

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Dance of Submission



DANCE OF SUBMISSION

An Ellora's Cave Publication, February 2004

Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.

PO Box 787

Hudson, OH 44236-0787

ISBN MS Reader (LIT) ISBN # 1-84360-803-0

Other available formats (no ISBNs are assigned):

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

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DANCE OF SUBMISSION

Reese Gabriel

Chapter One

He was pointing straight at her.

The most beautiful man Persephone had ever seen. Half-Polynesian, half-Anglo, utterly naked save for a strip of white cloth tied round his firm waist. With or without the pair of mai tais, she'd have been resilient as gelatin in his presence. All that tattooed skin—muscles bulging in that sensual, uniquely Pacific island way—the pale brownness offset by slightly elongated, sapphire-blue eyes, features like an exotic cat in the firelight. Gorgeous. Untouchable.

Or was he...

Again the finger beckoned, that of the bare-chested dream man, his hair blacker than the sky, pouring untamed down his corded back.

Her imagination ran wild with possibilities. None of them G-rated, none of them even remotely realistic.

"Go on, Sefy," urged her troublemaking girlfriend Stacy, pushing her forward into the fire-ringed circle. "He wants you."

"Yea, come on," agreed the equally traitorous Debbie. "Live a little. It's our last night on the island."

They held her upper arms, preventing her planned escape back to the relative safety of her hotel room. "I am living," she squealed, digging her bare heels into the sand. "Quite happily, I might add."

"As an old maid, maybe," snorted Stacy, who'd roped her not only into viewing this corny outdoor dance show, but the entire week's island vacation as well—a vacation, which, in Persephone's opinion, had been a colossal waste of time and money. "Now are you going out there or do we have to confiscate your PDA and your laptop till we get home?"

"You wouldn't dare and besides..."

Sefy's arguments, and everything else on her mind fizzled as he took her hand. It was not merely a holding of her flesh, but an enveloping, the fingers warm and firm, so much bigger and stronger, entirely possessing hers and yet not in the least bit threatening.

I will never hurt you, the fingers said, but watch out because I'm interested in you and I may not want to let you go.

Sefy's feet were powerless as he eased her forward, into his orbit. He stopped her just short of himself, settling her into a position and proximity that made the rest of the world spin away into insignificance, a galaxy or more away.

His body was like a carnival to her eyes. Everywhere she looked were delights to capture her attention, from the tiny gold rings inserted in his masculine nipples to the incredible array of body designs, gorgeous patterns covering one whole arm, his torso and most of his hard, powerful thighs and legs.

The ink was black and blue and red and green and she could just lose herself looking at the fire flickering over the ever-changing figures, creatures and symbols. What did they all mean? She wanted to know them all. More than that, Sefy wanted to kiss and lick every inch of his delectable skin. Was that the influence of the silly umbrella drinks, she wondered, or just the result of a starved libido?

How long had it been since anyone had made love to her?

He was saying something to her now, smiling coyly.

She couldn't understand a word, but who cared? Just watching those full, masculine lips move, each and every syllable radiating outward like invisible fire, the cheekbones high, but not feminine, the jaw strong, masculine and bold, was a heaven all its own.

An enigma. That's what this man was.

And he was beautiful, too. Had she mentioned that?

"Fire dancer say he want to make dance with you," interpreted the curly haired, Hawaiian shirted character with the swelled, poi poi belly who'd been acting as master of ceremonies for the torchlight tourist show. "Special treat, just for you. Called *Luatey*."

That must be Polynesian for 'embarrass the socks off the tourist girl', she thought.

"Lady like to dance?"

"Hell, yes!" Stacy answered for her.

"Go on," coached Debbie. "Tell him."

Sefy nodded just to shut them up, winning an immediate wink from the beautiful tattooed man that made her blush from head to toe. Standing here before such a strong, virile creature, she felt entirely too underdressed and underprotected in her lemon yellow bikini and sheer wrap.

"Hey, everybody," the announcer chanted in his charmingly broken English. "How 'bout big hand for pretty lady. She big sport, right?"

Sefy could hear Debbie and Stacy squealing in the background, leading the crowd of about fifty in a healthy round of applause. Really, she'd never done anything like this in her life. A bookworm all through school, and now a grown-up international banker, she'd shunned the limelight and the party life. Everyone else told her she was wasting her natural good looks, but as far as she was concerned, her long, wheat-colored hair and mannequin shaped figure only got in the way of serious pursuits.

"Dance begin with girl," said the announcer. "Girl move hips, show to man."

Persephone felt the heat rise to her cheeks. She hadn't bargained on being put on exhibit right off the bat.

"Come on, Sefy!"

"You go, girl."

Great, her own personal rooting section of sadists.

Persephone made a pathetic, minimalist effort. With any luck she'd be booed right off the stage, ending the thing before it began.

The tattooed hunk had other ideas, however. Catching her entirely off guard, he reached for her slender waist; his large hands lightning fast in the superheated air. Sefy gasped as he did the hip moving for her, demonstrating exactly what it was women did that looked so good to him and the rest of his gender. She ought to be infuriated that he was touching her without permission, but it kind of turned her on that he hadn't asked, that he'd been bold enough to seize her body and do with it what he liked.

Besides, who could argue with a man who looked like him?

As long as things didn't get out of hand. Again, she was aware of too much nudity, the hard heat of him burning her flesh through the intervening air as their crotches gyrated in synchronous movement. It was clear he was being careful, holding her at arm's length so as not to touch his sex to hers, but there was no denying her all too easily available flesh. It was a decidedly one-sided situation. She herself would never dare reach for his loincloth, and yet she knew the fire dancer could strip her in a matter of seconds, rendering her nude to his gaze or anything else he might wish to impose.

"Girl move good," commented the microphone man.

Sefy was beyond hearing the cheers of the audience. He had drawn her in, and there was no way back. It was in his eyes: the beating of her own life force, and in the touch of his strong hands, the strength of which was giving her the power to stay on her feet. For some reason, this man had suddenly become the center of her world.

Desperately, now, she looked to the lines of his smile for the approval she needed and craved. Was she really doing this right? Was he sorry he'd picked her and not one of the other girls—either of her sexy girlfriends or maybe one of the lovely native girls, all of whom were so much prettier than her?

"Second part of dance. Man see backside."

A flood of insecurity washed over Sefy, mingled with more than a tinge of resentment. Why was she the sex object here? Why was it always this way for the female? Maybe she'd like to inspect his ass for a while.

Before she could register a protest, the fire dancer lifted her off her feet and whirled her like a ballerina. Sefy felt a play toy to him and that just made her madder. He was a bully, that's what he was.

"*Lu-atay* is very old dance," the narrator was saying. "Once upon a time, it was used for sacred purpose by island prince. For selecting mate; woman known as an *isina*, who would submit to him in all things and live with him forever."

Sefy's ears perked up, her brain re-activating back out of what was dangerously resembling blonde bimbo mode.

Had he just mentioned submission?

Not on my watch, she vowed, moving to pull away. That might be fine for the natives, but she was a twenty first century woman, a professional who'd fought hard to get where she was.

The fire dancer refused to let her go.

"Let me go," she whispered fiercely, wanting to avoid a scene.

He clamped her waist more tightly.

Should she scream?

"I mean it; I'm done here."

Sefy gasped as he pulled her flush against him, back to front, the motion smooth and natural-looking under the shadowy torchlight. Could they tell in the audience what was going on? Did they know that the hard cock of their half-naked entertainer was now pressed into the crack of the ass of their suddenly helpless volunteer, whose scanty swimwear was leaving no doubt in her mind as to the man's shape and size—or his intentions?

"Girl move backside," encouraged the master of ceremonies, his voice crackling over the sound system like some bizarre version of the little devil that sits on people's shoulders in the cartoons urging them to do bad things. "Like in real *Lu-atay*."

All at once the fire dancer's confining fingers were gone. She could run now. He'd taken a step back, which meant he wasn't forcing his erection against her any longer, wasn't teasing her with the muscles of his thighs against the soft, feminine back of her legs or sapping the strength from her, making her want to lean against him and melt till they were fused, two bodies into one under the torch tainted moonlight.

She could run, it was true, but she didn't want to. Or rather her legs seemed to have gone on strike.

Her girlfriends must have been oblivious to her plight, because they were calling for her to continue, Stacy motioning for her to remove the wrap and keep the fun going.

Against all reason, as if watching herself in a movie, Sefy found herself complying, unknotting the silk wrap with the numbed fingers of her left hand. The garment slipped down her legs, falling to her feet. Now there was only the one layer of protection left, the tiny scrap of bikini material with its frivolous little bows that a man could slip open, or if strong enough, tear in his fingers.

She heard the girls again, telling her to shake and shimmy her body.

Yes, Sefy was supposed to move for the man. The man who was right behind her, legs apart, his cock hard, waiting for her. What was it the narrator had called this? *Lu-atay*, that was it; the dance where a mate is chosen for a prince. The woman who would submit to him in all things. Such a terrible word. Were there limits on that? she wondered. Did she have any choices, in or out of the bedroom, or was the girl destined to be little more than property? A virtual slave?

Sefy flushed. Submitting to a man was something she could never do. If she shook her ass to any male, it would be out of insolence. And wasn't the brash Stacy always telling her to do precisely that, to use her body to get whatever she wanted from men?

"They use us, honey, why not use them?" was Stacy's motto.

But Sefy couldn't do that. Least of all when the man in question seemed to her so strong and so completely...*dominant*.

Was that the right word?

Then again, what did she have to lose but another frustrated night with her laptop and her dog-eared romance books?

Sefy began to gyrate, very slowly. Could the audience tell that she was moist between her legs? Could they see the bullets that passed for nipples under her top? Thinking how all these people were watching made it hotter for her, especially when reinforced by the idea that it was all for him, for the fire dancer's enjoyment.

Such a man would never settle for polite modern notions of dating or political correctness. He would make his woman do and say precisely what turned him on. He would force her to be feminine, and in turn he would be for her the man that her heart craved. If chosen, she would have no choice but to serve, to surrender, to be down to her core a shimmying, swaying, tantalizing dream of pleasure.

"In olden days, every eligible female on island participate in *Lu-atey*," elaborated the quite modern-looking native. "It was great honor. Girls strip naked; seek to please prince. He see how they move, how they look and so on."

It was the "and so on" that got her thinking.

And moving away from her man again, apparently.

His hands reclaiming her hips were a wake up call.

"Oh, please, no," she begged piteously as he dragged her back into place, no longer certain her body would be able to deny him anything. "It's obscene...unbearable."

She was against his cock once more, held fast and firmer than ever. The man might as well be inside of her for all the control he had now of her poor, spasming body. One movement, one little shrug of his hips and he could set her writhing into orgasm. How was this possible, especially for a girl like her, usually so slow to warm to male attentions? And why weren't her friends picking up on this? He was damn near raping her with clothes on.

But it wasn't rape. The fire dancer was just standing there, letting her body touch his at precisely the place where they naturally fit, driving her so completely wild in the process that if something didn't happen soon she'd be tearing off her swim bottoms for him and either bending over or laying herself in the sand for penetration, not caring who saw what.

"Only one girl chosen, out of so many. Imagine, ladies and gentlemen. One girl only to belong to prince for life. To be his *isina*. To bear his children, to obey him in all things,

serving in humility and devotion, his sacred possession, treasured by him above all things.”

Sefy felt a wave of hot weakness—a combination of his overwhelmingly masculine closeness and the provocative nature of the words being spoken. The notion of being kept by a man as his ‘treasured possession’ was preposterous to a contemporary woman and yet she’d had fantasies like this, even read books about it. About strong warrior men who swept women off of their feet, honoring and fulfilling their femininity. Driving them wild sexually, invoking in them all their deepest passions.

But books and fantasies were not real life.

The fire dancer was on the move. A palm, broad and flat slid across her belly and settled, like a brand. Was it her imagination, or was his cock getting larger? Everything was out of proportion. She was forgetting herself in the moment, forgetting the fact that tomorrow she must go back to her settled little life as a currency expert.

How she hated this place, and this man for mixing everything up. Her capture dreams belonged at home, in her bathtub where she played with herself at the end of each day, reliving mundane events and people and altering them to suit her fancy. Altering herself, too, from a respected professional into the sort of woman whose worth came only from her looks and her ability to give pleasure to men.

Above all to one man, who would emerge from the crowd and stake a claim upon her. Giving her no choice, but forcing her to yield to her own deepest and most desperate needs to feel, to give and surrender. Frequently she sought to imagine such dark heroes from among the suit and tie types she worked with at the bank, or even the rougher crowd of service men in the building. She would dream of them, taking her, stripping her of her clothes and making her serve their lust, making her crawl like a bitch in heat from man to man, dealing with their hard virile cocks. As fantasy material, all fell short, however, particularly her disappointingly new age, divorced and vegetarian boss, Daniel Taylor, who was forever seeking inroads into her personal life.

What she was looking for, of course, were the sort of men who were now extinct. Men belonging to some other world or era, men undiminished by civilization, men who still dared to be men and sought to make their own fate, with their own hands. A struggle to the death. And by their sides, their soul mates, consorts to give them honor and pleasure. How many times she had given herself in the bath to such creatures? To bearded, bare-chested pirates, golden-haired Vikings and sword-wielding ancient warriors.

To men like this mysterious, longhaired Polynesian.

Sefy knew it was a mistake to reach behind her head to touch the man, to try and wrap her hands round the back of his neck. Somewhere she had a vague idea that her action would bring him to touch her breasts or slip his hand down the front of her swim bottoms. All it accomplished, however, was a wolf whistle from the announcer and a mortifying comment to go with it.

“Girl move good. Girl like dance. Maybe she go home with man tonight.”

Go home with him. Now there was a thought. Sefy had been lonely for so long, with only her fantasies for comfort, masturbating in her bathtub for hours on end, her cat Marble mewling and scratching at the door to come in the whole time.

Let it not be a dream, she prayed, let it be true that I'm here, close enough to feel this man's heart beating, the blood thundering in his veins.

And let him be kind.

Dimly out of the corner of her eye Sefy saw her little cheering section, though she was too far-gone to respond. Her entire body was like molten lava, her nipples little points of flame, her sex a volcanic maw. Even in her private sessions she'd never been this alive, and certainly not with any other lover, and yet here she was, in public, on display. As wanton a wench as ever graced a beach.

And it was all his doing. She felt nothing but awe for this man—this firelight warrior for whom she danced, the only one who'd ever been strong enough to bring her, nay, compel her, out of her shell.

"Girl move very, *very* good," chuckled poi poi man knowingly.

Yes, but were her skimpily covered buttocks enough for him? Could he bare her pale skin, so sickly compared to his own? Again, she thought of the other girls, the many exotic island wenches he must have at his beck and call.

Suddenly Persephone hated them, all the girls he'd ever had, and all the ones who'd ever even tried to captivate him, their tight little bodies enticing him to their conquest. She'd bet the little hula girls in the show would like to be in his britches if they weren't already, and that was just for starters.

What kind of foolishness was it, though, to feel jealousy for a man she didn't know? She wasn't his plaything, his girlfriend or anything close. What did she care who liked him, and for that matter, what possible difference did it make to her if he found her pleasing or not? In the end this was just a silly tourist dance and soon, very soon, it would all be over and she'd never see him again. This nameless god of a man whose heartbeat so mirrored her own.

"Girl is perfect," the host cried. "Give her big hand!"

Sefy was jolted back to reality by the sound just in time to feel a wave of hot embarrassment. What had she been doing with herself? A sheen of sweat covered her body. She was chilled and overheated at once; she was exhausted, aching from her performance, which, in retrospect, had contained little more dignity than that of a stripper.

"Now come fun part, ladies and gentlemen!"

Oh, goody. Like they hadn't had enough fun at her expense already?

"Fire dancer use juice of *la-ura* fruit."

The announcer handed over a sliced open purplish fruit, similar to the one served earlier—about a thousand years ago, it seemed—cut up in her mai tais.

Sefy watched as her swarthy, fate-chosen partner accepted the gift, holding the grapefruit-sized spheres above his breasts like a homegrown bra.

Well, this was interesting. Did he plan on turning himself into a drag queen?

“Girl taste *la-ura* juice,” enthused the announcer.

Sefy felt the blood drain from her face. Her friends had grown strangely silent. You could hear a pin drop on the sand—if ever one would bother to do such a thing at a beach.

Surely he was jesting.

Sure enough, the juice trickled down the tattooed chest as he squeezed the fruits, creating tiny rivulets, one over each of his generous pectoral muscles. The bright liquid meandered playfully down, respecting only vaguely the channels and pathways outlined by his body art.

Sefy felt a little queasy as she watched it drip as far down as his belly button. The sweet, sweet juice, waiting to be licked, dabbed at by a female’s tongue—her own, in fact, for tonight Miss Persephone Landers was playing the part of wanton, would-be slave to his ancient island prince.

It’s all a game, she told herself. You’re an independent, modern woman on vacation half way around the world and he’s just a pretty boy hired by a hotel whose stock, if she could get upstairs to her cell or laptop, she could easily acquire for her burgeoning 401 K.

But what a game it was. A lonely blonde, half naked and fully displayed in her arousal, being led and seduced by the subtle power of the drums and the not so subtle appeal of the glistening, tattooed musclemen to do things she would never dare to do at home. Not even in her most vivid of daydreams.

“Shy girls who do not obey prince and please him with their tongues are punished,” teased the master of ceremonies. “On their bare behinds.”

Obey. Such a potent word. Far too rough and dangerous for modern society. If she were ever to marry, she was going to be sure to exclude it from the service. Her bathtub fantasies aside, she intended to be the equal of her spouse. In every arena, especially the bedroom.

And that didn’t begin to cover the notion of punishment. On her bare behind. With what? His hand? Was she a child now?

All of Sefy’s unanswered questions pointed to her cutting her losses and running for cover right now. On the other hand, she didn’t want to break this off. Not yet, not after coming this far. Heart pounding, nerve fibers in electrified stalemate, she held herself in place, waiting to see what, if anything would happen next.

She dared not breathe as he dropped the fruit and came for her.

His touch was light as a feather. Employing only his thumb and forefinger beneath her chin, he drew her up on tiptoes, lifting her head, locking their eyes. Why hadn’t she

seen before how deep were those azure discs, and how intelligent? His muscles, formidable as they were, were nothing compared to them.

For the second time in the night he spoke to her in his native tongue. Sefy felt herself soothed, comforted like a small child. At once her panic began to recede. She belonged here, at this moment, and this was the man meant to guide and lead and direct her. Persephone closed her eyes, drawing a delicate breath as she prepared to proffer her lips and tongue. As tall as he was, his nipples were at exactly the right height for her to reach them.

His skin tasted divine, the flavor that of juice and of man and of power.

Were her friends shocked to see her licking the chest of a total stranger? A tattooed mystery native who seemed to know more about her than any of the fools she'd dated in her life, including the man who at one time was supposed to have been her fiancée?

The juice, mingled with the fire dancer's essence—spice and sea and salt and wind--was a kind of wine unto itself. A sharp and pungent flavor which might as well have been called perdition, for that is precisely what she was, wonderfully lost, even as humbled herself, tending to him and making of his body an object of adoration.

For his pleasure. And her own.

A tiny moan escaped her throat as he caressed her shoulders. She needed this touch right now, desperately, for the tattooed man had put himself at the center of her existence and her every heartbeat, her body's every sensation was for him, from the dull ache in her long neglected nipples to the warm wet roiling in her crotch, whose scent was as thick in the air as the *la-ura* fruit.

A decision now stared Sefy in the face. Did she dare bend and go down as far as his belly button or lower? He was hard beneath the loincloth, she knew that, and he was stained with the *la-ura* in his secret places. Why not clean it for him, while on her knees?

Sensing her intention, he curbed it, firmly positioning her on his nipple, his hands at the side of her head. Whoever this man was, he knew how to handle a female. Politically incorrect as hell, of course, but how could she deny how he made her feel?

Needy, and achy, hungry, enough to caress every inch of his flesh with her tongue pleasing him so that he might choose her; so that her body might become his in every sense of the word.

"Imagine, ladies and gentlemen, what it would be like: The prince has danced with many women now, and he is close to making choice." The announcer was talking in a low, dramatic whisper, heightening the tension. "Listen now for the drums of passion."

The sound of the men's palms slapping those big, tightly stretched skins was a sharp, jarring tease to her poor, untouched and throbbing pussy. Choose me, she heard the drumbeat say. I am ready. Let me be the one. Show me the world within my own body, the heat and fire only you can unlock...free me even as you imprison me in your love. Let me bloom as a flower, brilliant and beautiful under your tireless protection, vigilance and passion.

Choose me...my lord.

Was that what one called an island prince when one became his lover, his *isina*, and possession for life?

Her heart froze. He was angling her for a kiss. She couldn't afford that. It was too dangerous. She'd never be able to resist him afterwards and then he would have total power over her. Sefy had to escape. This was her last and only chance.

"Watch closely, ladies and gentlemen, this is it! Watch closely!"

His lips came to her in slow motion. Unstoppable. Beautiful, like a bird of prey soaring through the heavens.

"You see, she is the one, he claims her!"

Being kissed by this man was like touching the fire, being burned by something so dangerously irresistible, something you could not help but be attracted to even though it sears you to the soul.

It was a hot dry kiss, but somehow it slaked her thirst nonetheless, pouring life into her parched being. She was a shriveled moth, incinerated, then reborn. He was her breath now. More than anything she needed this, needed the sheer contact male to female. Hot and fast, even vaguely forbidden, out here in the open with all these people watching. Her own girlfriends included.

On tiptoes, she felt the electricity surging. She didn't dare touch him or respond in any way. What would he do if he sensed a green light from her? A man like this would stop at nothing short of her total conquest.

And what if he did? Conquer her, that is.

Sefy clenched her damp little fists at her sides, right against the pretty, girlish ties of her suit bottom, the ones that made her feel so sexy and vulnerable because she knew how easy it would be for this man to strip her naked while she wore them. Or she herself, for that matter. Indeed, she wanted to touch herself so bad right now, wanted to rip off her suit, to thrust her hands over her hot breasts, cupping and molding them like a man would and then, with her fingers, penetrating below, making herself come over and over.

And she wanted him to see it and be aroused by it. And then she wanted him to take her. Right there on the sand, melting her down with caresses, demolishing her, skin to skin, making her understand his language, teaching her what was behind those eyes and that devilish smile as he pummeled her with his impossibly hard and throbbing cock.

Alas, it was not to be.

As unexpectedly as it had begun, the kiss ended.

"One more Big hand for pretty lady! She big sport! Have big heart!"

The tourists were clapping. Debbie and Stacy were cheering. Sefy gave a little gasp as the Tattoo Man lifted her into his arms, taking several bows, cradling her effortlessly in the process.

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, more magic fire dancers; come from many faraway islands to entertain you!”

A trio of loincloth clad men ran in front of them, accompanied by a large cloud of colored smoke and some flashing lights directed from the little booth where the announcer was working. Sefy closed her eyes against the sudden sensory overload, instinctively burying her head against the big man’s chest.

Somehow in listening to the sound of his heart beating, she lost track of the fact that they were moving. By the time she opened them again they were at the nearby beach, the moonlit waves washing up over the fire dancer’s ankles, arrayed like silver flags, unfurling across the sand.

Sefy should probably have been afraid, because he was still a stranger, but somehow she sensed that she could trust him. For whatever reason, in the midst of it all, under the light of stars and moon, in her deeply burning belly, Sefy knew this much was true:

Masterful and powerful as he was, he would never hurt her.

Chapter Two

The fire dancer continued to carry her along the line of fine white sand till the shoreline turned inward into a lagoon that Sefy was pretty sure was not open to the public. There was a steep cliff behind the beachhead, topped by lush greenery. At the base of it, between two large stones, set like lions on either side, was an opening in the rough gray stone, some ten feet high and two feet wide. It was the mouth of a large cave through which the man now carried her. For a brief second Persephone imagined this was a palace and he was indeed the prince, bringing home his prize. His *isina*.

The inside of the cavern was enormous. Torches were set along the rough-hewn walls, casting an eerie glow. The floor was made of chiseled marble, sheets of it jutting on top of one another like stone waves. To the rear was a shimmering tidal pool, lit by torchlight and surrounded by its own miniature beach, the sand bearing a reddish hue. Next to this pool, stretched over the crimson sand and surrounded by candles, she saw a large piece of silk, brightly colored and decorated in exquisite patterns.

Sefy's pulse quickened. Had the man been anticipating bringing her or someone else to this Stone Age bachelor pad?

"*Ka-lu-yaney*," he whispered now, as if the incomprehensible word should somehow make everything clear in her mind. He looked down into her eyes, and Sefy fought back against the feel of him, his smooth skin, wet with sea foam, and the scent, too; salt and musk and fire, together forming an unmistakable mixture of brazen masculinity.

Oh, god, he was laying her on the silk on her back.

"I need to get back to my friends," she exclaimed, her mind desperately fighting the images of what could happen now between them or more precisely what he might choose to do to her. "They'll be looking for me."

"*Ka-lu-yaney*," he repeated, unfastening the loincloth at his waist.

All thoughts of leaving were crowded out at the sight of him naked. One look at that penis was enough to make her head spin. So smooth and well proportioned, deliciously uncircumcised. And so large. Could a woman take such an organ inside of her? Especially one as small as her? And those testicles, full and heavy with the thick white seed she knew must be inside him, their full roundness crying out the potency of his manhood. Persephone had never before imagined herself tasting or licking a man, but in this case, she found herself literally craving him. Indeed, he looked good enough to eat, with that dark tuft of hair at the base, and the glistening drop of pre-come at the end of his cock.

She ought to feel terrified. A naked man, this strong, in the middle of nowhere could do anything he wanted to her. Take whatever he desired. And yet he seemed to be waiting upon her somehow, hands at his sides, long, masculine fingertips grazing bronzed skin at his hips, inviting—no, compelling her—to look at him for his sexual value. As a lover.

Such a contradiction, this dancing native! Everything about him was so regal and supreme. Victory and competition exuded from every pore. There wasn't anything he couldn't do, she was sure of it, and yet there wasn't an ounce of swagger in his stance, not a bit of the cockiness she'd seen in lesser men.

Sefy swallowed hard as she realized the awful truth. If this man were going to claim her tonight, and she had no idea how to stop him, it was going to be because she needed him more than he needed her. Not an enviable position for any female, and yet secretly, what woman didn't desire to give herself totally and shamelessly to someone stronger, someone who wouldn't lose control, no matter what?

"I-I can't stay," she tried to explain. "This," she gestured expansively to indicate the cave and also the situation as a whole, "is no good. You. Me. Can't happen. Do you understand?"

A wry smile played over his lips. How magnificent he looked standing above her, a pillar of strength, a human sculpture, nude in the torchlight, his eyes flashing like stars, his mind oblivious to her language and her culture, and yet seemingly in tune with her soul in uncanny ways. Why did he look at her as if they had met before? Was it his imagination or was he claiming destiny on his side?

This was a casual, accidental encounter—nothing more. It would lead nowhere. For that matter, maybe she was dreaming. Where else could a woman conjure a package of perfect masculinity in such an ideal locale? One pinch and she'd be awake. Back in her hotel room, back in Kansas, back at her neat little desk, playing with her nice little foreign exchange rates. Only she didn't want to be pinched. Not quite yet.

"*Ye-ta-ri-isina*," he said.

Isina. There was that name again, with all its exotic, mysterious implications. It was supposed to be part of an ancient legend. Why was he using it now? Sefy felt a tiny spark of resentment. Did he think he was going to possess her, a modern, twenty-first-century female as if she were some simple, primitive island girl from the days of Captain Cook?

If I'm going to resist, she thought, it's going to have to be now.

"I would like you to take me back to the hotel," she sat up, packing as much punch in her voice as she could manage.

The dancer put a swift end to her rebellion. Lowering himself onto the silk, his hands gripping her upper arms, he restored her gently but firmly to the horizontal position. The action was a powerful and highly erotic reminder of their true relationship. Though he hadn't exactly kidnapped her, he had claimed her. There'd been a dance to solidify things and some fun and games under the firelight, but the time

had come for him to enjoy his prize. The longhaired god-man was going to take her body; he was going to make love to her according to his desires.

Sefy rebelled at the idea, but a secret part of her was thrilled, too. One look in his eyes, one feel of his hard body alongside hers said it all. He intended to take her, to make love to her. It was going to happen, here and now.

Would it change her, she wondered to be had by such a man? Was she already being changed, just by being in his presence? In her heart she feared the answer. The Polynesian had spotted her in the crowd, pointed at her and called her forth. Men had wanted Persephone before and made plays for her affection, but none had so thoroughly manipulated and controlled her like this. He had obviously wanted her alone, weak and aroused, at his mercy – and here she was fighting to keep her wits. Sefy rebelled at the thought, but at the same time she was secretly thrilled. He had seen her, captured her and now he would conquer her.

