and a sleeveless vest. He held the flogger loosely, his hungry gaze devouring the sub before him, his hard cock easily visible against the front of his tight pants.

His face held an intensity as the next blow fell, and Sandra clenched her jaw, waiting to hear the sound of leather hitting flesh. Too many years of surviving abuse from her mother had left her with a phobia of those types of sounds. But when the sound never came, she relaxed and enjoyed the flash of arousal spiced with adrenaline that spiked through her veins.

Unable to help herself, she reached up and pinched both of her nipples, hard, grinding against the chair to try to relieve the sudden throbbing in her sadly neglected body. As the flogger hit again, she stifled a soft moan and took a quick look around and behind her to make sure she was still alone. She grabbed the cloth of her knee-length peasant skirt and pulled it up so it was bunched around her upper thighs. She spread her legs as wide as the material would allow and slipped her fingers under the crotch of her lacy panties to pleasure herself.

The first touch made her bite her bottom lip, holding back the urge to moan.

When the Dom laid the flogger aside on a nearby table and approached his sub, Sandra stilled, wondering what he would do next.

Her stomach tightened in anticipation until he laid a gentle hand on the woman's shoulder and leaned down to whisper something into her ear. Before Sandra could gauge the sub's reaction, the Dom grabbed the woman's thong with both hands and ripped it off, tossing the shredded material off to the side of their play area.

As a shudder ran along the sub's body, Sandra gasped at the sharp rush of adrenaline laced with excitement that stormed through her.

The Dom dropped his pants, kicking them away, allowing his hard cock to spring free.

Sandra shifted, opening her thighs wider, sliding the crotch of her panties to the side and welcoming the cool air against her soaking center. She leaned forward and slid her first two fingers inside her pussy as far as she could, her internal muscles squeezing around them, while she still rubbed her clit with her thumb. It wasn't enough, not nearly enough to satisfy her cravings.

Sandra felt a ping of jealousy toward the woman below, who was most likely about to be fucked, and fucked hard. It had been far too long since Sandra had enjoyed a real man's cock. She didn't count her old Dom, Diego, since she hadn't enjoyed his rough play.

The Dom picked up a small packet off the table nearby that held his supply of sex toys, recapturing Sandra's attention and saving her from past memories.

When he ripped open the package, Sandra licked her lips as he rolled on the condom, trying to imagine how that thick length would feel stretching her, filling her.

Anticipation beat inside her along with her racing pulse, and for a moment, she could imagine herself trussed up with that rope, waiting to be fucked by that Dom.

Sandra was shocked at her thoughts since she had never wanted to be tied up—trapped and helpless—before. Especially after her experiences with Diego. She enjoyed watching it, but this was the first time she had ever been able to imagine herself in that position without panicking.

She watched as the Dom stepped forward and slowly rotated his sub around to face him, the ring over her head swiveling easily to accommodate the change in position.

He leaned down and grabbed the back of both of her thighs, lifting her until she could wrap her legs around his waist.

Reaching between them, he positioned his cock at her entrance and then leaned forward to kiss her and knead her breasts.

The woman squirmed, trying to take more of his cock, but he held her away, not allowing her much movement.

She bucked and nipped at his lips, seemingly in protest of his denial, but then he smacked her ass hard.

Sandra braced for the sub's further punishment, but then the Dom grabbed her ass in both hands and thrust inside, hard and fast.

Sandra blew out a breath as relief slid through her. The Doms in New York hadn't let the subs off so easily, even for such a small infraction. Maybe this place truly would be a better fit for her, both inside the Club and out.

The sub squirmed and arched, her head hanging back limply on her shoulders, her mouth open as if she were screaming or moaning as her Dom pounded into her.

Sandra's internal muscles clenched, begging for *her* pussy to be filled too. But instead, she could only rub her clit harder and faster as she watched the action play out in front of her.

Her orgasm hovered just out of reach and she scooted forward in the chair, desperate to reach her release, while moving her free hand to pinch her nipples, twisting until a hard zing ran between the two erogenous zones.

The sound of a throat clearing behind her broke the sensual haze surrounding her, and then she heard, "Master Brent will see you now, miss."

Sandra jumped like a guilty child, silently cursing the man for his poor timing as her elusive orgasm slipped away.

She wondered how long he'd been standing in the doorway, but then decided she didn't care. After all, he wasn't under any delusions about why she had come here, so she tried not to be embarrassed about enjoying the show—although she wished he would have given her a few more minutes.

She stood quickly, dropping and smoothing her skirt into place, not bothering to worry about the crotch of her panties still bunched to one side. She wondered briefly if he could smell her arousal. A quick glance down at the hard outline tenting his dress slacks told her he probably could, or he at least had enjoyed watching *her* enjoying the show.

Heat flooded her cheeks and she turned her face away to give her blush time to die down.

"Thank you," she managed as she followed him down the hall to a door she wouldn't have noticed if he hadn't stopped in front of it. He pressed a button and she realized belatedly that it was an elevator.

Whoever had designed this place had done a wonderful job. Even with the medieval feel of the outside, the inside was both modern and mysterious, which only served to heighten the erotic atmosphere surrounding her.

When they reached their floor, the doors opened directly into a large office. Piercing blue eyes captured hers immediately, locking her in place.

A flash of familiarity hit her before disappearing under the weight of that very intense gaze.

The owner of those eyes, a man with broad shoulders and rugged, almost harsh features, sat behind a huge oak desk. He stood, gesturing her inside before he walked around the desk toward her, in movements so fluid they mesmerized her. She'd never seen anyone move with such grace, and yet such definite authority and presence. His body was tight and toned, and she would bet he had sculpted abs and wonderfully muscled arms and shoulders under that expensive dress shirt.

Before she realized she'd stepped forward, the elevator doors shushed closed behind her and his large hands settled over hers. She tipped her head back to look up into a stunningly handsome face, wondering how she could ever have thought his features were

harsh. They were hard and masculine. However, those blue eyes and full lips were both sensual and commanding, and made the entire combination striking.

“Welcome to Club Desire, Ms. Barry.” His voice sent her body into overdrive. It was deep and resonant, and made her pussy clench, begging to be filled like she’d seen down on the dungeon floor. She could imagine hanging from that rope, even as the fibers gently bit into her wrists and across her torso, leaving soft marks she would still see the next day. Even as the man before her pounded his cock into her again and again until her orgasm raged and she let loose her scream.

God, she was wet. She should be embarrassed, but she was too horny and keyed up to even care if the whole world knew about it at this point.

He watched her like a predator watches its prey, his gaze intense.

Sandra was surprised to find she wasn’t in any way frightened by him, even though he was a million times more imposing than Diego, her last Dom, could ever hope to be. There was something about his gaze that unfurled the last hard knot of unease she’d carried deep inside her gut since she’d boarded the plane for Phoenix three days ago.

The sexy man who had captured her attention walked around her in a slow circle, examining her with dark appreciation in his eyes. He radiated Dom with every breath. It was as if the entire world was his to do with as he wished.

And damn if that wasn’t sexy as hell.

She resisted the urge to rub herself against him like a cat and bask in the very masculine scent that emanated from him. Nothing specific she could name, except virility, sex, and power all rolled into something that filled her senses and made her want to beg—although she wasn’t quite sure for what. Maybe the elusive orgasm her body still screamed for?

Yes, that was worth begging for—especially from this man.

He stopped circling and looked down at her, the edges of his lips curving enough to make her suspect he might know what she’d been thinking.

Her inner submissive raged to life, even though she’d never fully given herself over to anyone.

But she recognized in this man a Dom who could both master her and care for her. Something she had never believed coexisted in one man until now.

She’d come here thinking to indulge her love of watching, her voyeuristic tendencies that had begun to sprout.

When her New York roommate, Darla, had offered to introduce her to some “friends” so Sandra didn’t spend yet another weekend at home alone, Sandra had reluctantly agreed. One night of getting to know a cross section of Doms, subs, switches, and others in the lifestyle had been enough to keep her coming back for the friendships and the feeling of belonging. But it had taken much longer for her to come out of her shell enough to start to see what she might actually enjoy participating in.

After fleeing New York and her abusive Dom, Diego, she’d sworn off the D/s relationship thinking it was not for her, though still enjoyed the kink, but not being

controlled. Now she wasn't so sure if she was truly done with D/s relationships. Maybe she'd been too hasty?

Her nipples were hard and sensitive to each movement against her thin bra, the sensations shooting hot spurts of fire throughout her body.

He raised her right hand to his lips and brushed a quick kiss over her fingers—the same fingers that Sandra had just masturbated with...could he tell?

She watched him carefully for any reaction, but he only smiled down at her, breathing in the scent for a long moment until he slowly lowered her hand, but didn't relinquish it.

It took a moment to realize she was just standing in place, absorbing the new round of sensations and her rampaging thoughts...and still hadn't answered him.

With effort, she cleared her throat to make sure she could speak, searching her brain for what the man in the waiting room had called him, and finally giving up. "Thank you, Mr....?"

Amusement sparked in his eyes, his thumb now softly tracing the backs of her fingers—*those* fingers.

"Brent. Please call me Master Brent." A heavy silence fell between them as he watched her as if trying to solve a puzzle. "Now, what can I do for you...Sandra?" He glanced at her as if waiting for her reaction, and she realized she hadn't corrected him earlier and told him he could call her Sandra rather than Ms. Barry.

She wanted to smack her palm against her forehead for being an idiot, but instead she made herself smile up at him. "Yes, call me Sandra, please. I was hoping to petition for membership. Did you get the envelope from my old Dungeon Master?"

A herd of butterflies took flight inside her stomach and she swallowed hard. What if Master Brent turned her away?

She missed this life, or at least some of the kinks she enjoyed, like watching, as well as the friendships and the sense of belonging. But she hadn't realized how much she wanted membership in Club Desire to be part of her new life.

"Yes. Thank you for coming to us, Sandra." His deep voice conveyed sincerity, his sensual smile making her feel welcome. "Why don't you come in and get comfortable so we can talk?"

He gently squeezed her hands and pulled her forward to a large leather love seat off to the side of his desk. The butter-soft leather welcomed her, and she shamelessly ran her hand over the supple material while Master Brent sat in the large chair in front of his desk.

A low chuckle rumbled from his chest, and she looked up to find him watching her with definite heat in his eyes.

Or was she imagining it?

"I love the feel of that leather too. I'm very much a texture person, so when I found it in the showroom I had to have it."

Sandra smiled self-consciously, resisting the urge to tell him she was also a texture

person. It felt like too intimate an admission, although she knew there wasn't any logical reason to feel that way. Maybe the combination of this man and the general erotic air of this place were getting to her.

"Sandra, relax." His tone was calm and sure. "You have nothing to fear here."

She jumped as she realized she'd fallen silent again and turned to find him watching her. Another strong flash of familiarity caught her before it vanished.

She dismissed it. If she had ever met this man before, she wouldn't have forgotten him.

"I did receive the envelope from your old dungeon," he said, pulling her attention back to the topic at hand. "Master Mason and I have known each other since college. In fact he was the one who invited me to my first munch and showed me my first glimpse into the kink world."

Sandra had never been fond of the term "munch," which just referred to a social gathering of those involved in or interested in the BDSM lifestyle. She had never figured out why someone had settled on that horrible name for it.

Brent's voice held fondness and a soft note even though his presence was total Dom. She could imagine this man holding her in aftercare and soothing her with that same tone in his voice, or maybe even more.

Sandra stiffened at the thought. She needed to be smart about this. She'd just met this man. Choosing a Dom this quickly was part of what had gotten her into trouble last time. She needed to slow down. After all, she wasn't sure he would grant her membership, even with Master Mason's recommendation.

She didn't think she'd spoken to Master Mason more than four or five times in passing, the entire time she'd attended her previous dungeon. But within fifteen minutes of entering this one she now had a private audience with the owner? *Oh, how times have changed.*

She chided herself. The club in New York had been good to her. It wasn't their fault that Diego had turned out the way he had. In fact, once they found out what he was doing to her, they tried to help. One of the other Doms had even driven her downtown to file the restraining order.

"Sandra?" Master Brent's deep voice broke into her thoughts and she snapped her gaze to his.

"Yes. I'm sorry." She clenched her fingers until her nails bit into her palms, trying to bring herself back to the present and break away from the past. "I seem to be rather scattered tonight."

He gave her a slow smile that managed to be both comforting and sexy at the same time. "It's all right. I meant what I said. You have nothing to fear. You're safe here."

She cocked her head to the side, again wondering what Master Mason had written in that note.

"Mason told me about Diego, and the bastard won't bother you here. We'll make sure of it." Master Brent scowled, his voice taking on a dangerous edge, promising almost anticipated retribution should Diego choose to try to get to her here.

Even with Master Brent's assurances, though, she knew Diego. He had a way of convincing people he was sincere, that he had only the best intentions. Why would this club, this city, be any different?

Sandra's brow furrowed, and a frown pulled at her mouth as the familiar fear stabbed into her. "But how can you be so sure?" The question slipped out before she could stop it, and she hated that her voice wavered.

"Because, Sandra, we take care of our own." He leaned forward and ducked his head to capture her once again in his mesmerizing gaze. "We *will* take care of you. I'll see to it. You're safe here."

She blinked several times, letting his words take shape inside her mind, almost afraid to hope. "You're granting me membership?"

Master Brent gave a single nod. "You're a full member. I can give you a tour and introduce you to those not in scenes when you're ready." And just like that his voice and demeanor were back to normal. The glimpse of the dangerous man she'd seen hidden once again behind the sexy Dom.

She blew out a long breath, releasing all her nervousness with it—she hoped. "I'd like that...Master Brent." She deliberately enunciated his name and title, enjoying how it felt on her tongue. A quick flash of how other parts of him might feel on her tongue tightened her body with arousal.

His knowing look told her he had a good idea what she'd been thinking. "Why don't we go over some administrative details first, so in case you get...distracted by something during our tour, we'll have that out of the way?" His throat worked and she found herself mesmerized by his Adam's apple and the tanned skin of his neck.

Thoughts of what all those distractions he mentioned might entail intrigued and aroused her—especially if they involved him.

She wasn't sure why she was drawn to this man so strongly. She'd met many sexy, confident Doms before, and none had ever made her react like this.

There was something about Master Brent that both reassured and excited her.

He shifted in his chair and she noticed his muscular thighs under the dress slacks.

How would those muscles feel flexing under her fingers? She brushed the tips of her fingers together in an attempt to remind herself not to start fantasizing about reaching over to find out.

He smiled at her, a smile that sent heat searing through her, making her wonder if he knew the effect he had on her. "Or would you rather we save the boring administration details for later?"

Sandra resisted the urge to bang her head back against the wall behind the love seat. She was becoming quite distracted already and they hadn't even left his office.

"I'm sorry. I'm not sure where my brain is today. I'm not usually this scatterbrained." She squirmed in her seat while hope, leftover nerves, and a thousand other things churned inside her gut all at the same time. She forced herself to relax, uncurling her fists, unclenching her jaw.

There was no way she could sit still for another minute without splitting apart at the seams, or throwing herself at the sexy man in front of her. “I’d like to do the tour first, if that’s okay?”

He stood and held out his hand to help her up. “Absolutely. Let me show you my kingdom.” His boyish grin exuded pride and love, which made him seem younger and more approachable somehow.

She swept a glance over his office and then up at him. “Did you have this place built?”

“Yes, from the ground up, actually.” He stepped inside the elevator after her, inserted a key into the panel, and pressed a button for B4.

“Basement level 4?” she asked.

“Yes.” He faced her. “Full members have access to basement levels 1 and 2, but only a select few have access to basements 3 and 4.”

He smiled, pausing for such a long moment she thought he might not continue.

“Basements 2 and 4 are fully equipped dungeon play areas.” He held up his hands one above the other as if trying to show her how the floors were stacked. “Basements 1 and 3 are set up to enable people to watch the play on 2 and 4, while still having privacy to play on their own. As you can imagine, basement levels 1 and 3 are very popular floors.”

He gave her a knowing glance. “You enjoy watching,” he stated. It definitely wasn’t a question, and suspicion burned in her gut.

Sandra’s cheeks flamed as she wondered if the man who had caught her watching the play in the waiting area had told Master Brent, but then she reminded herself that he hadn’t had time to speak with Brent privately since he’d caught her. Master Brent’s serenely confident expression sent embarrassment twisting in her stomach.

He knew.

Chapter 2

“We have cameras in all of the common areas. There’s no crime in watching—especially here.” He looked away, but not before Sandra caught sight of the smoldering heat in his gaze. She wondered what angle the camera captured and how much of the specifics he’d seen while she was in the waiting room.... She supposed it didn’t matter. There was no disguising what she’d done. And if it caused the kind of searing look she’d just seen in Master Brent’s eyes, she was glad he saw her, and wouldn’t mind showing him again in person.

He continued, “Here, most things legal and consensual are possible. And there are those of us who like to watch.” His quick conspiratorial wink surprised a smile from her before she could stop it.

“Watching is one of my particular favorites, which is why I designed the basement levels this way.” He shrugged nonchalantly. “I was lucky the corporation who owned this site before I bought it had already done quite a bit of blasting and excavating down into the mountain for whatever project they were planning. It was still incredibly expensive to clear enough space for four full basement levels, but I think you’ll see that the final result was more than worth it.”

A soft chiming had her looking around for the source of the sound.

Master Brent turned the key in the panel and then slid the key back out, pocketing it as the doors whooshed open.

Sandra looked out into dark gloom, and fear snaked along her spine, tensing every muscle and kicking adrenaline and the urge to flee through her system. She backed up, hugging the wall of the elevator as if it were a lifeline.

What had she done? She’d come down here with a man she barely knew, and she was alone.

Alone, but not helpless. She raised her chin and mentally firmed her resolve. She wasn’t helpless. Never again. She’d sworn that to herself when she’d left Phoenix after high school to take NYU up on their full scholarship.

She took deep breaths and sighed as the fear slowly receded.

Brent must have noticed her discomfort because he murmured, “I’m sorry. Let me get the lights. Basement 4 probably wasn’t the best place for us to start, but I wanted to show you the setup.”

“It’s all right. Really,” she mumbled as she heard his footsteps head off to the right. She forced herself to take a few steps forward to at least look out of the elevator before the doors closed and sealed her inside. She gripped the side of the door and peered into the gloom, looking both to her left and right.

A small row of lights snaked along the floor, like the kind you would find in a movie theater. Just bright enough to help you find your way.

From the pattern of the lights, the hallway curved around on both sides, and made a

giant circle.

She could imagine the floor above with a large circular gallery allowing members to look down and watch whatever was going on down here on the Big Top of Basement 4.

A spotlight flared to life to her left and she blinked hard, letting her eyes adjust. The light centered over a St. Andrew's cross and a large nearby table with drawers underneath.

Another spotlight to the right of the first blinked on and showed a set of hanging bondage hooks suspended from large beams. Chains and various rings hung from the beams off to either side of the hooks, just waiting for various types of play.

More spotlights flickered on in quick succession. Without leaving the elevator, she really couldn't see what each play area held.

She huffed at her ridiculous fears and forced herself forward, heading to the right, where Master Brent had gone.

As she followed the curving path, play areas were sectioned off on her left. As she advanced they became larger, and the equipment more ominous. She spotted a spanking horse, a set of stocks like those she imagined would be found in a medieval town to punish the disobedient and lawbreakers, a few bondage beds and tables, and even a hot tub with bondage hooks and various large rings suspended over it.

She'd seen equipment like this at the other dungeon, but unease pricked along her spine at the possibilities of what could go on down here. Master Brent had said most things legal were fair game, but she knew that even legal things could encompass a very wide range of kink.

The imagery of being a fairy princess carried off to her doom returned, and she shivered as she remembered her silent wish for an erotic doom. But oddly, even with the ominous assortment of equipment down here, she suspected Master Brent would turn any play erotic and fun.

The thought stopped her and she turned to face the play area on her left. A spanking bench was positioned next to what looked suspiciously like a coffin, and several electronic devices she couldn't even begin to identify.

Just what went on down here under the superexclusive Big Top?

She tried to be repulsed at the possibilities of what the coffin could be used for, but the curl of arousal that tightened inside her pelvis told her she was at least curious.

"Are you all right?"

Master Brent's voice startled her, and she tore her gaze away from the coffin and turned toward him.

He stood just down the curved hallway from her, wearing a concerned expression.

She realized how distressed she must look with her posture rigid and her hands clamped together. She took a deep breath and forced herself to relax. "I'm...trying to take it all in."

He nodded as if she didn't sound like a scared child, and walked toward her. As he neared, it felt like his soothing, protective energy reached out and wrapped around her,

loosening her tight muscles and stroking her in deep, intimate places. She couldn't help but meet his intense gaze as he closed in on her.

He gestured toward the coffin in an offhand manner. "Several people have a fantasy about being with a vampire, or being one themselves, so this setup is quite popular. In fact, we might have to invest in a few more."

"Wow," was all she could manage while she continued to stare at the display.

"Don't get me wrong—I know a lot of people enjoy a good vampire movie or novel, but the whole vampire sinking fangs into someone and drinking their blood doesn't flip my switch." He chuckled, which made the muscles in her shoulders relax for some reason.

Possibly because if it wasn't something Master Brent enjoyed he'd never ask her to participate?

She knew it was an actual fetish. In her old dungeon there had been people who drank blood and liked being bitten on the neck with razor-sharp fangs. In fact, there were even those who had gotten their canine teeth filed to sharp spikes purely so they could bite people during play and drink their blood. But for some reason, the addition of the coffin freaked her out.

She thought about the few scenes she'd witnessed involving that. Everyone participating seemed to love it. The women and men who were bitten had screamed in what sounded like ecstasy and even begged for sex, but she remembered thinking the scenes almost looked forced. Then again, maybe that had been her own filters she'd interpreted their reactions through.

For every kink, there were those who got off on it.

She enjoyed reading about that kind of thing in novels, but that wasn't something she wanted to take part in.

Master Brent's last words trickled through her endorphin-soaked brain. He had said that the vampire thing didn't "flip his switch." She wondered what *did* flip his switch, and if she would ever be offered the opportunity to join in.

He cleared his throat. "On Basement 4, all the equipment can be moved, and the play areas rearranged or redecorated as needed. This is the level most often rented out for large parties or orgies, usually with the agreement that Basement 3 will be open to our members so they can watch."

Sandra laughed, and it felt freeing as her fear and tension melted away. "It's like a bondage version of Fantasy Island down here."

Master Brent shrugged, amusement clear in his expression. "That's one of the reasons Club Desire is one of the premier BDSM dungeons and fetish clubs in the Southwestern United States, and possibly in the entire nation." The pride in his voice was unmistakable, almost as if he were describing his own child.

Their gazes locked, and Sandra could have sworn attraction sparked between them. She thought Master Brent was going to lean closer and press his lips to hers, but then his expression closed off, and he looked away—although it almost seemed to her that he was as reluctant to break that connection as she.

She really needed to get a grip. He might be a Dom, but he had his pick of subs in the dungeon, and he wouldn't want an inexperienced woman who wasn't even a full sub and didn't know exactly what her limits were. But she certainly knew some things she didn't like.

She thought of Diego and shuddered. But he hadn't wanted to help her find her limits; he wanted to push her past any he found until she broke beyond repair. Yet she was healing, and swore to herself that she would move past her issues somehow.

Master Brent gently raised her chin with his finger. "Are you ready to see more, or have you seen enough for one night? We don't have to do all of this right now. There's no time limit on this tour or even the administrative details."

Sandra cast away all thoughts of Diego. "I'm ready. So what's next?" When her words came out sounding suggestive and needy, she winced.

"Well, Basement 3 is a large circular gallery that looks down over all of this." He gestured to the spotlighted scenes.

"Basement 2 is a more tame version of 4. There are bondage beds, spanking benches, more St. Andrew's crosses and those types of things. Basement 1 overlooks Basement 2."

He cocked his head toward the floor they'd just left, pride shining in his eyes, and he watched her as if waiting for her reaction. "I wanted you to see the layout while Basement 4 isn't in use." His gaze flashed with molten heat and he looked at her lips, with a quick betraying glance down at her breasts before meeting her gaze. It gave Sandra the distinct impression that he might like to introduce her to the workings of Basement 4 himself, and the thought filled her with excitement.

She was surprised to realize she already trusted Master Brent, and even beyond that, she might like to explore things outside of her comfort zone with someone who wouldn't push her before she was ready. Normally she would lecture herself that this would be much too soon to be thinking any of those things. However, the chemistry between them felt so right that she was making a definite exception.

Master Brent cleared his throat again. "Would you like to go up to Basement 2 and see some of the play scenes in progress?"

Was she imagining the note of anticipation in his deep voice?

"I could introduce you to some of the staff and other members. Or would you like to go to Basement 1 and watch a bit before we continue our tour?"

His eyes darkened again, and she saw definite hunger in his gaze before he looked away. A quick glance down at his crotch assured her she wasn't the only one affected by their proximity to each other. His large cock was a definite outline in the front of his tailored slacks, and she had to dig her nails into her palms to stop from reaching out to touch him.

When she took a deliberate step back, she caught Master Brent's gaze and realized he'd seen her looking at his cock like it was on the dinner menu. Heat blazed into her cheeks again, and she took a deep breath and blew it out before forcing herself to turn and head back to the elevator.

When he joined her, she realized all the spotlights still blazed. “Don’t we need to turn off the lights?”

“I’ll send Jake down to do it.”

“Jake?”

“He’s the man who escorted you up to my office. I think he was also covering the door for another of the managers when you arrived.”

She nodded as Jake’s identity fell into place. He was the doorman outside, who had also caught her watching the scene in the waiting area. Oddly she could only smile at the memory, and wondered if he caught people pleasuring themselves often.

“He’s one of our main managers here. If you ever have any questions or concerns and you can’t find me, you can talk to one of the managers. If need be, they can find me immediately.” His words were said as if imparting hard facts, certainties she could count on, which she was very tempted to accept and take comfort in.

“But...” She bit her lip against the stupid questions that nearly spilled out.

He turned to face her. “It’s all right, Sandra. You can ask me anything.” He gestured for her to continue.

Against her better judgment she had to ask. After all, these were the types of questions she hadn’t asked the first time she joined a club, and she’d regretted it. “Jake’s not a Dom. Aren’t dungeon managers usually Doms? And how can they find you immediately if you’ve already gone home for the day, or if you’re out of the building somewhere?”

She cringed as she realized how invasive the last question sounded.

Brent only smiled. “You’re correct, Jake isn’t a Dom. In fact, he’s pretty vanilla for the most part. But he’s excellent at administration and security, and I hired him for those traits. He does a great job, and I pay him well, so it’s a good situation for both of us.”

She chewed her bottom lip. “I’m sorry, it’s really none of my...”

He held up a hand, interrupting her. “Sandra. I told you to ask me anything, and I meant it. If there’s ever something I can’t or won’t answer, I’ll let you know.”

She nodded, and wished she’d never let her mouth and brain have free rein. They had always gotten her into trouble. “To answer your other question,” Master Brent said slowly, “I live here on the property, and we have a fully staffed kitchen. I rarely leave except for occasional business, or to reacquaint myself with the real world.”

He turned toward the elevator panel, inserting his key before hitting the button for Basement 2.

Excitement flooded through her. Basement 2. She would meet the staff and the other members and find out if she fit in. She hoped she would feel welcomed here. She missed the feeling of inclusion and belonging that she’d had in New York before Diego had destroyed the life she’d built there.

She caught herself nibbling on her bottom lip—a nervous habit—and put a stop to it. “Master Brent?”

“Hmm?” he said without opening those sensual lips.

“The basement dungeons seem to be a bit higher on the kink scale than the one on the main level—the one where I was watching while waiting for Jake. Is that to ease people in as they adjust to the higher levels of kink?”

He nodded, amusement dancing in his gaze. “The dungeon on the main level is mostly used for Dom training, sub training, people trying out new low-level kinks, or attending a munch to see if they’re interested in the lifestyle. Or if they are interested in joining Club Desire. It’s distinctly different from the other levels. Most of the more edgy kink goes on in Basement 2, and the extreme in Basement 4. My office, where we met, is on level 4, not to be confused with Basement 4.” He grinned. “Also on level 4 are my personal suite of rooms, the public dining areas, and the pool and spa.”

Sandra tried to picture where everything was and frowned as her picture came up with a flaw. “Don’t you have members frequently walking into your office off the elevator? Doesn’t that get distracting?”

His sensual lips curved and he met her gaze. “My office and my personal suite are reached by two separate elevators that aren’t for public use. They require special access, so I have complete privacy in both of those areas if I want it.”

The last four words burned along her skin like an erotic promise. With the timbre of his voice and insinuation of his words, her nipples hardened and the sensitive flesh brushed against the silky material of her bra, which now felt like sandpaper.

“How often do you want it?” She froze, her muscles suddenly tight as her brain registered the words that had poured from her mouth. Embarrassment flared and she had a sudden urge to run, but then common sense caught up, reminding her she was in an elevator and had nowhere to run to, so she locked her knees and purposely raised her gaze to see Master Brent’s reaction.

His eyes flashed fire, and electricity arced between them, tingling along Sandra’s skin, igniting every nerve ending and making her stare down at his straining erection. At the sound of him sucking in a breath she bit her tongue to keep from licking her lips, or shamelessly plastering herself against him.

Master Brent cleared his throat, which only seemed to amp up the electrical current zinging between them, but did help her tear her gaze away from that very hard cock so she could look up into his eyes again.

“It’s been a while since I’ve wanted to...have my privacy invaded. But I might need to rethink that.”

It was Sandra’s turn to suck in a breath as she drowned in the fiery promise blazing in Master Brent’s eyes.

The elevator doors whooshed open on Basement 2, startling Sandra. She raised her chin and clenched her fists, firming her resolve as if she were going into battle. This was the start of her new life here in Phoenix, and it *would* go well. She chanted that silent mantra as she followed Master Brent out onto the brightly lit floor.

Out here she did hear the sound of floggers, paddles, and even flesh hitting flesh, and she couldn’t help but flinch as long-ago memories tried to rise up to haunt her.

When would she be able to get past this? It had been ten years, and even now Sandra could feel the stinging sensation burning across her cheek and the fiery stab of betrayal slicing her heart.

Master Brent took her hand, distracting her and pulling her back from the past. “Why don’t I introduce you around first? The locker room is this way.” His speculative look told her he hadn’t missed her reactions, and that he was concerned.

Damn. She wanted to fit in, not stand out.

Master Brent led her into a large room that looked like a gathering hall rather than a locker room. There were couches, tables, televisions, vending machines, a refrigerator, and even a microwave. He guided her inside and the soft sound of ’80s rock music washed over her, making her smile. She wondered briefly if it had been playing out on the dungeon floor too. But then she hadn’t been aware of any sounds out there except the crack of different toys, and even hands, hitting flesh.

She startled when Master Brent took her chin between his fingers and raised her face just enough so he could capture her gaze.

“Why don’t we sit awhile, and then we can resume our tour?”

She shook her head, almost desperately. She didn’t want to sit. Didn’t want to talk about this. Didn’t want to see his sympathy or his pity about Diego, and definitely didn’t want him curious about her past and her many fears that past had caused. “I’d rather we keep going, if you don’t mind.” She sucked in a quick breath. “This doesn’t look like a locker room,” she countered, trying to change the subject.

Master Brent continued to watch her, those blue eyes seeming to take in everything around him for future study. “The locker room is through that door.” He gestured toward the back of the room and she turned to see the door he meant. “Aftercare is there.” He nodded to the right, and she obediently followed his gaze to a door with a large window in the top half showing a darkened room with several mysterious shapes she assumed were couches and chairs.

“We’ll go into each in a minute. This main room is something of a staging area. People can meet each other here before or after scenes, or hang out and be social. We do have a very social atmosphere at Club Desire.”

He pointed to a door off to their left. “There’s a full list of the official meet-ups posted there by the door, and there are a few that may interest you.” He guided her over to the list and scanned one large finger down the page past munches, membership information tours, and several things that made her smile, including “Switches for Sushi.”

She reached out to tap that one and sent Master Brent a questioning look.

His expression turned mischievous and he took his time answering her. “They actually do meet up at a local sushi restaurant and talk about the ins and outs of being a switch.” He chuckled. “Get your mind out of the gutter, woman. Where do you think we are, a kinky sex club?”

His mirth was infectious and she couldn’t help but laugh with him. She shrugged. “I really hope so—otherwise this is the weirdest karaoke bar I’ve ever been to.”

He laughed again. She really loved his playful manner and could envision how that would insinuate itself into a scene with him.

“Master Mason said you enjoyed friendships with many of the subs in New York. Several of our subs have a regular meeting each Wednesday evening. I don’t think they have a Subs for Sushi meeting, but I do seem to recall them having a penchant for desserts during their meetings.”

An “mmm” sound escaped before Sandra could stop it, earning her another wide smile from Master Brent.

“I’ll definitely make a note of *that* meeting.” And she would. She wasn’t sure why she’d bonded so well with the subs back in New York even with all of her issues. Her roommate had told her that under all the fears she truly was a sub; she just needed to find her true self under all the “stuff” life had piled on top.

Sandra wondered if that was true. It would explain her strong reaction to a Dom like Master Brent, and her immediate draw of friendship to most of the subs she’d ever met.

She turned, not surprised to find him watching her again. He always seemed to be watching her. She just wasn’t sure why.

Sandra knew she was attractive. Since middle school when she’d started developing before all the other girls, men had always taken long looks at her, most often centering on her breasts or her ass. There was something about the intense way Master Brent watched her, though, often focusing on her face and not her body, that made this different. But that still didn’t explain why a man like Master Brent would continue watching her. Maybe he thought she was unstable? A laugh bubbled up before she could stop it.

Great. Now he’ll know I am. I’ve removed all doubt.

He smiled at her in question and she shrugged, hoping he didn’t pursue it.

He didn’t, but he did continue watching her with that inscrutable gaze.

“Back here is the locker room,” he said as he led her to the other door past several people chatting, laughing, or flirting.

He must have noticed her gaze because he cleared his throat. “No sex play of any type is allowed here in the meeting area. There are plenty of areas for that, so this is a play-free and sex-free zone. It allows people to have somewhere to go to unwind, or to gear up before heading out to the floor.”

At the “ptthhhh” noise, Sandra turned to find an enormous Dom, with the smoothest brown sugar-colored skin she’d ever seen, rolling his eyes at Master Brent.

“Now Dexter, what kind of impression are you going to make on the new members?” Clear amusement and affection were in Master Brent’s voice.

“Oh, I don’t know, that you can be a pain in the ass?” From the warmth in the man’s manner, the affection was obviously returned.

“Rules are in place to help everyone feel more comfortable.”

Dexter smiled and shook his head. “Yeah, yeah, so that they can explore their inner kink in a safe and supportive atmosphere.” He snorted, showing that he’d heard this

explanation several times already and had it memorized. He turned to Sandra, and she was pinned in place by his large, dark eyes.

“Don’t let me throw you off, sweetheart. I’m just messing with our boy here. Since he’s giving you the tour instead of Jake, I figured you could take a little teasing. He doesn’t do the tours for just anyone, so you must be special.” He winked and she felt a smile blossom, although she was sure Master Brent was only giving her this tour because of her connection with Master Mason’s dungeon.

“Don’t let either one of them fool you,” a squeaky female voice broke in.

Sandra turned to see a perky brunette with wide, green eyes watching the byplay between Master Brent and Dexter.

“They are all sunshine and roses in here and in aftercare, but they’ll both kick your ass out there.” She gestured with her chin to indicate the dungeon floor.

A shudder ran through Sandra before the woman continued.

“Of course they both do the ass-kicking so very nicely that none of us complain. We scream, yes, but in a good way.” The woman turned to point toward a redhead dressed in a leather thong and nipple pasties. “Don’t you think, Min?”

Min nodded enthusiastically. “I definitely agree. I’ll chat later—gotta run! I can’t be late or Master Cameron might paddle me.” Although the wide smile she flashed showed erotic anticipation and not chagrin or fear.

“Sandra,” Master Brent began. “This lummoX here is Master Dex. He’s one of our main Doms, although he can be a pain in the ass.” From the tone of his voice it was obvious that there was a great deal of respect between the two men. “If you ever have any issues, you can always go to him if you can’t find me or one of the dungeon managers. Master Dex was the first Dom who joined us when Club Desire opened, so he knows nearly as much about this place as I do.”

Master Dex stood and Sandra tipped back her head as she had to look up, and up, and up to meet his gaze. He had gorgeous dark eyes, and his steady gaze left her no doubt he was a Dom, but it also told her that he was highly protective of those he considered his or under his protection, and that she had now joined that group.

A comforting warmth coiled inside her as she started to think she could feel safe here.

Chapter 3

Master Dex wore leathers that reminded Sandra of those worn by bikers, and a sleeveless leather vest that showed off bulging muscles and several tattoos, centered around red roses, which contrasted beautifully with his smooth, brown skin.

“Hi, Sandra. It’s nice to meet you.” He looked down at her as if trying to accentuate their height difference.

“Wow.” Sandra found herself liking him immediately. He seemed to engender trust and safety, almost like a big brother. She couldn’t see herself playing a scene with him, but she could see him becoming a confidant and maybe even a friend.

He smiled. “I’m not that tall, only six-eight or so.” He waved his unusual height away. “But Master Brent’s right. If you ever need anything, my door is always open. Even if I’m mid-scene, if something has you spooked and you can’t find anyone else, the safety and well-being of our subs comes first. Come find me and I’ll take care of it, whatever it is.”

She nodded solemnly, impressed that he’d just given her permission to break a scene if she felt she needed to. She would definitely make sure to never use that permission lightly.

Master Dex smiled, and she resisted the urge to say “wow” again. He was gorgeous in every way. But he wasn’t Master Brent.

Master Dex cocked his head to one side to indicate the brunette with wide green eyes beside him who had called out in a squeaky voice a few minutes ago. “This is Sherri. She’s one of my subs, but I’m by no means her only Dom.” There was no censure in his voice, only amusement, and at Sherri’s chuckle, he smiled wider.

“I don’t think one woman will ever be enough for Master Dex, and I know one man will never be enough for me,” the brunette said with a cocky air.

Master Dex growled playfully and turned his head to mock glare at Sherri. “Is that so?”

When she stubbornly nodded, he shook his head. “You are begging to have rope burns on your wrists and ankles, and wax marks on that pale stomach of yours by the end of the night, aren’t you?”

Sandra waited for things to play out.

The brunette bit her bottom lip, but there was no fear in her eyes. “Is that a promise, Master Dex?” Her tone conveyed that she very much hoped it was.

He laughed, more of a low, resonant rumble than anything else. “You’re much too eager, Sherri. I’ll find something else to teach you some manners.”

A huff of breath from Master Brent like he’d tried to stop a full-out laugh surprised Sandra. “Good luck,” Master Brent murmured so softly she wasn’t sure if anyone else besides herself had heard it.

Sherri giggled. “Nice to meet you, Sandra. Will I see you at the sub get-together on Wednesday?”

Sandra found herself smiling at Sherri’s enthusiasm, and looking forward to

Wednesday even more than she already had been. “I’m planning on it.”

“Great! See you then.” Sherri teetered off on her too-high stilettos, and Master Dex gave a long-suffering sigh. “Woman’s gonna break an ankle that way. I don’t let her wear those damned things on the dungeon floor, but some of the other Doms do.” He slid a sly glance over at Master Brent. “Hope you have good insurance, buddy. Because sure as shit she’s gonna break those skinny bird legs of hers and sue your ass off.” Master Dex rolled his eyes and didn’t quite hide the amusement in his expression.

Master Brent waved off Dex’s comments. “Sherri has been running around on those stilts long before she came to join us here. You’ll have to teach your subs some sense, Dexter.”

Master Dex’s loud, reverberating laugh filled the room and had every head swiveling to look at them. “The man who can teach that woman sense will also be able to walk on water and turn water into wine, and I don’t think He’s scheduled to be back in Phoenix for a while.” Dex motioned for everyone to go back to what they were doing.

Master Dex had some sort of magnetism that naturally drew people’s attention and compliance. That combined with being unnaturally gorgeous with a big sense of humor and a big heart made the man a triple threat, although apparently not to Sandra, since her body wasn’t revving up for him beyond what it would for any other attractive man she met.

“Sandra.” Master Dex held out his large hand and when she took it, he squeezed hers lightly. “I’m sure you’ll love it here. Let us know if you need anything...anything at all.” His expression told her he had meant the comment to be both teasing and serious.

She said, “Thank you,” and followed Master Brent toward the locker room.

When Master Brent pushed open the door, Sandra peered around him to see exactly what she would expect, down to the banks of stacked gray lockers with tiny, hanging combination locks on them.

He gestured toward the lockers. “When we go over administrative details, I’ll assign you one and give you the combination. There are also showers and restrooms back here.”

She followed him toward an area that turned out to be a hallway to the restrooms and showers, which resembled every restroom and shower area she’d ever seen, except these reminded her of a very high-class gym somewhere—somewhere she’d never been able to afford to join.

“This is really nice.”

Master Brent’s answering smile practically beamed, showing her how truly proud he was of Club Desire. “I wanted all the facilities and amenities in my dungeon to be the best anywhere, and I hope I’ve at least come close.”

She smiled up at him, not sure what to say.

“No sex or play is allowed in the restrooms or showers. However, another full set of restrooms as well as showers are on Basement 4 that can be used for those types of activities. The space needs to be reserved in advance to make sure it won’t conflict with any of the large planned parties or orgies down there. Those areas aren’t visible from level

3, so activities in the restrooms or showers on Basement 4 are private unless people are invited in to watch.”

She nodded as she remembered some of the kinks she'd heard discussed in New York that would definitely have to be carried out on Basement 4. She wouldn't mind taking a shower with Master Brent, soaping each other and playing a bit, but she was glad most of the hard-core kinks stayed on the lowest basement level.

Even though she was sure watching the things that went on down there was a definite fetish, she was glad that Master Brent had drawn a line there. This club did have limits, as did he, and those both made her feel safer and freer somehow.

She had nothing against people practicing their legal and consensual kinks, but how had Master Brent phrased it?

A lot of those things just didn't flip his switch.

She made a small “hmm” sound, earning a questioning glance from him. This time she was happy to answer. “I was just remembering how you said that the vampire thing didn't flip your switch, and I was thinking that several of the kinks that are probably carried out in the restroom/shower areas of Basement 4 most likely wouldn't flip mine.”

Heat seared her body at the thought of having Master Brent soapy and hard for her in a shower. “Well, maybe there are a few...” She trailed off deliberately and couldn't help but smile at the flash of male interest she saw in his gaze before he clenched his jaw and looked away.

He seemed to be doing that a lot. She wondered what had this very confident man disconcerted so often. She couldn't imagine this being an everyday occurrence for him. She was half tempted to ask, but bit her tongue and dug her fingernails into her palms for good measure. Her mouth did tend to get her into trouble if she let it have free rein.

“So you were going to introduce me around?” she offered.

“Right over here.” He gestured with his chin to a small group standing by the vending machines.

Over the next five minutes Sandra lost herself in a sea of faces and names, all paired with their designation in the lifestyle or their preferred kink.

Her face almost hurt from smiling, and she was sure she'd never remember even one piece of information she'd learned during the last twenty minutes. Everyone was friendly and welcoming, but Sandra was ready to take a break. Before she could figure out a way to say something, Master Brent glanced down at her, a gentle, almost protective expression on his face. His deep, soothing voice cut into the conversation.

“Sandra and I have commitments elsewhere. Enjoy your evenings, whatever your plans might be.”

Master Brent expertly steered her out of the locker room meeting area, across the dungeon floor, and into an elevator. She wasn't even sure if it was the same elevator they had exited earlier since it, too, was hidden unless you knew where to look.

