

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

REESE GABRIEL

*Come
and
Get Me*

COME AND GET ME

An Ellora's Cave Publication, March 2005

Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.

1337 Commerce Drive, #13

Stow, OH 44224

ISBN MS Reader (LIT) ISBN # 1-4199-0169-9

Other available formats (no ISBNs are assigned):

Adobe (PDF), Rocketbook (RB), Mobipocket (PRC) & HTML

COME AND GET ME Copyright © 2005 REESE GABRIEL

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part without permission.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. They are productions of the authors' imagination and used fictitiously.

Edited by *Pamela Campbell*.

Cover art by *Syneca*.

Warning:

The following material contains graphic sexual content meant for mature readers. *Come and Get Me* has been rated E-rotic by a minimum of three independent reviewers.

Ellora's Cave Publishing offers three levels of Romantica™ reading entertainment: S (S-ensuous), E (E-rotic), and X (X-treme).

S-ensuous love scenes are explicit and leave nothing to the imagination.

E-rotic love scenes are explicit, leave nothing to the imagination, and are high in volume per the overall word count. In addition, some E-rated titles might contain fantasy material that some readers find objectionable, such as bondage, submission, same sex encounters, forced seductions, and so forth. E-rated titles are the most graphic titles we carry; it is common, for instance, for an author to use words such as "fucking", "cock", "pussy", and such within their work of literature.

X-treme titles differ from E-rated titles only in plot premise and storyline execution. Unlike E-rated titles, stories designated with the letter X tend to contain controversial subject matter not for the faint of heart.

COME AND GET ME

Reese Gabriel

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

NFL: National Football League Association

NBA: NBA Properties, Inc.

Rubik's Cube: Ideal Toy Corporation

Chapter One

Eleesha was already five minutes late when she saw the motorcycle. Sleek, red and futuristic...and parked in *her* spot! She cursed both her bad luck and the owner's insensitive, uncaring behavior. How hard could it be to read a reserved parking sign written in plain English? She'd bet anything the culprit was a man.

Forced to round the corner to the side of the building, Eleesha settled on a place three rows back in the crowded lot. Slapping on an extra layer of nuke-proof lip gloss for insurance and double-checking her precariously ordered auburn curls, she hopped out of her sedan and hightailed it for the weekly department head meeting of Global Tech, Inc, already in progress.

Her navy blue heels were not cooperating. Neither they nor the slinky suit skirt she'd chosen this particular Monday were intended for a hundred-yard dash across pitted blacktop. Of all days to have to face the visiting corporate efficiency consultant, she thought. Of course this all might have been avoided if Chester, her lovingly annoying Siamese cat, hadn't chosen to walk all over her alarm in the middle of the night, rendering it silent at wakeup time.

Chester was a male, too.

"Good morning, Miss Greene," nodded Frank, the security man at the front desk.

"Morning, Frank." She blurred past the kindly, white-haired guard.

Invariably, her mind went into free association. Frank. Security. The motorcycle. *Justice.*

Eleesha skidded to a halt halfway down the corridor. "Frank, someone's in my spot," she called out. "Send for a tow truck, would you please?"

Frank's snow-white eyebrows knitted nervously. "Well, um, actually, Miss Greene, I can't do that."

She was back at the reception desk in a flash. Meeting or no meeting, she was going to sort this out. "What do you mean you can't? Someone's hijacked my place and I demand satisfaction."

"Actually..." corrected a confident, bordering on arrogant, smooth male voice behind her, "you can't technically hijack a parking place."

The ill-timed intrusion managed to snap Eleesha's last remaining nerve. "Excuse me," she whirled around to confront him, "but I don't believe I'm in need of any grammar les—"

Eleesha's exclamation fizzled mid-word. Her mouth hung open in blatant disbelief. This was no ordinary interruption she was dealing with. This was an unmitigated disaster. An unwanted, bad trip down memory lane.

"Hello, Eleesha," said Ross Maclean, the man who'd taken full and complete possession of her body for one scorching, unforgettable night a decade ago in college. "Long time no see."

She fought the flush in her face. The last time he'd seen her she'd been nude, panting on his bed, begging to be allowed to come as he tortured her maddeningly with his huge, pulsing erection, sliding it agonizingly slowly in and out of her slick, gaping sex. He'd won her that night in a game, a bizarre sorority ritual called Come and Get Me, which made the pledges into sexual door prizes for the big-time jocks.

"Ross," she acknowledged, trying to keep her tone neutral. Already, she could feel her body responding to him, the dampness between her legs, the quickening of her pulse. How could it be that her pussy still remembered the exact shape of him, the exact length and thickness? How could it be that she remembered his taste, salty-sweet as he let her lick his hardness, 'til it pulsed with need too great to ignore? The taste of her, too, on his lips as he kissed her after tonguing her swollen sex. One word, she feared, one motion of his fingers and she might be tearing at her clothes, ready to give in to him all over again.

If only he'd gotten ugly, old or fat. As it was, the intervening time had done absolutely nothing to diminish the raw masculine beauty of the former quarterback. His hair was thick and brown, brushed neatly back and trimmed around his ears. His face was ruggedly handsome, featuring cerulean blue eyes, a dimpled chin and a firm, decisive jawline. He was wearing well-worn blue jeans, which he filled out to perfection, along with a green T-shirt under a brown flight jacket.

She nearly swooned at the scent of him. So familiar...musk, mixed with pure testosterone. It was like being back in college, all those times she'd followed him around her freshman year. She'd been barely eighteen. He'd been a twenty-two-year-old senior—tall, dark and heroic—bound for the NFL. She'd have done anything to get his attention, and one day she'd finally gotten her chance.

Though not quite as she'd imagined.

As a pledge to the Tri Zeta sorority, she was required to play their secret sex game, Come and Get Me. An entry was filled out for each of them by their pledge sisters, depicting some specific sex act to be done to one of the boys in their partner fraternity, Delta Omicron. Eleesha had made the mistake of telling one of the sisters about her feelings for Ross, who was a member of this particular jock fraternity.

Ross was chosen among the males, having been able to chug a beer the fastest, to go first. Barbara, after making sure that everything went as planned, held a hat toward Ross. He then pulled a slip of paper from the hat. It was Eleesha's entry he drew. Barbara read the words they'd written for her on the paper, and with each one, Eleesha's face had turned redder and redder.

"Most people know me as a quiet little frosh with brown hair who's always carrying a load of books, but underneath, I'm a tigress, needing to be tamed. There's only one tiger for me... I want him inside me, I want him to tie me down and use me all night long... Ross Maclean...Come and Get Me... I'm Eleesha Greene and I want to be your love slave."

Hoots and hollers went up across the busy frat house. The guys had given Ross resounding thumps on the back, teasing him about what he'd do with his luscious

prize. Eleesha wanted to crawl under a rock, but the pledge sisters had been right there to drag her forward. She had been terrified, but excited, too. Questions had danced in her mind. *What would it be like? What if he rejected her?* He could have any girl on campus in his bed. Oh, why oh why had she dared show her feelings?

He must have read her doubts. "Don't worry," he'd whispered in her ear as the crowd pushed them together. "I think you're cute, too."

Eleesha had melted into his arms. He'd kissed her hard and deep and then lifted her high, cradling her small, trembling body. They'd had a room all prepared. The crowd had cheered as he'd carried her up the stairs. She was about to have the best sex of her life before or after.

Who could have guessed that this kind, gentle but passionate lover would betray her so terribly the next morning? To the rest of the campus he'd remained the star athlete, but to Eleesha he would forever be ranked as the World's Greatest Asshole.

"For the record," Ross said now, filling the awkward silence that had risen between them. "I wasn't really giving you a grammar lesson. I'd call it more a matter of correcting your vocabulary. As for the bike, it's mine."

Eleesha blinked. "Excuse me?"

"It's my motorcycle that's parked in your spot."

She waited for some act of contrition. When it did not seem to be forthcoming she said, "How interesting. One would think a man so well-versed in *vocabulary* could manage to read a simple reserved parking sign."

The man pursed his lips. He had tiny lines now, around his mouth. They only made him look sexier, damn him.

"I hadn't noticed it," he said. "I'll move it."

"If it wouldn't be too much trouble," she said, her voice dripping sarcasm. "Although, perhaps you won't be staying long?"

She made little attempt to hide the hope in her voice that he would vanish quickly from the building, as well as from her life. It felt good, she thought, being the one to reject him this time. The fact that her body was responding to him all over again—her belly quivering, her nipples peaking under her silk bra just like it used to whenever he would pass her in the hall—was beside the point.

He smiled slantedly. “As a matter of fact, I’m going to be hanging out here for some time. Your board has asked me to come in and look things over.”

Eleesha felt her knees buckling. Ross Maclean was the consultant hired by the company? *Oh Mother of all Mondays, when will it all end...*

“You? But how— You’re a...” She stopped short of reducing the man to his football position. Still, she had her doubts how the likes of Ross Maclean could have the expertise to advise a multimillion-dollar information services company.

“Just a dumb jock? Is that what you were going to say?”

Eleesha frowned. Now she was going to have to apologize. As if this man deserved the time of day after what he’d done to her all those years ago. “I didn’t mean anything by that. I just didn’t realize you had...qualifications.”

His smile betrayed subtle amusement. How dare he—the patronizing son of a bitch!

“My NFL career, as you may have followed, turned out pretty short and unspectacular, but I managed to save up enough to start a restaurant or two. One thing led to another.”

“Oh, were you in the pros?”

As if she didn’t have a box of clippings her girlfriends had sent telling the tale of his meteoric start for the Blazers, complete with a conference record for completed passes his first and second seasons. A shoulder injury had sidelined him the third season, however, and then he’d gotten married and dropped out of football entirely. A year later he was divorced. *Probably screwed that woman over, too. The prick.*

“Restaurants?”

She'd stopped reading about him after the marriage. It was always touch and go where Ross' legacy was concerned. Several times she'd actually threatened to burn the clippings. Once she'd watched him on television. She'd sworn at him up and down but then he'd gotten tackled and she'd broken into hysterical tears.

"You probably wouldn't have heard of them," he demurred. "It's a chain of kids' pizza places. Miss Soogy Skunk's Place?"

"I don't have children," she informed him pointedly. "I wouldn't know."

Wow, she thought. That sure sounded catty, if not downright bitchy. Where had that come from?

"I'll just go and move the motorcycle," he said, obviously a man in search of a quick exit if ever she'd seen one.

"Don't bother," she said curtly. "I've already parked elsewhere."

"It's the principle of the thing," Ross said. "Will I see you later?"

Her eyes flashed. Of all people to be talking about principles. "I don't know, Ross," she replied, showing the proper mixture of indifference, contempt and pure disdain. "That's up to our superiors. Good day."

He inclined his head. "Good day, Eleesha."

She could feel his eyes burning into her from behind. Ten years and he was still doing this to her, making her all flustered, confused and...wet.

Eleesha squirmed in the elevator. She had nearly been overcome, just by the man's voice, by his mere proximity for a couple of minutes. And her traitorous body wanted more. Just now, walking away from him there'd been the tiniest sway to her hips, the smallest of motions in her backfield.

Once upon a time this man had awakened her body, made her a woman. His woman, by virtue of just a few hours of seduction. And yet the instinct to please him, to turn him on was clearly still there. No matter that she was literally flirting with disaster.

Her flesh, lonely as it was, had its own logic. It wanted to submit, to be played with, loved, no matter what the emotional fallout.

This would not do. Not at all. As the company's new consultant he could be here for weeks. And at close range, too. Lyle, the senior vice president and acting CEO had indicated that the man would have plenty of hands-on time with each department head and that he would be picking all their brains at length.

The very thought of Ross' hands anywhere near her was enough to make her cringe. The way he'd touched her all those years ago, like he'd been born to make love to her, like he had nothing else he'd ever want to do with those hands. The same hands with which he'd thrown his famous sixty-yard touchdowns. She couldn't afford to make herself that vulnerable. She was going to have to go to Lyle, she decided, and deal with the situation.

Nip it in the bud. Use her good graces with the Executive VP to get Ross Maclean tossed out on his smug ear – out onto the street where he belonged. Then she could deal with a replacement and get on with the business of doing her own job. She barely listened at the meeting, which was already half over when she'd slunk in through the back door of the conference room. Her mind was focused on Ross, and all the things she would like to do to get even. Then again, she'd better be careful about hating the man. For all too easily, it was said, that emotion could change to its opposite.

Once she had put her heart into those hands, a trusting naïve woman. He'd shattered it and she was wiser for it. Never again, she vowed, wrapping her brain around the quarter's overseas sales figures. Never again.

* * * * *

Ross not only moved his motorcycle, he took it back out on the street, and from there to the freeway, up three exits and back down. He'd had no idea that Eleesha Greene worked for this company. How the hell was he supposed to conduct his

investigation with her around? It was tricky enough poking his nose into everyone's business, requiring them to unwittingly provide the very information about their jobs that could allow them to be downsized in a potential restructuring.

And now he was going to have to number among those people a woman who, after a decade, still obviously blamed him for his hasty departure from her life. Technically, he'd owed her nothing. They'd gone to bed with no expectations. It was a game they'd played. So what if he hadn't wanted anything more to do with her? She was a big girl. Eighteen to his twenty-two.

And yet there was no denying the shame he felt, the pain, then and now when he thought of his words to her that fateful morning. He was getting dressed, trying to make a clean getaway. The sex had been incredible, maybe too incredible. All he could think about was his pro career. He hadn't wanted to be tied down by anything, especially not a college freshman. Hell, he was going off to the land of pro cheerleaders and movie starlets. A different woman in his bed every night. He'd done Eleesha. It would all be downhill after the first time.

"Ross?" He'd heard her soft voice, half-plea, half-question. "Where are you going?"

Ross' mouth had gone dry as cotton. His heart had slammed in his chest. Big, strong football player that he was, he hadn't had the courage to face the tousled-haired, pale-skinned beauty under the sheets.

"I've got physics at nine," he'd said.

Like he'd been there all semester.

"Will I...see you later?" she'd wanted to know.

It was at that point that he'd whirled on her, despising the emotion she was showing, the weakness. He'd thought of his old man, the surly way he'd dealt with everything out of the bottom of a bottle.

"Grow up," he'd told her. "What makes you think you'll see me later? We screwed...that's all."

Her eyes moistened. She'd been too young to know how to hide her disappointment behind a veil of cynicism. Either that or she really had loved him.

"Stop looking at me that way," he'd demanded, unable to bear the burden.

She'd whispered an apology. She hadn't intended it that way, but it was like a knife had stabbed into his chickenshit heart.

Trembling, he'd pulled his shirt over his head. "It's okay," he'd told her. Walking over to her he'd given her a kiss on top of her head. A Judas kiss is what it felt like. And after all the passion she'd given him. Kissing every inch of his skin, licking down his muscled body, beautiful eyes closed in a gesture of pure devotion. Not to mention the press of her lips to the tip of his cock, her little tongue greedily claiming the tiny drop of pre-come that was to be the foretaste of a cascading fountain, every bit of which she took willingly down her sweet throat.

But that was only the beginning. Twice more, they'd made love, each time more amazing than the last, their bodies spurring each other to ever greater delights.

"It was fun, Eleesha," he'd told her. "Maybe we can do it again sometime."

That last statement of his had haunted him the most. There wasn't a worse thing he could have said if he'd taken a hundred years and studied with the world's masters of bad behavior. It was confusing and demeaning what he'd told her and it made the whole thing look like he either wanted to continue to take advantage of her body and avoid knowing her as a person or that he was just paying her lip service to shut her up.

His retreat had been hasty, but not so hasty that he hadn't heard her crying. There had been no mistaking the meaning, no misunderstanding, the damage he'd done. She'd had feelings for him. That's what the note that the sorority girls had written had been about. Going over it in his mind he'd thought of the tragedy of it all. Those sorority sisters had been damned mean to set Eleesha up. She'd been just a kid. So was he, come to think of it. If only he'd had the good grace to say no.

But the sex had been so good. He'd nearly forgotten how much she turned him on, what it felt like to look into those blue eyes of hers, to feel her soul open to up to him, or to hear her say "yes".

Ross had never been loved like that by any other woman. His cock had never felt so at home, so welcomed in a woman's body. She'd honored him—that was the word. It had bordered on worship. No other woman had felt that for him. Not any of the cheerleaders, not the starlets, and not even Chelsea.

He revved the bike, moving to the outside lane. He was going to get a ticket but he didn't give a damn. Ross needed the speed to clear his head. A tragic mistake of a marriage later, a shooting star of a career that had ended with him facedown on the ground in agonizing pain, and now a totally unexpected series of business successes and somehow he was back where he'd started.

Under the same roof as Eleesha. Damn, but she'd looked good to him today. It was months since he'd made love to a woman and she was more than just a woman. She was a superheated sex siren, glowing with her heat and energy. That body—shapelier than ever. That face—the lines of her life filled in so nicely. He'd wanted her, right there in the lobby, wanted her in his arms. Wanted her up there on that security desk.

She was sassing him something terrible. Just begging for a man to take hold of her and show her he meant business. And that ass when she'd walked to the elevator. Was it his imagination or had she been flirting with him just then?

This was all too confusing. He wanted to love her, he wanted to apologize on bended knee, he wanted to run like hell—a thousand miles away in any direction.

This meant one of two things as near as he could tell. Either he was about to come down with a severe version of the flu, or else he had unresolved feelings for this woman he'd yet to deal with.

Let it be the flu, he prayed.

* * * * *

Eleesha loomed over the desk of Lyle Wainwright, palms on the man's blotter, nails dug in, teeth bared. It was her best fighting stance, the one she saved for must-win battles. The do or die situations when she could not afford, for one reason or another, to back down. She liked to hope she did this for the sake of justice or at least for corporate fair play and efficiency, though every now and then she had to admit to taking things too personally.

This was not one of those times. And woe to anyone who said otherwise.

"I won't work with that man," she said. "And that's final."

Lyle leaned back in his chair, assuming a fretting, thoughtful countenance. He was a short, baldheaded man with heavy jowls and thick fingers. Lyle was as close as she'd ever known to a father, which made it doubly hard to ever hear a "no" from his lips.

"Eleesha, you know the confidence I have in your judgment." He held out his hands. "But I just don't see where you're coming from on this. Ross Maclean comes very highly recommended, and by a lot of people I respect. I've met him myself, and he seems not only sharp, but decent, too. If anybody can find a way to make this place more efficient and save our jobs, it's him. I know it's hard to believe an ex-jock could be a business whiz, but it turns out he's got the knack. Loves it, too. Anyway, I fail to see what you could have against him. You only just met him."

Eleesha frowned. "He parked in my spot," she said, well aware that she was running the risk of sounding like a spoiled child.

Lyle exhaled, trying to give her the benefit of the doubt. "I'm sure it was an honest mistake, Eleesha. We'll get the man his own spot."

She felt the wind being sucked from her sails. Ross was winning this battle. If she pulled back now, however, she could yet win the war. "I guess you're right," she relented, carefully preserving her objectivity. "I ought to give him a fair chance."

Lyle narrowed his gaze. He knew Eleesha better than to take such an easy surrender at face value. "And that's really all that's going on?"

"Yes. Although I will be keeping an eye on him, if you don't mind."

"Absolutely." He seemed relieved now. "Any problems, you let me know."

She arched a brow. "Count on it, Lyle."

Lyle licked his lips. She knew from experience that he was debating whether to ask a question.

"What is it, Lyle?"

He shook his head. "Never mind."

Eleesha didn't like the sound of that. He was already suspecting something personal here. It occurred to her now that Ross might well start bragging about his prior conquest of her. Would he be that low after all these years? Why not? Hadn't he parked in her spot just for spite?

Saying her goodbyes to the boss, she headed to her own office. A plan was formulating in her mind. It would do no good to sit around waiting for Ross Maclean to screw up. She was going to have to go to him, face-to-face and convince him just how unwise it would be to stay.

Men weren't the only ones who could tell stories, after all. And even a ne'er-do-well like Ross would have some desire to keep his reputation as a gentleman. If for no other reason than to go on deceiving other innocent women.

"Martha," Eleesha said to her very efficient blonde-haired personal assistant, fresh out of secretarial school. "I need you to set up an appointment for me with the new consultant. ASAP."

Her big blue eyes lit up under her soft bangs. "You mean Mr. Maclean? Omigod, he is like so hot. And he was a big football star, too, in like the NBA or something. Wouldn't you just die for a date with him?"

Eleesha shot daggers at the pretty young thing behind the desk in the outer office. "It was the NFL, Martha, and no, I most certainly would not. In point of actual fact, I would prefer a date with Wolfman Jack."

Martha cocked her head. "Who's that?"

Eleesha rolled her eyes, feeling worn to the bone with frustration. "You're too darned young sometimes, Martha, do you know that?"

"Yes, ma'am," she said meekly as Eleesha slammed her door behind her.

A moment later she popped her head back out, sheepish. "Sorry, Martha. You didn't deserve that."

"It's okay, boss," she smiled. "It's an executive thing, right?"

"Something like that," she managed weakly.

Something like that, indeed.

Chapter Two

Ross showed up promptly at eight-thirty the next morning for his scheduled appointment with Eleesha Greene. He'd been a bit surprised when her secretary had called yesterday to arrange a meeting, but the more he thought about it, the better it was to just deal with things straight up.

The last twenty-four hours had given him lots of time to think about why he'd reacted so strongly to seeing Eleesha yesterday. Since it was abundantly obvious by now that he did not have the flu, he was going to have to do the one thing he hated most in life – meet his emotions head-on.

Logically, the place to start was to truly and sincerely apologize. He owed that to her. He was man enough now. And with any luck, that would lay it all to rest. She would simply be another colleague, with whom he'd had a distant association, once upon a time. She'd be a generic worker, one of the many vice presidents here with no more sexual appeal than, say, Lyle.

Never again would he be up half the night, tossing and turning, dealing with an irrepressible erection as he imagined the Eleesha of the present, stripped of her clothes, helpless in his arms, unable to resist the power of his will. Twice he'd awoken from erotic dreams. The second time was so real that he'd had to stop and think for a minute if it was an actual memory of their encounter over the motorcycle or merely a fantasy.

In the dream, he'd come up on Eleesha as she was complaining to the security guard Frank. That much was the same in both versions. But in his dream version he told her flat-out that the spot was no longer hers. When she demanded an explanation, he told her it now belonged to him, as did everything else in her life.

Naturally she objected, and it was at this point that he moved in to kiss her. Instantly, he reclaimed all the territory of ten years ago and then some. She was his,

according to the passion of his lips, the brand of his hot mouth. And not just the Eleesha of old, but the one from the present, ten years wiser, more mature and stronger.