Persephone shivered at his initial touch, a graze to her cheek, surprisingly delicate, but filled with a charge that was almost electric in its intensity. Were it not for his heartbeat, so close to hers, she feared she might well fall off a precipice, never to return. Such a paradox, this physical connection that felt so uncannily familiar and soothing and yet which promised to do things to her body she couldn't even dream of.

He smiled, watching her nipples tighten in response. If he went much further, she would not be able to refuse him anything and they both knew it.

"Isina," he breathed, as if confirming the fact.

Sefy had no power to resist his lips on hers. Though her brain told her this was wrong and dangerous, her body craved the sensations. All he'd given her before and more. Instinctively, she parted for him, giving him full access to her smaller, female mouth. His tongue claimed instant access, hungrily filling her. She drank in the taste of him, the sweet smell of the fruit, mixed with sand and sky and the deep musky scent of manhood tinged in island spices.

Closing her eyes, she arched her neck to receive him. A little further...she'd let him go a little further then she'd shut him down, demanding he take her back to her room. Back to Debbie and Stacy, back to her lonely, loveless life.

"Ye ta ri," he punctuated the kiss, his hand behind her neck, gently teasing, but to a purpose.

Desperately, she tried to focus. Her brain was so fuzzy. He tasted of *la-ura* juice, and sea salt. He was like a quenching drink, but he made her thirsty, too. He had such strong, masculine lips, but they were full and red and downright...beautiful.

Oh, god, he was undoing the tie of her bikini top. She shook her head, moaning her protest, but the words went directly from her mouth to his, the hot, dry seal between their lips and faces perfect now and unbreakable.

Without interrupting his oral ministrations, he tugged at the flimsy material, effortlessly exposing her breasts. Her freed nipples tingled in the cool, moist air. One by one he flicked the nipples, exquisitely, delicately, the tip of his finger telling the story of

what was to come. Sefy arched her back, the tension on her swollen nubs like a telegraph to her already moistened sex.

The fire dancer met the challenge, pulling her tight to his chest. Skin to skin, the heat was passing through them with the speed and vigor of fire. Sefy couldn't help but wrap her arms round his neck, couldn't help but want him to do more, to kiss her harder and in different places. A million places all at once.

He seemed to sense her needs. Abandoning her lips, he moved to the little spot at the side of her neck where she'd always been so sensitive, even as a child. The Polynesian was rewarded with a low groan, barely audible. Seemingly emboldened by his initial triumph over his fair captive, he ventured to the hollow of her breasts, kissing her firmly, passionately, but without a hint of force.

"S-stop," she clasped his head, none too convincingly. "Please, I want to go."

Her left breast fit in his mouth like a morsel. A succulent fruit to be suckled, just like the *la-ura*. When he finally reached the center, taking the tender nub between his teeth, Sefy was so charged she cried out with pleasure. He had her on the verge of orgasm, and he hadn't even touched her below the waist.

There was no denying what would happen next. With a single hand, he gathered both of hers, pinning them above her head. He was causing no pain and yet it was evident there was no escape. Like a small, trapped rabbit she looked into his eyes with awe, seeking the reassurance she needed, the solution to the riddle of the contradictions she felt inside.

His exotic features radiated a quiet confidence no woman could miss. Or resist. His deep, deep blue eyes told her he had been down this road before and he knew its end. Her instincts told her he would see her safely through, and she must let go, for there would be no going back.

As she'd feared earlier, the tiny laces at the sides of her bikini bottom proved nothing more than a taunt, a delicious invitation to her stripping. Without releasing her hands, he pulled them one by one then flipped down the panel, bearing her tortured, throbbing sex to the midnight air, to the warmth of the torches and the blaze of his touch.

For agonizing seconds he made her wait, letting her anticipate. Soft moans escaped her throat as she imagined the feel of him. Unable to help herself, or to control the action, she began to writhe, lifting her body—helpless, confused, aroused beyond all sensibility. She didn't want this, she wanted to go free, and yet her burning body told a different story.

Again he kissed her, branding her hot and hard. Only dimly was she aware of him taking her bikini bottom and using it to tie her wrists together over her head.

A shiver passed through her as the implications sank in. She was secured now, in bondage and in a moment, he would have his way with her. More reassuring words followed from his lips, unknown but undoubtedly symbolizing what was about to transpire.

Surrender. He was speaking of her surrender. To a beautiful stranger. A raven-haired man whose skin danced with magic images, whose eyes beckoned to unseen worlds and whose will had claimed hers in an obscure dance, by firelight half a world away from her home. Once more, he took between his lips the aching nub of a single rosebud nipple, this time as prelude to cleaving her sex. Sefy was slick and wet for him, her trepidations in no way confirmed by this open invitation from her pussy.

She expected penetration by his manhood, but he was not yet done fanning her flames. This fire dancer knew how to love a woman, of that there was no question. His fingers, having trailed enticingly down her quivering belly, were making straight for her delicate lips and between them her delicately engorged clitoris. With the cruelly taunting friction came a fresh flood of feminine juices along with a groan, deep and soulful as he teased at her, the tip of his cock just touching her lips.

Sefy cried out, putty in his hands, her fists clenched, her hips raised from the silk, but not enough to close the gap. Wonder filled her eyes and also defeat as she beheld him looming over her, his magnificent cock and balls poised to penetrate, just as she'd imagined him doing since the moment she'd laid eyes on him.

Seconds passed like hours between them. Slow torture. How would it be? Fast and furious, a slow deep plunge to her depths? Would he make her come right away or extend it on and on, out here in the middle of nowhere?

The answer came in the form of a decisive thrust into her silky hole. Sefy took him to the hilt, as if she were made to hold him. His chest crashed down upon hers now, crushing her breasts and signaling the beginning. Her skin was aglow beneath him. Sucking in her breath, she clenched the walls of her vagina around him, craving more, needing more—most especially in the form of deep strokes to put her out of her misery.

"Yes," she hissed as he reared back and descended a second time. "That's it."

But it wasn't it. Withdrawing nearly completely, he held himself aloft, palms on either side of her torso. The intensity of his eyes liquefied her as much as his cock. What was it about this man? How was he able to look at her this way and touch her this way, as though they'd been intimate for years when really they were strangers, utterly unknown to each other until a few hours ago?

"P-please?" she finally begged.

He smiled, like he understood and buried himself once more.

It was only the beginning of her torture. As the lovemaking continued, Sefy was given no quarter. Again and again he claimed her opening, each time making sure to drive her mad between thrusts. She rose to meet him each time, blatantly offering her bound body, a living sacrifice to his lust.

It was, in many ways, a natural extension of the dance, her proffered beauty bared and spread for his pleasure. For all intents and purposes, the dance had already come true, the symbolism, the tease under the fire having played out in flesh and blood. She could scarcely believe that it had come to this, tied by his hand with her own swimsuit,

placed upon her back, opened and entered, spasming, awaiting only the slightest push, the tiniest impetus from him to allow her to come hard and fast.

Was this what it was like to be an *isina*, the consort of a powerful prince, his captive both by law and by passion? To be possessed and treasured, used as an object, a vessel to bear him children, subject to his command, his authority and to the reigning heat of his will?

A woman like her could never endure such a thing, could never accept it, and yet at this moment she had no care for her freedom, her life or anything other than to be fulfilled in this man's embrace, to live in his eyes, to bring pleasure to his handsome face. Indeed, his eyes were closing, and a small smile crossing his face. He was going to come inside of her; he was going to fill her with the white-hot seed of his love.

Sefy surged beneath him. Her silent and mysterious island lover would not orgasm alone this night.

"Oh, lover," she moaned, though they were little more than strangers. "It's so...incredible."

Bringing her arms down and around his neck she clutched at him, not daring to let go. She could feel the power surge through his veins and muscles. Unleashed, a force like this might fell a man who was twice her size, but he was channeling it all into a single focused point of pleasure, heat radiating all over his flawless, glowing skin, like the power of creation itself. Absorbing and branding her flesh, melding her as one with his own life pulse. Tiny clutches and nibbles and moans were all she had left. Where she ended and he began she no longer knew. It was all a matter of trust now, blind and total dependency that wherever he was taking her, to whatever unseen world, he would bring her home safely.

Over the edge of a purple and green and yellow waterfall, a waterfall of pure light and fire. Greedily, she drank of it, swam in it, rolled and crashed with it. Downhill and up, all sense of direction gone. Lust stripped to its essential nature, the ribbon of life twirled, and unfurled. The perfect, perfect fuck.

Sometime later, maybe seconds, maybe a lifetime, they descended to earth, like the silver waters crashing on the shore outside the cave, like the fire crackling into the moonlit sky. Sefy lay spent beneath him, her mind drifting across a thousand seas. He remained above her, inside her, his strong body protecting and enveloping hers. Never had she felt so safe and secure.

And so horny. Still.

To her amazement, so was he. Undiminished, he withdrew just long enough to turn her over, tucking the back of her knees toward her tummy, ass in the air.

"*Ka-ah-lur-isina*," he pronounced, taking her all over again from behind.

"Yes," she moaned in reply, his hands clutching her hips. "Take me."

Cheek pressed to the silk, knees drawn up, her still tied hands before her in an attitude of prayer, Persephone yielded to another orgasm, toe-curling, mind-blowing and earth-shattering.

I am going to die from pleasure, she thought, though in the end it was not like death at all but rather like waking from a long, long sleep.

* * * * *

Jairan Toko-pele Menoa Rivington returned the sleeping girl discretely to her hotel room shortly before dawn. It was not a permanent parting, but only a strategic withdrawal. Though she did not yet realize it, Persephone Landers was already his property. Being a girl of pure Western blood, it would take her time to understand her new status, her place as treasured possession. As his *isina*.

Her old life was effectively over, and all her struggles and agonies along with it, though she would scarce believe it if told so now. Job and money worries, bad hair days, traffic nightmares and, of course, whatever men troubles she might have, all of this was past tense. Never again would a man break her heart, dishonor her or steal a kiss. Under his protection, and his loving discipline, she would know only bliss, the deepest pleasures of her body and soul, at his hand and his alone.

It was not merely his hope that this be so, it was his responsibility. And also the law of his island. For it was the case, literally, by the right of *Lu-atey*, and by her own submission in the cave of love, that the American was his to hold and honor and provide for, under pain of his own death. And someday soon the evidence of this reality would be engraved upon her golden flanks, in the form of tattoos, designs of her slavery that he would choose to enhance her beauty and further inflame his loins.

Jairan regarded her briefly from the doorway on his way out of her room. Curled up into a ball, naked under the covers, her face more like that of a sleeping child than a grown woman. There were no words to describe the feelings she aroused in him with her quintessentially feminine contradictions. A girl at once so full of passion and yet so withdrawn, untried, as if no man had ever truly opened her for love. It had taken great dint of will for him not to prematurely complete the female's conquest this night. Had he but pressed the matter the tiniest bit, she would have offered her own wrists for marriage shackling, her own shapely buttocks for the engraving pen. But that would be a shortsighted victory, hollow in the end. In a few short weeks, when the honeymoon of captivity wore off, he would be dealing with weeping and wailing as well as the fruit of that vicious temper he was quite sure lay beneath her soft, blonde exterior.

No, he would have to conquer her with much more thoroughness, eliminating those more deep-seated elements of her nature that would resist his domination. Better to tend to matters on her home turf, that she might see clearly how he did indeed own her—her thoughts and feelings, hopes and dreams, and above all her will.

How hard this was, to let her go—even for a second! The feelings of manhood she inspired in him, already, were so much more than sexual, so much deeper than the trappings of modern social custom. He would lay down his life for her, suffer any pain,

go without sleep, surrender his fortune. She was his *isina*, the sun that rose and set over his humble existence. How could a man not treasure such a creature, knowing she was his, nude to his eyes, obedient to his commands, utterly subject and devoted, even as he was devoted to her?

Fighting back the overwhelming desire to have her again, to cover her in kisses and declare his devotion with cock and mouth and tongue, Jairan left her now, returning to the beach to scoop a bit of the sand of his mother's race. Intoning a dawn prayer to his ancestors, still clothed in the cloth of the dance, he sought blessing for his upcoming trip to the girl's homeland, the vastly different United States of America. He hoped the old spirits would approve of his choice in the *Lu-atey*, if not his methods.

Choosing a girl who'd agreed to partake in *Lu-atey* was one thing. Manipulating a girl who had no clue what she was doing and using her temporary seduction as grounds for her permanent enslavement was another.

A wry smile came to his face. The deviousness, the relentless determination to get what he wanted in whatever way was required was a trait he definitely got from his father, the late Simon Rivington. Fifty years ago, the wealthy young playboy had come to this island and fallen in love with and married a genuine princess, his mother, Le-leiki Menoa. He'd seen his mother only in the pictures, with her jet-black hair, down to her waist and her big, soulful eyes. Though barely five feet tall, the pretty young girl had been born with a will of iron. Thus it was that she insisted, prior to accepting Simon's proposal of marriage, that he participate in the *Lu-atey*, sampling the nude charms of all the other girls, in order to insure he was obtaining the best female flesh available.

To insure objectivity, she insisted her fiancée be blindfolded. Simon was heartbroken at the prospect. How could he be sure he would choose the right gyrating ass, or recognize the exact tongue dabbing playfully at his breasts?

That was the point, she said. If they could not be sure of objectivity, than the choice would be tainted. To everyone's amazement, the Englishman actually identified her, even without his sight, thereby proving that the girl had so obviously been born to be his mate.

The cheeky Le-leiki hadn't survived Jairan's birth, though his father had kept her memory alive with fierce devotion.

It was for that reason young Jairan had spent so much time here as a child, learning the old ways. Though he was by birth the prince and heir, Simon insisted he come by respect the hard way. Thus was the young lad pushed to be strongest, bravest and first in all things. As a result, he grew to be a man of great business acumen as well as a revered warrior and ceremonial dancer throughout the neighboring islands.

The best word, perhaps, to describe Jairan would be self-sufficient. For there was in him no great emptiness that required him to live in deference to another. He could easily have lived alone. Just as his father had done for the remaining twenty years of his

life until succumbing just this past year to the cancer that ate his brain. Watching his father live, and die, by his own wits had been a strong lesson.

Then again, Simon Rivington had also taught him never to close his eyes to serendipity, either in the financial markets or in his personal life.

Persephone Rebecca Landers was exactly such a gift from heaven.

It wasn't her physical beauty. Lovely blue-eyed blondes came from America by the boatload, quite literally. Ninety-nine percent of them, though, he wouldn't give the time of day because they were too entirely preoccupied with themselves. More specifically, with how they were affecting the men around them. Such women spent hours dressing for the pool and even when in recline, seemingly indolent, they were busy working to pump blood into men's cocks. The males of their own race, gawking young college boys and leering insurance salesman were bowled over, of course, visibly drooling at the silicone implants, the artificial tans and the strategically placed tattoos.

Look but don't touch, these women advertised, want, but don't expect to have.

It amused Jay in particular how they would treat him when they would see him in the hotel or on the grounds attending to some matter of inspection or supervision. Given his skin, long hair and often casual dress, they would take him for a menial, often bestowing humble tasks upon him.

He would comply, lips thinly pursed, offering a bow, seeing to it they got a drink or fresh towel. Never once did these scantily clad heartbreakers realize that not only was Jairan the owner of the hotel at which they were staying, he was also prince and head man of the island, which meant that according to traditional law, he would be well within his rights to strip and spank such wenches for insolence to his royal person. He'd been tempted more than once, being a firm believer that a few sound swats to the posterior can frequently render a vain and selfish woman immediately charming, pleasant and bed-ready.

But Persephone was not like these others. She hadn't even wanted to show her bikini, though she'd had a natural beauty that exceeded anything he'd ever beheld. Free of implants, her breasts were firm and ripe, and her buttocks were tight, as was her belly. She took care of her body, which was a good sign.

It was difficult to miss the scene three days ago, rather comical at the main pool. The two friends were obviously encouraging her to remove a thick terrycloth robe, and the little blonde, the one they called Sefy, was fighting them tooth and nail.

"No one wants to see me," she was complaining, and she meant it, too—she was actually a woman of humility.

When she finally disrobed, the girl took his breath away. She was like the Venus De Milo standing so serenely in her radiant shyness. At once Jairan knew he must have this creature, conquering her to her depths, owning every inch of her complicated soul, not to mention her red-hot curves.

It was at this instant he pictured her, in the traditional beaded collar of ownership, her body ceremonially tattooed to his specifications and adorned with whatever bonds

he sought to impose. From the hotel record he had determined her name and address. He'd thought of simply introducing himself, even picking her up in the bar, but that would be getting off on the wrong foot.

In situations like that, the woman has the power, accepting or denying the male. Persephone Landers must never be in a position to deny him anything. For while it might be his choice to coax rather than seize, to go slow rather than conquer outright, the choice was and always would be his. He was hunter she was prey.

The hotel fire dance was his golden opportunity. The *Lu-atey* was not a regularly scheduled dance, though neither Persephone nor her friends knew that. Tologo Joe, the good-natured host, didn't bat an eyelash at the last minute addition, first because Jairan was the boss, and second because they happened to be friends from childhood.

"Hey, Jay, my main man," crooned the approaching Joe now, his lame tourist mumbo jumbo dropped in favor of his own flawless English. "Was that a hot time in the old town last night, or what?"

"Yea," he replied in equally fluent English, clapping a hand on the man's shoulder. "And thanks. You did beautifully."

"You, too," he grinned. "I saw you sneaking back from the cave with her. Mission accomplished, huh?"

"No," he shook his head. "Not yet."

Tologo Joe looked at him curiously. "You didn't get any sex?"

"It's not about sex. It's about the sacred commitment of *Lu-atay*."

Tologo Joe laughed, but noted quickly that Jairan wasn't. "You are kidding, right?"

"No," he shook his head, much to the dismay of the disbelieving Joe. "I am not. Persephone Landers is the woman I will marry. She is my *isina*."

Joe was silent. There was no explaining such things. Or denying them, either.

Chapter Three

"Okay, Sefy, come clean. Exactly how many pencils is that you've chewed up and spit out today?" demanded Stacy, having barged into her office with Debbie in tow

"I'm not counting," she replied glumly.

"Well we are," said Debbie, "And we've decided it's time for an intervention."

Debbie and Stacy were coming at her in stereo, propping their shapely bodies on either side of her desk like bookends. Sefy knew she'd get no more peace the rest of the day. It was like the pair had this radar, knowing when she was most in need of privacy to work out her thoughts, and then promptly spoiling it.

"Yep," agreed Stacy. "We need to work on some of your issues."

"Give me a break," Persephone groaned. "Can't you two ever find anyone else to practice your amateur psychology on?"

Stacy, in a red dress and matching pumps, her hair in a bun, grabbed for the pencil holder. "Nope, you're a full-time job."

Sefy reached for it in a vain attempt to suppress the evidence it contained.

"Ah hah!" said Stacy, showing the contents to pony-tailed Debbie. "Just as we suspected."

Debbie's eyes widened. "Omigod, Sefy, you're like a pencil serial killer."

"It's not my fault," Sefy frowned, full red lips pouting. "I can't help it if they don't make them as strong anymore."

Stacy, as always, cut to the chase. "Honey, you'd snap a redwood as sexually frustrated as you are."

Sefy clamped her skirt-clad legs together, hiding still more evidence. "I'm just fine in the lovemaking department. If you must know, I'm tense about the yen this morning. It's not holding up so well against the euro these days."

Stacy pushed down her glasses, the ones she wore only for work. All three of them were in the same department now, which had its plusses and minuses, mostly minuses.

"The only yen you have is for some big, Polynesian cock. Honestly," Stacy crossed her arms under her torpedo breasts, "if we'd have known you'd end up mooning over that guy for the rest of your life, we'd have let you stay in your room all week and masturbate."

"I wasn't going to masturbate, Stacy. Why do you have to be so crass?"

"Me crass?!" she snorted. "I wasn't the one sneaking off to play Tarzan and Jane in some cave for a whole night."

"It just came naturally," she protested, regretting for about the millionth time ever telling her friends about her encounter with the stranger. "And lest we forget, who was it sent me – no, forced – me to go up and dance with him in the first place?"

"It was supposed to be just for a little fun," Debbie pointed out. "Not anything serious."

"Yea, no one told you to make yourself the man's love slave," said Stacy exasperatedly.

The words hit Sefy hard, making her relive yet again the feel of the fire dancer's hands on her body, hot and searing, marking her, getting deep inside so that she couldn't help but betray herself. Not to mention his lips and tongue and the swelling shaft of his cock, delving into her over and over, to the tune of four separate orgasms for him and who knew how many for her over the course of an endless night, which she had prayed would never end.

"Whatever," Persephone rolled her eyes dramatically. "Now if you'll excuse me I have work to do."

Neither girl budged.

"You make it so complicated, Sefy," Debbie emptied the pencil pieces into the trash. "Why can't you just admit you have the hots for this guy and move on?"

'The hots' as her friend so bluntly put it, didn't begin to cover all that Persephone had been thinking and feeling about her mystery dancer. For starters, she'd been more furious with him than with any male she'd ever encountered – and that was going some given her track record with the opposite gender.

He'd flat out manipulated and taken advantage of her in a vile, physical way, is what he'd done. She was pretty sure the whole thing wasn't even legal let alone moral. Tying her up, forcing her to come over and over, using her like a sex toy.

Right from the start, he'd embarrassed and humiliated her, tricking her into acting like some kind of cheap floozy onstage and then he'd topped it off by spiriting her off like some tramp for a night of nameless, cheap sex. She would never be able to show her face on the island of Surapay again, especially not at the Rivington Hotel. She could only imagine what all those nice Middle American tourists, with their disposable cameras, fanny packs and neon water shoes thought of her after seeing her throw herself at a half-naked native.

No doubt they'd been there in the morning, too, to see him bring her back, flush and spent in his arms. Thank god she'd had the presence of mind to feign sleep as he carried her or she'd have had to deal with the man face to face.

An ancient island dance, my foot, she thought bitterly. A cheap come on is what it was, the sleaziest she'd ever heard. She just bet he had a good laugh, too, with his buddies afterwards, some little hula girl on his lap while he told them all about the foolish American girl he'd tricked into bed, had his way with and dumped off without so much as a goodbye.

As if he'd even given her the dignity of a bed. Or even a roof over her head. Some might call a torch-lit cave romantic, but not Persephone. That night, that place and that man meant nothing to her.

In fact, she'd been ready to tell him that, in case he decided to come running after her as they left for the airport. She'd been more than ready to bite his head off and give him a good tongue-lashing. Because that was all she wanted from him, a shot at revenge, a chance to tell him to go to hell and laugh in his face as he begged her for another opportunity to make love to her.

And she'd tell him off, right now, today, too, if she saw him, because he was a smug, arrogant, devious bastard with no couth, no manners and no appeal to her at all.

Never mind all the masturbating she was doing thinking about him. That was beside the point. Irrelevant. Completely separated from reality. Picturing his naked, fire-lit body, his hard muscles, the dimples, the handsome, smooth features, the cobalt eyes, the perfect sculpted, cock, none of that meant anything. One could get stimulation from all sorts of images, even images of people one disliked or hated. Really, she was just using him as he'd used her, by letting him stand in for the real hero in her submission fantasies.

Honestly, though, her new Polynesian fantasies were turning her on like nothing else in her life. Even now she was wet, just thinking about giving herself upon the beach, dancing nude for him, enticing him to lift her once more to the heights of ecstasy. It is always him, of course, who holds the power. She knows she must excite him with her body, enticing him to ravish her, lest he be displeased and offer punishment. He is strong with her, this shadow dancer, he is the true man in her life, and unlike the males she is used to, he treats her as a woman should be, keeping and possessing and dominating.

But also loving, her, standing beside her and never ever leaving, not even when she is bitchy and difficult.

She could hear him calling even now, his voice a hot whisper in her ear, speaking that lyrical, sensual language of his. If only she were alone right now, she thought, she could touch herself and think about that night all over again. How masterful he'd been, putting her as he wished, tying her hands, letting her know that he was in control and that he would give her pleasure and take it from her according to his own designs, his own whims.

Desire turned to frustration. There was nothing she could do with these two in her office. And even if they weren't here, what substitute was her hand for the body and beating heart of a man? A warrior, born of the drumbeat, bold enough to steal her from the beach, to steal her body and maybe even her heart. Not the real man, the brute, but the imagined one, the one who finds her deeper heart, making her want to give herself.

Oh, never mind. It was all too confusing.

Like a nicotine addict, she began to rifle her top drawer for a fresh pencil. Finding none, she let out a soft grunt of frustration.

"I'm pathetic, I know," she buried her head in her hands before her pretty young interrogators. "Why do you even want me for a friend, anyway?"

"Cause you make us look good," quipped Stacy, as always trying to make her laugh.

"You're not pathetic," cooed Debbie, reaching forward to stroke her hair. "That guy was way hot, and the truth is, Stacy and I are both jealous that he picked you over either one of us."

Sefy looked up at them sniffing. "Really?"

Stacy snorted. "Are you kidding me? For a chance at a hunk like that I'd have crawled around that entire island twice in the buff, howling like a puppy dog on all fours."

Sefy wondered if the girl was serious about subjugating herself to the whims of a powerful male. Probably not. Other than a few surprise fucks in the mail room with the overnight package guy, the well-proportioned Stacy stuck to older men, whom she could control with exquisite precision.

"Sure," quipped Sefy, pretending it was no big deal. "And I'll be right behind you."

"Fine," said Debbie. "So next time, I'll spring for knee pads and we'll all be fine."

The three enjoyed a laugh together and then the conversation shifted to other things. The new guy Debbie was eying in legal and that sale down at Jasper's where you could get the most darling sling backs for ten bucks as long as supplies lasted.

Until this exact moment, Persephone hadn't realized just how lonely she was. Even in the midst of these, her closest friends, the ones she spent most of her waking hours with, she still had to hold back so much of who she really was. They couldn't know her real desires, how submission and domination wasn't just a lark, or a rare spice to try out on occasion, it was the main course and without it, she was starving in bed, and maybe in life, too.

The trouble was finding a man she could trust. One who would understand this part of her and not exploit it. One who could be a wolf with her in bed, but still tenderhearted the rest of the time.

When the phone call came for her to go and see Daniel, her erstwhile boss, Sefy feigned annoyance. In truth she was happy for a chance to get away and be alone for a minute with her thoughts. And her desires. If only she had time to masturbate on the way, she lamented.

The man's door was open and she went right in. Daniel had a corner office, overlooking the biggest skyscrapers in the city. At the moment he was steepling his fingers, eyes tightly shut, apparently practicing some new meditation technique. With his sandy blonde hair, gray eyes and earnest features, the forty-five-year-old wasn't the most unattractive man in the world, and yet she couldn't help but find him unbelievably dull and tedious.

She was pretty sure he had a crush on her, though he'd never actually made a play for her affections. Sometimes she wondered what the man might be like, outside of his blue suits, away from work, his short hair let down. At dinner, say, or a party. Or maybe even in bed.

"Daniel?"

He looked up focusing through his small, round spectacles. There was a perpetual furrow to his brow, as though he were forever attempting to solve a particularly difficult crossword. "Miss Landers," he addressed her, his voice stiff and formal as ever. "Are you familiar with Rivington, Incorporated?"

"Originally a hotel chain, founded by Simon Rivington. Since diversified into entertainment, tourism and real estate, mostly Pacific Rim and Europe but branching out into North America," she quoted her internal databanks, more often than not a curse to her peace of mind. "Why?"

Daniel continued to study her for a moment, the steel gray eyes intent, curious. "You stayed in a Rivington hotel on vacation recently, did you not?"

Her pulse quickened a notch. "Yes, what of it?"

"Apparently the CEO, Mr. Rivington himself spotted you there and identified you as one of our employees."

Sefy felt the blood drain from her face. When exactly had the man seen her? She could only hope it was not that final night. The night of mai tais and madness. "Daniel, I assure you, I did nothing untoward."

He cocked his head. "He hasn't made any complaint, Miss Landers. Quite the contrary; based on his observations of you he would like to do business with our bank. Quite a hefty amount of it, in fact."

Sefy blinked. "I didn't do any seminars or press the flesh," she read the question in his eyes. "If that's what you're wondering. If we even met, it went over my head."

Persephone winced internally at her choice of words. There had been quite a bit of flesh pressing, actually, the result of which had been the greatest, most incredible sexual encounter of her life, one she expected never to equal again as long as she lived.

"I wasn't wondering anything, Miss Landers." He kept his tone neutral, judicious, revealing once again why he'd risen to such a high place in the bank and why she was likely to stay a junior analyst her whole career. "Although, it does seem we are confronted with an interesting situation."