When the doors of the elevator shushed closed behind him, Master Brent inserted his key and punched the button for the floor. “I forgot to take you inside the aftercare room,

but I can show you that another time.”

Warmth and comfort spilled into her at the thought of Master Brent showing her aftercare—once they’d played a scene together.

He leaned forward to cup her chin and trace his thumb over her bottom lip, distracting her.

Fire ignited from that one simple touch, flaming out along every nerve ending and pooling between her thighs. Her soft gasp sounded loud to her inside the closed elevator.

“You seemed like you needed to get out of there, so I cut the tour a little short. I hope you don’t mind.”

Since her mind refused to work, Sandra settled for a wobbly shake of her head, and hoped he understood.

She wasn’t really tired, but the sensory overload of this place and all the new people and faces were beginning to wear on her.

She needed to eat and come, and right now. She didn’t much care in which order those two things happened.

“Talk to me, Sandra. What’s going on in there?” He gently tapped her temple and then traced one large, warm finger down her cheek and over her bottom lip again.

Without thinking, she opened her mouth and let her tongue stroke over Master Brent’s thumb.

The low growl that sounded from deep inside his throat made her spiral of need coil tighter, and she searched her vacant brain frantically for something coherent to say. “I’m hungry,” she finally pushed out through trembling lips.

The blatant innuendo in those two words hung heavily between them, and Master Brent nodded once, as if sexual energy wasn’t crackling around the enclosed space like lightning.

“Let’s tackle those one at a time, shall we?” His expression smoothed out and he met her gaze squarely. “And we can complete part of our tour at the same time.”

Heat flamed into her cheeks, and mortification swamped her. Master Brent had definitely not missed the double entendre of the word “hungry,” and had even said he would take care of it—both versions.

Hadn’t he?

Chapter 4

“Excuse me a moment.” Brent pulled his cell phone out of his pocket as that one word from Sandra still echoed inside his mind—hardening his cock uncomfortably against the back of his fly.

She’d said she was *hungry*, and stupidly, he’d told her they would tackle those things one at a time, openly acknowledging the double entendre.

He stepped out of the elevator and into the hall only partially to use the phone without breaking the illusion that he tried so hard to build around Club Desire. Many of his members told him they suspected him of outright magic, if not extrasensory perception, because he and his staff went the extra mile to anticipate their needs and then exceed their expectations without showing them too much of the mundane behind-the-scenes actions.

He enjoyed the reputation he’d garnered and did all he could to cultivate it. Beyond that, he wanted to impress Sandra more than he had ever wanted to impress anyone he’d ever given a tour of his club to.

She still hadn’t recognized him as the geek pariah from high school who had worshipped her from afar. Although Brent wasn’t sure he wanted her to remember him in case that changed the way she’d been looking at him for the past hour.

Right now he saw the raw need in her eyes every time she turned that amazing gray gaze on him. Whenever he touched her or even spoke to her, those full lips opened and she either flicked her tongue out to moisten them or delicately nibbled on that ripe bottom lip—something that was close to making him lose all his hard-won control and back her up against the nearest wall.

He clenched his jaw against the thought. Not only was she a new member to Club Desire, she hadn’t yet laid out her limits or her permissions. According to Mason’s note, she’d had a rough time with her last Dom and had fled the state to escape the man.

Brent glanced at Sandra again. Even though constant sparks erupted between them, he needed to proceed carefully and try to keep his libido *and* his Dom tendencies in check until she gave him the green light.

But she was making it damn hard for him to keep his head clear—especially when he saw how she reacted to the scene she’d been watching in the lobby while pinching her own nipples and dipping her fingers inside her cunt.

A mental image of Sandra wearing a blue thong with the matching rope tied around her to accentuate those beautiful, full breasts formed inside his mind so clearly he felt like he could reach out and touch it. In his fantasy, her arms were pulled tight over her head and sweet sounds erupted from her throat as his flogger fell to mark that wonderful heart-shaped ass.

He cursed himself, knowing he needed to keep his thoughts from venturing in that direction. For now, he needed to stop torturing himself with mental images of Sandra in erotic scenarios.

He wasn't sure of the extent of what her last Dom had done to terrorize her, but he might have to put in a call to Mason for specifics unless Sandra willingly told him.

Finally remembering the phone in his hand, he hit speed dial for the kitchens and as quietly as possible ordered some finger food and drinks to be delivered to his main personal alcove on Basement 1. He blew out a long, slow breath, hoping it would bring back at least a small portion of his sanity.

Since Sandra had walked through the front doors of Club Desire, all rational thought seemed to have escaped him, and it reminded him too closely of that awkward, insecure boy he'd been all those years ago and had sworn never to become again.

He stepped back into the elevator with her.

"I'm curious to see the setup of Basement 1." Her voice held both eagerness and true interest, and he had to force himself not to reach out and pull her against him.

She turned toward him, meeting his gaze squarely. "You mentioned it overlooked Basement 2 and allowed people to watch as well as play." Curiosity animated her expression and she nibbled that full bottom lip again.

He took a deep breath and forced a few words out. "It took a while to come up with this exact setup, but I think we've hit upon a winning solution."

He hadn't lied when he'd told Sandra he liked to watch. In fact that's what had originally interested him about the lifestyle. Something so simple, and yet incredibly erotic. And finding out Sandra shared his interest had only sent his long-denied craving for her into overdrive.

When he'd seen her on the cameras he hadn't recognized her at first. He'd only seen a sexy blonde in profile enjoying the scene in play on the main dungeon floor.

But when the elevator doors had opened and those familiar gray eyes had locked with his, he felt like he'd been sucker punched in the gut. Mason's note hadn't contained her last name, so he hadn't been prepared.

Her soft voice broke into his thoughts. "If my old dungeon was any indication, watching is quite popular. A safe way to get involved." She looked almost shy, which made him wonder if watching was what had enticed her into the lifestyle.

"Very true. What kind of setup does Master Mason have now?" He cocked his head to the side and allowed himself to study her lovely features for a long moment. "I haven't been to his new club. I think he moved into the new property about five years ago."

"Nothing like this." She gestured around her, her gaze sweeping left and right as if she were looking at the dungeon floor right now instead of the inside of the elevator. "There are just some couches, benches, and chairs around the periphery of the dungeon floor. It's common to see people having sex or near-orgies around the edges while they watch the scenes in play."

Seeing her flushed skin as she described Mason's club made him realize ten years had only made her more beautiful. She was still trim, but she'd grown into her already heart-stopping curves. No longer was she the young girl with a blossoming body; she was now a fully grown woman in her own right. And she continued to fascinate him. Not only for her

beauty and the graceful way she moved, but she was also an intriguing combination of confidence and sensual timidity that threatened to drive him insane.

There were definitely certain things she was leery of and he was committed to finding out why, as well as what caused the haunted look in her eyes. He found that he was feeling extremely protective of her, and angry that anyone had mistreated her in any way. No matter the fact that he hadn't seen her in ten years and that he'd never been more to her than some geeky outcast she passed in the halls between classes.

He dragged himself back to the present and her description of things in Mason's club. "That's exactly why I designated no-sex zones in certain parts of Club Desire. There are those who want to watch the kink in play without having to trip over an orgy to do it."

The soft chiming of the elevator pulled his attention back to their destination, and he placed a gentle hand on her lower back as the elevator doors whooshed open.

The lights on this level shone discreetly and were kept on, as elite members were allowed access to basement levels 1 and 2 at all times.

But whereas this level had a circular walkway like on Basement 4, Basement 1 had darkened alcoves instead of play areas.

Brent guided Sandra around to the right for quite a while until they neared his personal alcove. Most of the alcoves were sectioned-off spaces separated by soft, moveable walls and heavy, dark floor-to-ceiling curtains that hung down over the front except for right over the doorway. When the inner lock was engaged, a red stop-sign image showed over the door to allow privacy.

His alcove, however, was twice the size of the others, had hard walls, although they were moveable if need be, and required a special key to access it. Also, the image over his door read, "Private. No Admittance," even when the lock wasn't engaged.

"You said there were cameras all around the dungeon. That means down here too, right?" Curiosity laced her voice, showing him her embarrassment from earlier had passed.

"Members sign off on surveillance throughout the building in the legalese of the contract. Most never bother to read the full description, but those who do understand the need, since the contract also states the tapes will only be used or released for very specific purposes if the need arises." He paused as she nibbled her full bottom lip again and then forced himself to continue what he'd been telling her. "It's more for safety and liability issues than for voyeurism purposes. Jake and the two other dungeon managers who report to him watch the monitors real time to ensure nothing goes on that isn't safe, sane, legal, and consensual, and I make sure he has discreet and skilled security personnel on duty at all times in case a situation arises that requires their attention."

He held up his index finger. "However, I do like to have total privacy within my own, personal alcove. It's good to be the owner."

"If not the king?" she said softly, showing that she hadn't missed the Mel Brooks History of the World reference. He couldn't help but smile. Her lips quirked up at the edges, charming him, and she cleared her throat before speaking.

“I’m surprised there are people who don’t balk at the stipulation of cameras. A lot of very public and important people seem to belong to sex clubs.”

“True, but the specific purposes listed are usually very familiar and agreeable to those who can afford the membership prices to our very elite establishment.”

Sandra stopped short. “Membership prices? I totally forgot about that. I’m sorry. I haven’t even found a job here yet. I don’t think I can afford membership.”

Brent turned her to face him. “Your membership is taken care of for as long as you’d like to be here.”

She faltered, confusion creasing her brow and a frown marring her expression. “But...”

He laid his finger over her lips, silencing what she’d been about to say. “It’s taken care of. Don’t worry about it.”

Her furrowed brow showed him she wasn’t convinced, but at least he’d headed off the conversation for now. Membership prices were mentioned in the contracts, so she would have ended up asking him about it anyway.

He guided Sandra toward the entrance to his alcove and inserted his key into a small panel to the left of the door before pushing it open.

As soon as the door opened, soft lighting came on to reveal an overstuffed sectional, a comfortable bondage bed, and a few chairs, all strategically placed to give a good view of the happenings down on Basement 2 below.

Sandra sucked in a soft breath before she took several quick steps forward so she stood close enough to the curved floor-to-ceiling window to press her palms flat against it. “Wow. This is amazing.”

“I’m glad you like it.” And he was. He knew it had been ten years since he’d seen her and worshipped her from afar, but pleasing her was important to him, and he enjoyed the sensation.

He pulled the door shut and then moved deeper into the room to stand close behind her. He looked out at the view over her shoulder as the heat from her body tempted him to pull her back against his hard cock.

Instead, he took a deep breath and returned his attention to the happenings on the floor below them. Even though she stood a foot in front of him, the soft scent of honeysuckle and her arousal filled his senses and made him ache to touch her.

“I more than like it. I could’ve never imagined this back in New York. Don’t tell Master Mason, but his dungeon and yours are on two totally different levels.”

Pleasure hummed inside his veins. He leaned forward. “I won’t say a word,” he murmured almost against her hair, nearly giving in to the temptation to thread his hand into the silky mass, bend her head back, and take what was his. But he forced himself to take one firm step back and look out over her shoulder to see what she was seeing.

From where he stood he could see the full view of Basement 2 and all the play areas inside it. He knew if he were standing right next to the glass where Sandra was that there were some areas on the far side of the floor that weren’t visible, as well as the ones directly below them, but most of the floor was in easy view. That was the reason for the

circular setup.

“You can see so much from up here. This is great,” she said, mirroring the direction of his thoughts. She glanced back over her shoulder at him, her face animated.

“I have another private alcove, one I do rent or loan out on occasion—usually to Dex, Cameron, or one of the other main Doms. It’s on the other side of the floor.”

“Sort of like a time-share?” She laughed softly.

He smiled, her laugh making him feel light inside. “Something like that, but so far we’ve avoided any scheduling issues,” he answered in the same light tone she’d used.

“I’m surprised you don’t have the Doms fighting for reservations.” She braced her palms more comfortably against the glass.

“They keep themselves pretty busy, and there are lots of places within Club Desire to play.”

He clenched his fingers against showing her the scene forming inside his mind. He would have her widen her stance, then rip off her skirt and begin teaching her what pleasure she could experience at his hands.

He clenched his jaw. He knew he should continue to fight his overwhelming attraction to her. Even though there were no guidelines against him interacting with any member who agreed, Sandra hadn’t yet laid out her soft or hard limits, or even given her permission. He was a stickler with everyone else about having both of those in place before anyone played together, so he needed to try to discipline himself, at least until those were set.

Added to that, she was still recovering from a traumatic D/s relationship, and without knowing more, he could unwittingly make that worse.

A knock from behind him slammed his common sense back into place, at least for the moment.

Brent opened the door and gestured the server inside.

The man set the large tray filled with food and drinks on the end table next to the sectional, as was Brent’s usual preference. Then at Brent’s nod, the man left, quietly pulling the door closed behind him.

At the sound of Sandra’s stomach rumbling, Brent turned to find her looking at him.

He bit back the question that formed on his tongue—which hunger would she like fulfilled first? He was having enough trouble avoiding temptation without inviting it directly.

“That looks amazing.” She gestured toward the tray, making Brent smile. “How did you order all of that with only a few words?”

Brent motioned for her to sit on the sectional. “I come to this alcove often and usually order a selection of finger foods and various drinks to enjoy while I watch.”

She dropped her gaze as she took a breath to speak, making him think she was trying to hide her deeper thoughts from him. “I’m sure your subs appreciate that—”

Her words cut off abruptly and she sat down hard on the end of the sectional nearest

the tray of food, but she still wouldn't meet his gaze.

The urge to mark her as his roared, and he battled it back. "I've rarely brought anyone here. I usually use this place to rest and recharge."

Finally she raised her gaze to his, her expression inscrutable. "I'm sorry—that wasn't any of my business. My mouth does tend to get me into trouble."

And the things Brent could do with that mouth...

He resisted the urge to tell her exactly what he would do with it. Instead, he pulled an armchair closer to the end table so the tray rested between them. "I see no problem at all with someone who speaks her mind openly and honestly. In fact I prefer it." Brent remembered many years where he'd held his tongue for fear of censure, teasing, or outright bullying. He swore when he'd reinvented himself that he would never do that again, or require it of anyone else.

"What would you think of us eating while we talk...and watch?" He glanced toward the glass and the scene below before turning back to watch her chew her bottom lip as she considered.

Finally she raised her chin, her confidence slowly returning before his eyes. "That's the best idea I've heard in at least the last hour."

Her self-deprecating laugh made him frown. "You need to take better care of yourself. Why didn't you eat before you came tonight?"

Color blossomed in her cheeks and she visibly swallowed before trying to speak. "To be honest, I lost track of the time trying to make sure I was dressed well enough, and was brave enough, to come here."

He nodded but felt his frown deepen. "From now on, you take care of your body's needs as a priority. Understand?"

Her brow furrowed briefly and he realized he'd slipped into the mode as her Dom. He wondered if she would get spooked, but then she dropped her chin and murmured, "Yes, sir."

Chapter 5

Heat seared through Brent at her giving him the honorific “sir,” which she would call him as a sub—*his* sub. Subs in Club Desire never used “sir” or “ma’am” with anyone but a Dom they’d entered into a play arrangement or agreement with. But until he had her official permission and she’d outlined her limits, she was most likely answering a strong command out of habit.

No matter. It would be official soon enough.

He dropped his gaze to the tray and scanned the drink offerings. The kitchen had sent his normal preferences—Coke and several bottles of water. He usually drank Coke with the Jack, Crown, or Parrot Bay he also kept stocked in one of the wide drawers against the far wall.

He didn’t drink at the Club often, and even then only in his own suite of rooms or one of his alcoves. Running a place of this size and type did come with its fair share of headaches, though, and sometimes he did come here to watch, drink, and unwind. Although he was always very careful that none of his members ever saw him drunk, tipsy, or in any way out of control. That wasn’t to say he never allowed himself to *be* out of control, just that he didn’t allow the members to see him that way. A trusted few, like Jake, Dex, Cameron, and some of his other main Doms, could and did back him up when he needed to escape. That meant inside the club or into the outside world, and it was only they who had seen him drunk or otherwise in those situations. He knew he could trust them in their discretion.

One thing he’d learned well from growing up as a pariah was to choose carefully those he put his trust in, and he’d become very good at making those choices. None of those in his current inner circle had made him regret the trust he’d extended, and he hoped that trend continued.

He twisted the top off a bottle of water and passed Sandra the cold bottle.

She took a large drink and he enjoyed watching her throat work as she swallowed. She took another long drink before leaning over to study the assortment of finger sandwiches stacked neatly on plates.

“They look like the little sandwiches served at afternoon teas. I’ve always wanted to go to one.” Her features were animated, her gray eyes bright as she met his gaze.

He smiled, pleased that she knew some details of what afternoon tea was beyond something the British did. Most Americans didn’t. And she wanted to attend one.

Vivid fantasies involving Sandra, clotted cream, and a corner booth at a very busy tearoom filled his mind. He shifted in his seat to try to find a more comfortable position for his aching erection, without much success. “They *are* sandwiches from an afternoon tea. For my first job I spent several months in Britain and fell in love with their tradition of high tea. I don’t usually have hot tea except for breakfast, but when I order finger foods from the kitchen, they know I mean these.”

A smile blossomed over her face, making her even more beautiful. “You have a pretty

nice setup going on here. And your staff apparently keeps you pretty spoiled.”

He loved the teasing light in her eyes, and hoped he got to see this side of her more often now that she'd come back into his life. In high school he had only seen it infrequently when she was with her best friend, Michelle, or one of the few others she was close to. He had always longed to be in that small group, but he might as well have been on a different planet for how far apart in the social high school hierarchy they were. He pulled himself back to the present and the conversation at hand.

“There's chicken salad, salmon and cucumber, and watercress egg salad. They're all excellent.” He gestured to the small plate of scones, clotted cream, and jam. “We also have something sweeter if you're interested.”

When Sandra continued to watch him with rapt attention, Brent picked up a small triangle of a chicken salad sandwich and held it out to her.

She held his gaze and surprised him when she didn't reach out and take it, but instead, leaned forward and took a small bite.

Heat seared through him as her even, white teeth cleanly cut a small bite out of the sandwich.

She chewed quietly, a small crumb of bread on her bottom lip, and he couldn't resist the urge to brush it off with his fingertip.

Before he could pull his hand back she snaked out her tongue and licked the tip of his finger, making him suck in a large breath as if he might never get enough air.

“Hmmm, that's good too.” She looked at him speculatively, which nearly snapped all of his control. “May I have the rest of that sandwich?”

Brent mentally shook himself and handed her the rest of the small sandwich, and then took a small empty plate off the tray and filled it with an assortment of sandwiches before he handed it to her. It would be much more fun to feed her, but also much more dangerous to his weakening resolve to keep his hands off her.

“Eat. You'll need your strength.”

Her gaze snapped to his and he realized that he'd once again taken on the Dom role with her without even thinking. He watched her reaction carefully, but she slowly nodded and began to eat.

Silence fell around them for a long moment. He thought about trying to eat something so she would feel more at ease, but the only thing he wanted to feast on was the woman sitting on the end of his sectional.

He couldn't count the number of times he'd lain on that sectional watching the activities below, fantasizing about playing with his high school crush while he stroked himself to a thundering orgasm. He wondered how much better it would be to have her place both hands against the glass again, to pull up that peasant skirt and reveal her shapely ass. To put a spreader bar between her ankles and tease her with his fingers before he thrust inside her and fucked her while they both watched the scenes below.

He struggled to break out of the haze of raging lust and need, and back to coherence. Thoughts like that wouldn't get him through the next few hours without taking her, and

he needed to get a handle on himself.

Because no matter the man he had become, and no matter that she was in his club now, she wasn't his, and he had to face the fact that even if she chose to play scenes with him, she might never be "his" exclusively, although his body and his mind were in definite disagreement over that decree.

"These are all really good. Thank you for feeding me." She looked stronger, more confident, and her skin was flushed as she exchanged glances between the actions on the floor below and him. "Although being fed was fun too." She smiled, and it was like the sun had come out from behind a cloud. Her inner personality shone clearly, reminding him of what had fascinated him about her in high school.

"I'd have to agree. But I was sure you'd eat more food this way." He took a large drink of water to give his hands something to do. She surprised him when she pointed toward the basement floor below.

"What's that electric device she's using on him?"

Brent's brow furrowed as he glanced down at the scene she'd indicated. If she'd never seen a violet wand in use before, either Mason's dungeon was much more on the vanilla side or she wasn't a very experienced sub, or both.

As he thought about everything he'd seen from her since she'd arrived, suspicions curled in his gut, but he kept them to himself. There would be time enough to discuss that when they took care of the administrative details.

"That's called a violet wand." He watched as the man, who dangled upside down tied by his ankles to a beam overhead, was teased with the wand by his female Domme. The man squirmed as the arcing energy snaked out to touch him, but his clearly visible erection showed he was enjoying the stimulation.

"Is it some kind of electric shock?" She sounded almost horrified as she watched.

He laid his hand over hers, pulling her gaze away from the hanging man. "It gives a low-level electrical current, and can feel like anything from lush tingles to sharp shocks depending on the setting. It brings the blood to the surface and heightens the senses. It's arousing if used correctly. But it can also be used for temporary or permanent body modifications, so limits have to be clear when using one."

She shuddered. "Body modification? You've tried it?"

"I haven't used it for that purpose, but many do, and it's a definite fetish." He glanced down at the Domme below, pleased to see she was letting the energy arc into the man's body as it found its ground instead of holding it against his skin, which caused the types of marks he'd mentioned. "I wouldn't give anyone a permanent mark like that. I'll admit, I do enjoy marking a sub with a flogger or rope, but those marks aren't permanent, and last just long enough to remind them of the intense pleasure they reached during our scene."

A visible shudder ran through Sandra and she sucked in a small breath, but he pointedly ignored her signs of arousal from his words. With his already weakening resolve, he couldn't let himself become distracted. Brent took a small breath and

continued. “As for the regular use of the wand, I couldn’t see using it on someone else in good conscience without knowing what it felt like to have it used on me. I was surprised, but I enjoyed it.”

Sandra beamed at him. “You’re a good man, Master Brent. Do all the Doms here share your views?”

He frowned, wondering exactly what her experience with Diego had been. His protective instincts roared to life once again. “All the Doms here have gone through Dom training specifically for Club Desire. Part of that is an in-depth discussion of the philosophy of the consensual power exchange between Dom and sub, as well as the ethics and responsibilities that go along with that.”

He kept her gaze, trying to read any clues there as to what she’d been through, but finding none. “Our motto at Club Desire that everyone is trained to abide by is ‘Safe, Sane, and Consensual.’ If anything doesn’t meet that standard, it isn’t done here. By the same token, our sub training makes sure that the subs know their rights and their ability to set limits—basically that they have great power in the D/s equation.”

Sandra frowned. “I still struggle with the thought that the sub has power. I’ve heard the philosophy, but from my experience I haven’t really seen it practiced.” She frowned, a shadow clouding her expression. “Isn’t the whole idea for the Dom to have all the power over the sub?”

Brent wanted to shake his friend for not ensuring Sandra knew the basic tenets of the lifestyle. “Sandra, the sub willingly gifts a Dom with trust to take care of him or her, sexually and emotionally. The sub gains even more pleasure by giving the Dom pleasure. I try never to forget that.” He saw her interest sharpen and knew she hadn’t had such an experience in her own D/s relationship. He wondered if she’d ever even attended a munch or gone through any sub training. He’d call Mason at the earliest opportunity and find out the details.

His inner Dom burned to be the one to train Sandra as a sub...*his* sub. Not only to show her what pleased him, and find out what pleased her, but to introduce her to the idea and practice of true power exchange—which was the beauty of such relationships.

“Could we try it?”

Her softly spoken question sent a spiral of searing heat through Brent’s body, finally settling in his cock. He had to forcefully remind himself that she hadn’t heard his thoughts so couldn’t be referring to letting him introduce her to being his sub. “What would you like to try?” He wanted to make very sure he didn’t misunderstand what she was asking for.

She nodded down at the scene playing out in front of them. “The violet wand. Could we try it so I can see what it’s like? I feel safe with you, Master Brent. Like I can try out new things without being scared you’ll push me too far.”

Her last few words wobbled, and it cut him to the heart to know that some son of a bitch had mistreated her. The urge to protect her shoved aside the knowledge that he shouldn’t be doing this right now before she’d set her limits, signed her membership

agreement, met all the Doms, and willingly chosen one or more to play with.

She just specifically asked to play with you, his traitorous body reminded him.

So despite his better judgment he found himself nodding. “I do have one up here if you’d like to try it.”

She cast one more glance at the man below, who was now being slowly lowered to the ground by his Domme and lovingly caressed and kissed.

“Wow. I’ve never seen that outside of aftercare.”

She turned to watch him with interest sparking in her expressive gray eyes, and he had to clench his fists to keep from reaching for her.

“Most Doms and subs have quite a close, caring relationship. Play is intended to be pleasurable for both parties. That’s the point.”

She nodded but still looked as if she didn’t quite believe him. Silence fell between them for a long moment until she tipped her head to the side and pinned him with a suddenly strong gaze. “Well?”

Confused, he frowned as he tried to puzzle out what she was asking. “Well, what, my dear?” He wasn’t sure where the endearment had come from, but it felt right, and when she didn’t react, he relaxed.

“Are we going to try out the violet wand?”

Brent laughed. This new Sandra continued to surprise him, and he loved it. His previous reservations melted away, and he rose to go to the large drawer where he kept toys and supplies in case he needed them.

He had to dig to the bottom of the drawer since he didn’t use the violet wand often, but he finally found it. He set the case holding the attachments and other accessories aside and brought the wand to Sandra so she could examine it. As she did, he made sure he knew where anything metal or conductive was and glanced at Sandra’s clothes as well.

“It doesn’t look like much.” She grasped the nine-inch wand and stroked it like she would a hard cock, and Brent’s balls tightened as he vividly imagined her stroking him that way.

He took the power cord and snaked it over to the sidewall where the outlet was before returning to the sectional to sit beside Sandra. Before he could show her how to use the wand, she had it turned on and was testing the sensations against her palm, the spark jumping from the electrode to her skin.

After a few long moments she moaned softly. “I can see how this might feel good on more sensitive body parts once you get used to it.”

“Lift your shirt and try it on your stomach, unless you want to try your inner thighs. I know lots of subs enjoy that on the lower settings, although there are a few who enjoy the highest settings as well.” A vivid memory of intense, lush tingles flowed along his inner thighs and he shivered, anticipation of introducing Sandra to some new pleasure burning inside him.

“It’s very much up to personal preference. But I find if you give it a few minutes to let

your body get used to it, most of the settings can become quite pleasurable.”

She started to lift her shirt and then handed the wand to him.

Arousal stabbed deep into his pelvis and he sucked in a breath.

“I’d like you to show me, if you don’t mind.” Her voice was soft but husky with desire, her eyes clear, her gaze steady and sure.

Brent hesitated, all the reasons why he shouldn’t do this yet playing out inside his mind.

A sudden look of impatience crossed her features and she pursed her lips before speaking. “I know we haven’t discussed limits yet, but to be quite honest, I don’t know a lot of mine, except hard pain, and I’m very shy of being hit or slapped, especially on the face or neck.” She looked embarrassed at the admission, but she raised her chin and met his gaze squarely. “I’ve given you permission, and I’ll ‘yellow’ or ‘red’ if I need to, so unless you don’t want to, and you’d rather I go down to the dungeon floor to find someone else to—”

He cut her off by laying one finger over her lips.

The thought of her playing with any of the other Doms tied him into hard knots of jealousy and possessiveness.

“Fair enough,” he finally conceded, happy his voice came out sounding calm and cool. “I’ll be happy to show you as much or as little as you want. It can be used on most patches of bare skin, usually avoiding areas that are much too sensitive to that type of stimulation.” He turned to face her.

“Why don’t you pull up your top to bare your stomach, lean back, and get comfortable?”

Instead, Sandra leaned forward, pulled her top off, and tossed it on the floor at her feet.

Brent had to shift in his seat to find a more comfortable position for his suddenly harder cock. He forced himself to breathe normally as he raked his gaze over her full breasts, the gauzy thin cups of the bra she wore showing wide pinkish areolas and hard nipples.

With effort he lowered his gaze to her smooth, white stomach, where he would start showing her the effects of the wand.

“Master Brent?”

He snapped his gaze to hers, feeling for a moment like that long-ago high school boy who had been caught staring at the most popular girl in school. “Yes?”

“When you look at me like that you seem so familiar.” Her expression seemed wistful, as if she were trying to solve a puzzle. “So I’m sorry if you catch me looking at you a bit too long sometimes. It just feels like I’ve known you forever. But you’re definitely not someone I would forget if we’d met before.”

Brent’s throat worked as he swallowed the sudden lump there. “I feel very comfortable with you as well, Sandra.” He mentally kicked himself for not having told her who he was outright. It just wasn’t the right time to tell her. Even if it was for the partially selfish reason that stretched before him. He cleared his throat and gently pressed her back

against the sectional before taking both her wrists in one hand and pulling them over her head. He wished he could use restraints on her, but it was too soon.

“You’ll be better able to absorb the sensations if you’re less tempted to touch the area.”

She nodded, trust shining in her eyes as she relaxed her arms back onto the top of the sectional just behind her head.

“All right. Close your eyes and relax. I’ll start it on the lowest setting and let you get used to it.”

—

Sandra stretched out her legs, letting herself relax boneless against the very comfortable sectional. Master Brent’s presence beside her burned over her skin, and she couldn’t see the wand being any more erotic than that.

But when the first tingling rush hit the sensitive skin of her stomach she flinched, and a noise like a small squeak escaped. She glanced down, fascinated as the spark of energy jumped from the tip of the electrode onto her stomach, then sped out over her skin and down along her nerves.

“Relax and breathe. Allow your body to get used to it. I’ll give you a minute to collect yourself.”

His words were a strong command. The command of a Dom. She smiled as she obeyed and forced her body to relax as she blew out a long breath. When the sensation came again she still flinched, but found after a few seconds that she was able to keep her muscles from jerking and tightening and concentrate on what it felt like before it stopped again, abruptly.

The sensation was almost a lush tingling, and it ran along her nerves to pool in every erogenous zone in her body. After several more zaps, she wanted to come so bad she could scream.

But Master Brent’s voice told her to relax and wait for the next higher intensity, so she did just that.

When the next jolt hit her, she squeaked as she flinched away. Again, it wasn’t painful, only a more intense feeling than the previous level had been.

Her breath was coming in harsh pants, and for some reason the air suddenly smelled like a thunderstorm was brewing. It reminded her of the ozone smell that always lingered after such intense storms.

She breathed deep and tried to adjust to the sensations, but her entire body felt hot and achy. Each zap of the wand sent zings radiating out over her, which left her feeling oversensitized. One more zap and her nerves began to feel raw and brittle.

“Red,” she whispered, and Master Brent immediately turned off the wand and set it aside. He ran a hand over her sweaty face, brushing back the hair that had fallen into her eyes when she jerked and flinched during some of the zaps.

“Sandra.”

She couldn't find the will to even open her eyes, let alone answer him.

"Sandra," came his strong voice again, this time laced with Dom command. "Look at me."

She forced herself to open her heavy eyelids and then concentrated on making her throat work.

He loomed over her, concern clear in his expression. "Are you all right? Did you wait too long to red?"

She shook her head and forced herself to speak. "No, sir. I'm fine. Just feeling a bit oversensitized. I need a few minutes to let my body calm down, that's all."

He looked stern for a long moment but then his expression gentled, making her think he wanted to reach out and gather her into his arms. But then he nodded and shifted away, to give her some space and, she assumed, a minimum of tactile input while she recovered.

Sandra realized she'd truly enjoyed the few peeks she'd seen of Master Brent's Dom side. She didn't feel controlled or manipulated; she felt cared for and safe. Free of the decisions and pressure that came with giving herself pleasure. It sounded absurd, but she couldn't discount the sensation.

"Thank you," she said when her body had calmed a bit. She still wanted to come and wouldn't mind being fucked senseless, but the violet wand would be on her list only with someone she trusted, and for very controlled play on the lowest settings.

"You're all right?" He handed her the shirt that she'd tossed on the floor and she nodded as she slipped it on. She sat up straighter, leaning against his shoulder and enjoying his warmth.

She had hoped he'd put his arm around her, but instead he took her hand in his and threaded their fingers together.

Sandra sighed and tilted her neck from side to side, working out some tenseness that had gathered during the session with the wand. But then she returned her gaze to the dungeon floor below them.

To the right of the Domme using the violet wand was another couple. She gestured toward them. "I watched them together earlier up in the waiting area."

Brent followed her gaze and nodded. "They are both regulars, although they only play on the weekends. They always start up on the main dungeon level with relatively low-level play and then come down to Dungeon 2 to increase the spice a bit, depending on the night and their moods." He swept his glance back over the couple before returning his gaze to Sandra. "They've been living the lifestyle in and out of the dungeon as a couple for a few years now and seem happier than a lot of the vanilla couples I know."

"Would you like to watch more, or switch gears and go take care of the administrative details?"

Sandra glanced at the scene and noted that the woman was currently strapped to a bondage bed. She lay on her back, a spreader bar between her ankles. A rope snaked down from the ceiling to lift the bar, which pulled up her knees and bared and opened her,

leaving her in a wide-open position for her Dom to easily play with her pussy or her ass.

Her arms were stretched over her head, another spreader bar affixed to the headboard. Her wrists were tied to the bar, her fingers wrapped around it tightly. Her nipples were hard points, easily seen even from up here, and the stripes of red across her torso and breasts showed remnants of the play they'd enjoyed on the main dungeon floor.

Sandra knew she still hadn't answered Master Brent, but she wanted to see what happened next. Since he didn't push for an answer, she squeezed his hand where their fingers were still twined and leaned forward a little for the best possible view. Although if she watched too much she was going to end up pulling up her skirt and rubbing her clit right here. Her body had been in a constant state of arousal since stepping inside this place, and it only kept ratcheting higher.

When the Dom crawled onto the foot of the bed to lie on his stomach between the woman's thighs, he buried his face against her folds, and Sandra nearly moaned. Master Brent's quick intake of breath caught her attention more than the erotic image in front of her. Apparently he truly did like to watch as much as she did.

She glanced toward him to see a hungry, almost ravenous, expression on his face. A quick look showed her the hard outline of his cock behind the fly of his slacks.

She had a strong urge to lean forward and stroke him and watch his reaction. Would he let her unzip his slacks and pull out his cock? Would he let her rub her thumb over the tip to spread the moisture she was sure she'd find there? Would he let her take him in her mouth? The vortex of need inside her pelvis tightened impossibly at the thought of what Master Brent might taste like.

To her relief, Master Brent's hand closed over hers, drawing her attention back to the scene below before she did something totally embarrassing. He squeezed her fingers lightly, sending her a wolfish-looking smile before she turned back to the scene unfolding below them.

The Dom's face was still buried between his sub's thighs, his actions making the woman squirm and arch off the bed. He tipped her to her side and swatted her ass hard before settling her on her back again and resuming his actions.

Sandra squirmed against the sectional as her entire body screamed for action instead of watching from the sidelines. She needed to do something besides watch right now, and Master Brent was obviously keeping some type of distance, so she didn't want to push.

"I think I'm ready for those administrative details now." Her voice came out sounding thin and thready, and Master Brent's deep breathing was the only sound between them for a long moment.

"Absolutely." His deep blue gaze captured hers and held her while sending fissions of arousal shooting through her. "You can come back to this level and watch at any time. Let's get you set up."

He rose smoothly and helped her to her feet before guiding her to the door and around the curving hallway toward the elevators.

Chapter 6

As they walked into the elevator, Sandra was overwhelmed by Master Brent's strong presence so near her needy body. His heat and unique scent surrounded her, and all her instincts screamed for his hands to be on her, caressing her and making her come.

As soon as the elevator doors whooshed closed behind them, sealing them inside, he leaned in and brushed a simple, lingering kiss over her lips.

Her lips tingled from that one small contact. He stepped back and his heat left her, the loss raging through her, as she belatedly wished she would have had time to react. She turned toward him, tipping her face up and offering her lips in case he thought she might not have liked the fact that he'd kissed her.

"I apologize, Sandra, for taking liberties before having permission. But you seemed to need it." He took a deep breath as if he were about to say more, and intentionally cut himself short. "No one here will do anything without your prior consent and approval. Soft limits, hard limits, and safe words are fully respected at Club Desire. And no one will touch you or force their attentions on you in any way. Any touch or interaction will involve them having your permission first. So, again, I apologize."

Master Mason's note had apparently contained quite a bit more than she'd imagined. But right now, her senses were still buzzing from Master Brent's chaste kiss, and remnants of their play with the violet wand in his alcove. How would she react to a much more lingering kiss, or even a full scene with Master Brent?

"Don't apologize. You're right. I did need it, and I appreciate your reassurances. I feel safe here already." She stopped as she realized that she really did. Without even meeting all of the other Doms or seeing the entire club, there was something about the energy of this place that radiated safety and welcome. No wonder it was such an exclusive club.

"I'm glad." He stared at her lips for a long moment, making her wish he would come closer and kiss her again.

She watched him carefully and knew a smile curved her lips as she said, "Oh, and Master Brent..."

One dark brow rose in question.

"You have my permission to kiss me anytime you'd like."

The rustle of cloth was the only warning she had before she was pulled firmly against his hard body, his rough kiss sending torrents of excitement and need through her.

Sandra wanted to wrap her legs around his waist and demand he fuck her, right here in the elevator, but since he was taller than she, all she could manage was to bury her fingers into the softness of his shirt and writhe against him as the erotic sensations, and the danger of the elevator doors opening at any moment, nearly sent her over the edge.

Master Brent started to pull away and she grabbed his shirt tighter, yanking him back. "Yes, please. I'll 'yellow' or 'red' if I need to," she gasped around their heated kiss, giving him permission to do as he liked with her.

Her words seemed to spark something inside him and his arms came around her, bracketing her against him roughly, but only enough to be exciting, not threatening. His large hands cupped her ass and he lifted until she could wrap her legs around his waist and her mound bumped against his very hard cock.

He backed her up against the wall of the elevator, holding her in place with his body as he reached up under her skirt and found the crotch of her very wet panties.

He growled deep inside his throat, a guttural, almost possessive sound.

She panted as he slid one finger under the edge of the lacy material to find her slick center.

Sandra gasped, her pussy tightening around his thick finger as he pushed inside her. When he added another finger and pushed even deeper she moaned and let her head fall back against the wall, breaking their kiss as she drowned in sensations.

He worked his fingers in and out of her, building the quickly spiraling tension deep inside her pelvis.

“Sandra. Look at me.”

The unwavering demand in his voice broke her out of the sensual haze that held her, and she opened her eyes and lifted her head as best she could.

Immediately his intense blue gaze captured hers, branding her like his fingers that were still deep inside her.

“I want you to look at me while you come, and know who caused you to shatter.”

Something in his tone screamed “mine!” and she didn’t argue. At this moment she would gladly agree to be his sub...his anything, as long as he never stopped what he was doing to her.

The wet sounds of his fingers pumping in and out of her core filled the air around them as well as the thick, tangy scent of sex. She reveled in both, and only craved more.

“Please...” She hung so close to the edge it was nearly painful. “Please...”

A darkly mysterious smile curved his sensual lips and he mumbled, “Such a good little sub. I love it when you beg...” He said it so softly she almost didn’t hear it.

He ripped another gasp from her throat as he curled his fingers inside her and stroked her G-spot while at the same time rubbing her clit with his wonderfully callused thumb.

She hung on the precipice for a long moment...drowning in the deep blue of his eyes and the torrent of pleasure that raged through her.

“Come for me, Sandra. Come for *me*.”

At his soft command she exploded, hurtling over the edge and into a deep, endless well of pleasure, as his magic fingers continued to work her. A strangled scream ripped from her throat as the orgasm stampeded through her.

Only after she’d ridden out the length of her orgasm and Master Brent smiled and blinked did she realize that the elevator doors had opened and she was looking out at a small crowd of people.

People who had most likely just watched her have the most amazing orgasm of her life.

She waited for embarrassment or even mortification, but at this moment, she didn't care if the entire city had watched.

She lowered her gaze to Master Brent's and returned his smile.

He calmly removed his fingers from her core and raised them to his face. "I think we need to discuss some of those...administrative details."

He slid his fingers into his mouth, licking them clean, and Sandra's breath caught in her throat, her nipples tightening into hard buds and her clit screaming for attention all over again.

Master Brent leaned forward, his hard cock grinding against her sensitive slit, and he licked a slow line across her lower lip, pausing as he watched her.

She opened her mouth and traced her tongue over her bottom lip where he'd licked her.

His eyes dilated and his mouth crushed down on hers, his tongue invading her and claiming her.

Sandra was surprised to find that her taste was still in his mouth—tangy and sweet. She sucked his tongue, loving the jolt inside her body when he pressed his hard cock against where she wished it could be without all their clothes in the way.

"My apologies, again, Sandra." He smiled and it almost looked wolfish...anything but sorry. "It's time for us to finish up those details we've been putting off. I'm usually much more in control of myself." He shook his head, still looking flushed, aroused, and sexy as hell.

He gently set her on her feet and turned toward the now closed elevator doors.

Sandra hadn't even heard them close, or heard the murmurs of the watching crowd go suddenly silent. But she had been very distracted at the time.

Master Brent inserted his key into the panel and pressed the button for level 4.

Sandra caught her breath at the knowledge that they would soon be alone again in his office.

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Brent guided Sandra out of the elevator and back to the love seat she'd sat on earlier. He forced himself to walk around his desk and sit behind it rather than giving in to the temptation that she presented.

Her lips were still swollen, her face flushed from their time in the elevator, and he could still smell and taste her arousal. Although when he finally had the chance, he'd like to tie her up and feast on her pussy until he had memorized every nuance and could remember her taste in his sleep.

He glanced up to find her watching him intently, and he forced himself to concentrate on the administrative duties they'd come up here for. He'd never had a problem keeping his mind on business when it was needed. But she splintered his concentration and frayed his control. He would need to guard against both. He couldn't afford to let his business sense lag every time she was around. Both Club Desire and his continued involvement

with his international business-consulting clients depended on that.

He pulled a membership contract out of his lower desk drawer and filled out Sandra's name and the date. "This is our standard full membership contract. If you have any questions, please let me know."

"Could I read that tonight or tomorrow and bring it back with any questions I have before I sign it?" A smile curved her full lips and she met his gaze squarely, waiting for his response.

Warmth burst inside his chest. Not only beautiful, but smart as well. And he noted a spark of confidence she hadn't yet had in high school, which took her from extremely attractive to stunning. Probably a good thing she didn't have that spark in high school or he might never have recovered after she'd turned him down. "Absolutely." He passed over the contract and she placed it on her lap before returning her gaze to his.

"Now let's discuss limits. You mentioned earlier that you weren't yet sure about all of yours, but let's start with what you know and we'll go from there."

She nodded once, slowly, while she kept his gaze. He could tell from the dimming of her smile that she wasn't looking forward to this part of their discussion. "You said you don't like hard pain and are very leery of being hit or slapped on the face or neck. Correct?"

A furrow formed between her brows and a frown pulled at her lips, as if she were surprised he remembered her mentioning that.

He nearly told her he had always catalogued things like that, ever since high school, but he bit back the words. It wasn't yet time for that discussion, and he needed to stay focused on the topic at hand.

"That's correct." She raised her chin, the line of her body confident and sure. "Also, I like to take things slow. I know a lot of Doms want to push your limits, and I'm sure that's fine for a lot of subs, but I would prefer to be eased into that. Even though I've had two Doms, I don't really know what I like yet, and what I don't like, beyond the vanilla realm. Not really."

Surprise and jealousy sliced deep. He thought Diego had been her first and only Dom. But he knew he'd jumped to that conclusion. "You've had two Doms?"