He let her get the struggling out of her system. Her wriggling only brought her closer against him, anyhow. She moaned in frustration as she realized she was only managing to arouse him further, the motions of her breasts and pelvis inviting more, not less exploitation of her person.

In his dream, Ross took his time with his tongue, letting her know in no uncertain terms that he had penetration on his mind. The worse part for her was dealing with his erect cock, pushing out the material of his jeans, pressing intimately between her legs. When she tried to leverage herself sideways he simply slid his hands down her back, taking public claim of her full, womanly ass cheeks. A sigh escaped her captive lips as he settled her right back where he wanted her. Crotch to crotch.

Ross was patient. He made sure she had no fight left in her at all. Heartbeat by heartbeat he waited until she was reduced to proper, feminine panting.

Releasing her lips at last, he spoke. "Everything," he reiterated, "is mine."

To punctuate the point, he took hold of one full breast. It felt like heaven in his hands — as firm as he remembered.

"You sure know how to handle her, Mister," Frank said. "Makes you the first, too."

Eleesha tried to recover herself, pushing at his chest with her palms. He held her fast.

"It's not fair," she exclaimed, stamping her foot.

The gesture, so totally sweet and female made him want her more than he'd ever wanted a woman in his life. It was the handling part that really got to him. The way she was being taken control of, but at the same time willingly surrendering herself.

"Frank," he called to the guard. "Is there a room we can use?"

He chuckled. "You aiming to tame her good and proper?"

"I just need to finish something," he said. "Something I started ten years ago."

"Might try the first-floor conference room." He pointed down the hall. "There's a nice big table. Hope you won't mind that, Miss Greene."

"She'll be just fine," he answered for her. "Won't you, Eleesha?"

Her response was predictably hostile. "I hate you, Ross."

He started unbuttoning her jacket. "That's fine, sweetheart, but you'll still come for me."

"No, I won't!"

"Stop fussing, Eleesha, or I'll put you over my knee."

Eleesha settled down, though her breathing remained harsh—deliberate exhalations to indicate how unhappy she was. "You'd never spank me," she declared.

He pulled the jacket down over her shoulders and handed it to Frank. "Try me."

Her hands went up over her blouse-covered breasts. "You can't strip me out here in the open. I draw the line there."

"She's right," said Frank, employing classic dream logic. "The board members are coming and they are bringing your mother. You know how she hates you to tease the girls."

Never mind that Frank had never even met his mother. He found himself answering. "All right, I'll do it in the conference room. Let's get your pretty backside in motion," he barked the command to Eleesha.

She squealed as he slapped her ass, sending her down the hall.

He and Frank were laughing hard as she disappeared down the corridor.

"Say," the man told him, suddenly serious, "you better not let her get too far ahead."

Ross went after her, but the corridor was changing as he went, lengthening, and switching directions. He started running, knocking on door after door, calling her name.

He'd awoken in a cold sweat, his hard dick in his hand. It was as close as he'd come to a nocturnal emission since he was a teenager.

No doubt about it, he needed to lay Eleesha's romantic ghost to rest in his mind. Pronto. Armed with singular determination and a belly full of coffee, he presented himself to the woman's secretary.

"Mr. Maclean," said the cute as a button blonde. "Gosh, I can't believe it's you, right here in front of me. If it's not too much trouble, would you sign an autograph for my little brother? You were like his favorite pitcher when you played."

Ross took the blank piece of paper from her hand. "Actually, I was a quarterback," he offered gently.

"Really?" She blinked her saucer-sized blue eyes. "Wow. I could have sworn he said you were the guy who like threw the ball and stuff."

"That's true," he attempted to enlighten her. "Except in football the one who throws the ball is called a quarterback."

She looked at him blankly. "Wouldn't it be easier if you just used the same name for things in all the sports?"

It was something Ross had never considered. "You may be onto something, young lady."

She smiled with glee as he handed back the paper that he'd signed with a flourish. He'd even drawn a big football, so she'd keep it straight what kind of ball he used to throw.

"Thank you, Mr. Maclean, you're the greatest."

"You're quite welcome. I didn't catch your name, though."

"It's Martha," she blushed.

"That's a pretty name. By the way, please call me Ross."

"Okay," she half-giggled. "Ross."

Ross knew he could get this woman in bed in a heartbeat. It was amazing how his confidence increased with age. On the other hand, he was also feeling increasingly uncomfortable dealing with younger women. It was like stealing someone else's fruit, taking unfair advantage of his greater life experience to win cheap seductions.

He needed more than that. The trouble was, the "more" would mean a relationship, maybe even a marriage like he'd had with Chelsea. To do that would be to court disaster all over again. Some people just weren't meant to marry was all he could figure. And he was one of them.

The door to the inner sanctum opened, just enough to allow a head to pop out. "If you're quite through flirting," said Eleesha to the hapless secretary. "I am waiting to see Mr. Maclean."

The door closed again, abruptly.

Ross looked at Martha, wincing slightly in sympathy.

"It's all right," Martha assured. "She'll apologize later. It's an executive thing."

Personally, Ross thought it was a childish thing, but he kept his tongue. "Any time you want an autograph—" he winked, his hand on the knob to the domain of the wicked advertising witch. "You let me know."

"You got it, Ross." Her wink was conspiratorial, more like a little sister than a potential lover. Just as well, he decided.

Speaking of little sisters, he was feeling a sudden need to stick up for Martha. "Eleesha," he said to the woman standing before him, breathtaking in her blue pleated skirt and pink blouse. "Don't you think you were a little harsh on the kid?"

Ross knew he'd made a mistake the minute the words came out of his mouth. Eleesha's pretty features narrowed into a look of pure venom.

"She's not a kid, Ross, she's a grown woman. And how I handle my employees is none of your concern."

Actually it was his concern, very much so as the supposed consultant from the board, but he opted not to point this fact out. "Look, Eleesha, I know we've gotten off to a bad start," he said gently but firmly. "And I want a chance to make things right."

"Make things right?" she challenged. "It's a bit late for that, Ross. Don't you think?"

The images kept pushing at him from his dream—he had to fight the desire to answer her with a kiss, squashing those luscious lips, making her squirm and moan...and surrender.

"Ross," she would whisper, saying his name as once she had, so full of hope and innocence the night he had laid her defenses bare, possessing her in every manner known to man. Her body beneath his, covered in sweat, yearning and twisting.

He'd put her in ropes, even tying her wrists and ankles, to heighten the tease, to increase the trust. She'd strained against her bonds, helpless as he dove between her legs.

"Let me," she'd begged. "Let me climax."

"Eleesha," he said, fighting to stay in the cold, professional reality of the here and now. "I can't change things in the past. I...I can't even begin to address any pain I've caused you. But I can apologize, from the bottom of my heart. I don't expect you to accept it or to ever even like me again, but I hope there can be at least the peace we need to work together. Know this much—if I could change things..."

His voice trailed off. Where the hell was he going with this? Was he telling her he wouldn't have left her or that he wouldn't have slept with her in the first place?

She was too close, damn it. Barely four feet away from him. The proverbial third down and inches to go.

Something flashed across Eleesha's face, a shift in emotion he couldn't read. It was there and then it was gone.

"It doesn't matter, anyway, does it?" she offered with sudden detachment. "Things happen by fate. Life deals cards, we play them."

"Yes," he agreed. "Though most of the time we have to bluff."

Why did he feel like she was improvising this? Like she'd expected things to take a different direction?

Eleesha shook out her curls. He remembered nuzzling them like it was yesterday. The way she smelled as she purred in satisfaction, cuddling against him after the loving was done, after they'd climbed the peaks and swooshed down.

"I have work to do, Ross. I know you do, too. Let me get to the point of why I asked you here."

"Of course." He hated how she'd changed. So serious. Cynical. No more giggles. No more flashing, flirting eyes. He'd never told her how much he'd noticed her that night, even before he'd won her in the contest. How he'd singled her out among the herd of freshmen females, seeing something more in her spirit, her gumption. He'd wanted her from the start. And then when he'd found that she liked him, too, that he was her dream man, well that had been enough to flip his tough-guy stomach. Just like getting tackled on the forty-yard line by the entire defensive line of the opposing team.

"As you said, we have to work together. I'd like to know up front, what you need from me as well as from my staff. We'll get the records together, get you the computer access and set up times to interview the team. If you don't mind, I'm of the proactive school of management. I really don't like surprises. And if you have any intention of including me in your list of deadwood around here, I promise you I will fight you. Hard."

He pulled his eyes back to face level. He'd been looking at Eleesha's long, lean legs. She must work out, he thought.

"Yes," he cleared his throat. "You've made yourself clear."

Ross shifted. *Son of a bitch.* He was hard. It had been years since the mere presence of a female had gotten the better of him like this. And what an erection it was, too. Like he was back in college. For a split second he thought of putting her over her desk, lifting that feminine skirt and pulling down her panties. Would her pussy be as tight and wet

as he remembered? What had she been doing all these years, romance-wise? She had no wedding ring and so far no visible signs of a boyfriend. Was she divorced, like him?

“That’s all I had to say,” she told him, making it clear his welcome was at an end. “Unless you have something to add?”

He didn’t. Not a blasted word, except...

Ross made his move. Eleesha was in his arms before either of them could do anything to stop it. It wasn’t like his fantasy. She wasn’t fighting him. Nor was she the timid young woman from college, either. She was like a wildcat, kissing him back, moaning and biting at his lips. Her fingers were feverish, trying to open his shirt. She tugged his tie apart, yanking it off and tossing it to the floor.

His hands were working on her blouse. He’d planned the moves in his mind a million times over, and so, it seemed, had she. Her bra was white, delicate and revealing. He fumbled behind her back. Where was the frigging clasp?

“Rip it,” she hissed. “Rip the fucking thing.”

The material tore with a satisfying, clean sound, signaling that all bets were off. He grabbed her breasts, then mauled them. She reached inside his trousers, just as greedy for his cock. A moment later he had her down on her leather couch, her legs wide apart. The panties received the same treatment as the bra.

“Oh, god,” she hissed, sounding like a soul about to damn itself, an addict about to shoot that one last vial. “Fuck me.”

Ross wasn’t sure what was in her eyes. They were glazed and far away. This was not going anywhere good, he feared, but there was no holding back. And what wouldn’t he sacrifice for one more plunge?

Her whimpers verged on tears as he pushed his throbbing, thick-veined cock inside the folds of her waiting sex. It was like she’d been waiting for this, dreaming of it every moment since last they’d been together.

Was that just his imagination? Wishful thinking?

Eleesha grabbed his head and pulled it to her breast. He suckled at the soft mound, relishing the feel of her quivering nipple between his lips.

“More,” she cried and he commenced biting the whole of her breast.

“Yes,” she groaned.

It must have been a long time, he thought, since a man had loved her.

Ross lifted his pelvis, momentarily denying her. She kicked her shoes off and dug her heels into his spine, encouraging her own conquest. He made her wait, letting the tension build.

“P-please,” she cried, uttering the magic words.

He gave her what they both wanted, what they’d been desperately craving since the moment they had laid eyes on each other again.

“Yes, yes,” she cried.

Two more thrusts, in and out, in and out and Eleesha began to come. It was remarkable, he knew, for a woman to react this way. He could only imagine the pent-up passion. Holding back nothing, he went at her full force, driving her trembling, shaking body deep into the leather cushions over and over until her groans dissolved into his and the waves of her climax merged with the shooting jets of his own.

My god, he was filling her once again. Marking and claiming her after a decade. Something he’d never thought possible.

Eleesha kept right on going. Either it was a second orgasm or the continuation of the first. He clung to her tightly, sealing her mouth with a kiss. He rode out his own bliss, gifting her with every last drop of his seed. He did not want this to end. It would not end well. He’d already determined that.

This time there was no sliding down the mountain. It was going to be freefall.

Ecstasy to emptiness. In seconds flat. First came the shift in her breathing, the sounds of closure, the slight tensing of her muscles delivering the unspoken message. *Get the fuck off me.*

Then the stiffening of his own back, the shrinking of his cock to normal proportions. No longer at home in her pussy, no longer hand in glove.

Ross got off of her, careful not to look at her face or body as she sought to cover herself.

"You don't have to tell me this time," she said as he zipped his pants up and tucked in his shirt. "It doesn't mean a thing. And, no, I won't be asking you to do it again some time for fun."

He left without a word as she walked behind her desk to tend to something on her computer.

The words came to his mind as he passed the innocent young Martha, clacking on her keyboard. Unless Ross was mistaken, they came from Shakespeare. *Hell hath no fury, like a woman scorned.*

It had taken ten years, but Eleesha had won her revenge, all right. She'd scored first blood this time, cutting him open before he had a chance to hurt her.

* * * * *

Eleesha had no idea why she was crying. It wasn't like she'd never had sex with a man she didn't love. She'd done her share of one-night stands, in fact, especially in the months following Ross' brutal departure from her life. She'd been determined to prove that she was as tough and callous as he. Mature and worldly.

Sex without love got boring after a while, though, and so she'd ended up spending more and more time with her books. The results were a string of straight As and a scholarship to one of the best business schools in the country. Other than a brief and very unwise fling with one of her teachers, a man twice her age in the process of getting a divorce, she kept to herself, focusing on her career.

Once out of school she'd landed an excellent starter job and in record time she'd worked her way up to being a vice president of a mid-sized company. Her goal was to one day be a CEO of a Fortune 500 company.

She'd make it, too, if she didn't let herself get distracted. Damned, she hated being a woman sometimes. How did men hack their way to the top and screw around at the same time? How did they make it look so easy?

You could bet Ross Maclean wasn't crying. He was laughing. Thinking how he'd done it again. Taken advantage of the poor, naïve little female. No doubt he'd stopped on the way out to make a date with Martha, his inevitable next conquest.

Meanwhile, she was left with nothing. The seeds of bitterness. She could kick herself for that last little dig she'd given him about not needing to be told the sex meant nothing this time. What did that accomplish, except advertising to the man that she was still vulnerable, still smarting over a wound inflicted a decade ago? For heaven's sake—she'd spit back the very words he'd used on her. Talk about nursing a grudge. He'd chew her up and spit her out for that. If the rumors were true that the company was going to be downsized, you could bet her name was going to be on the top of the list.

If only the sex had not been so fucking good. If only Ross Maclean didn't have the ability to put her in a tailspin just by walking in the same room as her. The son of a bitch had pulled a complete end run, too, by apologizing. How could she go ahead with her planned threat to expose the man's behavior if he didn't leave the building at once and never return?

There was a difference between being tough and being mean-spirited. Honestly, could she stand by everything she'd done in college? What about the boys she'd toyed with? Hadn't she broken a heart or two as well? Her own pain was no excuse for that. Wrong was wrong.

The problem was that Ross just had this way of doing things to her. She'd practically attacked him. She just had to feel those hard muscles again after all these years. Those firm, rounded biceps, still like iron. That lean, ribbed belly. The fine

pectorals. The narrow athlete's waist. The sculpted thighs. That ass in her hands. Cheeks firmed and toned through years of exercise. He was still that same athlete underneath, even sexier in fact with all the experience he'd gained.

The way he brought her to climax, the way he pinned her up there on cloud nine, owning her orgasms, owning *her*. She hadn't wanted to come down. Hadn't wanted to let go of that cock or give up his teeth nibbling on her nipple. She wanted perpetual fucking. Something to save her from a life of vibrator sex and glossy magazines with models in them she'd never, ever meet in real life.

But Ross Maclean was better than that. And he was only looking better as he got older. He'd been on magazine covers, with that wry smile, the boyish twinkle in his eye. He made the women swoon and every guy wanted to be like him. What was he doing, anyway, working for her company, messing around with restaurants? She decided to do a little more research on him.

In the meantime, there were these tears. Which made no sense. Ten years ago she'd been an angry young woman, taking it in stride. Funny how things hit you in life, she thought.

"Ma'am, are you all right?"

She looked up at Martha in the doorway, blurry, underwater. "I'm okay," she sighed, not bothering to say anything about the intrusion.

There were two things she had not been able to get Martha to do. One was to keep her from barging in whenever she thought her boss needed help and the other was to get her to call her by her first name.

"Martha, about the flirting thing this morning —"

"I know," she cut off the apology. "Now how about you tell me the truth? Anybody can see you're not okay and it doesn't take a genius to figure out it has something to do with Mr. Maclean."

Eleesha sighed. "Don't you have some filing or something to do?"

"No," she shook her head somberly. "I'm all caught up. Which means you get to tell me the whole story."

"Lucky me," she said in mock exasperation.

"It's your fault for not giving me enough to do." Martha plopped down beside her in her black slacks and white blouse. She reminded Eleesha a lot of herself, a long time ago.

"Promise me one thing first, Martha. You're not going to go out with Ross, are you?"

"Me date Mr. Ross? Like he'd ever ask me. Besides, anybody with half a brain can see that you two have unfinished business. So are you going to talk or what?"

Eleesha took a deep breath. "All right," she decided. "I'm going to tell you the whole thing. But if you ever breathe a word of it, I will see to it that you are tied down to your desk and forced to listen to Wang Chung all day on the PA."

"Wang who?"

"It's something old," she warned dramatically, finding herself reminded of just how much younger Martha was. "And therefore very, very terrible."

Martha giggled, tucking her legs up underneath her as if they were at a pajama party. "Okay, I'm ready for the story."

Eleesha took another breath and began. At the beginning.

Chapter Three

Ross managed to avoid Eleesha for the next week. The building was large enough and he had enough leeway in his work that he was able to steer clear of her and her department. Twice in their daily updates Lyle had mentioned advertising and Ross had quickly changed the subject. That approach was childish—how long could he avoid examining a key department? As part of his agreement with the board, he was obligated to file a complete report, and so far he had a huge, gaping hole. He was being unfair to them, as well as to the employees themselves. He was supposed to be here finding ways to save jobs, not play adolescent games.

The thing was, he had painted himself into a corner. He felt very much honor bound to make things right with this woman, but if he shared his regrets, that might only anger her. Anyway, what good was a second apology now after he'd already given one that was supposed to mark a clean slate between them?

Truth be told, he was a little afraid of her, too, and what he might do in response to her. As it was, he felt obsessed. He was forever looking for her in the hall, across the company cafeteria and in the parking lot, like some kind of schoolboy mooning after the homecoming queen. He told himself he was just trying to make sure they didn't end up within close range of one another, but how did he explain the quick beating of his heart whenever he thought she was nearby?

There was nothing innocent or boyish about his desires. The dreams had yet to relent and every night she was there to torment him. He would get so close to possessing her and then she would run away. Usually she was looking over her shoulder, laughing at him. Other times she would be with different men, leaving him burning with jealousy. One time it was Lyle kissing her, while Ross was forced to stroke himself in isolated desperation. Eleesha was wearing black stockings with garters, a

black brasserie and panties and a short blonde wig with bangs. She was doing a burlesque dance, playing to Lyle, who was sitting in a chair reading the latest budget statements. Ross was trying to write the numbers down while keeping his hand on his cock. Eleesha was clearly teasing him, even as she bent over Lyle, kissing his neck, her ass shaking in Ross' face.

That one turned out to be a wet dream. Another physiological phenomenon he thought he'd left behind on the other side of twenty. Along with the spontaneous erections.

The very next morning he had to sit across from her at a conference table with her fellow department heads. It was an open forum where questions could be asked of him as to his progress.

Tim Warner from legal wanted to know why he wasn't spending any time with the advertising department. Were they corporate pets—immune from potential cutbacks?

"I've been more than ready to be examined," challenged Eleesha, her eyes burning a hole in Ross. "We have nothing to hide. From anyone."

"There's a set order that Ross has to follow," Lyle defended. "We just have to trust him."

"How do we know he's not just getting us ready for a corporate takeover?" asked Miles Southerby from sales, the dam having burst.

The next twenty minutes were a free-for-all. Ross had no memory of what he said in defense of himself. Eleesha's lips were the only things burned into his memory, and her earlobe—the way it looked so cute as she tucked loose strands of hair behind it with her fingers. She had pink nail polish on and all he could think of was having her hand wrapped around his cock, lightly stroking him with infinite care and love.

Love...had he used that four-letter word? His mind continued dissolving, until it felt like some kind of waking dream. He had to take the rest of the day off after that.

It went on like that until he could stand no more. In the middle of the night, he made his resolution. Things would have to be settled between them once and for all. They would have to lock horns. They would have to get down and dirty.

They would have to have more sex.

Enough of it to get this attachment out of their systems. A night full of it maybe, or a long weekend, he wasn't sure which. It would be scorching and mind-blowing, that much he knew. It would have to be, if they were ever to burn out their strong feelings, once and for all.

* * * * *

Eleesha could barely drag herself out of bed. Turning on the light in the bathroom, she studiously avoided the mirror's testimony as to her appearance. If she looked half as bad as she felt, her reflection would be a sad sight, indeed.

What had happened to her? she lamented in the shower. How could she have gone from a tough, vibrant woman to a basket case in a week? She couldn't concentrate, couldn't eat. Every time the phone rang she jumped. At work she hid in her office, dreading her trips down the hall or downstairs where she might see him.

It galled her how good he looked. None the worse for wear. The miserable bastard. Rubbing it in right under her nose how he'd gotten the better of her. And what did she have to hear every time she turned around, from her female colleagues and subordinates?

Ooh, isn't that Ross Maclean handsome...what a stud.

Wouldn't you love a private consultation from him?

Do you know he was almost in the Super Bowl?

Eleesha was this close to throttling someone. And that time in the department heads meeting when Tim Warner—little weasel that he was—had tried to stir up trouble by charging that Maclean was playing favorites. What could she say, when it was obvious

to everyone that Ross was avoiding advertising like the plague? The man was going to be the ruin of her.

She could have spit nails at him then. Why couldn't he do his job and move on? So she could have her life back. Her peaceful, orderly, lonely life. Without a man to be furious with, to hate so much, and lust for so much, in the small hours of the night.

"Mrowr?" inquired Chester, hopping up on the sink.

She petted the lovable cat, sighing heavily. Even her cat knew something was dreadfully wrong in her life. Eleesha had half a mind to call in sick when she heard a knock at her door. Throwing on her robe she went to answer it. Chester promptly hid himself under the bed, ever her brave little guardian.

Through the peephole she saw the one face she wouldn't mind opening up for.

"Hello, Martha." She let her assistant in. "Decide to get a head start on violating my privacy today? I must admit, home invasion takes things to a new level."

"You'll be sorry for that later," Martha predicted, brandishing the tray with two cups of coffee and a pastry. "Where should I put this?"

Eleesha pointed to the cluttered coffee table. "Feel free to shovel everything onto the floor."