"What situation?"

Taylor cleared his throat, the sound barely perceptible. "He will only deal with you, Miss Landers. Not only that, he insists you spend the week with him, showing him about the city and so forth."

"I'm not a tour guide, Daniel. We have people to do that sort of thing."

He crinkled his lips, looking down at his interlaced fingers. It might have been amusement on his face or it might not. "Mr. Rivington would like to house upwards of

a hundred million dollars under our collective roof, Miss Landers. Provided you accede to his request."

"The nerve," she stiffened. "I'm sure you said no."

Daniel allowed a few seconds or so to pass. It was a corporate pause, the sort employed before delivering bad news.

"It's a difficult economy, Miss Landers. This kind of money, I'm sure you'll agree, does not grow on the proverbial tree."

Sefy could see where this was leading and she was not going to stand for it. "You didn't tell him I'd do it, did you?"

"Miss Landers, my hands were tied. This one went right to the top. Rivington called Mr. Sandoval, the president, personally."

"I don't care, Daniel. Don't you see that this is exploitation, pure and simple? Let's be honest, here, okay? Some old, half-blind coot saw a blonde he liked on his beach and now he wants to drool over her at close range for a week and write it off as a business expense."

"Actually, it was poolside," came a deep melodic voice over her shoulder, "and if I may beg to differ, I am neither half-blind nor old."

Sefy looked at her boss in blind terror as the dismal truth sank in that she had just managed to insult a billionaire who stood to be one of the bank's largest customers ever.

With characteristic aplomb, Daniel rose to his feet and bowed. "Miss Persephone Landers, I would like to introduce Mr. Jay Rivington, son of the late Mr. Simon Rivington."

Breathe, girl, breathe. You can do this. Anyway, what could you say now that could be any worse?

"Mr. Rivington," she whirled adroitly on her heels preparing for major damage control, "Please allow me to explain, I—"

Persephone's heart seized in her chest. For a moment she thought she had gone crazy, that she was seeing things, imposing the faces of people she knew onto the bodies of others. But no, there was no mistaking the features. The skin, light brown like buttered, pale chocolate; the eyes, painted in the perfect shade of azure blue to highlight his coloring; the cheekbones crafted by some divine sculptor; the whole effect that much more devastating now that his hair was thickly oiled and pulled tightly back into a ponytail.

And the body, under that three-thousand-dollar, custom-made silk suit with Italian loafers; how could she ever forget that?

"Y-you," she stammered. "Y-you're...him?"

"It's all right, I know I'm not what people expect," he took her hand, covering for her tongue-tied foolishness beautifully. "From the name and my father's reputation

they think I'm going to be something totally different. Fear not, though, I've been to Oxford and the London School of Economics. I know my way around a spreadsheet."

The allusion to spreading brought a hot flush to her cheeks. She'd spread for him all right, and now he was back, apparently for more.

"Miss Landers is one of our finest currency analysts," said Daniel. "She's a graduate of the Harvard Business School herself."

Though you'd never know that by the way I'm acting now, she felt like adding.

"She is a most extraordinary woman, indeed," said Jay Rivington, whose clasp of her hand was rapidly exceeding the bounds of convention. "I knew that the moment I laid eyes on her. And just so you know," he looked her dead in the eye answering her earlier accusation. "It was not the color of your hair, splendid as it is, that brought me here today."

Sefy snatched back her fingers, the red-hot color descending down her neck to her cleavage. Was the man determined to completely mortify her?

"I'm sure that is of no concern to me," said Daniel. "My job is to look out for the interests of this bank. If you tell me, Mr. Rivington, that your comfort level with our services will be raised after a tour from the very capable Miss Landers, then it is my duty to place her in your hands."

Sefy felt a hot tingle down her spine. Did her boss have any clue what he was saying, what he was consigning her to?

"Daniel, there are a lot of projects I'm working on right now and —"

"We'll find someone to complete them, Miss Landers," he said a bit curtly. "Mr. Rivington, is there anything else I can do for you at this time?"

"No," Jay shook his head, the only one of the three who seemed to have any sense of equanimity left. "I believe I have what I came here for."

"I remain at your disposal," Daniel shook Jay's hand woodenly and for the first time Persephone knew without a shadow of a doubt that her boss had feelings for her.

And she might well have some back, if certain people weren't trying to interfere in her life right now, ruining everything.

"It is good to see you again, *isina*," said Jay when they were alone in the hallway. "I trust you feel the same?"

Sefy looked at him in disbelief, not comprehending how a man could be so dense as to think his showing up here would lead to any kind of normal conversation between them let alone make her jump for joy. Grabbing his arm, she marched him down the hall, pulling him into the empty executive conference room.

"Is there a problem?" he asked.

"A problem?" she whispered fiercely closing the door behind them. "I don't even know where to begin, there's so many. For starters, what do you mean by coming here and humiliating me like that in front of my boss? God only knows what he thinks of me now."

Rivington shrugged. "I am sure he thinks what any other man does, that you are the most beautiful woman he will ever see in his life."

Sefy fought back the urge to melt at his feet right there on the spot. "Oh no," she poked a finger at his powerful chest. "You're not getting out of this that easily. You're going to give me some answers. The last time I saw you, you were a native dancer and now you're a billionaire. Which is it, and what in the world would possess you to come however many thousands of miles here just to see me again, anyway?"

"I am both. And you are my *isina*," he said. "I have come to claim you."

She shook her head, laughing without humor "Oh no, we're not playing that little Tarzan game today. Maybe where you come from it's a joke to dress up in a loincloth and woo simple-minded American girls into dark caves, but here we have laws against that sort of thing. Well, maybe not laws," she conceded. "But strong principles, anyhow."

"The *Lu-atey* was no joke. I am not only the son of Simon Rivington, I am the son of the last of the high princesses of Surapay. By right of custom and sacred oath, I am the prince of the island. The right of bride choice is mine."

Sefy was finding the situation more bizarre and comical by the minute. "I think you want one of those reality TV shows," she suggested. "There's a big network down the street. Try them, I'm sure they can line you up a couple of thousand bimbos who would love to be Mrs. Primitive Billionaire Prince or whatever it is you call yourself."

"Thank you for the offer," he said dryly. "But I already told you, I have made my choice."

Her pulse was racing. The look in his eyes, the fierce determination combined with a total, almost bottomless patience was not only angering her it was awakening passion as well. The man looked like he was capable of waiting a thousand years for her and that was a little hard for any woman to dismiss out of hand.

"Yes, well, I haven't chosen squat, so how about if you hit the highway and we'll call it a draw?"

He looked at her strangely. "I'm afraid I don't follow all your American idioms. What exactly does it mean to choose *squat*?"

Sefy rolled her eyes. "It means nothing. Nada. The big goose egg. You get it?"

"I have come to claim you," he repeated. "We will use this week to get a little better acquainted while you get your affairs in order prior to accompanying me home. Forever."

She arched a golden brow. "Suck in a little too much jet exhaust, did you, or have you been hitting the fermented *la-ura* juice again?"

"Neither," he deadpanned.

Sefy held up her hands. "I don't have time for this. You are completely out to lunch and I can promise you the day I set foot on your island again much less agree to be Mrs.

Illustrated Man is the day my friend Stacy dates a man without a stock portfolio and a condo on the beach.”

“It will happen, Persephone. Of that you can be sure.”

“Oh?” she challenged. “How about you give me one good reason?”

“This,” said he, leaning in to capture her lips.

Sefy had no hope of fighting him off. She was too small and frail and besides her body had no will against his. It had sung and danced to his touch once, and now it seemed there were no limits, no safe zone for her, even a half a world away.

A tiny moan betraying her, Sefy arched her neck, giving him access, allowing him to do to her what he willed. Jay held her tight, an instant explosion, body to body, sex with clothes on, their lust only fueled by the intervening silk and polyester of their clothes and the stern, antiseptic surroundings of the office environment.

Sefy felt her knees turning to rubber in his embrace. She hated this man more than words could say. She wanted him to go away and never return, to drop into the sea, to be erased from her databanks, to let go of her conscious and subconscious minds, and to stop filling in all the places in her fantasies, taking the roles of the heroes on her book covers, keeping her up way past her bedtime and causing her to wake up again and again with damp sheets and fragrant moist heat between her legs.

She wanted him out of her life.

She wanted to see him naked.

Like a woman drowning, she threw her head above water one last time. “Jay, this isn’t going to happen again. Not here, not now, not – not ever!”

Jay lifted her by the hips and set her on the edge of the conference table. “Why must you fight your feelings so hard, *isina*?”

“I’ll scream rape,” she threatened.

“Am I doing something to you that you do not wish done?” he raised the hem of her skirt to get at her underwear.

Sefy tried to push his hands away as he tugged at her panties, pulling them down over her squirming thighs. “Jay, you can’t just waltz over here across the Pacific Ocean and make love to me in a conference room.”

“Why not?” he unzipped his fly, pulling his beautiful penis from his boxers.

“B-because,” her mouth watered at the sight of the splendid shaft, smooth, erect and beckoning feminine touch and attention. “It isn’t appropriate in an office.”

How was a woman supposed to resist this? How was she supposed to not want to swallow such a gorgeously sculpted spear of flesh into one aperture or another?

“Appropriate,” he repeated, positioning himself to slide effortlessly into her moist, hot opening. “Such a lifeless and deadening word, don’t you think?”

She clutched at him, drawing him in. “Oh, god,” she whimpered. “This is crazy. What if we get caught?”

He undid her hair, allowing the golden tresses to pour down over her neck. "What a prince does with his woman is his own affair."

"I'm not...not your woman," she gasped, though her bucking hips said otherwise.

"Say the word," he teased, withdrawing his glistening cock to the very entrance of her sex. "And I'll go."

She looked down at it, at him, feeling emptier than she ever had in her life. "Now you ask," she pushed her pelvis towards him, "you devious son of a bitch."

Jay seized her waist, impaling her decisively, the motion making it clear that this time there would be no more choices. "You will come for me, *isina*."

If the manly thrusts didn't undo her, the words did. It was not a request, not an invitation. The man had commanded her to orgasm, as if he were indeed her lord.

"You...don't...own me," she moaned, even as her body responded in perfect, soul-shattering obedience.

It wasn't right, this disparity between them. One simple erection on his part, and here she was, giving everything, surrendering all.

"Deny it, then," he challenged, melding his flesh to hers. "And see what happens. We shall both plunge over the abyss. I am no more a man without you than you are a woman without me."

"I—I hate you," she said, without much conviction.

Oblivious, Jairan took his pleasure, the first spurts of his seed shooting deep within her womb. "Come," he repeated, his teeth gnawing at her earlobe. "Now."

Yes, cried her body even as she tried frantically to shake her head no. Shamefully, needfully, she clutched at him, terrified that she was being reduced to little more than the man's plaything, an amusement for a spoiled billionaire prince, and yet unable to resist his touch, his influence. If only he wasn't this good, if only he didn't fill her so completely and give her orgasms beyond her wildest dreams. This one was like shooting stars, exploding rockets, meteor showers within meteor showers.

Even so, she was determined to yield him nothing.

Clenching her teeth, she tried to hide the evidence, the moans and cries, the obvious spasms. When at last they'd both subsided, however, he was gloating.

"I am pleased," he announced, remaining inside her as he stroked her hair tenderly.

She stiffened against this latest sneak attack on her willpower. If he thought he could cement his position over her now, post coitus, he had another think coming.

"And I could give a rat's ass," she shot back, trying to push him from between her splayed legs. "Now back off, before I scream rape."

"I may not be an expert on such things," he mused, pulling out his come-covered cock. "But wouldn't that be more effectively done during the act than after it?"

"Oh, shut up," she snapped, hating how empty she felt without the man's penis inside her. "And hand me my panties."

Jay was holding them up in the air, taunting her. "Such a symbolic garment, don't you think? Purporting to cover and protect, and yet in reality providing no obstacle to the male whatsoever. Quite the opposite, in fact, as a female so garbed verily screams to be taken."

She grabbed for the tiny piece of silk, just out of reach. "The only thing I'm going to scream for is security if you don't give my property back."

"No," said the prince, pocketing the panties. "I think I should like you to remain more accessible to me from this point on."

Persephone swooned inwardly at the implications. The man was denying her the right to fully cover herself, so as to give him better sexual access. He was taking control of her body, just as he'd said he would.

Covering her alarm—and the fresh rush of sexual moisture—she cast him a hateful glance. "You're a bully, you know that? I hope you sleep well at night, knowing you can boss around small, defenseless females."

He lifted her chin, compelling eye contact. "I sleep like a baby, how about you?"

Sefy burned red. Whether he realized it or not, he'd darn near exposed the secret of her long, lonely nights spent dreaming of a masterful lover. "You think you can get the last word," she spat. "But you can't."

"Yes," he ushered her out the conference room door to take her to lunch. "I can."

Chapter Four

Sefy made a point of sitting across from the prince in the back of the stretch limo, out of range of his wily hands, not to mention other parts of his anatomy.

Naturally, he was dissatisfied with the arrangement.

"You will sit next to me," he decreed. "Your knee touching mine."

"Oh, no," she shook her head. "You and I both know where that will lead."

"And where is that, *isina*?"

She rolled her eyes. "To sex, Jay. Just like every other time we get near each other."

"And this would be bad?"

She tried to keep her voice steady. "Yes, Jay, it would be very bad."

"On Surapay, your life will be given over to pleasure. Sexuality will permeate your being and radiate out of every pore."

"Sounds just peachy. While we're on the topic of the future, have you given any thought to the sort of investments you'd like to make with us? Currency is my field, but I assume you're interested in the markets. We have experts, particularly in commodities."

"You will come and sit beside me, *isina*, or I will come and get you."

"You wouldn't dare," she blanched. "And stop calling me that. I don't even know what it means."

"Literally it means 'little princess in chains.' Now are you coming over here to me or do I have to come over there?"

Sefy felt faint. Is this what she was to him? A diminutive creature to be locked in irons? Not wanting to push her luck, feeling off base enough as it was, Persephone relented, taking up her place beside the tall and somber prince.

"This is more like it," he pronounced.

Almost immediately his hand began to stray up her leg to her inner thigh. She tried to brush him off while giving a brief outline of investment opportunities in the Pacific Rim area.

"China has vast potential," she pointed out. "And South Korea as well."

"Put your hands on top of your head," he told her.

"What?"

"The command was simple enough. It does not bear repeating."

She stared open-mouthed. The next thing she knew, she was complying, leaving her body defenseless against his predations.

"We do have to consider tensions with North Korea," she attempted to continue, only to find herself under full assault, her skirt flipped up and her sex penetrated with his index finger.

"Jay," she cried out in exasperation as he zeroed in on her clit. "You can't just keep using me as a sex toy twenty-four hours a day."

"Wait, don't tell me," he unbuttoned her blouse with his free hand to expose her bra. "It's inappropriate. Isn't that the word?"

"N-no," she fought the arch in her back as he teased her swollen nipple through the silk. "It's perverted."

"There is much to learn about your American mores," Jay noted, unzipping his pants to reveal a fresh erection.

Sefy looked at him in wide-eyed disbelief. "How can you possibly be ready to do this again," she gasped. "It hasn't even been a half hour."

"I have always been this way," he shrugged, shedding his jacket and unbuttoning his shirt "My father was the same."

"How lucky for your mother," she said sarcastically.

"She died at my birth."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"You had no way of knowing."

"Who raised you, then?"

"The old man. Can't you tell by my soft and charming nature?"

"I had wondered about you being a little rough around the edges."

"I grow on people, you'll see."

"Jay, please," she resisted his sudden onslaught of neck nuzzling. "I can't do this right now."

"Give me your hand. Do you feel that?" he guided it to his hardness.

Sefy drew a sharp breath. It was literally pulsing in her hand. So big in contrast to her slender fingers, so rich and dark next to her pale, white skin.

"That is your responsibility now," he informed her gravely. "As my *isina*, you will provide exclusively for my sexual relief, from this moment forward, as long as we both shall live. My every ejaculation, beloved, is yours."

Persephone chewed nervously on her lower lip. "You mean you don't even..."

"Masturbation is forbidden among my people," he answered the unfinished question. "Given that I come four or five times a day, you can understand the necessity of having you close at hand from this point forward."

She pulled her fingers back like they'd been stung. "You mean you expect me to...to service you like some kind of whore?"

He stroked the wild strands of hair from in front of her face. "Why do you equate sexual servitude to your lord and master with something dark and degrading," he

inquired soothingly, "when it is in reality something so beautiful? Each time you feel me erupt inside you will only bring us closer."

"You're not my lord and master!" she tried to break free. "And I'm not about to become anybody's sperm receptacle."

He prevented her escape, his finger brilliantly pivoting in her sex so that her every motion served only to increase her arousal.

"Sit still," he advised the panting, whimpering, shivering woman. "And we shall proceed with your lessons."

"I don't want to learn any lessons," she pouted.

"And yet you already have," he strategically placed a finger on her clitoris, keeping her for the moment under perfect control. "You have learned, for example, that it is futile to disobey me."

"Don't flatter yourself. I can get free any time I want," she bluffed. "In fact, I'd like to see you stop me from jumping out that door right now."

"You are welcome to try, though I don't recommend a crash landing onto the expressway."

"You think you're so clever, don't you? Well, it's high time you learned a little lesson of your own about dealing with American girls, who can actually fight back."

Jay countered the attempted attack to his groin in typical male fashion, pushing her down on the plush, oversized leather seat and sinking himself to the hilt in her silky softness.

"I hate you," squealed Sefy, helpless and penetrated once again. She'd said the same thing upstairs in the conference room, but she felt it bore repeating under the circumstances.

"Hush," he whispered, infuriating her even further with what sounded to her like pure condescension. "You are spoiling the moment."

"What moment is that? Me lying here thinking of all the ways there are I could cut off your dick and feed it the crocodiles at the zoo?"

"You must let yourself go," he began to move in and out with slow measured strokes designed to shatter her defenses with maximum efficiency. "How else will you ever learn to stop and smell the roses?"

"It's not roses I'm smelling," she pushed at his chest, "but something a whole lot less fragrant."

"I smell your surrender, *isina*. Do you deny it?"

"Sex is your answer to everything, isn't it?" she snapped. "Well it's not going to work on me. From now on, no matter what you do to me, I will lie there like a bump on a log."

"You speak one set of words with your mouth," he declared. "But your body speaks another."

"You're a fine one to talk," she glared. "Mister pretend-to-no-speaka-da-English."

Jay withdrew, pulling the head of his cunt-wetted cock into the open air. "Lesson two," he left her suddenly empty and needy. "Never seek to conceal from your husband and master your true sexual feelings, for in as much as your body belongs to him, so, too do your dreams and desires."

Sefy grit her teeth, determined to hold out. "You're wasting your time, Rivington."

Showing once again that he did not fight fair, the prince of Surapay pulled her opened blouse down over her shoulders and with it the straps of her bra.

"No, don't," she gasped, putting her own weak little hands up against his in a total mismatch. "You have no right..."

"Lesson three," he clutched her bared breasts. "I will not relent until you have given yourself to me, a naked offering, upon your knees, your open palms held up to me in the way of traditional surrender, *isina* to master, seeking my eternal love, devotion and domination."

"Never," she panted. "Do you hear me? Never!"

"You are indeed stubborn," he grinned. "And untamed as a wildcat. I had hoped for no less."

"How wonderful for you," she spat. "*Your highness.*"

"One day soon," he bent to suck one of her swollen, traitorous nipples. "I shall make love to you as you lay chained to my bed on Surapay, your body bedecked in shackles and links of purest gold."

"Go to hell," she moaned, exhaling what they both knew would be her last coherent defiance in this latest round between them.

"Your body was made to be pleased by me, *isina*. And to give pleasure to me."

"You bastard," she hissed as he switched to the other nipple. "Just do it, already. Finish me off. Make me a total slut, I don't care anymore."

He taunted her a little longer, throwing her own words back in her face. "Are you not concerned that this is perverted?"

Sefy was bucking like a wild woman, trying to find his cock and put it inside her. She wanted to grab him everywhere at once, she wanted to tear the undershirt off him, to levitate and scream and explode into his mouth and above all to come and come and come.

"Please...Jay...please..."

"Lesson four," he lowered himself at long last, fully, satisfyingly into the tight wet inferno that was Persephone Landers. "You are not in control."

She turned away from his triumphal gaze, whimpering, chewing her lower lip, her fingernails digging ineffectually into the biceps of the man mountain that had taken up residence above her and in her. What a terrible time and place to be a female! He'd slaked the fires a little with his penetration a tiny bit, but she was still ready to explode.

And if he moved again now, even a little, there was no telling what she might do or say, no telling how she would betray herself.

She thought of his words.

I will not relent...until you are mine.

How could a woman fight such masculine will, a man this strong, this...well, for lack of a better word, perfect?

"Look at me, *isina*."

She did so, exasperated at the way he told her what to do, not to mention for his slow, leisurely usage of her body, like he belonged here, like he had all the right in the world to loiter on top of her person.

Far more, though, she was exasperated at the ways her own body encouraged the man, opening for him, beckoning him to master her again and again. What could she do, though, when it felt so good, each time better than the last?

"I shall treasure and honor you above all things," he pledged to her now, picking entirely the worst time to appeal directly to her heart. "Willingly will I guard you and lay down my life for you, worshipping your beauty, forsaking all others till my final breath upon this earth."

That was the dam breaker. Nothing could withstand a tidal wave that big.

Sefy was dimly aware of screaming out his name, of performing acrobatic feats with her legs that would have baffled the Ringling Brothers.

And then there was his voice. "You are mine, *isina*. Move for me. Dance for me."

It was all too much. Much as she hated to yield him such power she could not resist begging aloud. "Jay...oh, god," she moaned. "Hold me. Hold me tight. Don't let me go."

"Never, *isina*. Never."

His words pushed her into an unknown land, even as he clutched at her naked buttocks, his hands red hot like branding irons, nearly as hot as her own internal fires. So much passion, built up for so long. A maelstrom, triggered so accidentally, all beginning with a single dance on a foolish excursion to a nowhere island.

And now she was here, clinging to him for dear life, her lonely and neglected beauty, her true spirit so long hidden and oppressed in this dark land of appropriateness finally achieving its release.

He waited till she had subsided enough that she could once more hear the sound of his voice.

"Well done, *isina*. Now we shall tend to my pleasure."

Sefy opened her eyes, focusing once more on her surroundings, her life. And above all on the fierce warrior who had just pledged to her his life and who was yet, at this very moment inside her.

Undiminished. And as near as she could tell, unspent.

Sefy attempted a swallow down her parched throat. Could it be? Had the man really held himself back through all that? What was he, some kind of android?

"Jay," she shook her head, palms at his chest to hold him off. "No more. I'm exhausted, I give up. Whatever macho point you're trying to prove, you've done it."

And where exactly was he taking her for lunch, anyway, Timbuktu? They'd been in the car at least an hour.

"I have nothing to prove," he tugged the t-shirt over his head. "I know full well who I am."

Sefy's crotch tightened instantly in response to the sight of the man's bare chest. Still, she had a principle to maintain. "We're supposed to be getting something to eat," she reminded in a last ditch effort to regain some semblance of control.

"I intend to," he knelt between her sweat and come-soaked thighs.

Something in his voice suggested yet another trick up his sleeve.

"What is that supposed to mean?" she demanded even as she was compelled to view, in all its close range magnificence, the man's beautifully illustrated torso gorgeously muscled and intensely, exquisitely masculine.

"These are the signs of my manhood," he told her, as if she'd asked. "Here," he trailed a single finger round his left breast and down to his belly button, outlining a stunning yellow and blue snake, "is the mark of my coming-of-age ritual. Three days in the jungle of a nearby hostile island, no food, no water. And here," he touched briefly his pierced right nipple, indicating the epicenter of a red-and-yellow sun with splendid shooting rays, "is the verification that I have mastered the ways of life-giving and of life-sharing, one to another."

Sefy tried to conceal her infinite fascination, or at least her open drooling. "They're very...interesting," she chose the most neutral and minimally polite word she could, hoping it did not show in her eyes how badly she wanted to melt into his body once again, kissing and licking till she herself became part of that design, dancing with the snake, surrendering to its dangerous, poisonous glory, and touching with bare hands the scorching hot sun, feeling it pour over her like raw, liquid fire.

"You, too," he delivered yet another of his stunning little surprises, "will be marked. I shall choose the designs that shall declare to the world my ownership over you."

Her reaction was swift and vicious. "In your dreams, cowboy. The only thing that goes on my skin is vanilla musk and Candy's Secret lingerie, which I save for men that I choose of my own free will to be intimate with."

If he took the hint about himself being an unwanted lover he didn't show it. "You will prepare yourself," he announced, as though it were some state occasion. "To be taken once more."

"And you," she finally found the gumption to start scooting away on her still tingling behind toward the door and freedom, "can prepare yourself to take a nice flying leap off the edge of the nearest high building."

Jay grabbed her ankles and pulled her back, maneuvering her like she was nothing more than a posable fashion doll.

"You're hurting me," she lied.

"Only your pride," he lowered his head between her thighs.

Oh, god, now what was he doing? This wasn't at all what she'd bargained on. Not in a car. Not on a road. Not with him.

"Let me go!"

Her legs were bent up over his back so all she could do was pound her heels. The man was swift and deadly as always, going right for her clitoris. In no time at all, administering the barest few flicks across her tiny, engorged clit, he had her groaning and at his mercy all over again.

As usual, he didn't just want sex, but brainwashing, through more of his idiotic, downright psychotic banter about his precious Surapay.

"When we arrive home, *isina*, you shall be presented in all your splendor, nude to my people. They shall pay you homage and sing to you throughout the night, outside our window as I make love to you, without stop till the dawn."

"I could not care less about your island," she tried to break free. "And I would rather live in the ninth circle of Dante's hell than ever set foot on it again."

"You do not mean that," he offered her the forgiveness she did not want.

"Yes I do!" she exclaimed, but it was already too late.

Cleverly, and deviously, he turned the tables so that it was her on top of him, mounted on his cock as he sat where she had on the seat. She called him every name in the book but there was no way around her participation in the act. With him thrusting from underneath and her bucking from above, they were like two lizards, or dogs or some other kind of animals enjoying pure pleasure where a moment ago they'd been turf fighting--and would be again a moment from now.

Dripping perspiration, crying, cursing, moaning, she continued to writhe at the end of his cock, letting him shake and pummel and suck her into himself. She swore she was going to be washed away in her own juices. How long till the bastard came? Was he a machine or what?

No, not machine, but super human, island god, underhanded backseat bullying, limo humping super wealthy, fire-dancing stud.

"Now," announced Jairan, the sword of Damocles finally set to plunge into her head, her heart, her cunt.

And then the world blanked out, as it always does when you have the best sex of your life. World stopping is what it was, a mushroom cloud, a light flash of earth-ending intensity. And with it, for the briefest sliver of time, crystalline thin, unity,

accompanied by knowledge that whatever else might be wrong with them and with the universe, and whatever the future held, in this climax at least, they had common ground, mutual passport to some unknown land of raw and pure sensuality.

But as it always seemed to with these two, the matter came back again, immediately, to competition and power. For even as they writhed and bucked and melded and traded, her multiple comings for the one of his, they had been laying the groundwork for the next battle in their ongoing war. Infuriatingly for Persephone, it was the stalwart prince who had better managed to keep his head, thereby placing upon the act precisely the spin he wanted.

"You are learning your lessons well, *isina*. We shall have you trained in no time at all."

Sefy was almost thankful to the man for reminding her again so quickly what a manipulative bastard he really was, lest she have any illusions on that score. Once again, he'd gotten what he'd wanted from her and was taking the opportunity to lord it over her.

She removed herself promptly now, with precision and revulsion, treating his flesh with the contempt it deserved. "I'm so pleased," she chimed summoning twice if not ten times the venom contained in his ink snake. "After all," she grabbed her displaced pumps and threw herself into the seat across from him to pull her outfit together. "I live to be your little slave, don't I?"

"I prefer to think of you as my little hellion, yellow-haired, hot as the sun but also as gentle and warming when caught on the right occasion. In all, precisely the sort of paradox a man would want to spend his entire life unfolding. I take it, though, you have some issue with our relationship?"

She shot him one of those glances, of the 'if you even have to ask don't bother' variety. "Gee, do you think?"

Actually those were flat-out the most romantic words anyone had ever spoken to her, but she was not about to let him know that.

"Give me your bra," he said to her, sounding not the tiniest bit recalcitrant. "I should like you to be a little freer at lunch."

"Free for what?" she spat.

"I do not need to explain myself to you."