She nodded, her confident expression fading. "When I first joined the dungeon in New York my roommate introduced me to Master Scott."

His attention sharpened, and he suddenly needed to know why Scott hadn't protected her when he realized what was happening with Diego. Once Sandra was his, as a sub or something more permanent, he *would* protect her. He had stopped trying to remind himself that she would never be his, and embraced the knowledge that she *would* be. "Was Master Scott still your main Dom when things started getting out of control with Diego?"

Her expression darkened and she pulled her bottom lip between her teeth in what seemed like an unconscious mannerism. "No. Master Scott's job transferred him across the country, so I was left without a Dom after only eight months. Diego was new to the

dungeon and I thought he would have the time, like Master Scott had, to be patient with me as I got comfortable with new things. Master Scott had been great about that. And at first, Diego seemed like a good Dom. Kind, but intense. I even watched him play scenes with some of the other more experienced subs before I agreed to play with him.”

Brent made a conscious effort to soften his gaze. “What happened then?”

Tension suddenly radiated from her, her hands balled into fists in her lap, her gaze downcast.

He swallowed hard in an effort to keep his anger at bay. It definitely wasn’t directed at Sandra, and it wouldn’t help them build trust. “Sandra.”

His word seemed to slowly reach past her suddenly erected walls of protection and she finally raised her gaze to his, although it was a very tentative movement.

“We can save that discussion for another time when you’re more comfortable.” He resisted the urge to reach out and lift her chin so she would meet his gaze. “But we will have to eventually discuss it so we can make sure nothing we do here will make your trauma any worse.”

She nodded once, still refusing to meet his gaze. But her fists slowly unfurled and he watched her confidence slowly rebuild, layer by layer.

“I don’t like to play in groups, especially large groups.” As her tentative voice reached out to him she finally raised her gaze. “And although I’m interested in being trussed up and at a Dom’s mercy like I saw in the main lobby dungeon, I might need to take that slow. Watching them, I could almost imagine myself in that situation, but I’m not sure how I would react to it, or if it would freak me out that I had no power. I think it would depend on the Dom.”

Brent nodded, biting back the words to tell her that *he* would be that Dom, and she would enjoy every minute. He was pleased that she was finally openly discussing her wants and limits and didn’t want to spook her into retreating again. He could work with the limits she’d mentioned to try to get her to articulate more. He made note of them, and then looked up to find her watching him as if waiting for his reaction to her preferences.

“What else turns you on to watch that you think you’d enjoy trying out, or that you know you would enjoy?”

Her jaw firmed, as if she were clenching her teeth to make sure no words escaped before she could carefully evaluate them.

He wanted to take her in hand and start helping her discover what she enjoyed and what she didn’t, but forced himself to try the less hands-on approach first. “You said you were interested in being restrained and at the mercy of a Dom you’re comfortable with, but you’re not sure how you would react. Have you ever tried spreader bars or restraints in any fashion?”

“Master Scott did use some basic hand restraints and blindfolds. He also used spreader bars a few times, and the way he used them was titillating and arousing. He had even started to introduce me to light swatting with a flogger. But...”

Brent clenched his fists against the urge to walk around the desk and gather her into

his arms, stroking her to pleasure again and showing her she could feel safe telling him her story. But he stopped himself, knowing from her reaction that she wasn't yet ready to spill all the details. He'd have to go slowly and pull the information out of her in stages.

"When Diego used them you weren't comfortable?" His blood raged, and he wanted nothing more than to have his fingers around Diego's throat. Instead, he took a deep breath and made a valiant effort not to look murderous, although he definitely still felt that way.

She nodded and he quickly changed the subject, not wanting her to retreat so far that she couldn't discuss this subject at all. He had to understand more about her limits, and he got the impression she needed to articulate them, so he would have to probe gently. "So spreader bars and possibly some restraints as long as there is trust and a slower pace might be all right?" He glanced up to gauge her reaction before he made a note to that effect on the paper in front of him.

"Are you all right with intercourse during a scene or at the culmination of a scene?"

At her suddenly dark expression he added, "As long as you aren't pushed, and the Dom pays attention to your nonverbal clues, as well as your safe words and stated limits?"

"Yes." Relief was evident in her voice, which was now a little stronger. "Under those circumstances and with a condom I would welcome full intercourse."

Condom use was fairly common practice, and here at Club Desire it was the rule on the dungeon floor even for collared subs and their monogamous Doms.

But he knew that wasn't always followed religiously in other clubs. And apparently it wasn't at Mason's if Sandra felt the need to state that as a stipulation. Brent remembered in college that when Mason had taken him to his first dungeon, Mason hadn't always used condoms during his play sessions, and it hadn't been required at that particular dungeon. Although in the past decade more and more clubs were making that a rule. Brent firmly believed it was a necessary one.

"All right. We'll explore a little more of your limits as time goes on."

Her pink tongue darted out to taste her full bottom lip, and heat streaked through him as he realized he had said "we," as in the two of them together would explore her limits. He couldn't regret the slip of the tongue, and Sandra didn't look like she minded, so he moved on with what he'd been about to say. "Let's discuss some mundane business. What's your address?" He poised the pen over that line on her information sheet.

"I don't have a place yet. For now I'm staying with a friend from high school. But I can't infringe on her hospitality for too long." She blew out a slow breath, her expression showing she was starting to feel a bit overwhelmed. "I need to find a job and either pay her rent or find my own place."

Brent's lips tightened into a hard line. A friend from high school. He would need to tell Sandra who he was before he ever met her roommate. Although, unless the friend came to the club or frequented the kink or fetish scene, it was unlikely they would meet. Besides, anyone who knew him in high school would be hard pressed to recognize him now. Satisfied that it wasn't yet the right time to tell Sandra the truth, he moved on.

“What’s her address?”

Sandra pulled a cell phone out of a deep pocket in the side of her skirt before reading off the address to him.

He noted it, and then asked for Sandra’s cell number and added that to her profile.

“Emergency contact information?”

She looked distinctly uncomfortable for a moment as if searching for someone to list in that capacity, but then her expression cleared and she straightened and lifted her chin. “I don’t have any family, so use my roommate, Michelle Emery.”

Brent nodded. He remembered Michelle. She had always been quiet and ran in the popular crowd with Sandra. She had been peripherally aware of him, but he didn’t think they’d ever spoken during the entire four years of high school. Which had been rare for the more popular kids. Most of them had gone out of their way to spew their disapproval on him purely for being an outcast and not enough like them to be one of the popular kids. But not Sandra, and not Michelle.

“What type of work are you looking for?” he asked, wondering if any of his contacts could be of use in this situation.

She cleared her throat. “I have a bachelor’s degree in Business from NYU. I’ve worked on and off for different companies as an office manager. When I finally decided to leave New York and come back to Phoenix, I gave notice and got the hell out of there.” A dark shadow crossed her expression and she blew out a long breath before continuing. “I had spent six long months dealing with...well, it was time for me to leave, and I figured I could find a job here doing something similar, but the Phoenix job market seems rather tight right now.”

Brent filed through his mental Rolodex and nodded to show Sandra he had heard her as some likely names came to mind. “I have a few contacts who are always looking for talent in that area. If it’s all right with you, I can give them a call on Monday and see if any are looking for an office manager or something similar.”

Her throat worked as if she were deciding what to say. “I’d appreciate it if it’s not too much trouble.”

He pulled a notepad closer and jotted down a note, even though he knew he wouldn’t forget one bit of their conversation, or any nuance of her entire time spent here tonight. He’d always had the natural ability to remember minute details. It had served him well in business, but sometimes wreaked havoc on his personal life since he could relive every moment of things like his tormented high school existence. He returned his attention to Sandra.

“No trouble at all. I’ll call you when I know more. Until then, perhaps you’d like to come back tomorrow night and meet the rest of the Doms? I’m sure you’d like to get to know them and see if you click with any of them enough to feel comfortable playing some scenes.” He took deep breaths against the urge to tell her she wouldn’t be playing any scenes with anyone but him.

She would make her own choice, and he would let her.

Even to himself that didn't sound very convincing.

He glanced down, realizing his fingers were curled into tight fists and he was close to breaking the fountain pen he still clutched between his fingers.

She cleared her throat in what sounded like a self-conscious gesture. "I would enjoy meeting the other Doms, and I'm not sure if it's even an option, but I've already clicked with you, and I think I would enjoy playing some scenes with you."

Brent's blood surged. She had asked specifically for him, and he now had no reason to disagree. "I'm honored, Sandra." He forced himself to treat this situation exactly like he would with any other sub, and he switched out of his Dungeon Master role and into his Dom mode effortlessly. "As I said before, I encourage honest feedback from my subs. If I push you too hard or too fast, I expect you to yellow or red until you decide on more personal safe words. And then we'll discuss in aftercare if any of your limits need to be updated. I also expect you to take good care of yourself. Make sure you eat and rest before you come to the dungeon, and don't come here at all if you're not feeling well."

He watched her as he spoke, and her features relaxed as if a heavy weight had suddenly been lifted off her shoulders. "Are we clear?"

When she didn't answer, he reminded himself that he couldn't punish her like he would his other subs. Spanking her wasn't an option at this juncture, but he would find other effective ways. "Sandra?" he snapped, and captured her gaze as she looked up to meet his. "When I ask you a question I expect an answer. Are we clear?" He put unmistakable command in his voice.

She raised her chin and a small smile played at the edges of her lips. "Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir. I hadn't expected to find such a strong connection to a Dom on my very first night. In fact I wasn't even sure I'd be granted membership."

He walked around the desk to stand in front of her.

Her pupils dilated and her lips parted as she openly stared at his cock, which was now at eye level. He could tell she wanted to reach out and touch him, and he smiled. He had found his effective means of punishment when needed. He had also found an incentive for her. He wondered if she'd had punishments for behavior violations from Master Scott before he left. Brent wouldn't even consider Diego a proper Dom.

"Let's begin. Were you ever asked to assume a submissive position and wait?"

"It's been a while." She looked sheepish, glancing up at him from under her lashes.

"When I tell you to assume that position I expect you to get on the floor like you were on all fours and then lean back and sit on your calves with your knees spread. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir." Her breathing became deeper and slightly faster.

"Good, and when you come to the dungeon floor make sure you aren't wearing anything that you don't want ripped or stained. Also don't wear anything flowing or too tight fitting that will get in the way of our play. Understood?"

"Yes sir. What would you like me to wear, sir?"

Brent reveled in her easy acceptance of him as her Dom, and in the fact that she was

his, at least for their playtime in the dungeon. And until she decided if she'd like to play with more than one Dom, he reminded himself.

He clenched his jaw against telling her there would be no other Dom. He hadn't completely lost his control. Any sub he took on deserved his best protection for her highest good, and if it was for Sandra's highest good to split her playtime between him and another Dom or several other Doms, he wouldn't discourage her.

"A thong and tank top, or even nothing at all would be best for our purposes." He watched her frown at his last suggestion and added, "Although you need to decide what you're most comfortable with. If you prefer something else within those limits, we'll work with it. But if you choose shorts or a short skirt or something like that, don't bother with any panties underneath. You won't need them, and you certainly won't be wearing them long."

"Yes, sir." Her expression looked nothing short of ravenous, and it made his balls tighten and his cock jerk to see her staring up at him like that. He took a deep breath and mentally shook himself. He couldn't let her shatter his concentration and control like this. It wouldn't be good for either of them. But no other sub and no other woman had ever affected him like this, and while he couldn't regret that his fantasies regarding Sandra were about to come true—at least some of them—he knew playing with her would test every bit of discipline he'd worked to develop over the years to fulfill his duties as her Dom.

"Assume your submissive position and wait. I'll be right back."

He took the opportunity to go into the restroom that connected with his office through a door in the back corner. He quickly changed out of his dress slacks and dress shirt and into the leather pants and black T-shirt that he wore on the dungeon floor during play.

When he returned to his office Sandra was on the floor in the submissive position he'd outlined, and wore only her thin bra. He fisted his hands to keep from grabbing her. He needed to do this right.

"You've been a good sub. I think it's time for a small reward."

She looked up at him, surprise flashing across her features.

"A reward, sir?"

Her voice was so tentative, he wondered if she'd only been given punishments in her other play sessions. He would have to talk to Mason about his club's philosophies and oversight. Very few people could speak to Mason in such a way about his club and retain his friendship, but Brent knew he was on that short list.

"Sandra, I've caught you several times staring at my cock. What were you thinking about doing with it if given the chance?"

She sucked in a breath as she met his gaze. "Sir, I wanted to stroke it, to rub my thumb over the tip to feel the creamy wetness of the pre-come there. To take it in my mouth and down my throat, to see what you taste like."

Brent adjusted his stance as his cock twitched and his balls tightened hard against his body at the erotic picture she painted.

Apparently her rewards would be his, and her punishments would also be his.

“Then you’ll have to remember to be on very good behavior if you want to have all of that.”

“Yes, sir.” Her face shone with happiness and her tongue darted out to moisten her full bottom lip, making Brent wish he could take her right here on the floor.

But not only did she deserve better, she needed to be eased into things, and he wanted the first time he took her to be something she would always remember. Something that had taken her higher than she’d ever gone.

“For now, how about we start with you taking my cock out and stroking it. You are allowed to explore, but not to taste...yet. Do you understand your limits?”

She nodded and reached for him, and after a telling long second she dropped her hand back to her side. “Yes, sir.”

“Good, Sandra. Very good. You may continue.”

Chapter 7

Sandra swallowed hard. She reached out slowly and laid her hand over the large bulge at the front of Master Brent's leather pants. Even through the smooth material she could feel the heat pulsing off the hard outline of his cock.

Her mouth watered and she had to forcibly remind herself she couldn't taste him. At least not yet. But that was just more incentive to learn how to be his sub, and learn it quickly.

She slipped open the button on his pants and then slowly pulled down Master Brent's zipper. The metal slid effortlessly open and gave her a better view of the cloth-covered bulge that outlined his erection.

She glanced up to find him watching her.

Heat seared through her at the raw hunger in his steady gaze. Reluctantly breaking that contact, she returned her attention to her task. She slid her fingers inside the fly of the boxer briefs and sucked in a breath at the hot, firm feel of him.

Her mouth watered as she tried to imagine what Master Brent tasted like. She'd found that she really enjoyed having a nice, hard cock in her mouth. The spicy or even sweet and salty taste bursting over her tongue, and the thrust of it in her throat as she took all that was offered, always made her pussy ache to be filled. And now even the thought of all of that with Master Brent had the same effect, only more intense.

Damn, she really needed to come again. But not willing to risk a punishment, she took a breath and firmed her resolve to be the best sub Master Brent had ever had.

She explored his thick length, stroking him as much as she could within the confines of his open pants and his boxer briefs. "You have a very nice cock, sir. I can imagine having it inside me...in several different scenarios."

Impossibly, he hardened further in her hand as she continued to stroke him. She glanced up to find his intense blue gaze on her and lost herself in the command she saw there. Only then did she look back at his cock and allow herself to trace her thumb up and over the wide tip to find the drop of creamy pre-come she had known would be there.

She thrilled at the slick warmth of it and took a moment to enjoy spreading it over the swollen head and causing a rumbling sound of need in the back of Master Brent's throat.

Her entire body ached, and she reached down with her free hand to stroke her clit as she continued to slide her hand up and down his thick shaft.

Master Brent leaned forward and closed his hand over hers and pulled it away from him.

Confusion churned, and she glanced up to find his stern expression pinning her in place.

"Did I give you permission to touch your clit?"

Her mind raced, and she huffed as she realized she'd overstepped her permissions, quickly followed by the knowledge that she wasn't cringing away from Master Brent's

punishments as she had with Diego. She trusted him to take care of her. “No, sir. I’m sorry, sir. I got caught up in the moment.”

He nodded. “You’ll learn to stay within your bounds. You’ll learn that when you do I will always take care of your needs. Remember that.”

She blew out a slow breath as disappointment arrowed deep. She badly needed to come, but knew that she would now have to wait until she got back to Michelle’s apartment and went to bed. Her pussy clenched at the loss of what could have happened tonight, but she consoled herself that there would be many other nights. Many more possibilities, and she vowed to learn to be the best sub Master Brent could ever hope for. She would be so good at it that he would forget every other sub he had ever played with.

“Sandra?” Master Brent’s voice was laced with both concern and censure, and Sandra realized she’d let herself become distracted. “Yes, sir. I’m sorry again, sir.” She scrambled to remember the last thing he’d said...that he would always take care of her needs if she was a good sub. She thrilled at the thought. “Yes, sir. I will definitely remember that.”

“It’s time for our play to end, and for you to rest. Will you be here at the Club tomorrow night?”

She nodded quickly, hoping she didn’t look too needy or desperate, even though she was feeling both right now.

“I’ll see you tomorrow then.” He zipped up, and a sharp stab of disappointment assaulted her.

He tapped her gently on the end of the nose and she couldn’t help but smile. Master Brent seemed to always know when she needed to smile. “Don’t forget to eat and take care of yourself, and bring back the contract with any questions. I’ll meet you in the locker room waiting area tomorrow evening at seven?”

She thought about the day she had planned—laundry and cleaning house—her payment to Michelle for letting her stay there until she found a job. She had also promised to make lasagna. She could do all of that and be here by seven p.m. to meet Master Brent. She nodded up at him with anticipation churning through her. “Yes, sir.”

Master Brent nodded, reached into his desk drawer, and pulled out a combination lock and a small slip of paper before laying it in her palm and closing her fingers over it.

“Stand up and come here.”

Sandra pushed up from the floor and straightened in front of him.

He pulled her against him and threaded his fingers through the hair at her nape, holding her in place while he brought his lips down roughly on hers and kissed her senseless for several long moments before breaking the kiss and stepping away.

—

At the brisk knocks against the front door of his suite, Brent smiled and glanced up from where he’d been making himself some late-night hot decaf tea. He needed to calm his mind and body if he ever hoped to get any sleep, so coffee or any type of caffeine

definitely wasn't on the menu.

He'd been expecting this visit ever since he'd given Sandra the tour. He just wasn't sure which of the Doms had come with Dex, or if the big man had come alone. "Come on in," he called loud enough for whoever was at the door to hear.

When only Dex entered a minute later, Brent nodded in greeting as he finished pouring cream into his tea. "I figured I'd see you soon. Would you like some tea?"

Dex grimaced, as Brent knew he would.

"You don't have any coffee? You know I can't stand that stuff you love to drink."

Brent gestured to the small coffeemaker that sat on the counter a few feet away. "Be my guest. You know where everything is. That way we can both have our drink of choice while you grill me."

Brent left Dex to make his coffee and sat in his recliner in the lavish living area.

When Dex returned with a steaming cup in his hand, he cleared his throat as he sat on the love seat directly across from Brent. "So who is she?" He pinned Brent with an intense gaze. "And don't give me any bullshit. I heard about the scene in the elevator, and when the two of you came down to the dungeon floor it was plain to see both the sparks and the history that flowed between you. So let's hear it."

Brent took a drink of tea and then blew out a long breath. "Sandra and I went to the same high school." He fell silent in the vain hope that Dex would accept that as a full explanation, but he knew better.

"And?" Dex pressed, a hint of impatience creeping into his tone.

Brent tensed at the tone and then forced himself to relax. Dex was a good friend. He was concerned, and he had an interest in Club Desire and its inner workings. "I told you how horrible high school and even early college were for me. I was a totally different person then. And Sandra..." He let his words trail off, not sure how much he wanted to say. He didn't plan to be up for several more hours dissecting the personal details of his life, and Dex was relentless when presented with what he considered interesting information.

Dex studied him and Brent met his gaze squarely, knowing that anything else would only sharpen his friend's curiosity.

Finally Dex dropped his gaze and smiled. "All right. So I think I've got the picture. Just from looking at Sandra, let me guess. She was one of the popular kids? If she looked anything like she does now back in high school, I can't imagine her being in the outcast nerd population like you were. She's freaking gorgeous." He cocked his head to the side in question, and Brent remained silent. He should have known Dex would assess the situation correctly. The man worked for the FBI as a very high-level analyst. Not much got past him, which was both a great asset to Club Desire and a major pain in the ass for Brent personally.

Dex shifted in his chair before taking a generous sip of coffee. "So what's the problem? You were acting like you were marking your territory down on the dungeon floor. I've never seen you like that with any woman, especially not a sub. And while Sandra had eyes

for no one but you, she seemed incredibly unsure of herself and tentative about your attention. So what gives? Something just isn't adding up."

Brent steeled himself for the next phase of the conversation. He wasn't sure how his friend would react, but he knew how *he* would react if their situations were reversed. "She doesn't realize who I am yet."

A bark of laughter boomed from Dex before he relaxed back against his chair. "The plot thickens. All right. I can see how she might not recognize you. You once showed me a few pictures of you from high school, and man, I've got to tell you, even if I'd been your best friend back then I probably wouldn't recognize you now. When are you going to tell her? You know you have to."

His direct gaze drilled into Brent, who met it squarely. "It hasn't been the right time yet. But I do plan to tell her."

Dex shook his head. "You're playing with fire, man. I assume she's already a member and has asked you to be her Dom by now."

It wasn't a question, so Brent didn't bother to respond. Dex was only telling him what he already knew.

"The future revelation of who you really are is going to damage the trust between you. And it's my job as your friend and someone who helped you set up this place to tell you that you need to find a way to tell her as soon as possible. Before you both get in too deep."

Brent unclenched his jaw. "I plan to. And I know it sounds like I'm making excuses, but due to the circumstances..." He pulled Mason's note out of his pocket. "Did you ever meet my friend Mason?"

Dex shook his head. "No, but you've told me about him. Owns a dungeon in New York, right?"

Brent nodded and handed Dex the note.

After scanning the note, Dex muttered, "Shit. No wonder she looks like a scared rabbit about to bolt. Do you know exactly what happened?"

Brent shook his head. "I'm going to call Mason in the morning. I have some suspicions from her limits, but I have a feeling there's much more than I know or even suspect."

Dex shifted in his chair. "You know this makes it even more important that you don't damage her trust. It's obvious that you're her Dom of choice. I can be her friend, but even if she chose to do scenes with me, we'd never have the connection you two obviously already have."

Dex's words echoed Brent's view of the situation. He would prefer that he be Sandra's only Dom, but in the end if it was best for her to play elsewhere he would support her choice. But he'd already seen her with Dex, and she'd shown no signs of being the least bit attracted to the big man. Brent was ashamed to admit that he'd been relieved. Dex was one of the most sought-after Doms in the dungeon. The man might work mostly a desk job, but he took care of himself. Like Brent, Dex held a black belt in karate and judo, and his vigilant training showed in his physique.

“Thanks for being a good friend, Dex. I’ll do the right thing for her. After I talk to Mason I’ll give you an update so if Sandra does need a friend to talk to who isn’t her Dom, you’ll be armed with information.”

Dex nodded and stood, his chair scraping quietly against the tile as it moved back. “Until then, do you mind if I try to dig into this a little more?” He held up the note from Mason.

There was very limited information other than Diego’s first name, but Brent was sure Dex could find the restraining order and go from there. He nodded, grateful for any help or information his friend could offer.

Dex tucked the note in his pocket. “Oh, and Brent. Try to get some sleep. You look like crap.”

Brent laughed. Dex didn’t sugarcoat, and Brent had always liked that about him. It was something they had in common.

Chapter 8

Light speared Sandra in the face and she winced away from it, trying to burrow under the covers. But her restless night had hopelessly tangled her sheets. When she couldn't find her pillow either, she settled for draping her arm over her eyes to block out the stripes of bright light that streamed in through the blinds.

Her cell buzzed on the nightstand and she reached for it automatically. She started to click it over to voicemail since she didn't recognize the number, but she'd been doing that for the past few hours, and whoever was calling kept calling back.

She had nearly answered at six a.m., thinking for some odd reason it might be Brent calling from a different number than the one he'd given her last night, but the area code wasn't right. From the area code flashing on the screen it was someone in New York. But anyone she would want to talk to right now she had programmed into her phone, so his or her name would come up on her display, not just a generic-looking number.

Yet since whoever was calling had been insistent, it might be important, so she finally gave in, huffed, and answered. "Hello?"

"It's about time, Sandra," a too-familiar growl carried across the line.

Her blood iced over and she sat up so fast that her head swam.

Diego.

He'd called her from a different number and she'd fallen for it. She'd let her guard down after last night, thinking she would never feel so helpless and alone again. She'd let herself forget about him for a while. Did he know where she'd gone? And if so was he already here?

She took a deep breath, trying to think calmly even as her heart raced and she broke out in a cold sweat. He couldn't get her location just by calling her cell. At least she didn't think he could.

"I did *not* give you permission to go anywhere, Sandra. You'll be severely punished. And I expect you to meet me at the dungeon at seven tonight."

It took her a minute to realize he meant the dungeon in New York, not Club Desire. Yet even with the knowledge that he was still most likely in New York, bile inched its way up the back of her throat until she thought she would vomit.

He'd made her live in fear for the last few months. But no more. This couldn't go on.

She clenched her teeth and hung up.

She held her breath, her entire body tense until she scrolled through her call history and blocked that number. It wouldn't keep him from calling her from another phone, but that one action made her feel at least a tiny bit more in control of her situation. She blew out her breath when her lungs protested, hoping some of the fear and helplessness would go with it.

She wished she had told him to go to hell. But the jangle of nerves inside her belly and the metallic taste of fear on the back of her tongue told her she hadn't been ready for that

kind of bravado yet.

She needed to find a job. Then she could afford to change her cell number. She would have to figure out how much it would cost so she could budget for it. That was a priority. Once it was changed, she would have to let everyone who mattered know her new number without telling them where she'd gone or why. Her old roommate knew, and the Doms from New York, but she wasn't ready to retell the story to all the other people who might need to reach her.

One thing at a time.

She wasn't sure how she would hide where she'd gone since any new number she got in Phoenix would most likely have the local area code, and she wasn't sure if everyone would keep her number a secret, even if she asked. She would have to see if her cell service could change her number to one with an area code elsewhere...anywhere but here. There were national carriers, after all. There had to be a way, and she would find it. She just wasn't sure if any of those on her so-called trusted list would either purposely or inadvertently share the new number with Diego.

A shudder ran through her, and she clenched her fingers into fists to fight the effects of that thought.

Until she had the number changed, she would only answer calls from people she knew. But she refused to live the rest of her life looking over her shoulder, scared to death that Diego would find her again.

Sick dread pooled in her stomach like acid. Her head pounded, and her body shook as the sudden flood of adrenaline from her fear ran its course, leaving her hollowed out and weak.

When the phone vibrated again, she yelped and nearly dropped it. But after gulping in a few desperate breaths she saw Master Brent's name flash across the screen, and she scrambled to answer it.

"Hello?" She hated that her voice sounded thin and scared, but she hadn't had any time to recover and compose herself.

"Sandra, what's wrong?" Brent's deep voice brought back memories of last night and she longed for the confidence she'd dared to feel in his office.

"Sandra, answer me. What's wrong?"

Both concern and command laced his voice, and it ripped her out of the pit of despair she'd fallen into. With too much whirling through her overtaxed brain, she settled for the first word that came to mind.

"Diego."

"Is he there?" Brent's voice was dagger sharp.

"No. He called me." She gripped the phone like a lifeline as she spoke.

"I'm on my way." The strength in his voice calmed her a little. Enough to battle back the bile inching its way up her throat. "Stay inside with the doors locked. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

Diego slammed down the phone and cursed, scaring the young woman at the counter who had let him use it despite the restaurant's policy.

"Sorry," he mumbled and then walked away, headed outside to rein in his temper. He needed to calm down. He couldn't afford to bring attention to himself. As it was, if that woman or any of the patrons who were nearby were asked about him, his odd behavior would stand out.

He cursed again as he slid into his car and forced himself to pull the door shut behind him rather than slamming it.

How dare that bitch disappear? He hadn't been able to find her anywhere in the last week. And thanks to her damn restraining order, no one at the dungeon would tell him where she'd gone, and her roommate wouldn't talk. Not to mention the damn police had been shadowing him anytime he came close to the dungeon. But since Sandra had made herself scarce they'd started to let their guard down, and that was his opening.

He'd told her to meet him tonight at the dungeon to make her think she'd be safe with all the other Doms around who had tried to protect her from him before.

But he knew that if he could just get her to show up, he'd be able to grab her either on the way in or the way out. Both options would work for him...as long as she didn't let anyone else touch her. That wasn't allowed. He'd made it clear to her that he'd end her if she ever let that happen.

A slight miscalculation on his part, he had to admit. The day after he'd told her that, he'd been served with a restraining order and he'd run into a wall of both Doms and police who tried to keep him away from her.

But then she'd disappeared without a word, refusing to answer her phone or return any of his calls. Which was frustrating, since he had to keep calling from different numbers. He wasn't stupid enough to use his cell or his home number to call and violate the damn restraining order, even though his current identity was just one of his many aliases.

He hadn't used his real identity in about a decade now. But he didn't want to give the cops any reason to dig into his past. There were too many things they might start wanting answers to.

Sandra could be lying low staying with friends or hiding out at a hotel somewhere. Damn the bitch for doing this.

He owned her, body and soul. She might not know it yet, but she would. The weak were put on this earth to be preyed on by the strong. And he was definitely one of the strong. The fact that most of the so-called civilized world didn't agree with him was their issue. He knew he should move on and find another woman, but Sandra was the first who had slipped through his grasp before he was done with her, and he wouldn't allow that failure to taunt him.

No, he would find her. And she would pay.

Brent pulled up outside the small house Sandra shared with her friend from high school, Michelle. His senses were on high alert watching for anything threatening, especially the man who had terrorized Sandra.

It was in an older neighborhood, so there were lots of large trees and shrubs where someone could hide. He scanned the area around the house for anything or anyone out of place, but found nothing. Rather than breathing a sigh of relief, he tensed further. The fear in Sandra's voice when he'd spoken to her had cut through him, and he swore he'd make her feel safe again.

Here in Phoenix. With him.

He shook his head, forcefully reminding himself that even though he was her Dom now, that might be where their connection ended. He would have to keep in mind whatever was for Sandra's highest good regardless of his personal feelings. He made a silent promise to himself that he would.

After hanging up with Sandra, he'd immediately called Dex to update him. Even though Dex worked for the FBI, he also had several very good friends with the Phoenix Police Department. Brent wasn't sure they'd be needed, but if Sandra had felt the need to file a restraining order against Diego in New York, the situation was bad enough that police might be needed.

And worst case, Phoenix PD could keep Brent from killing the guy.

He smiled grimly at the thought as he noted the thin frame door on the house and the several cutouts filled with glass that decorated the top half. He sighed and made a mental note to look at the safety and security of this place. The door cracked open and Sandra's pale face appeared.

Brent could tell right away that she was still rattled, but she didn't seem to be in any immediate danger. He needed to get her away from here at least for a while. Somewhere to distance her from the emotions Diego's call had caused. Then they could deal with how to make sure it wasn't repeated. And beyond that, to ensure Diego would never find her again.

"Sandra. How are you doing?" He gently pushed the door farther open, which forced her to step back to let him in. She was shaking, so he wrapped his arms around her, pulling her against him. She immediately melted into his embrace.

She bit her bottom lip and then sucked in a breath before tipping her head back to look up at him. "I'm okay. I just need to get hold of myself. I'll be fine."

Her words were still shaky, but they showed at least a small hint of the confident woman he'd seen a spark of last night. Still, he knew even the strongest individuals could be shaken to the core.

"It's all right." He rubbed small circles over her back, basking in her warmth. He slowly guided her toward the couch and pulled her down next to him so he could tuck her against him.

Her eyes were glossy, showing him how close to tears she still was below the thin veneer of confidence she was working hard to show.

“Thank you for coming, Master Brent. I’m all right. Truly.” She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth again and worried it for a few long seconds. “It caught me off guard. I’ve blocked the number he called from, but that won’t stop him from finding somewhere else to call from. I just won’t answer any numbers I don’t recognize.” Her voice ended on a combination of a small sob and a frustrated sigh.

Brent understood feeling powerless, and he hated that he saw that same knowledge in Sandra’s eyes. “You know, Dex holds a self-defense class on Monday nights down in Basement 4. No kink, only self-defense lessons, if you’re interested. I told the Doms, managers, and security staff about Diego so we can be on the lookout for him. But it might also make you feel better to know you can defend yourself if it’s ever needed.”

She tipped her face to look up at him and he could clearly see tearstains from where she’d been crying before he arrived. He took her face in his hands, gently feathering his thumbs over her soft cheeks before he lowered his lips to brush hers.

She needed tenderness and care right now, not arousal or sex. This might not be aftercare from playing a scene, but Brent had become very good at reading what people needed at any given moment. That had fueled not only his business success but also his success as a dungeon owner and a Dom. That attention to people’s needs had made him a popular Dom. But he’d had several subs who had finally left to find other Doms because he wouldn’t collar them. He cared for them, but he didn’t love them, and he wouldn’t offer his collar or his ring unless that emotion was involved.

Slowly, Sandra’s shaking lessened and then stopped. She laid her smaller hand over his, her palm cool to the touch rather than warm like it had been last night.

“Thanks for being here, Master Brent. I let my guard down after last night. It was stupid of me.” She met his gaze squarely even though her bottom lip wobbled, showing how hard she was trying to at least appear strong. It was a start.

He still needed to get her somewhere safer as soon as possible.

She cleared her throat. “I would be interested in Dex’s class if he has room.”

A wave of warmth filled him. She might be timid in some areas, but she was a fighter. Even if she didn’t realize it yet. “I’m sure he does. Let’s find out.” He fished his phone out of his pocket and hit speed dial for his friend. He pressed the speaker button as soon as it started to ring.

“Brent, buddy, what’s up?” came Dex’s booming voice over the phone line.

“Hey, Dex, you’re on speaker. I’m here with Sandra at her house in Glendale. She had an unexpected call from Diego this morning and she’s a little spooked. I told her about your self-defense class and she wants to see if you have any room left for her to join you.”

“Sandra, are you there, sweetheart?” Dex’s voice was gentle, but he still spoke to her as a strong Dom, showing he expected an answer.

Sandra turned toward the phone Brent still held in his hand. “I’m here, Master Dex.”

Brent was glad even more strength had returned to her voice.

“There’s always room for more in my classes. Monday night at six p.m. Wear something comfortable that you can move well in, like shorts or yoga pants.” The distant sounds of

traffic in the background made Brent wonder where Dex was.

He spoke again, his deep voice filling the line and covering the background noise. "For the women, I usually tell them to wear sports bras if they have one. Try not to eat for three or four hours before class unless you need to. We do a lot of kicking, punching, and moving around, and being full isn't a good combination with that. But several of us usually go grab dinner at the Irish pub down the street afterward. You're welcome to join us."

Sandra lifted her chin to meet Brent's gaze. "I'd like that, Master Dex. I'll see you Monday night. Thanks."

"Take care, sweetheart. And don't worry. Everything will be fine. We'll take care of you. You're one of ours now."

"Thanks, Master Dex," she said right before he hung up.

Brent took her chin between his fingers. "Now tell me about Diego's call. Everything you remember, anything you might have heard in the background, any hunches you might have about where he is. Anything that sticks in your mind."

As Sandra outlined the call and her assumption about Diego still being in New York, Brent catalogued details to tell Dex later. If he could get this guy on some type of watch list it would help. And if anyone had the connections to make that happen, it was Dex.

His friend had been in on several manhunts across the nation. High-profile ones the general public knew nothing about. Brent probably shouldn't have been privy to them, but two years ago Dex had gotten into trouble and needed Brent's help to get out, so Brent had not only helped, but had become a sounding board and confidant.

An attractive brunette with large blue eyes and a full figure came through the front door and stopped short when she saw him and Sandra on the couch.

Brent tensed waiting for any flicker of recognition on Michelle's features, but as the seconds ticked by and there was no change in her expression, the muscles in his neck and shoulders slowly unknotted. He looked nothing like he had in high school, so wasn't surprised she didn't recognize him, but there was always that chance.

He needed to tell Sandra who he really was soon so she didn't find out accidentally.

Sandra straightened, pulling away from him. "Michelle. This is M...Master Brent," she said. She sounded flustered, as if Michelle had caught them naked on the rug instead of fully clothed on the couch. Brent wondered what was throwing her off about being caught with him. She'd called him "Master Brent" in front of Michelle, so he was reasonably confident Sandra had told her friend about Club Desire and the lifestyle.

Michelle raked a thorough gaze over Brent as if evaluating a horse she was about to buy. Brent had gotten used to women looking at him this way, but it was disconcerting that it was someone from high school. Someone who had definitely never looked at him like this back then.

Finally Michelle seemed to shake herself out of her detailed perusal. "Brent. Hello." She came nearer and held out her hand. "I heard a lot about you last night after Sandra got home." She flashed a smile.

Brent stood and took her offered hand. "Hello," he said lamely instead of the normal "nice to meet you." That would be an outright lie, since he'd already met her several years ago.

After a long moment of holding on to his hand, and an awkward silence settling over the room, Michelle transferred her intense gaze to Sandra. "Sandra, you've been crying. What happened?" Michelle dropped Brent's hand and her too-friendly gaze turned into a glare aimed straight at him until Sandra's voice broke through the tension.

"I'm all right. But Diego called me." Her face darkened, the fear still lingering in her eyes. "Master Brent came as soon as he found out."

Michelle raked one last gaze over Sandra and inclined her head to Brent. "Thank you for taking care of her. She's had a rough time of it." She nudged him out of the way and sat next to Sandra on the couch, hugging her and patting her back.

Brent wondered how much Michelle knew about Sandra's involvement at both dungeons. Obviously at least enough not to blink at the use of his title. If she knew about Diego, she probably knew at least something about Sandra's time in the lifestyle. But he would leave that to Sandra. It wasn't his story to tell. And whatever she'd told Michelle was between the two women.

"Thank you for giving her a place to stay." He took a breath, searching for the best way to phrase his next question without offending her. "Would you mind if I had a friend of mine who is a security specialist contact you? This is an older house, and I want to make sure you're both safe."

Pink stained Michelle's cheeks. "I can't afford a security system right now, but thanks." Her tone was curt and dismissive.

Brent winced. She thought he was trying to sell her something. "I'm sorry. You misunderstand me. He'll send any bills to me. I only want to make sure there aren't any security vulnerabilities here that Diego or anyone else could exploit."

Michelle pursed her lips and glanced between him and Sandra. "Thank you. I apologize for my assumption. I haven't met too many people who don't have an ulterior motive for offering to do something nice." She fell silent for a long moment before continuing. "I know you want to keep Sandra safe from Diego."

"I'd like to keep everyone safe from Diego. But you two might be the ones in his path right now." Brent ground his teeth at the thought of Diego getting anywhere near these women.

Michelle nodded. "We appreciate it." She stood, giving Sandra's hand one last squeeze. "I've got things to do, so I'll leave you two alone. It was nice to meet you, Brent." She flashed him a smile and one more appraising glance before she left the room.

Sandra looked a bit stronger, as if she'd soaked up some of her friend's strength and calm. Brent brushed his thumb over her bottom lip, enjoying the way her eyes dilated as she watched him dip his head until he could capture her lips.

She opened for him and he took, deepening the kiss as heat seared between them.

Chapter 9

Nearly drowning in the sensations that Master Brent was stirring with his very thorough kiss, Sandra sucked in a breath and pushed away from him.

Concern and a touch of surprise flowed across his handsome features, nearly making her laugh. He was a Dom, and a very good one if she was any judge, so he probably wasn't used to women pulling back from his kisses, or from anything else he had to offer for that matter.

He laid a gentle hand on her shoulder, his intense blue gaze clearly showing concern. "Are you all right?"

She nodded lamely as she searched her sluggish brain for anything to say to explain what was going on inside her right now. She finally settled on, "It's been a long day already and I'll bet it's not even lunchtime." A quick glance over at Michelle's grandfather clock showed her it was still early for lunch, but just barely.

Brent nodded, his expression gentle and caring, which sent another surge of warmth through her. "Why don't we get you out of here for a while so you can put some emotional distance between you and what happened this morning?"

Diego.

Master Brent was trying not to say that name in front of her, and she appreciated it. "I have things I need to do before I head to Club Desire tonight." Although if she were totally honest, she just needed to take a long nap, eat, shower, and dress. Then she would be ready. Or at least she hoped she would.

She wasn't worried about Master Brent and what he would do to her tonight. She already trusted him, and his racing over here this morning after he'd heard Diego called had only confirmed that. She was more worried about herself and her reactions to the intensity that burned between them.

She longed to be normal. To be more like all the other subs she had met. But since she couldn't wish away her past, she would just have to move forward from where she was.

"Are you even up for Desire tonight?" He traced his thumb over her bottom lip again as he pinned her with a gentle but insistent gaze. "It would be totally understandable if you wanted to take a lazy, relaxing day and night for yourself at this point."

Disappointment threatened and she shook her head. "I've been looking forward to tonight. That's one of the things that's kept me going, so I'd still really like to keep our plans."

His gaze softened and he nipped at her bottom lip, chuckling at her startled laughter. "All right. Then if you're comfortable, why don't you bring a bag with you and you can shower and get ready at Desire."

Sandra thought about it for a moment. The idea of spending the day with him lifted some of the load of fear and dread she'd been battling since Diego's call. "I'd like that. Let me go pack a quick bag. I'll be right back."

A few hours later they were back in Master Brent's car, headed to Club Desire. They had already stopped for lunch, and had gotten her cell number changed, thanks to Master Brent. It still had a Phoenix area code, but since changing the number with the proof of the restraining order had been free and immediate, she didn't want to deal with the extra several steps of getting a number outside of the current area code that didn't match her billing address.

She would only give her new number to those she trusted implicitly. And Master Brent had given the number Diego had called her from to the proper authorities. She wasn't sure exactly whom he had called to report it to, but he had assured her that if the number could be traced back to Diego, it would be.

Now, after everything that had happened today and her very abrupt wake-up this morning, her lids were drooping and her thoughts had become sluggish. She had foolishly hoped she and Master Brent could play before tonight, or that he would join her in the shower. But at this rate she would only fall asleep and miss whatever happened.

Brent tucked Sandra into the large bed in one of the guest rooms in Club Desire. "I'll have dinner brought up around five so you have time to digest before heading down to the dungeon floor whenever you're feeling up to it." He brushed a soft kiss over her forehead. "Get some sleep."

She murmured a sleepy response he couldn't make out and burrowed farther under the covers.

As he walked out of the room, he nearly ran into Logan, one of the original Doms that Club Desire had opened with. In fact, Logan was the second Dom who had signed on, right behind Dex.

"Hey, Brent. Is everything all right?" Logan studied him critically. "You're rarely up here."

They were only one floor above Brent's own suite of rooms, but he supposed Logan was right. He didn't come up to level 5 or 6 too often. There wasn't usually any need to go there. He gestured toward the door he'd just exited. "Sandra. The woman I told you all about this morning."

Logan glanced toward the door. "I saw you two on the way up and figured after the information this morning that something might be going on, so I followed you to see if you needed anything."

Brent was glad to see the protective gesture. It meant that Logan was taking the possible threat Diego posed seriously. And even more than that, it meant he was committed to ensuring the safety of the Club Desire members. And if Logan was, then all the Doms were. Logan and Dexter, along with himself, set the tone for what went on here.

Not that Brent doubted they would be diligent in taking care of the members, or they

wouldn't be allowed into his club, but it was a nice confirmation nonetheless.

“Did you find out anything else?” Logan had pitched his voice lower so it didn't carry beyond the two of them even though the hall was deserted.

Brent clenched his jaw. “Not much. He called from a New York number, a restaurant, apparently. NYPD is checking that out now. Sandra is spooked, but holding up all right. She insisted that looking forward to playing tonight was keeping her going through all of this, or I would've kept her out of the action for the rest of the weekend at the very least.”