Martha quickly created a tidy little spot for their impromptu breakfast. "I'm getting worried about you, ma'am—" she bent over the couch, brushing away cookie and potato chip crumbs, and whatever other crumbs she'd been accumulating. "You're not handling this Ross Maclean thing at all."

"It's not about him." Really, Eleesha had come to seriously doubt that she'd done the right thing by telling her assistant the history between the two of them. "I'm just...depressed."

"Sit, drink," ordered Martha, who was sounding more like the boss every day.

Eleesha did as she was told. "Mm, this is good," she exclaimed, taking a small sip of the sweetened, light brown beverage. A couple of more swallows and she was feeling almost human.

"I dreamed about him again," she said, putting her head back on the couch.

"So what else is new?"

"This time he bought me. As a slave."

"Ooh, that sounds juicy."

"It was," she admitted. "We were all at a meeting. Warner was going on and on about Ross playing favorites with me. Southerby started stamping his feet and crying like a little kid. He had one of those baby bonnets on his head...it was kind of cute. Anyway, they all started arguing about where the money would come from for the advertising budget—and my salary. Lyle finally spoke up and said there wasn't any money for me, so I'd have to work for free. Warner was salivating, chattering on about how in that case, why not make me a slave. Ross had been really quiet up to that point, but finally he stood up and put one of those silly gold tokens from one of those kids' restaurants on the table.

"'You all know what this is worth. I'm claiming her.'"

"The men started fighting over me, but he just grabbed me and I clung to him, shivering. He picked me up in his arms, like he did all those years ago, and he told the others that if anyone came near him, he would knock their block off. I nuzzled his neck and then he ordered everyone out of the room. He took me, right there on the table. And then after, just so everyone knew I was his property, he chained me up outside—naked—to my own reserved parking sign—the one I gave him such grief about the first day."

Martha was doubled over by this point. "That is...so funny."

Eleesha hadn't thought of it in humorous terms, but she supposed it was a tad bizarre, to say the least. She shrugged her shoulders and started eating the pastry.

They had it about polished off when the doorbell rang again.

"Who could that be?" wondered Martha. "At this hour of the morning."

"I don't know. I'm fresh out of nosy assistants," Eleesha quipped.

Her elevated mood took a sudden downturn as she looked at this new face through the tiny circle of glass. It was him. Ross.

"Martha..." Eleesha didn't have to say another word. One terrified look in her assistant's direction said it all.

"You want me to tell him you're not here?"

"No. He'll have seen my car downstairs in the lot. And I can't let him think I'm that intimidated by him. I have to let him in."

"I could hide in the bathroom," she offered.

Eleesha charged forward on bare feet to grab her arm. "No. I need the moral support."

Martha let herself be dragged to the door. "Are you sure you want to see him like that? Maybe you should put on some more clothes?"

Oh, god, all she had on was her silk robe. Something told her it was too sexy for the occasion, but she was determined to appear blasé. If he was turned on, that was his problem. He was nothing to her and she'd be darned if she'd change her clothes for him.

She let Martha open the door. Eleesha swooned at the sight of the man, freshly shaved and showered, wearing a blue suit. She felt twice as naked now, like some kind of geisha girl.

"Good morning, Eleesha. Martha." If he was surprised by either her appearance or the presence of her secretary, he gave no indication.

"Eleesha, I'm sorry to be bothering you at home. I got your address from HR. I need to talk to you. It's urgent."

"Yes?"

He pursed his lips. "No offense," he said to Martha, "but I wonder if we could have a moment in private?"

"No," said Eleesha fiercely. "Anything you say to me, you say to her. She knows all about us anyway."

This time he did look shocked. "You told her...everything?"

"Like you haven't told anyone," she snorted.

"Actually," he corrected her, "I haven't."

Eleesha felt a wave of shame, followed quickly by fresh anger. How dare he make her feel bad about her behavior?

"Just get to the point, Ross. Then maybe we can get to work. By the way, any chance you'll actually do some in my neck of the woods? Or is your main interest staring at my breasts?"

It was his turn to be embarrassed. His eyes snapped back to her face. She reveled in the victory, not to mention the knowledge that she could so easily arouse him. All the better to exploit him...

"It's a personal matter, Eleesha. Deeply so. Are you really sure you want Martha in on it?"

This was the last straw. "For heaven's sake, Ross, you fucked me practically under the noses of half the undergraduate class. Then last week you screwed me in my own office. Don't even try to tell me that you have any sense of discretion."

His gaze darkened. She'd hit a nerve. Good.

"Very well, Eleesha. I came to tell you that I have decided we have unfinished business. In the bedroom."

"Um... I think I'll make some more coffee," Martha muttered.

"No," Eleesha ordered. "Stay."

Martha planted her feet obediently. "Yes, ma'am."

“What business?” she demanded. “Didn’t you get enough? Need another piece? Want me to spread my legs for you right here? Why don’t you bring some of the boys from the office by, too?”

She couldn’t believe she was talking like this. Was she feeling bold because Martha was present? Whatever it was, she was getting pretty damned wet.

“You see? This only proves my point. This hostility – this insane dance of avoidance and confrontation between us. It’s all about sexual tension.”

“That’s a crock and you know it. You’re trying to rationalize your way into my panties again,” she accused.

Ross turned to Martha. “You’ve been in on this. What’s your take?”

“She has no take,” protested Eleesha. “She doesn’t have anything to –”

Eleesha stopped herself. He’d managed to trap her, using her own secret weapon against her.

“You know Eleesha, you’ve seen how she is with me. Do you think she’s genuinely through with me, or is she sending out mixed signals? Because I’ll be the first to admit, I’m confused as hell.”

“Well, I’m not confused,” she spat back. “Tell him, Martha. Tell him how not confused I am. How much I don’t want this man anywhere near me.”

Martha winced guiltily, caught between her loyalty to her boss and her need to speak the truth as she saw it.

“It’s kind of tricky, ma’am... I mean...you’ve been having the dreams and all.”

“Dreams?” His brow furrowed. “What dreams?”

Eleesha scowled. The damage already done, she went full speed ahead. “Sex dreams, you arrogant son of a bitch. Is that what you want to hear? Does that make you feel more like a man, knowing you can make my nights a living hell of frustration without even trying? Does it get you off, putting me in my place like that? I’ll bet you’re

working your way right through the building, aren't you? Putting those notches on your belt. Sorry, but I already warned Martha about you."

Ross' face had a hard edge to it. Not angry, but determined in a way Eleesha had never seen him — or any other man for that matter.

"Martha—" he turned to the young woman, his voice unequivocally calm and steady. "Do you trust me?"

"Yes," said Martha without hesitation, honing in on his voice, his presence like a bellwether in the middle of a storm.

"Enough to leave right now, knowing that I will do what is best for Eleesha?"

Eleesha sensed the trap. "Don't answer that, Martha."

Martha looked at her boss and then back at Ross. "I trust you, Mr. Maclean," she said firmly.

"Ross," he reminded.

"I trust you," she corrected herself, "Ross."

"Martha, don't do this to me! Don't leave me with this maniac! You heard what he said. He intends to rape me."

Martha looked questioningly at Ross.

"Trust," he reminded with a wink.

Martha nodded, ready to deal with her boss. "I did hear what he said, Miss Greene...Eleesha, and he didn't say anything about rape. Just unfinished business. Honestly...I think you need this."

Eleesha couldn't believe her ears. Of all the times for Martha to turn independent on her.

"Martha, please let everyone know that Eleesha will be late coming to work today."

"No! No!"

He grabbed Eleesha around the waist as she clawed at the door handle. She was like a wildcat, scratching and kicking at the air as he picked her up off of her feet.

"I'll let myself out," suggested Martha.

Ross put the struggling woman over his shoulder, giving himself a free hand to lock and chain the front door.

"Put me down," she cried. "You pompous ass!"

"No," he defied. "Not 'til I get you where you belong."

And that was on her bed, ass down. Chester, who was still hiding under the bed, bolted for the living room. Ross closed the bedroom door, ensuring the cat's exclusion from whatever activities he had in mind.

"Take the robe off," he ordered.

"Go to hell," she fumed. "I'm not one of your little cheerleader sluts."

He took his jacket off and hung it on the hook behind the door. "You're well on your way to earning a spanking, young lady."

"And you're gonna be on your way to jail when I call the cops on you."

Ross ignored her, opening the top drawer of her dresser. "Where do you keep your scarves?" he wanted to know.

"My what? What do you want with them?"

"To tie you," he said matter-of-factly. "Or shall we look for some rope in your laundry room?"

"You're insane," she informed him.

His hands went to his hips. He'd undone his tie and pulled it free. "Probably," he agreed. "But the fact remains, you are going to be put into bondage. Ropes, scarves, it's your call. If it were me, I'd prefer something soft like silk."

Her lips went into a full pout. "On the closet door," she muttered.

He wasn't really going to do this, was he? After all this time? A quickie in the office was one thing, but bondage? After a decade?

She had a ton of pretty scarves on the door. She had her phases, times of year when she never went without one.

"Your robe is still on," he noted, picking out a nice selection for himself. "Are you that anxious to be put over my knee?"

Her pussy flooded at the thought. She felt a flutter in her belly, hot and wicked. Surrender was seconds away, unless she fought back now. Springing to her feet, she made a dash for the door. Ross caught her by the wrist, imprisoning her in a grip of steel.

"You're hurting me," she said, though it was more a matter of pride than anything.

"Tell me you want me to let go," he challenged.

Eleesha couldn't answer. But that in itself was the answer. Pulling her close, he undid the belt of her robe, pulling it free from the loops.

"I've waited ten years to see you completely naked again, Eleesha Greene," he declared. "And I won't wait a second longer."

His words slickened her sex like butter dropped on the grill. There never had been another man to take control of her like this. Never a man who'd wanted her so much—or at least appeared to do so. A clever illusion, yes, but she'd settle for it. One more time.

Ross released her and pulled the robe down over her shoulders. "Let me look at you," he declared. "I need to look at you."

She wasn't so young anymore, not quite so perky. Would he be disappointed? Curse him for being able to make her feel this way now, just as he had their first time together.

He had reassured her then, would he do so now?

"Turn around." He deprived her of the silken covering, her only garment. "Slowly."

Eleesha put her hands over her head. Closing her eyes, feeling like a ballerina, she made a small, tight circle. Her nipples burned, she felt the heat between her legs, too, like a raging, unseen fire.

"Again."

She trembled like a leaf. What did he think of her? Why wasn't he saying? She was twisting, dangling, helpless, craving his approval. Damn the man's power over her after all this time.

"That's enough. I want you to come here."

Eleesha opened her eyes, torn from her dark little world. She saw him sitting on the edge of the bed, shirtless.

"Over my lap," he commanded, patting his thigh. Then added for emphasis, "I'm going to spank you now."

She felt her buttocks tingle. This had not been part of their magical night together, nor was it something she'd ever done with any other man.

He must have read her uncertainty, because he immediately said, "This isn't just about the spanking. I discovered a taste for this years ago. I like the feel of my hand on a woman's ass, heating it up. I like the intimacy of it, the trust...and the power. And then, afterwards, the lovemaking and the comforting."

Eleesha moved toward him, glided, scarcely aware of the motion of her own limbs. Her heart raced. The man was so strong, so confident, and he was going to do this thing to her, make her feel the presumed sting and then...and then...

She lowered herself, bending over his crotch. His cock was rock-hard, stretching the material of his pants. Her nipples grazed the material of his pants.

"All the way," he said as she attempted to keep her body bridged above him.

His hand pressed her down, commandingly. She collapsed onto his erection, her bare pussy immediately connecting to his hardness.

She feared she might orgasm.

"I wanted to do this every time I saw you," Ross confessed, rubbing his hand over her. "You're so different now...so cheeky and feisty. You bring things out in me. You make me want to...own you."

Eleesha groaned as his finger found its way between the folds of her labia. How well he knew her body. Obediently, her clit swelled at his touch.

"You...bastard," she hissed, though her voice was filled more with longing than any real resentment. "Do it, then. Make me yours."

"I've dreamed about it, Eleesha. Every damned night since seeing you again. But I never make it to this point." He lifted his hand and delivered a smooth, efficient blow.

Eleesha cried out, from the heat and sudden shock. It was a sweet burn, an inside flame that went straight to her pussy. She was on the verge of begging for another, but a fresh surge of rebellion coursed through her veins instead.

"That hurt. I don't like this."

Ross held her in place. "No, Eleesha. We're going to see it through. You will submit. For both our sakes."

He touched her again, breaking her resistance with the lightest of strokes, circling her clitoris, swelling it and filling her with indescribable need. This time when he spanked her she could only whimper, "No, Ross. No."

Ross alternated the smacks with probes of her pussy. Her cheeks were hot to the touch, her flesh jiggled with each blow. The pain blended with pleasure. All she knew was sheer sensation. He was invading, having his way with her, plucking the chords of her body, and playing it with sadistic delight. Unable to help herself, she strained upward, begging with her body even as her lips continued to voice unhappiness at his domination.

For his part, he ignored her protests, proceeding on a path of his own.

"I was so young the first time, Eleesha," Ross said. "I had no idea what I had in you."

"You had...nothing," she panted, shaking her lovely head.

"No, Eleesha. I had everything. And I threw it away."

He was going after her emotions. It wasn't enough to assail her body's defenses. He was trying to break down the carefully built walls around her heart. Why? Why did he have to be so cruel?

"Ross, fuck me, please."

He held her on the brink of orgasm. A razor's edge from which he would allow her no release. He let her breathing calm, just a little.

"First the bondage," he said.

She shuddered in utter physical defeat. The man truly was asserting himself. If he wished to break her heart then she had no hope.

"I want you to lie on the bed," he told her, caressing her back in slow, tender circles. "I want you to lie down...for me."

His hand felt so good. Her body shivered with need. When he stopped the caress, she gave in to a small sob.

"The bed," he reminded.

Yes...the bed. She was to lie on...for him, she thought dreamily.

Ross helped her from his lap onto the bed. Never was she so grateful to crawl upon a mattress in her life. And never was she so uncertain as to what was going to happen to her body in a lover's charge. In every important way, Ross had been her first. The young man who'd made love to her before him, in the back of a post-prom limo had been a well-meaning fool who had no clue as to what to do with the female body. Ross had been the one to open her and brand her.

And leave her.

If he tore the scabs off of all those old wounds, if he went that deep again, she did not know if she would survive. And yet there was no resisting this man. She desired too much, yearned too much, for his nakedness, his raw power, his energy and personality.

She needed Ross inside her. Physically. Spiritually.

Eleesha felt like a stranger in her own bed. It was his space now. An area that he had designated for his use of her. She was going into bondage, he'd said. That word had several meanings. How many would he invoke before he was through with her this time?

Eleesha put her hands over her head, palms up, anticipating. Ross was at the foot of the bed, tying the scarves together in various lengths. She watched his fingers work. It had been nylon rope on the bed back in college. The sorority sisters had secured the ends ahead of time at the four corners. Finely braided, scarlet red rope. That should have been Eleesha's first clue that her being chosen to be with Ross had not been an accident.

The room was decked out for the love slave fantasy. The one she'd imprudently shared one night when she was drunk. She was sober now, and so was Ross.

"Tell me," Ross said as he worked. "What happens in your dreams?"

"You possess me," she whispered, knowing how much she risked. "You make me come for you...over and over. You have me any way you want, on the beach...on the floor...on the conference table at work, even."

"I've had that fantasy, too," he confided. "It's one we'll live out."

Had she heard him right? Did he intend to carry this further?

"You said we were getting this out of our systems..."

Ross leaned over, taking both of her slender wrists in one hand. He was so strong.

"It may take some time," he said, securing her wrists together.

He attached the other end to the head of the bed. Deprived of her hands, her breasts utterly exposed, she awaited his next move.

Ross' kiss was worth the wait. He was here, he was telling her. He was in this wholeheartedly, and he was not a twenty-two-year-old kid anymore—a cocky quarterback with stars in his eyes.

But who was he? This new man was still a stranger to her.

He took her face in his hands. "Elesha, you are so fucking beautiful. Those other girls in the sorority, they were just jealous. You know that, right?"

Her eyes watered. She'd never told anyone what had happened to her the next day, after Ross left. Not even Martha.

"I went to the pledge meeting," her voice cracked, "after you left. They looked at me and laughed. Said I was a frigid little bitch—that everyone knew that I hadn't pleased you. That you'd had to go fuck Mary Lou Kennedy so you could get a decent lay out of the deal. I didn't say a word. I didn't want them to...to think worse of you."

The pain in his eyes was genuine. "Sweetheart, I had no idea. You did that for me?"

She laughed through her tears. "Then I told them to fuck off. No sorority for Elesha Greene. My best friend was the library after that."

"They didn't deserve you," he declared. "And I don't either."

Elesha shook her head. "Ross, I don't know what to think."

His hand went to her full breast, cupping it. A perfect fit. "Don't think, Elesha, just feel."

"Oh, Ross," she arched her back. "Oh, god."

He massaged her breast, nuzzling her neck. She moaned in pleasure. If only she could die at this moment. But there was so much more.

His hand strayed down her hip, slightly calloused from his workouts. He kneaded her flesh along the way, releasing years of pent-up tension.

She waited for the word and when she heard it, she complied at once.

"Open, Elesha."

"Yes, Ross." She parted her thighs.

Elesha lifted her hips, trying to make contact with his lightly grazing fingers. He teased her clit, and traced lines around her outer lips until she was putty in his hands.

"Wider," he commanded in a sheer display of power.

Elesha spread herself, begging for penetration. "Ross...please..."

"There will be no going back," he warned her. "Not this time."

"I don't care," she murmured, although she really did. The aftermath was going to be messy, complicated, but there was no seeing beyond her agonizing, desperate need to get off.

"I need to come, Ross...oh, god, don't make me wait."

Ross' tongue singed the tip of her nipple. "Are you sure?"

She clenched her bound hands. "I surrender, Ross. Is that what you want to hear? You've won. My body will never hold out against you. You have power over me...forever."

"You'll hate me for that," he predicted, "as soon as this is over."

She groaned in painful release as he gave her what she wanted. The fullness of his masculinity, his shaft sliding deep within her, filling her aching pussy, causing her vaginal muscles to clench greedily, encouraging her to push ever further, lifting her to greater heights. Until both ignited into a firestorm of mutual lust.

"I've hated you all along," she confessed. Though she didn't know how much longer she could keep it up.

"And I've loved you."

Eleesha exploded as soon as he said the words. He'd been in love with her? Since when? He seemed as shocked as she, but at the moment, there was nothing to consider but the orgasm overtaking her.

It was a molten storm, lightning tearing her flesh, thunder shuddering deep in her soul. Ross' teeth were clenched, his eyes closed. He looked so gorgeous this way, claiming his place within her captured body. She gave everything to her bondage climax, riding wave after wave. She took his semen deep...the pent-up flood of his manhood.

"Eleesha..." He turned her name into a song, the low, satisfied growl of the male in full glory.

Her heart lit at his happiness as she pressed head-to-toe against him. “Ross...” she urged him on, reveling in every detail of the sex. Nipple to nipple, hip to hip, bellies undulating, their bodies so different and yet craving one another so much. The beating of their hearts conjoined in shared bliss, shared ecstasy.

He thrust his cock in and out until he’d drained himself fully, until there was nothing left to be spent. At long last he collapsed upon her—upon the satisfied body and reawakened soul of Eleesha Greene.

Ross was the first to attempt speech. “I haven’t had anything like that since...since ever,” he declared.

She couldn’t offer anything by way of affirmation—not that she didn’t feel it, it was just that she was scared now. Terrified of what he might do—of what she might do—to destroy it all.

“Thank you, Eleesha.” He brushed the hair from her face.

He was being so mature about it, so cool and at peace, as if everything could just *be*. For some reason his complacency pissed her off.

“The silk is digging into my wrists,” she said. “If you don’t mind.”

Her tone was slightly brittle. Not rude, but hardly warm. She was walking that very fine line—too tired to hate him, too afraid to love. All in all she wanted to be alone. With her cat and a bag of potato chips.

He untied the scarves. “I should be going.”

“You probably have a lot to do,” she agreed.

“Always something,” he smiled thinly, putting on his underwear.

“Yes.”

Ross pulled his white T-shirt over his head, giving her one final look at his torso in motion. She fought to keep her mouth from watering. If only the man knew how much she wanted seconds.

“See you at the office, then?”

Eleesha had gathered the sheets around her. She was propped up on the pillows. If anyone walked in now, they might never know anything had happened between them.

"I'll be in later," she confirmed.

"We'll start scheduling time to look at your departmental operations."

"Good."

He opened the door and left. Chester ran in, telling a long and complicated story about the evil man who'd locked him out of the bedroom for a million years preventing him from gallantly defending her, which he most certainly would have done, and by the way, was she aware that the cat food dish was down below halfway?

"Come here, you goofball," she sighed. The cat hopped onto the bed, presenting himself for some long overdue petting. "Well, that was it," she told him. "The latest hit and run by Mr. Maclean. Hopefully he has me out of his system now."

He was certainly out of her system. She'd let him know that, too, if he ever tried any more funny business. Like that conference room thing. The idea of making love to her on the table. Taking her, right there at work, just because he wanted to and had to have her. Pulling out his hard cock, his insatiable member, demanding that she yield to it again. Giving her no choice but to be rocked to thunderous orgasm. Maybe even more than one.

Eleesha sighed. Wet again. Shooing Chester to the floor, she got her vibrator from the nightstand for some alone time. It wasn't about Ross, she told herself—she was just generically horny. Closing her eyes, she set about fantasizing. Generically. Anonymously. Men with no faces. Men who did not look like, smell like, sound like or fuck like him.

A minute later she was screaming his name, the vibrator whirring away at her pussy, massaging her swollen clit.

I'm doomed, she thought. Totally doomed.

Chapter Four

Ross poured over the figures for the hundredth time, looking for the solution. It was like one of those damned Rubik's Cubes. How to refit the pieces of the company in an integrated, streamlined fashion. Computer networking was the key, but that could result in position redundancy.

Layoffs.

So why not look at expanding the customer base? Eleesha's advertising department was already lean and mean. Could it be unleashed even more effectively on the growing market for high-tech security solutions? Global Tech was one of the best in the business at doing background investigations for employers and they were excellent at outsourcing private protection work, too.

He shifted in his seat. Another erection. From thinking about Eleesha and her department. What the hell was wrong with him? Hadn't he just made love to the woman an hour ago? He was halfway tempted to close the door and masturbate. Or maybe take up one of the many hints he was getting from the female staff at their availability.