Sefy frowned dramatically as she reversed herself, re-opening her blouse. Focusing on the details of her actions, she tried to keep at bay the deeper feelings, the sudden response of her nipples and of her loins to his words and to how she was obeying them. How had this happened? How she been reduced to a perpetual state of arousal, meekly surrendering undergarment after undergarment, offering herself wantonly to a man who'd as much as declared her his slave for life, sexual and otherwise?

The unfastening of her bra only served to remind cruelly how she was already nude under her skirt and how she had no power to control the almost constant moisture that was coming with their every interaction, their every verbal exchange.

"Place it on the seat," he inclined his head to a place beside his hip, the right one on which she knew was etched a pale green, purple-eyed dragon, with multicolor wings, fine like a butterfly's.

The silk of Sefy's blouse grazed her nipples as she moved. She could feel the heat off him and if he reached for her or even whispered her name now she knew she would crumble all over again.

Jay didn't tell her to come to him after she put the bra down, so she sat back on the seat, leaning against the dry, cool leather of the unused, unsexed seat. It wasn't until she'd been sitting there a few minutes trying hard not to look at either him or her stolen bra that she felt it. Very small, but undeniably real between her defensively clenched thighs.

Persephone Landers was having an orgasm. Without even being touched.

She could only pray the man would not notice.

Why oh, why, she wondered miserably for the millionth time, hadn't she just walked out of Taylor's office, packed up her ferns and pencils and desk photos of Marble and dropped off her resignation at the front desk?

Because, she answered her own question, I am way too stubborn for my own good. Not to mention way too horny.

Chapter Five

The restaurant was barely ten blocks from the bank office. Which meant the conniving bastard had driven halfway across the state just to get in her pants. Again. As punishment she made him wait at the table as long as possible while she did damage control in the ladies room. Her makeup was easy enough to fix and her hair wasn't beyond all hope. A little mascara, some lip gloss and a hair clip and she was good to go from the neck up. The rest of her was a bit more complicated. Exactly how did you hide erect nipples without a bra? And how was she supposed to keep herself sane with naked loins that juiced every time she moved?

Or even thought about him.

Ooh, how she despised that man. Why should she even care what she looked like? He didn't deserve to see her dolled up. He didn't even deserve to be breathing the same air as her or the other customers out there, none of whom, she was quite sure, had spent the morning molesting their tour guide.

"If he tries anything," she told her reflection. "I'll scratch his eyeballs out."

"Man problems?" a slinky but cute brunette wanted to know. Like the rest of the patrons in this rather exclusive restaurant she didn't look like she'd ever seen the wrong side of a soup line.

"You don't know the half of it."

"Try me," she fished for eyeliner, having plopped her sequined purse on the marble counter next to Sefy's. "I've seen it all."

"How about a wealthy Polynesian prince who thinks he owns your ass—literally—because you did some hokey little tourist dance on an island south of Bali?"

"That," the brunette admitted, "is a new one on me."

Persephone took a deep breath and bid the woman farewell.

"Hey," she called out as Sefy reached the door. "Give him hell."

"Oh, don't worry," she promised. "I will."

It was less of a walk back to the table as a march. What exactly she'd say to him she wasn't sure, but she was pretty sure something would come to her. It always did where this man was concerned.

"I took the liberty of ordering," said Jay rising to help her take her seat at the highly desirable corner table.

"Of course you did," she replied acidly. "It's not like I would have any preferences or anything."

"Would you care for some wine?" He held up the bottle, having resumed his chair across from her at the small, round table covered in fine white linen cloth.

"Why don't you tell me," she shot back. "I'm the slave after all."

Jay filled her glass. "This behavior really doesn't suit you," he decided.

"Oh, and what behavior is that, *master*?"

"That. Right there. That petulant sarcasm. It doesn't suit you. I find it *inappropriate*."

He'd put just enough emphasis on the last word to remind her it was her own, the one she'd applied initially to their relationship. Sefy fought every impulse to throw the glass of Chablis in the man's face. "I know what you're doing," she smiled coldly.

"What is that, *isina*?"

"You're trying to get me worked up. To lose my cool so you'll have even more power over me."

"I need gain no more power over you," he put the glass to his full dark lips, allowing the wine to trickle down his throat. "You are already mine, *isina*."

"I thought I told you already," she complained. "I want you to stop calling me that."

He eyed her now in that way that never failed to disconcert her, making her feel like a sheep in front of a hungry wolf. "Do your lovers dominate you in bed, *isina*?"

She clenched her naked thighs, the words like a sudden thrust between her legs. "I don't know what you're talking about. And I'll thank you to stop changing the subject."

"Do they take control of you," he persisted, making the matter ten times worse with his slow, drawn out explanation, "either by commanding your actions or placing you in bondage?"

Sefy flushed, the words sending searing hot images into her brain. The long sessions in the bathtub, the hot, steamy nights twisted in her own sheets, coming in and out of consciousness, sometimes finding the material twisted about her body suggestively, as if some man had bound her this way, for his pleasure. And always the wondering what would it be like, really, to have a man so devoted to her as to bind her, to move heaven and earth to possess and love her.

But this was fantasy, a dangerous illusion that only got a woman hurt in the face of the reality of selfish, shallow men in a dog eat dog world. Above all, it was nonsense. She would never, ever allow any man that kind of power over her and her dreams, least of all this one.

"That is none of your concern, Rivington, and I will thank you to keep your conversation decent and professional from this point forward. We can talk about sightseeing or banking. Your call."

"Decent," he smiled, "and professional. Another of your relationship words? You have quite a vocabulary of them, it seems."

"We don't have a relationship, Mr. Rivington, in case you're forgotten. As for what happened to us in the car, as far as I'm concerned, that is —"

"I prefer your hair loose," he interrupted mildly.

"Excuse me?"

"You have your hair tied back," he pointed out. "I like it better when it is free, hanging about your shoulders. Like when we were together on Surapay."

She arched an eyebrow. "And I'd like you better if you were on a jet back there right now, but I guess we can't always have what we want, can we?"

He took his time replying, like a cat toying with a canary. "I could, of course," he finished another sip of wine, "call your Mr. Taylor and report your failure to please me."

"Report all you like," she snapped. "I'm not a corporate geisha."

"Many persons in your position would be afraid of losing their job," he pointed out.

"Is that the best you can come up with, Rivington? Blackmail? Is that the way you maintain your power over women?"

His lips pursed into a most infuriating expression. "You tell me," he mused.

She shot daggers. "I'm not afraid of you, Mr. Rivington, if that's what you're after. I can run circles around you. Professionally and sexually. You want to see me with my hair down? Fine. Allow me to entertain you; the perfect blonde sex toy."

Sefy pulled the clip from her hair to shake it loose, the boldness of the gesture surprising even her. It was an act of defiance if ever there was one. "Do you like what you see, Mr. Rivington? Is this what a woman is to you? An object to look at and possess?"

He observed the cascade of golden tresses, pouring like liquid gold. "You are not any woman. You are my woman."

She saw the desire in his eyes. As gambits went, this one of hers was threatening to backfire big time. Not only for what it was doing to him, but for the effect on her. Just seeing him wanting her like this was turning her on, making her want to do even more to advertise herself in his eyes.

"I belong to no one, Rivington. The sooner you recognize that, the less you'll torture yourself in the long run."

"I should like you to run your fingers through your hair for me," he continued. "And lick your lips, as if you were about to be kissed."

Her heart seized in her chest.

"Excuse me?" she forced a derisive laugh.

Jay's face was a mask of passion now, dark and compelling, beyond the pall of any woman to resist. "Show me," he rasped, like a modern Svengali. "Show me your beauty."

Her fingers moved of their own accord. "I won't be manipulated," she was saying, though her voice sounded hollow and faraway. "Is that clear?"

"Show me," he said once again, inducing her to move through the soft tresses, her long nails tingling across her scalp.

"Again, more slowly."

Sefy's curls unfurled for him, layer by layer, every strand springing to life.

"Your lips," he reminded, inducing her to dab her tongue at the impossible dryness, the craving, desert-like dryness.

"What are you thinking of, *isina*, at this exact moment?"

No. He couldn't ask her this. It was too invasive.

"Do you desire punishment for disobedience, *isina*?" he inquired with firm resolve. "I asked you a question."

Her neck was arched, her eyes closed as she performed for him. Punishment? It wasn't possible. She would die first. Die a thousand deaths, one each for all of her fantasies. From the ice palaces in which she'd lain chained in furs, yielding to Viking lords, to the deserts where nomads had torn aside her dancing silks and thrown her down upon hot sands, and the forests, where she'd been run to ground by all manner of creatures, from lusty princes, to hot-blooded ogres and werewolves, all of them wanting to thrust themselves deeply and decisively between her soft pink lips.

But all of that came to naught with the reality of this man. Jairan Rivington. Be it the wine, the persistence of jet lag or just the aftereffects of relentless over stimulation at his hands, it was fact, irreversible, undeniable.

Clamping her spasming, desperate thighs, she fought back the orgasm. "I'm thinking of...you."

"You are climaxing."

"Y-yes."

"Touch yourself, then."

"Jay, no, please."

"Open your legs, *isina*, and do as you have been told."

She obeyed, the cool, conditioned air electric upon her dripping pussy. "You would punish me," she murmured, slipping into another, bigger climax. "If I disobeyed?"

He gave her the answer she needed to get off. "Over my knee, yes, *isina*. Your naked ass, subject to the swatting of my hand."

Persephone placed her fingers against her thrumming sex. "You're a...monster," she was saying in between stabbing breaths.

"Again," said Jairan, showing no mercy.

"Yes," Sefy humped her hand, oblivious to who might hear or see. They were alone, but anyone walking by would know without a shadow of a doubt what was happening. "I wish," Sefy confessed, looking like the most gorgeous creature on earth to the man, "that I could be sucking you."

"You will have ample opportunity," he promised. "The rest of your life."

The implied servitude had its predictable effect, making her shoot like a rocket.

"Yes," she cried, hunkering down. But then she saw the waiter, out of the corner of her eye, approaching fast.

"You will not remove your hand," said the prince, seeing the same thing.

"Jay, please..."

"You will continue," he confirmed. "Until I tell you to stop."

She covered herself desperately with the napkin. The waves were pulling her apart and she was a total wreck, pantyless and braless, sexually overheated, her cunt having poured itself out on the seat and over her hand. She would be lucky if the waiter didn't grab her and throw her to the floor and mount her like a dog in heat.

"Everything is to your...satisfaction, sir?" the man inquired, his eyes straying to Sefy as he pronounced the word 'satisfaction.'

"I am pleased, yes."

"Anything more for the young lady?" he wanted to know.

"She is satisfied, thank you."

Persephone orgasmed yet again. There was no holding her back as she sank her fingers, greedily taking pleasure, like a slut, a whore. And surely that must be what the waiter took her for.

"Will there be any dessert, sir?"

Sefy stifled a moan. The men's voices disappeared into the background as she tended to her female needs. Her surroundings had faded and there was nothing now but doing as she'd been told, obeying Jairan's will. He was the one protecting her; he was the one she answered to.

Shuddering again, she pressed her belly to the edge of the table. It was a whirlwind this time and when she opened her eyes, the waiter was gone. There was just him, looking at her, smugly.

"Good girl," he praised as though she were his pet.

Shaky and blown away as she was, the man's condescending remark was enough to wake her up to reality.

"I do not recall giving permission for you to rise," he observed as she stood.

"You didn't," she wiped her hand on her napkin. "I did."

"You will sit back down, *isina*."

"What are you going to do," she taunted. "Spank me?"

"Warming your pretty little behind is an option, yes," he agreed. "So, too, is confining you, as I deem fit in rope or steel."

She regarded him with as much contempt as she could manage in her weakened and still very aroused state. "You must be insane."

"No more so than the men of your nation, who deny their natural desires as well as their responsibilities to honor and discipline their females."

"This meal, this...everything," she tossed the come soaked napkin down on the table, "is at an end."

"As you wish. I shall have my driver take you wherever you wish to go."

"You're not going to fight me?" She was suspicious immediately.

"I have time, *isina*. All the time in the world. You will not be able to resist me forever, I assure you."

She stuck up her button nose in full blonde indignation. "You can wait till hell freezes over for all I care."

"I will be at the Park Hotel," he informed her. "Though, I warn you, when you return to me, you will face punishment before you are allowed pleasure."

"Fat chance." A quick turn of her hip and she was gone, head in the air, her veneer of haughtiness covering her deep arousal.

"Where to?" the cab driver asked, flipping the sign to occupied.

It wasn't till she opened her mouth to give the address that she realized she hadn't been breathing since she left the table.

"1232 W 56th Street," she said. "And step on it."

Sefy half-expected Jay to follow her with his dastardly black car. The one he used to seduce her, prick that he was.

"Four fifty," said the cabbie as he pulled up to her apartment building.

Her body and sex still on high alert, she looked out the back window. Nothing. Fighting a totally irrational pique of anger that he hadn't thought her important enough to come after, she told the driver to wait while she went upstairs to change.

"I'll be down in five minutes, after that I need you to take me to Central Trust Bank."

The man shrugged his shoulders. If he'd smelled the sex on her, he hadn't said anything. Probably he was used to this sort of thing and worse.

"I'm a banker," she felt compelled to tell him, leaning forward over the seat with her nipples sticking through the braless top. "Not a hooker."

He pointed to the clicking meter, tapping it. "Lady, I don't care if you're the Queen of England, it's your nickel."

Feeling chastised, she hopped out of the car, the foremost thought in her mind being how to pull herself together in a few short minutes in order to protect herself from the prying inquiries of the ever nosey Debbie and Stacy as she returned to work to turn in her resignation.

* * * * *

Jay's cock throbbed at the sight of the shapely posterior retreating dramatically from the restaurant. He decided that Miss Persephone Landers was most attractive when she was furious. She was clearly a woman used to getting her way, and that would pose an interesting dilemma in the future. Maybe he'd pushed her too hard, too quickly revealing the depth of his power over her. While he had no doubt her body craved restraint and discipline, he was well aware there was no telling a proud, independent American woman anything, especially when it flew in the face of all her upbringing.

Facts were facts, though. As his *isina*, she would be his princess and yet also subject to him. His would be the right to correct her verbally, even to punish her. His father, by his own accounts had been reticent to spank or paddle his mother, but there were times when the cheeky princess would herself bring the instrument of discipline and lay it at his feet.

Being more moral than men, and thus more subject to guilt, women want to make amends, his father had explained to him. Also, a woman wants and needs the comfort of knowing she is truly secured, bounded and held by hands stronger than her own. Otherwise, she might as well live with her sisters or stay in the house of her mother. In the culture of his homeland, balancing discipline with love was the great challenge of a husband; one he hoped he would be equipped for.

In this case, for example, the lovely blonde had been practically begging for a spanking over his knee, her lovely, bare ass reddening beneath measured, loving blows, and yet he had determined not push her too hard until she came to fully appreciate her need to surrender. By letting her go now, he would, in other words, guarantee her return. As the elders were wont to say, it was all too easy to crush a woman's spirit, to break her heart. The real challenge was to tame her, to gently bring her into the sort of captivity in which she might bloom into a creature far more beautiful and splendid than any man could ever hope to be.

Pouring himself another glass of wine, for fortification, he resumed eating his half-finished lunch. He was going to stay the course, that much he knew. Ten minutes, ten hours, ten days, whatever it took, he would collect his fiery little *isina* and take her home. With her moods and temper, with her brilliant spark of life, her golden flanks and heavenly body, her emerald eyes and flaxen hair, and above all her passion, which one day would call her to love him with all the fervor she now used to fight him off.

In the mean time, he would have to wait. And deal with rather more pedestrian problems. Like his renewed erection, more appropriate for a man who hadn't had sex in a month than one who'd already enjoyed several orgasms just today.

* * * * *

Debbie and Stacy had to make an emergency call to stall number one.

"Come out of there," tapped Debbie on the light green metal.

"Or we'll have to knock down the door," threatened diminutive Stacy.

"It's all right," she sniffled. "I'm fine."

Of course she wasn't. No sooner had she walked off the elevator on her way to Daniel's office then she'd broken down in tears.

"Like hell you are, girl. Either you come out, or we're coming in," Debbie laid down the law.

"And you know what a mess that will be," quipped Stacy. "One broken nail and Deb will be a basket case."

Sefy relented, walking out miserably to collapse on the sofa in the lounge. Her gray power suit, with crisp skirt, jacket and blouse had been a miserable failure as had been her attempt to keep up her poker face in the midst of a storming sea of emotions such as she'd never felt before. "My life is over," she said dramatically. "I'm ruined. I might as well pack up and go back to Indiana."

Withholding comment for the moment, the girls sat down on either side of her, Stacy in a lemon-yellow dress, cute and short, Debbie in more practical black slacks and white top. It was a wonder, really, how they fit together, similar enough to enjoy each other's company but just different enough to avoid fighting over the same guys. Debbie liked the stolid, practical types while Stacy went for the wild boys and the rich old men. And Sefy, well, she was doomed to a life of reading romance novels.

"Tissue," said Debbie, handing her a bouquet.

"Deep breaths," coached Stacy.

They waited till she regained her composure.

"I'm assuming," ventured Stacy at last, "that things aren't going so hot with Prince Charming."

Persephone sucked on her lower lip and started bawling all over again. It took several more minutes before she could gather herself enough to talk. Point by point, then, steeling herself as best she could, she shared the whole sordid mess. From the lovemaking on the conference table, to the shenanigans in the limo, all the way up to the little stunt he'd pulled on her in the restaurant, forcing her to masturbate in front of the young waiter.

The group was silent for a while once Sefy had wound down, ending with the part about how she'd run out of the restaurant, changed clothes and come back here to quit her job.

"Well, I don't know about you two," announced Stacy at last. "But I don't get it."

They looked at her.

"Well you said the guy's rich, right? And we all know he's handsome, and obviously dynamite in bed. And here he's come half way round the world to be with you forever and make you a princess and he's so into you he can't keep his hands off of you. How is this a problem, exactly?"

"Stacy, it's not about money and sex," chided Debbie. "Sefy's feelings are involved. How would you like to be married against your will?"

"You mean to a drop-dead gorgeous gazillionaire with his own tropical island?" quipped Stacy. "Here," she held out her bracelet covered wrist. "Twist my arm."

"Oh, you're impossible. Didn't you listen to a word she said? The man intends to keep her in chains and spank her like a child. He took her underwear away from her, for heaven's sake. It's positively...gruesome."

"Gruesome?" Stacy countered. "It sounds kinky to me. Do you have any idea how much money people pay for that kind of spice in their sex life? Call me old-fashioned, but if Persephone doesn't want him, I'll be the first to pull up my skirt and lie over his lap."

"Be my guest, Stacy. I wouldn't go near him again for ten tropical islands," Sefy vowed.

"Debbie," Stacy lamented. "Help me talk some sense into this girl, will you?"

"She's got more sense than the two of us put together," Debbie argued. "So tell us, Sefy, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know," she shook her head, the initial cloud of anger having passed. "All I can say is no one is going to buy or own me. But he's not going to make me lose my job, either. I've worked too hard to get where I am to give it all up. The way I see it, the bastard has me over a barrel for the next five days. And after that, he's history."

"Over a barrel," remarked Stacy. "Interesting choice of words."

"Hush, Stacy," chided Debbie.

"I meant it in work terms," Sefy insisted, though there was no denying that right smack dab in the middle of all the complex emotions this man was stirring up in her was a desire, such as she had never known before. She wanted him, now. Wanted him to teach her more things she didn't know about her body, wanted him to take her on a journey to his strange, forbidden world, where a woman could be loved so much by a man that he would never let her go, never allow a bit of harm to come to her.

Even if it meant marking her as a possession.

"So what's your POA?" Debbie asked.

"Other than digging a hole to China and taking on a fresh identity as a Geisha?"

"Geishas are Japanese," corrected Debbie, "not Chinese."

"You could just ignore him," Stacy pointed out. "Until he goes away. That's what I would do."

"I don't think so. You don't know the guy like I do. He's waiting for me at his hotel." Sefy swallowed hard at the memory of what he'd done to her so far and how he'd told her she'd be back for more. "I'm supposed to meet him there, whenever I'm ready."

"You have a billionaire at your beck and call," she chimed. "That's darn near like winning the lottery."

"Forgive me for not turning cartwheels," Sefy grumbled, "over the prospect of having my butt warmed by a muscle bound brute."

The girls looked at each other.

"Gosh," said Deb, flushing a little bit red. "Do you think he'd really..."

"What? Spank me? Hell, yes."

"Maybe you could beg forgiveness," Stacy's lips curled wickedly. "Show him what a good girl you're going to be from now on."

"No," decided Sefy, the secret warm tingling passing between her legs as she imagined herself on her knees before such a man. "I won't give him that satisfaction. From here on, it's all business. One hundred percent."

Debbie and Stacy went silent again, indicating they were as unconvinced as she was.

"I'll say one thing," Sefy ventured at last. The next one of you mentions going away on vacation, gets hung from the nearest yard arm with her own panty hose."

"What's a yard arm?" Stacy blinked.

"It's pirate talk, kiddo. Look it up."

Chapter Six

She was standing at the doorway to his suite, the very picture of cool, crisp efficiency. All business in her fresh change of clothing, the gray suit skirt complemented by black pumps and pearls. The perfect ice queen, as the expression went. Idly, Jay wondered what color bra and panties she'd put on to replace the ones currently hanging over his bedpost.

"Yes?" said he, barefoot in his slacks, his chest barely contained by the sleeveless T-shirt.

Persephone launched into her statement, which sounded pre-rehearsed. "I want you to know that my being here in no way is yielding to you, and I want you to know I still don't like you and I have no respect for you whatsoever. I'm here because it's my job to entertain you. That is what I will do. From now till the end of the week. Ra-ra-siss-boom-ba, I will be your wonderful cheerleader. During this time, you will not touch me, speak to me inappropriately or even look at me in weird ways. Above all," she sucked in a refill of air, "you will not mention anything at all about your silly island, its customs or mating habits. Are we quite clear?"

Jairan drank in the sight of her in the crisp form-fitting jacket and tight, polyester skirt. He liked the clothes on her. He'd like them even better off of her. Except for the string of pearls. These she would be allowed to keep on while he made slow leisurely love to her, imagining as he did so that it was a collar of the bead and shell variety worn at home by the consorts of the high men. To friends and family, such an adornment was an object of respect and honor, but between the lovers themselves, it signaled something else entirely. Namely submission, the female having been claimed and conquered by the male.

Scratch that. Not slow leisurely love, but fast and frantic.

Jay's cock was so tight in his pants it hurt.

"What are you looking at?" she demanded. "Are you even listening to what I'm saying?"

"I have heard every word, *isina*, only there is a flaw in your logic."

"What is that?" she flipped back her wheat-colored hair warily.

The gesture, so unassuming, made his blood boil. It did not go unnoticed by him that she had left her hair down. "You say there is nothing personal or physical between us, and yet your body appears to say otherwise."

Sefy looked down self consciously, wondering what he could see.

"Your cheeks," he offered, "are flushed. Are your breasts as red?"

"You're a pig," she crossed her arms over her chest. "A gentleman would never treat a lady like this."

"I never said I was a gentleman. As for how I treat you, I do not wish to play games this afternoon, *isina*. You are free to come or go, but be warned, if you cross this threshold, it will be on my terms and mine alone."

She took a step backward, like a tiny rabbit begging to be caught. "Are you threatening me?"

"I make no threats, *isina*. I will never force you to do anything against your will."

"And yet you want to degrade me. To humiliate me, to...to..."

Jay seized the vibrant, indignant package of femininity in his arms, delivering a single kiss. It was a merciless blow to her ego, soft and tender and yet utterly dominant. Resisting the impulse, for the moment, to imprison her in his grasp with all finality, he let her free.

"Choose," he repeated. "Now."

"You can't...keep doing this," she gasped. "You have to accept me as an equal. We have a business relationship. At least use me as a tour guide. There are all kinds of places we could go. The harbor. The museum. The..."

Again, he took her lips, making a mockery of her arguments. She was breathing heavily when he released her, the carefully maintained resistance she prided herself in all but shattered. "You don't fight fair, Jay Rivington, damn you. All right," she conceded. "I'll come in. We can make love once more, just for closure's sake and then we talk about getting back to a platonic footing. Fair enough?"

"No," he shook his head, dismissing her attempt at bargaining with a body that was already his. "That is not good enough. In fact, I have changed my mind. I no longer wish you to enter my rooms. Not for closure or any other reason."

She swallowed hard. He suppressed his amusement seeing her small, very female dilemma. By maintaining the moral high ground she was now facing rejection. "But, a moment ago you said—"

"It's different now," he said curtly. "Chalk it up to my finally getting the big picture, as you Americans say. You said yourself, there isn't to be anything between us, so why waste my time? And don't worry about your job. I'll make sure your bank receives its investment money. Good day, Miss Landers."

"Wait!"

His hand was already on the door jam. "What is it, Miss Landers?"

Her eyes were wide and moist and so very predictable. "I—I just thought after everything..."

"What is it you want, Persephone?"

"A chance to just sit down and talk," she gathered as much dignity as was possible under the circumstances. "Like civilized adults."

He admired her straightforwardness. Still, this was no time to relinquish his mastery. "I'm sorry," he shook his head. "My decision is final."

He'd no sooner turned the dead bolt when he heard her knocking again.

"It's the spanking, isn't it?" she greeted him as he re-opened the door. "That's what this is all about."

He said nothing.

"Well, I can't let any man do that to me. You should know that. It's a deal breaker, Rivington. Anything else, pretty much is okay. But not that. For starters, you don't have the right."

"I have made it clear what rights I claim, *isina*."

"Jay, what do you want?" she demanded, suddenly angry. "You can't keep playing with me like this. You come on so strong one minute, the next you are all standoffish. I'm trying to work with you. Okay, I admit, something's happened between us. But can't we just sort through things, one by one, starting with the bank deal we need to work out?"

"You are right," he agreed, pulling her by the lapels. "It is time."

"Jay, what are you doing?"

"I am undressing you," he unbuttoned her jacket and pulled her blouse from the waistband of her skirt. "What do you think I'm doing?"

"You can't," she protested.

"Why not?" His hands were already working the buttons of her blouse. He'd had enough of her teasing of his manhood, unwitting though it might be. Had she really desired to be free of him, she'd have been gone long ago.

"Because," she squirmed, "we're in the hallway...anyone could walk by."

"And what would they see?" he nuzzled her neck to devastating effect. "Only a stunningly beautiful princess serving her prince."

"No more flattery," she grimaced, trying to push him back. "That's hitting below the belt."

Her resistance was token. By the time he pushed the white silky blouse and pinstripe jacket down over her creamy shoulders, she was utterly melted, like a flower, shedding its petals to reveal its life giving essence.

"Oh, god," she moaned, the act of semi-public stripping clearly heating her up to boiling. "This is crazy."

Sefy wore a white bra, decorated in lace. As he unclasped it from behind, her breasts fell naturally against his chest. "No more, Jay, please no more."

He circled his hands round her waist. The next step of submission would be hers to make. "The skirt, *isina*. Undo the skirt."

"Jay, enough—"

Another kiss settled the matter. Masterfully working her mouth, he left her hands no choice but to do his bidding and now the skirt was puddled at her feet along with the blouse.

He helped her with the panties, allowing her to step from them. Instantly, her fragrance filled the air, the space between her long, curvaceous legs beckoning, the swell of her honeyed triangle rendering him nearly to the point of explosion.

"Now the shoes," he commanded. "Step from your shoes."

Sefy obeyed, instantly making herself two inches shorter, not to mention utterly and completely naked.

"J-jay, p-please, let me inside."

"I want to look at you, first."

"Someone might see," she resisted, reminding him once more of the shy beauty he'd fallen in love with.

"Hands at your side, *isina*. Do not hide from me. It is my will."

Persephone posed for him, humbled and naked, and yet, at the same time, filled with the raw radiance of the sea born Venus.

"I have no words," Jay said, the tears welling in his eyes. "To describe what I see."

"May I come in?" she murmured, her voice delicate as the tendrils of dawn.

He swept her into his arms by way of response, a lord accepting the gift of his lady, his love, offering herself in all her glory.

Her eyes were glued to his, so many emotions conveyed. He knew that she would give him more this time, much more, daring to put herself at his mercy in ways she did not herself understand. It was a gift he could only pray he would prove worthy to receive.

Gently he laid Persephone down upon the bed, as if in a sea of rose petals, she herself some nymph of supernatural origin. It was all he could do to resist falling atop her, instantly vanquishing the proffered beauty. Thank the heavens for rituals to protect them both from such an untimely climax.

"Your hands, *isina*, cross them at the wrists and present them to me."