Logan nodded. “Good. Hiding isn't going to make this any easier on her. But playing and practicing some power exchange might...not to mention a few dozen killer orgasms could help her feel more relaxed and in control.” He smiled knowingly. “But I'll leave that to you. Unless you need any help taking care of her in that arena?”

Logan's teasing grated on Brent's nerves, especially since Logan was usually a man of few words. This change in personality meant he was worried about Brent's reactions here.

Brent appreciated the concern, and knew it definitely had merit, but it irritated him nonetheless. He had to force himself to take a deep breath before responding. “No, Logan, but thanks for checking. I've got this.” He made a shooing motion, which only made Logan laugh.

“Eager to be rid of me? Are you planning on heading back in there and getting started on those orgasms right now? Does it really take you that long to warm her up?”

Despite wanting to remain irritated, Brent couldn't help but laugh. Logan was a good guy and a good Dom.

Brent recognized his territorial instincts when it came to Sandra and tried to rein them in. He wouldn't tolerate them from any other Dom in this type of circumstance, so he had to hold himself to that same standard. Subs should always have the choice about whom they played with and when.

“Logan, I know you're only trying to look out for me and make sure this situation is handled correctly, but please leave it alone. At least for now.”

Logan cocked his head to the side and studied Brent openly. “All right. I got the message.” He smiled, letting Brent know he wasn't offended. “Are you going to warn everyone else away from her? Is it there already? From the briefing this morning it sounded like she still needed a lot of experience and training to see if the lifestyle is truly for her.”

At the sound of a door opening down the hall, they both glanced toward the sound and then away as a couple walked the other way down the hallway.

Brent shook his head. “It's complicated. We all need to watch the situation and do what's best for Sandra. And that includes me. I'll admit I'm a bit territorial where she's concerned, and it will be extremely difficult if she needs another Dom, but whatever's best for her is what needs to happen, regardless of my personal feelings.”

Logan nodded. “You're a good man, Brent, and a good Dom. After listening to you this morning I knew there was something decidedly personal about this. I can imagine how hard this must be for you all the way around. Don't worry. We've got your back...and

hers.” He smiled. “I’ve got to head down. I’m teaching sub training to the new batch today.” He tipped his head toward the door to the room where Sandra slept. “I’m assuming you’re taking care of her training? And will let us know if you need any help?”

Brent nodded once, acknowledging the statement. “Thanks, Logan. Have a good class.” As Logan was about to leave, he added, “I’ve got to go check in with a few corporate clients as well. Duty calls, and it might involve a trip to London in the very near future, so I’d really love to get this situation with Diego and Sandra handled soon.”

Brent was an efficiency expert for several major corporations around the world, and while he loved his job, he often had to juggle it with his responsibilities at Club Desire. He’d known that when he opened the club, which was why he made sure the Doms he brought on board were not only top-notch Doms, but also men he respected and trusted to take care of things when he had responsibilities elsewhere.

Logan smiled. “No problem, man. Regardless if this situation is resolved before you have to leave, we’ll make sure things go smoothly in your absence. But who knows? Maybe Diego will cooperate and fall and break his neck and save us all a lot of trouble.” Logan’s brow furrowed and he shot Brent a concerned look.

“What?” Brent wasn’t sure what that look was for. He knew his nerves had been stretched tight for the last twenty-four hours, so maybe he’d imagined it. Either way, he needed to make some time for a workout soon.

Logan sent a pointed glance down at Brent’s clenched fists.

Brent forced his fingers to relax, irritated he hadn’t noticed he’d been doing that. “I’m fine. It’s just been a stressful few days. But I’ve got this. Thanks.”

Logan must have heard the finality and dismissal in Brent’s tone because he cast a doubtful glance over his shoulder as he said goodbye and walked away, headed down the hallway toward the elevator to the public areas.

An hour later Brent had completed his business calls and was stepping off the elevator on Basement 4. He had one area here set up as a dojo so he could work out and de-stress as needed. There had been a few times others had rented out that space specifically, and on those rare occasions Brent made sure to have Jake lock up the staffs and other weapons he sometimes practiced with. His practice weapons were not to be used during play of any type, and although he was very careful about who he allowed down into Basement 4, he still didn’t like to take chances. Those in the throes of endorphins sometimes didn’t make the best decisions. Himself included.

He felt an almost physical pull as he neared his temporary dojo. It had become something of a sanctuary for him when he couldn’t calm his turbulent mind or flush the stress from his body. His habit of daily workouts had become ingrained, and no matter where he was he always tried to carve out time for them. But there was something special about using his own space.

One of the myriad ways Brent had reinvented himself back in college was his immersion in martial arts. He practiced several types, and held a black belt in a few, but he had started purely to be able to defend himself.

He'd already hit six foot one by then, but he'd still been just as scrawny and frail as he was in high school. A local gang had mugged him and beaten him up one night when he'd stayed late on campus to study. He'd felt helpless and had sworn to himself he would never have to feel that way again.

Martial arts had been a savior of sorts for him. It had allowed him to discipline his mind, while honing his body and his reflexes. It had also opened a new world for him. One where he could be confident and a leader. Once he'd gotten a taste of what that was like, his life began to change in every area. That's when he started to think big and actually have hope for the future.

He toed off his shoes and pulled off his socks before stepping into his dojo area. Maintaining that kind of respect for his area helped him concentrate. Much of martial arts took strength of mind, not only of body.

Within minutes his muscles were warming and his mind was focusing. He smiled as he felt the stress sluice off him like water, while his body hummed with energy and vigor.

He pushed himself hard, punching and kicking the Wing Chun wooden practice dummy in the corner of the room until his muscles ached and his hands and feet stung. When he finally stopped, sweat poured off his body and he grabbed a towel out of a cabinet to dry his face and neck.

It was a very good thing he had play sessions scheduled for tonight. He knew he was a better Dom after a particularly taxing workout. The discipline to both his body and mind during his workouts was an easy extension to his play dynamic with his subs. And after a workout like today's he literally craved the thrill of the power exchange.

Now that he had found the way to discipline Sandra toward her own pleasure, he needed to gently guide her toward a true D/s relationship. He had a lot of work to do to undo the past, but for her, he would go to any lengths.

He looped the towel over his neck and headed off to get ready for tonight.

Chapter 10

Sandra put the finishing touches on her makeup and studied herself in the mirror. Even with a little blush she looked pale, but since the makeup hadn't helped there was very little she could do about it. The deep sleep in the comfortable bed had helped, and so had the wonderful dinner Brent had sent up for her, but they couldn't erase months of restless nights.

This guest room, as Brent had called it, was more luxurious than she was used to, but that didn't stop her from appreciating and enjoying it.

She raked a critical gaze over her reflection. The outline of her hard nipples was obvious through the comfortable blue crop top. That wasn't really a surprise. She had been thinking about Brent and their impending play session all day, which had kept her entire body on arousal overdrive.

She hadn't exaggerated when she'd told him that looking forward to tonight was a big part of what had gotten her through the aftermath of the call with Diego this morning. The anticipation of feeling Master Brent's hands on her and what he would do to her filled her stomach with buzzing butterflies, and not just a little bit of raging lust.

Memories of the scene in the elevator had replayed in an endless loop inside her mind since it happened. Which had the unfortunate side effect of leaving her right on the edge of orgasm. Not a comfortable sensation long term. She had tried to masturbate in the shower earlier and relieve her torment, but thoughts of when Brent had punished her for touching her clit without his permission had both excited her and kept her from getting there.

She would have to be careful not to earn any more punishments tonight. She wanted Brent's cock inside her in every way imaginable. And he had obviously zeroed in on that need and was going to use it ruthlessly to teach her how to be a good sub.

She couldn't be angry about it. She'd seen her old roommate punished with spankings from Master Mason. But then, Darla had loved being spanked. She also loved being flogged and a few other things that made Sandra cringe.

Darla had insisted that if Sandra would just give it a chance she would love impact play, too. But as soon as Diego realized it was a fear of Sandra's, he'd begun to torture her with it until she'd started to pull away and then run away.

His words on the phone this morning still stabbed icy fear through her veins, so she shook her head to try to dislodge the instant replay her mind kept rerunning.

"He can't touch me anymore," she said aloud, hoping it was true. "It's time to start a new life without him. And who knows, maybe with time and patience I'll see what Darla and all the other subs love so much about spankings and punishments."

She looked at her doubtful reflection and shrugged. Only time and distance from her past would tell.

Right now it was time to go down to see Master Brent. Her blood raced, her clit

throbbled, and giddy anticipation swirled through her. She couldn't wait to see what new experiences the night would bring.

When she arrived downstairs, she slipped into the locker room to look for Master Brent. She didn't see him, but Master Dex was there with another man who exuded Dom with every movement. He had sandy-brown hair and nicely tanned skin.

Add in Jake, and she was sure all the other Doms she hadn't even met yet, and damn, this place was every woman's wet dream.

Both Master Dex and the man next to him were sexy, with an air of authority and control that sent prickles along her oversensitized skin, but neither of them was Master Brent. And that was the man her body and her mind craved right now.

Where was he?

"Taking in the scenery?"

Master Brent's deep voice behind her startled her and she whirled to face him. His words had held dark amusement, but she wasn't sure if she'd just unwittingly done something she would be punished for or not.

His lips were curved into a smile, and his blue eyes held a spark of mischief, which made her let out a welcome sigh of relief.

He reached out and traced her bottom lip with his thumb and she sucked in a breath as her arousal spiraled higher.

"Master Brent. You surprised me." She was embarrassed that her voice sounded so breathy. She had hoped to appear confident tonight, but apparently that wasn't to be.

"I assume you were looking for me?" He raised one dark brow, his smile and eyes still clearly showing he was amused and not angry.

She nodded quickly. "Yes. I was. I am. Sir," she added quickly as an afterthought.

Deep male laughter from across the room drew Master Brent's attention and that too-discerning gaze moved away from her toward Master Dex and the mysterious man with the sandy-brown hair.

"Let's introduce you to Master Logan before we head out to the floor." He motioned toward the two men, indicating she should go first.

As she neared, Master Dex turned his attention toward her. "Sandra. Come on over here, sweetheart."

Sandra stopped in front of the two men, and Master Brent's warm presence settled beside her. When silence fell, the man held out his hand. "I'm Master Logan. Welcome to Club Desire." He smiled, taking his face from good-looking to striking and devastatingly handsome, and she couldn't help but smile back.

She took the offered hand. "It's nice to meet you." His grip was gentle but firm. A lot of men gripped hard when shaking hands with a woman; no doubt they thought it showcased their masculinity or something along those lines. But not Master Logan.

Up close she could see the definition of his chest under the soft-looking black T-shirt he wore, and his arms were sculpted and muscular, showing he definitely worked out.

If she weren't already so entranced with Master Brent she might be interested in playing with Master Logan. But all her thoughts and desires were for Master Brent, and she was impatient to get started.

"If you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I'm due out on the dungeon floor with Master Brent."

Brent's low, rumbled laugh from beside her made her wonder what it would be like for him to make that sound while he was lying on top of her, his cock buried deep inside her.

Before she realized it was going to happen, a small sound of need escaped her and split the quiet of the small group, shattering some of the tension.

Master Brent cleared his throat. "As the lady said, she's due out on the dungeon floor. Enjoy your evenings." He nodded toward the two men and placed his large hand on Sandra's back, guiding her out the door and onto the dungeon floor.

There were several scenes already in progress. Most of them mid- to high-level kink—or at least to her they were mid to high.

Master Brent guided her to the right until they reached a simple scene with a bondage bed, a spanking horse, and a toy bag sitting nearby on the table. A rush of moisture between her thighs showed her how ready she was for things to get started. She squirmed in a vain effort to relieve some of her pent-up arousal.

He gently turned her to face him and then leaned down to brush a simple kiss across her lips.

The sizzling warmth of the contact made her whimper. She didn't know how long she could hold out before she needed to come. She hoped that Master Brent wouldn't make her wait too long.

He pulled back and took her face in his large hands before he stroked one thumb over her bottom lip, leaving arousal sparking in its wake.

"Are you ready to play, my dear?"

The dark promise in his voice sent shivers marching through her. "Yes, sir," she forced out through trembling lips.

He sent her a concerned look. "What's wrong, Sandra?" He ran both thumbs over her cheeks in a soothing rhythm.

"It's nothing, sir. Really."

A slight frown creased his brow and his lips straightened. "On the dungeon floor, Sandra, I decide what's nothing and what isn't. What's wrong?"

She swallowed hard, hoping this didn't get her into trouble before they'd even gotten started.

"I'm just so horny, sir. I need to come badly, and I'm not sure I can wait." She sucked in a breath and tried to slow down her swirling thoughts so she wasn't babbling like an idiot. "I need you inside me. In every way possible. I need to come. To come until I'm totally spent and exhausted." She held her breath, waiting for his reaction.

Master Brent gave one slow nod. "When was the last time you did that, Sandra? Come until you were totally spent and exhausted?" Desire sparked in the depths of his very blue

eyes. “Where you were left shaking and floating in the stratosphere from the flood of endorphins and sensations?”

She shook her head, her thoughts spinning with the possibilities. “Never, sir. I’ve heard other women talk about subspace, and I’ve read about it in novels, but I’ve never experienced it. I would really like to, though.”

He dropped his hands away from her face, feathering his fingers down her shoulders and arms. “Did you masturbate up in the room?” He pierced her with a long, searching look as if all her secrets could be easily read on her face, and since she was horrible at hiding them, they most likely were.

“Sandra, I didn’t tell you never to masturbate or touch yourself. Just that during scenes or while we are playing you should wait to be given permission. Or you can ask permission during a scene. Is that clear?”

Relief flooded through her as well as anticipation of what would come next. “Yes, sir. I tried, but I couldn’t get there. I was afraid I would be punished, and I didn’t want anything to short-circuit our play tonight.”

His lips tightened, but his gaze was gentle. “Did Master Scott or Diego tell you that you would be punished for doing those things without their permission?”

Dark memories threatened to flood back and she slammed the door hard on them, willing herself to drown in Master Brent’s gaze instead. “Yes. Or at least Diego did. I wasn’t allowed to let myself get wet without his authorization, although I never figured out how to do that, so I was punished quite a bit.” Her stomach churned as vivid images of some of her punishments came back to her.

Master Brent sighed and a muscle twitched along his jaw as if he were clenching his teeth. “I’m so sorry you had to deal with that, Sandra. But you’re here now and I’m going to start teaching you what pleasure is possible in the D/s relationship. Are you ready?”

“Yes, sir.” As if to underscore her new lack of unreasonable restrictions, moisture flooded her pussy and her nipples puckered hard against the soft lining of her bra.

Chapter 11

Brent traced one finger over the hard nub of her right nipple, making her gasp. “Very nice. We’ll get to these in a moment. Assume the submissive position and let’s begin.”

Almost afraid this entire situation would vanish before she could enjoy it, Sandra scrambled to comply, her soft black shorts stretching easily around the tops of her thighs as she sat back on her calves. She thought about taking off her top and bra, but rejected the notion as soon as she looked up and saw several people either milling around or walking by, trying to seem casual about it.

She wondered how often Master Brent played with subs on this dungeon level to have aroused such interest. He said he didn’t take them to his private alcove, but then where?

“Sandra?”

She snapped her head up to meet his gaze. “Yes, sir?”

He smiled as if in approval of her appropriate and quick response. “You were frowning and staring off into space. What were you thinking about?”

Heat burned up her neck and into her cheeks, and she wished she had learned how to stop herself from blushing long ago. It always gave her emotions away. “Sir?” she asked as she stalled for time, trying to figure out some way to answer without actually telling him what she’d been thinking, which would come off sounding much too proprietary and needy. And besides, she knew she was a horrible liar. That was one of the things Diego had ruthlessly used against her. He would get her to admit some dark secret or yearning and then exploit it, or worse, twist it and punish her with it until it turned into nightmares—both waking and in her sleep.

Master Brent looked down at her, straightening to his full height. “Come up here.”

She quickly stood and he reached out to thread his fingers into her hair, the friction against her scalp delicious. He gently pulled her head back so she had to look at him. “You can tell me. Honesty will never bring punishment, Sandra.”

She swallowed hard and then let her glance slip past him to all the people who had started to gather to watch.

Master Brent turned his head to follow her line of sight and then tightened his grip in her hair, sending zings of need arrowing through her. “I think I understand.” He turned back to study her critically. “You’re self-conscious of everyone watching us? Didn’t they do that at the dungeon in New York?”

She was tempted to take the easy road and just agree that she was self-conscious, and hope he didn’t realize there was more to it. But she wanted to believe him that honesty would never bring punishment, so she swallowed again and forced herself to speak. “Not really, sir. My scenes with Master Scott were tamer than most. Diego always managed to do scenes away from too many witnesses, so a crowd was never around to watch.”

She shrugged. “I suppose I’m a bit self-conscious about people watching, but mostly just uncomfortable about being naked or semi-naked in front of strangers.” She looked

down, trying to formulate her thoughts. “However, I have to admit that all those people seeing what happened on the elevator yesterday was extremely erotic.” She smiled and couldn’t help the quick, probably goofy smile that curved her lips. “I kind of liked it.”

Brent’s expression showed erotic promise, which sent a wonderful shiver of anticipation through her.

With effort she dragged herself back to Master Brent’s original question. “I was wondering why everyone is so fascinated with watching anything you do here. If you bring subs to this level to play, and if not, why is everyone so curious? You said you don’t bring them to your private alcove...” She trailed off, not sure what else to say without revealing that there might be a small spark of jealousy behind her curiosity.

“Ah.” He pulled her head back, stretching her until he could lean down to nip at her throat, which sent arousal marching over her skin to pool need into every erogenous zone she had.

“I do play scenes with subs in several areas of the Club, but for some reason whenever I or one of the main Doms play, it usually draws a crowd. Don’t let it bother you. They love to watch, just like you and I do.”

A shudder ran through her as understanding dawned. If situations were reversed, she would be one of those gathered to watch, although knowing what she knew now, she wouldn’t want to trade places with any of them. She wanted to be right where she was, waiting to experience everything tonight that she could. To let Master Brent show her what she had been missing.

He slid his fingers out of her hair, and she straightened and then stepped back to look up at him.

There was definite heat in his gaze. “Enough preliminaries, Sandra. Let’s begin. Flat on your back on the bed, please. I would suggest you lose the clothes, but either way you won’t be wearing them for long.”

A gasp escaped as his words sank in. Her blood surged as anticipation churned higher.

“I did warn you about the clothes.”

“Yes, sir. You did.” She took a deep breath, trying to calm her galloping heart and her throbbing clit as she headed toward the bed. Without looking back, she slid her toes out of the simple sandals she’d worn before pulling her crop top up over her head and tossing it aside.

She heard Brent come closer, but she didn’t turn. Instead, she hooked her thumbs in the elastic waist of her shorts and pushed them down over her hips until they fell around her ankles. She stepped out of them, leaving them where they lay.

Standing only in her thin bra and panties, the air around her felt cool, but since her entire body was humming with heat she wasn’t cold.

She didn’t want Brent to cut off her bra, so she reached back to undo the clasps and then slid it off her arms and dropped it on top of her shirt.

As the cooler air caressed her chest, her nipples puckered into even tighter points, the intense sensation only adding to her need to come.

The panties she left on. Brent could take them off however he wanted to.

The thought made her smile as she remembered the couple she'd watched in the waiting room and how that Dom had ripped off his sub's thong. Another flash of excitement lanced through her. She couldn't wait to find out how Master Brent would do it.

Before Master Brent became impatient she turned and sat on the side of the bed, relaxing back and then swinging her legs up to lie flat. She immediately scooted in a little so she wasn't directly on the edge of the bed, and then brought her arms up to cover her naked breasts and crossed her ankles, instinctively hiding her most vulnerable parts from view. Logically, she knew the crotch of her now very wet panties would hide her, but she knew that wouldn't last long, which left her feeling very exposed.

Before she could get comfortable, or even assess how many people were watching them, Brent loomed over her, blocking her view.

He tapped his finger lightly against her forehead. "Sandra, keep your focus here, on us. Let the rest fade into the background. Concentrate on the sensations coming alive inside your body. That, and following the directions I'll give you are your only jobs for this evening. Are we clear?"

"Yes, sir," she said automatically as she mentally took stock of herself.

The mattress underneath her was comfortable and not too soft. The high-quality cotton sheets felt good against her skin, and the pillow beneath her head was firm but not hard. Probably perfect for the needs of a bondage bed. She had only been on one twice before. Both times with her first Dom, Master Scott. But she had never been as turned on by it as she was right now.

Diego had preferred much more extreme settings, although she had seen some scenes using bondage beds that were pretty intense. A sliver of unease ran through her at the thought, and she mercilessly quashed it.

"Sandra?"

Damn, she should have schooled her thoughts more. Master Brent had an amazing ability to notice details that didn't allow her any secrets. She would have to be on guard for that in the future.

"Yes, sir?" She snapped her gaze up to gauge his reaction. She saw only slight concern in his expression.

"Are you all right?"

She nodded automatically. "Just waiting to see what's going to happen, sir."

He chuckled. "Speaking of that...Do you trust me to take care of you?"

She did a quick internal check before she answered. No tight stomach or sensation of nausea to give her pause. "Yes, Master Brent." She met his gaze squarely. "I do trust you. Fully. I just need to take your advice and stay in the moment and allow the new memories we make here tonight to erase the old ones."

A sense of rightness and sweet relief slid through her as she said the words. She knew that was exactly what she needed to do, and she was eager to get started.

Master Brent smiled down at her, the intense need in his expression sending zings of anticipation along every nerve ending.

“Do you have any new safe words for this evening?”

“No, sir. I’m used to red and yellow, so I’ll continue to use those for now.” She was proud that her voice sounded confident and didn’t waver. Maybe she could overcome the past after all.

“Good.” He picked up a blue cloth off the table near the bed and brought it close to trail across her bare breasts.

It was cool and silky against her skin and left a wave of gooseflesh in its wake that sent a wonderful wash of arousal through her.

The cloth was a deep blue, the same color as the crop top she’d just taken off. She glanced up into Master Brent’s eyes and smiled. Yes, blue was definitely her favorite color. Maybe it was a sign of great things to come?

“I was wondering why you’d chosen blue for the cloth,” she said, surprised when her voice came out sounding husky and low.

Master Brent brushed some stray hair away from her face, the sweet gesture sending warm comfort and reassurance through her. “I remember how well blue accentuated your skin and hair when I saw you last night—especially as I watched you on camera.”

His words made her breath catch as she pictured Master Brent watching her with her fingers in her core on a monitor in his office.

His warm hand trailed across her stomach and then higher to brush over her right nipple, which ripped a gasp from her throat. Her nipples had always been one of her biggest erogenous zones.

He pulled his hand away and she glanced up to look at his face, only to have something block her vision. The cloth settled across her eyes and he guided it around her head, nudging until she lifted her head so he could tie it in the back.

She made a “hmmm” of approval in the back of her throat. She trusted Master Brent with this, and only looked forward to what he would do with her while she was deprived of her sight. If anyone else tried this it would send nausea and swirling fear into the pit of her stomach, but the only thing in the pit of her stomach right now was the heavy weight of arousal.

She rested her head back against the pillow and Master Brent adjusted it so she wasn’t lying directly on the knot from the blindfold. She was touched by the sweet gesture and the thought for her comfort.

His fingers closed around her wrist and he lifted it, slowly stretching her arm up over her head until he guided her fingers around what felt like a smooth wooden dowel that she knew was attached to the headboard.

As he repeated this with her other arm, she thought back to scenes she’d seen where subs were strapped down to bondage beds. Most of them had been fun and teasing, and she’d enjoyed watching them. Even the rougher ones had turned her on; her only fear about them was that they might give Diego ideas along those lines. She’d been sure when

she left New York that she would never want to be tied up and at the mercy of any man ever again, but now here she was, waiting impatiently to see where Master Brent would take her.

Next he fastened restraints around her wrists, trapping her arms in place, stretched over her head, and keeping her hands in position where she gripped the dowels. The soft leather restraints were snug but not too tight.

Diego had preferred metal manacles, so tight they bit into her skin and sometimes drew blood.

She slammed the door on that thought as soon as the first prickle of unease tried to sneak through.

This was Master Brent. Not Diego. She would never be at Diego's mercy again.

She heard Master Brent move away and then some rustling near the table where he was most likely digging things out of his bag. She stiffened instinctively before reminding herself that she trusted him to take care of her.

"Stay with me, Sandra." Master Brent's deep voice reached out to her and caressed her in deep, intimate places she really wanted him to touch in reality.

"Yes, sir. Sorry, sir."

Silence fell for a long moment and then something scraped across her nipple, making her jump. It wasn't an uncomfortable sensation; in fact when it came again it shot a delicious, electric sensation straight to her core.

When it came a third time it startled a gasp out of her, and she squeezed her thighs together as her pussy began to throb, begging to be filled.

She breathed deep, her head lolling to the side as she absorbed the sensations. A long moment later she realized it wasn't going to happen again and disappointment settled in her gut.

She relaxed her muscles, blowing out a long breath, and then something brushed over her hip, startling a squeak out of her. She tensed again trying to anticipate where the next touch would come from, but Master Brent varied his touches and would wait until she'd given up and let her guard down to begin them all over again.

Each touch, along with the uncertainty of when and where the next would come from or what texture it would bring, heightened her senses and gave this a decidedly erotic air. The low murmurs of the group gathered to watch ratcheted up her arousal as well.

The fist of need inside her pelvis tightened to an uncomfortable point, and while she couldn't wait to come and relieve that pressure, the process of this teasing and slowly building her up was wonderful, and she was reluctant for it to end.

She loved to watch, but she knew she'd better be careful or she'd find that she was also something of an exhibitionist. She laughed at the thought, earning a soft tap on her chin from Master Brent.

"I'm being much too playful if you're laughing rather than gasping or moaning right now."

Without warning, his rough hands gripped her panties and ripped them off.

Sharp arousal careened through her, startling a strangled scream from her throat. The sudden need to come and come now slammed into her. She thrashed against her restraints, desperate to see Master Brent's expression and to beg him to let her come.

But then his large hands pushed her thighs apart, and she was surprised when his body settled between them.

Was this it? Was Brent going to fuck her?

Anticipation soared and her mouth went dry.

He pushed her thighs farther apart and his hot breath feathered against her wet folds.

She caught her breath, braced for whatever came next.

When his hot tongue laved her center and sensation shot through her in a searing rush, she screamed.

She couldn't help it.

When she'd heard subs scream in the past she thought they were just being dramatic, but if they'd experienced anything like this, she now understood.

Brent licked her again, this time dipping his tongue deep between her folds and sucking one of her labia inside his mouth to nip and tease. Explosions of sensation ricocheted through her body, sending her careening out of control.

She bucked against his face until he cupped her ass in his hands, lifting her enough where he could control her movements. "You taste amazing, Sandra. I only had a small sample in the elevator yesterday, but tonight I will eat my fill."

Another gasp and she forced herself to stop struggling and squirming. She concentrated on relaxing, and let her thighs fall open as far as they would go, shamelessly begging him to fulfill those words.

He didn't wait. He immediately started to mercilessly pleasure her, sucking, nipping, licking, and nuzzling, but her orgasm still hovered out of reach. Frustrated and aching, she tightened her grip on the dowel, yanking it repeatedly as if that small burst of violence would push her over the edge. When it didn't, she yanked harder.

"I can feel how close you are, Sandra. We're just getting started. Are you ready to come for me? To let me taste your sweet orgasm?"

"Yes, sir!" she shouted as she braced her feet against the bed, trying to gain purchase in the swirl of intense sensations ripping through her.

One of Master Brent's hands released her ass, but the other held her up easily as he continued his onslaught.

When he pinched her nipple and plucked it she gasped again as the arousal spiked and pushed her nearly to the brink, but still not over.

"Harder. Please, sir," she begged. She needed more, and she needed it now.

Brent's chuckle traveled along her swollen pussy lips and up into the deep knot inside her pelvis that waited for release. She had wondered how it would feel for the deep vibrations from his speech or laughter to travel through her, and now she knew, and

couldn't wait to feel it all over again.

“Good girl. I love it when you ask for what you need.”

He dipped his tongue deep, swirling it along her oversensitive folds before he sucked her clit into his mouth, alternately nipping and sucking until she wanted to cry from the frustration of not being able to fall over the cliff of release.

Then he pinched her nipple hard, plucking it firmly, and she skyrocketed as the explosions thundered through her.

Brent sucked her clit through it all, pushing her until she thought she wouldn't be able to handle one more second. Impossibly, another orgasm hit her like a fist, stealing her breath.

He gentled his attentions but didn't stop them, slowly guiding her down to a more comfortable level.

He traced her slit lazily, lightly licking her clit on each upstroke until her muscles relaxed and her thighs fell open once again. After she'd gotten used to that, his finger replaced his mouth, which slowly renewed the climb toward orgasm once again, even though he was taking her up slowly. Torturously slowly.

Then he slid his finger down even farther, pulling moisture down to her ass.

She gasped at the intense sensation as a bolt of warmth radiated from deep inside her pelvis again.

“You like that.” It wasn't a question, but his tone told her an answer was necessary anyway.

“Yes, sir. I do.”

She was surprised that she really did like it. Anal play had never been one of her favorites, although she'd never had very much of it. It never did much for her so Master Scott hadn't pursued it, and Diego had spent his time tormenting her with too many other things to get to that.

As Master Brent rubbed his finger over her again she moaned and bucked against his hand, surprised to find herself wanting more.

Apparently when she was turned on to this point and had survived two of the most amazing orgasms she'd ever had, ass play was something that she not only liked, but craved.

Although she didn't want to get ahead of herself. This was only a tease, and she knew it could get much more intense. But for now she was going to stay in the moment and enjoy everything Master Brent gave her.

“Are you still with me, Sandra?” The wonderful deep vibrations from his voice mesmerized her.

“Yes, sir. Still floating a bit.”

“And craving more?” he asked like a man who already knew the answer.

“Yes...sir,” she added as her endorphin-soaked brain reminded her to use the honorific. “I'm ready for everything.”

She thought she heard a small intake of breath from Brent, but she couldn't be sure over the loud pounding of her heart.

"I believe I promised you a night of intense pleasure, Sandra. And I try never to break my promises."

When she said, "Yes, sir," as more of a habit than an actual answer, she was rewarded by a rumble of laughter from Master Brent.

He reached for something next to the bed, then settled back between her thighs, his hot breath tickling her pussy. She squirmed, cursing the wrist restraints that kept her from touching him. However, she had to admit, the intensity of not having her sight to help her process all of the new sensations breaking over her made this even more erotic than she'd ever thought possible.

She heard him open some type of bottle, and then something cool settled against the sensitive pucker of her ass.

Lube.

He rubbed, teasing her and letting her explore the new and intense sensations while he continued to torment her clit with his lips, teeth, and tongue.

Almost distantly she was aware that arousal had started to tighten inside her gut again, but she was too lost in the sensations Master Brent was creating inside her to focus on that for long.

When one thick finger dipped inside her anus it startled a moan out of her, and she couldn't help but arch into the slight invasion. He gently wiggled the tip of his finger as if letting her explore the feeling longer, and she bucked against his hand, wanting more of him inside her.

She hadn't been kidding when she'd said she wanted him inside her in every way imaginable; she just hadn't thought she would be having thoughts of him burying his thick cock inside her ass after only this cursory introduction to how erotic anal play could be.

He nipped the inside of her thigh and then slowly slid more of his thick finger inside her.

Her body started to tighten around him, to push him out, and he stopped.

"Relax, Sandra. For any type of anal play you have to be totally relaxed. I won't hurt you and I won't ever push you past what feels good for you, or past what you can handle. Relax into it and let the sensations take over."

She took a deep breath and forced her muscles to unknot along with her exhale. She trusted Master Brent to take care of her.

As soon as her muscles loosened, the finger slid in farther, spearing her with new waves of pleasure. She fought against the instinctive reaction and instead slid into a deep pool of bliss, arching into his ministrations.

Her breathing became choppy and hard, her heart pounding inside her ears like it had become a runaway freight train. She found herself bucking her hips, demanding more, faster and harder.

When Master Brent suddenly sucked hard on her clit, nipping the end firmly between his teeth and sliding his finger fully inside her ass, she exploded again. This time, after the main explosion of her orgasm, the incredible waves of pleasure kept going on and on until they swamped her system under a wave of sensory overload.

Chapter 12

What felt like twenty minutes of orgasm later, Sandra found herself being picked up off the bed and cradled against a warm, hard chest. She frowned as she realized she didn't remember the scene winding down or Master Brent releasing her from her wrist restraints. She blinked in the darkness, realizing the blindfold was still wrapped around her head, covering her eyes.

She curled into Master Brent's arms, still flying high, her mind and her body still in some strange ethereal plane, breathing in the warm, spicy, unique scent of Master Brent.

So this was subspace.

She'd heard it talked about, but like so many other things, she had nearly been convinced it was exaggerated and something that didn't really happen. Sort of the kink version of the Easter Bunny.

How wrong she had been.

Master Brent settled them onto what felt like a large, overstuffed chair or sofa of some type in what she was sure was the aftercare room.

She curled around him more comfortably, thankful for the warmth of the blanket that she hadn't realized until just this moment had been tucked around her.

"Still flying?"

She mumbled something she hoped was semi-intelligible.

"Now that we're somewhere dark, let's get this blindfold off you. Too much sensory input while in deep subspace isn't good, so I left it on until we were out of the bright lights."

The cloth loosened and then Master Brent pulled it off. She blinked, looking around at the dark room but not making out anything except large lumps she was sure were other couches.

Master Brent tucked her more firmly against him and brushed the hair away from her face.

"I know you're still flying, but I want to make sure you're all right. Take stock of your body and let me know if you're having any discomfort."

With effort she got her brain to cooperate, and she focused on her body. For the most part she felt amazing. Boneless and wonderfully spent. The only discomfort she sensed at all was from her abdominal muscles. Several very hard orgasms and her bucking her hips as she begged for more had given her probably the most comprehensive ab workout of her life.

She rubbed her wrists expecting to feel pain or even raw spots like she had every other time she'd been restrained, but while there were a few spots of soreness where she'd thrashed against her bonds, she was sure there wouldn't be any marks from this tomorrow.

Part of her grieved for that. She would have treasured them. Soft marks that would take

several days to fade and would also remind her of this magical night with Master Brent.

She swallowed hard to make sure she could speak. "I'm all right, sir."

He tapped her softly on the tip of her nose. "Sandra. It took you quite a while to take stock, so what have you left out? I decide what's important or not in this realm, remember?"

She nodded. "Yes, sir. My abs are going to kill me later. I was expecting my wrists to be sore like they have in the past, but they're fine."

"Any discomfort from the anal play?"

She thought about it for a moment and then shook her head. "No, sir. Just a sort of wonderfully well-used feeling. Once I recover, I think I'd like to try some more."

He chuckled. "Fair enough. I think I've created a monster. We'll discuss that as soon as you come down from subspace."

Before she could feel any disappointment that he wouldn't discuss it with her now, her thoughts drifted off again, back into the strange euphoria that had so completely captured her mind and body.

She wasn't sure how long she floated before she became aware of the world around her again. As her body slowly settled back to planet Earth she cuddled against Master Brent, enjoying his gentle touches and his softly spoken words. When she finally felt more normal, she slowly sat up and smiled until her face ached. Now that she wasn't flying and her eyes had adjusted, she could make out the couches and furniture even in the soft light coming from around the closed door.

A few other couples sat on couches similar to this one, which surprised her since she hadn't heard them come in. But then she hadn't noticed being gathered up at the end of that intense scene either.

Or...they might have been here when Master Brent brought her in. She didn't think she would have noticed an entire crowd of people at that point.

Subspace indeed.

Master Brent studied her critically, his handsome face shadowed and striking in the darkened room. "Are you all right?"

She nodded. "Yes, Master Brent. Thank you. For everything."

"My pleasure, Sandra. Absolutely, my pleasure."

She shook herself as she realized Master Brent had never come during their play. Or at least that she knew about. After all, she didn't even remember the end of their scene.

"Sir?"

He tipped his head to the side, considering her. "What is it, Sandra?" Concern laced his deep voice.

"I would like you to have some pleasure too. You gave me the most amazing night of my life, and I don't want to leave you frustrated. Can I take care of you?"

He smiled, a soft expression stealing over his face. "Tonight was about you. Your first scene here at Club Desire, and your first experience with subspace if I'm not mistaken."

She pursed her lips and tried again. “You asked me if I was all right with intercourse during or at the end of scenes...and—”

“Yes, I did. And that will definitely come in time. But you’ve had enough intense sensations for one evening. I think it’s time for a shower and a good night’s sleep. Do you want to go up to the guest room, or would you like me to take you back to Michelle’s?”

Disappointment washed through her that he hadn’t offered to let her stay with him, or at the very least offered to stay with her in the guest room upstairs. But she had to admit that she would probably fall asleep on him in the first five minutes anyway. She shook her head. “I’m exhausted, but I think I should probably go back to Michelle’s.”

She couldn’t make out Master Brent’s expression in the murky light, but she hoped he was at least a little disappointed. Tomorrow was Sunday and she didn’t think too much was going on around here, but she didn’t know for sure. She shrugged.

“Oh, I nearly forgot to mention this.” He skimmed his knuckles across her cheek, leaving a trail of warmth that seemed to burrow deep inside her chest. “If you don’t have plans for Monday morning, I know someone who is looking for an office manager. I can come by and give you a ride if you’re interested.”

Her breath caught. She definitely wasn’t used to being taken care of, and she was afraid it was a very dangerous thing to get too comfortable with. She would come to rely on it and then it would break her heart when it stopped. She mentally shook herself and focused on answering. “Thank you, Master Brent. I would appreciate that. What time should I be ready?”

He took her hand in his and squeezed lightly. “I’ll pick you up at eight o’clock.”

She leaned over and brushed a kiss against his cheek. “Thank you, Brent,” she said, purposely leaving off the honorific. This action was outside their D/s relationship and she wanted him to know she appreciated it in that light.

He squeezed her shoulder and placed a kiss on top of her head, a gesture that squeezed her heart and made her fight a silly grin that tried to curve her lips.

“Let’s go upstairs, get your things, and I’ll drive you home.”

—

Brent stumbled through the front door of his suite and closed and locked the door behind him. His body still burned with pent-up need from the intense scene with Sandra.

He toed off his shoes and stripped off his clothes, tossing them away to land wherever they would. When he was naked, he headed to the shower to cool his raging lust.

He reminded himself again forcefully that he needed to go slow with her no matter how much he wanted to plunge inside her willing body until they were both gasping and spent. Instead, he had done his duty by her and given her the night of euphoria she both wanted and needed. He needed to help heal the wounds of the past, both the ones he knew about and those he could only guess at. One day he would remove those shadows of fear that slipped into her gray gaze now and then.

If he ever met her first Dom, Scott, he would have some words for the man about not fully training Sandra and showing her the power a sub wielded in the D/s relationship. If he'd done that properly, she would have built up enough self-esteem and confidence that she might not have been easy prey for Diego.

White-hot anger flashed through him as he thought about Diego.

The bastard had better hope if they did meet that Brent was sane enough in that moment to only hand him over to law enforcement.

It was criminal to use the position of a Dom to inflict abuse of any type, and it sent renewed fury burning through Brent's gut as he briefly pictured using Diego the way he had used his Wing Chun wooden practice dummy down in his dojo. A quick glance into the bathroom mirror showed him wearing a predatory and slightly evil-looking smile.

As much as he would like to teach Diego a lesson, he didn't want to kill him...Well, he actually did, so it wouldn't be a good idea to be given that chance since he wasn't so sure he wouldn't take it.

He stepped under the cold spray of the shower, wincing against the sudden temperature change but welcoming the distraction from his thoughts.

Coming in from the Arizona summer night, his body had adjusted to a temperature in the low 90s, so the cold water was a shock to his system.

However, even with that, his cock remained hard and ready for Sandra. He really shouldn't be surprised. He had fantasized about having her laid before him like a banquet since he'd first seen her his freshman year in high school. So to finally have her there had been heady...as well as making him feel both honored and frustrated as hell.

He hadn't quite known in high school that he was a Dom, or that his fantasies clearly reflected that. But looking back, it would have been all too clear if he'd known what to look for at the time. Luckily in college, Mason had recognized him as another Dom and introduced him to the lifestyle. That one interaction had changed his life forever, and he would always be grateful even though he and Mason didn't always agree on how to run their clubs.

Mason had been contrite enough on the phone when they'd spoken, so Brent was able to get the full story on Sandra. Mason didn't see any need to have his clientele or his club stay at a certain level, whereas Brent always wanted to maintain the highest standards in both. While Club Desire was definitely a kink and fetish BDSM dungeon at its core, those who chose to practice their preferences here did so in a classy, clean, and safe environment. That didn't mean there weren't some risks inherent in any type of fetish and sex play, but safe, sane, and consensual were the rules here, not the exception. While that wasn't always the case at other dungeons, Brent refused to accept anything less.

He shook his head and brought his thoughts back to the here and now as the cold water continued to spray against his skin, making him shiver but not relieving the burn of his lust.

He suspected only plunging inside Sandra's tight and willing body would do that, but then again, he could envision pleasuring Sandra, and by extension, himself, for an entire

lifetime and never getting enough of her, so maybe this was to be a permanent state for him?

That was a thought for further reflection. He needed to separate the Sandra he'd fantasized about in high school from the woman she had become.

Right now she needed to be guided in her own pleasure, and he was happy to take on that role. He knew she wanted him to take her...something he desperately wanted as well. But he had to make sure the timing and situation were right for Sandra, too, and not only for his own raging libido.

He leaned one hand against the tile wall and forced himself to stay under the stinging spray of water. When his body had grown accustomed to the temperature and he no longer even noticed the cold, he grabbed the soap and lathered it in his hand before palming his cock.

Sensations raced along his length, down into his balls and then deep inside his pelvis to radiate out to the rest of his body.

He pictured Sandra lying on the bondage bed earlier tonight, her wrists bound and her arms stretched over her head so her lovely breasts were bare and on display. She had wonderful breasts, full enough to overflow his hands, with thick pink nipples that hardened easily.

Sharp excitement had surged when he'd found out her nipples were extremely sensitive. He would bet that with enough stimulation, she could come just from that. His first thought was that he would have to buy her some nipple clamps. He had some regular clamps, but those didn't have adjustable pressure, and he wanted to ease her into the sensations to make sure they stayed pleasurable and not painful. As sensitive as her nipples were, he would have to pay close attention to her body language to make sure she was enjoying it and not only trying to please him.

Some women got off on pain, but from what he'd seen of Sandra, and from hearing even part of her experiences with Diego, she didn't seem the type. She might eventually enjoy stinging sensations like light spanking or flogging, but with her nipples as sensitive as they were, pain wouldn't be pleasurable for her.

He would find her the perfect pair of nipple huggers with dangling chains or jewelry tomorrow, so he could make a gift of them on Monday.

A vivid image of her lovely pink nipples hard and captured inside jeweled nipple huggers made his cock twitch in his hand. She would look amazing bent over a spanking horse, the chain from the jewelry draping down toward the floor. In his vision she was trussed up in a tantalizing picture with her ass displayed for him to tease and fuck.

He would eventually fuck that beautiful ass. She had been much too responsive to anal play to forgo that possibility. He wanted Sandra in every way imaginable. However, he would go slow for her sake as well as his. He was a bit too large for it to be comfortable for her yet. He could introduce her to some plugs and toys to get her used to relaxing and being open enough for him to get to the point where it would be pleasurable for both of them.

He stroked his cock, picturing Sandra's glistening pussy as it had been tonight, open and wet for all to see. He sucked in a breath as he imagined pushing inside her and hearing her moan as she tightened around him.