Kelly, one of the barely legal secretaries from accounting, had made it abundantly clear that bending over the copy machine bare-assed for a former NFL quarterback was one of her top three fantasies in life. Admittedly, the shapely blonde's ass was something he wouldn't mind seeing bent over a copy machine, especially if her sex lips were half as moist and pink as her facial lips.

"I want you," said Kelly, with the bluntness and total disregard for commitment typical of this new generation. "I think you're a total hottie, just like me."

Ross swallowed hard. A man would have to be comatose not to be affected by a pair of fully loaded, in-your-face breasts, and a set of three-inch dragon lady nails trailing over his crotch.

"How do you type with those?" was the only response he'd been able to come up with at the time.

One thing was clear, he thought as he rubbed his bleary eyes. This idea of getting Eleesha out of his system was every bit the nonsense she'd said it was. You didn't get over a temptation by giving in left and right. That's called feeding the addiction, not breaking it. What he had to do was...well, to put it as politely as possible, take care of business elsewhere. Maybe not with the likes of Kelly or sweet little Martha, but there had to be someone out there.

Of course he'd been saying that for years. At one point he'd thought Chelsea was it. She was a sensitive, chain-smoking artist who hated football, but he'd felt so committed, so in love. And then one day she'd come to him, out of the blue, it seemed, and asked "where his head was at".

He'd claimed ignorance, which had made her angrier.

"You're here," she'd said. "But you're not here."

Everything had fallen apart. Overnight he'd realized that he hated expressionist art, couldn't stand her friends and was bored to tears with their lovemaking. They'd divorced quickly and quietly. No harm done, or at least as little as possible in such situations.

"At least we didn't have any kids," she'd said, with her typical bravado, frequently bordering on cynicism. That was another thing he hadn't liked. And her hair—it was either spiked out or short and hopelessly tousled. And couldn't she ever wear something besides sneakers?

She had been pretty much in the same boat. All that opposites attract stuff had worn down to the nub, leaving both with a marriage full of painful abrasions.

One of the things that Chelsea had complained about—she couldn't stand that name, by the way, insisting everyone else call her China—was that Ross had held back something from day one. She didn't know what it was, but it was there.

He wondered now if it had been Eleesha all along.

Ross was still pondering things when he heard a timid knock on the door.

"Come in."

It was Martha. "I hate to bother you..."

"Not at all." Actually he was anxious to talk to her, and for more than one reason. "Have a seat."

"Thank you." Martha sat on the sofa, smoothing her skirt.

"What can I do for you?"

Martha tucked her lemon yellow hair behind her ear. She looked like a schoolgirl at the principal's office. "Am I in trouble with Miss Greene?" she wanted to know.

"What on earth for?" he exclaimed.

Her face colored crimson. She couldn't even make eye contact. "For...for leaving her apartment when I did."

"Oh, that. Well, if you are, I will see to it that she doesn't give you a hard time. You were looking out for her interests, and for that you have my gratitude."

"Thank you," she said shyly, then cleared her throat. "May I say something else, Mister... Ross."

"Of course."

"I've known Miss Greene a year and a half, and before you got here I had never seen her so angry, or sulky or irritated or mixed up. You know what that means, right?"

He smiled wryly. "That the two of us are oil and water and I'm ruining her life by being here?"

She shook her head, looking suddenly wiser than her years. "It means she's in love with you."

His heart skipped a beat. "You sure you're not stretching things a little?" he asked, trying to keep his emotions under wraps.

Martha interlaced her fingers, staring at her lap. "How could she not be in love? You're like the most fall-in-loveable guy on the planet."

"Thanks, Martha, but I'm not so sure."

"You should go after her."

"I'm too old to chase. Bad knees."

"You're not even forty," she laughed.

"That's ancient," he said. "Besides, I don't see your point. If Eleesha loves me, why does she keep shutting down on me?"

"No offense, Ross, but you burned her pretty bad. You were like the prototype player in her mind—player being a man who uses women for sex and then runs out on them. She won't trust easily."

"It's a lot to think about," he sighed.

"Do you love her?"

The simple question floored him. "It's not black and white, Martha. There's a lot of history. When you get to be our age..." he trailed off. "Listen to me. I sound like a fool."

Martha rose to her feet. "Just a really cute guy with a lot to sort out. By the way, thanks for the autograph. My brother is in heaven."

"I can give you a football for him, if you like."

Her eyes lit up. "Do that and he might actually regard me as a human being, at least for a day or so."

"Consider it done."

"Thank you...and about Miss Greene. Thank you for letting me talk."

"Not at all. Like I said, she gives you any trouble, you send her to me."

She leaned over the desk to give him a peck on the cheek. "With all due respect, Ross, I think you're going to have your hands full with Miss Greene a lot more than I will."

Martha was right, of course.

This was more than proven an hour later when he received a second visitor—Eleesha herself.

"I've been thinking about something you said," she declared, without preamble. "And I want to get to the bottom of it."

"Yes?" For his part, he was trying to keep her clothes on mentally. Despite his best efforts, however, he was seeing through her sensible blue dress to the vital, sexy body underneath. She'd been everything she was in college and more. More statuesque, more...classical. The added years meant nothing. It only made him want her more as he saw in her beauty nature's plan for a woman to ripen.

If she looked this good at twenty-eight, imagine thirty-eight or forty-eight.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked suspiciously.

"It's eye strain. From the computer. You said you had a question?"

Eleesha folded her arms over her bosom—not overly large, but more than a handful. He could play with those nipples for hours. Wouldn't it be something to tie her down completely, spread-eagle and truly have his way with her body, exploring its every intimacy and possibility?

"You said something about the conference table."

He shook his head, missing the hint.

"You said you intended to fuck me on it," she said rather more explicitly. "Does that sound familiar?"

"I may have alluded to something like that."

"Well, it's not going to happen," she snapped. "I want that perfectly clear."

He folded his hands, and leaned back in the chair. "No problem, Eleesha. I won't fuck you on the conference table."

Her gaze narrowed. "I won't be trifled with," she warned.

"How am I trifling with you? You said you didn't want to be fucked, so I'm honoring your wishes."

"Hmmpf," she snorted. "Well that would be a first, wouldn't it?"

Ross exhaled heavily. "Look, Eleesha, I don't know what you want me to say. I feel like I can't win with you."

"*You* feel like you can't win? How do you think I feel?" She shook out her curls, her eyes wild, her nostrils flaring. "Did I come to *your* apartment to have sex with you and claim I wanted to 'get it out of my system'? Did I try to turn your personal assistant against you so I could have some cheap thrills at your expense?"

Ross wanted her so fucking badly that it was killing him. Few women could actually manage to look more attractive in a snit, but this one did. "Your analogy doesn't hold, Eleesha. For one thing, I don't have a personal assistant."

She made a noise of total exasperation. "You're impossible, Ross Maclean."

"You're not so easy yourself, you know."

"Just stay away from Martha. Stop poisoning her mind. And just wipe all those ideas about conference rooms straight out of your head."

"Yes, ma'am."

She shot him a look that told him she was well aware that he was teasing her. "I mean it, Ross."

"I mean it, too. Quarterback's honor."

Eleesha rolled her eyes. "Fat lot of good that will do me."

He managed to keep a straight face as she tossed her pretty head and offered him a curt "good day". With great interest, he watched her bouncing posterior. Talk about

mixed messages. What was she really trying to tell him? Did she *want* to be fucked on the conference room table?

One thing was certain. This consultancy gig could not end fast enough as far as he was concerned. The faster he put this place behind him, the better. Then he'd be able to go on with his perfect bachelor life. Motorcycles, pretty women, and no strings attached. Any guy's dream.

So why was the prospect making him so miserable all of a sudden?

"You busy?" Lyle poked his head through the door. Lyle was a decent guy. Maybe he'd be the one to lend a sympathetic male ear.

"Nah. Just ruminating about the meaning of life. Death. Taxes. Women. The usual."

Lyle arched a brow. "The only three unavoidable things in life," he mused. "Though at least death only kills you once. The taxes, the women, they bleed you dry your whole life."

Ross grinned. "Buy you a drink?"

"It's not quitting time," he pointed out.

"Consider it part of the consulting. Let's see how efficient you are at passing out."

"You're on," Lyle nodded. "Though I warn you, I can drink any man under the table. Or is that drink any table under the man?"

The two went off to find the nearest bar, Ross feeling more animated than he had since his college days. Back when a certain female with curly hair and big eyes had caught his attention at a frat party.

* * * * *

She had done it again. Wiggled her ass for Ross Maclean. After telling him—no, more like lambasting him—to not think of her as a sex object. This was awful. She was acting like every woman she despised. Why did Ross keep bringing this out in her? It

was a damned good thing they'd never had a relationship, because it was obvious that he was not good for her.

Stopping at the watercooler, she couldn't help but overhear the conversation of the two young women behind her. She recognized the speaker as Kelly, one of those young new hires in accounting. The other was around the same age.

"I'm perfectly serious," Kelly said. "I am going to marry him. Just you watch."

"No way," the other countered. "You're delirious. There's no way Ross Maclean would even give you the time of day."

Eleesha stiffened. They might as well have touched a cattle prod to her still sore behind. Without making it obvious, she continued to hover in front of the large blue water dispenser.

"Shows what you know – we've already been lovers."

This was more than Eleesha could bear. "What are you talking about?" She rotated at lightning speed, giving the two young women a deathly stare. "Out with it, are you making this up? Tell me now. Before I turn you in for fraternization with a corporate agent – a direct violation of the ethics code, section ten, paragraph three, punishable by summary termination."

The two women turned a shade whiter.

"Please don't report me, ma'am," Kelly pleaded. "I've never touched Mr. Maclean. I was making it all up."

"You never spoke to him then?"

"I did," she said gravely. "I, um, offered and he refused."

Eleesha was suspicious. "You weren't led on?"

"No, ma'am."

Eleesha gritted her teeth, not sure what to believe. "Get back to work," she said. "And trust me, I will get to the bottom of this."

"Yes, ma'am," said Kelly.

“Yes, ma’am,” echoed the second one.

She watched the two young women scuttle away, terrorized. She’d put the fear of god into them, but it was Ross who was the real troublemaker. He’d had something to do with putting ideas in Kelly’s head, Eleesha was sure of it. The nerve of the man—using his position to seduce an innocent young woman like that.

Eleesha told herself there was no jealousy on her part. This was a matter of morals and ethics and corporate policy. The fact that Ross was obviously trying to put his quarterback’s hands all over such a young set of breasts was beside the point. She and Ross were through. He’d done his little “working things out” ploy followed up with the cold shoulder treatment just now, which was all well and good. Let them stay happily alienated from each other forever.

Eleesha shook her head. *I’ve got to drop this obsession*, she thought. *I’m going to drive myself nuts. Who cares who Ross screws? He wasn’t a gentleman in college, why should he be one now?*

Still, she had to consider his potential future victims. She owed it to Kelly and the others to put a stop to Ross’ predations in the building. He was dangerous, and she was the only one who knew it.

He sure was a sweet form of poison, though...taken in small doses. Too bad she couldn’t take a little pressure off of herself at Ross’ expense, as he had done to her. Hit him up for a meaningless screw to restore her professional equilibrium. Get her rocks off, as men put it.

Something quick and anonymous. Heck, maybe that conference table wasn’t a bad idea after all.

* * * * *

Lyle was the kind of guy Ross could relate to. Sure, life had taken them in different directions—Lyle had three kids, a mortgage and a steady career, while he had a suitcase

full of spectacular memories and an empty six-room condo he visited maybe four times a year – they were fundamentally men of deep thought. Adventurers at heart.

“Ross,” Lyle slurred, sometime between their fourth and fifth beer. “If you could live in any time in history, what would it be?”

“I’d be a gladiator,” Ross said, without hesitation. “Now there was a sport for real men.”

“Good call. Me—I’d be a pirate, sailing the seas, capturing maidens and ravishing the bejeezus out of them.”

“To ravished maidens,” Ross toasted.

The beer mugs sloshed, the spilled liquid joining the stains already left on the small wooden table they’d procured in the corner of Riley’s Pub. It was a largely vacant emporium featuring a baldheaded, green-shirted bartender and a pair of passed-out customers – bookends at either end of the impressively carved maple bar.

Lyle guzzled his beer and refilled both his and Ross’ from the half-full pitcher. “Ross, can I let you in on a secret?”

“Considering that I’m the one holding your job in the palm of my hand, and any slip-up could put you on the street...why not?” he quipped.

“It’s Eleesha,” he said.

“What about her?”

“I wanna fuck her in the worst way.”

“And what would be the worst way to fuck her?” Ross asked.

Lyle laughed, slapping Ross’ forearm. “Wouldn’t be a bad way, that’s for sure.”

“She’s a beautiful woman,” he agreed.

Lyle snorted. “What are you getting all uppity for? She’s a fine babe and everybody there wants in her panties. I’d try if I wasn’t married, though they say she doesn’t put out.”

“Oh?” Ross was relieved to hear this.

"Yep. They say she's a lesbian, but I doubt that pretty highly."

"And why do you doubt it?" he asked suspiciously.

Lyle licked his latest beer mustache. "Because, *mon nuevo amigo*," he replied, mixing two languages into one. "I caught her once, sitting at her desk, crying her eyes out."

He felt her pain, even across time. "You saw Eleesha crying?"

"Yup. She was looking at a man's picture. In the newspaper."

"Whose picture was it?"

Lyle smiled, the deep wise smile of a drunk. "It was yours, *mon frere*."

Ross was stunned. He'd had no idea she'd given him the slightest thought all these years. "Are you sure?"

"I saw her crying. I left, of course, but later, I couldn't help myself. I took a peek on her desk and there it was. The picture, along with the story of your early retirement."

"I don't know what to say," he shook his head.

"If it were me, I'd be saying 'thank you, God' and running off to book the nearest wedding chapel, but hey, I'm just an old married fool. Going on twenty-five years of pain and suffering. And I wouldn't trade a minute of it, truth be told."

"You understand, Lyle, there are issues. Hell, I don't even know what I feel for the woman."

"I can't help you there," Lyle admitted. "And I don't know the history. She never even let on to a soul that she knew you. But if you have anything closely resembling an emotion in that macho head of yours, I'd tell her, 'cause it seems to me she'll be open to about anything."

"I doubt that. Eleesha hates me right now."

"That's because you're butting heads with her. Trust me, all that will get you is a concussion."

"I just don't think I'm cut out for marriage."

"None of us are, buddy. It's the curse of our gender. Consider this my little way of spreading the virus."

"Another pitcher." Ross held up his hand to the bartender.

"Make it a double," Lyle quipped.

"You know," said Ross. "If I weren't so drunk, I'd know if I should thank you or curse you for what you just told me."

Lyle grinned. "If you're on the same road as me, *compadre*, you'll be doing plenty of both before it's all over."

Chapter Five

Eleesha woke up drained, as always, worn out from her nightly dreams about Ross. In this particular version, she'd been in the mailroom, trying to run away from him. Ross kept laughing at her, nipping at her heels. Every few feet or so, someone would grab at her, tearing her clothes.

The people tearing her clothes were department heads and various other company employees. Ted ripped her blouse off while Lyle managed to unwind her skirt. Her breasts were falling out of her bra and workers from the mailroom were running alongside her to lick at her nipples. The licks stung, as though she was being whipped.

Behind her a motorcycle revved. It was Ross on his red bike. He was holding her reserved parking sign, swatting her with it. Ahead of her, Kelly and the other young woman were urging her on, trying to get her to jump into a large canvas mail cart. They were wearing heavy makeup and short skirts, like they would wear out to a club.

They were calling her bitch, telling her to get her groove on.

She was naked now, except for her panties. Running straight toward the mail cart, she dove headfirst. She'd expected to be hidden in a huge pile of shredded paper, but instead the paper began rustling ominously around her, pressing against her body and making her sexually hot. The people were gathered around and she couldn't believe that she was actually going to come from the pressure of rustling paper.

She awoke, in the midst of the laughter, with Ross just looking at her smugly.

Fortunately the rustling papers had given her an idea. It was something she should have thought of yesterday—the one thing that could get a man removed from the company faster, even than embezzling.

A charge of sexual harassment.

Really, she wouldn't need to turn in the form. She'd just fill it out and give a copy to Ross, letting him know, just between the two of them, that his fraternization with Kelly was not okay. If that didn't put a damper on things, she didn't know what would.

* * * * *

Ross sincerely wished that everyone would quiet down in the conference room. Not that anyone was actually yelling—it was just that with his hangover, even the tiniest little sounds were like explosions up and down his nerves. Drinking that much with Lyle on a Thursday night, considering that he had to work the next day, was one of his dumber moves of the last couple of months.

His only consolation as he prepared to begin his latest meeting with the sales department was that Lyle was sitting across from him looking just as miserable. Served him right for instigating. Not that anyone had held a gun to Ross' head. The two of them had drunk each other silly until finally being escorted out of the bar a half hour after last call. The bartender had helped to spill them into a cab, which took them home to sleep it off.

Ross had had to wake up at six to catch another cab back to the bar to pick up his stranded motorcycle. Not until he saw the small, pink stucco structure did their full conversation come back to him.

According to Lyle, Eleesha had been in love with him all along. Enough so that she had cried over his retirement picture in the newspaper. Even he hadn't gotten around to mourning the loss of his time on the gridiron. No wonder Eleesha had reacted so strongly when he'd gotten here. He wasn't just a distant blip on her radar screen—he was...an event. Maybe *the* event if Lyle was right.

He felt that stab of anguish again as he remembered how he'd hurt her that morning in the frat house. Guilt, he thought scornfully, the gift that keeps on giving.

The next time he saw Eleesha, he was going to make a point to really look at her, close up, to see what emotions he'd missed behind her eyes. Feelings had never been his thing. He was like most guys that way. Bonds were based of what you did together, on how you were connected, not on anything sappy.

"Excuse me, Mr. Maclean."

Ross looked up, trying to keep the room from spinning. A delivery boy was standing there, holding out an interoffice envelope.

"You have to sign for it." He held out a register book.

Talk about archaic. Ross grabbed a pen off the table and scratched his initials.

"Don't you people use e-mail?" Ross asked Lyle as he accepted the envelope marked "Confidential – Eyes Only".

Confidential? This was like thirties spy stuff, straight out of Dick Tracy.

Lyle cast a quick glance and shrugged painfully, indicating that he had his hands full running the meeting.

"If we could get started," he announced, not sounding any happier with the volume of his voice than Ross was.

Ross opened the clasp and pulled the single sheet of paper out halfway. The title of the form read *Sexual Harassment – Grievance Report*. It was already filled out, with his name next to the space left for "Accused".

What in blazes? He skimmed the rest of it, catching the gist.

The accused Ross Maclean did harass employee Kelly Young, soliciting sexual favors...

This was crazy. Who in the world was responsible? A little further down it listed "Reporting party: Eleesha Green".

For crying out loud. Would this woman ever give it a rest?

A note lay on the desk. It had been in the envelope.

The original goes to HR unless you're gone by end of day.

Ross clenched his fist, crumpling the small piece of paper embossed with Eleesha's name. She'd gone too far this time.

"Ross, where are you going?" The exasperated Lyle watched him get up from the table.

"I have business, Lyle. It can't wait."

Lyle looked at him meaningfully. "It's about her, isn't it?"

"Let's just say next time we go out, you owe me big time, 'cause that little curse of yours is already hitting me like a ton of bricks."

Lyle grinned. "Jeezuz, I can't believe it, but you've actually made my day. Someone around here is more fucked than I am."

Lyle was referring to his wife's refusal to let him in this morning. Among his other problems he was now facing relocation to the spare bedroom above his own garage.

"Keep it up, wise guy," said Ross. "Keep it up."

Martha looked white as a ghost when Ross stormed in. She rose from her desk, stricken. "Ross, you don't want to go in there. I'm not sure what's gotten into Eleesha, but she's not in her right mind today."

He tossed the envelope on the desk. "You got that right. Have a look in there."

Martha read the grievance form. "This is crazy, Ross."

"That's why I have to go in there, Martha."

"But I think you should..."

Ross ignored the young woman's advice. Striding purposefully across the floor he opened Eleesha's door without knocking. He made it a half step when he crashed into the large wooden table. A flipping conference table parked right in front of the door.

"Hello, Ross," smiled Eleesha, in full splendor, sitting on the edge of her desk in a gray pinstripe suit.

"Eleesha, what is this doing here? Do you want to kill me now, in addition to making my life a living hell?"

"It's there for security. To prevent intruders. See how well it works? Stopped you dead in your tracks, didn't it?"

Ross wasn't fooled for a moment. "I know what this is about. It's your little revenge for what I said yesterday."

She shook out her curls, a blatant attempt at feminine distraction. "Oh, did you say something?" She blinked innocently. "I don't remember."

"You and I...on top of a table," he jogged her memory.

"Oh...that." She sighed. "Yes, I did wait for you this morning, all naked and wet, but you never showed. Say, why don't you get one of your little bimbos to play on it with you? That's a good idea, isn't it?"

Ross wheeled around, retrieved the envelope, stalked back, tore it in half and slapped it on her desk. "This is what I think of your report."

"Ooh," she mocked. "Such a show of power. You don't know what it does to me."

Ross' jaw snapped closed, teeth set on edge. "Grow up, Eleesha! I've had just about enough of your nonsense."

She raised a brow, thrilled to have gotten his goat. "What's the matter, Ross baby? Are grown-up gals a little harder for you to handle?"

He grasped his head on both sides. It was going to split open any minute. "For the last time, Eleesha, I have had nothing to do with any woman at this company, except for you. And trust me, that's a mistake I won't repeat."

"I'll ignore the insult, Ross," she said coolly, "because I know you're under stress. But I'd be careful from here on in, if I were you."

"Thanks for the warning, Eleesha."

"Don't mention it." She crossed her legs. "So I assume you've started packing up your desk?"

He shook his head. "You're really a piece of work, aren't you? Well, just consider this, whatever happens. I came here to help this company. I did this as a favor to a

personal friend on your board. There are a hundred – hell, a thousand – places, it would be easier to be right now.”

“Oh, please.” She made a face. “You think I’m going to buy a line like that?”

“No, Eleesha, I don’t. Not that it matters, because I’ve decided not to fight you anymore. I’m giving up, Eleesha.”

Ross closed the door behind him. Never had he felt such a slam against his body and heart – not even his worst tackles compared. He headed straight back to his office and collapsed on the couch. The room continued to spin until, at last everything settled into darkness.