Persephone's chest rose and fell with exquisite perfection. Her lower lip had found its way between pearl-white teeth. This was no longer the woman of arguments, the proud debater. This was a female of flesh and sighs, a real and true woman, who would find her bliss in obedience and trust and love.

How delicate were those wrists in his. How easily held. How easily bound. The rope was silk, a many-braided cord done in the fashion of the ancients. She shivered at the touch of him, at the feel of the bond upon her flesh. She did not evade his gaze. They both knew the meaning, the explosive consequences of her binding. They would be more than casual lovers now, though they still had so much to learn of one another. As a result there would be an inevitable sorting out afterwards, a falling out, the way

things always did when centuries clashed, when lust and desire forced its hand against the blunt conventions of society.

Jairan tied a love knot, the bond of marriage. Sefy's belly undulated, as it had on the island, as it had in the limousine, but it was bespeaking more now. More in the way of understanding. More in the way of unbridled need. Again, with the greatest gentleness, he placed her confined wrists over her head, molding her into the form of surrender, both real and symbolic.

Leaving her only an instant, his eyes not once leaving her lightly trembling, eagerly awaiting body, he stood to undress. Sefy's thighs parted in anticipation, the gesture a further sign of her submission, coming with complete unconscious innocence. It was this factor about her, the way she yielded so disingenuously that most charmed him, and most inflamed him.

In perfect docility she received his mouth upon her breasts. The act of tasting them was, in his mind all the more greatly reinforced what had led up to this. The trust, the act of giving by which she'd allowed him to strip her in the hallway and bring her across the threshold, like she was already his bride.

Cooperatively, the pretty little nipples swelled in his mouth. These, at least, belonged to him, unquestioned, night and day, as did the rest of her body, from her lips to her toes, and most especially her sex, which so completely gave itself to his skilled loving. It was that other, more elusive part of Persephone, namely her heart, which he had yet to fully conquer.

Jay's continued suckling brought the arching of her back, a deep guttural groan, as though she'd been fully entered already. The woman did not yet realize the connection he'd established, his most incidental touch on her sex suggestive of her claiming and reclaiming at his hands. It was a form of conditioning, really, which implied that no other cock would ever satisfy her, ever again.

Relentless in pursuit of the pleasure they both craved, he pressed on, nibbling and sculpting her flesh, his power translating into a floating ferocity, a maddening application of heat and pressure at every sensitive place on her body, every curve and hollow and swell. He wanted her to beg, to plead and to acknowledge. This is what he himself needed, the final aphrodisiac to swell his member to a size and life worthy of this wondrous creature, this exquisite china doll, this exotic little beast and infinitely wise woman with her hips lifting, her cunt wanting his penetration and the lips wanting his tongue. Such a greedy creature was this female. And naughty, too, for she was going to make him forget that one other part of her body needing attention. And correction.

"Turn over," urged the prince, "ass in the air, cheek to the bed."

Sefy groaned, past the point of speech. She would do anything now, whatever she was commanded to continue the pleasure, the contact. He offered no help as she maneuvered her diminutive sweat-covered body, placing herself in position for the long

overdue punishment. It was a slight challenge with her hands bound as they were, but she was a trooper, managing the submissive posture in no time at all.

"You know what must be done?" His hand caressed the upturned cheeks, so delightfully vulnerable. Sefy twitched, undulating her captive body. With her hands bound, palms down she could do little more than bury her cheek in the bedspread and rub her raw and naked breasts for comfort.

"Say it, *isina*."

"I—I must be spanked," she made her confession, half in fear, half in desire.

"You grant me the right?" He let the caressing fingers stray to her cunt.

She hissed her answer. "Do what you will."

His palm cracked efficiently, yet lovingly upon the woman's ass. Sefy cried out in reply, as if she'd been penetrated.

"This is discipline, *isina*. The price of disobedience."

She thrashed her head, the protest issuing in an almost comical moan of need. "I'm not...a child..."

He spanked her again. "No," he agreed. "You are a grown woman. Subject to the will of your mate. The one who will love and protect you forever."

Again he struck, careful to intersperse the punishment with warm and tender rubbing. Not to mention a finger delicately tickling her clitoris. It was, predictably, a lethal combination.

"Jay...stop...I can't take...anymore."

"Your behavior in the restaurant," he pointed out, "was rude."

"I—I'm sorry, I didn't mean it."

"You ran away out of fear. Why do you deny your own heart? You belong to me, *isina*. Why can you not grasp this truth?"

"Jay...please..."

She needed to be put out of her misery, as did he.

Never had his cock slid so cleanly and perfectly into a pussy in his life. Already it was better between them, each encounter hotter, more fulfilling than the last. Mounting her from behind like this was particularly satisfying. Gathering her at the hips, he impaled her fully, his nostrils flaring like a stallion's.

"You will bear me fine sons," said the prince, "and beautiful daughters."

Sefy shook from the core with the power of her orgasm. There was no holding him back now, the rush of seed being too powerful to restrain a second longer. It boggled the mind to think of their future, with its thousands of climaxes and nearly endless flood of encounters.

"Jay," she half-whispered, half-gasped, acknowledging her conquest.

He stroked her hair, remaining both above and inside her, but being careful not to press her in any way with his much larger body. She was already captive, that was clear and there was no need to compound the matter.

Jay let her collapse onto her side at last, untying her bound hands. He lay beside her, then, enveloping her with his arm. One hand splayed over her stomach, he felt for the vibrations, some early sign that she already bore his offspring. Their offspring. Listening to her breathing as it quieted, first to a murmur then a purr, he allowed her time to sleep, though he did not remove the cord that held her hands together.

Interestingly enough, she did not complain about this. Had she done so, he would not at this time have yielded to her wishes. Not now, not at this crucial juncture for them both. What they needed now was the healing of sleep, the knitting together of past and future, of reality and fantasy.

"Let me in," he whispered, his lips grazing the lobe of her unconscious ear. "Let me into your dreams...trust me, *isina*."

Chapter Seven

Persephone awoke first. Jairan was snoring beside her, face down, his arm over her stomach. The brute had her pinned on her back, his thigh hooked over her leg. She tried to move her arms and felt the cord. That's when she remembered him tying her. Taking her, bound, his cock plunging her hot depths, his body slamming into her warmed, freshly spanked buttocks. And now, after brutalizing her, using her like a common whore, he had the nerve to lie down with her, like they were actual lovers.

As if a man like Jay Rivington could ever be capable of such a refined emotion. What Jay loved was torturing her, getting her all worked up, using her body against her and playing head trips, like his little Tarzan routine for one. Well, she wasn't going to be Jane anymore.

Were there no limits to the man's nerve? Stripping her in the hallway, making her practically beg to be allowed into his suite, naked and humiliated. What kind of man did that to a woman? For that matter, what kind of a woman actually responded to such treatment? Was she some kind of masochist, or was she moved by deeper feelings for the man, no matter how misplaced? Had she become just another of the army of her sister females doomed to be in love with a bad boy, the sort of male incapable of loving her back?

She couldn't be in love with Jay. Could she? Sure, he consumed her thinking, took up all her time and energy and her life seemed to hang on his, but that could imply all sorts of things. She'd seen people get far more worked up over the stock market. Jay was just a passing thing, something she could as easily control and eliminate from her life as, well, smoking, if she actually had that particular habit.

Sefy sighed, exasperated with her own interior monologue. It smacked of denial and she didn't like that one bit. All the more reason to get out of here ASAP. What time was it, anyway? She'd gotten here sometime after four. It had to be dark out by now. Definitely time to go. As soon as she worked her way out from under this human mountain of political incorrectness, she would be right out the door, hopping in the first taxi. He ought to consider himself lucky she wasn't looking to press charges.

Sefy strained to escape in vain. What was the man made of, iron? His arm alone must have weighed a ton. Collapsing, exhausted, she explored her options. Near as she could tell, she had only one, and it was risky as hell. Jay mumbled in pleasure, stirring slightly as she massaged his cock with her hand. With any luck, she'd be able to get him worked up enough to flip over in his sleep. Otherwise, he'd mistake this for the worst kind of come on, thinking she actually wanted to be taken again, tied up, and maybe even treated to another spanking.

Jairan was moaning softly now and humping her thigh. This was cruel to do to the man, she knew, but she had to get out of here somehow. Squirming downward and turning sideways, she suckled at his nipple, inducing him to turn. Her heart pounded as she felt the weight lifting off of her.

She'd done it! Converting him, stomach side up, into a beached whale.

Correction, into a beached Greek god, his dark hair splayed about him like he was riding bareback through a hot and windy desert, his perfect body in complete repose, the mocha-colored skin glowing, dazzling the eyes. And the tattoos, the array of colored images dancing up and down his body, moving as he breathed, shimmering. The snake on his hip curling, seductive and deadly, its fire red tongue inviting her eyes toward his seemingly insatiable cock. And on his chest, the dazzling sun, brilliant yellow on his pectoral muscle, begging to be licked and cooled by her small tongue. And adorning his biceps, the colored bands in intricate designs around those strong, strong arms, the patterns stretching out to connect the other images, creating a total marvel in which a woman could lose herself happily forever.

Held, ravished, treasured.

If only the man weren't such a complete Neanderthal.

She should go. Just as soon as she finished looking at him. His face. Angelic in repose, features regal and semi-divine. His neck. Thick and powerful. His cock. His wonderful cock. So straight and proud, half-hard already, a sweet island delight, the most unique of colors, defined by no race, but promising something universal as it lay there awaiting her tongue, her pussy. She spasmed at the notion. It was ridiculous, of course. He'd never stay asleep through sex and why would she want to give him the satisfaction—literally?

Then again, this was no ordinary man. This was a prime specimen. There wasn't a woman in the world strong enough to resist, no matter how moral. Here was a dream opportunity, if ever there was one, to sneak up on the male predator. To take what she wanted, seizing whatever pleasure she wished, touching, fondling and caressing. She would be ever so subtle. What harm would it do, anyway, just to take one little taste of him? One tiny kiss—not because she cared for him, which she didn't—but just for the sake of having done so. Something to tell her granddaughters one day. A little revenge, you could call it, getting to use him as an object for a change, to get her jollies, while he lay there, unable to resist.

True, he might wake up, but she could still run for the door. And once she was in the hall, screaming, the game was over. He'd be in jail, or back on the plane to his ridiculous island and she'd be free. Free to thumb her nose in the face of anyone who'd ever doubted a woman could beat a man at his own game.

Stealthily, wickedly, Sefy crawled back onto the bed. She paused on all fours, beside his hip. This was crazy and she knew it. Only a fool messed with a sleeping tiger. Wasn't that the saying? All she had to do was wake him up and she as good as

imprisoned again, pinned underneath him and back in bondage quicker than she could say. 'Thank you, master. May I have another?'

Damn, but he was gorgeous. So well proportioned, with his broad shoulders and aerodynamic torso, the buttocks so very tight, the belly rock hard, made of pure muscle like he'd never eaten an ounce of junk food in his life. A woman could spend forever with this body, studying and looking and touching. The colors, the stories, the images, the wondrous journeys contained. More than that, she could know what it was like to live within those worlds, to be pleased beyond belief and challenged and teased and kept and even revered.

At the moment, though, she wanted him for his cock, plain and simple.

Sefy's tongue felt like sandpaper in her mouth. She could swear it was like she'd been drinking all night. Maybe it was the anticipation. Certainly her heart was thundering in her chest at the prospect. Working up just enough moisture in her cheeks, she lowered her head cautiously, a small female cat, about to turn the tables on the powerful male

Employing the finest of breaths, she began simply by blowing upon it. At once the noble, uncircumcised spear began to respond, stirring itself like the sleeping giant it was. Another breath, hot and sweet, and it stood nearly at attention. Using her hair she finished the job, whisking at him, feather light with her long, wheat-colored strands. The contrast of her fair hair against the very dark thatch of his own pubic hair was most dramatic, not to mention arousing. Very slightly, he arched his back. She could see response in the nipples now, the pale brown points so enticingly peaking even as his chest began to rise and fall more rapidly. Like he was dreaming of some new conquest.

Unable to resist herself, she crawled up to taste them, one by one, barely touching her tongue to the metal. He released short, shallow moans in response. He looked sexy as hell like this, helpless on his back, all that male muscle at her total disposal. The only natural thing to do was keep on going, licking the tattoos, as if they might hold flavor, running her tongue over each and every muscle, driving him absolutely mad, fulfilling in his dreams at least, his own wildest fantasies.

And what exactly did he dream of? she wondered, as she kissed at his thighs, her soft female lips so seemingly well suited to soothe and pleasure the harder, stronger flesh of the male. What maidens and creatures of fabulous sexual potential peopled his mind's eye? Surely not her. No one could ever see the likes of Persephone Landers as their be all and end all. Maybe this whole thing between them was itself a dream and she would wake up soon and find there never had been a Jay Rivington, or an island called Surapay.

This last possibility filled her with mixed emotions. She longed for her freedom, but a part of her, maybe the biggest part, seemed most alive in his presence. There was a function to her life, a meaning that came only with her connection to this man. What he asked—no, what he demanded—was her complete surrender. To his mocha-colored, statuesque body. And to his will. Uncompromising and hard as iron.

Jay was fully erect now, thanks to her delicate, feminine attentions. She was wet and hot too, and it was going to take some willpower not to throw in the towel by waking the man and begging him to simply have his way with her. She'd make the effort, though, beginning with a very faint dab at the tip of his rounded cock. There was a drop of pre-come already, which she claimed greedily.

By rights it was hers anyway. For if what he had said was true, then no drop of this milky liquid would ever spill again except inside her body.

Light breathing gave way to a groan in his sleep as Sefy licked around the knob of his cock, in full anticipation of swallowing it. His lips, dry and begging for the kiss she'd withheld for fear of waking him, curled into a slight smile. He wanted more. More of it. More of her. She gave another, longer run of her tongue, very, very slow and tentative around the outside. So far he wasn't waking up. She had time to indulge herself.

Grabbing the shaft, she slid her mouth over the tapered top, like it was a lollipop, slightly salty, musky and not at all unpleasant. Sefy was more than hungry for him now, her libido awakened. There wasn't going to be any pulling away, not till she'd had her way with him.

Sefy didn't generally like to offer oral sex. It was embarrassing mostly, and awkward, to be there at someone's crotch, the man feeling obligated to say all the right things to encourage you while you're just squinting your eyes trying so hard to get it over with. But with this man, so raw and primitive, she felt natural, like a beast at play, taking its morning feed.

Damn, but she needed to masturbate. Shifting to her knees, she managed to work her tied hands down to her sex. That rope had to go—that was the next order of business. But first, a little self-touching while she worked. Maybe she could get them both off at once. It was tough going. Sefy's head wobbled as she tried to keep her hand in place.

No good. She kept slipping.

There was only one thing to do. Sefy was going to have to mount him.

Taking one last look at his privates, the balls swollen with seed for her pussy, the tiny slit at the tip of his cock wide open and ready to shoot, she climbed across his pelvis. Inch by inch, down she went, her labia gaping to receive him, her pussy muscles contracting immediately at the familiar fullness.

Oh, yea. That was it. That's what she needed.

Biting her lip to keep from crying out, she began to move herself, rubbing her clit over his shaft. She wanted to lift herself higher, but she was afraid the increased motion would wake him.

Frustrated, she rocked from side to side, then moved forward, trying to maximize the pressure on her clitoris. It was at this point, eyes closed for concentration, that she heard his voice.

"I see you are off to an early start, *isina*, in fulfilling your sexual duties today. I'm afraid you've overlooked one crucial point, however. It is the master, not the servant who decides how and when he is to be pleased."

She looked down in horror, caught in the act. He was smirking, hands behind his head.

"How...how long?" she stammered.

"How long have I been awake do you mean? The whole time, naturally."

The bastard had played her for a fool. As usual.

"Well you can just wipe that smug look off your face," she informed him. "I was trying to escape, that's all."

"By riding me like a bronco?"

"It was nothing personal," she informed him, with a shake of her curls. "Just pure reflex."

"Indeed," he noted, bemused. "In that case, your reflexes are quite admirable."

"Good-bye, Prince Jairan," she moved to dismount. "And good riddance."

"Let me go," she squirmed as he held her fast, hands on her hips.

"Your request," said the blue-eyed devil, "is hereby noted, and denied."

"I'll cry rape."

"I think not," he flexed his arms, sliding her wet sex over his hardness in a way designed to drive her mad.

"I mean it, Jay!"

"Be still," he scolded. "Or is it another spanking you're after?"

"You're the one who should be punished," she accused as he continued to enforce their copulation. "You're a complete monster."

"Am I?" He flipped her to her back, resuming his natural place of domination.

She grit her teeth in fury. "What else but a monster would want to kidnap a woman to a foreign country to be his slave?"

One hand holding her wrists captive over her head, he slid the other over her hip. "Do you deny being my slave?"

"Bastard. You know I can't deny you anything when you have me like this!"

He opened her labia, dissolving her to a puddle. "I want to hear it nonetheless."

"I'm yours," she thrashed her head. "All yours."

"You know," he sighed. "I think I see your point. In the heat of the moment nothing you say counts."

"Then why are you even talking to me?" she writhed in utter exasperation.

"It seems I am a glutton for punishment."

"You should never have come here," she struggled in vain. "What you had of me you should have left on Surapay. It was a dream, a wonderful dream. The real me can only disappoint."

"I do not want a dream. I want the real Persephone."

Sefy bucked beneath him, making one final attempt at self-preservation. She had been running from this man since his arrival, and before that since she'd first laid eyes on him in the circle of fire. He was wrong for her, he demanded what she could not give, he would take from her her very identity. "She isn't for sale."

"I seek not to purchase her but to redeem her. Do you not know the story for which you are named?"

"It's a Greek myth."

"Yes. The daughter of Demeter was the original Persephone, stolen to the dark underworld by Hades, to rule as his queen, giving him life."

"He was a brute—just like you!"

Jay's reply was to slide his body down between her legs, his tongue like a rivulet, trickling over her lightly pulsing clit.

"No," she protested feebly. "No, no, no!"

It was a hollow objection, indeed. In truth she needed more of this loving, much more.

"Tell me, *isina*," he paused in his sensual assault. "Are you happy?"

"Happy? What kind of question is that? I have my job, a nice apartment."

"Those are possessions." His tongue snapped like a whip. "Not states of mind."

"Just tell me what to say," she moaned. "And I'll say it."

"I want you to speak what is true, nothing more, nothing less."

Wonderful, she thought sardonically, a cunnilingual lie detector test.

"Do you wish me to go away and never return?"

"Yes! No. I don't know."

"You don't know? And yet you accuse me of assaulting you?"

"You did!"

"It was not I," he pointed out, "who attempted unconscious intercourse. As I understand your American law, it is you who would face charges of assault and not me."

"Hah. Like anyone would believe I could ever rape you."

"With the right lawyers, anything is possible."

"Whatever," she snorted. "All I know is, you're the one forcing me right now."

"Really?" He released her. "Get up, then. Go wherever you like. It makes no difference to me."

Persephone bit her lip, her distress apparent. "There's no way you'd stop this now. You're bluffing."

"Try me," he rolled over, putting his back to her like a wall, dark and impenetrable.

A moment later, predictably, she sidled back up to him, begging. "Jay, please, I was so close. And I know you were, too."

He grabbed a fistful of hair, stopping her attempted seduction in its tracks. "Sex is a privilege, *isina*. Not a right. It must be earned."

"You're hurting me."

"Only your pride."

"I want to go home," she met him with cold green eyes, her wounded ego battling with her deep sexual heat.

"No one is stopping you." Jay took her hands, opening the complicated knot. "I trust you can find the door?"

He turned back over, ready for sleep. Sefy sat up beside him, her heart pounding, her head swirling. It was all happening so fast. She didn't know what she wanted anymore. If only the man wasn't so set in stone, if only he would compromise just a little, considering her feelings even a tiny bit. Then again, if he really did so, she wondered if she would find him half as fascinating.

Such a paradox—a man sworn to protect and defend her and yet unable to bend in the tiniest way when it came to respecting her will.

"Jay?" Her voice was a whisper in the silent half darkness of approaching evening.

"Hmm?"

The halfhearted grunt was hardly encouraging.

"I'd be willing to stay...if I knew what to expect."

"No, *isina*. You want to stay because you do not know what to expect. That is the appeal."

Sefy called him a name and scooted off the bed. Making a point of slamming the bathroom door behind her, she turned on the shower. She was ready to forget, ready to wipe the man away. Soap would do the trick, she thought, and hot water. Hot enough to burn him off of her, to remove the smell and feel and the deep down sense of invasion.

Creating a soapy lather with a fevered passion, she went to work. Covering every inch of her nude body. There wasn't going to be enough soap, she feared, especially with the feelings and sensations being conjured by the silky smooth bar itself. She hadn't counted on this—being aroused by the material itself against her tender skin. And the water jets too, high-pressure hotel needles, were themselves enemies, causing tiny explosions up and down her spine.

I'm doomed, she thought. I'll never survive.

"Yes, you will."

Had she spoken that aloud? And who was answering her?

The answer came in the form of hands. His hands grasping her belly from behind.

How had she missed him coming into the shower with her?

"Jay, get out," she whirled around to face him. "I don't want you in here."

"But it's my shower." He fingered the slick, foamy nipples, holding them between thumb and forefinger. She could break away, but why would she want to?

"I'm not kidding, I want you out."

He seized her ass cheeks. "Liar."

She nearly fainted at the feel of his cock, hard as ever, poking at her.

"Your shower is done," he informed her. "Go and wait for me beside the bed. I expect to find you on your knees. Wet and naked."

"What you'll find," she challenged, "is an empty room."

He made no response, which unnerved her more than anything. If he argued with her she could fight back at least. But when he left her to her own designs like this, and in a state of total sexual frenzy, no less, she was doomed.

Her hand trembled as she reached for the towel. She could not hold it. Dripping, she looked down to where it lay at her feet. She wanted to dry herself, but he had told her she must be wet.

Of their own volition, her legs were carrying her now, unclothed, just as she was to the bedroom, to the place he'd told her to go. I will just try it, she reasoned. I will kneel, just as he said, only for a moment, just to feel what it is like, and then I'll leave. I will get a little thrill and then I'll grab my clothes, dry off and be gone from his life forever. After all, where else would she get a chance like this to feel and taste, safely, a slice of the life of a captive woman, a kept woman under the command of her lord. An *isina*.

With each step, Sefy felt the thundering of her heart. Her senses were alive to everything. The carpet pressing upon her bare feet, the chill of the air on her wet skin, the dripping of water from her hair, down her back, over her breasts, with the nipples rock hard, and her thighs rubbing together, was sending tiny jolts of pleasure and anticipation to her most intimate places. Places inside her no man had touched, places she herself had only felt round the edges of in her most secret dreams. Places that belonged to her true master and prince. Not this man, heavens not him, but someone, perhaps like him.

Hence this experiment in kneeling, like a bungee jump, to the last second plunging to death only to be held back by an unbreakable cord. Just for a second, pressing her knees to the prickling fibers, lowering herself, putting herself as object, possession, symbolically lower, subservient to the will of another, a man, who might, at his whim, grant her pleasure...or pain.

Sefy sucked in her flat belly. At the brink of orgasm. Again. What a habit this was becoming. I'll go home, she thought, and dream about this. I'll use it in my fantasy life.

Never had it been so close to real, so close to fulfillment. Deprived of clothes, unable to dry herself, made to wait, having no clue what might occur next.

His words burning in her ears. And in her crotch.

You want to stay because you do not know what to expect. That is the appeal.

Sefy's hand dipped where it belonged. To the one place she couldn't dry now even with a towel. She suspected with a man like Jairan, a woman would always be wet. No wonder she wasn't to work outside the home or be more than an adornment. What could she ever concentrate on around a man like that except being beautiful and desirable? What could she ever want, except to be fucked long and hard according to her man's will for their mutual pleasure?

"You are more ready, it seems, than I'd imagined."

Sefy froze. It was Jairan behind her. She'd waited too long! How would she tell him now this was not what she'd intended. It was a misunderstanding. A mistake. Whatever he did to her now would be under false pretenses, as if she truly wanted him to take command of her. How would she ever restore the balance—returning to her proper place as a surly opponent to his every proposition?

His hand brushed her head. He was in front of her now, lifting her chin. "Tonight, you will deny me nothing."

Persephone creamed in response. Like her, he was naked, and dripping.

"You will taste my bonds, *isina*. You will know the kiss of gold upon your flesh. And you will learn to shatter the barriers of shame and fear."

His thumb pressed her lips. Instinctively, she opened them, taking him into her mouth to suckle. It might well have been his cock and they both knew it.

"I mean to teach you trust," he said softly. Do you understand what that means?"

"No."

He left her just for a moment to fetch the blindfold. To the young woman, already his in so many ways, it felt like a lifetime. It scared Persephone to be this vulnerable, this dependent. If only it didn't feel so damned good, she'd be able to fight back better.

"Sensory deprivation, *isina*, is the first step," he slipped the folded red silk across her eyes, knotting it behind her head.

Sefy's world was swallowed in darkness, cool and cloying. Immediately, she raised her hands, seeking reassurance.

"Arms down," ordered Jay. "Hands behind your back."

Sefy startled herself with her quick compliance.

"These are ancient manacles, *isina*, cuffs of silver, belonging to the princes of Surapay for generations."

Jairan crouched, enclosing her wrists in the shackles with such gentleness that she wanted to cry. How paradoxical that by this action he was confining her, rendering her prisoner in the most blatant, sexual sense.

"Open your legs," he whispered to the helpless girl.

Sefy obeyed, sliding apart her knees. At once he claimed her breasts from behind, encasing them in his hands. She fell back against him, melting, dissolving.

"You are the most maddeningly beautiful, intoxicating woman I have ever encountered," he declared. "The only one I have found worthy to be owned."

"But you could have anyone, Jairan," she couldn't help but point out. "Princesses, fashion models, heiresses. Why me?"

"Because," he teased her nipples, making her groan. "You were made for me."

"Please, Jay," she begged. "Make love to me."

"Silence, *isina*," he chided. "You will no longer speak without permission."

A moment later he was on the phone. "Room service? Yes, I'd like to place an order."

Sefy listened intently, curiously as he described, item by item what he was looking for. Her ears perked at the mention of several delicacies native to Surapay. Including the infamous *la-ura* fruit.

"Knees apart," he reminded as he hung up the phone.

She heard the sound of the closet opening, followed by the squeak of a dresser drawer. Was he putting on clothes?

He came to her, placing around her neck a cold, metal chain. She heard the click of a lock and felt the weight of a small padlock. The end of the chain hung between her breasts. Licking her lips, she anticipated, but did not receive a kiss.

Again, he came back to the point about spreading her knees, lightly slapping her inner thighs to chide her. Sefy spread them for him, wet and fragrant. If only she could speak, if only she had something other than her body itself with which to beg his attentions. Willingly would she tell him that she was his tonight, without reservations, their relationship, for the next few hours at least, one of complete subservience on her part. But perhaps he already took that for granted. Indeed, how could he not, with her arrayed and dressed—or undressed—as she was?

The rapping on the door jarred her senses, bringing her back from heated reverie. It was room service. Sefy gasped at the sound of the chain sliding in the lock. Surely he wasn't going to let someone in with her like this?

Persephone balled her fists. "Jay," she croaked.

"Silence, *isina*," commanded her lord harshly. "Another outburst and you will be punished. Is that clear?"

Sefy nodded, her cunt burning for attention.

"Back straight," barked Jay, undoing the dead bolt. "Breasts thrust out."

"Your order, sir." The bellhop sounded young. Sefy inhaled the odor. The pungent fruit, the sharp taste of the special beef he'd ordered. Cubed into tiny pieces.

She heard him clear his throat, indicating he'd gotten an eyeful. "I'll, um, leave it right here."

"No, I'd like you to bring it in," countered Jay.

She heard the rattling of the rolling cart. Sefy could only imagine the expression on the bellhop's face to see a naked blonde, handcuffed, blindfolded, in a position of complete subservience.

"Here," Jay indicated where to place the food.

"W-will there be anything else, sir?"

"She's quite beautiful, isn't she?"

"Sir?"

"It's all right. You can't help but stare. She is my fiancée, if you are interested. Impressive, isn't she?"

"S-she's gorgeous," the young man croaked. "Is she a model?"

"A banker. *Isina*, must I remind you about your knees yet again?"

Heat passed up and down her torso, cheek to knee. He wanted her to reveal her female intimacies to this total stranger.

"Sir, I should be going."

"No," Jay insisted. "She must learn obedience. Back on your heels, *isina*. Now."

Her head was swimming. She did not even know what this person looked like. She'd barely known Rivington more than a day or two, and now she was to spread her cunt, to put it bluntly, for both of them.