He increased both his pressure around his cock and his pace, using his other hand to cup his balls, which only added to the vision of him pounding inside her willing body.

The slick friction of his fingers over his hard length increased like a fast-rising wave, making him gasp for breath as the wave continued to rise higher.

He adjusted his stance so he could thrust his hips, which only took him back to the vision of fucking Sandra as she was bent and tied over the spanking horse. She wasn't ready for it, but he hoped eventually she would warm to the idea of being spanked and pleased in that way. The sensations from impact play could enhance other play, and he hoped to eventually introduce her to those. But only if she was ready.

Yet here in the shower he could let his imagination run wild. He could picture flogging or spanking her until wonderful red stripes marked her beautiful pale skin. Then when she was screaming with arousal and drowning under an endorphin high he would fuck her hard, pounding inside her until she tightened around him and screamed for him to come.

He hadn't realized how real his vision had been until his balls tightened against his body and he felt the impending explosion screaming for release.

His orgasm hit him like a fist to the gut, and he shouted as he leaned his forehead against the cold tile and continued to pump into his fist until every last drop of cum had been spent.

It took him a few minutes before his heart had returned to a normal speed and his breathing had calmed.

Damn, he couldn't wait to see her again.

Tomorrow was Sunday, and he had things to take care of around Club Desire. He needed to give her some space anyway. As far as he could tell, things had been a whirlwind since she'd gotten back into town, and she needed some downtime to rest and reflect. He would see her Monday morning, and he would have to be happy with that. He could use the time to plan their next scene.

The surge of arousal told him he needed to steer clear of any sexual thoughts about Sandra for the next day, or he would never get anything productive accomplished.

Although that might not be such a bad trade-off to make.

He laughed at himself and shook his head. How was it that all these years later she could still shred his control and send him back to that timid high-school boy pining after the hot, popular girl?

—

Diego took a deep breath as he pulled into the motel parking lot. He'd spent the last few days driving to this godforsaken hellhole called Phoenix. Without the humidity of New

York, the heat here seared into any exposed skin, making him feel like he was being flayed alive.

Damn Sandra for making him come here. The bitch would definitely pay for this.

It had taken him several hundred dollars to bribe someone to give him a page of Sandra's cell bill so he could see where she had been calling. It had been too much to hope for that the address listed on the bill would show him exactly where to find her. Instead, it still showed her address from New York, and he'd been unable to get her old roommate, Darla, to talk. With all the scrutiny from both the local Doms and law enforcement there, he hadn't wanted to risk forcing Darla to tell him, although it would have been enjoyable time spent after her asshole boyfriend, Mason, had banned him from his dungeon.

He didn't usually enjoy torturing men, but for Mason, he might make an exception. That man had gotten in his way for the last time.

Seeing Sandra's list of calls hadn't improved his mood, but it had shown him clearly where she'd gone. Her recent calls were mostly to Phoenix, with a few still to New York. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out she'd run home to Phoenix. He had looked up all the numbers on the bill, and when he'd found two calls to Club Desire, he'd been livid. A quick Google search had shown him it was a very elite dungeon, which meant Sandra was allowing some other Dom to fuck her.

That was unacceptable, and she would be severely punished. His mouth watered at the prospect. It usually took him nearly a year to finish playing with his victims before he was ready to kill them. The chase only made the final moments and the fear in their eyes all the sweeter. But in Sandra's case, she had pushed him beyond his limits. Since Sandra had stayed one step ahead of him since she ran, he didn't have the luxury of giving her the kind of send-off that would satisfy his cravings for revenge.

He couldn't risk getting caught, and Sandra's whining to the other Doms had brought him too much undue notice already.

He would find her. He would punish her, and then he would kill her. Slowly enough so she would suffer and feel fear, but then she *would* die so he could find the next.

The simple thought of the next woman in a long line cheered him and gave him renewed determination.

He pushed open the car door and headed to the small motel office to rent a room for the night. After some rest he could finish studying Sandra's cell bill and then start looking for her. He considered going back to New York when all this was over, but then another thought came to him. The authorities were watching him closely in New York, and he was sure Mason and the other Doms had gotten him blacklisted at all of the local dungeons, but neither of those was the case here in Phoenix.

As much as he hated this place, it also represented an untapped well of new women for him to choose from. It would bear checking out, and worst-case scenario, if he didn't find a good dungeon in need of Doms here, he could go to San Diego. Better weather, and the large kink and fetish population were more open about it than here in very conservative

Arizona. Or at least they all tried to *appear* conservative.

He smiled to himself. New prospects were opening up, so maybe this trip would yield extra rewards beyond seeing Sandra receive her rightful punishment.

Chapter 13

Sandra huffed out a breath and swung her legs over the side of the bed as she sat up. She'd tried to sleep last night, but after a full day of thinking about Master Brent without even a text message, her frustration had kept her wide awake and endlessly replaying their scene from Saturday night over and over inside her head. Which definitely hadn't helped her sleep.

And now he was picking her up in a few hours for a job interview, and she most likely looked like hell. Time to see what a brisk shower, some hot coffee, and some damage-control makeup could do.

An hour later she was downstairs, excitement coursing through her veins at the possibilities the day before her might hold.

When the knock sounded against the door frame, she jumped and let out an embarrassing squeak. She couldn't remember being this excited to have someone pick her up before. She wondered if this would have been what it felt like to be picked up by a prom date back in high school. Because of her home issues she had never accepted any high school dates, and she'd always felt she had missed out by not attending her proms.

She opened the door and drank in the pure male beauty that was Master Brent. He wore black dress slacks and a hunter-green button-down shirt that looked made for him from the way it lovingly caressed his sculpted torso and muscular arms. He was clean-shaven, and it took great effort not to reach up and run her fingers over his smooth, sculpted jaw. But she didn't need to be distracted this early in the day. She had important matters to take care of.

"Good morning, Sandra." His voice was gravelly and deep, that sexy male morning voice that sent shivers over her skin.

"Good morning." She held her arms out to her sides. "Will this outfit do?" Her silky A-line skirt fell sensuously around her calves, and she'd chosen a matching top with a tasteful V-neck and a three-quarter-length sleeve, since the heat was already strong, even this early in the morning. Michelle had insisted that business dress in Arizona definitely took the hotter climate into account, but there was still a part of her that worried she was underdressed.

"You look amazing." His thorough gaze raked over her from head to toe, and she sucked in a small breath at the almost physical sensation that look left in its wake. "I forgot to remind you that what passes for business dress in New York is very different from here. But it looks like you've adapted seamlessly."

Brent opened the front passenger door of a blue-gray BMW and helped her inside before lightly closing the door behind her.

The soft leather seats sighed as she slid in easily with the silky material of her skirt. She stretched out her legs, thankful for the roomy car, and also for the cold blast of air from the AC vent in front of her.

She wasn't overly tall, but her long legs made it tough to get comfortable in a lot of cars

and total hell on plane flights. So she always appreciated when she had ample legroom.

Brent had driven her home in a different car on Saturday night, and she had only just found out that he'd borrowed Master Dex's car that night.

Both cars were nicer than anything she had ever owned, but if given a choice she preferred this one, and not only because it was Master Brent's.

Maybe one of these days she'd get her feet under her and be able to buy one of these cars for herself.

"Did you eat something?" His deep voice held only curiosity and concern, so she forced her shoulder muscles to relax. She had to get past the automatic defensive reactions. They had no place in her new life.

She nodded and then realized Brent's concentration was on the busy freeway in front of them and not on her, so she cleared her throat to make sure she could speak. "I had a quick English muffin an hour or two ago."

He nodded, giving her a glance before returning his gaze to the road. "We'll pick up some lunch after your meeting with Gary, unless he wants you to start right away. If you're interested in the job after you two talk, that is."

She tried not to fidget in her seat as nerves finally set in, but ended up adjusting the sleeves of the dressy button-down around her arms. She loved the feel of the soft cotton and the way the deep blue material gave her face some actual color after her long night. She smiled at the memory, and her body seemed to wake up at the mere mention of her time with Master Brent Saturday night.

She wrenched her mind back to the interview and what lay ahead. She'd known he was taking her to meet someone about a job, but now that he'd said it out loud, it felt like a suffocating cloud had closed in around her.

She blew out a slow breath and mentally shook off the odd sensation. "So what kind of job is it?"

"I gave Gary a quick rundown of your qualifications, and he told me he'd love to talk to you about a position he'd been trying to fill." Brent signaled before he changed lanes and sped up to match traffic. "I'll let you two talk and decide if this is a good fit or not. You're under no obligation to take this unless it feels right to you."

"Thank you." She reached out and squeezed his shoulder. She'd needed to touch him, to show how much it meant to have him care for her this way. "I appreciate you setting this up, and driving me out here."

"No problem at all." He sent her a quick smile before he returned his attention to the road, slowing as several people changed lanes to take the next exit. "I've known Gary for several years," he continued. "He owns several successful international businesses and is always looking for good talent."

"International businesses?" She cringed as she realized that had come out as more of a nervous squeak than her normal voice. She really hoped that didn't happen during the interview. Sandra had always picked up new skills quite easily, but for some reason the thought of an international business loomed larger and more frightening than a fully

domestic one.

“Don’t sound so nervous.” Brent reached out to brush a comforting hand over her knee. “Just because it’s an international business doesn’t mean you can’t handle it. You’re a smart woman. I’m confident you can easily pick up whatever you need to learn.”

His voice sounded sure and echoed her previous thoughts, so she pulled some of his confidence deep inside herself for strength. “I will,” she said with determination. “It just threw me off when you said ‘international’ for some reason. I’ve only ever worked for small companies that had fewer than fifty employees.” She thought back to the job she’d left in New York. She had enjoyed the challenge of organizing the office and keeping everything flowing as it should. But a much larger company that dealt with multiple countries would give her a lot to learn on every front. A sliver of excitement flowed through her and she laughed.

“Are you all right?” His voice held amusement, and she didn’t blame him. She’d been clearly scared a minute ago and now she was laughing. What a damned basket case she was lately.

“Yes, sorry.” She forced a smile onto her face, hoping it looked natural. “I gave myself an internal pep talk, and now I’m excited about the new prospect and ready to go.”

Brent chuckled, his sexy lips curving. “I’m glad. You really are a smart woman, Sandra. You always have been...”

His voice cut off suddenly, making Sandra frown. The statement struck her as very odd. He’d only known her for a few days.

She thought about asking about the odd wording but shook the thought away. She was most likely reading too much into his words, and she needed to concentrate on the coming interview.

He took the freeway exit and merged with the busy downtown traffic.

“Let’s get you to this interview, and then we can talk over lunch.” He sent her a quick smile as he pulled up to a stoplight, and several pedestrians scurried across the street in front of them.

His smile was genuine, but there was something there that made her pause. A tightness around his eyes that she wasn’t used to seeing. It was probably just something she’d imagined. She really needed to get her thoughts under control. She needed all her concentration to go toward getting this job and starting her new life.

After a few more harrowing turns onto one-way streets, which reminded Sandra why she hated to drive in downtown Phoenix, Brent turned into a parking garage and then slid into a spot with a “Reserved for Trask Industries” sign posted in front of it.

Sandra gave in to a quick bout of vanity and checked her hair and face in the small mirror on the visor. She made sure her cover-up makeup hid all the evidence of her long, restless, sexually frustrated night spent missing Brent. She couldn’t believe after the amazing orgasms she’d had Saturday night that her body craved even more, but craved it did.

Right now she needed to get her mind off her sex life. She pushed up the visor, turned

to him, and smiled. "All right. Let's do this."

—

Brent stood as Sandra and Gary came out of a conference room down the hall. Two hours in the waiting room chairs hadn't been comfortable, even interspersed with pacing.

As Sandra turned and their gazes met, he sucked in a breath. For the first time since he'd seen her on the monitors at Club Desire, she looked happy. The dark shadows that always lurked in her eyes had been vanquished, and on Sandra, true happiness made her breathtaking. Literally, in this case.

"Brent." Gary walked forward and held out his hand. "I'd like you to meet my newest employee."

Brent shook Gary's hand. "Congratulations, Gary."

"Hey!" Sandra was looking at him with a mock frown. "What about me? Don't you think I deserve some congratulations?"

Brent shrugged, trying to look nonchalant. "I was just congratulating Gary on stealing another great prospective employee from me."

Sandra laughed and waved him away. "You couldn't handle me as an employee anyway."

Brent found he really enjoyed this new, bantering side of Sandra, and hoped to see more of it. "Oh, really? Why do you say that?"

She shared a conspiratorial look with Gary before turning back to Brent. "After some discussion, Gary and I have agreed you couldn't handle me."

That startled a laugh out of Brent and he wondered what they had talked about. Gary knew about Club Desire, but as far as he knew tended toward vanilla, so it couldn't be in that arena.

Gary slapped Brent on the shoulder surprisingly hard, especially as the older man was a good four inches shorter than Brent and a great deal less solid. "Well, my boy, you brought me a firecracker here. She's smart, and from everything I can tell she knows how to run an office. We need to train her up a bit on the international aspect, but it sounds like she can wrangle the toughest office into shape."

He cast Sandra an expression of pride and anticipation. "I even took her out to the cube farm and let her try out her skills on the programmers and support staff. After several minutes of their trying to frustrate her with misinformation and double talk, she sweetly and swiftly put them in their places and got them to not only get back to work, but promise to have the office straightened up and organized, and even have their equipment fully inventoried and documented for her by the time she comes in tomorrow." Gary cast Sandra another gaze of glowing approval. "And that was even before I offered her the job."

Brent laughed. "Congratulations, Sandra. I think." He sent her a quick smile. "Although I'm not sure I did you any favors subjecting you to this crotchety old man every weekday."

"Hey now. Who are you calling old?" Gary shook his finger at Brent as if he were

scolding a naughty pupil. "I'll accept the crotchety, but just because I'm older than you doesn't make me old. Speaking of old, have you heard from Valerie lately?" His tone was light, but Brent knew how much pain lurked beneath that subject.

"We lost touch," Gary added simply, his expression giving away nothing to anyone who hadn't known him for several years.

Brent remembered when he'd first met Gary. The London branch of Gary's business was failing, which caused him to spend most of his nights and weekends in the office or on conference calls. He and Valerie had been dating for several years at that point, and she'd finally gotten fed up and left him.

Brent had gotten Valerie a consulting job with another local firm doing the same thing she'd been doing when she'd first met Gary. But then he'd lost touch with her too until a few years ago, when she'd shown up at Club Desire to petition for membership.

Brent motioned for Gary to step off to the side of the lobby with him. "Sandra, excuse us for a moment. I'll be right back."

When they had stepped out of earshot of Sandra, Brent smiled at his old friend. "I have heard from Valerie."

Gary's head snapped up, and unmistakable hope and longing filled his gaze. He was obviously still madly in love with Valerie, and she with him if Brent was any judge.

"She's doing well. Been promoted several times over, and looking fantastic, as usual." Before Gary could interrupt to ask how to find her, or if Brent had her current number, he pressed on. "I would suggest you come by Club Desire this Saturday night. About seven thirty or so." He let silence fall for a long moment while Gary fidgeted. "I'll give you a tour of the place, and...introduce you to some of the regulars."

Gary stood looking stunned for a long moment until he finally cleared his throat. "The Club. Okay." He met Brent's gaze squarely. "What should I wear for this tour?"

Gary's voice was strong and even, but Brent had known him long enough to tell he was uncomfortable with this topic. He thought about messing with Gary and telling him to wear a Catwoman outfit, or to dress up as Dr. Frank-N-Furter from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, but he took pity on the man. He knew Gary's view of what a fetish club looked like wasn't accurate. "Just wear whatever is comfortable."

Gary nodded woodenly and then darted a glance across the lobby, where Sandra sat reading something on her phone. "Give me an example. What do you wear at the Club, Brent?"

Again, Brent bit back the temptation to mess with his friend as all kinds of interesting answers spilled through his mind. In the end he settled on honesty. "When I'm not participating, I tend to wear something very much like what I'm wearing today." He gestured toward himself. "Comfortable dress slacks and a button-down shirt. And comfortable shoes are a must for me since I do so much walking to oversee everything."

Gary's gaze panned down to Brent's Armani loafers. "What about when you are... participating?"

Brent smiled, unable to resist the temptation any longer. "You know, assless chaps,

nipple rings, a leather Catwoman costume—things like that.”

Gary paled and cast another glance toward Sandra.

“She can’t hear us, and she isn’t even paying attention,” Brent reminded Gary.

Gary looked decidedly uncomfortable, and Brent took pity on him again. “I’m kidding, Gary. You seem like you’re about to pass out.”

Gary blew out a long breath as relief flowed across his features, and he shook his head. “All right, Brent. I deserved that.” He laughed as the tension finally left his face. “I know when you were a newbie in the industry I played quite a few jokes on you. All in good fun, I assure you, but I was quite merciless at times, even more so when you looked green in the gills.” His expression turned slightly sheepish and he shrugged. “So I suppose I had it coming.” He met Brent’s gaze squarely. “All right, for Valerie I’ll break through my misgivings and step foot inside Club Desire.”

Brent knew how hard that one act would be for Gary. He had never been to any club as far as Brent knew. Valerie had always tried to get him to accompany her, but he had always adamantly refused.

Brent didn’t think Gary was morally or ethically opposed to it. He was most likely more concerned about who would see him there. If Brent could coax Gary out, he would do his best to safeguard his privacy as much as he could. That was business as usual at Desire, but since Gary was a close friend, Brent would go out of his way to try to ensure his first visit was memorable in a good way—especially considering how difficult he knew it would be for his friend to even show up. It was the least he could do for one of the men who’d helped him make his name as a successful business consultant. He would never be where he was today without Gary and a handful of others like him.

He nodded toward his friend. “Gary. If you’re worried about being seen at the Club, don’t. It is very discreet, and to steal a movie line, ‘What happens at Club Desire stays at Club Desire.’ And anyone you might see there will also be visiting a kinky sex club, so it will even out.”

Gary blew out a long breath. “Thanks for pointing that out. It really does help to think of it like that. Working too much, and me worrying about appearances,” he said wearily, making Brent wonder where this was going, “that’s what eventually drove Valerie away, and now that I’ve found her again I refuse to let a little fear about the unknown keep me from her. So be straight with me, Brent. If I show up planning on participating, what should I wear?”

Surprised by the sudden breakthrough, Brent took a slow breath and answered honestly. “I wear leather pants and a comfortable black T-shirt. But there are several Doms there who wear dress slacks, jeans, or even shorts. It’s whatever you’re comfortable moving around in. Why don’t you bring a few things with you in a bag on Saturday and we can talk more specifics then? If you come early, we can talk before Valerie arrives. In fact, you can stay at the Club if you like. We have terrific rooms upstairs.”

“Thank you, Brent.” Genuine gratitude shone in his expression. “I’ll see you on Saturday.” He walked across the lobby and held out his hand to Sandra. “Welcome to the

team. I think Trask Industries will be an excellent fit for you, and that you'll be a wonderful addition to our team. I'll see you first thing in the morning."

—

Fifteen minutes later, still bubbling with excitement over her new job, Sandra walked beside Brent toward the front of the Different Pointe of View restaurant. It was a very nice, romantic restaurant inside the Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs Resort.

Sandra had always wanted to eat here, but with her finances, or lack thereof, hadn't thought she'd ever get to, let alone step inside the resort for a look around.

A strong breeze swirled the ends of her hair into her eyes. Now and then a few small leaves would fly by, and she would brush them off her clothes or out of her face. But since the breeze was a welcome respite from the hot day, Sandra smiled and enjoyed it.

Brent slowed and turned toward her, causing her to stop short. "I should have asked. Do you like the Different Pointe of View restaurant?"

She nodded, trying and failing to keep what would most likely be a sappy smile off her face. "I've never been here. I've always wanted to, but just never...got around to it."

She bit her tongue to keep herself from diving into another ramble, or even worse, revealing too much about her upbringing. Especially her abusive mother, their constant lack of money, or how horrible the punishments were when her mother caught her daydreaming about having a better life. Alice Barry didn't like Sandra to have any escape from her control, not even a temporary mental one.

Brent smiled at her and then raised his hand.

Sandra instinctively reacted, flinching away and taking a small step back.

Her brain kicked in, reminding her that this was Brent and not her mother.

She was usually better at covering those instinctive reactions, but since she'd been thinking about Alice and that old way of life, when Brent raised his hand...

She firmed her spine and forced herself to look up and meet his too perceptive gaze. Except he was probably thinking of Diego and not her mother.

Or at least she hoped so.

"I'm sorry, Sandra." His expression was concerned and gentle. "I was just going to pick a few leaves out of your hair. I should have warned you."

She reached up and ruffled her hair, watching a few small leaves flutter off into the wind again. "It's not a problem."

She saw the knowledge in his eyes of what he'd thought had caused her instinctive reaction, but she tried to smooth it over. She didn't like to talk about that time in her life if she could help it. And she definitely didn't want him always treating her with kid gloves.

"I'm starving. How about you?" She smiled at the comfortable, playful tone that she had successfully infused into her voice. Maybe they could move past this without incident after all.

Brent nodded, but she wasn't sure if he had accepted her dodge of the situation or was

biding his time until he could bring it up again. In either case, she really was hungry.

“I called ahead while you were in the restroom at Gary’s, so they have our table ready.” He held out his hand, a gallant gesture that warmed her heart.

She placed her hand in his, a thrill of connection running through her at the skin-to-skin contact as they continued to make their way toward the front of the resort.

Since the entire property was perched on a hilltop, she shouldn’t have been surprised when they were seated next to a window that gave them a breathtaking view of the city below. Somehow when she had imagined herself in this place back in high school she had never quite envisioned sitting here, enjoying this spectacular view while a sexy man across from her ordered wine and appetizers.

He made sure she liked red wine and asked her appetizer preferences. “In celebration of your new job,” he said with a nod.

When the waiter returned with the wine, he told them about the specials. Since she wasn’t sure how much attention she could direct toward the menu, she went ahead and ordered the first special he mentioned. Only after the waiter had left did she realize she hadn’t even asked how much it was. It had sounded good, although she couldn’t really remember what she had ordered now that Master Brent was staring into her eyes from across the table.

He took her hand in his, the warm skin of his slightly roughened fingertips making her remember what that touch had felt like last night against her sensitive skin. She shivered, but not from cold, and raised her gaze to meet his.

His blue eyes looked darker somehow in the intimate atmosphere of the restaurant. They weren’t the only patrons, others were scattered around, but not at any of the tables closest to them.

It felt like they were in an exclusive part of the dining room, and who knew—they might be. She didn’t have any experience with a place like this. She almost felt like the poor country cousin come to visit the city.

She tried to stop fidgeting in her chair and just enjoy the experience.

“Sandra. Relax.” His voice held gentle understanding. “No one here will bite.” The edges of his lips curved up into a mischievous smile that took his features from handsome to totally devastating. She wished she could steel her heart against that deadly weapon, but it felt as if it were melting into a glob of clay that he could mold however he wished. “Although if you’re a good little sub, I’ll bite you. And I promise to make sure you love it.”

A zing of arousal shot through her and she shifted in her seat against the wetness that dampened her panties. Even though he’d said it in jest, she had no doubt that Master Brent could deliver on that implied promise. And she couldn’t wait.

Brent was one of the most charming men she had ever met. He was the total package—sinfully good-looking, cultured, well mannered, generous, and adventurous, and all wrapped up with a wonderful sense of humor and playfulness that probably made every woman he met fall at his feet.

She winced that she was only one of many until she reminded herself that he was with

her now, and had been two nights ago. If she were any judge, he would be with her many times again.

Thoughts of all those future times sent her pulse racing, making her wish she were adventurous enough to do something daring and bold right here in the restaurant.

She wasn't ready for something like that yet, but suspected the more time spent with Master Brent, her bravery would grow until she was able to be brazen and sexy in public.

She hoped so.

It had been such a wonderful morning so far, and definitely promised to be an amazing day. She had a job with a boss who seemed understanding, funny, and friendly, and now lunch at a restaurant where she'd always fantasized about eating. And later tonight was her first self-defense class with Master Dex back at Club Desire.

Thoughts about all the times in her life that self-defense skills would have come in handy flitted through her mind as if someone were flipping the pages of a book in front of her face.

"Sandra?"

She jumped, feeling as if she'd just been caught, but caught doing what, she wasn't quite sure. "Sorry. My mind wandered a little."

"Not a problem." He gestured with his chin toward the large window beside them. "That view would make anyone turn a bit introspective. Terrific, isn't it?"

She met his smile with one of her own. "It's amazing. I've always wondered what it was like in here." She squeezed his hand. "Thank you so much for bringing me. And thank you for introducing me to Gary." She felt another rambling speech coming on and bit her tongue to stop it.

His too perceptive gaze raked over her, making her feel as if he could see every secret she tried to keep carefully hidden inside.

"You're literally glowing with excitement. It's nice to see." Brent took a sip of his wine and gestured toward her waiting glass. "And there are still great things in store today."

She nodded as anticipation marched through her.

Chapter 14

The moment she was dreading came as they finished lunch and waited for the delivery of the fruit tart Brent had ordered for dessert.

“Sandra.” He laid his large hand over hers, and even the strength and warmth pulsing from the contact couldn’t warm the core of ice that had formed in her belly. “Who hit you?”

She’d known it was coming, but even so, she flinched as if she’d been struck, her mouth and throat went dry, and tears brimmed in her eyes.

He stroked his thumb over the back of her hand, and she looked up to meet his gaze before she could catch herself. She always had the feeling that Brent could see way too much when he looked into her eyes. But it was too late now.

What she saw in them made her already shaky breathing hitch. There was concern, but also a fierce protectiveness on her behalf that she’d never seen so intensely from anyone.

A thick silence fell as she tried to form words to explain away or deflect the discussion she knew was coming. Through it all, Brent’s gentle yet firm gaze held her captive, and she had to resist the urge to run away to avoid this conversation.

When she thought she couldn’t stand another second of the tension and dread building deep inside her belly, she pushed out one word that wasn’t exactly a lie, but wasn’t the entire truth either. “Diego.” She tried her best to make it sound like she was surprised he didn’t already know.

His gaze never faltered, but his head cocked slightly to the side, those deep blue eyes still pinning her in place.

“Who else before Diego?”

Before she could think better of it, she sucked in a small breath that sounded loud in the thick silence that Brent allowed to hang between them.

He knew.

“Do you remember what I told you?” he asked gently.

Her mind scrambled to find the relevant conversation, but nothing came to her. Brent must have read that in her expression, because he continued.

“I told you that I would decide what’s relevant and what’s not that could affect what happens on the dungeon floor.” His gaze softened a small fraction but still didn’t waver from her. “Because of the very nature of the play we engage in, as your Dom, it’s my responsibility to not only protect you, but guide you toward your pleasure and your deepest desires and needs. I can’t do that if I don’t know what happened.” He paused, and his entire demeanor changed as he turned to allow the waiter to set the tart between them and then retreat.

Sandra hadn’t even noticed the man was there until the tart plate clinked softly against the table. But Brent had easily and effectively let her save face by making it seem they were so caught up in each other that they wanted as much privacy as they could get. A

swell of gratitude rose, and she closed her eyes, steeling herself against what she knew was still to come.

He gave her a small smile of support. "It's all right. I know in the past that Diego used things like this to hurt and manipulate you. I can only try to earn your trust over time and prove I won't do the same. But I can't risk hurting you with any more play until I know the situation."

The knot of ice in her stomach tightened and the first tear slipped down her cheek. She knew Master Brent wasn't trying to blackmail her using her craving for play to get what he wanted, and she could even see the logic in his statement. But that didn't make it any easier to discuss the subject she'd been instinctively hiding since she was ten years old.

She straightened her spine and raised her chin. All of that was in the past and had no place in her new life, so maybe it was time to vanquish it. To finally admit it to someone other than Child Protective Services, and even possibly deal with it with the help of a therapist. But first, she had to see if she could even tell Brent.

She took a fortifying breath and steeled herself before diving in. "My father left us when I was ten." The memory still sliced deep, and the familiar pain in her heart broke the control she'd been holding on to with the last shred of her willpower. Hot tears flowed freely down her cheeks. "My mother resented me as an unwelcome reminder of what she'd lost when he left, and she turned to alcohol." Sandra tried to find the words to explain the rest, but she already felt hollowed out from even that admission. She'd held it inside for so long that it had become a constant part of her, and it felt odd to have set it free.

Brent gently squeezed her hand, compassion and understanding strong in his gaze. "Alcohol can often cause people who are holding on to pain and anger to lash out, especially toward those who are closest to them."

His words and calm, understanding tone seemed to break open the last of her barriers to that part of her life, and words tumbled out of her.

"It started only a week after my dad left us. Mom dressed up in a slinky party dress that showed her boobs, slathered on too much makeup and perfume, and told me there were TV dinners in the freezer as she walked out the door." Sandra closed her eyes against the sharp memory, but her words wouldn't stop. "I had been home alone many times before that, but since my dad's leaving was still so fresh, I was terrified that my mom had left me too. That I was alone in the world. And in a way, I was from that moment on."

She took a small sip of her wine, welcoming the moisture onto her dry tongue. "As soon as Mom's car pulled out of the driveway, I broke down and sobbed until I felt hollow and empty."

She was surprised to realize Brent had moved his chair closer and she was pulled tight against him. When had that happened?

The familiar raw pain and fear came back and she sobbed against Master Brent's chest. He threaded his fingers through her hair, gently massaging her scalp, a sense of comfort melting the edges of that remembered pain.

As he held her, Sandra continued. “Hours later, Mom came home drunk, although at the time I didn’t quite understand that. Neither of my parents ever drank in front of me, and I had never seen anyone drunk, not even on TV. When I first heard her car pull into the driveway, relief rushed through me, and all I could think about was that I would feel safe again. She had come back. She wasn’t abandoning me like Dad.”

Sandra sucked in a breath so she could continue. “I ripped open the front door and ran out to meet her, wanting to feel her arms around me and hear her tell me that she would never leave me, and that she loved me. Instead, she raised her arm and backhanded me so hard I was knocked off my feet. I fell on the ground, hard, my lower lip bleeding, and pain ripping open my heart all over again from my dad leaving. I had never been hit by anyone before that, and the pure fact that it was from my mother made it so much worse.”

She spared a glance at Brent and found him looking at her, concern and protectiveness apparent in his gaze. He took one of the cloth napkins from the table and gently brushed away her tears while still holding her and offering her his silent strength.

Sandra licked her lips, tasting the salt from her tears. “It became a routine after that. When I heard the car pull into the driveway I would hide, hoping she would pass out and forget all about me until morning, but she rarely did. She would slam into the house and come looking for me. It didn’t matter where I hid—she always found me.”

Sandra rubbed her hands self-consciously over both arms, remembering having to wear long sleeves even in the summer. “It became almost second nature to conceal the bruises. If someone did notice, it was effortless to lie about them and hope my mom never found out that I had let someone know our horrible secret.”

She shook her head, remembering the frustrating cycle that had been her life. “A few times people did see my bruises, and I paid dearly for not being careful enough.”

Brent’s body stiffened just enough that Sandra could tell he’d reacted to her words. So when his low rumble came, it didn’t surprise her. “CPS never removed you from the situation?”

Sandra shook her head, staring at Brent’s cheek or chin rather than be caught in his gaze once again. “I would be called out of class to report to the counselor’s office. The school counselor and a CPS worker would be waiting. They would ask me about the bruises, or whatever report they had gotten from the neighbors or my teachers, and I would either tell them the truth or blatantly lie and defend Mom—it never made a difference.”

She tightened her hands into fists at the frustration that still burned through her that those appointed to protect her never had.

“They would tell me it would be all right and not to worry. Then before I got home from school they had already gone to speak to my mother. She’d tell them how hard it was without my dad and how difficult it was to raise a ‘problem’ child while working full time. Then she would promise never to do it again, or lie and tell them that I had come home with the bruises and wouldn’t tell her how I had gotten them. In the end, I would return home to another beating, sometimes so severe I wasn’t able to go to school for a week until the bruises faded and I didn’t wince every time I spoke or moved.”

She sniffled, noticing the tears were slowing. “After a while I prayed that CPS would just stop intervening. I could weather the original beatings. I had grown almost used to them. But the ones after their visits to her were brutal. I’m still surprised there is no lasting physical damage.”

She shook her head, anger welling for the first time in a long while at the situation. “Throughout all of it I kept expecting them to take me and put me into foster care somewhere. That’s why they exist. Or so I thought. But they never did take me. Unless a minor ends up in the ER, they continue to let things slide.” She fisted her hands so tight her nails caused little pinpricks of pain against her palms. “I hope it’s not that way anymore, but back then it definitely was, at least here in Arizona.”

Brent’s arms tightened around her and she burrowed against him, tucking her head under his chin. She sniffled, embarrassed that she was having a mini breakdown in a public place. But Brent’s strong and comforting presence seemed to insulate her and hold the mortification at bay.

His warmth and strength poured into her and she let out a sigh as the heavy weight that she’d carried all these years lightened, if only a little.

“So you became adept at hiding it from everyone, putting on a mask of serenity and kindness that would keep people from looking too closely at you and your home life.” He said it as a fact and not a question, so she only nodded, feeling numb and disconnected from the entire conversation.

He rubbed gentle circles over her back, which slowly helped calm her breathing enough to answer. “By the time I got to high school I somehow made it into the ‘popular’ set, although I have no earthly idea how.”

She laid her hand over Brent’s heart, letting the steady beat and his warmth soothe her. “I didn’t have any close friends to speak of since I couldn’t risk letting anyone get that close to me or my deep, dark secret. Oh, there were a few people I liked to see at school and who made me smile, like Michelle. I never shared too much that was personal with any of them, though. I couldn’t risk it. But I interacted just enough so that I began to look forward to seeing them and hearing about their lives that were so much more normal and calm than mine.”

Sandra shuddered at the painful memories that swamped her and pulled back a little from Brent. His touch was wonderful, but right now there was too much going on inside her, so much that she was afraid she might burst if she allowed any more input into her overtaxed brain.

She sucked in a breath as more words tumbled out. “I did go out of my way to see the good in others and try to be kind at all times, no matter how much I was tempted to lash out.” She frowned a minute, wondering at Brent’s ability to be so accurate on that count. Maybe he knew someone who had been through something similar? She hoped not.

She cleared her throat as more words bubbled up. “I refused to be anything like my mother, and that included raising my voice or using harsh words toward anyone. I never invited anyone to my house. I rarely attended parties or get-togethers, and then only when my mom was partying for the weekend or shacked up at the house of some guy she

had just met.” She shook her head. “I just couldn’t risk it. But somehow amid all that I ended up being popular.”

Sandra licked her lips, suddenly wishing she were back in bed and not drowning in memories from the past. “I can only surmise that a good chunk of that was because I filled out early.” She glanced down at her generous cleavage and then up to meet Brent’s gaze. “I grew into my curves before most of the other girls, and the boys started to take notice. I’m surprised I made it out of high school a virgin for all the times that boys would try to manipulate me into having sex, a male teacher tried to kiss me or ‘accidentally’ brush against my breasts or my ass, or Mom brought one of her drunken boyfriends home from the bar.”

She squeezed her eyes shut against the vivid memories that tried to flood back. “I learned early on to keep my room locked and stay out of sight. The upside was that if she brought one of them home, she wanted to look like the perfect mother, so she never touched me on those nights.”

Brent offered her a smile and she basked in its warmth for a few seconds before continuing. “I would usually try to sneak out the next morning before either of them woke up. I’d go hang out at the park or on the bleachers at the high school until I thought it was late enough that the men would be gone. It usually took until nightfall for Mom to sober up, so I learned to time it well, and she never seemed to care that I had been gone all day.”

Brent cupped her cheek in his large hand, the warmth of the contact burning through her and softening the hard core of ice that had formed inside her belly before she’d told him.

“No child should have to deal with something like that. Children should be loved, cherished—protected. I’m sorry you had to go through that.” He brushed a slow kiss over her trembling lips before tucking her against him again.

She didn’t answer, but a sense of the rightness of his touch soothed her. She was glad he hadn’t said he understood. No one understood unless they’d been through it, and she didn’t want to think about this wonderful man ever having gone through the hell she’d survived.

Oddly, it hadn’t been as difficult to talk about as she’d feared. The pain was still there, but somehow it was muted. She had expected that reliving those memories would be just as painful as living through them the first time, but in a way it almost felt like she was relating the story about someone else, some stranger. Only the churning of remembered dread deep inside her stomach confirmed that it had indeed happened to her.

“Thank you.” She blew out a slow breath, trying to get used to the sensation of being without all of her heavy secrets. “I’ve never told anyone all of that outside of the different CPS agents who came to my school to talk to me. It actually feels good to finally let it out.” She pulled back enough to meet his gaze. “I never thought I’d say this, but thank you for pushing me to tell you.”

Brent’s lips curved into a gentle smile, his handsome face showing compassion and something that for a flash of a second she thought might be...no...it couldn’t be that. It

definitely wasn't love, although there might be the first stirrings of it on her side. She'd seen in Brent's gaze a deep caring, at the very least.

"I'm glad you trusted me enough to tell me." He smoothed his thumb over the back of her hand in a soothing rhythm. "Now I understand why you have a hard limit about being hit. I won't abuse that knowledge."

She returned his smile. She'd let her guard down with him. She'd learned never to share any type of personal information with Diego, especially fears and sensitive spots. But she believed Brent when he said he wouldn't do the same. If she was wrong, only time would tell.

She sucked in a deep breath, hoping she wasn't wrong. *Please, not about this.*

Brent brushed his fingers over her forehead as if he were smoothing away the creases that formed when she frowned. It made her aware of her tense expression, and she forced herself to relax her face and loosen the muscles of her shoulders and neck. It was time to move forward.

"As for now, Master Brent, I think we have more important business to attend to." She purposely used extra emphasis on his honorific to try to steer the conversation to more comfortable topics. The flash of sexual interest in his deep, blue gaze showed her it had gotten his attention.

He sent her a questioning look, which made her laugh as she'd hoped. "We have this beautiful fruit tart to eat."

He laughed and then dropped his gaze to the tart. "It's too bad we don't have more privacy here. We'll have to try a restaurant with a little more next time, but not too much."

Her skin heated at the dark hunger that shone in his eyes.

"What *would* you do if we had a little more privacy?" she pressed, truly curious.

Brent picked a piece of kiwi off the fruit tart and brushed it against her lips. When she opened her mouth to take it, he pulled it away. "You'll have to be patient. Believe me, there are wonders that are definitely possible, even here, but I don't think you're ready for them yet." He brushed the kiwi over her lips again, spreading its moisture before lowering his mouth to hers.

He kissed her thoroughly, effectively stealing the sweet juice from her lips and causing her entire body to heat as moisture dampened her panties.

When he pulled back from the kiss her breath was coming in harsh pants. All she wanted at this moment was to have him buried deep inside her. A vivid image of him laying her back on the table, on top of the tart and everything else, to fuck her hard until she screamed his name in front of the waiter and all the other diners sent shivers racing through her.

As if he could smell her arousal, he threaded his fingers through the hair at her nape and took control of her mouth in a rough, thorough invasion. As the sensual assault continued, her nipples puckered hard against the cups of her lacy bra and her clit throbbed.

The sound of a clearing throat broke through her haze of arousal, and Brent's deep chuckle echoed through her as he slowly broke the kiss and pulled back.

It took her a few long moments to make sense of the situation. When she did, she saw the waiter standing right next to them, looking decidedly uncomfortable. She knew she should feel embarrassed, but she only wished Brent would have ignored the interruption and completed her vivid fantasy right here in front of the world.

“Yes, we'll take the check. Thank you.”

Brent's voice brought her the rest of the way back to the present moment and reality. She must have missed the entire exchange between Brent and the waiter to this point. She tried to gather her wits, but the endorphins still raged through her.

Master Brent had awakened her desire, and her body demanded more. Because right now he was *Master* Brent and not just Brent. Once again in charge of her desires, and she loved it.

“Let's get back to the Club and we can take care of you before your self-defense class this evening. If I send you to the class this aroused you might end up killing someone.” He smiled, and she forced her lips to curve in response.

At least he recognized how aroused she was and he wasn't going to leave her this way. Or worse, demand that she not take care of it herself or punish her for even getting wet. She shoved those thoughts away. That was her old life. She needed to bury it and enjoy building this new one.

Master Brent paid the bill and then offered her his hand so she could stand. She was glad for the help—her legs were wobbly and her entire body was busy trying to process all the signals and stimulus of the past hour.

Chapter 15

By the time they reached Club Desire and she'd changed into something more comfortable, Sandra's body was screaming. Master Brent had taken her back to the room she'd stayed in before, to let her change and freshen up before they headed down to Basement 2.

Not sure what was on the agenda for the day, she slipped on a blue, lacy baby-doll nightie with spaghetti straps. The bottom ruffle tickled the tops of her thighs, flashing the small scrap of material that passed for the matching panties each time she moved.

Master Brent growled deep inside his throat. "I love that color on you, Sandra."

She turned to find his possessive gaze raking over her. No one would mistake the blatant message of "mine" in his gaze. The knowledge thrilled her and kicked her arousal back into overdrive. "It's the same color as your eyes."

His expression darkened with something that made anticipation surge through her. That gaze promised erotic explorations that would leave her boneless with pleasure. And she couldn't wait.

Master Brent led her down to Basement 2, where only a few people were playing scenes or sitting in the locker room chatting.

"I suppose I shouldn't be surprised it's not very busy right now." She glanced around at the sparsely populated space. Most of the play areas looked like sets for a production that weren't in use. "It is a Monday afternoon, so most people should still be at work."

He laughed and continued to guide her around the long, circular hallway to the opposite side of the floor from the locker room. He stopped next to a scene with a bondage bed, a tall spanking bench, and a St. Andrew's cross, along with several overhead bars and chains to hook D rings into for various purposes and a large blue toy bag lying on a table nearby. A fresh surge of moisture dampened her panties at the thought of what play Master Brent might have in store for her today.

"You'd be surprised when people flock to the Club." He ran one large finger over her shoulder and down her back nearly to the top globes of her ass. A wave of goose bumps flowed over her, bringing a rush of erotic heat. "There are some Mondays that end up being busier than Friday or Saturday nights."

She shook her head as her mind finally caught up with the fact that Master Brent was unaware of the erotic maelstrom he'd set off inside her with that simple touch and was continuing his response to what she had said. If she kept drowning in arousal and pleasure, she might never be able to think straight again. A smile curved her lips at the thought. What a wonderful way to lose her mind.

He ran his hand down the back of her silky nightie and farther to stroke over the sensitive skin of her ass. "Do you trust me to take care of you, Sandra?"

She turned to face him, meeting his gaze and reading the intensity and the anticipation there. "Yes, Master Brent. I do trust you." She waited for any signal from her body that

she didn't entirely mean that, but none came. Only a sense of rightness and anticipation. She smiled up at him.

He nodded once, his handsome face promising wonderful pleasures she could only guess at. "Take off the nightie and anything else you don't want ripped off. We're pretty removed from the main part of the floor, so we should have privacy for our scene." He caressed her cheek, sending warmth through her as if she'd swallowed a nice, smooth shot of whiskey.

"Step on the stool in front of the spanking bench and bend over it so your ass is in the air and at my mercy, and those beautiful breasts are hanging down on the other side."

The muscles across her shoulders tightened as instinctive fear sliced through her. It took her a long moment to battle it back and remind herself that this was Master Brent and not Diego. She'd told him she trusted him, and she meant it. Before she could overthink things, she quickly stripped off the nightie and the small thong panties, and squared her shoulders.

Through sheer willpower, she put one foot in front of the other until she was close enough to step up onto the wide stool in front of the spanking bench. The step up brought her high enough so she could bend over the comfortably padded bench that supported her from the crease above her thighs to just under her breasts. Most of the benches she'd seen were lower so the Dom could sit and bend his sub over his knee for spanking or other punishments. These taller ones were usually about penetration or some type of more intense play.