* * * * *

Eleesha just sat there in shock. The last thing she’d expected was for the great Ross Maclean to simply...surrender. It was all she’d ever wished for and yet the victory felt strangely hollow. Could it be she hadn’t really wanted to see him raked over the coals like this? For all those tears she’d shed, never quite seeming to get him out of her system, for all the times she’d played “what if”, speculating on how things might have been, she’d never once thought what it might be like to really win her revenge.

Were all such triumphs as cheap and tawdry in the end?

Maybe she needed a vacation, she thought. How many years had it been since she’d taken one?

“Eleesha, what’s going on?” Martha had entered the office through the open door. She looked concerned and maybe a little angry.

“You saw for yourself, Martha, the man left.”

“You drove him off,” Martha accused. “With this...this craziness.”

She was gesturing to the table, but she meant everything. The whole series of behaviors she’d shown since Ross’ arrival. “Martha, you don’t know –”

"Yes I do," she interrupted with unexpected boldness. "Because you told me, remember? And that means I'm free to form my own opinions. I've heard what you said, and I know Ross did wrong. But he's trying to make it right and you're not listening."

"I am, too."

"No, Eleesha. You're not. That report you wrote out—did you know that he told me that Kelly came to him and wanted sex but he refused?"

Eleesha hid her discomfort. "But I'm sure he did something to give her that idea. He is not innocent in this."

"You knew that, didn't you? Did Kelly tell you?"

Eleesha frowned. "I wasn't planning to turn the complaint in," she murmured. "I just wanted him to see it."

"It seems to me that you need to go after him. And now it's your turn to apologize," Martha pursued. "Because from where I stand, you're the one in the wrong."

"I could fire you, you know."

"You'll only come begging me to come back tomorrow."

"True."

"He went to his office, Eleesha. Go get him."

Eleesha nodded. "You're right. As always."

She would go to him. To make amends. And relieve some pressure.

* * * * *

Ross felt a hand tapping his shoulder.

"Ross, it's me, are you okay?" came the concerned, female voice. He recognized the perfume, the sweet, succulent scent.

"Eleesha," he sat up. "What— Where—"

He was groggy as she handed him a glass of water. "Drink this," she said. "You passed out."

"I passed out?" It seemed incredible. Then again he had no recollection of getting from Eleesha's office to the couch of his own. Nor had he any clue as to how much time had elapsed.

"I'm afraid it was my fault," she said softly.

Ross blinked, clearing his vision. Eleesha was on her knees in front of him. She was moist-eyed, looking like a teenager again. He drew a sharp breath as she began to unbutton her jacket. She had no blouse underneath, only a silken bra.

"Eleesha, what are you doing?"

"I owe you this, Ross, for being such a bitch."

He squirmed, fighting a dangerously strong erection. "That's not necessary. Anything you did, I had coming."

She smiled, radiant and so very gentle. "Call it a reward, then," she shed the suit jacket, "for not yielding to the temptation of Kelly."

"Eleesha, this is not a direction we need to go."

She moistened her lips and undid her bra. Her breasts swung free. He'd never really fully appreciated them, on their own like this. Tiny masterpieces.

"Your cock thinks otherwise." Her fingers fell into his lap.

He grabbed for her, but he feared he would not have the strength to stop her. "My cock doesn't do my thinking anymore. And I won't let it rule you either. No more sex—we agreed."

"Not sex," she shook her beautiful head. "At least not according to our former president."

His manhood swelled in eagerness. She intended to suck him off. "Eleesha, if you push this any further, I warn you, there are going to be consequences."

She unzipped his pants. As feared, he was mounting no resistance.

"Like what?" she teased, jiggling her breasts as she released him from his boxers. "A spanking?"

"No. Worse. If you pursue this any further, if you give yourself to me again, even a little, I won't be able to let you go this time."

She laughed. "Gonna keep me caged up, are you?"

"It's not a laughing matter, Eleesha..."

She kissed the tip of his shaft, ignoring his attempts at serious discussion. A tiny drop of his pre-come slipped into her mouth as she sucked the small opening. The bulbous head quivered in anticipation. Slowly, very slowly now, she wrapped her lips around the tip of his cock, stopping an inch down. The vein on the underside throbbed with need. He was ready for the pressure, the friction.

The explosion.

"Eleesha," he sighed, running his fingers through her hair. "Do you have any idea how much I need you?"

She replied by lowering her head another few inches, taking him closer to the back of her throat. Using her tongue, she worked the vein, giving him maximum sensation. Ross responded with deep groans. Leaning back against the leather sofa, he gave up all thoughts of pushing her away. Whatever happened now would be left up to the gods of lust.

Ross had a large cock and there was no way that Eleesha could take all of him. But she could wrap her hands around the exposed base as she deep-throated him, giving him the feeling of complete envelopment. Ross stroked her head appreciatively, giving every indication that Eleesha was in the right place at the right time.

In fact, he was on the verge of coming. With great effort, he held himself back. Eleesha's mouth was not what he wanted, sexy and tight as it was. He wanted to make love, wanted to get inside of her. Did he owe her another special warning as to what this would mean? A reminder of the path she was taking?

Ross felt like a man who'd sat on the fence too long. He wasn't getting any younger, he was in his prime and there was no one, no one at all on the horizon for him. Except Eleesha. She was the only one among all the women he'd had whom fate had boomeranged back into his life. The only one who'd ever given him this much trouble or shown this much promise.

He would make this vow—if they completed this act, here and now, he would not leave her. He would stay by her side. He would marry her. Or die trying.

Lifting her head, he looked into her eyes and said, "I think you should go now. You don't want me. Not forever."

"I want...love," she breathed, her lips glistening.

He pulled her by the upper arms so that her lips were against his. "We can't...play games...anymore."

She shook her head no. Did that mean she agreed or disagreed?

"Eleesha, if we make love, we'll be engaged."

"Hush," she said, nuzzling his neck. "Just enjoy. Just live."

His hands reached greedily for her breasts. This was something he could never get enough of. Her body was a drug, and she'd brought it right back in here, under his very nose. Such a wickedly wonderful creature...

"Your skirt," he ordered. "Take it off."

"Now that I'll obey," she said, fumbling at the waistband.

His eyes widened as she whipped the material aside revealing a perfect brown-thatched pussy.

"No panties," he exclaimed.

"I lost them on the way over," she rasped. Her fingers played over his earlobe, driving him wild.

"On my cock," he commanded. "Ride it."

She straddled him. "Yes, sir."

Ross grunted, sinking himself, deeply, satisfyingly into the silky depths of her. She was so wet and warm. The best fit he'd ever known. Eleesha purred, shifting, to rest her weight on her knees. She wanted leverage, to fuck him for real.

"Hold on tight," she warned.

Ross seized her breasts – as good a set of handles as any.

Thrusting her hands behind her neck, interlacing her fingers, she began to move. Back-arching, feline moves – belly-sucking, nipple-peaking moves. The kind of moves that could arouse any man. Eleesha was all female, that was certain. He'd known dancers and prostitutes – women who made a living from selling sex – and none had the natural erotic power that she had.

And she was all his.

Once he'd let her get away. This time there would be no escape.

"I want you to come," Ross said, grabbing her hips. "I want you to come for me. Let it all out."

Eleesha threw back her head, a look of pure and silent joy on her face. Her eyes were closed. He'd never seen anything so breathtaking in his life. His cock felt like it was going to blow apart. He was going to shoot his seed so far up in her womb that it would end up in her belly. But he had to wait for her. He had to hold off until he witnessed her yielding to him, once and for all.

"Come, Eleesha...for me."

The words spurred her on. She bucked on top of him, writhing like an obscene cowgirl, a mermaid thrashing in a foaming, pre-orgasmic sea.

"Together..." he hissed, as much to hold himself back as to move her forward. "We come together."

Eleesha moaned. Over and over, trying to stifle the sound, as she started to come. Midway through, he joined her, finally allowing his own pent-up release. His semen shot forth, up inside her, satisfyingly deep. Eleesha received him with a complete

welcome, her pussy muscles tightening to hold him, her belly pushing forward against him. She wanted this, wanted him, and her every motion said so.

They held fast to each other, allowing themselves to slide gently back down a slow and lazy spiral from the jagged peak of ecstasy. It was a sweet and silent clinging, elemental and powerful. At last she collapsed upon him, spent. He suckled at her neck, instinctively giving her comfort and approval as his woman.

"Mmm," she sighed. "This just gets better and better."

"And to think it's only the beginning."

She giggled. "Don't get too carried away, cowboy. You'll be leaving pretty soon."

So she really doesn't understand, he thought. Well, she soon would. "I'm not leaving, sweetie. I told you, we're forever now."

Eleesha lifted her head, trying to see if he was joking. Seeing no smile, she said. "There's nothing forever about us, Ross. It's just fireworks. One explosion touching another. Surely you see that by now?"

"I don't see anything," he caressed her cheek lightly, "except a beautiful woman on my lap who is going to be my wife."

Eleesha climbed off him like he had a sudden case of the plague. "Are you crazy?" she exclaimed.

"I don't believe so, no." He was smiling lightly, in his element with this woman at long last. If only he'd thought to do this long ago. How much pain they might have avoided.

"I'm getting out of here." She bent over, searching for her clothes.

"After work tonight, we'll go."

"Go where?" she asked as she finished dressing.

"To the Caribbean," he replied, as though it were the most natural thing in the world. "To be married."

Chapter Six

Eleesha hightailed it back to her office. “Martha,” she called out on the way to her inner sanctum. “If Ross comes, call security. Better still, call the local psychiatric hospital, because the man is certifiable!”

Martha blinked. “What did you say, Eleesha?”

Eleesha slammed and locked her door.

Martha commenced to knock. “Eleesha, are you okay?”

“Okay? Of course I’m not okay. I’m being stalked.”

“By Ross?”

Martha sounded skeptical. Why did no one but her see what a menace this man was?

“Obviously by Ross. He is coming to get me. He has it in his head that he is going to marry me.”

“Marry you?”

“That’s right. Now do you believe me that there’s something seriously disturbed about him?”

“Do you mean he proposed?” Martha sounded eager, happy and not at all mortified like she should be.

“No, Martha, a proposal is when you ask. Ross *told* me I was marrying him. He isn’t going to take no for an answer.”

“Oh, Eleesha,” she exclaimed. “That’s wonderful. I just knew he was madly in love with you.”

"Wonderful!? It's awful." Eleesha opened her door back up to confront her assistant face-to-face. "Don't you get it? He plans to kidnap me to the Caribbean for a fly-by-night marriage. Does that sound normal to you?"

"Normal, no," she agreed. "But romantic as hell – yes."

Eleesha buried her head in her hands. "Is it too late to put in for a transfer...to another universe?"

"Yes," said Ross, chipper as the break of dawn. "It is."

Eleesha stood behind Martha dramatically. "Make the bad, scary man go away."

"Hello, Martha," said Ross. "Have you heard the good news?"

"Eleesha told me... Congratulations, Ross."

"Thank you. I am a very, very lucky man. Especially if I'm able to hogtie my bride tight enough to get her to the altar."

"Ross, if you don't leave now," threatened Eleesha, "I'll call security."

"Too late for that. I already made Lyle my honorary best man and Frank is going to hold the ring...in absentia, of course." He cleared his throat. "It's not my place to say, Eleesha, but you might want to make Martha your maid of honor."

"Oh, Eleesha, could I?" Martha tugged at her arm. "You know when you get back we could do up a small service here, with a reception, just for show."

"Martha, that's a brilliant idea," Ross concurred.

"You're both out of your minds." Eleesha looked from one to the other. "Am I the only voice of reason left?"

"Eleesha," Lyle cried from the doorway. "Congratulations!"

Frank was behind him and about a half dozen others. Eleesha wanted to crawl under a rock. Ross moved in effortlessly beside her.

"Be nice to the people," he whispered, as he smiled for the newcomers. "These folks think the world of you and they just want you happy."

Eleesha offered her best fake, corporate smile. There was no way she could resist this without making an embarrassing scene. Better to go along with things for now. Plenty of time to filet the man afterwards.

"If they really want me happy," she replied out of the side of her grinning mouth, "they would take up a collection and have you dropped into some hole in the Siberian ice with the rest of your Neanderthal friends."

"Neanderthals lived in Western Europe," he corrected.

"Oh, thank you." She returned a hug, taking the opportunity to "accidentally" grind her heel into the top of Ross' shoe.

She gave him credit for withholding any bloodcurdling screams. He did, however, get even by pinching her, rather dramatically, on the ass. Now it was her turn to maintain her composure. Fortunately, there'd been no witnesses.

"Be careful," he whispered in her ear, pretending to offer a kiss. "You are going to be under my spousal discipline very soon."

"The hell I will, you son of a —"

Ross turned her for a full-frontal kiss. It was a sneak attack—a dirty move if ever there was one. The fact that her body gentled right down in response, one leg kicking out backward like one of those docile little 1940s film stars, meant nothing.

Neither did the quickening of her heartbeat nor the way her eyes slid shut—trusting, and content.

"It's love, all right," said Lyle. "They are made for each other."

What the hell would you know, she thought glumly. The man had been married since the Stone Age. What could he possibly remember of the sparks of passion or romance, or the inevitable cooling off that follows?

She had seen what divorce had done to friends—couples who had once been in love. She knew what it was all about. She'd learned in college, with Ross, what a young woman's reward was for believing in something.

And here was Ross – the poster boy for superficial relationships – standing up here passing himself off as husband material.

“I can’t believe you managed to keep it a secret,” said Sheila Wayne, the self-appointed queen of gossip from accounts receivable.

“Congratulations, Ross,” came a sweet, demure little voice.

Eleesha frowned. It was Kelly, giving Ross a peck on the cheek. Was she also trying to whisper something in his ear?

Eleesha tugged hard on the arm of her self-appointed fiancé. “If you’ll excuse us, everybody, we need to have a little talk. Alone.”

“Sure, we know how it is,” Lyle said. “Come on everybody, back to work.”

Sounding like a cackling wedding party, Lyle and Martha shepherded the small throng back into the corridor.

Eleesha promptly motioned Ross into her office. “We are not to be disturbed,” she ordered Martha as she closed the door brusquely.

Ross was grinning at her, looking like the cat that had just dined on the canary. “I don’t know what you’re so happy for, you are about to be slapped by a half-dozen harassment injunctions. I may hire a hit man, too. I haven’t decided.”

“You were jealous.” He leaned back against her desk. “Admit it.”

“Jealous? Of who?”

“Of Kelly. I caught that look you gave her when you thought she was trying to come on to me.”

Eleesha flipped back her curls. “May I tell you, Ross Maclean, that you are without a doubt the most vain, deluded and arrogant man I have ever met? Do you think I care about your pathetic sex life?”

“You seemed pretty interested a while ago,” he reminded her of the grievance form.

“I was trying to protect Kelly, that’s all.”

“And that’s why you dragged me in here just now?”

"No, you impossible man, I brought you in here so I could tell you exactly how furious I am that you just told the whole office I was going to marry you."

"Well, you are, so why shouldn't I spread the news?"

"For starters," she snapped, "there's the small matter of my consent. Or do you plan to knock me over the head with a club and drag me to your cave, Neanderthal that you are?"

He appeared to consider. "It's an interesting thought. But actually you did consent – back in my office, by making love to me again."

She threw up her hands in exasperation. "Ross, that was sex. It happens between men and women."

He smiled ironically. "I know, it doesn't mean anything. We've been telling each other that all along...and I think we've both been lying."

For a split second, she nearly opened, nearly responded to what looked like sincerity on his face – genuine pain. Then she remembered to whom she was speaking.

"Speak for yourself. I just want you out of here – out of this office, and out of my life."

He shook his head. "That's not going to happen. I won't let you run away from this, anymore than I will run away from it. You will be flying with me to the Caribbean this evening. You will be wined, dined and mercilessly seduced. And then we will marry. By the end of this weekend."

"Not unless you intend to tie and gag me," she defied, attempting to contain the turgid sea of emotions she now felt.

Ross grinned again, clearly enjoying her reaction. Damn it, she'd forgotten who she was dealing with here.

"A bondage wedding," he mused. "Now that's an interesting thought. Except I'd have to let you talk long enough to say your vows."

Eleesha felt a stab of warmth in her belly as she thought of Ross taking possession of her like that. It was a strangely erotic idea, having him want her this much.

"I won't be kidnapped," she made clear. "You're a fool if you think you can get away with that."

"There will be no force," he concurred. "I intend to use your own body against you."

Her knees weakened slightly at the implications. "What are you going to do?" She attempted to keep it humorous. "Make a voodoo doll of me?"

"You're already my doll, sweetheart. I wish I'd been able to say that a long time ago. That morning I ran, I was just scared, Eleesha. I'd never had any real feelings in my life. I'd never known what it was to love. All I'd had was football, and all the glory and pain that comes with it."

"If you're trying to sway me with sugary words, Ross —"

"Come here, Eleesha," he interrupted.

There was authority in his voice, nothing forceful or strident, just this deep sense that he had the right to command her because he really did know what was best.

"No, Ross," she shook her head. "It's not a good idea."

"It's the best idea in the world, now come to me."

Oh, god, how she wanted to be in those strong arms right now. And yes, the bastard was right, she had been ready to tear Kelly's eyes out for even coming near Ross. "Tell me first, what you're going to do."

"Eleesha," he said crisply. "Do you want to be spanked for disobedience?"

She sort of did, but she went to him anyway. "I don't have to do what you say," she told him, just on principle.

"Lift your skirt above your waist with both hands and hold it there," he instructed.

She rolled her eyes, like it was nothing. Secretly she was already moistening in anticipation of his attention, his loving domination.

"You asked how I would get you to the altar," Ross said, leaning in to take her lips. "The answer is sex."

Eleesha lost her mind in two seconds flat. Each kiss was more mind-blowing than the last. Not to mention more potent and more devastating. This time he fenced with her tongue, forcing a quick yield as he took away her very breath. She could think of nothing but him. Of being made love to by him. Of having her body played with and teased and brought over the top of that golden mountain of orgasm that only he could take her to.

Ross released her, panting, totally enslaved to the moment. She moaned, begged for more. Reaching for him, however, she was gently but firmly denied, his hand circling her wrist before she reached his zipper.

"I'm going to keep you continuously aroused, Eleesha. That will be my power. You will obey me with the desperation of the lowest slave, all the way to the altar."

Her eyes widened as the full depth of his deviance sunk in. Would he dare? Yes, his expression told her, he would.

"But that's...that's monstrous."

"All's fair in love and war," he said grimly. "I make no apologies. You will be my wife, Eleesha Greene, in spite of your stubbornness."

"You won't get away with this," she said, though her voice reflected awe as much as anything. Never in her wildest dreams had she heard of a man going this far to win his love. But did he really love her? Or was she just some prize—the one thing in his life that had eluded his grasp?

"Why not?" He pushed her hands back down her thighs. "Did I tell you to let go of your skirt?"

"No," she spoke in a small voice, lifting the hem back up. She felt numb...and terribly aroused.

Ross knelt on one knee and pulled down her panties. "You are one obstinate woman," he told her. "Then again, I am one obstinate man. Lift your left foot...now the right."

She stepped out of the panties. He stood up and put them on her desk. "Bend over," he commanded. "Grab your ankles."

"I will not," she said defiantly.

He whirled her about, quick as lightning and administered a firm smack to her posterior. It was hard enough to make her squeal.

"Bend over," he repeated. "And grab your ankles."

This time she complied, though with a heavy, exaggerated sob. "When the judge asks me to say I do," she vowed. "I am going to tell him—"

Ross punished her naked ass with a crisp swat, having flipped up her skirt. "Tell him what?"

She fell into brooding silence. A total of five times he made contact with her smooth, round ass. Eleesha hated that the feel of his skillful, athlete's hands turned her on so much. She hated that his strength, and the heat he created in her, made her want sex at any cost.

"Ross...fuck me?"

His finger found her opening, caressed her labia, but kept well away from the kind of penetration she needed. "I told you, Eleesha, you will be kept wanting. I'm taking no chances on you psyching yourself out of this."

"Oh...god," she groaned. "What a motherfucker you are."

The expletive earned her another smack, a powerful explosion of liquid fire that radiated throughout her whole body.

"Watch your language, Eleesha."

"Ow," she whined. "You're going to kill me. I need to go to the hospital."

He pulled her upright, smoothing her skirt over her throbbing posterior. "Stop being so childish," he chided. "Get your purse, and whatever else you brought with you. It's time to go to the airport."

Eleesha sniffled, finding her small bag. She followed as he walked out the door, feeling far too much like a pet in training for comfort. Talk about a devious plan. Already she was so consumed with need that she could not bear to be away from his side. There was nothing he could tell her, she feared, that she wouldn't do.

Would she be able to regain her senses before the unthinkable happened—before she found herself forever cursed with the identity of Mrs. Eleesha Maclean?

"How are we doing for wetness?" He leaned across to her in the elevator.

"Fine," she replied, as businesslike and curt as possible.

"Let's find out." Ross pinned her against the wall. Taking both her hands in his, securing them above her head, he performed an impromptu inspection, his hand sliding up her thigh, like a branding iron on its way to her sex.

"Oh...Ross." She writhed, pushing herself toward him as much as her confinement would allow. Her lips begged a kiss, hot and dry. He allowed her a small peck, just enough to make her that much more thirsty.

"I...I...need...to..." She shivered with heat, on the brink of coming.

His hand stopped her just short. "First floor," he announced.

The doors dinged open. She sought desperately to compose herself. He was walking ninety miles an hour with those long, loping strides of his. She had to jog to keep up.

"Ross, wait."

He stopped in front of his motorcycle. "Ever ridden one of these?"

"You can't be serious."

"It's not very hard. Just hold on tight."

She tried to picture herself, legs astride that powerful machine, no underwear, her chest against the sexiest, most aggravating man she'd ever known in her life, forced to cling to him for dear life.

"I won't, Ross. Please. Anyway, I have my car."

"We're going straight to the airport, we don't need it."

"But...but, I'll need clothes."

"We'll buy everything there. Must you have an argument for everything, woman?"

"Excuse me for not being instantly on board for your demented little fantasy flight," she spat sarcastically. "I guess that makes me a lesser —"

He picked her up off the ground before she could say "person". Hoisting her by the waist, he set her on the bike. She cried out as the leather made contact with her pussy.

"Omigod, that's cold."

"You'll warm it up." He winked.

"Pig!" she shot back as he pushed a helmet onto her head.

Ross smiled contentedly as he busied himself with the chinstrap. It was his bloody self-satisfaction that ticked her off the most.

"You haven't won anything," she told him. "I haven't even started fighting yet."

"Good, I'm counting on it."

Ross swung his leg over the seat. Even in a suit he looked cool as hell on a bike. The machine fit him well. He had it under control, he was finessing it, all that power between his legs, at his beck and call. Was she all that different from the motorcycle? she wondered sardonically.