What would happen if she disobeyed? Would he spank her, right here in front of the bellhop? Would he put her into deeper bondage, in steel or rope as he'd said earlier was his right? What were the limits of his power over her? Wasn't this still America, wasn't she still a free woman?

"Good girl," praised the prince.

Sefy felt a fresh wave of shame. She had done it, degrading herself for the man, ready for a quick, easy fucking. Certainly the smell of her loins did nothing to belie that impression.

"What do you think, my friend?"

"Honestly, sir?"

"Absolutely. Feel free to speak your mind."

"I wish I could get my girlfriend to act like this."

Jairan laughed. "Well said, young fellow. Here's another hundred for your trouble."

"Thank you, sir."

"One more thing," he stopped him at the door.

"Sir?"

"Do you love your girlfriend?"

There was a moment's pause. "I guess. I mean we haven't been together long. But she's hot, if that's what you mean."

"No, I'm afraid it's not. If you want a woman's complete obedience, you must give complete love. Sovereignty over a female's heart and body is the most sacred of responsibilities in the world. Any man who takes such a gift and squanders it for quick sexual thrills is not only a fool, he is doomed to be condemned by the gods. Remember that, son."

"I will, sir. Thank you."

The door closed. Sefy heard the deadbolt click back and then the sliding of the chain. A delicious sense of anticipation curled down her spine, combined with a rising storm of rebellion. In the midst of it, she strained for the sound of his breathing, his imminent approach.

She nearly jumped from her skin as she heard the sound of metal utensils scraping against one another.

"I trust you brought your appetite, my dear?"

The soft cooing of his voice poured over her ragged senses. She longed to be taken into his arms, comforted and held, the darkness put at bay. And yet just knowing he was there, so close, ready to protect, delight and torture was itself creating a need deeper than she had ever known.

Still, there were some things a girl could not overlook.

"I will never forgive you," she said, "for making me do that."

"Now you shall learn the traditional way of feeding," he ignored her outburst.

Sefy's belly seized. She could sense him right in front of her, kneeling.

"*La-ura*," he announced.

"Put that thing in my mouth and I'll bite your fingers off."

Jay caressed her left breast, holding the fruit under her nose.

Starving and helpless, Sefy devoured it.

"*Shu-la*," he said now, working the right breast as he fed her a piece of spiced meat.

Hungrily, she took it down, the radical difference of flavor exploding her taste buds. He gave her more things now, though he no longer announced what they were. Her heart thundered in her chest as she took by pure trust the piece of chocolate, the salted fish and the ripe slice of strawberry.

With each morsel came another bit of sexual torture.

"Wine," he pronounced as she finished the strawberry, his finger sliding in and out of her dripping opening.

She expected a glass, but he inclined her chin gently and had her stick out her tongue. Sefy took the tangy beverage drop by drop off the end of a spoon. Her mouth was agape for more and it was at this point he gave her his tongue, slicing open her

every nerve fiber in the process. The heat of her was so thick and the scent of her womanhood so powerful that it commingled with and nearly eclipsed the richness of the feast.

"Do you know how difficult it is," he slid his hands over her collarbone to the swell of her unprotected breasts, "for a man to keep his hands off of you? Or to abide the sight of you clothed? On Surapay, I shall keep you naked, save when I must reveal you to the eyes of others. For me, you shall wear only tattoos and chains. And your blushes."

Sefy moaned, at once a protest, a confession and a surrender. He had no right to treat her thus, to take her liberty, to tie and tease her, to force her to respond as a female, to make her crave the very abuse he was handing out.

"Go fuck yourself," she cried.

"A prince of Surapay does not masturbate," he reminded, massaging her trembling breasts simultaneously. "He spills his seed into his *isina*, and into her alone."

Sefy whimpered. "You're insane."

"*La-ura*," said he, beginning the feeding all over again, this time trickling the juice over one of her erect, trembling nipples.

She threw back her head. He repeated the action on her second nipple.

"*La-ura* is my favorite," he said matter-of-factly, "among our native fruits."

Sefy froze as she felt breath at her belly, a faint blowing, at the top of her rib cage. What on earth was he doing now?

"Your body was made for my mouth, *isina*. Imagine the nights you shall spend chained to my bed, under my command, enduring my sweet touch, the lick of my tongue, the caress of lips, the maddening bite of my teeth."

She gasped as he slurped the dripping juice and with it the glimmering layer of sweat on her skin. How could he be such a contradiction, so tender and thorough and yet so masculine? When he took the nipple between his teeth, establishing his wolf-like domination, she screamed. Though it was not a cry of pain, but of ecstasy.

"Remember the fire, *isina*? The dance? The first time we touched?"

Sefy clenched and unclenched her fists a million times to the beat of imagined island drums. Flames crackling around her. She could almost hear the faint chant, the sound of the shuffling feet. Would they dance around her one day? The men and women? Would they witness her passion, her surrender to this lord among men?

"There is so much more to your magic, *isina*. Surely we have but scratched the surface."

He was trailing his fingers down her belly and thighs. She rocked against her heels, bucking not against steel, but against the one set of bonds that could never be broken — namely that of his will stamped upon hers. Thus would he do to her whatever he wanted leaving her to endure, enjoy or suffer, according to his whim. And therein lay the thrill, the indescribable delight.

Her body did not belong to her. The rights over it, at least for this space of time, were ceded, given over to a man—a man who drove her crazy, who was all wrong for her and who had to be, by anyone’s account, the biggest control freak on the planet.

“Shall I show you a secret seasoning among my people, *isina*?” His voice had a wicked edge. She bit her lip and sucked in a breath as he pressed his hand, gaining himself full access to her sex. It was a decisive action, not forceful, but still a potent reminder of who indeed held the physical and sexual power in the relationship.

Sefy’s pussy welcomed the invasion. Her lips were swollen with need, the tell-tale juice already trickling down her legs like a mini-waterfall. She writhed as he touched the morsel to her clit. Obediently, she saturated it. Moments later he held it to her lips, popping it into her ready mouth. Sefy chewed languidly, taking the bite that tasted like her. Again and again he repeated the act, trying one after another the potatoes, vegetables and various fruits. Sefy slurped the juices of her capitulation, giving him what she knew was a most erotic site for his very male eyes.

Would he want to fuck her now? Would it happen here on the floor, while she wore the handcuffs of silver? Whatever he had in mind, she would have no say, nor would she have the means to stop him.

“You seem agitated, my dear.” Jay stroked her cheek. “Alas, this is the hard part. Because now you must wait, while I eat.”

She shook her head like mad, communicating mayhem without words.

“Hush,” he soothed, caressing her head. “Patience is a virtue among *isinas*.”

Sefy pulled impotently at the cuffs, her mind already turning to revenge as she contemplated how many ways exactly there were to emasculate a man with a rusty butter knife.

“You will stay as you are,” he instructed. “Or I will be forced to chain you hand to foot on your belly. The position is called by you Americans, I believe, a hogtie.”

She was on the verge of responding when he issued a fresh warning. “And that will include a gag as well, if you do not remain quiet as you are.”

Making as many little noises as she dared, she settled down on her haunches to listen to him consuming what was no doubt a full meal eaten off a plate with utensils. All in all, the most frustrating experience in her life. In one way, though, this little demonstration was a good thing because once again it served to remind her never to confuse Jay with a human being, capable of bringing her joy and answering her deepest needs.

It was a mistake she’d not make again.

* * * * *

Jay had not failed to observe the girl seething in her bonds. She thought herself fearsome, perhaps, but truly, he found her adorable. Did she not realize it only piqued his appetite for her knowing that she was garnering her strength for another fight? Clearly she understood little of male psychology if she did not know that it was the thrill of conquest that made the love making so sweet. Indeed he could only hope she would continue to put up such resistance the rest of their days together, lest things become stale between them.

Not that he would ever love her less. That was a thing fixed in stone, writ in eternity. Taking his sweet time with dinner, savoring the many courses of traditional fare, he finished with a cup of coffee, flavored with fresh vanilla bean.

As an aperitif, he would enjoy the woman's tongue wrapped round his cock.

"Isina," he called. "Come here and pleasure me."

"Go to hell."

"You are speaking," he reminded her. "Without permission."

"And you are speaking without making any sense," she defied. "Let me out of these, Jairan. I don't want to play this game anymore."

"Our life together is no game."

"Call it what you want to," she pulled uselessly at the cuffs threatening to injure herself. "I want out."

"Do not risk upsetting me further," he counseled. "Crawl forward on your hands and knees, in the direction of my voice. Bring me your mouth. Now."

Sefy was coming, but she'd risen to her feet first. Was the woman crazy? She'd run headlong into him.

"Persephone, what do you think you are doing?"

"I'm showing you what I think of your little training techniques," she growled, flying in his face.

He wrapped his hands around her midsection and lifted her off her feet, dislodging the blindfold in the process.

"Let me go!"

She was a whirlwind, kicking and screaming. He had to put her over his shoulder and carry her bodily to the bed. Face down, she was still struggling, completely irrational and hysterical.

"Stop this at once," he commanded. "Or I will tan your behind so you don't sit down for a week."

"Go on," she swore at him. "You big bully. Beat me up, teach me what a big man you are."

He pressed his hands to her back, keeping her flat, and safe, on her stomach on the mattress. "You have to calm down. I can't let you go like this."

"Of course you can't. I'm your slave, right? Your little animal to show off naked to the bell hops. I bet he'll talk that up big. Maybe you can have him and some of his little buddies come up later and fuck me. I bet that will get you off big time, you fucking pervert."

"What I do to entertain myself is my business. If I want to give your body away, I will do precisely that."

Jay regretted the words at once. For starters, it wasn't true. He never would share his one true love with another. Were a man to so much as look at her with lascivious intent, he would go out of his mind.

"So I am a whore for you! I knew it!"

She turned her head so fast he never saw it coming, a pair of pearl white teeth clamping his lower arm. Jairan howled as she vented her fury, holding on to him for dear life. He did manage to pull himself away but not before receiving a nasty nip.

He backed up, giving a small, rather undignified yelp.

"Omigosh," she exclaimed, the reality of her deed having sunk in. "Are you all right? Should we call an ambulance? I didn't mean to—"

Jay held up his hand, terminating the dialogue. Terminating everything. "Get dressed," he told her a moment later, his face expressionless as he returned with the key to unlock the handcuffs. "I'll have my driver take you home."

There was shock in her eyes, a wound that looked far worse than his. "That won't be necessary," she brushed past him on the way to the bathroom.

He wanted with all his heart to say something, to reassure her, but they had crossed a line and there was no going back. Defeat hung heavy in the air, and the fault was his, not hers.

"Well, I guess that's it, then," she said at the door.

"Yes," he agreed, as dispassionately as possible. "Good day, Miss Landers."

"Good day," her gaze narrowed in pure feminine pique. "Mr. Rivington."

Chapter Eight

Jay hoisted the shot glass filled with twelve-year-old scotch, watching as the girls removed their clothing, item by item on the hotly lighted stage. Never again, he vowed, raising his bandaged fist for a refill, would he take up a relationship with a foreign girl. Or for that matter, a serious relationship of any kind.

Up to now, he had thought he knew what it meant to be in pain. As a teenager, he had lost his closest friend in a skiing accident and later the same year, his beloved uncle, the former regent. And this did not begin to cover the effects of the constant demands imposed by his father's overarching plan for greatness—the injuries from fencing and football, the agony of defeat in tournaments, from chess to polo. Even now, with the old man gone, there was still the burden of living out his dreams and administering his blood bought empire.

The one thing to keep Jay going had been the promise of *Lu-atey*, that by its magic ritual he would not be alone his whole life but would one day have a soul mate, a perfect submissive consort.

Such dreams, however, were mere ashes now. The girl was gone and in her wake, he could only wonder if he was meant to rule Surapay at all. For what was a prince without a consort? A headman without his woman, his love slave? He had been so certain of acquiring the female, so sure she was meant for him. How could he have been so wrong?

Jay's eyes glazed as he beheld the dressing on his wounded fist. A fist that could inspire terror and win mighty contests, and yet which, at the moment, was utterly impotent. What a fool he'd been. How poorly he'd handled the matter, from start to finish. All had seemed slick and easy on the outside. How could he have failed, with so much going for him, to win her heart and her surrender?

The answer, of course, was childishly simple. Persephone Landers was not Le-leiki, not his mother, born to breathe and live the traditions of his people. She was Western, with all the contradictions and inhibitions that accompanied such a cultural background.

He had moved too quickly, that was it. He should never have so blatantly squashed her tender emotions. What else could she do but balk at his intimidation?

Not that it would have mattered, as he was not the man for her. He was too weak. He'd gotten hot-headed, possessive and competitive instead of showing the tenderness due her.

Sefy was right, he was a bully. He deserved to be bitten and she had no place calling him back to apologize. Which is why he had not and would not return her numerous phone calls from the past two days. What was done was done. To interact

further would only show his weakness all the more, leaving them both open to be hurt again. The break had been made and the results were final. They were too different in nature from one another, their cultures clashed horribly and he himself was simply unsuited to provide the love and nurture needed by an *isina* in the first place.

His mind was made up and every minute more in this country only reinforced his certainty. Thankfully, his days here were numbered. One more night and then he'd be on a plane back home. The only reason he'd stayed on this long was so that he could keep his word and finish up the deal with Persephone's bank. He had saved some face at least, and actually secured beneficial arrangements for his company in the bargain. The lawyers could handle the details, ironing out how many more millions he'd make. All in all, a productive trip, he thought dryly, with that caustic wit his father had made so famous.

On the stage, meanwhile, just a few feet away, an attractive brunette gyrated her crotch, to the cheers of the audience, the finely trimmed hair of her vagina barely hidden by the g-string. It was amazing that a man could consider himself alone in such an environment of light and color and sex, and yet Jay was. Just as were all the others in this elegantly decorated club, the hunkered down, worn out executives, the eager young salesmen celebrating their latest commission and even a table or two of high rollers, bank and stock men entertaining the wealthy few who could afford to buy anything on the planet. Including the finest human flesh.

Jay was only torturing himself in coming here, of course. It was something he'd learned from his father. Simon Rivington had been a cold man, and while he'd given his son character, he'd certainly never offered a hug or encouraging word. Such things were considered weakness by the self-made billionaire. If the man had ever had a heart, it had died with Jay's fragile mother; the only woman who'd ever endured happily, even thrived under the old man's tyranny.

Simon Rivington was a dominant man, as was Jay. Such men can never settle for wives or mistresses. They must have an *isina*. One woman upon whom to dote, upon whom to mete out punishment and praise, and above all, to cherish and adore. Persephone was that woman for him and he ached to have her, more than anything he'd ever wanted in his life. It might seem a paradox that the master should be so in need of his slave, but truly it was she who was the sun to his planet, the source of power that made his blood burn, his heart pump. In his mind, he marked her as center. The time before her was a distant memory while the time ahead was made up of endless lifetimes of loneliness that could not pass fast enough.

Given his sentence, Jay would have to acquire the ability to deaden his feelings. To perfect the art of living without being alive. Ironical, considering that the prince who took the original Persephone was Hades, Lord of the Underworld and King of the Dead. For half the year, in her company did he truly come alive, while for the rest he was made to endure the cruel environs of the lonely land of the dead in solitude, unable to partake of the merciful sleep allowed his subjects.

Jay had squandered his own golden beauty. She had screamed out to be gently tamed, and he had lacked the patience, the character. Love, it seemed, was too deep and too complicated for the Rivington men. They understood baser emotions. Self-preservation. Greed. Sexual release without intimacy. Growth without mercy. Jay remembered the time his father had caught him masturbating at age fifteen and beaten him for it, soundly. Afterwards, the boy was sent to a prostitute. Jay's favorite uncle, his mother's younger brother, who was regent of the throne until he came of age, had explained the cultural taboo against masturbation and how male semen was sacred to his people and that it must never be expelled anywhere except into the orifice of a female. Such injunctions placed pressure upon the women and also ensured they never forgot their place as vessels, objects of release for the men. Among the common persons, at least in the olden days, it had often been necessary to pass the females about for this very reason. It was not uncommon for a stranger passing through to ask for and obtain the use of a man's grown daughter or even wife along with his night's lodging so as to avoid any spillages.

Such customs, anti-feminist as they were, had fallen out of vogue, though among the royal family--of which his father was a member--many of the old ways were kept. For Jay to pour himself into his hand or some tissue now would be as unthinkable as...as forgetting Persephone.

Had he more willpower, the strength of meditation, he might be able to simply close off that part of his nature altogether. As it was, from the moment Persephone had left his sight, he'd been pining and burning for her. Even his dreams were not entirely safe from the little blonde minx, whose bite, in this particular case, actually was worse than her bark.

To sum the matter up, Jairan had come here to the Sugar Room to get laid. Out here on the main floor of the establishment, there was little action to be found save the agonizing, pathetic tease of the bump and grind. But the driver, an affable fellow named Tony had told Jay he need only sit tight and wait. The club was one of the finer establishments of its kind, located in a first rate entertainment district. Rich, red velvet curtains decorated the stage and the bar was crafted out of mahogany. The rail at the bottom was brass, reminding a man of more genteel times, when bowler hats were worn and ladies giggled demurely in their pantaloons. In some ways, it was almost overdone, given the more modern function it now served.

"Trust me, this place is heaven on earth. The girls are the best. Real friendly, too, if you know what I mean."

"Lap dance?" asked a smoky-voiced redhead dressed only in high heels and a micro mini skirt.

Jay regarded her. It was impossible to ignore the lean lines and curves of her, the high, bare breasts, small, but well shaped, the dancer's legs, the convex belly. It was the eyes that interested him most, however, for only in those glassy depths could one hope to see through her outer form to the seat of her soul.

In this case he saw playfulness, restlessness and longing.

And also boredom.

Jay frowned. Perhaps he'd made a mistake. This was not like home, where there were women treasured and honored to perform such services for men.

"You're a shy one, huh?" She ran her finger over his lips, ponytail bobbing. It was sad, in a way that such a pretty creature did not have a man of her own to keep her from the indignities that must come with such a job as this.

"Something like that," Jay mused as he regarded the hard-faced men nearby, bouncers, their eyes riveted to the scene unfolding. It was one of the peculiar tortures imposed by men on other men in this culture that they were made to pay to look at, even drool over women they could not touch. Were he to attempt such a thing, those men would come after him, fists flying. They would prove no match, of course, given his extensive training in the martial arts, but he really didn't want to create an incident.

The redhead bent forward, advertising her assets. "You know, we can do more than talk if we go in back."

"What else is there?"

"Whatever you like."

"I like everything."

"Whole menu, huh?" She was purring, her lips nearly touching his.

"I'm not from around here," he warned. "When I say everything, I mean complete submission. Total and absolute."

She flashed her pearly whites, looking game. "You talking whips and chains, cowboy?"

"No. Flesh on flesh is all I require. Nothing more."

"How much?"

"Name your price."

The redhead gave him a number, which he promptly doubled. A minute later she was leading him by the hand through the bar area to a back door, leather-upholstered, windowless. On the other side was a long blue corridor, trimmed with gold wainscoting and lit by lightly glowing wall lamps, disguised to look like old-time gas lamps. She took him to one of a dozen identical closed doors, slid the latch from 'unoccupied' to 'occupied,' and let them in.

"There're cameras everywhere," she warned bluntly, closing it back and engaging the lock. "You try anything funky and security will be all over your ass so fast it'll make your head spin."

Jay regarded the décor. The bed was a four-poster covered in a rich red spread. A Victorian style settee graced the corner, along with an old-fashioned hat stand and spittoon. Again, the contrast struck him between the room's elegant pretensions and its carnal reality.

"Where do you want me?" she asked, hand on her hip, like they'd done this a thousand times.

So much for the passion flower routine out front. Apparently once the customers were nabbed, they weren't worth buttering up anymore.

"You realize that if we are intimate I will drive you wild with passion?"

She laughed dryly. "Mister, no flesh and blood man has ever done that. Not even my ex-husband. No offense."

"None taken."

Jay had her remove her skirt, g-string and shoes, and lie on the waterbed on her back, feet pulled toward her buttocks, thighs wide apart.

"I'm a patient man," he informed her, removing everything but his boxers. "And I always get what I want."

Except for his one true love.

The hooker-dancer's eyes and mouth telegraphed her awe at the sight of his naked skin. "Baby," she croaked, a little of the sexiness coming back for real, "you didn't tell me you had *that* underneath."

"What? The tattoos?"

"All of it, honey. All of it."

Jay sat down beside her. Truthfully, he tended to forget his effect on women. His beauty wasn't something he sought to capitalize on, anymore than did Persephone with hers. They were alike in that way, preferring to be judged on character and to judge others in the same way.

"As I said," he began to stroke her dancer's belly. "I intend to make you climax, no matter how long it takes. If that requires more money, so be it."

"Sweetie, I should be paying you," she crooned. "Cause if I met a guy like you anywhere else, I'd scoop you up in a heartbeat."

"It doesn't matter where we are," he began to tease her inner thighs. "You are paid to meet my needs, and I won't see you short-changed."

"Don't worry about that, Tiger," she reached for him.

"Hands over your head, palms up. Do not move them again without permission."

She obeyed him, as most women tended to do. With the notable exception of the luscious Miss Landers, who alone had really challenged him, enflaming the full depths of his manhood.

"Have you done this work long?" he flicked her clitoris with a single fingernail.

"Since—since I was eighteen," she breathed. "Oh, baby, you know right where to go, don't you?"

"Your man doesn't mind what you do?"

"I don't have one." Her hips were starting to buck, ever so slightly.

"If you were my woman," he informed her, "You would not do such things as this with your body, nor would you expose yourself to the gazes of other men."

"I'm available," she half teased. "If you...oh, god...want me."

"I have an *isina* already, thank you, though any man would be proud to have you."

"A what?"

"An *isina*. A life mate. Mine for life, bound to my will. We are mated by the laws of my home island."

"Whoa...that's kinky," she arched her back, enticing the finger deeper. "So why aren't you with her now?"

"It's complicated. Things didn't work out."

"But you said you're still together," she managed between sharp intakes of breath.

"The mating cannot be undone. Therefore, in her absence, I will never have another woman for my own."

"How sad. Is it the same for her?"

"She's American," he observed, not without irony. "She can do whatever the hell she wants."

The woman was past caring about his love life.

Jay set off the multiple orgasm, one hand at her crotch, the other manipulating firmly one of the girl's rubber bullet nipples. As predicted, she screamed aloud, thrashing back and forth, sounding like she was releasing years worth of tensions.

"Oh, honey, that was fucking incredible," she sighed when at last she was able to speak.

She'd forgotten his injunction to stillness, but he let the matter go, as there really wasn't much point under the circumstances.

"I want you inside me now, please?"

The girl's cunt beckoned, slick and open, prettily trimmed with a tuft of fine red hair. Her body was nearly perfect, her pelvis a wonderful bow. This is what he was waiting for so why did he hesitate?

"I can't," he told her, collapsing on his back. "I am sorry."

She turned over, resting her arms on his chest to look him in the eyes. "But why did you come here, then?"

"I thought I could have sex without love like my father. But I am not like him."

"Then why don't you go back and get this girl, this mate of yours?"

"It's too late. What is done cannot be undone. My love dies with her, unsung."

"I think that's about the most romantic thing I've ever heard," she declared, her eyes watering. "So tell me about her. Is she very beautiful?"

"Beyond description."

"And me?" she teased the hairs on his chest. "Do you think I'm pretty?"

"You, too, are beautiful," he stroked her head lovingly. "I told you already, you would do honor to any man."

"Even to you?"

"Yes."

"If I were yours, you would possess me completely?" Her voice was raspy. He could smell her heat as her small fingers trailed over his hip. It was clearly too great a temptation for her to be so close to his erect penis.

"I would see to it you were spoiled and honored and cherished," he told her.

"But," she ran her tongue across his pectorals. "You would still discipline me and control me. Don't deny it. I know your type."

"If you did not obey me, yes."

"What kind of things would you order me to do?"

"You would give yourself over to a life of pleasure. You would feel all the joys a woman can feel and you would give me pleasure, as well."

She licked her lips, eyes full of the devil. "Would I have to suck your cock?"

"You would be used by me in every way imaginable, and if I so desired, by any man I might choose in my stead."

"Sounds a lot like being a whore."

"Worse," he grunted as she kissed the head of him. "Much worse."

He let the little redhead devour him, her eyes closed, enjoying in her mind, perhaps, the dream of being a captive girl, one who is claimed by a male as his own utterly. The girl was good, a natural. She must be very lonely, he thought, and starved for love.

How many more such females, he wondered were so suffering in the world tonight?

With a final groan, Jairan expelled himself, a spurt of hot tension, raw, liquid, tamping only a tiny bit the explosive desire building in his heart. For her part, the redhead swallowed it down, like the true professional she was.

"Sure you don't want a nightcap?" she lazed up at him from the bed a few minutes later. "It's on the house."

He regarded her stunning, nude body. "That's kind of you, but I should be getting back to my hotel. Tomorrow I am returning home to my island."

She smiled sadly, thoughtfully. "Her name is Persephone, right?"

He looked at her strangely.

"You were saying her name while you were getting off."

Jay nodded. "But what's your name? You haven't told me."

"Why don't you name me?" she challenged. "My lord."

He thought for a moment. "*Me-le-la-te*. It means 'beautiful red dawn.'"

The hooker sighed. "You're sure you can't marry me, huh?"

"Not in this lifetime," he winked.

"I'll wait for the next."

He laughed. "Good night, *Me-le-la-te*," he kissed her forehead gently. "May the gods go with you."

"You too, my dark and handsome dream master."

Jay left her behind in the room and returned to his waiting limo. Within a minute of laying his head on the pillow back in his bed, he was sound asleep, the best rest he'd had in days.

Chapter Nine

Sefy fretted over the mug of lukewarm coffee. She was out of pencils to chew and tears to cry. Exactly thirteen times since leaving Jay's room three days ago, she'd called the hotel for him and exactly thirteen times she was told she'd have to leave a message. That made thirteen messages in all, and thirteen non-returned calls. Most people would take the hint by now. As a trained banker, a supposed expert in working exchange rates for monies all around the world, you would think Sefy could do the math.

But she was beyond math. Beyond reason.

At least she still had a job, though. It turned out Rivington was doing business with her bank after all. Daniel was happy as a pig in mud. Supposedly Jay would be here just one more day to work out the details. Which left her how many more phone calls? The weird thing is, she hadn't a clue what she'd say if he ever did answer. She wasn't any more ready to play cave man and cave woman with him now than she had been before, and she certainly didn't love the big brute; it just felt wrong to end it like this, so awkwardly.

Awkwardly. Listen to her, using another of those sanitized, polite words he was always kidding her about. Awkward didn't begin to cover what had happened between them. Fireworks, sparks, all out war and certainly mind-blowing passion, yes, but not awkwardness. Wrong as they might be for each other, they had fit, even if only in the heat of mutual desire. Miserably, she let loose another sob, the total number of which even her calculator couldn't keep tabs on anymore.

"We took up a collection," announced Stacy, entering her office with a contact paper covered coffee can filled with bright shiny, new pencils.

"It's like a sponsorship deal," explained Debbie, happily in tow. "For pennies a day, we give people the chance to keep you in lead."

Sefy laughed through her tears as she accepted the offering. "You guys are the greatest. Totally wacky, but still the greatest."

"We know," they chimed in unison, assuming their standard perches of judgment on either side of her desk.

"So," Debbie handed her a tissue. "Are we to assume Mr. Tall, Dark and Primitive has yet to return your calls?"

She nodded her head.

"You know," said Stacy, with that little sigh of hers. "This may sound like a dumb question, but the two of us were thinking, if you want to see this guy so bad, why don't you just go over to his hotel?"

"Or find out when he's coming here again to meet with Daniel," Debbie pointed out.

Sefy opened her mouth to pour out her reasons for not following such a course of action and discovered she had none. How strange was that?

"Sweetie," Stacy leaned forward to pat her hand. "We've taken a poll, and it's two-to-zero that you're not really serious about this guy, you're just well...going through a little midlife crisis."

"Midlife?! I'm only twenty-seven."

The pair of twenty-two-year-olds looked at each other.

"Maybe mid-life is the wrong word," Debbie acknowledged, "but still..."

Stacy cleared her throat, conspiratorially.

"Spill it, girls," Sefy blurted, unable to bear their coven-like cloak of secrecy. "I know there's something you're not saying."

Debbie pulled the book from behind her back. Sefy hadn't even seen her come in with it. "You left this in the bathroom yesterday. I know it was you, because I came in just after you."