Her breasts hung down over the side and she cupped them, suddenly self-conscious about their size and weight.

Master Brent's voice sounded from close beside her, making her jump.

"Stretch your arms out in front of you and wrap your hands around the bar." His voice held quiet confidence, and she thrilled at having all of that intensity trained solely on her.

She raised her head so she could see the bar he'd mentioned and then stretched out her arms so she could wrap her fingers around it. She had to rest her full weight on the bench beneath her to get her hands around the smooth, wooden bar, which left her breasts hanging free. It wasn't painful or even uncomfortable, but it did leave her feeling very exposed.

Master Brent pulled a length of blue rope from a toy bag nearby. The rope was the same blue as her nightie had been and her pussy clenched at the thought of what he was going to use it for.

She was surprised when he began wrapping the rope around her wrists and then tethering it to the rings that went through the bar. Master Scott had always used soft restraints, which were easier to secure than rope, and Diego had used manacles or pure fear to keep her in place.

"Sandra," Master Brent said as he secured first one wrist and then the other. "These should be tight but not uncomfortable. They are to keep you from moving or using your hands while the scene is in progress, but there shouldn't be any pain involved. You need

to let me know if they are uncomfortable or painful in any way. You will never be punished for telling me, no matter what it interrupts.” He brushed his fingers over her cheek in a sweet gesture that sent warmth surging through her.

“Remember what I told you. I need to have all of that information so I can choose the best things for both your highest pleasure and your well-being during our scenes.”

“Yes, sir,” she answered without thinking.

Treating Master Brent as her Dom had become second nature in only a few days. It felt so natural, she wondered where she would be right now if he had been her first Dom. She would always appreciate Master Scott for taking on a very insecure and totally inexperienced sub. But going through what she did with Diego after feeling abandoned by Master Scott hadn’t helped her develop as a sub.

She frowned. She knew Master Scott hadn’t had a choice. His job hadn’t given him any. It was relocate or lose his job. But she accepted the fact that she had felt abandoned, and until this moment had even put part of the blame for the entire Diego episode firmly in Master Scott’s lap. She realized in a quick flash of insight that in a way she had kept hoping Master Scott would rush back and “save” her from Diego, which was why she had waited as long as she had to run.

In hindsight, after all she’d been through, both the good and the bad, she was surprised she was here in another dungeon. Not only comfortable with a very strong Dom, but also excited to be exactly where she was.

Master Brent interrupted her thoughts when his large hand closed over her ankle. She jumped, and he smoothed his hand down the back of her calf.

“Stay with me, Sandra. Keep your focus on the here and now. Because of your previous experiences, it’s always going to be a temptation to think about the past and compare it with now. I know it’s difficult, but keep your thoughts on enjoying every second of what’s going on in the current moment.”

He pressed a kiss against the back of her calf and she gasped. “Let the pleasure build through you. Our scenes start when I meet you in the locker room. From that moment forward you are mine until the completion of aftercare. And I am yours.”

Master Brent’s words thrilled her. She liked the thought of him being hers until aftercare was completed, and she also liked the thought of belonging to him for that duration, although she wouldn’t mind it being longer.

He skimmed his palm up the back of her other thigh, and she sighed as his lightly callused hand skittered sensations along her nerve endings that shot straight up her legs and settled between her thighs.

“Do you want to keep these sandals on for the scene? It won’t matter to me either way, but if you thrash or squirm you might lose one or both, and we won’t be stopping the scene to put them back on.”

Since she could bet she would be thrashing and squirming, she said, “Off, sir.” She slid her toes out of the sandals, and Master Brent took them and replaced each foot against the stool, which was lined with slightly ribbed hard rubber. For traction, she supposed,

which made her smile. But it wasn't uncomfortable against her bare feet.

Master Brent applied pressure against the inside of her calves and she widened her stance for him until he slid what felt like a spreader bar between her ankles and then wrapped more rope around her ankles to secure her to the bar and keep her legs apart. In this position, she was truly vulnerable and open to anything Master Brent wanted to do to her.

She waited for the instinctive fear or dread, but only a swift wave of arousal and anticipation washed over her.

"Are you all right, Sandra?" Master Brent rubbed his hand over one ass cheek while he waited for her answer.

"Yes, sir. I feel a bit exposed and vulnerable, but it's exciting."

Master Brent traced his fingers down the backs of her thighs, making her gasp. "I'm glad. But we're far from done."

He walked around the table toward his bag and pulled out some kind of small plastic bottle. Lube? She heard the slight pop of the bottle being opened, and then a musky scent laced with vanilla and some type of citrus filled her senses.

Before she could ask about it, she heard the sound of Master Brent rubbing his hands together briskly and then felt his hot touch against her bare ass.

She sucked in a breath so fast that it hissed between her teeth. His hands against her skin felt divine. It wasn't quite so much a massage as it was him rubbing the smooth oil into her skin. Blood rushed to everywhere he touched, making those areas more sensitive. As he stroked and kneaded her ass, she craved more sensation there and arched into his touch, wordlessly begging for more. No matter how much he gave her, she wanted even more.

She couldn't believe she was even contemplating asking him, but then she opened her mouth and let it spill out. "Master Brent?"

"Yes?" His voice held a note of amusement, which made her suspicious.

"I...Would you mind trying some basic swatting?"

Master Brent made a pleased-sounding rumble in his throat a second before she felt a firm swat on her ass where he'd been massaging. The swat stung, but then those sensations radiated out, joining the fire of her building arousal. She closed her eyes and raised her ass as much as her position would allow.

She was immediately rewarded with another swat. This time the intense new sensory input made her clit throb, and she whimpered again before blowing out a long breath.

"You said Master Scott had started to introduce you to some basic swatting and flogging, if I remember correctly." Master Brent laid one warm hand on her hip. "But you seemed to flinch on the dungeon floor when you heard the sounds associated with those. Are you all right?"

She nodded. "I didn't like it at all when Master Scott tried to introduce it. I think I had too many hang-ups about my past, and I couldn't see being excited about physical punishment of any kind. But now..."

Master Brent swatted her again and she raised her ass as much as she could.

“Now I think you’re finally starting to understand why people come to enjoy impact play. It’s just another form of sensation for the body. That slight sting triggers the body to release endorphins, which feel good but also feed into the arousal already building.” He swatted her again and she gave in to a long moan.

She really needed to come, but she knew Master Brent was far from done with her. She didn’t want to miss one second of what he had planned for her, so she tried to breathe through the tight frustrations of her body’s demands. Master Brent’s large, hot hands still rubbing the wonderful-smelling oil into the sensitive skin of her ass wasn’t helping her calm the raging need.

“Impact play isn’t about being abused or beaten,” he said as he smoothed his hands over the areas he’d swatted. “It’s about using the body’s natural responses to build arousal and pleasure so it takes you beyond where you’ve been before. Like anything else that brings pleasure, it can become addictive.”

Sandra must have made a noise in the back of her throat because a soft, sexy rumble came from Master Brent before he moved his slow massage down to her thighs and to the backs of her knees. “You might be surprised at the things you begin to crave if they’re done the right way.”

She nodded her head. Master Brent could make her crave anything he wished, and she looked forward to finding out what was on that list.

He continued his massage, avoiding the spots she really wished he would give his attention to—especially with the oil. The wonderful smell of vanilla and citrus filled her senses, and Master Brent’s caresses heightened her awareness. He continued his slow attentions to her ankles and feet before moving to her back and shoulders, adding more oil to his hands as needed, and warming it before smoothing it over her body.

He seemed to know every spot that would spike her arousal, and he exploited them mercilessly until she squirmed and bucked as much as the bench and her bindings would allow. Arousal built and burned deep inside her belly more intensely with every passing second.

When Master Brent’s hands closed over her breasts, she whimpered. He pinched her nipples and rolled them between his fingers, ripping a long moan from her throat. She couldn’t get enough. She had to have more. She thrashed against her bonds, her body on fire and craving.

He stopped and straightened, making her whimper again. “Please, sir, I need to come. Please don’t stop.”

He kissed the top of her head. “Don’t worry, Sandra. We are far from done. You’ll be soaring in subspace quickly enough. And I have to make sure I give enough attention to these beautiful breasts of yours.” He tweaked her nipples one last time before he walked around the table and rummaged inside his toy bag, leaving arousal singing through her and her breasts feeling even more heavy and full than this position would warrant.

She turned her head until she could see him. As he came back toward her he held

something cupped in his hand, but she couldn't tell what.

"I brought something that I think will enhance our play." He opened his fingers and a long silver chain with what looked like blue sapphires on it spilled out. He held up the two ends so she could see the soft-looking black loops that fed into a scroll of silver metal.

"It's called a slider nipple chain. It doesn't have clips on the end like a lot of nipple clamps. The black loops can be snugged around your nipple at any intensity we need for the scene. These are never meant to be painful." As he finished speaking, he cupped one breast in his hand and then pinched the nipple between his large fingers.

She gasped, a hot surge of arousal rushing through her.

"Your nipples are so wonderfully responsive, I would be remiss if I didn't use them to your advantage during scenes." He tweaked her nipple a few more times and then rolled it between his fingers again. She arched into his touch as her clit throbbed, and her breathing hitched.

She looked down to watch Master Brent slip the soft black loop over her hard nipple and then slide the silver base up to snug the loop around the throbbing nub. Master Brent didn't give her time to get used to the new sensation before he gave her other breast the same treatment.

He was right. Her nipples had always been very sensitive, which was one reason she had always been leery of nipple clamps. But these were anything but painful. She was touched that Master Brent had taken the extra effort to find something that would work well for her. Club Desire definitely operated much differently than her old club, and it would be interesting at some point in the future to talk to her sub friends from New York about the differences.

"How do those feel?" Master Brent asked her as he gently tugged on the chain that ran between her nipples, which sent a delicious jolt of pleasure through her and pulled a long, low moan from her throat.

She swallowed hard to make sure she could speak. "They're fine, sir. Not too tight and no pain."

"Good." He leaned down to brush a kiss over her lips and nip her bottom lip before he pulled back. "The idea of these is to bring blood flow to the area and keep it there. That makes them more sensitive, and will keep your arousal ratcheted higher." He flicked the chain, making her gasp at the delicious sensation that speared through her nipples. "Trust me, Sandra. We can adjust them as the scene progresses and you begin craving more. Just like you saw with the light swatting, as your endorphins start firing, you may need more stimulation to give you the same result."

"Yes, sir." She smiled as she dropped her head to look down at the pretty silver chain winking with blue sapphires that ran between her dark pink nipples.

Master Brent let go of the chain, and she gasped against the intense stab of arousal that shot through her as the full weight of the chain fell and tugged against her captured nipples.

Master Brent smoothed his hand over her back. "Are you all right?"

“Yes, sir. I just didn’t expect...” She trailed off, unable to finish as her thoughts scattered.

“I will always take care of you and lead you to your pleasure. I want to take you higher than you’ve ever been. To teach you how much pleasure your body is actually capable of.” He traced her slit with his finger, teasing by inserting just the tip so she arched as much as she could, trying to take more. But even though every cell of her body now craved an earth-shattering orgasm, there was something else she wanted.

“Sir? What about your pleasure?”

Master Brent moved behind her and cupped both globes of her bare ass, kneading the skin there and making her buck against the table. “I gain pleasure by giving you pleasure. Don’t ever worry about me, Sandra. That’s not your job in this dynamic.”

His hands left her and she heard him move around the bench and take something else from his toy bag. She had only a few seconds to wonder what it was when the blue blindfold settled over her eyes and was firmly tied behind her head. Her thoughts tried to flow back to the scene she’d watched her first night here—the woman with the rope wrapped around her torso plumping up her breasts, her arms suspended over her head.

She hoped to be comfortable in a scene like that someday. As long as it was with Master Brent. She forced her thoughts back to the present and adjusted her stance now that he had finished preparing her.

She heard him rummaging inside his toy bag again and anticipation tingled over her entire body, where every inch of her skin was still sensitized from his very thorough attentions.

When his hand settled over her lower back she couldn’t help but moan. Her body was screaming, both for Master Brent and for release. But she also knew that if she behaved and gave up control to Master Brent he would take care of her. He had proven that so far, and deep inside her gut she knew he would continue to do so.

Something slick traced up her slit to settle over the tight pucker of her anus and she gasped. If the anal play he had in store for her today was anything like last time, or even more intense, she would definitely be flying in subspace very soon.

A little more pressure and the tip of something slick and smooth slid inside her ass. As it slowly advanced it felt huge, and she stiffened.

Master Brent immediately stopped what he was doing, although the invasion didn’t retreat. He ran his hand over her lower back in soothing circles. “Just relax. There’s a tightening reflex that you should breathe through. The sensations will be intense, but shouldn’t be painful. Once the plug is in fully it will be nothing but pleasurable relief.”

She concentrated on the plug, and now that Master Brent’s words had calmed her and she was relaxing, it was starting to be pleasurable, and she wanted more.

He continued speaking, apparently thinking she needed more time to relax. “This kind of invasion is new and different for the body. You need to get used to this before we can work you up to having your ass penetrated by a cock.”

“I’m ready, sir. Please. I need more.”

He didn't make any sound, but she had the distinct impression she had amused him.

"Breathe and relax, Sandra. This is only the first one, and the only one for tonight."

She hoped he meant the only one in her ass. She was still hoping he would fuck her pussy. She did as he instructed and blew out a slow breath, forcing her muscles to loosen.

The invasion edged forward again. She breathed in and out slowly as she felt stretched wider and wider.

The starter plugs she had seen were pretty small, yet she had heard from other subs that they all felt as wide as the Grand Canyon when they were first used.

"Do you like that, Sandra?"

She opened her mouth to answer when Master Brent reached forward and gently tugged on the nipple chain. A sudden jolt of bliss speared from her nipples down through her to her aching clit and her anus, which was now beginning to demand more attention.

"Yes, sir. I hadn't realized how much I could enjoy anal play until our last session. I would love to feel your beautiful cock there."

The pressure increased, sliding the very welcome intrusion in a bit farther. She arched into the sensation, begging for more.

"We'll take it slow. Plugs are a good way to ease into more serious anal play. We don't want to hurt you, and being able to relax the muscles enough for that to happen while your body instinctively works to tighten around the invasion takes getting used to." He slid it in a little farther and she stiffened against the bench and yanked against the bonds around her wrists as her body instinctively tightened around the plug. She concentrated on relaxing into the intense sensations that added to the vortex of need building inside her. "Please, Master Brent. I need to come."

"And you shall, my dear. Very soon." He laid one large, hot hand over her lower back and slid the plug in slowly deeper with the other. "Breathe," he reminded her. "Only a little more to go."

She obediently inhaled and made sure she was breathing normally as intense sensations assaulted her. The plug was obviously tapered, stretching her wider as it went deeper. She concentrated and relaxed as much as she was able but the sensations were becoming more uncomfortable, almost painful. She trusted Master Brent, but she didn't like this anymore.

She took a deep breath, ready to yell, but then the bulb slid all the way in, the base seated firm against her ass cheeks, and relief flooded through her. Even with it fully inserted, her body tried to tighten and push against the invasion, and she had to breathe deep and ease into the new feeling of being filled there. But it definitely didn't hurt anymore. After a few minutes she was able to fully relax, and her body began to crave more once again.

Brent swatted her ass cheek, surprising her and making her body immediately work to expel the plug again. She forced herself to relax, and she found that it was easier this time now that she knew what to expect.

"I'll send you home with a few starter plugs so you can practice and play with them on

your own, but don't go too fast." He rubbed more soothing circles over her lower back as he spoke. "I also have some lube that works well with them that I'll send with you. You obviously enjoy the sensations, and we'll work up to me burying my cock deep inside your lovely ass."

Brent firmly tapped on the plug and Sandra cried out, her body flushing with heat.

One large finger traced her wet slit and she cried out again. "We've gotten your body to a point where it's extremely sensitive to new sensations. The perfect place to dive off into subspace." Definite satisfaction as well as anticipation laced his deep voice. "Are you ready to fly, Sandra?"

Tears pricked at the backs of her eyes, although she was far from sad or hurting. "Yes, sir," she answered, earning a light, playful swat from Master Brent that sent more wonderful arousal rushing through her, although not yet enough to make her come. "Please, sir. Please let me come."

She heard the quick sound of a ripping foil packet and bit back a moan, not daring to hope that she would finally feel Master Brent buried inside her.

Before she could think too much more about it, or even wonder, he stepped close behind her and traced the tip of his cock up and down her soaking slit.

She arched into him, hyperaware of the plug still deep inside her anus. She had always wondered what it would feel like to be filled in both places at once. She was about to find out and couldn't wait.

She tried to breathe through the sudden impatience, hoping Master Brent didn't make her wait too long, when he pushed forward even farther, sliding inside her deliciously slowly, bit by bit, stretching her. He grabbed her hips in both hands and leaned his large body over hers, which only added another layer of amazing sensations to those already churning through her.

"Are you all right? Sometimes the sensation of being filled both anally and vaginally can be a bit overwhelming. 'Yellow' if I push too fast for you and you need some time to let your body catch up." He skimmed his hand over her lower back and the top of her ass, a touch that was probably meant to be soothing but only ratcheted her arousal higher.

She adjusted her feet as best she could with the spreader bar holding them apart, trying to push up on her toes to take him faster, but without much success.

"Green, sir. Please. Green, green."

Master Brent laughed, and gave her a firm swat as he slid farther inside her.

She gasped as his body bumped lightly against the base of the plug, seating it more firmly, which reignited all those sensitive nerve endings and added to the building maelstrom.

Master Brent leaned over her, sliding slowly deeper, but not yet fully. He was larger than she was used to. Both longer and thicker, and she reveled in the wonderful feeling of being filled and stretched. She let herself go, drowning in incredible sensations that continued to swamp her.

"Are you with me, Sandra?"

“Yes, sir.” She tried to bring herself back to the moment, but it was like wading through thick mud to even form a coherent thought.

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Brent took a deep breath and blew it out slowly. Taking the appropriate time to let Sandra’s body sing with each new sensation was slowly killing him, when all he wanted to do was bury himself deep and fuck her hard until they were both boneless. But he had to make this right for her. There would be time later, once she was more used to everything, when he could turn off his tightly reined control and just take her. But for now, he would give in to his own raging demons only enough to send her flying.

“Take a deep breath, Sandra, and hold it.” He smiled as she did as she was told. She learned quickly.

“When I say ‘now,’ blow out your breath, relax, and then breathe normally. But don’t forget to breathe.” He waited a few long beats to build her anticipation. “Now!” When he felt her relax and heard the soft sound of her blowing out her breath, he leaned forward so he could reach the beautiful sapphire nipple chain he’d given her. He waited a few moments until she relaxed under him again and then simultaneously pulled gently against the chain and slid deep, burying his cock inside her and bumping the plug firmly with his body.

Exquisite sensations thundered through him, threatening his control as Sandra shouted, her body shuddering and quaking with her orgasm.

Loosening his reins, but not releasing them, he started a slow rhythm of pushing inside her sweet, tight body and then retreating, only to start all over again. He still held the ends of the long nipple chain in one hand so that it tugged against her sensitive breasts with each movement.

A steady stream of sounds rose from Sandra. A combination of moans, gasps, and other sounds that showed she was soaring in subspace already. But he wasn’t finished with her yet. She had come a long way in just this one scene, and he wasn’t about to waste the momentum when he could show her a little more of what her body was capable of.

Since the spreader bar between her ankles kept her legs apart and her lovely pussy and ass spread for him, he allowed himself the indulgence of slipping his free hand into her thick, blond hair and pulling her head up just enough so he knew the added sensations would gallop through her along with the rest. And the fact that it made his balls tighten against his body reminded him that he needed to maintain a little control and distance. It wasn’t time to let himself go.

Her body shuddered under him again as another orgasm hit her, and he pumped into her harder, pulling on both the nipple chain and her hair to increase the sensations. Her body tightened around his cock so hard he nearly came, but he clenched his teeth and fought it back.

When she slowly loosened around him and only the soft after-quakes of Sandra’s orgasm remained, he let go of her hair and decided it was time to finish the scene. He had

taken her far enough for one day, but that didn't mean he couldn't ensure she would soar once more.

Noticing she hadn't seemed oversensitive to him thrusting inside her and bumping the plug, he pulled the nipple chain taut but not too tight, smiling when she shouted his name.

He allowed himself to pound inside her, although not as hard or as fast as he craved. Not yet.

She thrashed under him, trying to tip her ass up and take more of him. His beautiful Sandra was already craving more, and he would give it to her. He leaned forward, bracing his free hand against the bench next to Sandra's side, and started thrusting harder and faster, making sure he was hitting the plug with each thrust. "Are you ready, Sandra?"

She nodded frantically, most likely unable to speak at this point, but he had to be sure.

He clenched his jaw and forced himself to stop all movement.

She whimpered and a sob escaped before she bit out, "Ready, sir. Please!"

He rewarded her by thrusting inside her hard, burying himself deep. He yanked on the nipple chain and gave in to his desire to pound into her. Her body greedily clamped around him, which caused delicious friction up and down his cock and radiated down into his balls. Thrusting inside Sandra was more than he had ever imagined. He loved the way her tight body accepted him and gripped his hard cock.

His thrusts grew more frenzied, and delicious sounds of ecstasy spilled from her lips. When he couldn't hold off his own orgasm any longer he smacked her ass with his open palm, pulled on the nipple chain again, and thrust deep as his orgasm thundered through him. A wave of endorphins hit him in a tsunami and he braced his knees, as they almost buckled from the intense pleasure raging through him.

His shout seemed to trigger Sandra and she shuddered beneath him again, tightening around his softening cock as she rode out her orgasm.

When her quaking stopped he slowly straightened and pulled out of her, cleaning himself quickly and then turning to take care of his beautiful sub.

His sub. He loved being able to say that. He'd dreamed of her for so many years, but somewhere deep inside he had always thought it nothing but a dream whose time had passed.

He had started to tell her the truth about himself several times before they got to this point, but tonight had gotten away from him. He raked his gaze over the beautiful woman laid out before him and chided himself for his weakness.

He hoped that when he told her who he was, it didn't ruin what they had already built. He needed to tell her soon. But right now she was in subspace and he had responsibilities.

Brent untied her and rubbed her ankles and wrists with the musky vanilla oil, smiling over the thought that with all her thrashing she would carry his rope marks for at least a few days.

When he was done taking care of Sandra, he rolled up the ropes and tucked them back inside his toy bag. She was still boneless and flying. Like he had after their last scene, he

picked her up, tucked her against his chest, and carried her to aftercare.

The dungeon floor was only a little more full than when he'd come back to start the scene, but those who were out stopped what they were doing to turn and follow him with their gazes. He knew it wasn't because they'd never seen him coming out of playing a scene before, or even having to carry a sub who was still flying in subspace—although that last part was more rare. But he would be very surprised if it wasn't easily visible that Sandra meant much more to him than just a sub to a Dom. And that was very rare, at least for Brent.

He ignored their gazes or even muttered greetings as he made his way with Sandra into aftercare. Today they were the only two in the aftercare room, and he was content to cuddle her in his lap while she slowly floated back to Earth.

“Master Brent?” Her voice was sleepy, but he knew it was part of the normal process of coming down from subspace.

“I'm here, Sandra.” He brushed her hair away from her face and pressed a kiss to her forehead. “Are you all right?”

She nodded. “Better than all right, I think.” She scrunched up her face, and it made her look so damn cute that he couldn't resist pressing another kiss to her forehead.

“What's wrong? Do you hurt anywhere?”

She nibbled on her bottom lip—a habit that always drove him insane by making him want to nibble on all parts of her. “I think I lost it.”

He frowned, trying to figure out what she was talking about. He was surprised she was so susceptible to subspace. It wasn't a normal thing for everyone, and yet Sandra was flying high both times that they'd played. Granted, he had made sure to push her pleasure to the limits, but he was glad she was able to fly so high once again.

People in deep subspace often said things that made little sense until they came out of it, but he needed to make sure she wasn't trying to tell him something that he needed to take care of right now. “What do you think you lost?”

She pursed her lips, her brow furrowing in concentration. “Plug,” she finally said with much effort.

He couldn't help but smile. “You didn't lose it. I took it out. It will be ready for you to take home with the others I got you, and the lube. Are you sore from our play? You need to ease into anal play. Don't overdo.”

She shook her head sharply. “Not sore. Loved it.” She nibbled her bottom lip again. “Just didn't want to lose it.”

He cuddled her closer. “Just relax and let me take care of you. At this moment you don't have to worry about anything. Let your mind drift and your body level. I'll be right here with you.”

He loved being able to say that. He thought back to all the times in high school and even since that he wished he could hold Sandra in his arms, just like this. But after she'd turned him down in high school...

He frowned as that day came back to him. He had finally gotten up the nerve to ask her

to the school dance. She had been polite but had turned him down. When she'd raised that beautiful gray gaze to his, he'd seen fear, which had haunted him all these years. But now...now he knew it wasn't him that had put that fear in her eyes, but the possibility of him finding out about her deep, dark secret at home, and her being punished for it. She'd been an abused child, scared and hurting. Since he hadn't known and had been reading into the situation from his own past, he'd taken it as the ultimate rejection of *him*.

While he could feel sympathy for Alice Barry losing her husband and being left with a child to raise alone, he couldn't understand her turning against that child and becoming an abuser.

Brent had sent Dexter a quick email after leaving the restaurant with Sandra and asked his friend if he would be able to find out if Sandra's parents were still in the area.

When Brent and Sandra returned to Club Desire and Sandra was getting ready before their scene, Brent had taken a few minutes to touch base with Dex to find out what he had learned.

Never able to leave any puzzle with pieces unmatched, Dex had found more than Brent had hoped. Alice Barry still lived in the area, in the same house Sandra had lived in while in high school. Dex had also found that Mark Barry, Sandra's father, now lived in Houston with his third wife and her two children from a previous marriage. He had abandoned the woman he'd left Alice and Sandra for, along with his newborn son, a few years after leaving Phoenix and his family here.

Rage had burned deep in Brent's gut at the thought of any man treating his families so callously. Mark Barry wasn't a true man in Brent's book. And apparently not in Dex's, since Dex had only half-jokingly asked if Brent would like Mark Barry to suddenly be caught in the middle of an FBI sting or a very extensive tax audit or two.

Brent had told Dex quite plainly that he would much prefer just beating the man to a pulp, and hoped he never got the opportunity because he didn't know if he would be able to stop.

Dex just shook his head and told Brent that he wasn't worried about him killing anyone in cold blood, even for revenge. It would be a self-defense situation or Brent defending someone he cared about that Dexter predicted would tip Brent into murder.

Brent couldn't say that Dex was wrong. He had always hoped he wouldn't be able to kill someone in cold blood. But because of his experiences as an outcast, he was extremely protective about those he cared for, so he could definitely see himself taking a life in protection of one of them.

Chapter 16

Sandra watched as Master Brent and Master Dex demonstrated several self-defense techniques. They both looked so graceful and yet powerful at the same time. Sandra knew she should be paying attention to the different moves they were explaining and demonstrating, but all she could concentrate on was Master Brent.

He was a study in masculine beauty, and since she'd had all of those hard muscles concentrated solely on her this afternoon she was mesmerized. She had a quick flash of how amazing he had most likely looked pumping into her and sending her soaring. She had already been too far gone in subspace to notice many details, but now that she could see each muscle ripple as he kicked, blocked, and punched in beautiful symmetry with Master Dex, she began to wonder about some of those tantalizing details. Especially her voyeuristic side.

When Master Brent fucked her this afternoon while she was draped over the tall spanking bench, did he push down his pants so his very muscular ass could be seen, each thrust inside her displaying the beautiful play of muscles she saw now? She hadn't felt his leather pants slapping against her folds, so she didn't think he'd fished his cock through his fly. But then again, she hadn't been paying attention to anything but the amazing sensations she'd been drowning in.

Besides, Master Brent was so...she settled on "cultured" for lack of a better way to describe him...that she couldn't see him doing anything so common. She tried to picture Master Brent sitting on a dirty couch on a Sunday afternoon drinking beer, farting and scratching his balls while watching TV, and she nearly giggled.

It just wouldn't compute.

"Sandra?" She jumped, and her cheeks heated both at being caught daydreaming and at the clear amusement in Master Dex's voice. There were only three other students in the class, although Dex had told her there were usually around ten.

Some type of national job fair was going on at Arizona State University today, so several of Master Dex's usual students hadn't been able to attend tonight. Which made it harder for Sandra to hide when her mind wandered.

Master Dex gave her a kind, understanding smile. "Why don't you come up here with me and we can go over some basics? The other ladies have already had three or four sessions, so Master Brent can work with them while you and I go over some things to get you started."

Disappointment arrowed through her that Master Brent wouldn't be working with her, followed swiftly by a sharp twinge of jealousy toward the three women who would be receiving his attention. But she firmly reminded herself that she would probably learn much more from Master Dex. She followed him to the other side of the room and returned Master Brent's encouraging smile as they passed each other.

When Master Dex turned toward her she smiled up at him, marveling again at how tall he was. He truly was a gorgeous man, but he wasn't Master Brent. Although he had

amazing arms and shoulders—muscled and defined without going overboard—and a very nice ass that flexed wonderfully under his snug jeans with every step. She was glad no one had called her on watching Master Dex’s every step across the room. But what woman wouldn’t have watched in her situation?

“All right, Sandra. The purpose of self-defense is for you to defend yourself long enough to get the hell out of there.” He smiled, making his dark brown eyes twinkle. “And the first rule of self-defense is that there aren’t any rules. If you are being threatened in any way, you do what you have to do to break away and run. Understand?”

She thought back to the times with both her mother and Diego when she wished she would have adopted that mentality. But she had always been too afraid of what the eventual punishment would be to try anything.

Master Dex must have read her expression because he added, “If there are deeper or more long-term issues at work, then you find someone like myself or Master Brent to help you break away from that situation. But for a short-term, ‘right-now’ solution, use whatever means and methods are at your disposal to get away and run to somewhere safe.” He laid a large, solid hand on her shoulder and met her gaze as if he knew what kinds of thoughts and emotions all of this might bring flooding back.

“Once there, contact someone you trust who can help you. I’ll give you my card at the end of our session that has my cell number and email on it. You can contact me day or night. I’m sure Master Brent told you the same thing. We take care of our own.”

She nodded lamely, wishing she’d had people like Dex and Brent as a child, and even in New York, that she could have called.

She shook herself. *Get a grip, Sandra! That’s not your life anymore. This is.*

“Yes, sir,” she answered, not sure if she’d missed a response somewhere along the way and wanting to err on the side of caution.

He laughed softly. “While I appreciate the enthusiasm, we aren’t in a scene, and you’re not one of my subs.” He patted her gently on the shoulder. “You are welcome, of course, to call me ‘sir.’ I definitely won’t be offended.” One side of his mouth quirked into a charming smile. “Since I am a Dom at Club Desire, my correct address is Master Dex, but only those who are my subs or those playing a scene with me are expected to answer me with the honorific of ‘sir.’ It’s not that way in every dungeon, but that’s how it is here at Club Desire.”

She swallowed hard before she tipped back her chin to look up at him. “Thank you, Master Dex. At the dungeon in New York I would be punished for not answering with ‘sir’ or ‘ma’am’ to any Dom or Domme there. Even if they weren’t members or if I didn’t know they were a Dom.”

The muscles in Dex’s jaw flexed and released as if he was grinding his teeth. “I’ve heard a lot about Master Mason’s dungeon. I might have to go and visit him when I’m out there on business next month.”

Sandra bit her bottom lip to keep from smiling. Nothing in Master Dex’s tone was disrespectful or even questioning of Master Mason and his dungeon, but she had the

distinct impression he had larger issues with how that place was run.

She knew Master Brent and Master Mason were friends, but Master Dex would only be a visiting Dom. She was sure any criticisms he offered wouldn't be taken well. She almost wished she could be there to watch. But she never wanted to step foot in that place again if she could help it. Too many bad memories now overshadowed the good ones.

Over the next hour Master Dex taught her the most vulnerable spots on both women and men, and how to best use them to break away and gain her freedom. She had also asked very specific questions about how to break out of holds and situations she remembered finding herself in during past experiences. She hadn't told Master Dex that's what they were, but she suspected he knew. Like Brent, Dex was extremely intuitive, and she doubted he missed much that went on around him.

He had her visualize situations where she might feel powerless, such as being caught in a dark alley with a stranger. Then he taught her in those situations how to gouge eyes, scratch faces, kick, and hit. He also showed her how to knee someone in the groin for maximum pain, and kick the side of someone's kneecap to pop it out of joint and disable the person long enough to get away. When she practiced those motions while visualizing Diego or even her mother, she felt a tiny slice of the pain that encased her heart crumble and fall away. A surge of confidence rose through her, making her feel powerful. It was very freeing.

She knew some quick visualizations and one self-defense lesson wouldn't be enough to fully protect her anytime soon, but it was a start.

By the time she gave Master Dex a quick hug, accepted his business card, and walked toward the elevator with Master Brent, she was feeling empowered and much more prepared to meet life, no matter what it held.

“Master Brent.”

Sandra stopped next to Brent as a pretty blond woman approached who had been in the group that he'd taught in the self-defense class. She looked to be in her early forties and was petite and confident, but her body language didn't hold anything that made Sandra jealous.

“Valerie,” Brent said warmly as he took her hand. “How are you today? I don't usually see you here on Mondays.”

Gary's old girlfriend, Valerie? Sandra's curiosity burned as the name registered in her memory.

Valerie blushed at Brent's attentions, and the added color and animation in her features took her from pretty to beautiful. Only up close did Sandra notice the tiny telltale signs that Valerie might be older than Sandra had originally thought. But even the faint lines next to her eyes and mouth only enhanced her beauty. Sandra hoped she aged as well as this woman.

Valerie shrugged in response to Brent's comment, which showed off her very muscular arms and shoulders through her sheer top. Sandra remembered how graceful and confident she had been practicing her self-defense moves.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Valerie glanced at Sandra and then back to Brent. “I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

“No problem, Val.” Brent cleared his throat and looked at each of them in turn. “Valerie, this is Sandra. Sandra is new to Club Desire, and this was her first night at Master Dex’s self-defense class.”

Valerie held out her hand and Sandra took it. “It’s nice to meet you, Valerie. I hope eventually I look as graceful doing all those moves as you did.”

Valerie laughed. “I’ve been taking that class for nearly a year now. You should have seen me when I started. I felt so sorry for poor Master Dex. I’m sure I drove him to distraction.”

Sandra wasn’t sure what to say, but she returned Valerie’s smile, and fortunately, Brent broke the awkward silence.

“It’s great to see you, Val.”

Valerie laid her hand on Brent’s arm and looked up at him. “I heard from Gary today. You didn’t have anything to do with that, did you?” Her voice held a firm resolve, but no anger that Sandra could detect. “Did you talk him into coming to Club Desire this weekend?”

Brent shook his head. “I did see him, but coming to the Club was his idea. However, once he mentioned it I did offer him a tour and answered a few questions. But I didn’t coerce him, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

Valerie studied Brent’s face for a long time, as if trying to find any hint that he wasn’t telling her the truth. But then she nodded and dropped her gaze. “I have to admit, I was happy to hear from him.” She pursed her lips. “In fact I was surprised at how excited I was to see his name flash across my cell phone screen.” She glanced at Sandra and then back at Brent. “It was only a text, but it reminded me how much I still love him.”

Brent took both of Valerie’s hands in his and gently squeezed them. “You two were great together, Val. He misses you.”

A slow smile blossomed across her face. “If I’m honest, I miss him too, but I’m just not sure if we can make it work if we give it another try.” She slid one of her hands out of Brent’s and patted his arm. “I know you need to get going. I just wanted to know if you had talked him into coming to the Club or not.”

Brent brushed a kiss over Valerie’s cheek.

“It was great to meet you, Sandra. Master Brent, I’m sure I’ll see you on Friday night. I invited Gary to meet me to watch the big event down on Basement 4.”

She gave a wide grin, and Sandra wondered what big event was going on down in the über-kinky dungeon.

Valerie walked away, leaving Sandra and Brent to continue toward the elevator.

Once they were inside and headed toward level 4, Brent turned his head to look at her. “You looked good doing those self-defense moves.”

The knowledge that he’d watched her even while he was working with other women

warmed her. "It felt good." She gave him what felt like a wide, goofy smile. "It made me feel like I could actually defend myself if needed. At least enough to get away or to make that person back off."

Brent smiled and squeezed her hand. "I'm sure Master Dex told you to concentrate on getting away and going somewhere safe where you can contact one of us, or someone else, to help you with the situation long term."

She nodded. "Yes. He stressed that and gave me his card. Don't worry, I've had my fill of being a punching bag and taking it lying down, so to speak."

He reached over and gently stroked her cheek. "Good. There's no need for you to ever do that again." He took her hand in his, threading their fingers together. "Let's get you home so you can rest up for work tomorrow."

She pursed her lips, wishing they could play tonight and she could rest up here. But she knew it was probably better to go home, relax, and have some alone time. "What's the big event down on Basement 4 on Friday?"

Brent chuckled. "Just this afternoon we had a large party book Basement 4 for a Roman-themed orgy." He gestured with his hands as he spoke. "Jake and his team are redecorating and moving scenes as we speak."

"Wow. I remember you mentioning large events down there, but it will be interesting to see." She ran her fingers through her hair as she tried to picture what it would be like to watch an event like that. "What time does it start? I don't think I can pass up a chance to watch an orgy in action." She laughed and shook her head, amused that she was excited to see it.

"Would you join me in my private alcove on Basement 3, so we can watch together?" The raw desire in Master Brent's voice was unmistakable.

Excitement curled through Sandra and she had a sudden mental image of pushing him against the elevator wall, dropping to her knees, and taking his beautiful cock in her mouth. She exhaled in a rush as her body responded to her thoughts, and she raked her gaze over Master Brent, centering on his cock through his black dress slacks where the cloth covered it.

Brent brushed his lips across her forehead with a soft "mmm" sound. "Is that a yes, or a no?"

She threw her arms around his neck, pulling him close and kissing him hard. "Yes," she managed through the heated kiss as he took control, pulling her against him while he kissed her until she was breathless and shaking.

When the elevator dinged and the doors slid open, Master Brent pulled back slowly, breaking the endorphin-laden spell she had been caught in.

She glanced out through the open doors, disappointed that there wasn't anyone there to catch them in their heated kiss.

Brent turned his head to see what she was looking at and smiled. "Hoping we would be caught again?" he asked, amusement clear in his voice as he echoed her thoughts.

She laughed. "I think letting my kink run free has become my new obsession. And I'm

loving it.”

He playfully pinched her nipple and nipped at her bottom lip before pulling away again and leading her down the hall toward the room where she had left her bag. “Let’s grab your things and get you home before we get distracted again. Work is going to come early in the morning, and I’m going to make another attempt to get Michelle to schedule a time for those security updates. She keeps telling me she’s too busy, but I’m pretty sure she’s reluctant to accept such an expensive gift.”

Sandra nodded but remained silent for a long moment. Brent was right. Michelle had balked at Brent paying for the security, even though she couldn’t afford it on her own. But Michelle also knew it was necessary. A few days ago they had come home to find a junkie trying to break in through the window in the office. As soon as they drove into the driveway, he ran, leaving behind a trail of used syringes and a few baggies of drugs that the police had collected when they responded. They confirmed it sounded like a local junkie. The incident had spooked both of them, and Michelle had promised she’d take time off next week and call Brent to set a time for his security consultant to come out. Considering how old and rickety the house was, they hoped it would take only a few days.

Beyond suggesting newer windows or bars over them, the police hadn’t been much help, although they said they would see if a squad car could do a few drive-throughs of the area each night since it was an older neighborhood and only a few miles from the police station. Sandra purposely hadn’t told Brent about the incident because she knew how protective he was, and trying to strong-arm Michelle into doing anything, even if it was for her own good, just made her even more stubborn.

Brent led her to the room so she could grab her bag, and then she followed him down to the garage for the drive home. Sandra had hoped to spend more time with him, but he was probably right. She needed to be fresh for work in the morning.

Until she could get her own car, Michelle had agreed to drop her off and pick her up since she worked downtown as well.

“Damn.” Brent shook his head at the flashing orange-and-white signs stretched across the on-ramp. “Surface streets it is. I forgot the 51 is closed for resurfacing tonight.”

Sandra laughed. “That’s Phoenix for you. There’s always one freeway or another closed. That’s why I’m so glad this entire city is one giant grid. I still remember how to get around, even though I was gone for ten years. The grid stayed mostly the same.”

Brent glanced over at her before returning his gaze to the road. “True. Although the neighborhoods and businesses turn over enough so that even a decade can change things until they are almost unrecognizable. I had to drive to Tempe to meet a client a few weeks ago and I barely recognized it.”

Sandra frowned and pursed her lips. She had never thought to ask where he went to college. “Did you attend ASU?”

“Yes. Got my master’s in Business from there.”

“I didn’t realize you grew up in Phoenix.”

Sandra turned her head so she could look at Brent’s profile as he drove. She wasn’t sure

why the stripes of light from the streetlights as they passed made him look like he had stiffened. She shrugged. She had to have imagined it. Brent had no reason to stiffen at such a basic topic of conversation.

“I’ve been here for quite a while. I feel like I’ve seen this city really grow up.”

The answer wasn’t exactly evasive, but it also wasn’t as straightforward as she was used to from Brent. She shrugged and looked back at him. “That explains why you’re a pro at navigating Phoenix even with the detours. A lot of people hate this place, even though I think it’s much easier to get around here than New York. I usually took the subway there. I don’t think I would have survived having to drive in New York.”

He laughed and steered them into the left-turn lane. “I have to admit that the few times I’ve been there on business, I was very thankful for cabs and good maps.”

Sandra opened her mouth to ask him more about his time at ASU, and about where he grew up, but her cell phone rang and buzzed inside her bag. She fished it out and saw Michelle’s number flashing on the screen. “I should get this—it’s Michelle.” She swiped her finger across the phone screen to answer.

“Hey, Michelle. What’s up?”

Michelle spoke in a rush. “I got called back in to work to fix an issue, but I forgot about all the damn *planned* freeway closures tonight, and I just found out the hard way that the I-17 just closed at Thunderbird for a car crash fatality. I resigned myself to taking surface streets all the way there when my car died. I’m on the southwest corner of 19th Avenue and Thunderbird in front of Macayo’s.” She was obviously upset. Before Sandra could speak or offer any comment, Michelle pressed on.

“Anyway, you said you were going to be with Brent tonight, and I didn’t know if you guys were able to come and give me a jump. I think it’s the battery. I hope. Especially since I need to drive you to work in the morning.”

“Hold on a sec, Michelle. Brent is right here with me.”

She took the phone away from her ear, covered the mic with her hand, and turned to Brent. She outlined the problem, and before he even agreed or offered any comment he had turned and headed toward where Michelle had broken down.

“Tell her we’re on our way and we’ll be there in about fifteen minutes.” His voice was full of reassurance and the general protectiveness that she had come to associate with Brent. “Let her know that I can give you both a ride to work in the morning if needed, so not to worry.”

Sandra relayed everything to Michelle and got information on exactly where she was before hanging up.

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After watching the house for the last several hours to make sure no one was home, Diego slipped on latex gloves and jimmied the lock on the ancient back door to the house where Sandra had been receiving her cell phone statements. He had hoped to find her home, preferably alone, but he could wait. And then she would pay for making him chase her all

the way to this godforsaken dust bowl.

He slid inside the house and carefully checked every room to make sure no one was here before he went into the two bedrooms and found the one that had to be Sandra's.

It was spartan, with no keepsakes or pictures of Sandra in the group shots.