"Why don't you have to wear a helmet?" she asked.

"They aren't required by law."

"So I won't wear one either."

"You will, actually. It's for your own protection."

The gesture touched her a little but she made darned sure he didn't know that.

"Good idea, that way when I jump off, I won't crack my skull."

"You won't have much time to think about jumping." He turned the key and footed the throttle. "You'll need to be holding on to me. Very tightly. And you'll need to lean on the turns."

She envisioned the prospects of that much connection to his body. She'd never keep her wits about her.

"In your dreams, football man!"

The bike took off and Eleesha screamed, barely managing to wrap her arms about Ross' chest. She hadn't been on the bike ten seconds and already she hated it.

"Stop!" she screamed. "It's too fast."

"We're only going twenty miles an hour," he called back.

She burrowed against his back. That was twenty miles an hour too much as far as she was concerned. When they hit the expressway she was sure she would fly off and be blown clear to Canada. It was the most terrifying thing she'd done since riding the tilt-a-way with Jimmy Joe Collins in the twelfth grade. Except Jimmy Joe didn't have this kind of a body to hold onto.

Once she found her stride, convinced he really wouldn't drive them over an embankment, she began to pay attention to other things going on in her body. Like the throbbing between her legs. The vibrations of the bike were managing to impact directly on her pussy like a two-ton vibrator with an internal combustion engine. It was sexy being out here, for damned sure. Guys were looking at her, from cars and other bikes. They wanted her and they were jealous of Ross. She held him even closer, preferring his protection to that of any stranger.

Ross would fight for her, too. She could see that now. He was a man on a mission. A little out of hand, granted, and totally impractical and doomed to failure, but he was sure getting into this in a big way.

Could anyone out there around them figure out what was going on? Did they know she was on her way to being a genuine kidnapped bride?

Did they know she was about to come, her breasts pushed hard against the Ross' back, her thighs clutching the motorbike with feverish intensity. She closed her eyes, letting the sensations wash over her.

An open-air orgasm, a solo flight, her clit engorged and sating itself against the ribbed, leather seat, which was indeed hot now, just as Ross had predicted. It was also wet, slick from the fluids seeping out of her needy opening. Clenching her teeth, digging her nails into Ross, trying to breathe him in, she let herself plunge into the abyss.

A sexy, exposed and dangerous climax. Gasoline and raw power. She could almost smell the leather of the jacket he'd been wearing that very first day. Every time she'd seen this motorcycle, she'd imagined herself across it, naked, being used by this man. Helpless, loved and...wanted.

Her shudders rose to a crescendo, teeth grinding, body undulating. Did Ross know what she was doing? Would he approve of it or think it a violation of his little game of sexual control? *I might be on my way to another spanking*, she thought.

The idea heated her up, pushing her to a second climax, a longer, rippling one. Toes curling in her shoes, pussy clenching and unclenching as though possessed by his cock. *He wants to marry me*, she told herself. *He wants to make this legal, exclusive and permanent.*

If I were smart, I'd jump.

Eleesha was still tingling as they reached the airport. The aftershocks, fading to sweet echoes, gave way to a whole new range of sensations. Anticipation. A total helplessness in the face of the unknown. This man had her now, literally. As he parked the machine, turning off the ignition, she knew it had only begun. The real ride he was taking her on, the breakneck roller coaster, lay ahead. First would come the airplane ride, and then a complete saturation of island color and beauty... The Caribbean, where he'd promised her single life would end and her married life would begin.

Chapter Seven

Eleesha was curled up on the seat beside him, sound asleep. Her small, dainty feet were tucked up underneath her, her shoes safely stowed in the little net-covered rack in the seat in front of her. Her sweet breathing put him in a mellow mood. He was more than a little moved that her head had found its way to his shoulder for support. Falling asleep, she'd originally leaned away from him against the window, still displaying her vehement protest against the entire venture.

Apparently her subconscious felt differently. At least he hoped so. This was an awfully big risk he was taking. There was no logical way to prove Eleesha loved him or that they were meant to spend their lives together. A part of him had been afraid that the real reason he was pushing so hard, and why he'd made such a big production of telling everyone at work was in order to convince himself.

Or did he just need that audience, that crowd to play to? That was what had always rallied him when the chips were down. There was no way to describe that feeling—tens of thousands of people on their feet, screaming their lungs out, calling your name, knowing that you could do the impossible—throw a seventy-yard touchdown on fourth and long, seconds to go in the fourth quarter, the best defensive line in the league frothing at the mouth to rip you to shreds. He'd been there—he'd felt what that much energy could do when transferred to one individual.

He'd been called brave for standing up there so many times, facing all those hits just to pump an air-filled piece of pigskin down the field. But that was just it. Football was a game, about pigskins and uniforms and pretty cheerleaders. Sure, grownups played it for real and people got hurt, but he never once considered it real work, a real challenge.

It was guys like Lyle that he envied, who had the balls to get up every day and punch a clock, facing that ongoing challenge of raising a family, loving the same woman, being there for her, through thick and thin.

He could only pray that he would have something close to that.

It was ironic, to say the least, that Lyle would think him even more of a hero for this, for just grabbing his woman and taking her off to be married. If only he knew that what really scared Ross was doing it the regular way. Asking permission. Waiting his turn. Risking actual and genuine rejection, not the football kind, where you could dust yourself off and play another down or another day, everything forgotten.

So what was his plan, in actual detail? Well, he did have to admit it was pretty clever, given it was all off the cuff. Using various contacts he had—who, themselves, had whole sets of contacts—he was able to book first-class airfare to the Isle of St. Ignatius, a small Caribbean island territory of the United States. This jurisdiction was important, because it meant he could procure a license and a judge. Being that the place was also a bona fide tropical paradise, he was sure to have the right backdrop for his perfect seduction.

A complimentary hotel suite had also been obtained, thanks to some endorsements he'd done for its owner. Down the line, he'd been handed all the perks. A waiting limo at the airport, free drinks, snorkeling, skydiving, parasailing, whatever they might want.

For Ross' part, he planned to do anything and everything that would wear down Eleesha's resistance. Sexual desire was one thing, but it was only the beginning. More than anything in the world, he wanted her to turn to him before they walked down that aisle and say, "Ross, you were right...this is right...for us."

But that could not be forced. Anymore than he could force that football into the receiver's hands. He had to let it go. Literally and figuratively tossing it up. If the other side came up with the interception, that could be the ball game, but it was a chance he had to take. That's called trust. In one's team, in oneself and in one's fans. It's the one

thing that couldn't be developed in the weight room or on the practice field alone. It came from the heart.

Eleesha had taught him a lot since he'd come back into her life. He was changing, evolving. He hoped she would too. Time would tell. The next couple of days were critical. In the meantime, there was still that overpowering feeling of her physical closeness. The way she smelled, sweet and so very female. The way her curls poured over him, the way her lips pursed in sleep. And the warmth of her body, that incredible, exquisite body he could not get enough of.

He laid his hand on her thigh, where her skirt had ridden up. Was this what it felt like, when one was married? To have one woman who was yours alone to touch? To know you would be welcomed when doing so? Ross already knew that he could not bear for another man to touch his Eleesha.

God, that sounded good to his ears. His Eleesha.

A man had been looking at her as they got on the plane and Ross had stared him down. No one would look at his Eleesha. No one would touch her. No one would love her, except for —

He'd nearly said himself. Which raised the question of love.

Damn it all, he had to be the biggest fool in history. Planning this off-the-charts romantic marriage without even being sure of loving the bride. He knew he wanted to be touching more than her thigh right now, did that count?

Ross turned off the overhead light and pulled Eleesha's blanket over her lap. What he intended to do to her was his business and no one else's. Reclining her seat all the way back, he whispered in her ear.

"Roll on your back, sweetie, open your legs for me."

"Mmm," she smiled tenderly in her sleep. "Ross."

He relished hearing her talk to him this way, even if she was asleep. Working his way under her skirt, making sure to keep things well out of sight from any passersby in

the largely deserted cabin, he went to work on her clitoris. He had her writhing in seconds. Tiny flicks to the swollen bud of her sex caused fragrant moisture to emanate from deep within. She encouraged him with the motion of her hips, inviting him to plumb her womanhood, to bring her to the brink of ecstasy.

It was an act of pure trust on her part, to show so much of her lust, to respond to him so fully. This was the Eleesha he'd known from the beginning, but with more maturity and confidence born of years of experience. She was ever so much more desirable now, ever so much more alluring.

Ross sighed in satisfaction. Eleesha was one of the most sexual women he'd ever encountered.

No one had ever had the ability to turn him on like this, either. If only he could mount her, right here at thirty thousand feet. She'd wrap her shapely legs around him, cry out in thrilled release and explode with him to the mutual orgasm of a lifetime.

For now he'd have to settle for watching her come. He'd so wanted to see the look on her face on the back of the bike on the way to the airport. He hadn't let her know that he'd figured out what she was doing. But he'd certainly enjoyed the thrust of her body, the squirming motions as she'd tried so hard not to react. Truth be told, he'd wanted her to have that reaction. A man did not put his woman bare-ass on a motorcycle and not expect a reaction. Most especially a woman like Eleesha.

If they weren't on a tight schedule, he'd have fucked her at the airport. Being with her, it was getting harder and harder not to want to make love constantly. Ross attended to her now, observing as she made little mewling sounds, reaching out with her arms. It was wild but true—she was actually translating this experience into her dreams.

"Come for me." He stroked her swollen pussy. "Come for me, darling Eleesha."

Eleesha's pussy muscles clamped down on his fingers. She grasped her own breasts, emitting a deep, soft groan, barely audible, indicating her bliss. She was like an angel, an angel advertising pleasure.

A few seconds after Eleesha subsided, the flight attendant came by—a shapely redhead, tall, with a raspy purr of a voice. “Please fasten your seat belt, sir. Seats in the upright position.”

The way she was talking, the way she was looking at him made it clear—she was his for the taking. A year ago, he thought, a month, even a week ago, he would have been getting her number, or arranging for drinks right after the flight. But he had a full-time project now. One woman with whom he had his hands full. And the funny thing was, he didn’t mind.

Kind of liked it, actually.

“Time to wake up, sleepyhead.” He gave her a kiss.

* * * * *

Eleesha stirred. She was dreaming of being made love to by a prince on a picnic blanket. He had the most beautiful body, and he was the gentlest of lovers.

The real pressure on her lips—light and tingly—continued to pull her to the surface. It was the kiss of a man...the sort of kiss you had to respond to. Arching her back, she felt the strain on her nipples. Her thighs were slick with her own fluid. This was real then?

Ross.

This was his doing. Who else? Her eyes popped open, fully awake. He was there, on the other end of those male lips that were kissing her, leaning across his seat to hers. She protested, rather inarticulately, which only led him to press harder.

When she tried to flat-out push him away with the heels of her hands, he gave her an order. “Hands down, Eleesha.”

She hated herself for obeying, for allowing him continued access to her body. The point he was making was clear. The kiss would stop when he was ready and not before.

This was classic Ross, staking out his territory, which he might or might not make use of.

“So what were you dreaming?” he teased, his lips grazing her earlobe. “It must have been pretty interesting.”

It occurred to her now that she’d made quite a show in her sleep. The pig had no doubt enjoyed it all.

“I saved this for you,” he whispered.

Two of his fingers touched her lips. Oh, god, they smelled like her.

“Clean them off, sweetie.”

“Don’t call me that,” she hissed.

Ross caressed her breast through her blouse until she had no choice but to suckle. The fingers had been inside her all right—he’d masturbated her in her sleep. Eleesha had to rub her thighs together afresh at the sensations he was creating. The way he molded her needy breast as he gave her this unique taste, her sex and his skin.

She closed her eyes, wishing it were another part of him she was sucking.

“We will be landing shortly,” said the flight attendant.

Ross deprived her of the fingers, diverting his attention instantly to the redhead. Eleesha had hated the woman from the start. She knew the type well—the sort that liked to kiss and tell. And she was hot, too, as good as anything in a magazine, which made it worse.

“Is your seat all the way up?” the woman asked, her oval face perfectly framed in the cabin light as she bent over.

Eleesha saw her long, decorated fingers snaking out. The bitch was actually going to check his seat button herself. With another woman sitting right next to him.

“It’s just fine,” snapped Eleesha. “Why don’t you run along and play coffee, tea or me somewhere else.”

She cocked her head. The old expression eluded her. “Coffee, tea or me?”

Ross grinned slantedly. "We're fine, Miss, thank you," he resolved the potential catfight.

Eleesha laced into him next. "Don't you dare say I was acting jealous, Ross Maclean. And another thing. Would you mind explaining why I am wetter than the Caribbean? As if I didn't know, with the evidence all over your grubby fingers."

His close-lipped smile grew to insufferable proportions. She hated how handsome he was, without even trying. The trip had probably turned her into Frankenstein's monster's fiancée, but he looked better than ever with slightly tousled hair and tiny lines at the edges of his eyes.

"I was enjoying my gorgeous, totally irresistible woman. Is that a crime?"

The words melted her more than any manual exploration of her pussy. Was that what she was now – Ross' woman?

"Flattery will get you nowhere, and yes, groping people in their sleep is generally considered –"

Another kiss knocked her breath away. He seized her hair, tugging her head back for complete invasion of her mouth. This was no idle tease. This was a flat-out conquest. He'd won this, he'd won her...but she had to tell herself there was far to go before either of them could really trust.

"When we check into the hotel," he told her, not cracking a smile this time, "you won't be doing any sleeping, Eleesha."

"Yes, Ross," she whispered, understanding it to be nonnegotiable.

He put her hand, blatantly, over his erection. "You feel that, Eleesha? It's hard for you, not the flight attendant. You'll be dealing with me one-on-one the rest of your life, so get used to it."

"Oh, Ross." She marveled at the feel of him, the surging power. She knew what lay underneath those trousers, but she wanted and needed it all over again, as if for the first

time. In her mouth, between her legs, looming over her, touching every part of her body...taking her.

"That's enough for now." He placed her hand back in her own lap. "Pull yourself together. We'll be landing any second."

"Yes, Ross." So this is what he meant, she thought, when he promised to control me with sex...with the heat of my own body.

It was true. For the first time in her adult life, Eleesha did not feel free. This man held sway, as surely as if he'd fitted chains and shackles to her wrists and ankles, and a collar of golden metal around her throat.

How was he accomplishing this? Other men had made love to her, even made her come. A few, quite unsuccessfully, had even asked her to marry them. Probably they had loved her, too—which was more than she knew about Ross. And yet he was the one she sat beside now, excited out of her mind.

You won't be doing any sleeping tonight, Eleesha.

The man intended to make love all night. But what if she exercised the right of every woman to say no? It was a razor's edge they walked—the mutual thrill surrounding her conquest, and the very real fear and doubt she felt.

The plane landed with a series of efficient bumps. The tires screeched appropriately, and they rolled up to a tiny disembarkation facility. Hardly a terminal by mainland standards.

"All passengers may disembark, thank you for flying with us," trilled the deep, island bass of the captain's voice. "May you find here what you seek."

Interesting choice of words, she thought.

Ross grabbed her hand. "Come on, let's go."

He was as eager as a teenager, and again she felt so very special. "Calm down. You're going to pull my arm off," she laughed in spite of herself.

"I'm not wasting a moment with you," he informed her, helping her from the last stair down onto the tarmac.

The terminal was made of corrugated steel, painted a pastel green.

An exceedingly bored-looking customs agent was waiting. There were all of five gates inside, and three counters representing the only airlines that did business on the island.

"Baggage claim, sir?" asked a beaming, dark-skinned skycap ready to show Ross the way.

"No luggage," Ross said. "We're looking for a limo, to the Port Royale Hotel."

The man looked suitably impressed. "Nothing but the best, sir, am I right?"

"What else would you have me do?" said Ross. "When I am here with the most beautiful woman on the island?"

Eleesha blushed.

"I'd have to say you are right, sir," agreed the sixtyish man with long, thin features. "The most beautiful on this, or any, island."

The limo was waiting out front. Eleesha was bathed in a current of warm sea air as soon as the door opened. Palm fronds swayed gently above them, and stars gleamed in a velvet-black sky. She could hear the ocean somewhere nearby – the endless rippling waves, assailing this sandy coast as they had for a thousand years.

"Taxi, mon?" hawked a Jamaican leaning out the window of a beat-up blue sedan.

A dozen others picked up the call, like seagulls, squawking out of the window of their own cars, not too alike, though each as colorful and ancient. Other people were selling food. A large woman with a bandana had some sort of cinnamon stick pastries, while a young boy offered pink fruit, juicy as the fruit of Eden, or so he said.

Then there were the car horns, the bicycle riders and a hapless traffic cop with a whistle and long white gloves trying to make sense of it all.

“Mr. Maclean?” A man tapped Ross on the shoulder. He was all of four-foot-three, wearing a Hawaiian shirt, shorts and sandals. He had a straw fedora on his head. To Eleesha he looked like a miniature Jimmy Durante. “The car is over here.”

The limo was parked up the street. Long and white and sleek. It had only one set of back doors but Eleesha counted three windows on each side. The glass was smoked—the kind you couldn’t see through.

“We’re not waiting ‘til we get to the hotel,” Ross decided as they followed the little man to their ride.

She felt a stab of wet, hot weakness. It was going to start in the car.

Chapter Eight

"Undress," he said as soon as the driver closed the door behind them.

Eleesha looked at him in disbelief. Surely he didn't intend for her to disrobe completely in the back of a moving vehicle?

"Beg pardon?"

Eleesha was sitting in the row of seats facing the rear, while Ross was across from her, facing forward. Three feet of thickly carpeted floor separated them.

"I said take all your clothes off, Eleesha. I want you naked."

She swallowed. "But...we're..."

"Don't argue with me, woman," he said crossly. "I've waited ten hours to get my hands on your bare skin and I will absolutely not be delayed a moment longer. Now, either you can feel pleasure or the sting of my hand on your ass, the choice is yours."

"Is this your brilliant plan for handling me the rest of our lives?" She pouted, removing her jacket. "Bullying me into submission?"

"When the mood suits me. I'm glad to see, at least, that you are reconciling yourself to being my wife."

"I was speaking hypothetically. Only to show how ridiculous this all is," Eleesha informed him.

Her nipples peaked in eager anticipation as she unbuttoned her blouse. Her skin was flushed, her breathing shallow. The intensity of the man's gaze was nearly enough to make her swoon.

"Can you turn that down a little?"

"Turn what down?" He narrowed his focus a notch further.

"That," she complained. "The way you look at me as if...as if...you owned me."

"I've made my claim. I won't apologize for that, Eleesha. As for already feeling possessed, you should know, after following my career as closely as you have that I always get what I want in the end."

Her mouth opened in shock. Who had told him such a thing? "I've never had any interest in you. Whatsoever."

"Careful, Eleesha, remember who it is you're lying to."

"How dare you!" she shot back. "You've no right to accuse me of lying."

His features grew hard as stone. She'd never seen him like this. Suddenly this big limo was feeling awfully small and cramped.

"I'll accuse you of whatever I like, Eleesha." Gone was the aloof amusement. The man meant business now. "And I want the rest of those clothes off—if you can't do it yourself, I will tear them from your cringing body."

Eleesha felt tears forming in her eyes. Why did he have to be this way? "I despise you, Ross."

Her fingers trembled as she removed the blouse and unhooked her bra. The cool, open air hit her nipples. She felt the heat of the Ross' eyes, not knowing what he planned for her, certain only that it would involve him taking pleasure from her—satisfying that raging erection in his trousers.

Eleesha wasted no time with the skirt. Lifting her hips, she unhooked the clasp, and stripped herself bare. Her uncovered sex was wet and fragrant beneath swollen pink lips and a thatch of soft fleece.

"I may decide to tattoo you," he said. "On the inner thigh, perhaps, or on your breast."

With the mention of each place, she felt a hot kiss, in the exact spot, the sting of the ink pen, the utter and complete submission that would come from letting this man mark her so permanently. She imagined herself there in the tattoo parlor, all or part of

her body bare as the artist discussed with...her husband...how exactly she was to be marked.

“Would you like that, my Eleesha?”

Her breath caught as he called her “his”.

“I asked you a question.”

“Ross, I don’t know if I would,” she replied honestly. “I don’t know what to think or say...”

“Open your thighs wide,” he told her, accepting her answer for the moment. “And put your finger on your clit.”

She shuddered, finding her button, the key to her most intimate pleasures.

“Wider. Arch your back, pinch your nipple with the other hand.”

Eleesha was being put through paces. There was nothing about this that spelled equality, and yet she’d never been more certain in her life that she was pleasing a male, doing exactly what he most wanted her to do.

It was hardly good feminism to feel this way, but when it came to sex, Eleesha had always been most aroused when being given orders. Let’s face it – men go to whores for that reason, to be able to call the shots.

“This is what you need, isn’t it, Eleesha?”

“Y-yes,” she managed, through clenched teeth.

“Harder,” he said, compelling her to clamp down on her own nipple even more intensely.

She released a small, piteous moan, which he ignored.

“Now answer my other question. Would you like to be tattooed?”

Eleesha was slipping into a different plane of existence. The pain he was making her inflict on herself was being transformed, into something vacant and open. She could do nothing but dreamily confess, softly begging any and all torture he might have to offer. “Yes, Ross...mark me...put your...brand on me.”

"I want you to do something for me," he said, as if she could deny him. "Will you do what I ask?"

"Yes, Ross, please...let me."

"I want you to arch your back, lift your pelvis off the seat. Show me your pussy...yes, that's it, sweetheart."

Eleesha strained, bending her body backward. Her sex was sopping wet, a dripping offering to this bold, increasingly kinky man.

"You became mine ten years ago," he remarked. "I see that now. I should have kept you then."

Her eyes slid shut. This was all too much.

"Take your hand, Eleesha, and slap your pussy with your palm."

The car was rocking slightly down a road that was less than ideal. Her footing was uneasy on the narrow heels. She held out her own arm, one word in her thoughts—*obey*.

"Nnnn..." she grunted in response as the quick slap was delivered across her mons.

"Again."

She repeated the action, this time feeling a blaze of heat throughout her nether region. Twice more he had her do that before telling her to get down on the floor on all fours. She did so, her limbs shaking. Her palms and knees tingled as they made contact with the floor.

I'm naked, she thought. On the floor of a limousine with a clothed man sitting above me.

"This is domination, Eleesha. Something we've skirted around up to now. It's an aphrodisiac for both of us, so we'll be doing a fair amount of it. I think it makes for some of the best foreplay around. Gives things a real kick, and it seems to bind us like nothing else." Hitting the intercom, he called the driver. "John, I'd like to take a little detour. To the beach. Can you find us something remote?"