Persephone glared at it with hot familiarity, the title and picture far too blatant to be pawned off as anything so simple as mid-life crisis. *Pirate's Pleasure*, it was called, and it chronicled the adventures, or rather misadventures of a young, nubile woman shipwrecked on a desert island with a bloodthirsty cutthroat, whose penchant for ropes proves to be just what the doctor orders when it comes to winning over her libido. It was one of Sefy's favorites and she'd practically memorized every scene of delicious punishment, torture and abuse at the hands of the handsome pirate and his crew.

"It's no big deal," said Stacy, eyes already appealing for backup from Debbie. "I mean...we're not into this stuff, but lots of people are."

"There are groups, Sefy. Places where you can be with others with the same...interests."

Persephone snatched back the racy book and shoved it in the drawer of her desk. "For Pete's sake, you two make it sound like I have cancer or something."

"Oh, no," Debbie countered, sounding like some kind of counselor. "They say wanting to play rough is more like being gay. You have to come out of the closet and just accept it."

"Closet?" Sefy laughed. "What on earth are you talking about? I'm just a little overworked, that's all. This is a book," she held it up. "It's not real life. If I watch a vampire movie, does that mean I want to be accosted by vampires?"

And if she'd bought a pair of handcuffs, just to try on by herself in the privacy of her own bedroom, so she could feel the cold, confining steel on her wrists while holding the vibrator inside herself, well, that wasn't real either. The reality was her freedom as a modern woman, and she was darn lucky to have it. One day she'd find a good man, and have respectable children and live in a respectable house and have normal sex. Not

trysts in the back of limos or bed-bound orgasms in the complete and utter power of the biggest male chauvinist on the planet.

And the handsomest.

"Just try this out, Sefy, okay?"

She looked at the card Stacy had laid out for her on the desk. "The Electric Dungeon. You can't be serious."

"Think about it, Sefy, it all makes sense. The way you responded back on the island, the way you very obviously fell into this super macho guy's orbit. I mean he spanked you, right? And you liked it."

"And he tied you up, too," reminded Debbie enthusiastically.

"That means nothing," she said flatly, regretting now having told these two anything.

"Fess up, Sef. You need domination, isn't that it?" asked Debbie bluntly.

"Do you think that's why I'm trying so hard to get a hold of Jay Rivington on the phone? Well, you couldn't be further from the truth. Jay and I had a very complex relationship, it's true, but it wasn't just a bondage thing, it was..."

"It was what, Sefy? Look at you, you can't even finish your sentence."

Persephone blinked, a deer in front of Jairan-shaped headlights. Curse these amateur psychologists for striking pay dirt yet again.

"You're just jealous," Persephone snapped, "because Jay's so rich and handsome and he loves me."

"He loves making you suffer, sweetie," corrected Debbie. "And after looking at that little book of yours, I can see that'd be right up your alley."

"We're not putting you down," Stacy added. "Actually, that book was kind of a hot read. The heroine's a little like you, isn't she?"

Sefy blushed, thinking of poor sweet Christiana, the young woman rescued from a shipwreck only to find herself reduced under the sway of the infamous brigand Brandon Killian to a mere pet, a crawling, naked wench begging for the kiss of the branding iron.

"Look," Debbie spouted the obvious. "I know it's none of our business, but we just don't want to see you get hurt. At this dungeon place, you can find safe people to play with. Jay Rivington isn't safe; you said it yourself. He wants to own you for real. Is that what you want?"

Sefy's pulse started racing. "No," she whispered, images of herself naked flashing through her mind, her small white body at his mercy, subject to his love, his heat...his wild passions and iron will.

"I don't think she knows what she wants, Deb."

Sefy frowned, flipping back her curls. Stacy was sounding like her mother now and that was going to piss her off in a hurry. "Look, I'm sorry I said what I did about Jay

picking me over you two. Honestly, it's been more of a curse than a blessing. But I need some space to think now, okay?"

"To play with yourself, more like," teased Stacy, relinquishing her spot. "I'd go right to the third chapter," she winked, sliding the book in her direction. "It's a real sizzler."

Persephone glared at half naked Christiana on the cover, kneeling, her bosom swelling, her shackle-clad wrists reaching up to the virile brigand.

"What do you know about love?" she grumbled at the unreal girl, getting up to lock the door behind her departed friends. The feel of the metal knob sent memories jolting to her brain. The way he had closed the cuffs on her, how he had fed her by hand, how he had teased her and pleased her and driven her out of her mind. Throwing herself down on her small couch, Sefy let loose the hot rain of tears, one last shower she hadn't thought was left.

Funny, it hadn't dawned on her till just now that she really had loved the man. Unfortunately, as men are wont to do, he had most thoroughly and completely mucked it up. There was no going back though. Faucets, that's what her eyes had been since they'd split. Well that meant she could turn them off, too. Back at her desk, she found the card, right there waiting. Black with purple lettering:

The Electric Dungeon

"Where Fantasy Plugs into Reality"

There was an address underneath. It wasn't too terribly far from clubs she'd been to in the past. She'd be able to find it easily enough. Maybe Sefy could begin a new life there. As one of those kinky submissive types who plays games with men and then goes out for steaks and cocktails afterwards. On the other hand, maybe the idea wouldn't fly at all. Maybe it would be a joke. Either way, she'd get Jay Rivington out of her system.

Once and for all.

* * * * *

The two girls were operating as a unit, tag teaming him in the hallway just outside of Daniel Taylor's office. One of them pressed the strange card into Jay's hand while the other told him to be sure and attend the festivities there tonight at ten. They were young, pretty and a bit breathless, like plotting schoolgirls. It was only after they'd gone running back down the hall suppressing giggles that Jay realized they were Persephone's friends from the island.

Puzzled, he examined the business card. It was from an adult club, of the S-and-M variety. What on earth would make them presume he would ever have such an interest?

Then it dawned on him the young women might be playing matchmaker. Theoretically, he supposed, Persephone might be there tonight, having received a similar invitation. Then again, as much as he'd turned her off to the notions of imbondment with his heavy-handed approach, The Electric Dungeon was probably the one place Jairan Rivington could go tonight and be sure not to find Miss Persephone Landers.

What would he say if he did see her? Good-bye. He owed her that much. And an apology. For all he'd done to ruin her life, to destroy her faith in men and in love. He wished her well. He wanted her to know that as well. A good life is what she deserved. A life uncomplicated by the troubles of his dominion and control. Convincing himself he had no other motive in mind, Jay returned to his hotel, to find the right outfit to wear to the club.

* * * * *

The Electric Dungeon might as well have been an electric zoo. Sefy had to use every ounce of willpower just to make it through the door. With every footstep, it only got worse. It wasn't the lights and colors that got to her, or even the costumed people running around in everything from jockstraps to full Dracula regalia. That she would have expected, but not the dark predatory stares, like those creepy old houses where the eyes of paintings follow you around. It wasn't hard to figure out who the dominants were in this group and who were the submissives. That was for sure. As near as Sefy could tell, the former were the equivalent of the lounge lizards in regular establishments, with some added leather and a whole heck of a lot more moxy.

Finding her way to the bar, she ordered a soda water with a twist of lime. Breath, she told herself, do not forget to breathe. Taking one bracing swallow, she heard a man's voice next to her. Very, very close.

"You won't find it," he said, his voice a mix of gravel and velvet.

"Excuse me?"

She should have been on guard, but for some reason she sensed she could trust him.

"Whatever you're looking for," he hooked the heel of a booted foot on the brass rail. "It's not going to be in here."

She regarded him, with a flip of free form curls. He was maybe fifty, well preserved with short silver hair and a thin mustache. The black shirt and jeans looked comfortable on him, not like a uniform the way some of the others were wearing their clothes. "How do you know what I'm looking for?"

"I don't. But one look at you says you're a sweet kid, and there isn't anything for your type in here."

Sefy opted for boldness. "I'm looking for a master. Or at least," she added as a hasty proviso, "to see if I'm good submissive material."

The black booted man ordered another scotch and soda water for her. "Look at me," he handed her the fresh glass.

She took it, allowing their fingers to interlock, just for a moment. She pinkened, wondering if this dashing looking man might be the one. At least for tonight.

"No," he shook his head, having pierced her with his green eyes. "You're not looking for a master. You already have one."

Sefy gave the remark the scorn it deserved. "That's impossible."

He shrugged, downing the scotch. "I call 'em as I see 'em."

"Well, I don't know what you can possibly see in me, other than a sincere curiosity about the lifestyle."

It was a term she'd picked up on the Internet for people who tried to live out relationships of master and slave. A lot of it reminded her of Jairan, except it wasn't a game to him.

"The lifestyle?" Now it was the man's turn to heap derision. "Every time I hear that expression I want to heave. Senior citizens and boy scouts have a lifestyle. Leather folks just live. One day to the next."

"I don't see you with any leather."

"I wear mine on the inside. It's a state of mind, my dear. To explain any further, I'd have to take you in back to the playroom. And that's by special invite only."

"I assume that's some sort of sado-masochistic pick-up line?"

"Nope. Just me, feeling sorry for yet another little lost sheep," he ordered a second scotch. "Go or stay, it's up to you. I'm just telling you, cute as you are, I'm the only one who'll give you the time of day."

"Why's that?"

"Like I said, you've got 'Property of' stamped all over you. And unless I miss my guess, he's a heavy hitter, too. Mafia, maybe, or some big shot politician? Am I right?"

"Something like that," she evaded. "So why are you willing to mess with me?"

He smirked. "Maybe I'm working on a merit badge. Does it make any difference?"

"No," she decided. "It doesn't."

The playroom was located behind a red door at the end of a long, twisting corridor made up of gray and black painted cinderblock.

"Now don't freak on me," said her black booted guide, who for some odd reason reminded her of the man in the yellow hat in the Curious George stories. "It can get a little hardcore inside."

Sefy could hear music, hard, slamming metal. Maybe she should turn around and run. On the other hand, could it be any worse than what Rivington had put her through already?

The answer was yes. No sooner had he opened the door than her senses were overloaded with images of dimly lit naked bodies, tied and chained, stretched and spread in every conceivable manner.

"Is this legal?" she asked foolishly, focusing for the moment on a large dark haired woman on an x shaped cross being struck all over with a long, red leather flogger. Right next to her a small, chubby brunette was kneeling, her neck and wrists sandwiched in a set of wooden stocks. In her mouth was a gag of a sort Sefy had never seen, one that actually kept her mouth open by means of metal hinges. A man was masturbating in front of her getting ready to come on her tongue. Meanwhile, a second man was lightly whipping her large tits, which were exposed and available

She was blindfolded, like all the other prisoners arrayed in the large, red and black room. It dawned on Sefy now that these were various 'stations' for customers to patronize, little tableaux where they could live out one or another's play fantasy with a nude, chained female completely unable to protect herself.

"Don't worry, it's both legal and SSC to boot." The man quoted the little plaque on the wall. "That means 'Safe, sane and consensual'. BDSM for the PC crowd."

Sefy stood aside as a small, nude Asian woman came up to him, squealing. She wore a harness and collar and was dragging a leash.

"Master, I missed you!"

"Lita," he ran his hand through her hair. "Have you been a good girl?"

"No, master," She shook her head, a look of mischief in her eye. "I think you'll have to punish me...again."

"Alcove one," he grinned. "Wait for me. On your knees."

"Yes, master," she grinned, rising on tiptoes to deliver a kiss to his cheek.

"Now for you," he turned back to Sefy. "Ready to widen your horizons a little?"

"I—I think so."

"Too late to back out now," he winked, taking her hand.

The woman was behind the velvet curtain, sitting cross-legged on the floor of the alcove. She wore a black leotard and nothing else. Her long silver hair was tied behind her head with a ribbon. It was difficult to gauge how old she was. She was one of those women that would always look at least ten years younger than her chronological age. The lines etched in her ruddy cheeks suggested sixty at least, though her body was slim and fit as any twenty-year-old.

"Well, well," she crooned, her voice a gravely cheer. "What have we here?"

"A novice, Madame Zoelda, in case you couldn't tell."

The woman called Zoelda had only just opened her eyes a moment ago. Her hands were palm up, suggesting a deep state of meditation. Sefy felt instantly at ease in her presence. No offense to her male companion, but there was something about the older woman that reminded her of a kindly aunt or grandmother. Albeit a kinky one who liked to hang around S-and-M parlors.

"I'm Persephone," Sefy put out her hand. "Pleased to meet you."

Zoelda's grip was warm and firm. For several seconds the woman said nothing as she looked deeply into the girl's eyes. They were roughly the same height and weight, leading Sefy to speculate as to whether she might age so well herself. Too bad she'd do so alone, she thought glumly.

Zoelda shook her head, apparently having reached some judgment.

"No, Calvin, you're wrong," she declared, not at all afraid to defy this self-proclaimed dominant. "She is no novice. She has been here before."

Sefy looked to the man for backup. "But I'm sure I've never been to the Dungeon."

"Not the Dungeon," Zoelda corrected. "Forget the distractions of your senses, forget everything but your heart." She placed her wizened fingers on Sefy's bosom. "Here—here is the only place one may truly exist. Now tell me, what is his name?"

Sefy recoiled as if Madame Zoelda had suddenly been electrified. She meant Jay, she was sure of it. "What are you talking about?" she feigned ignorance.

Madame Zoelda exhaled in slight impatience. "Never mind, child. Come closer and let me see for myself."

'Seeing' in this case meant placing her fingers on Sefy's temples. Massaging them lightly, Zoelda closed her eyes, disappearing once more into her trance world.

"He is not what he seems," she pronounced, drawing a deep breath. "This one you love is a man with his feet in two worlds."

A shiver went down Sefy's spine. The woman was seeing Jairan's dual existence, as a Westerner and as a Polynesian.

"He lives in two eras, as well. The two of you—you have met before. You have surrendered to him, many times, in many lives."

"That's ridiculous." Persephone did her best to laugh it off, though her heart was thundering a mile a minute.

"You will be lost without him," pronounced the seer solemnly. "He is half of your whole, he is the sovereign before whom you must kneel."

Sefy broke the contact, backing up straight into Calvin. "I think I should be leaving now."

"Give me one hour," Zoelda held up a single finger, smooth as driftwood. "And we shall know."

"Know what?"

"What you came to find out. Leave us," she waved imperiously to Calvin. "This is not for male eyes."

Calvin gave Sefy a wry smile. "It's been a pleasure, young lady."

"We'll be ready for company in ten minutes," Zoelda told him at the doorway, whatever that meant.

Sefy folded her arms as soon as the man was gone. "I'm not sure what you have in mind, but —"

"Hush." Zoelda's magic finger was over Persephone's lips. "Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Forget your surroundings, forget your own fears and tell me, what do you taste?"

"Taste? I don't know. Lavender, maybe?"

"No maybe. You must sense deeper, feel deeper. Remove your clothes, my child."

"My clothes?" She laughed nervously. "I don't think so."

Zoelda arched an eyebrow, canny and indisputable. "You don't eat, you don't sleep. You think of him non-stop, isn't that correct? He is master of your heart. You are an owned woman—it's written all over your face. And yet you refuse to strip naked as you belong?"

"You're crazy," Sefy defied.

Zoelda's eyes burned; fierce blue flames that reminded her of him, of Jairan with his impossible demands, his completely unrealistic notions of male-female relations, and his endless need to control.

"You've come here looking for him," she said. "You cannot live without him. His touch, his dominion over your body. You scream it, child. And you know he is close, too. Closer than you can stand. Strip for him, then. Let him find you, if he will, naked and obedient."

"I—I don't feel well," said Sefy, her head swimming. Was it the scotch, the excitement of the club or the woman's strange words and even stranger presence? She most certainly had not come here to see Jay. She was here to avoid him, to forget him, to find, if possible, someone else. Anyone else. But why at a fetish club? Why a place with chains and whips and all the other trappings of total sexual possession? Before Jay, she had never dreamed of being tied and controlled by a man, and yet here she was now. Could it be he was still in her blood, driving her to act this way, to come to this Electric Dungeon, in a black skirt and white blouse and high heels like some elegant, wicked courtesan?

"And you won't feel any better," the woman argued. "Till you do as you're told."

Persephone's fingers trembled as she opened the first button. She was just a little overheated, that's all. She'd undo one button, maybe two, no more and then she'd leave.

"You two have played the game many times," Zoelda whispered fiercely, her arms outstretched, palm up. "He has won you in battle, bought you at auction, stolen you at sea. Never, in any of his incarnations has he been able to live without you. Again and again, age after age, he has hunted you down and forced you to his bidding. You are his love slave, in the dance eternal."

The blouse fluttered to the floor, followed by the white lace bra. Sefy shivered, the cool air on her vulnerable breasts. Could it be he was here tonight? Zoelda had

intimated as much. But letting him find her here, like this, would be madness. What would he think of her?

"Hands at your side," said Zoelda, as she sought to cover herself.

Sefy complied, though she was ashamed to show her arousal, the peaked nipples, the flushed skin.

"You are lovely as an angel," declared the woman. "It is no wonder he cannot bear to share you."

"That isn't true," Sefy defied, her voice petal soft, the heartache peeling off her soul in the finest of layers. "He doesn't want me. He's made that quite clear."

She hadn't intended to sound so bitter, or so disappointed.

"What is your name, my angel?" Zoelda asked soothingly.

"Persephone."

"Persephone," she sounded. "I should have guessed. That was your name once before, a long, long time ago, in the days when gods shared the earth with men. Touch your breasts for me, my dear Persephone. Tell me what you feel."

Sefy shivered at the touch of her own fingers on her super heated flesh. The tingling sensation traveled rapidly through her belly, to that most uncontrollable place of all, the delta between her thighs.

"I feel..." Sefy hesitated. What she felt was Jay, caressing her, molding her into what he wanted her to be, into what she needed to be, but she dared not say this, not in front of this most peculiar, witch-like woman.

"You avoid my question," said Zoelda. "You do not obey." The old woman reached forward and opened Sefy's skirt deftly. "Is it punishment you crave?"

Persephone released a small moan as the garment slid to the floor, baring her panty-covered crotch. The silk was so thin and so damp she might as well have been naked.

"What would he do if he were here now," she persisted, "seeing your behavior? Your lack of respect for me?"

Persephone knew she hadn't really done anything wrong, and yet she was feeling herself getting caught up in the heat of the moment. "He would take me over his knee," she rasped. "He would show me that as his woman I am accountable to a higher standard and that he would tolerate no foolishness from me."

Damn it, why was she bragging about this, like this was something good on the man's part; some sign of his love for her? It was sadistic and just plain sick, that's what it was.

"You are aroused to say and think these things," Zoelda declared. "It is your belonging to him that opens the floodgates."

"No," she moaned, her head thrown back, her hands still molding her own heaving breasts. "I don't want to belong to him. It's not fair. It hurts too much...to be a woman, his woman."

"But that is what you are. Why do you fight it? Your life is for love; you are the crown of your lord's achievement, the flower of his soul. Do you think his chains are meant for cruelty, or that his firm dominion is designed to suffocate you? These things are to free you, to be the lovely creature you are inside."

"I—I'm so afraid," Persephone breathed.

"As well you should be," she spoke sternly. "The rest of your clothes, little one—put them on the floor, now."

"Yes," she hissed, trance-like, slipping off her heels one by one. It was right, even necessary to do this. The shoes were an impediment to humble bare feet, and the panties...sopping wet, long having outlived their usefulness.

"Now you are correctly attired," said Zoelda approvingly as she slipped the wet silk over her ankles, one at a time, shedding the undergarment like a piece of snakeskin. "Naked for your lord and master. But how shall he find you, if indeed he comes?"

Sefy looked at her piteously. "I—I don't know what you mean. Won't you please tell me?"

Zoelda smiled wickedly; half-childish imp, half-she-demon. "I suspect you would look fetching in chains."

Sefy clenched her thighs. The very idea of it, to be restrained like that here, in a public place, and for him no less was almost enough to make her come on the spot.

"Unless you'd still like to go home," she teased.

"No. I'll stay." She'd come too far to back down now. She had to feel more, to be more.

"Give me your hands."

Sefy shook out her hair and presented her slim wrists.

Zoelda brought the chains and shackles of gold. "These are not toys, Persephone," she reminded. "Once on you, they cannot be removed by your own will."

"I understand," she whispered.

"No," she countered, "you do not. But you soon will."

The cuffs fit snugly, smoothly. The sound of the tiny locks clicking shut made her want to touch herself, but that was out of the question now, because Zoelda was lifting, Sefy's arms high, slipping the chain over a hook depending from the ceiling. The hook, in turn, was connected to another chain, on a pulley.

Persephone sucked in her breath as Zoelda turned a crank on the wall. Inch by inch, the hook and chain rose, till Sefy was on tiptoes.

"There," the wily old woman said with satisfaction. "Now you are ready."

As a finishing touch, she produced a blindfold, form-fitting, made of black velvet. Persephone could see nothing now. Naked and stretched to her limits, physically and mentally, she was as vulnerable as a female could be.

Anything could be done to her now. Hands could play with her breasts, stroke her pussy or ass, or even smack it. A mouth or mouths could suck her nipples. She could be taken, too, by anyone who wanted her.

"I leave you now," Zoelda kissed her cheek. "To your fate."

Sefy tensed, clenching her fists. "But where are you going? You can't just abandon me. What if someone comes in?"

"In that case, you had better prove pleasing, my dear, or you might wind up on the short end of the stick – or the riding crop."

Sefy jolted as the black leather device touched her hip. Gently, but with definite instructive intent, Madame Zoelda ran the tip of the whip up her side and across to her cheek. Never had Persephone felt this undressed, this caressed, this feminine. It was an unspeakable bliss, but also the most helpless feeling in the world. For at this moment, her happiness, her wellbeing, hinged solely on her being an object of pleasure.

She ought to be disgusted, horrified, but instead she was merely horny.

"He has done this to you," said Zoelda, putting the whip to her moaning lips. "Just as he has always done. Stealing your freedom. Ruining you for it. Time and again, born only to bow to his will."

Persephone kissed the instrument of torture as she was bidden. Would Jay use such a thing on her? She couldn't imagine such a thing, and yet she was quite sure he would reserve the right to, where she was concerned, just as he did with everything else.

Jay was the most impudent man alive. If he dared come here tonight, she would...well, she wouldn't be able to *do* anything, but she would protest it...somehow.

"I am my own person," Sefy declared, rallying her pride. "I belong to no one."

Zoelda demolished her foolish rebellion in a single gesture. A flick of the whip across her protruding nipple. Not enough to cause real pain, but enough to let her know she was a prisoner, subject to stimulation against her will.

"Oh, god," she cried, the sudden paroxysms overtaking her pussy. "Touch me, please. Let me come."

"That's not my place, is it? Nor is it yours. That right is his, and he will let you orgasm as he sees fit, not before. Isn't that what's killing you? All the waiting, knowing you are his to command."

"Please," she moaned, the request turning into a soft, feminine wail directed not to Zoelda but to Jairan. "Take me, punish me, show me no mercy, but let me be your woman; I am so sorry for doubting you."

The empty air offered no reply. She heard the curtain open and close, signaling Zoelda's promised departure. Sefy had no choice but to yield to the tears bottled up for so long. The sudden strong emotion made her quiver in her bonds. It wasn't fair, she repeated. Not fair to be a female. Not fair to be in love. Especially not with a man who was chauvinistic, inconsiderate, rude, selfish and mean to her not only in this one lifetime, but – if Madame Zoelda was to be believed – in lots of others as well.

* * * * *

Jay's natural presence and exotic looks held great appeal for the female patrons of The Electric Dungeon, but he himself failed to understand the draw of the place, or why anyone should wish to solicit him, a perfect stranger, for purposes of engaging in behaviors of an intimate nature.

Where was the turn-on in such a tawdry atmosphere? Did anyone expect to be aroused by silly leather costumes, pantomimed whipping or stylized displays of bondage? These people reminded him of children playing at the business of adulthood, going through the motions while comprehending nothing.

At the end of the night these 'normal', 'adjusted' citizens would drag themselves home with or without their lifestyle partners and hunker down into conventional beds, resting up for the next conventional day. What did they know of the smell of a submitted female upon the sacred altar, the inking instruments claiming her body at break of day? How could they begin to appreciate the feel of a quivering *isina* as she comes upon your hand or crawls into your lap for protection against the sheets of lightning searing across the endless Pacific skies?

How ironic that these persons, these lifestylers, did not seem to know that they were not living at all, whereas he, who had tasted the bliss and freedom of truly possessing a woman must now live his life in her absence. Still, as the saying went, hope was the last thing to die. For in the back of his mind, and in the pit of his stomach, there had been this feeling that somehow, against all odds, Persephone might be here. What he would have done if he had been confronted with Persephone Landers reborn in flesh, however, after all that had occurred between them, he hadn't a clue.

"Can I buy you a drink?" asked the silver-and-gray-haired man at the end of the bar.

"Thank you," Jay replied, though he'd been on his way back out of the club after a perfunctory inspection. "A whisky will be fine."

It was a matter of courtesy. To refuse a gentleman's invitation would be highly rude. Besides this fellow seemed different than the others, with his laid-back mannerisms and down to earth presence.

"Two whiskies," the man held up a pair of fingers to the bartender. "The name's Calvin," he turned back to his guest.

"Jay Rivington. Pleased to meet you."

"The pleasure's mine." He handed him one of the shots. "Jay, forgive me for being blunt, but I couldn't help noticing your disappointment."

Jay took the small glass filled with the powerful alcohol. "It's nothing personal, Calvin. This just isn't my kind of place."

Calvin smiled wryly. "Mine either," he confessed. "Though maybe I'm just getting too old for all the noise."

Jay toasted with his glass, liking the man more and more with each passing minute. "To old age."

"To old age," he agreed. "And to not being alone."

The whisky went down hard and fast, burning a much needed fire trail through Jay's gullet. "There's worse things," he declared, "than being alone."

The man regarded him. "Can I push my luck and ask you another question? And mind you, you're not at all obligated, even though I did just spring for your drink."

"A man with ulterior motives," Jay grinned. "I like that."

"I'm nothing if not underhanded. So tell me, Jay," he flagged down the bartender for a refill. "Why aren't you going home with one of these fine ladies? There's women in here who would give themselves to a man like you, body and soul. No limits, my friend."

"I gathered as much."

In the short space of time Jay had been here, he'd already fended off a half-dozen propositions, including an offer from a bare breasted redhead to serve in perpetuity as his unpaid homemaker and breeding slave.

"I bet you have something better at home," he prodded. "Is that it?"

"It's a good thing you keep buying," Jay downed his second drink. "Or I might not like you butting so much into my personal affairs."

"She must be pretty special," Calvin reasoned. "But that only begs the question why you aren't with her now."

"There isn't anyone, not anymore."

Calvin fell silent. Jay was grateful at first but then the images came into his unoccupied mind, pictures of Persephone, laughing and teasing, striking a hundred poses, from that of insolent little girl to his own personal whore. And in between, every shade of defiance, impudence, each more beautiful than the last. Why oh why had the gods let him meet such a creature only to lose her? How could he ever love another? How could he ever seize another pair of lips, kissing them to obedient silence? How could he ever arouse and subdue another body, bringing it to that place of perfect submission? Who would argue with him as she did, only to be defeated? Who would challenge him, who would embrace him and who would kneel before him, gifting him with the present of her sacred, reverent trust?

"Love's a bitch," Calvin grumbled at last.

"Indeed."

"You're the second one tonight, actually."

"Second one?"

"With a broken heart. A young woman, very pretty, came in an hour ago."

Jay's pulse quickened. It couldn't be. Not in a million years. "She left already, I suppose?"

"No. She's in the back. In one of the alcoves. One of our club's regular's, Madame Zoelda, is attempting some special therapy with her. She's behind a red curtain, you can't miss her."

"A red curtain, you say." He tried to keep his voice steady.

Calvin inclined his head toward the back of the club. "Have a look, if you like."

"Yes, thank you. I might."

Jay was only dimly aware of saying goodbye to his new friend. He was in a kind of tunnel, his thoughts intent on only one thing as he made his way back to view the woman behind the red curtain—namely cashing in on his one final chance at happiness, no matter how slim it might be.

Persephone's juices trickled down her inner thighs. With every sensation, every passing second in bondage, her titillated body only grew hotter and needier. The blindness only intensified her arousal. To her ears came the snap of the whips, the giggles of willingly tormented females in the room beyond the velvet curtain, while to her skin came tiny charges, zaps of electricity as she imagined things being done to her, naughty and wicked things.

Would Jairan ever chain and blindfold a woman this way? For pleasure or discipline? Would he demonstrate his absolute command over a woman's body so as to make her all the more willing and eager to please? Maybe he was doing it right now, to some hula bitch on his foolish island, driving her out of mind with desire so that she didn't know whether to laugh, cry or scream. The arrogant bastard would enjoy every second of her torture, too. He'd alternate teasing her then leaving her, amusing himself at some sport or business enterprise, letting her simmer, a pot, set to go off by his will and his will alone.