He rummaged inside the closet and drawers until he came to the lingerie drawer. Lacy panties and bras were inside, as well as a few silk nighties and a thong or two.

Rage burned through him as he found nothing that he'd bought for her. He had forbidden her to wear any bras or underwear that he hadn't approved, and now there was no sign of his influence left.

Bitch.

She apparently still didn't realize that she was his and his alone. Anyone who got in the way would die along with her.

He pulled out his pocketknife and took his anger out on the items, slashing through the cups of the bras as he pictured the knife digging deep into Sandra's flesh, and shredding the panties as he envisioned long, bleeding stripes crisscrossing Sandra's fair skin. Rage joined arousal as his vision intensified, but when he ripped the last nightie apart with his bare hands, his vision remained hollow since he had no body to gloat over, no woman to make suffer.

Earlier he had tracked down the dungeon Sandra had placed several calls to according to her cell phone statement. Club Desire was a gothic-looking monstrosity up on the mountain, and he had taken a big chance even driving by it. Since it was in an upscale part of the city, the police presence was a bit thicker than he would have liked. No one here had any idea who he was besides Sandra—even his car was registered to the name he had on his fake driver's license—but he didn't want to get caught before he got close enough to make her pay for leaving him. A large event was going on in a few days at Club Desire, and he was determined to find a way inside. He had no doubts that some other Dom was bruising Sandra's beautiful flesh, and the fact that anyone else was touching her was unacceptable. If time permitted, he would like to cut the balls off the man who had defiled her. But he would have to be careful about it. That added bit of revenge would be sweet, but wasn't worth his freedom.

Being smart and careful had allowed him to let his passions have free rein to this point. It was no time to change all that now.

He walked across the hall and found the roommate's underwear. It didn't give him the same satisfaction he'd felt slashing Sandra's, but it was necessary.

He searched through all the drawers and the closet, making sure things looked disturbed before he crossed the hall back to Sandra's room and looked through everything for any other clues to how he might find her and get her alone. If nothing easier presented itself, he would find a way into the Club Desire event in a few days. However, quick and easy would be preferable, and safer.

He had just finished riffling through Sandra's things, and had walked down the hall toward the back door, when a pair of headlights shone through the flimsy curtains over

the front window, nearly blinding him. He cursed and hurried to the window to peek out around the edge of the curtains.

The dark-colored BMW looked out of place in this neighborhood and definitely wasn't the car that had driven away from the house earlier.

Chapter 17

Brent pulled his car in front of the house Sandra shared with Michelle. It was full dark and he looked around for the streetlamps, which should provide at least some light, but both were dark. In an older neighborhood like this it wasn't uncommon for the bulbs to be burned out and not replaced for months or the wiring to have gone out with little or no maintenance, or for kids to have broken the lights by throwing rocks. He would have to put in a call to the city tomorrow.

The clouds shifted and weak moonlight shone through, making everything look even more surreal in the barely-there light.

A stiff breeze blew a cloud of dust over the car and he hoped it didn't turn into a full-out haboob—the severe dust storms that Arizona was known for this time of year. Especially since those often came with rain. Trees rustled and the occasional leaf or other debris flew by in swirling eddies, causing skittering noises against the car and making Sandra jump and fidget.

He stared out into the dark gloom for a long moment. “Are you sure you don't want to come back to Club Desire for the night and I can take you to work in the morning? Michelle might not be home for hours, and I don't like to think of you here alone.”

After they had gotten Michelle's car running again, they had followed her to work to make sure she made it, and Brent had called a friend to come out and take a look at the clunker to make sure she would be able to make it home.

Sandra shook her head. “We already drove all the way out here and Michelle will be home later. I don't want her coming home to an empty house. Besides, she has to be back to work at nine a.m., so I might as well go in with her.”

Brent nodded. “At least let me walk you up to the door and get you settled inside.”

She laid her hand on his arm. “Brent, I appreciate all you've done. But I'm a grown woman. You don't need to bother with all that.”

The slow patter of rain began, sounding loud against the roof of the car.

He laid his hand over hers and met her gaze. “If you're still sure you want to stay here, then I would feel better if you let me make sure you're safe.” He smiled, hoping that in the moonlight she could see his sincerity and how much he wanted to take care of her.

After a long pregnant silence, she slowly nodded. “All right. I know Michelle has been a bit stubborn about finding time for the security guys to come out. I really do appreciate you looking out for me. I'm just not used to it.” She raised her chin. “Being totally self-sufficient has become something of a way of life for me. It's a hard habit to break.”

He reached out to skim his finger over her lips. “You're a strong woman. You've survived and thrived through so much. There's no shame in letting someone else look out for you now and then. It doesn't mean you're weak. It means you're strong enough to accept help.”

She pursed her lips as if trying to decide whether what he had said was true or not.

Finally she nodded. "I know you have to get back to the club, and I need sleep before work tomorrow. You can walk me to the door if it makes you feel better."

He held back a smile at this small victory, but he still wished she would change her mind and come back to the Club with him. "Let's go." He pushed open his car door against the growing wind and stepped out into the murky night.

The steady rain immediately chilled his skin and he hurried his pace.

By the time he had walked around to the front of the car, Sandra was already there, trying to hold her hair out of her face while the wind whipped it and the rain continued to pound.

He took her hand and walked her to the door, scanning the shadows around them on both sides. He had no real reason to think that anything was wrong other than the bad weather in the making, but this place gave him the creeps. The murky dark, rain, and wind didn't help. It felt like they were walking up to a haunted house that held fear and secrets, and he didn't like the sensation. But he couldn't toss Sandra over his shoulder and kidnap her to Club Desire for the night, no matter how tempting that idea sounded.

When they reached the porch, they had some protection from the rain, but the wind still reached them, chilling his skin under his damp clothes. Brent held out his hand and waited until Sandra laid the keys on his open palm.

He slid the key into the lock of the flimsy wooden door and vowed to double down on his effort to charm Michelle into letting the security guys in here to update the place. He turned the key and opened the door.

A loud banging from inside the house made him stiffen and nudge Sandra behind him.

She made a sound that he wasn't sure was from protest or fear, but she stayed behind him, grasping his waist in a death grip.

When he brought her home the other day he'd noticed the light switches were across the room on the far wall near the kitchen. He thought about putting Sandra inside the locked car to keep her safe, but he knew that was no guarantee of safety, so he opted to keep her with him where he could keep an eye on her. The house was dark, but enough weak moonlight shone through the thin drapes to cast everything in a spooky glow.

He turned to Sandra and laid his finger against her lips with a whispered, "Shhh."

She nodded, and when he took her hand and led them forward she stayed with him without hesitation or complaint.

He made it across the room and flipped the switch, flooding the room with light and making him blink against the sudden illumination just in time to hear rain pelt down harder against the house and the howling of the wind increase in volume.

The loud banging was coming from inside the kitchen, so he carefully peered around the corner of the archway into the room. The back door seemed to be broken and splintered, hanging from its hinges and banging against the door frame with the growing wind outside.

"Brent," Sandra whispered urgently. "Look."

He turned to follow her line of sight and saw clothes, mostly ripped lingerie of various

types, strewn down the hallway leading to the bedrooms.

In his peripheral vision he thought he saw something pass across the front window. When he turned his head to look there was nothing, and he couldn't be sure if he'd seen anything at all other than debris from the building storm.

Sandra still stared down the hallway and he didn't want to scare her, so he stayed quiet.

But the clothes in the hallway meant someone had been there. That someone could still be in the house.

Lightning flashed outside, strobing through the house, and thunder boomed several seconds later, making the pictures on the walls rattle. As if brought on by the thunder, rain pelted harder against the windows and the wind howled.

Sandra yelped and pressed against him. She was clearly terrified, and he didn't blame her one bit.

Icy fingers raced down his spine as he considered his options. Even though the weather had turned bad, he thought getting outside and back to the car was the best option. He was confident he could protect them in any hand-to-hand confrontation or even with a knife involved, but against a gun he would be at a huge disadvantage, especially with Sandra's safety to worry about. No amount of martial arts skills could stop a bullet.

He reached around the archway into the kitchen and grabbed the handset of the phone where it sat in the holder on the wall. Stretching the tangled cord so he had some slack, he brought it to his face and quickly dialed 911 before pressing it to his ear to hear complete silence. No dial tone.

Either the storm had taken down a phone line or someone had cut it. Either way, it wasn't good.

He looked down at Sandra, who lifted her tearstained face to meet his gaze. Her eyes were wide and glossy, her nostrils flaring, her entire body stiff. He rubbed his hand over her back in soothing circles. He wanted to stop and comfort her, but they didn't have that luxury.

"Stay strong for a bit longer." He took his iPhone out of his front pocket and dialed 911, but it only rang and rang. After the tenth ring, he hung up as frustration burned through him. He pulled up the messages app and typed in a one-word shortcut he had preprogrammed a few years ago after he had rescued Dex from an FBI op that had gotten out of control. He hit "send" before slipping his phone back inside his pocket. Dex could track Brent with the "Find My Friends" app on his iPhone and would know what to do when he received that message.

Brent needed to get the house secured for both Michelle and Sandra, and he couldn't do that alone. Especially with the storm raging, and all the unknowns.

Quickly scanning his options, Brent decided that being out in the open would be better than in here, especially with the entire back of the house a possible hiding place for any number of assailants, and with clear evidence that someone had been inside the house.

Every few minutes, headlights would slash through the thin curtains over the front windows and pan across the room as a car drove by, but the storm continued to rage. Even

though he might have seen a shadow at the front window, there was no way to know whether that was anything to worry about. Going out the front was better than the back, where they would have to deal with a backyard area that was cut off from view of the street, and then make their way around the house to the car during the nasty storm.

He leaned down close to Sandra's ear and realized she was shaking. "It's going to be all right. Follow my lead, and if anything happens, fight like hell remembering everything Dex taught you earlier, and I'll take care of the rest."

Brent took her hand and made his way to the front door. "Let me make sure it's safe to go out first," he whispered.

When she nodded, he opened the door slowly and peered outside. He couldn't see very far in the dark gloom and rain, but then neither could anyone looking for them unless he had night-vision goggles. And if that was the case, they were on an entirely different level of threat. He had to go with the most likely scenario, which was that anyone out there was dealing with the same murky darkness.

He took one step outside, keeping Sandra behind him standing just inside the doorway. If he could get them to the car, he was confident he could keep them safe until help arrived. He took her hand, ready to do a quick walk to the car. The yard had become a mud pit in the last twenty minutes and he didn't want either of them to trip or twist an ankle.

He looked back at Sandra. "Let's get to the car and we can sit in there with the doors locked until Dex arrives."

"I'm ready." She squared her shoulders and looked out into the pouring rain that was now falling at a 45-degree angle because of the high winds.

Making sure he had a firm grip on her hand, he stepped off the porch and onto the squishy lawn, making sure the footing was firm enough before taking another step.

He stayed aware of Sandra and her progress as well as where they were in relation to the car. Within seconds, Brent was drenched and Sandra looked like a drowned kitten. Their clothes were whipped against their bodies, and they had to push forward against the force of the wind to keep moving.

Barely any moonlight filtered through the storm—just enough so Brent could make out where he had parked the car.

When they made it to the car, he pulled out his keys to deactivate the alarm and unlock the doors, but his fingers were so slick from the rain that he fumbled and dropped the keys onto the sloped curb and they skittered under the car.

He cursed and squeezed Sandra's hand to alert her he would be moving.

She squeezed back and let go before he knelt on the wet sidewalk, leaning down to look under the car and search for his keys. In the dark, they weren't readily visible.

He had just closed his hand over them when Sandra screamed, startling him. He snapped his head around toward her and smacked his forehead against the bottom door panel.

Pain shot through his head and his vision swam. He took a deep breath to shake off the

sudden disorientation. He pushed to his feet as Sandra's scream echoed through the night, but farther away this time, off to his right. He frantically scanned for her in the raging storm. As a flash of lightning lit the sky he caught sight of her at the edge of the yard, a man pulling her along by the hair, one rough yank at a time.

She was scratching, biting, and kicking the best she could in the muck and driving rain.

The man pulled his fist back to punch Sandra, and Brent's rage boiled through him like lava erupting from a volcano.

He ran forward, sliding in the mud, barely managing to stay on his feet. Another flash of lightning gave him a quick view of her. The man thrust his fist forward. Sandra ducked and head-butted him in the groin, his fist coming down on her mid-back.

The man crumpled and went down on his knees, his wet hair plastered against his head. Sandra staggered from the blow to her back, just to the side of her spine. The man's howl of pain and anger cut through the storm as Sandra fell, but then rolled away and pushed to her feet.

Good girl!

Brent darted forward the last few feet, but the man grabbed Sandra's leg before he could stop him. Sandra lost her footing on the slick ground and she slipped and fell backward into the mud, her head hitting the ground a second before her shoulders, and then she lay still.

Fear shot through Brent and when he reached them seconds later, the man surprised him by striking out with his fist, which connected with Brent's side, but glanced off since Brent was in motion.

Brent would have to be careful since he couldn't see when the man was telegraphing his next move in the dark and driving rain unless a flash of lightning struck at the right time. Before the man could steady his stance, Brent struck forward with the heel of his palm in a firm uppercut, aiming for the man's chin, to snap his head back. If he could disorient him, he could disable him.

The man could still have a weapon that hadn't come into play yet, so it was better to err on the side of caution.

At the last second, the man moved, trying to lunge for Sandra, and Brent's blow hit him squarely on the side of the head just under his right ear.

He stumbled back and howled, obviously enraged.

Sirens blared in the distance, and Brent could only hope it meant that Dex had received his message.

With one last glance at Sandra, the man turned and fled, navigating the slick mud with only a few lapses and wobbles.

Brent was tempted to go after him, to make him pay for attacking Sandra. But Sandra was still lying flat on her back in the muck, with rain pelting down on her and the wind howling around them.

Ice ran through his veins as he looked down at her still form. She had thrown one arm over her face, but made no move to sit up.

He knelt next to her, leaning over her to block the rain as much as possible. “Sandra, speak to me.” He gently lifted her arm to see her eyes closed tight. He brushed her matted, wet hair away from her face and glanced back quickly to make sure the man who had attacked her wasn’t doubling back. Another flash of lightning showed the man ducking between two houses across the street as he disappeared from sight.

Brent hesitated about moving Sandra in case she had sustained a head or neck injury, but he didn’t want to leave her in the pouring rain. He gently traced his fingers down the side of her head until he felt a large bump. It didn’t take him long to figure out what had caused it. Her head rested on a metal grate that was overgrown with grass.

Fear for her hit him like a fist to the gut as his mind raced with options.

The sirens blared closer, turning down the street, then the vehicles screeched to a halt in front of the house.

The strobe lights illuminated the scene, and he was glad to see an ambulance along with the two police cars. Dex was always prepared for any eventuality.

Dex’s car pulled up behind them as the police officers spilled out of their cars and shouted for him to raise his hands and step away from Sandra.

Grinding his teeth and leaving her to the mercy of the steady rain, Brent did as he was told. After he had shown his ID and Dex had flashed his credentials, the EMTs were finally able to tend to Sandra.

Dex laid a firm hand on his shoulder, guiding Brent back several steps to give the EMTs space to work. He knew his friend was right, but it killed him not to be there to soothe and comfort her in case she woke up.

As they slid her onto the backboard and lifted her onto the gurney, Sandra’s eyes fluttered open and her gaze searched for and then settled on him.

Ignoring the protests from the emergency workers and Dex, Brent stepped close and grabbed her hand. Her skin was cold and wet, and he was thankful when they slid a blanket over her.

“Sir, we need to get her onto the ambulance. We’re taking her to John C. Lincoln. You can meet us there.”

He nodded and turned back to look at her pale face, lit by the lights of the ambulance. “Sandra. I’m here. I’ll get to the hospital as soon as I can.”

Her gaze was weak and unfocused, but he thought it settled on him again before her eyes closed.

He squeezed her hand and then reluctantly let go and stepped back.

Dex moved up beside him. “They’ll take good care of her.” He gestured toward the porch and the cops. “Let’s get the rest of this taken care of so we can drive to the hospital to see her.”

As they stepped up onto the porch, one of the officers looked at Dex. “Agent Alexander. I just talked to an Agent Tanner at the Phoenix office.”

Brent looked between Dex and the cop who had spoken. Dex wasn’t actually an agent,

he was a high-level analyst, but Brent knew that he didn't often bother to dissuade people of that notion if it worked in his favor.

Dex nodded, waiting for the man to continue.

The officer stopped to motion to his partner, who had just come back from canvassing the neighborhood for Sandra's attacker. "Jim. You're going to want to hear this too."

When Jim stepped onto the porch, the first officer continued. "I just talked to Agent Tanner from the FBI, who works with Agent Alexander here." He gestured to Dex. "He wants us to send all forensics from the scene over to him tonight. There's a rush on everything. He thinks there may be a connection between this attack and Miss Barry's stalker from New York."

Jim held up his hand. "From the briefing this morning I only heard that he had a restraining order against him, but there wasn't any mention of him violating it. So what's the FBI's sudden interest in this?"

When Brent bristled, Dex laid a heavy hand on his arm, reminding him to hold his tongue and let this play out.

The first officer stepped in. "We knew he might be in town, but if he's the man the Feds think he is, he's pretty high on their Most Wanted list. If he really is that man, then under at least eight aliases he's kidnapped, tortured, and killed a minimum of nine women in the BDSM and kink scenes, using dungeons around the country to find and target his victims. He's been able to go under the radar since this was only put together lately when links were found between the cases and MOs. This guy's never even been arrested for anything larger than disorderly conduct."

Brent stiffened and his blood ran cold. Dex had said he was digging into Diego's past so they could have a better chance of keeping him away from Sandra, but this was the first Brent had heard about the information he'd uncovered.

If Sandra hadn't run from New York, she might very well have been Diego's next victim. Brent shook his head, unwilling to imagine that outcome.

"In the meantime Agent Tanner has authorized an agent to be stationed outside Miss Barry's hospital room, just to be on the safe side."

A large weight lifted from Brent's shoulders. He would still prefer to be there in person to watch over her, but until he could, having an FBI agent guarding her was a relief.

The man's gaze moved to Dex. "You and Mr. Weston are on the visitors list, as long as her doctor okays it."

"Thank you." Dex reached out and shook hands with the older man. "I appreciate everything you've done."

The first officer ran his hand over his jaw and then over his spiky dark hair before he continued. "However, after the break-in attempt last week, this might not have anything to do with Miss Barry's stalker."

"Break-in attempt?" Brent asked before Dex had the chance.

The officer nodded. "Michelle Emery filed a report last week. She and Miss Barry came home and scared off a man trying to break in through the window of the back bedroom

that's used as an office. A man matching the description of a local junkie ran, leaving behind drug paraphernalia. We'll know more when we catch up with him. He's been lying low."

Brent clenched his fists. He didn't like knowing there was another man who might also be a danger to Sandra besides Diego. He wished Sandra had confided in him, though if that hadn't moved Michelle forward on fixing security for the house, then him pressuring her wouldn't have changed things either. But his inner Dom chafed at the feeling of helplessness.

He hadn't been able to protect Sandra, and that simple fact ate at him like acid.

Dex slapped him on the back, hard, and Brent turned toward his friend. "Hey, now that the police are done with us, the next-door neighbor has offered us tools to board up the back door and the broken window in the office so we can leave the house secured.

"While the EMTs were checking Sandra over, I called Michelle and her boss. She's on her way here to check the extent of the damage and see if anything is missing. Her boss is giving her a few days off, with pay." A self-satisfied smile curved his lips, telling Brent that feat had taken some finagling. Which was one of Dex's fortes. "Then, because this could be peripherally related to Diego, as soon as she checks out the house and lets us know what's missing, I've arranged to get her put up in a hotel room while the security measures are being installed here."

Brent nodded as another huge boulder of stress was lifted off of him. "Good. Thanks, Dex. Give me one second." He fished out his phone and called his friend who owned the security company he'd been trying to schedule to take care of Michelle's house.

"Hey, Mitch," Brent said when his friend answered. "Sorry to bother you after hours, but that job I told you about last week? It has just become urgent. Can you come out first thing?"

After getting Mitch's agreement, Brent confirmed that his friend had the address and set up a meeting for nine a.m.

If tonight's events and Sandra being in the hospital didn't make Michelle see reason, he wasn't sure what he would do. But the meeting was set up. He would figure out what to do if the problem presented itself.

Chapter 18

Several hours later Brent was finally driving Sandra back to Club Desire. The hospital had released her after running several tests, including a CT scan and all the usual neurological tests. She had only a mild concussion as well as a goose-egg-sized bump on the back of her head where she had hit the metal grate when she fell. The doctor was concerned because she had been knocked unconscious, but other than the mild concussion she checked out perfectly on every test the hospital staff had run. So the doctor had sent her home and asked that as a precaution someone stay with her tonight.

Brent had been more than happy to volunteer for that duty. When he had seen her fall and go limp, he'd felt as if his chest had been ripped open. He had known he was falling for her, but that incident had proved it. Sandra was more than just a sub to him. More than just his old high school crush.

She made a small sound of pain as she shifted in the passenger seat. He reached out to lay his hand on her arm. "Are you all right?"

"Yes." She sounded sleepy. "Just bumped the back of my head when we turned. I'm all right."

Guilt stabbed at him, followed by a renewed determination to protect and care for her. She curled more firmly under the blanket and against the small pillow he had grabbed at the gift shop on the way out, and he took care to drive as smoothly as possible.

She would be groggy for quite a while from the pain meds the hospital had given her, and he had gotten the Percocet prescription filled as soon as they left the hospital so she would have the meds when she needed them. He hoped she would sleep and heal. She had already been talking about going to work tomorrow even though the doctor told her to take it easy for several days.

He shook his head. He would call Gary and tell him what had happened. There was no way his friend would expect her to be in the office tomorrow. He also knew how bad Sandra would feel for the next few days while she healed. He had sustained a mild concussion a few years back, and sleep and occasionally getting up to eat and take more meds for the pain were the only things on his mind.

Brent glanced over at her curled against the passenger seat window in the darkened car and his chest swelled with emotion and warmth that spread throughout his entire body.

It was finally time to admit it. He was in love with her. Not the Sandra from high school, the beauty he had worshipped from afar, but the Sandra Barry who had survived and thrived to become the woman she was today.

He waited for any small trace of denial or even fear, but none came. Only a sense of profound rightness.

He just hoped that someday she could come to love him too. Brent shook his head. He knew she was attracted to him, and that she craved him dominating her and showing her how much pleasure was possible. He was more than happy to be her Dom, and always would be if she still accepted him once she found out the truth; he couldn't help that his

emotions had gone well beyond that. He would have to carefully separate that from their D/s relationship until she fell in love with him too.

God, he hoped she fell in love with him! There was no guarantee, but he didn't want to imagine a future that didn't involve them ending up together. He thought about just telling her the truth about himself right now, getting it all out in the open so they could deal with it. But he bit his tongue. That would be selfish. She was in no condition to deal with that right now, and he knew it.

She moaned softly and burrowed tighter against the door.

Her blanket had fallen down around her shoulders, so he pulled it back up, tucking it around her before turning up the heat.

Rain still pattered against the car in a steady rhythm, but the storm had calmed considerably over the last few hours. The wind had died to only a breeze, and with everything so wet, no dust or leaves were flying around.

Soon the rain would stop too and the main evidence of the storm would be humidity, which was rare for Phoenix, and everyone waking up to their cars covered in dirt. Every car wash would have a long line both before and after work hours.

From what he had heard on the news over the car radio, a few power lines had gone down on the southeast side of the city and lots of tree limbs had ended up in yards and even a few in swimming pools, but no major damage had been reported.

The haboobs became more and more prevalent every year. When he'd been younger, the Arizona monsoon season had lasted for three months and consisted of several days of rain per week, but the raging dust storms were rare. Over the past twenty years that had all changed.

He would still take living in Phoenix over anywhere that had to deal with snow, blizzards, tornadoes, or earthquakes, but the dust storms could also be dangerous.

When he parked in his reserved spot in the parking garage at Club Desire, Sandra moaned and sat up, pushing the blanket away.

"How are you feeling?" He was instantly on alert, watching her carefully to see what she might need.

She groaned. "My head really hurts and I'm getting hungry."

Brent bit back his own groan, remembering the last time Sandra had told him she was hungry in his alcove before their play with the violet wand. "Let's get you upstairs and I'll call the kitchen and order some food. You can't take the Percocet on an empty stomach."

She started to nod and then stopped, bringing her hand to her forehead. "Ugh. No nodding. I'm ready for food and Percocet."

She started to open her car door, but he laid his hand on her arm, stopping her. "Are you okay to walk? I can carry you, or I think there might be a wheelchair in the storage room."

She started to shake her head and then stopped, sucking in a breath instead. "No wheelchair. I can walk."

Brent came around the car and helped her step out. After a few seconds she looked a little steadier on her feet, so as she leaned on him, he guided her toward the private elevator that would take them up to his personal suite of rooms. It had been another added expense to design things so he could maintain some level of privacy while still being accessible to the staff, with easy access to the main areas of the Club. But it had been worth every penny.

Sandra seemed to be more alert after her nap in the car. She had slept on and off at the hospital in between tests and the poking and prodding that came as a normal part of any hospital experience, but he could tell how much she had wanted to escape.

After she had been cleared of everything except the mild concussion, the police had stopped by to take her statement and see if she remembered anything about her attacker.

She confirmed what Brent had seen, that the man was tall with a medium build. But with the storm, the dark, and everything happening so fast she never got a good look at his face, although she said she hoped that he still carried some of the scratches she'd left there, and she had been quite proud that her head butt to the groin had brought the man down.

Just saying that much had worn her out, so the doctor had kicked everyone out while her discharge instructions were processed, and the police had promised to wait until the next day to drop by Club Desire to see if she was feeling well enough to speak with them more.

“Mmm.” She leaned against him on the elevator ride up to the fourth floor and he enjoyed wrapping his arms around her to keep her steady. She was warm against his side and tucked perfectly against him. There were a few times she began to sway and he held on to her to keep her from falling. She seemed ready to fall asleep standing up.

If he ever got a few minutes alone with the man who had caused this, he wasn't sure he could contain his anger. But for that few minutes it would be immensely satisfying beating the man to a bloody pulp.

As the elevator came to a stop, the slight jarring of the car made Sandra groan softly and pull away to stand on her own.

He kept his arm around her and guided her down the hall, reveling in the fact that she would be falling asleep in his bed tonight. With him.

He didn't often spend the night with women, even after sex. And since he had opened Club Desire, no woman had slept in his bed. In fact, he couldn't remember ever bringing a woman up to his suite of rooms.

But that was before Sandra.

—

Sandra was surprised when Brent took her to his own suite of rooms rather than back to the guest room where she had stayed before. She knew he had agreed to watch her during the night because of the concussion, but she had assumed he would just check on her throughout the night.

Something warm squeezed her chest at the thought of spending the night with Brent inside his own space.

When he guided her through the front room and into the living room, she had only brief impressions of a tastefully decorated but comfortable room before Brent led her to a large bedroom decorated in various shades of blues and grays.

“Here we go. Let’s get you settled, and I can call the kitchen and get you something to eat. The doctor suggested soup as a good start. I think they usually have tomato basil and French onion as well as a rotating soup of the day, but they might have more.”

She headed for the California king bed and sat down, happy to find that it gave a little with her weight. In her experience, men usually preferred beds that were much too hard. But Brent’s seemed perfect. She pushed on it with her hand a few times, testing it, before tugging at the collar of her robe, as it rubbed uncomfortably around her throat.

She still wore the robe that Brent had bought at the hospital gift shop, since the clothes she’d been wearing were a muddy mess. The robe was soft, fluffy terry cloth and much better than the damn hospital gown, but she didn’t want to sleep in it.

Brent opened the top drawer of a polished oak chest of drawers and pulled out a sage-green cotton T-shirt. “This might be more comfortable to sleep in than that robe since you don’t have any of your things here. I can send Jake to Michelle’s tomorrow to grab some things for you.”

She smiled that he had picked up on her discomfort. She had felt cherished and cared for ever since waking up in the hospital. Well, at least after being angry and annoyed with all the tests, prodding and poking, she did. “Thank you, Brent.” She slid the robe off her shoulders and let it fall around her, leaving her breasts bare to the air in the cool room. Her nipples puckered, but not from any type of arousal. Even with Brent in front of her looking delicious as always, and his bed beneath her, sex was the farthest thing from her mind right now.

Brent’s intake of breath sounded loud in the quiet room, and she lifted her gaze to his to see only concern and tenderness.

She was surprised when his gaze raked over her torso and shoulder but didn’t linger on her breasts. “You’ve got a lot of bruises. Do they hurt?” He looked like he wanted to reach out to touch them, but decided not to at the last moment.

Her throat tightened with emotion at Brent’s obvious concern. He really did care for her beyond just being his sub. That much was obvious in his actions and how he treated her. “The bruises don’t really hurt except the ones on my back where I fell. But I’m not sure I would notice with my throbbing head. Not only from the concussion, but my scalp hurts where he yanked me across the lawn by my hair.”

Brent’s expression looked stricken and he closed it off quickly, making her wonder how much of his emotions he was hiding from her. He helped her put the shirt on, careful not to drag the material over the back of her head or to put too much pressure against her back.

When it was on, he smoothed down the material over her shoulder. “You’ll love this

shirt. It's soft and large enough that it should work as a very serviceable nightgown."

She pushed to her feet and Brent took her arm to steady her. The T-shirt slid down her body to fall around her mid-thighs.

Perfect. "You were right." She smiled up at him as he pulled the robe off the bed and laid it on the chest of drawers, out of the way.

"I usually wear panties with an oversized shirt to sleep in." Standing and managing to verbalize that long sentence was exhausting, and she nearly fell back on the bed with her energy depleted, but settled for slowly sitting, enjoying the slight give in the mattress as it took her weight.

Brent steadied her again, taking a moment to skim his fingers down her cheek. "The gift shop at the hospital didn't have any panties, and yours were a total mucky loss, so I figured you wouldn't mind going commando just for one night." There was a slight trace of teasing in his voice. More than she had heard all night. She knew tonight had been stressful for Brent too. She'd been the one attacked and hurt, but Brent had done most of the fighting and had been busy worrying about and taking care of her.

"That looks much better on you than it ever has on me. I might have to give up my favorite T-shirt. But it would be worth it if I get to see you wear it now and then." He cleared his throat. "I'd better go order that food. I'll be right back."

Exhaustion pulled at her, but the pain was persistent and her thoughts diffuse. "Brent? Diet Pepsi?" She didn't have the energy to say anything beyond that, but a Diet Pepsi sounded really good right now.

He nodded and pulled the covers back so she could lie down and find a comfortable position on her side that didn't put pressure on the large bump on the back of her head.

The soft sheets and amazing bed were almost enough to lull her to sleep, except for the throbbing pain in her head.

—

Sandra woke the next morning curled against a very warm, male body. At least if the large erection against her ass was any indication of the person's gender.

Her thoughts were slow and muddled, and her head still hurt, but she remembered Brent feeding her tomato basil soup and a wonderful piece of fresh-baked sourdough bread last night before she took her Percocet and then fell asleep in his arms.

She only wished she'd been more alert so she could have enjoyed it.

She must have given some sign that she was awake, because Brent laid his hand on her hip.

"Good morning. How are you feeling?"

His voice was gravelly and low and she loved it. She had just spent the night with Brent cuddling her almost reverently, and this morning, other than the pain and being a bit foggy, she felt almost buoyant. Like she could fly. "Good morning," she mumbled, her own voice raspy and a bit hoarse. "My head still hurts and I'm kind of hungry."

Brent eased away from her back, leaving a cold spot where his body had warmed hers. He pulled the covers back over her, but it wasn't the same without him, and she mourned the loss of the tender moment.

"I'll order us some lunch and be back with your clothes Michelle brought this morning."

"Lunch?" she asked as confusion made her frown. She started to move to search the bedside table for a clock, but her throbbing head stopped her and she relaxed back against the pillow with a sigh. "Maybe I had better call work and tell Gary I won't be in today."

Brent straightened the rumpled covers. "Gary heard about last night and has given you the next several days off to rest and recover. He'll check in with you as the week goes along."

She blew out a breath. She had just accepted the job and she already needed time off. She mentally shook her head, since doing it physically wasn't a pleasant option at this point. "Thank you. I appreciate you letting him know. I guess I slept in a little this morning."

"Just a little. It's nearly one in the afternoon."

She cringed. "That explains why I'm so hungry."

"I'm on it. Any requests for lunch?"

She tried to think of something that sounded good—anything that sounded appetizing at this point—and came up blank. "Some type of comfort food. I'm hungry, hurting, and just a bit grouchy." She smiled gamely as she realized that was all too true. She wasn't a good sick person. It always made her impatient to get back to what she should be doing. Even when her father had still been around, he had told her she was a grouch when not feeling well. The quick memory hurt, so she shoved it aside and concentrated on the fact that she was here in this beautiful room with Brent and had just spent the night with him cuddled against her.

No sex, just comfort and cuddling. Not that sex was bad. Quite the contrary, but that was for when she felt better.

Sandra frowned, something Brent had said finally filtering through her head. "Michelle was here?"

He gave a nod. "She's worried about you, but I assured her I was taking good care of you. She went back home to meet with the security company. It will take a few days for them to install everything, and Michelle will stay in a hotel until it's complete, but by the time you go home everything will be done."

Emotion swelled inside Sandra's throat. "Thank you, Brent. You've done so much for me, for us. I can't ever thank you enough."

Her head began to throb again and she let her eyes slip closed to block out the light.

—

Brent watched Sandra as she fell asleep again just seconds after she had finished

speaking. He checked the temptation to lean down and brush a kiss across her forehead. He didn't want to wake her until the food was delivered. Which meant he needed to order it.

Fifteen minutes later, he gently rubbed her shoulder until her eyes fluttered open. It took a minute for her gray gaze to find him and focus, but when it did, she immediately pushed at the covers. "Mmm. I smell it, but can't tell what it is. I'm starving."

He helped her sit up and let her have a minute for her equilibrium to settle so she didn't get dizzy. "You said comfort food, and since you enjoyed the soup so much last night I got more tomato basil soup and grilled cheese sandwiches. It's not gourmet, but it's something I remember my grandmother making for me on rainy, miserable days when I was younger." He turned to find her watching him closely. He didn't think he had shared much about his life growing up, afraid it would lead to discussions of high school, but he wasn't sorry he'd told her. "Lunch is out on the table just off the kitchen. Do you want me to bring it in here and feed you again like last night?"

He remembered lifting each spoonful of soup to her beautiful lips and being surprised when it was his heart that swelled and not his cock as he cared for her.

Having never been in love before, this was all new for him. He had cared for people before, of course, but not like this.

"As much as I enjoyed that, I think I'd like to get up for a bit. I just need to make a stop on the way..."

He nodded and helped her stand, and when she was ready, led her over to his master bath and gave her some privacy.

When she opened the door again he helped her into the hallway and out to the table, where he'd already set out the food.

He smiled as she took a bite of the grilled cheese—with cheddar and sourdough, which was his favorite—and smiled. "This is really good. I don't think I've ever had it any way except with white bread and American cheese." She held up the piece with the bite mark out of it. "This is much better."

Silence fell for a few minutes while they both ate and Sandra slowly seemed to gain more energy.

The police had called at nine a.m. and Brent had told them to call back tomorrow. Today was entirely devoted to Sandra resting and recovering. He had already asked Dexter to watch over Club Desire while he took care of her.

"Do your grandparents live here?"

The question caught him off guard. "My grandparents?"

She took a large drink of Diet Pepsi. "You said your grandmother used to make this for you when you were younger." She gestured down at her plate. "And you said you grew up in Arizona. I just wondered if your grandparents still lived around here."

Old pain throbbed inside his gut. "No. Both my grandparents died in a car crash when I was in high school." He had been about to say "a few weeks after you turned me down" but bit that back.

“Oh, Brent. I’m so sorry.” Her forehead was creased with concern and she reached out to lay her hand over his. “Were you very close?”

He remembered the day the school counselor had called him out of class and told him that the two people in the world he loved the most would never be coming home again and that he would be going into foster care. He blew out a slow breath. “It’s a long story, but my grandparents raised me since I was a baby. So to lose them both at the same time like that was really hard.”

She nodded, then winced.

“Oh, let me get your Percocet. It’s more than time for your next dose and you’ve eaten enough so it shouldn’t upset your stomach.”

He grabbed the bottle off the counter and shook out one pill onto her palm.

She took the pill, washing it down with generous amounts of Diet Pepsi, and then finished her food.

Brent made himself eat something, although after talking about his grandparents, the food no longer sounded appetizing. Especially something that always made him think of his grandmother.

One day when everything was settled between him and Sandra, he would pull out his boxes of keepsakes and tell her about the two people who gave up their retirement years to raise their son’s unwanted baby. But for today, he needed to keep his thoughts on taking care of Sandra.

Soon after she finished eating, her eyelids were drooping and it was time to tuck her back into bed.

Chapter 19

Diego studied himself in the hotel room mirror and cursed as he ran his fingers over the four long scratches that bitch had given him last night. He would make her pay for that!

He ran his hand over his hair, glad he no longer needed to wear that hideous white-blond wig. He much preferred his normal glossy black color. But once he had seen the gangly junkie hanging around and casing the house where Sandra was staying, he thought the wig might come in handy. They were both about the same height and build, so he couldn't pass up the opportunity. Of course it had been raining so hard and was so dark last night that he doubted anyone had even noted his hair color, or much of anything else.

He had seen on the news that the junkie had been arrested, and had apparently been so strung out that he had confessed to attacking Sandra. Diego laughed.

That stupid bitch hadn't even recognized him. Breaking the streetlamps the night before the storm had also been an inspired idea.

He still wasn't sure how he was going to get into Club Desire on Friday. Infiltrating any of the groups attending was proving harder than he had thought. Apparently "Master Brent," as he was known, was a stickler for security, and his staff and even his patrons were extremely loyal.

Even at the other dungeons in town, Brent and Club Desire had an impeccable and envied reputation. But Diego had come too close to go home empty-handed.

After he had run last night, he had called around to local hospitals on the off chance that Sandra had sustained serious injuries.

He had finally found the hospital she had been taken to, but they wouldn't give him any details as to her condition, and when he asked them to ring her room he was told she had already been released.

Another trip to their house would have been foolhardy at that point, so he had come back to the motel to shower and regroup.

The Roman orgy started at eight p.m. sharp. An out-of-town dungeon master from Detroit had organized a road trip for people who wanted to visit the famous "Club Desire." He sneered. He had done some checking on Brent Weston. He hadn't inherited his riches, as Diego had originally thought. No, he was a bona fide self-made man, much to Diego's irritation. The damn man was a highly sought-after efficiency expert both in the United States and abroad. That, along with some great investments and plenty of luck, had propelled him to where he was—one of the many millionaires who lived here in this hellhole called Arizona.

Diego traced the darkening bruise that ran along his jaw just under his right ear. It was still tender, and he couldn't believe the asshole had marked him like that. He had bought some under-eye concealer at the drugstore posing as a helpful husband so the clerk would help him choose one that would work well. He hoped that cover story would throw off anyone who came asking questions. This trip was causing too many small things that could be traced back to him if someone dug deep enough.

Now he just had to figure out how to use the event tonight to get close enough to Sandra to separate her from anyone who would help her.

—

The doorbell chimed, and Sandra glanced at the small screen the contractor had just installed inside the house next to the front door. The foreman smiled at her on the screen, and behind him she could see the walkway and a strip of the street where his white truck was still parked. The yard had finally dried out after Monday's horrible storm, but they could see enough on the monitor to know what might be going on in front of the house and possibly alert them to any trouble.

She unlocked the door and let him in.

He was a gangly man with red hair and a thick Irish accent. "It's all set. We're waiting to install one more part for the doorbell and it's all done. Then we'll run you through everything to make sure it works, clean up our gear, and get out of your hair. Give me about twenty minutes and I'll be back for you to sign off on our work."

Before Sandra could ask what else he could possibly be installing, he was out the door and out of earshot. She shook her head. When Brent said he was going to send someone to beef up security, she and Michelle hadn't realized the enormity of what that would entail. Not that they didn't appreciate it. With the improvements they'd seen so far, both of them felt safer and more confident about living in this neighborhood as two women alone.

She had insisted Brent bring her home last night when Michelle moved back in from the hotel where she'd been staying. It had been tough sleeping alone after three wonderful nights falling asleep in Brent's arms, but she didn't want to make Michelle sleep here alone her first night back.

Some of the doors and windows had been replaced.

It wasn't a bad neighborhood, just older, and there had been a few break-ins and some vandalism a few streets over during the past few months as well as the junkie and the episode that landed her in the hospital.

But Sandra was glad the work was nearly finished. Michelle had let in the men doing the installation this morning before she had left for work, which was much more trusting than she usually was, even though Sandra had already been awake and having hot tea and honey with some breakfast—an addiction she had picked up from her few days staying with Brent.

Brent had tried to talk Michelle into letting him move them into a newer home in a more upscale neighborhood, but Michelle had flatly refused. She said it was one thing to accept some security updates, but she wouldn't let Brent become their "sugar daddy."

At the thought of Brent, Sandra's body warmed, and then a hard pang of longing filled her belly. She hadn't heard from him all day and wouldn't see him until later tonight at Club Desire.

She'd been falling—at least into extreme obsession—for a while now. But had she

already fallen all the way...in love? The hard burst of warmth inside her chest was enough to tell her the answer.

She was irrevocably, madly in love with Brent. No matter that they'd only known each other a short time. They might not know every detail about each other yet, but they had time to learn. And being with him felt incredibly right.

And yet, what if Brent didn't feel the same? Her gut tightened at the thought, and she swallowed hard.

She knew he was smitten too, and possibly even as obsessed as she was, but that didn't necessarily equal love. She would have to wait and see what happened between them. It might kill her not to tell the world now that she had realized the depth of her emotions, but she would wait. Either until Brent told her how he felt or until the time was right to spill her deep, dark secret. Either way, it would most likely make the hours until she could see him even more unbearable.

Keeping this secret from him was going to be the hardest thing she'd ever done. She couldn't believe she had felt comfortable enough to tell him all about her childhood. For most of her life she had accepted the fact that she would go to the grave with that knowledge, but it had taken a huge weight off her shoulders to share it with Brent. And she had been incredibly surprised that she was able to talk about it. For some reason Brent slipped past all her barriers, as if they had known and trusted each other forever.

They hadn't played any scenes since the attack, but before that he'd gone out of his way to work around her limits and make her more comfortable, and now she was beginning to see what her old roommate, Darla, and all the other subs had meant about power exchange, subspace, Doms, and all the rest.

She smiled, her chest filling with a buoyant sensation she could only call happiness. She had found her place in Club Desire. She was in love with Brent, she adored Dex, and she already liked Jake, Logan, Min, Sherri, and Valerie. And she absolutely loved and craved Brent's touch and domination. His very loving but firm domination.

She'd known women who claimed to feel that way, but she had always been at the New York club mostly for the friendships. The D/s relationships had been purely a means to an end for a girl who hadn't had a chance to develop full dating and social skills in high school and even college.

Michelle breezed in from the kitchen, startling Sandra. She hadn't heard the car or the garage door. But then she'd been lost in her own musings. About Brent. Again.

He seemed to be all she thought about lately, and she couldn't bring herself to be sorry. No matter how quickly the situation had happened, Brent made her happy. Happier than she'd ever been, and she just hoped and prayed that nothing came along to ruin that happiness.

Every other time in her life when she thought things were starting to fall into place for her, something had shattered her world. But this time, no matter what, she would fight for the life that was taking shape around her.

"Sandra?" The concern in Michelle's voice made Sandra realize she was scowling and

staring at her feet. She looked up and forced a smile, although she was sure her friend knew her well enough to see through the effort.