"Can do, sir," he promised cheerfully. "And that's my promise to you."

The beach? Eleesha's mind reeled. It was half past midnight. She was stark naked. Surely he didn't intend to do it to her on the sand, under the stars?

Not that the idea wasn't perfectly romantic.

"Ross, we could get caught."

"Relax, my little spitfire. It's time to widen your horizons."

"Don't call me that," she complained, though admittedly it was just the tiniest bit sweet of him to give her a nickname.

Ross bent over to swat her ass in a most undignified manner. "Why not, it's true. You give them hell at the office. I love to watch you work your magic. Not to mention the trouble you give me."

"Good—you deserve it! The nerve of putting me down here like a little pet."

She expected another spank. Instead he inserted a finger up into her very slick canal. He moved it about expertly, so that when he removed it a second later, her ass climbed into the air, following.

"I'm not doing anything that won't make you enjoy it more when we get down to business. And get down we will—on the beach. I'm going to come inside you, Eleesha, under the stars."

She moaned openly now, all resistance gone as he teased her gaping lips, enough to feel his presence, but not enough to allow her satisfaction.

"Oh, Ross," she jettisoned the last shreds of her pride. "I need it now. Please, come in me now?"

"My cock has to be ready, baby. Want to get a head start?"

She turned in time to see his cock slip easily out of the opening in his trousers and underwear.

"Yes, Ro—" the sound of his name dissolved into greedy gurgles as she took his cock inside of her soft, silky mouth. Did she want a head start? Hell, how could she turn down an offer like this? His cock was filling her brain as it was. The taste of him, the

feel of his pulsing hardness—steel covered by velvet—merely confirmed how lost she truly she was. How completely in the orbit of Ross Maclean.

He had her in every sense. She wanted to be overwhelmed by him. She wanted him to explode in her mouth, to give her his come to swallow. Those hands, caressing her head. Hands that had been insured by Lloyd's of London at one time for ten million dollars. Hands that had thrown their way to glory, to the adulation of the masses. The bastard knew she'd been one of those fans, too. Hanging on his every move. Mourning his retirement, in spite of her efforts to hate him.

The limousine made a sharp turn and the ground softened considerably. Her heart palpitated as they slowed to a crawl. They were on the beach. Ross opened the window—a smooth, automatic whir.

“Smell the ocean, my spitfire angel. Doesn't that just rock your world?”

He rocked her world. The ocean was pleasant-smelling enough, the mix of salt and smoke from far-off bonfires, and the sweet, succulent aromas from open grills. This was paradise, after all, a feast for all the senses.

“No one's ever loved me like this,” he confided. “Your mouth...was made for me.”

She sucked him deeper, grateful for the compliment, for the opportunity. At the same time though, she was feeling her own emptiness. A lacking so profound that it made every fiber of her being cry out for penetration.

The vehicle came to a stop. This time it was Ross who opened the door and not the driver. “Go on,” he said, lifting her off of his throbbing erection. “Play in the water.”

She looked at him and then out the door. The waves were capped by moonlight. So beautiful, exotic...and lonely.

“Aren't you coming with me?”

“I want to watch you play first.”

“But...”

Ross kissed her, soft and sweet and reassuring. "It's okay, honey. I won't leave you unprotected."

A flood of wetness, fresh and warm, pooled at her opening. What was it about this man that could make her feel so sexy, even when he wasn't trying? Or was he?

"You want me to play naked in the waves..."

"I need to see you, Eleesha." Was it the moonlight pervading the limo or were his eyes as moist as hers? "I need to see you out there...for me."

"All right, Ross." She touched his cheek, feeling so much affection. "Though I still think you're crazy."

"Crazy, yes," he agreed. "For you."

She wanted to see if she could parlay that into the all-important admission of love, but he was already pushing her out onto the sand, his hand on the lush curve of her posterior.

It was at this point that she remembered she was naked. "Ross, wait."

He closed the door behind her. "Go," he grinned. "The sooner you get out there the sooner I'll join you."

The car began to move forward. He was leaving. He couldn't do this to her. She chased them, finally falling to her knees in exhaustion in the sand. Eleesha saw the lights fade in the distance. She wanted to cry. But he'd told her to trust, hadn't he? It was all so confusing.

Why was he doing all of these things to her? Why was she going along with everything, step-by-step? She ought to have her head examined. He was probably off to bang that flight attendant, with her clothes in the backseat. They would laugh about the silly female executive who thought she was here to be married.

She could picture the woman disrobing, bearing those torpedo breasts. She'd flip up that uniform skirt and her pussy would be scorching hot and available. Ross would

open his arms and she'd jump on him, wrapping those long legs around his midsection. They'd fuck in the back of the big white car, in every conceivable position.

And to think the red-haired bitch was going to be using the erection she'd given him. Eleesha rose to her feet. The mighty waves were calling her. They wanted to comfort her. They felt her pain. As only the anonymous forces of nature can. She ran, flat-out, her breasts heaving, the night breeze lifting her hair off her neck, giving it wings. She was so exposed, the whole of her being—naked—body and soul.

Her ankles hit the water. Wading deeper and deeper, she let the sea stake its claim—dark, silvery water swirling in darkness, the ocean floor, salty and warm. Wafting foam tickling at her pussy hair and then, as she managed to wade deeper, up to the bottoms of her nipples.

The ocean surrounded her on every side, welcoming and playful. It had a message under the moonlight. Play and enjoy. She laughed out loud, taking handfuls of water and pouring it over her head. Sticking out her tongue, she let the salt claim its surface. The water dribbled down her chin and into her ears.

Headfirst, she dove.

Quiet darkness illuminated from above by sheets of silvered light. She counted the number of seconds, stretching her time in this delicious new environment, free from her stresses and worries and heartaches.

Now here was paradise.

Eleesha's head bumped straight into it. Bone and flesh. She gurgled to the surface screaming. "Shark!"

Ross stood there, stark naked, laughing his fool head off. She'd run into his knee underwater, thinking it was some vile sea creature.

"You son of a bitch." She pounded at his chest.

Ross continued laughing. "Settle down, Spitfire."

"I'm not your...spitfire," she sputtered.

He lifted her from the water and put her over his shoulder. "Okay, I'll call you mermaid, instead. How's that?"

"Put me down!" she demanded.

"Not 'til we get to shallow water."

She struck her fists against his back, squirming to be free. Really, she was never so happy as to have been wrong in her life. Ross had not deserted her after all. He hadn't gone to fuck the flight attendant, he'd just taken his clothes off and come in to join her...stark naked.

"If you touch me," she warned as he set her down in the sand, the surf lapping lightly at her toes, "I'll scream rape."

"So will I," he said. "Though I doubt anyone will hear either of us. Open."

He meant her legs—it was a command she was getting used to. "They don't get any more romantic than you," she quipped.

Ross lowered himself, his muscular body dripping wet, lightly glowing in the moonlight. "Romance has its time and place," he conceded. "But so does ravishment."

He took her hands in his, fingers interlaced. Pushing them down into the sand on either side of her head, he imposed the full dominion of his male power. She shivered at the feel of his cock, the tip of it a mere brush against her sex.

"Do it, then," she gasped. "Get it over with."

"Not so easy, Spitfire. You have to beg first."

She lifted her hips, trying to squirm onto him from underneath. "Stop being such a prick," she exclaimed.

Ross bit her nipple gently, settling her fast. "Lie still," he ordered. "I want this coming from deep down."

Eleesha stopped struggling.

"That's better." His tongue ran across the throbbing nipple, sending her into burning ecstasy.

She thrashed and he bit down harder.

"Ross," she squealed. "Please, I surrender."

"Do you?" He tested her, kissing and teasing both her nipples at length.

She whimpered, but this time she stayed still. "Yes, Ross."

"I hope so, because I'm not entering you this time unless you're going to be completely docile for me."

Her ass burned in the wet sand. The sea air stung her overcharged body. How could she be so close to the relief she needed in the form of sexual penetration, and yet so far?

"I'm docile," she promised. "I swear it."

"Maybe." He nibbled at her ear. "But wouldn't it be just like you to try and trick me?"

"Not this time," she murmured, the feel of his mouth and teeth sending light tugs all the way down to her pussy. "This time, I'm...yours."

"Mine." He grazed her lips but didn't kiss them.

Eleesha groaned. Helplessly, she clenched her captured fists, but she kept the resistance from reaching the rest of her muscles. She'd show him, she could lie here, the perfect vessel, anticipating...prepared and absolutely open.

"Discipline," he said, "is your friend at this moment."

She nodded her head yes, to show her understanding.

"And humility, too."

Damn, this was hard. She wanted to just give it right back to him, throw it in his face. Why did the woman have to be humble and not the man? Why couldn't she dole out some of this precious discipline on him for a change?

Because that's not what turns us both on, came the voice in the back of her head, the one she hated to listen to because it was invariably right.

"Yes, Ross...humility."

"We both know the score." He settled his cock, moving it just inside the walls of her pussy. "This is what we need. Neither of our lives will make sense without the other. Admit it—admit you've been floundering, emotionally, like I have. Tell me how no one's come along. Hell, I was married, and I'll be the first to tell you it was a mistake. I should have hung on...I should have come back sooner."

She shook her head. He was going to break through barriers that had been put there for her survival. "But you left me in the first place."

"It was a mistake," he sank an inch deeper, "that I will never forgive myself for."

"Oh," she moaned. "I'm so...close...just a little deeper."

"You know what you have to do."

Beg. He wanted her to beg. "Please, Ross?"

"That's not enough."

"Please...take me...take my body. I...I beg for your hard cock...please, may I have it?"

"You want to be fucked?"

"Fuck me... Oh, yes," she cried.

His cock slid inside, nearly all the way. "You will not move," he reiterated. "You will not come without permission."

Eleesha thrashed her head. "Please, not like that." It was torture, to be filled like this with his manhood, the thick, hard, veined cock pulsing against her vaginal walls. He allowed her to do nothing to reach her climax, forced her to hold back.

It was a sweet, deep pain, sharp and gnawing. It was as though he was taking her on a roller coaster ride, and this was the moment of clinging to the rail at the top, waiting to plunge to the thrilling depths.

"Discipline, Eleesha," he reminded. "I expect that in a wife."

"I can't Ross. I'm not ready."

"You'll be my bride in less than forty-eight hours, Eleesha. Of course you're ready."

"Just let me come, Ross..."

"Focus on my eyes."

She did, finding herself instantly calmed.

"We do this together," said Ross.

"Together..."

"Yes."

She shuddered as his cock sank to the hilt. For a moment he laid there, both of them savoring the feeling. Neither dared breathe lest they explode. Never had she known this kind of pressure, this amount of buildup to an oncoming climax.

"Hold on," he told her, and then he began to lift, withdrawing exquisitely slowly, causing ripples of pleasure—rings up and down her canal, up and down the whole of her body. They were almost orgasms, but not quite—each one a distinct pulse. Eleesha clung to him, her hands gripping those strong shoulders. If he should abandon her now...

Trust. He will see this through. He won't leave.

Ross pulled himself out, nearly to the tip, displaying that perfect ramrod discipline he'd spoken of. Everything about him was alert, at attention, straight and beautifully masculine. No better case could be made for why he was the one in charge here.

I worship this man, she thought. I always have. From the first time she had seen him at football practice, in his shorts and sleeveless half T-shirt, laughing with his teammates, tossing the ball, encouraging them and kidding with them. It wasn't just his body that had gotten to her, or his handsome face. Not just the neatly trimmed hair and rounded muscles, nor the sheen of sweat on his skin—although yes, she wanted to run to him and fawn and be pretty and hope for him to take her as a lover. It went deeper. Ross Maclean was a leader. Everyone else respected him. The team was drawn to him.

Something inside of him spoke to things more meaningful than just winning and losing football games. Ross Maclean was the genuine article. A real hero. When she'd

read of his injury—that he wouldn’t play anymore—it had hurt her as badly as anything in her own life. It was a double wound, because she felt both his physical and emotional pain. It had been the death of his dream to be in the Super Bowl, a plunge into a place of low, dark anguish. She’d felt it from the start, the agony of crashing to the field, of having his bones and muscles give way.

She’d cried for Ross, over the newspaper, though she had never told a living soul.

How did she reconcile all that emotion, the complex history they’d shared with what was happening now? That she was underneath him on a beach under his complete and total command.

“Not yet,” Ross shook his head. And he invaded her again. She was on a razor’s edge. How could she not come, unless she somehow gave herself over, her very will?

“Ross,” she whispered, pressing her aching breasts. “I’m yours.”

She meant for now, for this, not for all time. It was a distinction, however, she was in no position to make.

He stopped halfway, every muscle as rigid as iron. “Move,” he ordered. “Show me.”

Her moans were deep and shattering, barely audible. What he was asking was impossible, and yet she had no choice. He wanted her to lift, to writhe, to give him pleasure, to allow him proof that she was indeed conquered.

Drawing a stabbing breath, she impaled herself...*can’t come*, she grimaced. Squeezing and releasing her muscles, she gave his cock the stimulation every man enjoyed.

“More,” Ross said.

Eleesha pushed her breasts toward him. Propped up on her elbows, she offered them.

He took a nipple into his mouth, slowly grinding his teeth, just hard enough to torture her with pleasure. She whimpered. How much longer could he hold her like this?

"More," Ross grunted.

"There isn't any more," she cried in frustration. "This is everything."

Ross rose to his knees, depriving her of his cock. "You're holding back, Eleesha."

"No, I'm not. Please, Ross, don't do this to me."

He touched his finger to her belly button. "Hold still." He traced a line, branding her with the heat of his touch.

Just short of her mons, he stopped. "When you can come without being touched, Eleesha, you'll be ready."

"No...now, now," she squirmed, feeling like an impetuous child.

Ross grabbed hold of his cock. To her horror she watched as he stroked himself, smoothly and efficiently. A moment later he erupted. Thick, rich fountains of his semen arced through the air and landed on Eleesha—on her belly and breasts, and even her face.

She cried from the loss of it. She knew what this meant. Nothing for her. Not until he was ready again.

"You selfish bastard," she exclaimed.

"You understand nothing, Eleesha." He was on his feet looking down on her, his face dark and brooding. "Go in the ocean, get yourself cleaned up."

She scrambled to her feet, more than happy to put some distance between them. "You'll pay for that," she declared.

With that she turned and ran, splashing into the waves.

* * * * *

Ross watched Eleesha under the moonlight. She looked a million times more fabulous than when he'd come upon her just after sending her out of the limo. Could it be that was just an hour ago? It felt like a lifetime. She was so spectacular out there, like a nymph, her wet hair fanning about her, her rounded backside caressed by the waves. She had her hands beside her in the water, which surprised him. He'd expected to see her masturbating in revenge for what he'd done to her.

Ross was not proud of leaving his woman in that state—aroused, with his own spilt, wasted semen covering her fair form. He hadn't planned to impose that upon her. He wasn't sure what had made him withdraw—physically and emotionally. A fine example he was, demanding she give all when he was still picking and choosing his moments of intimacy.

So why wasn't she pleasuring herself? He certainly deserved to be cut off. What message was she sending, if any? Did she wish for things to simply go on? Did she want him to pursue his unorthodox seduction? She had said he would pay for that, but how? What, if anything, did she have up her nonexistent sleeve?

This was what had always frightened him about women—the seemingly bottomless sea of their emotions. After Ross' father had left them, his mother had given in more and more to that internal world. In all fairness, it may have had more to do with the alcohol than with her being a woman. Through drink, she could go back again and again to the place of her deepest pain, nursing the wounds with an almost sick fascination.

Her own father's betrayal. Her husband's betrayal. And the endless disappointment that her football-playing son had become. She wanted a writer, a poet—a man of intellectual substance. Ross just played harder, finding his strength among his teammates, who genuinely appreciated and needed him.

It was no wonder he had a hard time trusting women. When Eleesha had shown that vulnerability so long ago, wanting him to stay, he had loathed her for it. At the

same time, he had wanted her so. It was that fear of intimacy that had led him to give up trying in his marriage.

And it might well stop him again here, if he let that demon win. Ironically, it was Eleesha who took the lead now, by continuing to accept the terms he'd laid down and forcing him to honor them.

At this very moment she turned back and was heading toward him. She had the look of the devil in her eyes and a fighting sway to her bare hips, but still she was coming—straight at him.

Oh, yeah, she was up to something all right.

"You owe me, and before we pursue your crazy marriage scheme a second further, you are going to make things right."

Ross put his hands on his hips, genuinely intrigued. "And how exactly do you propose I do that?"

"By serving me." She flipped her drenched locks back over her shoulder. "By tending to my pleasure."

Interesting.

"Here, you mean? Now?"

She angled an eyebrow. "You certainly didn't have any problem earlier with taking your pleasure out here in the open for all the world to see."

"Point taken."

"You will make me come," she said imperiously. "In whatever manner I choose."

He could take a wild guess what that entailed. "One orgasm," he negotiated. "And then I reassume control."

"Two, and don't push your luck."

"Two," he agreed, hiding his thankfulness to have this second chance.

"Good. You are to follow my every instruction. If you fail to obey me, then you will have to take me straight back to the airport. Understood?"

Ross smiled wryly. "So that means once I've done what you've asked you'll submit to me completely, all the way to the altar?"

Her nose went up in the air. "No, I promise no such thing. Pleasuring me just gets you back where you started."

"You drive a hard bargain."

"Aren't I worth it?"

"Yes," he replied in all seriousness. "For a fresh chance with you, I would give up everything I own. My very life."

She rolled her eyes. "There are no extra points for melodrama."

"No," he suppressed a grin, "of course not. Shall we begin, then?"

"Yes, we shall. To start with," she said haughtily, "I should like to see you play with your nipples. Make them hard."

Ross touched each tiny nub. They were sensitive, and stimulating them brought out a side of him that was a bit more sexually passive than normal. Admittedly, there was something very hot about this gorgeous woman taking charge, at least for a little while.

"That's a good boy," she teased. "Now I want you to play with your cock. I want it hard again. I want you frustrated and out of your mind like you made me."

Ross' cock swelled in his hand. As much as anything, it was the sound of her voice, raspy and sexy, making his cock respond.

"Your balls are still tight," she observed. "You have a lot left in there."

"You bring out the testosterone in me," he quipped.

"Did I say you could talk...slave?"

His breath quickened. "No." He picked up on the game—the flip side of the one they usually played. "Mistress."

"You're here to give pleasure, pretty boy, and don't forget it. Maybe we'll give you a little taste, too, of your own medicine, of the way you've treated so many women."

Ross continued to caress himself, because she hadn't told him to stop. He was really wishing he were inside her now.

"It's time to pay honor to your Mistress, slave. Down on your hands and knees."

Ross lowered himself to all fours in the sand. His strong, compact muscles surged with a delicious sense of life. It was a strange, unexpected freedom to be under Eleesha's control. For one thing, he could really be assured now of making her happy, of pleasing her. And that, more than anything in the world, is what gave him peace.

"Kiss your Mistress' foot, slave."

Yes, that was right.

Ross pressed his lips to her soft skin. She tasted of salt. Sand crystals clung to her. It was a beautiful thing, he thought, to show his woman devotion. He felt nothing demeaning in this, no surrender of his power. If anything, this showed how strong he was. That he could be gracious and loving.

"The other foot."

He felt her shivering. There was something so completely kinky and erotic about this—a powerful male subjugating himself to the smaller, weaker female.

"Work your way up, slave. Earn your way home."

Home...her pussy. He liked the sound of that.

"Lick, too," she encouraged.

He dabbed his tongue, cutting a swath. He was licking salt, licking skin...licking Eleesha.

"Show me what you'll do between my legs, slave, if I let you get that far."

He tended to her eagerly, switching from one leg to the other, enjoying her beautiful, unblemished skin. He sampled her calves, nibbled her knees and kissed suggestively at her thighs.

"Mmm, that's it," she sighed, offering the validation he needed. "This is what I call restitution."

Her slim fingers grasped his head, beckoning. She was in no position to truly force him, but as she opened her legs, there wasn't a power in the universe that could keep him from tasting, and ultimately consuming her.

"My clit, Ross, work my clit."

He'd have done that anyway. He was no stranger to female anatomy, especially this female. As her crotch pressed forward and she shifted her feet, he could feel her softening. The power was already shifting back. In a few minutes, she'd have her orgasms and he would resume winning her...heart, body and soul.

Using his tongue like a miniature cock, he probed her depths. Her sweet fluids dripped down his chin. It was like the nectar of the gods. Greedily he inhaled. This was his woman, and his woman's sex. And soon to be her climax.

"Ross...if you weren't so damned sexy," she lamented, "I might be able...to get rid of you."

He decided to push her over the edge for that. Grasping her ass cheeks, he secured her tight against him. There would be no mistake. No playing games. Let her see that everything sexual between them *would* mean something, from here on out.

Her hands went to his shoulders for support. "I didn't say...yet," she cried, though it was too late.

He pushed her over the top. Again.

Chapter Nine

Eleesha stood on the balcony, watching the sunrise. She had the comforter from the king-sized bed gathered about herself. She was feeling languid, decadent as hell. There was one thing Ross had been wrong about—they had slept, at least a little. About an hour ago, he'd finally slipped into unconsciousness, allowing her to do the same.

Though he'd set a condition for her rest—her continuous possession, even during slumber.

"They are not your personal toys," she'd complained as he'd spooned her, his hands clutching her still tingling breasts.

Truth be told, he made her feel safe and wanted, though she could not reveal too much. Not yet.

"You're half right," he muttered into her ear, "they're not toys. But they are mine. At least until I have to share them with our babies."

Eleesha had squirmed to be free. "I'm not making any babies with you, Ross Maclean. I haven't even gotten around to liking you yet."

His half-erect cock had pushed against her from behind. "You're not supposed to like your husband. Now settle down before I tan your behind."

"Fine, but I'm not sleeping."

The next thing she knew, the first rays of dawn were creeping across the Mediterranean tile of their huge bedroom. That was what had brought her to the balcony, where she was soaking it all in. Especially this new thing about babies. Eleesha had always wanted to be a mother. It was a dream since childhood, ever since her aunt had adopted her. She would play endlessly with her dollhouses, making up the names and characters of imaginary children. Ruthlessly, little Eleesha would maintain control over her world, pouring herself into it, allowing nothing to be disturbed.

The psychologist had said it was a reaction to the grief of losing her parents. The man had told her aunt that Eleesha would find friends again, and then, when she was ready, she'd stop living in her fantasy world. Yes, she had found reality, and sometimes she wished she hadn't. It was the curse of her richly imaginative childhood that she was always so romantic about things. Ross had come along at such a vulnerable time. She was away from home as a college freshman, she was dealing with so many emotions, and there he was, the epitome of everything she thought a dream husband and father should be.

How ironic, after all this time and heartache that he should want the babies.

Across the blue-green bay, the water as smooth as glass, Eleesha watched a parasailer—a beautiful young brown-skinned man, so elegantly and fearlessly taming the tide. From the beach, several long-legged, starry-eyed young women in bikinis were watching. Their version of Ross, she imagined.

What a breathtaking place this was. And what a hotel. Fifteen stories, curved like a horseshoe, coated in pink stucco with pleasing classical features and full, rounded marble balconies. They were at the very top. In the finest suite. She was so proud when they went to the front desk and the man recognized Ross. Of course they'd been expecting him, and wouldn't he step right this way. She just clung to his arm, not feeling inferior, just happy to let him have the limelight.

Your bride? asked the bellhop. *No*, he'd said, *my fiancée*. A whole other set of emotions there.

The sun had risen now, the full orange ball having emerged, recreated from the ocean horizon. It would be another flawless day.

"Got you," growled a playful voice.

She gasped as Ross's arms slipped around her waist, pinning her arms. "Are you trying to give me a heart attack?" she complained.

"No. I had something else in mind."

Ross was hard as a rock, his erection jammed between her ass cheeks. Her pulse quickened in anticipation, despite her best efforts.

"Well, you can put it out of your mind," she said. "I am not in the mood this morning."

"So you're refusing to come back to bed?"

"I am," she said, wondering if he would actually accept this for a change.

"In that case—" his hand slipped under the comforter to grasp her bare belly. "I'll have to take you out here."

Oh, god...he wouldn't...

"Over my dead—" she shrieked as he tore the comforter from her, spinning her out like a top. She ended up against the railing, stark naked.

"Give that back." She charged him.

He held it over her head. "No, Eleesha. You can't have it."

"Let me inside then."

He blocked her way. "Are you going straight to bed?"

"Yes, damn you!"

"And you will submit, completely and totally?"

As if she was in any position to deny Ross. "Yes, Ross. I will submit. Now let me in, before someone sees me."

"So what? You're a beautiful, gorgeous woman."

"Please, Ross. Have pity." She was hugging her breasts and trying to keep her mound covered all at once.

"You forgot about your ass," he pointed out.

"I'll bite," she threatened.

He relented, laughing. "All right, Spitfire, but I expect you to be nice and tame when I get there."

Ross dismissed her with a humiliating slap on the ass. The fact that it made her pussy tingle gave her one more reason to not be very happy right now with her anatomy. Crawling back into bed, her sex already wet, she considered where exactly along the line she'd forfeited rights over her own person.

She fumed at seeing him still standing out there on the balcony in his boxers, casually enjoying the sunrise. Was she some kind of slave who was supposed to be constantly available for his use?

"You'd better hurry up," she called out to him. "I intend to be on the beach sunning myself in an hour."

Come to think of it, what in hell was she to do for clothing on this blasted island? Scratch the sunbathing. It was serious shopping time.

"You're gonna have to take me to some stores first. You do know that?"

"I'll decide what you wear, Eleesha. If anything."

She wanted to throw the lamp, but she settled on a pillow. "You won't get away with this."

A knock on the door stopped the brewing row. For the moment.

Ross padded across the floor, utterly indifferent to his disheveled, singularly displeased roommate.

"You're not going to let someone in? At least let me hide in the bathroom."

He was letting someone in, straight into the bedroom.

"Thanks, Maurice, set everything there, would you?"

Eleesha covered up with the sheet and blanket, making herself as invisible as possible. Was there no end to this man's gall?

They carried on an animated conversation for what felt like an hour. At last Ross sounded the all clear.

"You enjoyed that," she accused, poking her head out from the rumpled sheets.

He was grinning ear to ear. She hated how roguishly charming it made him look, not to mention scrumptious.

“Me? Perish the thought.”

Eleesha’s attention diverted to the packages on the elegant armchairs in the corner. “What are those?” she asked suspiciously.

“Your wardrobe.”

He proceeded to present her with the various items. Swimsuits, bikinis in lavender and yellow, sarongs in lovely silk prints, an assortment of shoes – from evening wear to sandals – as well as walking shorts, tops and a straw hat.

“What about that?” She pointed to the garment bag on the clothing rack.

“Ah, yes,” he nodded. “The pièce de résistance.”

Unzipping the long bag, he revealed a silver dress – backless, with spaghetti straps. The sequins dazzled in the morning light. It was quite simply the loveliest garment Eleesha had ever seen. Stunned, she asked. “But how did you know my size?”

“You have Martha to blame for that. She gave away all your secrets.”

Eleesha blinked, moist-eyed. “No one’s ever bought me anything like this, Ross.”

“It’s for tonight. We’re going dancing. The hotel has a big celebration in conjunction with one of the island festivals. I have a tux on the way.”

She shook her head. “You are making it awfully hard to keep hating you.”

“I’m working on it,” he nodded somberly. “Would it help if I rudely ordered you onto all fours and told you to face the headboard for a good hard fuck?”

She suppressed a smile. “It might.”

“Consider it done, Spitfire.”

She felt the mischief rising. “And if I refuse?”

“In that case...” he rummaged through another bag on the floor, one she’d missed. “We have these.”

Ross was dangling handcuffs—silver with fuzzy pink lining—from one hand. In the other he held a black riding crop.

Her heart was thumping like a rabbit's. Her skin burned already, half fearing, half craving the new sensations. Steel to hold her wrists. And a whip. To punish her as she'd never been punished before.

"Now that's more like it," she offered dryly. "For a minute I thought the real Ross Maclean had been exchanged for some nice, polite sap. The sort who fawns over women."

"Not a chance." He slashed the whip through the air. "So are you going to cooperate or not?"

"I guess I haven't a choice."

"Sure you do. Pain or pleasure."

Elesha presented her ass, just as Ross wanted. She was completely vulnerable, open to whatever he might deliver to her nude body. The fact that she could no longer see him behind her only heightened the anxiety. This bed was so damn big, too. So far he'd made excellent use of it, rolling her about, pinning her and prodding and poking her every which way.

But she had a feeling it was going to be different this morning. They were going to penetrate a new layer of their relationship.

She jolted as his hand touched her, light as air.

"Easy, Spitfire..."

His words made her sigh. She loved the nickname. Loving it all, in spite of how exasperating and unfair he could be.

"Do you remember? Our night together? I asked you about that fantasy of yours? Being my love slave? You said that it wasn't true? The girls made it up, to embarrass you?"

She braced herself for the inevitable.

"You were lying to me, weren't you?"

His fingers slipped inside her, taking immediate control. She would not hold out long this time. Why had it been so much easier to conceal things from one another when they were younger?

"Yes," whispered Eleesha.

"You dreamed of being my slave."

"Yes."

"What did you dream?"

Her body tensed in anticipation, her nerve endings sharp with desire. It was coming. The moment of reckoning.

"Serving..." she began, no longer able to form full sentences. "Obeying...naked...being...whipped."

"I know, Eleesha. That's why I bought the crop."

She shook her head. "Oh, Ross, we can't go there..."

It was a plea, not a statement. One he opted to refuse. "Head down," he caressed the back of her neck, "buttocks in the air."

She had no strength to obey, or to resist. Using both hands, he put her body in the position he desired. She was panting already, her pussy clenching and unclenching, feverishly anticipating.

"I'm...scared."

But why, and of what? she asked herself. This wasn't just about the pain, not just about the momentary exchange they would have. There was more, something deeper.

He soothed her with a kiss on her cheek. "I'll be here... Your Master will be here."

"Yes," she shivered, as though he were inside her, even now. "Master."

Ross read her need, the implications. "Come. Now," he commanded, giving her a single finger to work against.

She shifted, shamelessly rubbing. Eleesha reveled in it, feeling delicious.

"I'm going to take you anally," he told her once she'd subsided. "I wanted that...long ago, but I was afraid. I wanted this, too."

"This" was the whip, caressing her now instead of his hand.

She gave in to a heavy sigh, and to the confession that went along with it. "I masturbated while thinking of you, Ross...so many times...you don't know."

"Before we made love? Or after?"

"Both...all the time...in every position..."

"I've never made love to another woman that I didn't see you, Eleesha." Ross reared back, cracking the whip against her posterior. She cried out from the heated sting—deep, erotic—surging through her body.

I'm being whipped, she thought, by my lover.

"You may thank me, slave." He tapped the affected area. She felt the rising welt.

"Thank you...Master."

He struck her again. "You look good this way. Twitching. Sweating."

Eleesha grimaced. God help her, she wanted another. "Thank you, Master."

"I will have to be careful. So you can still wear one of those nice little bikinis for me, later." Ross whipped her again, a crisp, precise blow.

"You've done this before, haven't you?" she asked as it occurred to her that he seemed awfully proficient.

"Once or twice," he acknowledged. "It's a hobby...one of many."

The fire was continuous now, throughout her ass. It was more intense than the spanking. But more exciting, too.

"Are you ready to be used, slave girl?"

She shivered, remembering what he'd promised lay ahead. "Yes, Master."

Eleesha was an anal virgin.

"Ross...Master?"

"I know, Spitfire, I figured as much," he'd read her mind. "We'll go slowly."

He had lubricant. Yet another surprise from the bottom of that special bag. He squirted some into her opening than massaged it with his finger.

"I did this the first time with a prostitute when I was eighteen. A birthday present from my coach. He bought me the works—the man was like a father to me. It was good, but it was just sex. It was always that way, 'til I met you."

She gasped as he slipped a second finger inside, opening her.

"Relax, Spitfire...this is supposed to be fun."

"Easy...for you to say," she managed.

He slapped her ass. "Stop mouthing off," he teased. "You naughty slave."

A moment later the finger was replaced with a thicker object—his cock. She felt a rise of panic. She'd never be able to take him inside her, not like this. He'd said to always trust, but she needed more.

"Master...Ross...what more was it...with me?"

He chuckled. "I think you know the answer to that."

She needed to hear it, though. That would make all the difference in the world.

"But, I don't know."

Too late. He was clamping her waist, exercising testosterone-driven power, closing down the higher avenues of discussion.

"We'll go slowly," he reiterated. "But I'm not compromising. You'll give me everything I want. You'll take everything. Every inch. Is that clear, slave?"

"Yes, Master."

"I'm your first, Eleesha, and I'll be your last. No one else," he vowed, "here...or here."

He snaked a finger into her pussy, making her writhe. Ross took advantage of the opportunity to impale her another inch.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

“Don’t fight it.”

She felt so full. Like being fucked, but different, too. Heavier somehow – deeper and more wickedly primal.

“I’m glad we waited for this,” he said. “It means so much more now.”

Her first...and her only.

Ross gave her another inch, and then another.

Settling himself into his conquered domain, Ross said, “It’s time for the fucking.”

Eleesha tensed. She’d nearly forgotten there was more. That having Ross’ cock stuffed up her anus was just the beginning. Now would come the movement. The pleasure.

Maybe part of what made this arousing was that, as a female, she felt truly used like this. Her ass was not her pleasure center—it was his. The best she could do was to submit sufficiently, opening her body so as to minimize the pain of the invasion. And yet there was a pleasure in this, too, an abiding sense of peace that came from knowing she was pleasing her man. There was also the perverse enjoyment that seemed to come along with the submission. It was this last element that had fueled her fantasies all these years. Beginning and ending with Ross.

Ross grunted as he began to move. It was slow as promised, though there was no mistaking his power. If he wished, he could take anything and everything from her. To put herself in this position...at his mercy, she knew of no greater sign of love and trust.

“Oh, Ross,” she groaned, heady from the erotic pressure. “I’m so fucking yours, it’s not even funny.”

“Then show me,” he taunted. “Even the prostitute took me deeper, and she didn’t care one whit for me.”

The remark stung. He’d done something similar to her last night. What was it that put him off? Was it when she overwhelmed him with emotion? When she got out there too far in front of his carefully arranged script – or in his case, playbook?

Maybe he needed to be thrown off track even more.

"I love you, Ross Maclean."

It was a devious attack, indeed. The one thing he could not defend against. Not without opening his own heart.

"That's Master Maclean." He fucked her harder, faster, in retaliation.

"I love you, whatever your name is," she defied. "Whether you like it or not."

"That'll be enough, woman. It's time to receive me."

Her bare toes curled. "Come in my fucking ass. Yes...fill me with your hot come."

"Please, Master," he corrected, glorying in his resumed authority.

"Please, shoot it in my ass, Master. Mark me. Mark your territory."

He was pistoning furiously into her, slamming hard and long. At a certain point she fell forward onto her belly. His body followed her down. With one hand beside her, holding himself steady, and the other pressing into her back, he finished himself off. Eleesha lay underneath him, undulating as he pumped himself dry, jetting his warm semen into her tight, oiled channel.

She felt it all at once. The heat of the whipping, the closeness of his skin, and her own ongoing sexual excitement. Could a person climax in the whole of their body? Could they relish a moment to the point of a sort of spiritual orgasm?

Ross nibbled at her neck, recovering himself. He must have sensed her strange state, because he asked, "Are you all right?"

She had but one response. Two words, clear as a bell. "Hold me."

He turned her to her side, wrapped her in his arms, and enveloped her in his powerful embrace.

"Always," he whispered, nose to nose. "My Spitfire."

She fell asleep again, this time with a definite smile on her face.

* * * * *

Eleesha examined herself in the mirror. She highly doubted that she had the looks or the figure to pull off wearing this dress. It was the sort of thing you put on a runway model or an actress heading down the red carpet to receive some award. Ross must have spent a fortune on it. And the silver shoes, with the darling little clasps were a picture-perfect match. If only she were someone more deserving.

Her hair. Whatever would she do with it? An afternoon sunning and sailing had turned her hair into a riot of curls. Exposure to the sea always had that effect on it. Ross had told her not to fret, that it would look fine no matter what, but he was a man, and as such, his opinions were limited in this area. He was also a bit prejudiced when it came to her. Eleesha didn't usually mind that, but she didn't want to be humored either.

Maybe she should wear it up. Experimenting with some twists, she replayed the lovely events in her mind. How wonderfully the day had gone. How comfortable she'd felt in his presence. He was such an interesting man, full of fascinating opinions she would never have expected. And she'd never realized all that he'd had to overcome in childhood, either. In a way they had both suffered parental loss and been forced to grow up at an early age. Ross wasn't the type to use his life as an excuse, though. She liked that. He took responsibility for things, good and bad.

She was surprised at the extent to which he was interested in her business ideas, her plans for improving the company if ever she were to assume the reins of power. He was a natural businessman, though she knew his heart still lay in the game of football. She had an idea in this regard, one she was planning to pursue in secret.

The swept-up hair didn't work. She let it all down, a tumbled mess, utterly hopeless. Honestly, she could have just cried. She really hated being female sometimes. Men never had these problems.

"Spitfire? Where are you?"

It was Ross, looking for her. She sucked in her lower lip. She'd been stalling him for half an hour, having him wait downstairs in the bar.

"I'm in the bathroom," she called out from behind the locked door.

"What in blazes are you still doing in there, woman? How many free cocktail weenies do you expect me to consume?"

She sucked in her lower lip. "I need more time, Ross."

Naturally, he looked perfect. Straight out of the gate, ten minutes to put on his tuxedo and comb his hair. It made her sick.

"More time? For what? You're already ten times more beautiful than any woman in the hotel."

She flushed pink—she wondered if she'd ever get tired of hearing words like that. "You're biased, Ross, because you...like me very much."

She'd almost slipped and used the dreaded "L" word, the one he'd been avoiding like the plague.

He must have caught on. "If I say I love you, will you come out of there?"

"Not if you don't mean it."

"I never say what I don't mean. I love you. Satisfied?"

She snorted. "Hardly."

He cleared his throat. "Eleesha Marie Greene. I love you. Will you please come out of the bathroom?"

"I can't," she sniffed. "Because...because I...look horrible."

Ross sighed. "Eleesha, please open the door."

He sounded just so entirely patient, loving and supportive, and much as she hated to disappoint him with how poorly she filled out the dress, she needed him nonetheless—his shoulder to cry on, his arms around her. Sobbing, she released the lock.

She buried her head against his chest, letting it all out. So much pent up inside. "I just...don't...want...it to be...a dream," she cried, the words coming in short, tearful stabs.

He caressed the back of her head. "Spitfire, what are you talking about?"

He sounded so gentle, so loving that she couldn't help but open up to him. "I don't want you to leave me again...for the prettier girls, like last time."

"Prettier girls?" He sounded shocked. "Baby, there aren't any prettier than you—I told you, it was me. I was scared. You were just so...perfect. You had everything going for you, and you cared about me for me. I couldn't handle that. I was sure I didn't deserve it, that I'd only fuck it up like my father had fucked up his life, so I didn't even try. Now I see that the only way to fail is not to try at all. I was never worthy of you, Eleesha, but I am trying. This is my fourth and long, Spitfire. It's a miracle throw, but it's one last shot. At you. At happiness. You're a princess, Spitfire, you're class all the way. I could never do better."

"No, I'm just a slut. Everyone laughed at me. You used me, and I let you."

"That reflected on me, not you. Eleesha, look at me."

She forced herself, running makeup and all.

"Eleesha Greene, I truly do love you, and I truly want you to marry me. That is, if you're crazy enough to have me. And furthermore, you look so incredibly, totally out of this world in that dress, I don't think I am going to be able to share you tonight with anyone else."

Eleesha laughed, sniffing. "That's good, because I am not exactly ready for prime time here."

"Actually, I was more concerned with having to fight the rest of the men off with a stick."

She rolled her eyes. "Just tell me if we get married, you're not going to be this sappy all the time?"

"I'm afraid so. Except when I'm spanking and abusing you, that is."

"Oh, goodie. Exactly how long is this deal supposed to last?"

"Not long," he assured. "Seventy, eighty years tops."

"Well, you gave me a decade off. I guess I should be thankful for that."

Ross whirled her about for a swift smack to her sequin-covered ass. He meant to deliver a second, but she covered herself with her hands and took off running. They chased each other around the room like a couple of teenagers 'til at last she dove straight onto the bed.

Ross leaped on top of her, pinning her on her back. They were kissing in seconds, their hearts matching rhythms. Outside the sun was setting. The party was starting downstairs but neither cared. They had their own party going up here. And tomorrow, they were getting married.

Epilogue

The DJ had just announced the first dance. Well, not exactly the first dance, but at least for the purposes of the reception it was. Ross and Eleesha's friends were on their feet cheering. Martha loudest of all. As promised she'd been maid of honor. Eleesha fully intended to let her catch the bouquet, as well, especially as she had her eye on a young wide receiver, a former teammate of Ross' who was among the guests for the spectacular event.

Since the two were already married, the service had been just a formality. It was the party everyone was waiting for. Ross happily took his bride of six weeks into his arms. She looked lovely in the off-the-shoulder white dress. He wore a dark blue suit and white boutonnière.

One would think there were few surprises at this point, but actually each had promised the other a very special nuptial present.

"I love you." She clung to him, feeling so at home in his arms.

"I love you, too," he replied, having learned to let the words roll quickly and easily off his tongue in recent days.

Back at the table, in their seats of honor, they squared off, each offering the other a small flat shirt box.

Eleesha opened hers first. Inside she found a golf shirt, royal blue with her own company logo on it. While it was certainly nice enough, she wondered what made this so special.

"There's a note," he pointed.

She unfolded the piece of paper. "A little something for your first day of work...as CEO."

Eleesha looked at him. "I don't understand."

"I bought the company," he grinned. "Well, not me alone, but a group of investors. Former players like me, with money in the bank. We put our heads together and figured this was a good investment. We also figured on you as the right one to steer the ship. If you're interested."

She threw herself into his arms. "Oh, Ross, thank you. You won't be disappointed."

"I hope not," he embraced her. "'Cause I'm not as forgiving as the others. They'll just cut back on your bonus. Me, I'll put you right over my knee."

"Oh, I hope you'll do that no matter what," she crooned. "Now it's your turn."

Ross attended to his own box. Inside he found a shirt, too. He held it up to great laughter. It was a Blazers shirt, a golf shirt, fire engine red and silver, the team colors. "Now I can root them on in style when I go see the games," he said.

Eleesha shook her head. "Sorry, dear, but you'll be a little busy. You're not going to wear that as a spectator."

He cocked his head. "Spitfire, you know I'll never play again."

"You're not going to be a player either." Eleesha raised her glass. "Folks, I'd like to offer a toast. To my husband, Ross Maclean. The new quarterback coach of the Blazers."

Hoots and hollers went up throughout the room.

"Finally," shouted Lyle. "We can have a winning season again."

Ross frowned. "Eleesha, I don't know a thing about coaching. And how did you arrange all this?"

"Sure you do. It's all in your head, and in your heart. You're a natural. Trust me. And I'll fill you in on the details later. It's as good as in the bag. A done deal."

"I wish I had your kind of confidence in me," he said.

"Oh, I'll make sure you believe in yourself, every step of the way."

"And if I break out in cold sweats and throw up my first day on the job?"

“Then I’ll be there to hold your hand,” she laughed. “Just like you’ll do for me the first day I have to go in and actually be the boss instead of just another peon who gets to bitch about everything.”

“It’s a deal,” he nodded.

She leaned over and took his face in her hands. Never had she been hungrier or more ready for a kiss in her life. They both knew the real challenges were just beginning. Two new jobs, and a baby on the way. But they’d make it, because their love had already stood the test of time and distance.

Besides, where would either of them find someone else so perfectly suited for playing Come and Get Me? The way the two of them saw it, they would have a lifetime of fun, adventure and sparring.

Even if they would have to come up with a G-rated version of how they met to tell their grandkids.

About the author:

Reese Gabriel is a born romantic with a taste for the edgier side of love. Having traveled the world and sampled many of the finer things, Reese now enjoys the greater simplicities; barefoot walks by the ocean, kisses under moonlight and whispers of passion in the darkness with that one special person.

Preferring to remain behind the scenes, cherished by a precious few, Reese hopes to awaken in the lives of many the possibilities of true love through stories of far off places and enchanted lives.

For the sake of love and hope and imagination, these stories are told. May they be enjoyed as much in the reading of them as in the writing.

Reese Gabriel welcomes mail from readers. You can write to Reese c/o Ellora's Cave Publishing at 1337 Commerce Drive, #13, Stow, Ohio 44224.

Also available by Reese Gabriel:

Dance of Submission

Kimberlee's Keeper

Roping His Filly

Temporary Slave



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

www.ellorascave.com