“Sorry, just caught up in my thoughts. You’re home early,” she said, trying to redirect the conversation.

Michelle nodded. “It was a half day. They’re remodeling the restrooms and had to turn the water off, so they sent everyone home. How are you feeling?”

Sandra shrugged, realizing she hadn’t needed a Percocet yet this morning so had forgotten all about them. But she didn’t want to take them unless she needed them. “I’m starting to feel better. My head isn’t throbbing and the big bump on the back of my head only hurts if I touch it, bump it, or my hair pulls on it for some reason.” She waved the situation away. “So in that respect I’m much better. I just need to get a nap in before going to Club Desire tonight to see Brent.” She smiled as thoughts about what Brent had in store for her tonight filled her like helium, making her feel like she might float away.

“Ahh, the beauty of a woman in love. I have to admit, I’m a tiny bit jealous.”

Sandra studied her friend. “I almost feel guilty for being so obviously sappy in front of you.”

Michelle hit Sandra playfully on the arm. “Don’t. Just keep an eye out at that dungeon for any hunky men who might be a good match for me.”

They both laughed, but Sandra knew that Michelle was only partly joking. She would love to have a good man in her life, and they were difficult to find.

The doorbell rang, startling her again. Michelle started forward before Sandra could even react, so she just followed slowly as her friend checked the screen next to the door, and after seeing the foreman of the security team opened it.

Half an hour later, they had toured the house and property and had inspected every aspect of the new security measures. A new front and back door had been installed as well as the door that led from the kitchen into the garage, and all three had received new locks. A few of the windows had been replaced that were broken or hadn’t been installed correctly in the first place.

The new alarm system required them to punch in a code as soon as they entered the house. The doorbell doubled as a camera and apparently also captured the fingerprints of whoever pressed the button to ring it. That fingerprint part was the last piece the foreman had installed before calling the job complete.

The man held out a clipboard and a pen to Michelle. “If you’ll sign at the bottom to signify that the work is complete and that I’ve gone over everything with you, I’ll get out of your hair.”

Michelle took the clipboard and read the forms carefully before lowering it to look at the foreman. “It says here that by signing it I’m agreeing to pay for all the work...”

He waved away her words. “Mr. Weston has already specified that all bills go to him. You’re signing to say that the work is complete and that I went over it with you. I know if Mr. Weston isn’t happy that my boss will kick my ass, so I made sure you ladies are taken care of. I’m not sure how they know each other exactly other than my boss said that Mr.

Weston saved him a bunch of money several years back.” He winked.

Weston...

That was the first time she'd heard Brent's last name.

Brent Weston.

It suited him...and that sense of familiarity she'd had since she'd first seen him in his office pulled at her again.

Had she met Brent before?

The name might sound familiar, but there was no way she'd ever forget the man who now filled her thoughts if she had met him before. She'd never known anyone like him.

Maybe she'd just heard the name somewhere?

Michelle took the clipboard with a frown, although by the time she signed the form with a flourish, her expression had cleared and she offered a bright smile to the foreman. “Thank you for all your help.”

He ripped off the back copy of the form Michelle had signed and handed it to her. “All in the line of duty, ladies. It's been a pleasure.” He flashed them a smile as he left.

At the nearly deafening quiet left behind, Sandra turned to find Michelle frowning again, staring at her copy of the receipt.

“What's wrong, Michelle? What's going on?”

Michelle took a deep breath and blew it out before meeting Sandra's gaze. “Come with me. I think I just solved a mystery that's been bugging me for the past week.”

Confused, Sandra followed her friend down the hall and into the office.

Michelle reached up to pull a dark green book off the very top shelf of her bookshelf. A book that Sandra hadn't seen in ten years. In fact, she wasn't even sure what had happened to her high-school yearbooks. When she'd left Phoenix to move to New York, they hadn't been a priority, and since she wasn't sure what her mother had done with her things, she didn't know if they were even still around.

Michelle leafed through the book and then with a little sound of accomplishment, she pointed to a picture and held the book out for Sandra to see.

Michelle was pointing to a senior picture of a boy Sandra barely remembered from high school. Looking at him now, Sandra could see he was a cute boy, even with the large Harry Potter glasses he wore.

She searched her mind, but his name remained elusive. Michelle's finger covered the name printed right under the picture.

He'd been one of the kids shunned by the more popular set. If she remembered correctly he'd been extremely smart, and for that as well as his smaller, scrawnier size he'd been labeled a nerd. Several of the football players had reveled in picking on the poor kid. She hadn't spoken to him more than a handful of times before he'd asked her to a dance their senior year.

She winced as that memory came back to her. She had totally avoided dating anyone in high school because she was too ashamed of her home life and had to hide her bruises. So

even though she'd felt sympathy for the fear in his eyes as he had asked, *her* fear mixed with shame had outweighed his. She shook her head trying to remember how she had reacted and how that meeting had ended, but she couldn't recall. It had been too long ago, and too many things had happened since.

"Do you remember him?" Michelle prompted.

Sandra nodded and glanced up at her friend. "I don't remember his name, but I remember him. Poor kid. Everyone was pretty mean to him. It had to be a rough way to go through high school."

Michelle nodded. "Have you ever wondered what happened to him?"

Shame flooded through her. Even after remembering how horribly he was treated, she hadn't spared a thought for how he'd fared since then. Only for herself. "I haven't, no. But I hope things worked out well for him. He was really smart, and a sweet guy." She remembered the way he had looked at her, like she was a princess in a tower and he wanted nothing more than to be her prince. That was where her memory ended, and she felt a pang of sadness for the boy who had endured high school in such a way.

Michelle cleared her throat. "I have a feeling he's done very well for himself. In fact, he may have even transformed himself entirely."

Sandra frowned at something in Michelle's voice. She felt like she was missing something, but she had no idea what.

Michelle held the book out again and Sandra's gaze was drawn back to the picture. She took in the dark hair and the blue downcast eyes visible even through the thick glasses, as well as what she would have termed a "baby face" back in high school. Something about the set of his mouth gave her another sudden flash of familiarity, and then Michelle moved her finger off the name she'd been covering.

Brent Weston.

A hard stab of ice pierced her stomach, and she sucked in a breath as betrayal burned deep.

Brent.

Her Brent. But how? And why hadn't he told her? She tried to tell herself that maybe he hadn't known who she was either. But then she remembered all the times she had caught him watching her.

The boy who had asked her out in high school. The boy who had most likely had a crush on her, one of the popular girls. The boy she had turned down.

She could see how he might be excited to finally have the girl he had wanted all those years ago. Unfortunately, she now felt like a fool. Like everything they had built between them wasn't actually real.

But now it made sense. She had wondered why a man like Brent would spend time with her, a decidedly broken woman who was a lot of extra work for him as a Dom and didn't even know what she wanted. But knowing what she did now, all the pieces fell into place. She had been the unattainable one and now he had "obtained" her. She wasn't sure where that left them. She had no one to blame but herself. She knew this had all gone too fast

and that she should slow down and be more careful, but things at the time had felt too right with Brent, so she had ignored all her internal warnings.

Hell, until Michelle had shown her his high-school picture, everything had still felt right.

She sighed as the grandfather clock chimed the hour, and she glanced over to see that she had only a few hours until she was supposed to meet Brent at Club Desire.

How could she go meet him now? How could she play scenes with him and pretend that nothing had changed?

She couldn't.

Michelle gently pulled the book away and closed it with a snap before replacing it on the shelf. "Something about Brent had been bugging me since I first saw you two on the couch. Something made me think I had met him before, but I kept telling myself that if I had ever met anyone remotely resembling Brent I wouldn't have forgotten it."

Sandra remembered thinking the same thing to explain away her flashes of familiarity. But even knowing Michelle had the same thought process didn't offer much comfort.

She turned to go, not wanting to endure Michelle's sympathetic gaze right now. She clenched her teeth and straightened her spine. Somehow she would find a way to get through this.

Chapter 20

Brent opened the large cabinets on the wall that his large desk faced. They held a bank of TV monitors that cycled through every view they had of Club Desire. As he'd told Sandra, there were cameras in all the common areas and even in the alcoves—except for his two private ones. People had started to arrive for the orgy in Basement 4 and Jake and his team had their hands full checking IDs, cross-checking them against the list of people who were attending, and turning away those who were just curious to get in.

The group who had booked it had requested an invite-only event, so anyone who wasn't on the list wasn't admitted.

Extra security was placed at all the elevators and around the building. Brent wasn't expecting any problems, but Jake and his security teams usually took care of any before Brent even knew about them. He paid them well and they did terrific work.

His phone buzzed, which meant a call from one of the managers. He hit the speaker button on the phone. "What's going on?"

A man cleared his throat and Brent immediately recognized it as Jake. "Brent, Sandra is here to see you and I think something is wrong. Should I escort her up to you?"

A heavy ball of dread settled in Brent's stomach. What if Diego had tried to contact her again? Or got close to her? Dex had learned that one of Diego's aliases' credit card numbers had been used several times in Phoenix over the past few days. So unless it had been stolen, Diego was here in town. Did he already know where Sandra was? Brent hoped not, but Dex had Phoenix PD and even some FBI looking for him. Once they found Diego, he would be going away for a very long time, and he wouldn't be able to hurt anyone ever again—especially not Sandra.

"Yes. Thank you, Jake."

A few minutes later the elevator opened, and Sandra stood stiff and tall. Her chin was raised and there was anger and hurt shimmering in her eyes. She wore the same peasant skirt and blue top she had worn the first night she had come to Club Desire and she held a green book that brought back memories of a decade ago.

He stood and walked around the desk toward her.

She stepped forward and the elevator doors shushed closed behind her.

She held the book up like a shield between them. "Why didn't you tell me? Why did you lie to me all this time?" Her voice rose, and he could tell she was trying to hold onto her anger, but the hurt was winning.

He wanted to hold her, to touch her, to try to explain, but she held her hand up in stop-sign fashion and he stilled. "I'm sorry, Sandra. I tried to tell you several times. But we got distracted and I never got back to it. I never meant to hurt you. We are both very different people than we were back then."

He remembered the fear and hurt in her eyes when she had turned him down all those years ago, and the hurt shimmering in her eyes now sliced much deeper. He had caused

this.

He had to try to make it right. “Does it really matter that much? We’ve gotten to know each other now and I think we are very good together.”

She laughed, but it was a bitter sound. “So what was it? Because I turned you down you wanted to dominate me, humiliate me, and make me pay?” Tears brimmed in her eyes and slowly slid down her cheeks. “Did you get your revenge, Brent? Did all of this make up for how badly everyone treated you back then?” She was breathing hard, as if she had run a mile.

Her words hit hard, but not because any of it was true. It was because she could even think he would do something like that. “I never humiliated you. You craved someone to dominate you. To show you what passion and pleasure your body was capable of, and you and I have a great Dom/sub chemistry.”

She was staring down at his shoes, refusing to meet his gaze.

He clenched his hands into fists to keep from reaching for her. Even when his mind was screaming for him to hold her, he would never touch her when she had told him she didn’t want him to. “The fact that I’ve grown to care about you outside of the dungeon has nothing to do with ten years ago or turning me down for a high-school dance. I think once you move past your hurt and anger, you’ll see that.”

He took one step forward, hoping she would at least look at him.

She lifted the book and swung it, hitting him in the side of the head so hard his ears rang, and pain pierced his heart. When he raised his hand to touch his head and took another step forward, she threw the book at him and punched the button to open the elevator doors.

“Just leave me alone.” She stared at him over her shoulder. “I’m sorry if I hurt you all those years ago. I never meant to; I was too busy hiding my own secrets and too selfish to understand what you were going through. But that didn’t give you the right to manipulate me, to trick me and to lie to me.” She stepped inside the elevator when the doors opened. “I fell in love with you, damn it, and now I find out it’s not real. There’s no trust between us.”

She hit the button inside the elevator repeatedly until the doors closed, hiding her from view.

Brent cursed and sat down hard on his desk chair. He’d known all along that he needed to tell her. Dex had even warned him about this, and now he had hurt her, maybe beyond repair. The woman he loved had just run from him and asked him to leave her alone. But how could he? Especially when she had just told him she loved him too.

It was what he had hoped for, but he didn’t expect it this soon. And especially when she’d found out he’d been keeping secrets from her.

Brent slammed his hand on his desk before he picked up the phone to call Jake and fill him in.

If he couldn’t watch over Sandra, then there were others here who could. If she stayed here.

His blood ran cold. She had already been attacked once, and even though the junkie was in jail awaiting sentencing, Diego was still out there just waiting to get his hands on Sandra.

He tried to call Dex but there was no answer.

Damn!

He grabbed his remote and cycled through the different views on the bank of monitors, searching for her. He wasn't sure what to do next, but he knew she had asked him to stay away, and that knowledge had nearly ripped his heart out.

—

When the elevator opened downstairs, Sandra stepped out and then stood in the walkway, not sure where to go or what to do. Brent hadn't reacted the way she'd expected. He hadn't denied hiding it from her, or tried to turn it around and somehow make it her fault.

She remembered him telling her he'd gone to ASU and that he'd grown up here.

Damn. He *had* tried to tell her, and now that she thought about it she remembered other times when he had started to tell her and then got sidetracked. She hadn't recognized at the time that that was what he was trying to admit, but now she did.

He had asked her if it even mattered. They were both different people now. Did it matter?

All she knew was that her emotions were in turmoil and she needed some time away to figure out how she felt about it. Right now she felt like a fool. She wasn't sure if Brent had meant to pay her back or not. It didn't really ring true for the man she felt he had become. But it could have started out that way.

But again, did it matter if it had? She loved the man he was now, or at least the man she thought he was. But she had thought that man would always be honest with her. If she could get past all this, she would always have that niggling doubt about his honesty. Because even though he had tried to tell her, for something that important, he should have told her despite interruptions or anything else.

Dex.

She needed to find Dex. He said he would always be there for her if she needed him, and right now she needed someone she trusted.

She walked around the perimeter of the main dungeon level, seeing all the new faces most likely here for the Roman orgy. When she finally found one of Jake's security team, she asked if he knew where Dex was.

"He said he left something in his car. He just went down to the parking garage."

Sandra forced a smile and thanked him. At least now she had a destination and a purpose. She weaved through the crowd and made her way to the parking garage.

She remembered Dex's car, but with so many people here for the event she wasn't sure how she would find him. He and Brent had reserved spaces, but she had only been down

here once, and her sense of direction wasn't the best.

The security guard watching the door from the parking garage into Club Desire turned to smile at her. He had seen her several times over the past week. "Leaving already?"

"Just looking for Dex."

He nodded. "He went to grab something from his car." He pointed to the right and she thanked him and headed that way.

The garage was jam-packed tonight with cars. She realized this had to really be a huge event.

She edged along the wall, figuring she would eventually find Dex. He had to pass her to get to the entrance back into the Club.

She passed several rows of cars and even some buses and a few motor homes. Some jackass had parked his truck right on the line so he blocked two spaces. She edged around the bed of the truck to get by.

Someone grabbed her from behind. Strong hands grabbed her neck and squeezed as they pulled her back against a hard prick. Her lungs were filled with the familiar scent of cologne she had hoped she would never smell again.

Diego!

She clawed at his hands, trying to get him to loosen his grip.

No, it couldn't be. How did he find her? She tried to take a breath to scream, but he squeezed her throat until she gasped and sputtered.

"You stay quiet or you'll end up quiet forever. Got it?" *Diego's voice. She'd been right.*

She nodded and said a silent prayer that Dex or Brent's security teams would find her on their multiple video cameras.

"You disobeyed me and caused me a lot of trouble, little girl. And you'll be severely punished. Do you understand?" Diego loosened his hold just enough for her to answer.

She knew what he expected, but she was done being a doormat and a punching bag. So she did the stupidest thing she had ever done. She took a breath and shouted, "Fuck you!"

He immediately squeezed her throat and she thrashed, kicked, and fought with all her strength.

He squeezed her throat tighter and she thought he would crush her windpipe if she couldn't break free.

She stomped down on his foot as hard as she could and reached back trying to scratch and hit him, but it wasn't effective in this position.

Silver stars were beginning to sparkle behind her eyelids and her head swam.

Was this it? Was she going to die in a parking garage and never see Brent again? How stupid could she be to walk away from love over a decade-old secret? After, all she'd had her own. But she'd trusted him enough to tell him hers, even though it had been one of the hardest things she had ever done.

Blackness started to close in.

Brent's heart nearly split in two when he rounded the corner and saw Sandra. A tall man—Diego?—stood behind her with his hands around her neck.

He started to rush forward, but a hand settled on his shoulder, stopping him.

He looked up at Dex, who motioned for him to circle around the other side.

Brent watched as Dex pulled his Glock from a shoulder holster Brent only saw him wear while not on duty, since FBI analysts didn't carry guns. And then Brent concentrated on circling around behind several cars to come up on the other side of where the man he assumed was Diego was choking Sandra.

“Take your hands off her or I'll put a bullet in your head, asshole.”

Dex's voice echoed through the parking garage and when Diego turned his head to look at Dex, Brent darted forward, finding a position just a few feet from Diego.

When Diego didn't react, Brent ran forward, striking him in the side of the neck. Not a lethal strike, but then he wasn't trying to kill him. Yet.

A gurgling sound from Diego, and then the pressure around Sandra's throat loosened just enough for her to suck in a small breath.

When Diego started squeezing Sandra's throat again, Brent lifted his foot and struck down and in against the side of the man's knee. A loud *crunch* sounded a split second before Diego's scream of pain.

When he still didn't let go of Sandra's throat, Brent grabbed Diego's right wrist, and using pressure points on the joint, inflicted severe pain until Diego finally let go of her.

Dex rushed forward and grabbed Sandra as Diego fell, leaving Brent to deal with the son of a bitch.

Brent wasn't sure if that was a mistake or a favor, but as soon as the man thumped against the concrete Brent kicked him in the side, a satisfying crack telling Brent he had broken a rib.

Diego cursed, yelled, and threatened to disembowel Sandra while Brent watched.

Rage rose inside Brent, and for a split second he thought about ending Diego's miserable life.

“Brent.” Sandra's hoarse voice stopped him. “He's not worth killing.”

Anyone else who tried to talk him down might not have been successful, but Sandra's pain-filled voice helped him see reason.

Brent rolled the man over onto his stomach and planted his knee firmly on Diego's lower back, holding him down while pulling one of his arms behind his back. A lock that stressed the shoulder joint and caused extreme pain.

Diego yelled again and cursed until Brent yanked back nearly to the point where the joint popped out of its socket.

After another yell Diego fell silent, followed by only whimpering sobs.

Brent glanced up at Dex and heard the soft clink of metal against concrete to his right.

“Brent!”

Sandra’s hoarse croak only confirmed what he knew. Diego had pulled a knife or some other weapon out of his left pocket.

Brent grabbed Diego’s wrist and twisted until the knife clattered to the concrete.

Dex rushed forward and kicked it away just as screeching tires echoed around them.

The sound of pounding boots on pavement echoed through the parking garage. Apparently Brent’s security guys had seen what was happening on the cameras and had called the police.

Four men ran forward, surrounding them. Brent recognized two of them as the officers he and Dex had spoken to on the porch at Michelle’s house last week.

Diego started yelling for the police to help him. Saying he had been attacked and that Brent had broken his leg and rib and was trying to dislocate his shoulder.

Brent had been extremely tempted to dislocate the asshole’s shoulder, but figured he had dispensed enough pain for the day. Diego would get even more once he found himself in prison. The other two cops didn’t look familiar, but from their dress he assumed they were Feds.

When they addressed Dex, and they all started talking, he figured his assumption was correct.

He couldn’t hear what they were saying because Diego was still cursing, screaming, and outlining the horrors that Brent, Dex, and even Sandra had inflicted on him.

Finally one of the agents came forward and motioned for Brent to get off Diego and let him up.

Brent nodded and reluctantly released Diego’s arm and wrist. Then with one last full weight lean on the man’s lower back, Brent stood.

No one made any move to help Diego up, but Brent immediately made his way to Sandra, and only at the last minute did he remember she had told him to stay away from her. Instead, he opened his arms and she threw herself into his embrace.

Brent crushed her against him as the sound of a gunshot rang through the parking garage.

—

Sandra was being moved from one place to another, but she didn’t know how or why. She didn’t even know where she was being taken, but she hoped it was to see Brent. She had been a bitch, and almost dying had made her realize that he was right. She did love the man he was now, and the past didn’t matter for either of them.

She wasn’t sure how she got there, but when her mind brought her back to reality she was in another damn hospital bed. She hated hospitals.

What the hell was wrong with her now?

She swallowed and pain flooded her, bringing back the memory of what had happened with Diego. Well, right up until the point where she had run into Brent’s arms.

She tried to open her eyes to see if anyone was here in the room with her, but her eyelids wouldn't cooperate.

She opened her mouth to try to speak, but only a weak, painful rasp came out.

A strong hand brushed over her forehead. "I'm here, Sandra."

Brent. He came for her. Even after she'd lashed out at him and then run away. Her heart swelled and she wished she could speak to tell him everything she was feeling right now. Frustration burned inside her, which started the hot flood of tears.

Brent brushed away her tears with his fingers and then dabbed at them with a Kleenex. "It's all right. Your throat is a bit bruised, but it will heal with a little time." He pressed his lips to her forehead and held her hand. "Are you in pain? Squeeze once for yes and twice for no."

She exhaled, cursing the pain with that one action, then squeezed Brent's hand hard, one time.

"Hold on. I'll be right back."

What could have been minutes or hours later, she heard a woman's voice along with Brent's. Then something cold streaked down her arm and she realized she had an IV in her arm and that a nurse had just injected some meds into it.

Thankful that relief was on the way she relaxed and gave herself up to it, only wishing that Brent were still touching her.

And then he was. His strong hand caressed her cheek, and she floated off to sleep with happiness filling her chest.

—

Brent sat behind his desk impatiently, waiting for Sandra to arrive. She was meeting him here after she got off work and he hoped he had planned things out perfectly.

So many things had happened since Sandra had come back into his life, and now he knew he never wanted to live without her.

The Feds had Diego in custody and he had been charged with murder, along with several other felonies. He awaited a harsh sentence from a judge who had lost his daughter to rape and murder several years ago. Looked like karma was about to visit Diego in a big way. The man was lucky that when he had grabbed one of the cop's guns out of the holster and tried to shoot at Sandra, the bullet hadn't hit anyone. Otherwise he probably would have been ripped limb from limb by several Feds and Phoenix police, just on principle.

Sandra had slowly healed over the last week until she was able to speak without pain. Brent hadn't seen her in a few days; he had been busy with preparations that he hoped she wouldn't mind once she knew about them. He wasn't sure what he would do if she rejected him. He hoped he didn't have to find out.

—

When the elevator doors opened this time, Sandra was struck once again by that familiar blue gaze. The same one that had mesmerized her the first night here at Club Desire.

“Brent.” She took a few steps forward, stopping herself from running around the desk and throwing herself at him.

“Sandra.” He stood and came around the desk, pulling her into his arms and holding her tight. “How are you?”

She cleared her throat. “My voice still feels a bit raspy, but it doesn’t hurt to talk or breathe anymore.” She took a deep breath. “Brent, I’m so sorry.” She buried her face against his hard chest and closed her eyes tight against the tears she felt building. “You’re right. Those people we were ten years ago don’t exist anymore, and the fact that you didn’t tell me who you really were doesn’t matter. I know the man you are now, and that’s what counts.”

Brent led her over to the couch and sat, pulling her down onto his lap. “I’m sorry too. I should have told you. The woman you are today is all that matters, and that’s the one I fell in love with.”

Sandra gasped, trying to see if she had heard him correctly. “Brent?”

His expression was wary, but he kept her gaze. “Yes?”

“Did you just say you loved me, or are all the drugs they gave me still messing with me?”

He laughed and held her closer so he could brush his lips over hers and then deepen the kiss so it turned molten.

When Brent finally gentled the kiss and leaned back, she nearly whimpered. She wanted him so much. Hell, she loved him so much.

Brent looked down at her to capture her gaze. “Yes, Sandra, I’m in love with you. You have a way of distracting me from well-laid plans. Hold that thought.” He gently lifted her off his lap and set her on the couch. He stood and walked to his desk, taking out a box covered in blue velvet.

Her heart skipped a beat. It was a long, narrow box. She wondered what it could be.

She had to tell him before they went any further. “Brent.”

“Sandra.” Brent held up a hand. She couldn’t stop now.

“I can’t hold it in any longer. I’ve fallen in love with you, and you’re right. I do want your domination, but I also want your tenderness, your love, and I want to be able to take care of you as much as you take care of me.”

He sat beside her on the couch and she turned to face him before reaching out to trace his bottom lip with her index finger. He sucked it inside his mouth, sending a flood of heat and moisture straight to her pussy and making her squirm in her seat. It had been too long since he had been inside her and she craved it like a drug. “I don’t just want all that sexually with you, but in all ways.”

She took a breath, trying to concentrate on what she was saying with Brent sucking her finger and scattering her thoughts. “I’m not sure how exactly that will work. But that’s

how I feel and what I want. I'm done hiding and running, and denying my feelings. I am who I am and I don't care who knows it. And if you're brave enough to love the woman I am now, then I'm definitely brave enough to love the man you are right now."

Brent shook his head and laughed as he slid off the couch and knelt in front of her. He set the box aside and laid one finger over her lips. "Woman, sometimes you talk too much. I love your mouth, but if you'll give me time to speak, we'll find a much better use for that lovely mouth of yours."

His words sent prickles of arousal marching over her, and she forced herself to wait patiently for what would come next.

Brent picked up the box and placed it in her hands, but kept his hand on top so she couldn't open it yet.

"Sandra Barry, I know you have a troubled past. I do too." He blew out a slow breath. "But like I said, none of that matters. I have fallen madly in love with you and can't imagine my life without you."

He lifted the lid of the box and Sandra gasped again.

A silver collar studded with sparkling blue sapphires was inside, reminding her of the nipple chain he had given her during their last scene. Nestled next to it was a stunning silver ring with a huge marquis-cut diamond on top, and the sides were studded with smaller diamonds and more blue sapphires.

She looked up and met Brent's guarded gaze. "They're beautiful." She waited, not quite sure what else to say. He hadn't asked her anything. Only opened a box filled with beautiful jewelry. What did this mean?

Brent laughed and shook his head. "I never allow myself to give in to cowardice, but you tend to scatter my senses and distract me on every level." He reached out and brushed his knuckles over her cheek in a gentle gesture that she had grown to love.

"Sandra, inside Club Desire will you wear my collar and allow me to be the only Dom to pleasure you and bring you to new heights?" He traced one finger, first over the collar and then over the ring, making her wish he were touching her. "And will you marry me and be my wife and lover?"

He seemed to hold his breath, making Sandra realize she was holding hers. Trying not to make a fool of herself, she blew out her breath and let her mouth have free rein. "Brent Weston, I will wear your collar and enjoy every second of your domination and love. And I will wear your ring, and marry you and be your wife and lover. And I would love you to be my Dom and my husband." She gave in to the impulse and snapped the box closed so she could set it aside and throw herself into his arms.

Like she had hoped, he kissed her senseless before he pulled back and held her away from him. He picked up the box, lifted the lid, and almost reverently took out the collar and gently wrapped it around her neck. The cool metal settled against her skin, snug but not too tight, as he fastened it at the back. Then he picked up the ring and slid it onto her left ring finger before crushing her to him again.

It was another hour before they stepped off the elevator onto Basement 2 to play their

first scene as a committed D/s couple.

There were murmurs and even a few gasps as they walked around the floor toward their play area.

Then they reached a play area with a large hanging bar with loops for D rings and a toy bag overflowing with blue rope.

She gasped as she glanced back at the large crowd gathering to watch their scene.

He raked his gaze down her body, pausing at the collar and then again at the ring. "Assume the submissive position and remove anything you don't want ripped off. But leave the thong."

Sandra smiled, hoping he had in mind what she suspected. Excitement churned through her as she stripped off her nightie and kicked off her sandals before getting down on the floor on all fours and then leaning back on her haunches, thrusting out her bare breasts for the world to see.

She scanned the gathering crowd, seeing many people she knew well, and realized that while she was totally naked except for Brent's beautiful collar and her gorgeous new engagement ring she wasn't embarrassed in the least. She was excited for whatever was about to happen. Anticipating her Dom pleasuring her until she was flying.

When Brent settled behind her, looping the blue rope around her torso and guiding her up onto her knees, she smiled. She raised her arms so he could wrap the rope snugly so it lifted and plumped her full breasts, giving her a push-up bra, bondage style. Just like the one she had seen the first night she had been here.

When he was done, he offered her his hand to help her stand and guided her over until she was under the hanging bar.

"Lift your arms and grab the bar."

When she complied, he bound her wrists to the bar's D rings. Then he moved to the side of the set and turned the pulley to raise the bar until she had to balance on the balls of her feet.

She felt exposed, stripped bare, and excited beyond belief.

Brent moved back into her line of sight and walked forward with the familiar blue blindfold, covering her eyes and heightening her arousal as he began to tease and touch her until she was burning with need. Then he rolled her nipples between his large fingers, building the tightening vortex deep inside her belly. When tight pressure settled around her nipples and stayed, she realized he had attached her nipple chain. Her pussy clenched, begging to be filled.

"Sandra."

She balanced on the balls of her feet and gripped the bar tighter. "Yes, sir."

"I'm going to turn you around. Are you ready for whatever I give you?" His deep voice stroked her in deep, intimate places and she knew he would satisfy her physically, very soon. "Do you trust me?"

Sandra's clit throbbed in anticipation. "Yes, sir. I trust you implicitly, sir. Please make

me fly.”

He laughed and turned her so her back was facing the murmuring crowd. Her skin was still burning with arousal. She craved more sensation, but didn't want to ask for it and earn a punishment, which might ruin the scene. She trusted Master Brent to take care of her.

When the first sting of the flogger fell, she cried out as sensations flowed over her body and edged her closer to her first orgasm. She laughed as she realized that while she used to wish for just one orgasm, now multiple orgasms within a scene with Master Brent were normal and she had come to expect them.

Another stinging lash snapped against her ass and she gasped, wishing Master Brent would fuck her. The lashes continued to fall with no discernible rhythm and in no particular place. Both sides of her ass, her thighs, and her back were going to be striped with Master Brent's attentions and she would mourn them when they disappeared.

When the lashes suddenly stopped and Master Brent turned her again, she cried out from the sudden lack of intense sensations. She whimpered, and he nipped at her neck as he turned her.

He lifted her off her feet, and she wrapped her legs around his waist as he thrust inside her hard. As the head of his hard cock hit her cervix, she cried out as pleasure flooded through her body, but she still hovered on the sharp edge of her building orgasm.

Master Brent tugged firmly on her nipple chain while he plunged back inside her repeatedly. Her body tightened and then shattered, pleasure exploding over her in a tsunami of shimmering waves.

Master Brent continued to pound into her, rattling on her nipple chain at just the right times to build her up or send her soaring again.

She lost count of how many orgasms she had, and sweat had begun to trickle under her collar and her arms began to ache. She was close to giving Master Brent a “yellow” when he shouted and continued to thrust into her through his own orgasm.

When he slowed and slid out of her she was left balancing on the balls of her feet, sweaty and soaring, facing a crowd who watched her with lust-filled gazes. It was enough to make her crave another orgasm.

Damn, Master Brent hadn't lied. This was extremely addictive.

He stepped close as the scent of musky citrus filled her senses. Master Brent gently pulled on her nipple chain, shooting sensation straight to her aching clit. “I love you, Sandra. With all my heart and soul. And I pledge to always take care of you and pleasure you for the rest of our lives.”

Sandra sucked in a breath. “And I love you, Brent. But my mind isn't coherent enough to tell you how much.”

He firmly yanked her nipple chain and then his slick finger rubbed firmly over her clit, making her explode once again. She rode out the flowing ripples that raged through her and then gave herself up to subspace.

Epilogue

Sandra walked hand in hand with her new husband along the bank of the Thames. Since he had business in London, they had decided to tack their honeymoon onto the two-day business trip.

She had never been outside the country, so she was loving every minute, especially the afternoon teas!

He guided her into a small café and ordered wine for both of them, and she gave a happy sigh at the whirlwind the last few days had been.

Since neither she nor Brent had any immediate family aside from those at Club Desire and a few from her old dungeon in New York, they had held a beautiful wedding down in Basement 4 with dancing, wonderful food, and all the trimmings.

The justice of the peace who had come to perform the ceremony had been decidedly reluctant to come inside the Club, but after he had been assured that the wedding would be entirely G-rated, he had relented, and after the ceremony had even joined in the celebration and dancing.

Her old roommate, Darla, had been her matron of honor and Michelle, her bridesmaid. Dex had both given Sandra away and had acted as Brent's best man, with Jake, Logan, and Cameron standing up with him as well.

It was more beautiful than Sandra could ever have imagined, and she had been stunned to find out that being Brent's wife meant that everyone considered her an owner of Club Desire as well.

She supposed since Arizona was a community property state that was true enough, but that didn't explain everyone's attitude change toward her overnight. They treated her as if she now understood all the inner workings of Club Desire just as well as Brent and Dex and had the same decision-making power. She had a lot to learn to fulfill that new role, along with her day job, but Brent was mentoring her and seemed excited about having her as his business partner as well as his wife and sub.

She was happier than she had ever thought possible, and her past memories seemed farther and farther away with each passing day.

When the waiter returned with their wine, Brent turned to her with mischief dancing in his blue eyes. "How about a light lunch? You'll need your energy for later," he teased, hinting at their plans for tonight.

She smiled and nodded, giving the waiter her order and gazing into her husband's adoring eyes.

Tonight they were visiting a local dungeon. A friend of Brent's had recommended the place and had contacted the owner to get them in as VIPs.

Sandra had her bag with her that contained her collar, her nipple chains, and some of her other favorite toys, and she couldn't wait.

She turned her head to look at her new husband as he sipped his wine and her heart swelled. She still couldn't believe that he was hers in every way. But that didn't stop her from enjoying the hell out of it.

When he caught her looking at him, a large smile curved his lips and he pulled her to him, capturing her mouth, expertly plundering her until she was breathless, uncaring about who saw them.

“Hmm, my beautiful wife. I think we might need to head to the dungeon now rather than later. I don't think either of us can wait too much longer.”

Even though they had made love in the shower and then again on the bed before they left the hotel room several hours ago, Brent was right. She needed him. After all, this was their honeymoon and they had to take full advantage of it.

“Let's go.”

In loving memory of Judi Thoman/Brit Blaise, who was my inspiration to branch out into the erotic genre, as well as my longtime friend and mentor. I wouldn't be here if she hadn't befriended me back in 2003 and started our wonderful Butterscotch Martini Girls critique group.

Acknowledgments

Huge thanks to my critique group, The Butterscotch Martini Girls, and especially Cheyenne McCray and Kayce Lassiter for all the brainstorming, laughter, and wonderfully insightful and honest critiques. You guys keep me sane.

For the love of my life, Jon, and my wonderful son, Darian. Thank you for all your love, support, and patience with a woman who lives in her own fantasy world, and talks to and argues with imaginary characters. I love you both dearly.

To my wonderful agent, Paige Wheeler, for always believing in me, even in the tough times.

To my terrific editor, Sue Grimshaw, who gave me a shot at getting back into the game!

BY CASSIE RYAN

Seducing the Succubus
The Demon and the Succubus

Club Desire
My Obsession

Writing as Tina Gerow
Sleeping with Shadows



PHOTO: LOU WEGMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY

CASSIE RYAN started her career writing steamy paranormal romance under the pen name Tina Gerow. However, when one of her critique partners suggested she try her hand at erotic romance, she gave it a shot—and Cassie Ryan was officially born. She lives in Phoenix, Arizona, and besides being a write-a-holic, is a frequent speaker and teacher on several writing and motivational topics.

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The Editor's Corner

July is the month for sizzling romance and Loveswept has all the books for your reading needs right here.

In *New York Times* bestselling author Marquita Valentine's *Take the Fall*, the first spin-off novel from her successful Boys of the South series, passions run hot as a rugged, brooding marine rekindles an old flame. Elisabeth Barrett begins a heartfelt new Briarwood series with a tale of forbidden love, broken promises, and second chances in *Once and Again*. Club Sin returns in *Commanded*, a decadent new romance from *USA Today* bestselling author Stacey Kennedy. Next, *USA Today* bestselling author Claire Kent's deeply sensual story of love, lust, and deception, *Sweet the Sin*, where a woman searching for the truth discovers that she's sleeping with the enemy. Another *USA Today* bestselling author, Serena Bell teases all five senses in *Turn Up the Heat*, a poignant, tantalizing novel of fantasies long hidden...and finally indulged.

The heat is on in Cassie Ryan's story of temptation and total surrender, *My Obsession*—a powerful master gives his dream girl a new beginning in the dungeons of decadent ecstasy. Violetta Rand's explosive new Lies & Leather series kicks off with a red-hot motorcycle racer who rides hard and plays for keeps in *Loving Lucas*. And *New York Times* bestselling author Tracy Wolff poses the question: Do nice guys always finish last? In the new Extreme Risk novel, *Slashed*, a burned-out underdog and a vulnerable tomboy defy the pressure to be perfect and go after what they really want.

If you adore billionaire romances that are blistering hot, don't miss Tracy's Play Me series, now available as one book!

My, it's *hot* in here. And it won't cool down for August—just wait until you see what we have in store!

Until then,

Happy Romance!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gina".

Gina Wachtel
Associate Publisher

Read on for an excerpt from

Commanded

Club Sin

by Stacey Kennedy

Available from Loveswept

Prologue

Eyes cast down. Rope. Naked flesh.

Sawyer Quinn studied the bound submissive before him. The tight bindings squeezed her flesh in just the proper way so that the black hemp rope accentuated the curves of her feminine body. She was enticingly beautiful.

While his cock mourned the action tonight, he was mentoring Dominant Max on suspension bondage. Sawyer observed the artful ropes that captured the dark-haired submissive named Amanda. Though he didn't linger too long on her rosy erect nipples, as she most definitely belonged to Max.

Keeping a close eye on Max's proficiency as he bound Amanda's knee, Sawyer leaned against the dungeon's stone wall for support. Black leather couches surrounded glass coffee tables and wrought-iron sconces dimly lit the room. The best of BDSM equipment decorated the squared structure with St. Andrew's crosses, spanking benches, ropes hanging from steel support beams, and much more. Club Sin was a five-star BDSM club and Sawyer happily renewed his membership each year.

Under his careful examination, Max fumbled with one of the knots and then unwrapped it to try again. Bondage required extreme patience and Max allowed himself to become frustrated, being too hard on himself for not getting it right the first time. As he corrected the error Sawyer knew Max was trying to stay focused, not an easy task when you have someone looking over your shoulder.

All in all, Sawyer thought, Max had done well.

Throughout the fifteen years Sawyer practiced BDSM, he noticed two different types of people who enjoyed bondage: people who tied up their lover to add kink into their sex lives and people who had a bondage fetish.

Those with a fetish got off on seeing their lover wrapped in rope, just as Sawyer did when he bound a woman. Even the act of applying the bindings and seeing the rope spreading across naked skin brought him arousal. He often enjoyed trying to make the high that much higher.

Sawyer first trained with knots. Then he focused on Shabari before moving on to suspension bondage. Bondage long ago had become second nature to him. He could bind a woman to increase her pleasure as well as he could tie a shoe.

The loud slaps of a leather flogger against flesh echoed across the dungeon from the spanking bench across the room. He stayed focused on the task at hand. Amanda kept her eyes closed as Max continued working over her body, knotting the rope at pressure points that he'd learned from Sawyer during their first training sessions.

Enjoying the soft music playing through the speakers above his head, Sawyer took note of the crowd. It didn't surprise him to find newer members watching the scene. He couldn't spot Club Sin's owner, Dmitri. Nor could he see any of his fellow Club Masters, Kyler, Miles, Aidan, and Porter—all of whom Dmitri appointed to help run the club,

oversee the submissives in the dungeon, and educate the members.

His fellow Masters were highly experienced, and the training aspect of the scene stole away the passion and intensity. Those who watched Max and Amanda tonight did so to learn.

Nevertheless, his students enjoyed themselves.

One quick look between Amanda's thighs under the light and you could see her wetness. Sawyer grinned to himself, understanding their mind spaces. When he bound his ropes around a woman, locking her into his care, his cock always hardened. *Always.*

Tonight, though, his dick lay soft and unaffected in his jeans. Needless to say, since he wasn't doing the binding a little boredom had begun to settle in. When he first earned Master status, he took great honor in teaching others. Now, though he still enjoyed playing with casual submissives, the joy of mentoring other Doms had diminished.

"There," Max said, breaking into Sawyer's thoughts. "She's good, right?"

Sawyer pushed off from the wall, walking toward Max to see his handiwork. Amanda's erect nipples indicated the level of heat burning through her. Yet her arousal was not Sawyer's concern. "Do your bindings feel all right, sweetheart?"

"Yes, sir." Black pupils overtook her blue eyes.

Sawyer chuckled. A breeze from the wind could make this sub come. "I'm glad to hear it. You're doing well." Looking back to the young blue-eyed, baby-faced Dom, Sawyer commented, "Don't ask me the question. Ask your sub. All right?" At Max's firm nod, Sawyer examined the bondage with a keen eye. "Excellent knots. Well done."

"Thank you." Max smiled with a Dom's arrogance.

Sawyer tilted his head at Amanda, raising his brows. Max realized his misstep quickly, adding without a moment's hesitation, "Thank you for letting me practice this tonight, Amanda. You were outstanding, darling."

Her breath whooshed between her swollen pink lips. "You're welcome, Master."

Master.

That one word told everyone in Club Sin whom Amanda belonged to. It never bothered Sawyer that he'd never been addressed that way by a sub before. He never yearned for it. The responsibility of a full-time sub didn't interest him. Casual relationships suited him more, due to his busy work schedule and busy life.

As he studied his students, the air thickened. Pleased by their enjoyment and the bondage, Sawyer returned to his place against the wall. "The more you play with Amanda," he told Max, "the better you'll be attuned to her. But when dealing with bondage, use your voice to ensure she's comfortable. Understood?"

"Got it."

Sawyer examined the couple, curious about their next steps.

Max's posture stiffened, appearing taller, as he admired his work. He ran his palm over Amanda's rounded stomach. She leaned her head against her bound arms stretched high above her. Smiling with pride, Max stroked her leg bound at the knee, leaving her partially

suspended. “I like you this way. So beautiful. All mine.”

When Amanda shuddered, Sawyer took his cue to leave. What they both needed now: a good quick fuck. He gave Max a final proud nod, pleased by the other Dom’s use of tender rewarding words. Turning on his heels, he strode into the crowd as he moved toward the black leather couches. While his instruction might be done tonight, he didn’t trust Max enough to leave him alone with a bound submissive.

Being a Club Sin Master meant protecting a submissive’s well-being. A responsibility he’d become proud of. Respect he’d worked hard to achieve. Even if he found himself lacking the enthusiasm he once had.

Only when he reached the couch, ready to take a seat, did he realize his phone vibrated in the pocket of his jeans. Thinking it best to stay focused on Max and Amanda, he ignored the call, figuring he’d return it later. But the vibration continued, and wondering now if there could be a problem he was unaware of, he decided to answer it. “Hello.”

His father replied in a tight voice, “Son, it’s me.”

Sawyer stared at Max, who was dropping his pants to his ankles. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s your sister.”

“Is she okay?”

“No, she’s not.” A pause. “Someone beat her up. It’s bad, son. Ashlyn needs you.” His father’s voice cracked, filling with heavy emotion. “Your mother needs you. We’re at Sunrise Hospital. Please get here as soon as you can.”

Before he could even end the call, Sawyer ran for the door, somehow aware that, in this split second, his had life changed forever.



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