Sefy wouldn't be that way. She'd be cold as ice for him. Frigid to the touch. He could hang her all night and she wouldn't beg for a thing. Not one touch of his hand on her breast or belly, not one kiss to her lips, not even so much as a nibble to her earlobe would she crave. And if he took her to bed, he would find himself making love to a block of ice.

This last notion made her laugh. Who was she kidding? All her noble principles wouldn't amount to a hill of beans in his presence. Oh, sure, she'd be angry at him for chaining her, but secretly, she'd be thrilled. To feel so safe, so desired, so completely cared for and confined as the sole object of the man's desire. A man so uncompromising, that he would settle for nothing less than his total satisfaction. And hers, too.

Jay made Sefy's body speak for itself, and what that body said to him again and again was yes. And where her body was, could her heart be that far behind? Could she really imagine living without the man? In spite of, or maybe because of all his foibles, his exasperating habits and ludicrous notions of male female relations?

Almost unconsciously, she began to writhe, stretching out her belly, inviting him, in her waking dreams to come and take her. To claim her, carrying her off to his faraway island, to a life of golden servitude, a strange but exquisite mix of captivity and bliss, the object both of his adoration and of his unyielding will.

Where was he tonight? Why had he left her behind? How could she ever go back to the life she knew? It would never be the same. The old, sensible Sefy was gone. Look at the risks she'd taken coming here tonight. And it would only get worse, she was sure of it. She wasn't safe alone anymore. She was spoiled for freedom, like Zoelda said, rendered incapable of living as the uptight, aloof, asexual being she had been. She wanted to be female, to please, to make her man rock hard, to drive him mad with the need to conquer her over and over.

Her man. The only one she would ever want again. The one man who by the same token she could never have.

Persephone froze as she heard the curtain sliding open. Someone was coming in.

"Zoelda?"

The quirky old woman did not answer, nor did anyone else.

"Who's there? I hear someone." Sefy pulled irrationally at the chains. They were more than a match for a woman's strength. "I know you're there. It's no use hiding."

Sefy heard breathing—a man's breathing. The reality of her sexual peril came crashing home. Had Zoelda left the whip? If so, he could use it on her. If not, there were plenty of other things a man could do to a naked, bound female. A wave of panic overtook her as she thought how this must look—she was obviously aroused, flushed and wet. What if he mistakenly thought she was enjoying this sort of treatment?

"This isn't what it looks like," she announced hastily.

"No, and what is it, then?"

Sefy's heart seized in her chest. A dozen emotions, all of them painful, exploded inside her being. "Jay?"

"Yes. It's me."

All at once her dreams crashed, giving way to a harsh reality. There was no love in his voice, no affection whatsoever. He must surely be thinking her a wanton woman, willing to display and surrender herself to any casual passerby.

"I—I didn't think you'd be here," she said foolishly.

"It doesn't matter, Persephone. I leave tomorrow and I won't be returning. Ever."

"Oh." She felt as if she'd dissolve right there on the floor. "Then I won't...see you again?"

"No," he confirmed. "You won't."

He sounded so aloof, so distant.

"Jay, we need to talk."

"There is nothing more to talk about. You've made your choice."

"My choice? You mean this?" She squirmed ineffectually in her bonds. "No, you don't understand."

"I know all I need to know, and so do you. Good-bye, Persephone."

She called out to him, but he was already gone. It was a soothing, consoling Zoelda who arrived a few minutes later to help her down.

"My life is over," Sefy sobbed as Zoelda removed the blindfold. "Do you hear me? Over."

"Hush, child," she scolded lightly. "Did you listen to nothing I told you? Do you think your cosmic fate, at work over thousands of years and dozens of lifetimes, can be undone by the foolish pride of your current incarnations?"

"I—I suppose not."

"Just leave things to me," she reassured. "The two of you may be stubborn as mules, but I'm going to wear you down, trust me."

Sefy wiped her eyes. The really crazy thing out of all of this was that for some reason, she did.

Jay found Calvin where he'd left him at the bar.

"Well there you are," the man crooned. "Did you see the little gal behind the curtain? She's a real cutie-pie, isn't she?"

"Very pretty," Jay managed crisply, pulling several hundreds from a thick billfold in his pants pocket. "I wonder if you would be so kind as to see to it that she gets home safely tonight?"

The man gave him a curious look. "You know her, then?"

"No," Jay replied with absolute honesty. "The woman behind that curtain was a stranger to me."

Calvin tapped the folded bills. "That's no good here."

Jay retrieved it, realizing his error. "My apologies. I did not mean to impugn your honor."

"Your apologies aren't any good either. Consider the girl under my personal protection. Just promise me you won't give up on trying to be happy."

"Happiness is for children and fools, Calvin. You're old enough to know that."

"Maybe. But reaching for it is the only thing that makes life worthwhile."

Jay put out his hand, a combination peace offering and getaway move. "Good night, Calvin. And thank you."

"Good night, Jay. And good luck."

Jay smiled ironically on his way out. Luck wasn't something he had use for anymore, nor love either. Chains were real and betrayal was real and hurt was real. Not that he could blame the innocent Persephone. He'd awakened needs in her obviously, and now she was filling them. In the arms of strangers, it seemed, but then, that was her

right, too. He had forfeited his claim over her body and with it the right to dictate how and with whom it was used. If she wished to offer herself to one and all, to be a toy in a bondage parlor, strung up for the amusement of drooling, dull-minded suburbanites, that was her business.

The fact that seeing her trussed up as a naked, chained offering filled him with rage and jealousy and unbearable lust was his problem to deal with, not hers. Persephone was not his woman. He did not own those milk-white breasts, lightly trembling, perfectly shaped and tipped in rock-hard, coral-pink nipples. He did not possess those hips, nor could he claim command over the wondrous juncture between her thighs wherein lay the greatest passion he had ever known. Above all, he had no rights to that wriggling, impertinent ass, which begged to be grasped and held and spanked till it reddened deliciously under his palm.

No, he was a lonely bachelor, with an empire to run. There was no female returning with him to his island, no demure, elegant little beauty by his side, intent on his every word, making him the envy of every male. His queen by day, and by night, his wild she-beast, craving to be tamed, again and again, striking with her playful claws just so as to be brought in line by her firm but loving lion.

Fantasies. Vain fantasies. And pain. That's what women brought. That's what love brought. Cruel hurt, the inevitable stinging of wounded pride. He was better off alone. This was his father's teaching, the legacy that now he would live. Almost convinced, and more than a little dazed, Jay Rivington sat heavily in the back seat of the limousine. The very one in which he'd shared such delicious intimacies with Persephone.

"I've had enough," he said curtly to the chauffeur, lacking his usual polished and genteel manner. "Take me back to the hotel."

Chapter Ten

The doorbell would not stop ringing. Whoever was out there was not getting the hint.

"Go away!" Persephone called from her cocoon of self-pity. "Let me die in peace."

Eventually, she yielded, dragging her sorry, pathetic person off of her fluffy, overstuffed couch to the triple-locked front door. Through the peephole she made out the twin forms of Debbie and Stacy.

Big surprise.

"Usually when people don't answer after the first hundred times," she told the pair. "It means they're either not there, or they want to be left alone."

"You called in sick today," said Stacy, employing her own unique logic. "How else were we supposed to talk to you?"

"We brought emergency supplies," Debbie held up the plastic grocery bags. "Chocolate ice cream, chocolate donuts, chocolate milk and chocolate sauce."

Sefy, looking and feeling like Jabba The Hutt in her down comforter, rolled her eyes. "Just what I need. While you're at it, why don't you get me a chocolate IV, too?"

"I knew we forgot something," Stacy snapped her fingers.

"Seriously," Debbie said. "There's something important we have to talk to you about. And it's not chocolate."

"We should all sit in the living room," Stacy suggested, taking Sefy's arm.

Before Persephone could open her mouth to argue, they were facing each other over the coffee table. It was Debbie who spoke first, sounding like she'd drawn the short straw.

"Um...I know last night was really horrible for you at the club," she began. "And we're not here to try and fix everything with a magic wand."

Sefy's antenna went up immediately. "How did you know it was horrible? I haven't talked to either of you since then."

The girls looked at each other guiltily.

"Donut?" Debbie diverted, holding out the box to Persephone.

"Look," Stacy pressed on, the braver of the two as always, "we might as well just come out and say it. Your meeting Jay last night wasn't exactly a co-incidence."

"It wasn't?"

Debbie cleared her throat, putting the donuts in her lap. "We kind of, um, knew he would be there."

"We sent him there," said Stacy bluntly. "Just like we did you."

Sefy felt a rush of anger. "You were trying to get us back together, weren't you? You set us up. How dare you."

"We meant well, Sefy."

Persephone was beside herself. "Meant well?" she stormed. "Are you serious? I can't even imagine such a thing. Do you have any idea what you put me through, and Jay, too? Did you honestly think you could manipulate us like that?"

"Actually," said Stacy. "There's more."

"More? What do you mean more?"

Debbie had her lower lip between her teeth. She was studying the donuts again, like they had some deep dark secret in them. "It kind of wasn't an accident that you met those other people, either," she explained.

"Excuse me?"

"Calvin," said Stacy, the only one of the two able to maintain eye contact. "And Zoelda. They're friends of my cousin Lori. You know, the one who owns her own clothing store? She sells them a lot of custom-made stuff, leather and fetish gear."

Sefy wasn't sure which to be more outraged over. Her friends' behavior or the carefree way Stacy was explaining it all. "So let me get this straight," she said with exaggerated calm. "You tricked Jay and me into going to a bizarre sex club where you had a couple of pros get me to take off all my clothes and chain me up, so he could see me, be totally disgusted and run off, leaving me totally humiliated and traumatized?"

"It sounded a lot better in our heads," defended Debbie.

"Besides," Stacy pitched in. "We've a new plan to fix everything."

"Oh no." Sefy put up her hands. "No more plans. No more strategies, no more pep talks. No more nothing."

The girls were silent.

"I mean it. You two are going to leave this alone. Got it?"

"Yes," they grumbled in unison.

"Good. Now let's have some chocolate."

Debbie fetched the bowls and spoons, pouting as she scooped out the frozen confection. Stacy wasn't much better, pushing dark brown swirls of chocolate thunder around the ceramic surface of her dish like someone had just shot her dog and taken away her department store charge cards all in one day. The clinking of the spoons was getting so loud over the stony silence, Sefy wanted to scream.

"Oh, all right," she exclaimed at last, worn down by their calculated cheerlessness. "You can tell me your plan. But I promise you already, I won't like it and I won't agree to it."

"Oh, that's the beauty of it," the reanimated Debbie leaned forward. "You don't have to like it for it to work."

"In fact," confided Stacy conspiratorially, "you won't know anything about it, even once we tell you. That's what you call plausible deniability."

Sefy glared in amazement. "You guys have finally gone around the bend, do you know that?"

"I don't think so," Debbie licked her spoon coquettishly, "because as we speak, Mr. Prince Jay Rivington is about to meet his match."

"The one force in the universe capable of making him change his mind," supplied Stacy.

There was only one person she could think of to fill that bill.

"Zoelda," said Sefy. "You're going to use Zoelda, aren't you?"

"Off the record? Yes."

Sefy shook her head. "It won't work. A man like Jay would die a thousand deaths before admitting he was wrong, even on the tiniest point, let alone something like this. He's said goodbye to me, and that's it. Forever."

"We don't need him to admit anything, my dear. All we have to do—all Zoelda has to do—is get him to agree to another *Lu-atey*. A real one with blindfolds. Then we make sure you're in it so he can pick you over all the others. What will he be able to say when he takes that cloth off his eyes and sees you—his mate for life, fair and square? He'll have to take you back."

Persephone sat back, balancing the icy cold bowl on her crossed legs. It was a ridiculous plan. A pipe dream, lacking any and all foundation in reality. There were a thousand things that could and would go wrong. In short, it would never work. Not in a million years.

Or would it?

* * * * *

"Young man, I'm sure there must be some mistake. This was arranged for me weeks ago."

"I'm sorry, ma'am," replied the flustered young man in the red coat and tie. "But the computer doesn't show anything. That's all I have to go on."

Jay couldn't help but notice the situation, the stately woman in black, with the wide brimmed hat and high heels, a light wrap gracefully adorning her statuesque figure, looking so out of place in front of the Formica-topped airline counter. She seemed as though she ought to be simply waltzing on to the airfield, waving to throngs of adoring fans as she boarded her private jet.

"May I be of some service?" he inquired, allowing himself a slight detour on the way to his own plane.

"Mr. Rivington." The twenty-year-old straightened himself to attention in recognition of the head of the airline for which he worked. "It seems we have a discrepancy with a reservation, sir."

"A discrepancy?" The woman made a small 'hrmmph' sound and turned up her nose. "A travesty more like."

"She's heading to Los Angeles, sir. But we have no record of a first-class reservation on this flight."

"Is the flight full?"

"We have seats in coach, sir, that's it."

"Coach?" The woman looked as though she'd been offered a meal of live cockroaches. "Surely you're not serious?"

The young man looked at his boss, beads of sweat forming all along his forehead. "Sir, there's nothing else I can do, unless someone wants to give up a seat."

The woman raised her head proudly. "No, no, no," she waved her hand. "I simply will not accept charity. I want my seat, not someone else's."

Jay suppressed a smile. "Ma'am, may I offer you an alternative?"

She turned to Jay, as if seeing him for the first time. "Do I know you, young fellow?"

"Jay Rivington, at your service," he bowed dramatically. "As owner of this airline, I would like to make up for our grievous error by offering to fly you in my own jet. I am leaving at once, if you would do me the honor of accompanying me."

"I am Madame Zoelda," the woman extended a gloved hand. "It is comforting to know there are still gentlemen left in the world. I accept your offer. Is there someone available to see to my luggage?"

"Naturally," he kissed the woman's slender fingers. "My staff will see to it at once."

Jay had hoped for a quiet flight, a chance to catch up on the sleep he'd lost the past few nights. His passenger, however, had other ideas. Seated across from him in the luxurious custom designed cabin, she kept him plied with questions, punctuated with deep penetrating gazes all the way to LA. It seemed she was a medium of some kind, claiming to be able to see into the depths of the human soul. He didn't put much stock in such things, but when she began to talk about certain details of his childhood, things no one else could know, he sat up and took notice.

"There is one thing," she told him, "that you seek but cannot obtain. You would give all you have to get it, and yet there is no buying this thing, no bargaining for its possession."

"There are many things matching that description," he sought to maintain a healthy skepticism. "Love, eternal youth. Who wouldn't want to live forever or be adored by a perfect mate?"

Madame Zoelda smiled cunningly. "You think I'm giving you general information, of the sort that would apply to anyone. I have something else in mind."

"And what would that be?"

"What you seek is the approval of your father. That is the one thing holding you back."

Jay hid his surprise. "And I suppose you're going to tell me I should move on because he really loved me even if he couldn't say so, and if he were here, he'd be proud of me?"

Zoelda laughed, the wickedly free sound of a cawing blackbird, mixed with the juice of sweet spring berries. "Good heavens, my boy. Do you take me for a sap? If old man Rivington ever did come back it would be to tell you that you were running things all wrong."

Jay laughed in spite of himself.

Damn, it felt good to let loose. When was the last time he'd felt real joy? Not since losing Persephone.

"I hope," he managed at last, "that you are not relying on your prophecies to make a living, because no one will ever pay you a nickel to hear things like that."

"True," she agreed. "Which is why I am very fortunate to have had two wealthy husbands, both expired."

"I'm sorry for your losses."

"Their losses," she shrugged. "My gain. But let's return to the subject at hand."

"Which is?"

"Your sex life, dear boy."

"That's easy. I don't have one."

"And you blame the woman for that."

"Which woman?"

"The one you love but can't be with. The one who loves you and won't be with you, either." Zoelda sighed at her own pronouncement. "Gracious, but you young people do make things complicated."

"I suppose it was simpler in the old days?"

"No, we just knew enough to do more drugs."

"I know there must be a point in here somewhere."

"Only that you need to buck up, stop feeling sorry for yourself and start acting like a prince."

"Why don't you tell me how you really feel?" he deadpanned.

"There is a dance, is there not? A sacred mating ritual on your island?"

Jay frowned. So she knew about the *Lu-atey*, as well. Were there no limits to her power? "You've obviously done your homework."

"I have," she agreed. "And so should you. Look at you, Jay. You're a fine, strong man. You are not your father. You are not a European entrepreneur. You have your

mother's blood. Why live in the past with Simon's ghost? Claim your identity. Command the women to dance for you. Stake your claim on whichever one strikes your fancy. What are you afraid of? That the gods will make a mistake? Or is it that you're afraid they won't?"

"Are you always so blunt with people who give you free rides?"

"Only if I'm quite sure they're not going to throw me out along the way."

"The thought had crossed my mind," he admitted.

Madame Zoelda leaned back, seemingly quite satisfied with herself. "I need a drink, Jay, if you would be so kind."

"My sentiments exactly."

They were silent for the rest of the trip, though Jay was hearing echoes in every sound. *Lu-atey*, in the tinkling of the ice in the glasses. *Lu-atey* in the hum of the jet engines, *Lu-atey* in the hydraulics of the landing gear.

Maybe the dance wasn't such a bad idea after all. What did he have to lose—except his painful memories of Persephone? Surely she was going to go on with her own life, dating that boss of hers, perhaps, the overly clean little man who kept giving her the eye during their first meeting.

The thought of her with another man made his blood boil. All the more reason to put this behind him. Zoelda was right. He was not European, and certainly not American. He was Surapayan, and it was time to start acting like it. If the ancestral gods wanted him to have a bride, he would take her, if not, he would embrace his solitude like a man.

* * * * *

Persephone scooted down the hall to Daniel's office. At last, a new client, and they'd asked specifically for her. A week had passed since her disastrous night at the club and she was finally starting to feel like herself again. Happily, she'd begun to burrow once more into her work routine and this weekend she planned to spend the entire time analyzing the performance of the yen as a barometer of the Japanese-Anglo trade balance.

She had no idea who the new client was. Daniel hinted it was a big fish, and that the account would be all hers to handle. This is what she needed. Work to sink her teeth into, some real, practical things to live for and not her silly dreams and fantasies. Some people were made to fall in love and some were not. She was definitely in the latter category. As for Jay Rivington, he was a fading blip on the radar screen that was all. Growing smaller by the day.

And maybe if she kept telling herself that enough times she'd actually believe it.

"Persephone, come in." Daniel was standing, gesturing to an elegantly dressed woman. Sefy took one look at her and saw the whole thing for the set up it was.

"I'd like to introduce you to Madame Zoelda. Madame Zoelda, this is Persephone Landers."

Zoelda took her hand. "You come highly recommended. By a mutual friend, as it happens."

Sefy fought to keep her balance. So she knew Jay, too. "Jairan Rivington," she repeated as nonchalantly as possible. "Yes, of course."

The next several minutes were a blur. Sefy's head was pounding so loudly, she didn't hear a word that was being said. When she finally regained her equilibrium, she found herself arm in arm, being led away by Zoelda down the corridor.

"You probably guessed the whole investment thing is a ruse," she confided. "Honestly, money bores me to tears. What I do enjoy, however, is watching the human drama unfold."

Sefy was reduced to stuttering. "D – drama?"

"Yes, dear, and you are about to star in a fine one, as soon as you pack your bags."

"P – pack?"

They were at the elevator now, waiting for the shiny golden doors to open.

"You're going back to Surapay, obviously."

"W – why?" She could take a guess, but she'd really rather not. Going to Surapay at the moment held about as much appeal as listening to one of Daniel's three-hour dissertations on Thai cooking.

Zoelda looked at her as if she were touched in the head. "To dance in the *Lu-atey*, dear. Why else?"

* * * * *

"This is not going to work," Persephone announced for the hundredth time as the attendants continued to fuss with her nude body.

"Sefy, you have to give it a chance," lectured the gorgeous, bikini-clad Stacy. "Don't you believe in fate?"

"It's true," echoed Debbie, looking quite stunning herself in a black one piece suit, "you have to take some chances if you want to live happily ever after."

"And you aren't getting any younger," reminded Stacy.

Sefy regarded her ever tactful, know it all friends. Why exactly was it she'd insisted Madame Zoelda let her take them along on this trip? Moral support, oh yea. That was it.

"Don't get too cocky on me, you two, or do I have to remind you that you're the ones who kept saying I didn't really love this guy."

"That was before we saw you melt away to nothing without him. If that's not true love, I don't know what is."

"Debbie's right," enthused Stacy. "You would never have met him in the first place if you two weren't supposed to be together."

"This is all going to backfire," Sefy pouted. "Just like at the Dungeon. And don't think I've forgotten how mad I am at you two for setting me up—letting Jay see me like that, all hot and naked when I didn't even know he was there. How can he ever respect me again?"

"He made sure you got home safe that night, didn't he? That means he feels something. And after today, you'll have stolen his heart completely and none of the rest of it will matter."

"But is this what I really want? I mean, what was I thinking, letting myself be flown half-way around the world for another stupid dance to win the affections of a stubborn, arrogant, pig-headed prince?"

"He's not just any stubborn, arrogant, pig-headed prince, dear, he's yours," reminded the hovering Zoelda, looking spectacular in her indigo sarong.

Sefy looked with growing apprehension at the ever-extending line of her fellow participants in the *Lu-atey*. "But look at those girls. Half of them could do professional modeling."

Stacy's eyes widened as her friend's density. "Hello...so could you."

Sefy flushed. No way. She wasn't that hot. She was just a banker. A banker who'd been finagled into yet another disastrous encounter with Prince Jairan, this one promising to be ten times as humiliating as the last.

"You spread legs now," one of the matrons ordered sharply in her deep island accent.

Wonderful. Now they were perfuming and powdering her vagina. Could this possibly get any more embarrassing?

"I feel like a total bimbo," she complained. "And I'm fat, too. Can't I wear a blanket or something?"

There was just no way Jairan would pick her, and even if he did by accident, he wouldn't want her once he took the blindfold off. And if he did want her, well, that would be the scariest thing of all.

The thing was, the dark haired prince hadn't actually been told Persephone herself would be one of the dancers. As far as he was concerned, it was a clean slate. And that made the whole thing doubly difficult, because he'd have to find her without even knowing to look for her at all—assuming he even wanted her anymore.

"No, Sefy, you can't. For heaven's sake, girlfriend, get a grip," Debbie intoned.

"I just wish I'd had more time to talk, to study," she fussed. "I really don't know the first thing about erotic dance."

It was true. She'd had a crash course from Zoelda this morning, but her G-rated lessons had raised more questions than answers.

"Just get up there and be sexy," was Stacy's advice as she pinned the number on the shell necklace, "and leave the rest to Mother Nature."

"It's all in here," Zoelda touched Sefy's bosom indicating her heart. "Remember that and you can't lose."

"Rest of contestants get ready to line up," called Tologo Joe, the red shirted host for tonight's exclusive and decidedly non-tourist show. "Dance starts in five minutes."

Sefy's heart thundered in her chest. Would she even be able to walk across the sand, let alone perform?

"Number seventy-eight," called Joe. "Line up now."

Persephone felt the girls pushing her forward. The man had called her number. Seventy-eight. Out of one hundred and fifty.

"Go get 'em, Tiger," the girls encouraged "We're right behind you."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Sefy grumbled.

* * * * *

Jairan was suffering from a huge case of cold feet. What had he been thinking following Zoelda's suggestion? Duplicating the blindfolded *Lu-atey* of his father and mother's day was both foolish and arrogant. Neither lightning nor the whip ever strikes twice in precisely the same spot, so went the old saying. The gods would never honor such an event and bless him with a consort.

On the other hand, he might as well rule out the matter of serendipity forever. If this final attempt did not work, if none of the remaining naked maidens sparked his libido as Persephone had—and none would, of this he was sure—than it would be proven that the old ways were truly dead.

Then he could resign himself to life as a monk, or else move to some adjusted suburb, take a normal wife and raise conventional children.

"Number seventy-seven," announced his childhood friend and companion, signaling for the next girl to make her approach.

Jay winced, bracing himself for a fresh assault. Because this was a traditional *Lu-atey*, and as there were no underage persons in attendance, the girls were encouraged to make the prince as tactilely aware of their charms as humanly possible. He himself was left no protection, being made to stand naked and blindfolded as they had their way with him, one by one.

Thus had seventy-six nubile, obviously beautiful young females already come to him, their skin hot under the light of the fire, their bodies aroused and slick with sweat.

Eagerly had they rubbed themselves, making impressions everywhere they could upon his flesh with their firm, round tits, flat bellies, curved asses and sweet sexes.

Truthfully, he had no idea how a man could distinguish anything in particular after being bombarded with so much estrogen, so much scent and juice and heat of womanhood. Unabashedly, they had left their trails upon his legs as they humped him, and also the thick saliva of their mouths as they sucked on as much of him as they could.

It was interesting to follow the various strategies employed. As each girl had but two minutes to reveal herself to best advantage, she had to make choices as to how to most effectively inflame him. The goal of each, of course, was to so convince him of her utter and total suitability as a sex partner that he would stop the proceedings, throw her to the sand and possess her. After this, he would tear off the blindfold, behold her comeliness and declare her to be his forever.

Number seventy-seven had large breasts, which she imposed directly upon his tattooed chest. Admittedly, they were tempting, but not enough to give up his bachelorhood. She was a feisty one, pushing the envelope by brushing the tip of his badly throbbing penis against her furry mound again and again. Technically, the females were not allowed to touch the man's genitalia, except by way of slight, incidental contact. Otherwise the man would never make it past the second or third dancer.

What the prince wanted to make very sure not to do was to ejaculate, because in that case whichever lucky young lady received said spray upon her face, breasts or any other part of her anatomy would automatically be named consort, without the prince's say so.

Number seventy-seven, in his opinion, needed a good spanking, as she seemed to be forcing the matter. Clenching his fists, he restrained himself while the little vixen attended now to his scrotum, blowing a hot layer of air over each full and heavy sac.

She did have one limitation, which in the end would save him. Dancers in the traditional *Lu-atey* are cuffed, hands behind their backs. To that extent, he could not fault number seventy-seven overly much, since a woman so confined, nude, performing for the arousal of a blindfolded man cannot help but feel the stirrings of deepest womanhood calling her to subjugate and abase herself in order that she might, even at the price of her own life, please the male who might become her one true lover, controller and virtual god.

"Time," called Joe, inducing a carefully suppressed sigh of relief on the part of Prince Jairan. "Next girl. Number seventy-eight."

One closer to the end. Excellent. Counting off the number of seconds for the new girl to arrive he prepared himself, shoulders squared. Holding his breath, he listened for the approach. The soft breath, the motions of femininity in the night air. He could feel her in front to him. She was as still as he was.

This one was strong and calm. Likely she'd begin with a kiss to his nipples, or a nibble to his ear

Nothing.

He knew she was there, and yet she was making no effort whatsoever to interest him or even make him aware of her presence.

What game was she playing at? Didn't she care if she won or lost?

Jay licked his lips. He was curious about her, anxious and more than a little stimulated. Such impudence, such complete and utter disregard for his power and position.

The seconds continued to pass, and still nothing.

"Time," called Tologo Joe, attempting to brush off the obvious faux pas. "Number seventy-nine next!"

"Stop!" commanded the prince, his hands reaching for the shoulders of number seventy-eight before she could make her escape. "This one. I must know who she is!"

"Prince," Tologo Joe reminded somberly. "You know the rules. If you stop the proceedings for any girl, the results become binding."

Number seventy-eight trembled in his grip. She was a female, after all, very real and delicate. Frail and helpless, despite the moxy of her performance. Why had she made no attempt to win him? By rights she was in contempt of his person. He could have her punished.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

There was only her breathing.

"I can have you thrown in jail if you do not answer."

Silence.

And then it struck him. His own weakness and pride remained so strong within him, not rooted out as he'd thought. The curse of his father still tainted his own blood. Had he learned nothing from his time with Persephone? The obedience of a woman could not be forced. Nor could love. This particular female had no desire to be had. Whatever had brought her here to this contest, it was not to become the possession of a stranger, in accord with an archaic, unjust system. She'd made a statement, thereby, loud and clear.

"What is your decision, prince? Are you choosing this one?" Joe asked in his loud, ceremonial voice.

It was the most difficult decision of Jay's life. Could it really be time? Time for the island to grow and change, time to honor the memory of his parents in new ways, instead of adhering to the ghosts of the past?

"Forgive me," he whispered, one apology sufficient, he hoped, for all of the offended ancestors.

"The *Lu-atey* is stopped," he pronounced, releasing the dancer, she who had no equal among the others, and who could compare only to one other in his life. "Go home, all of you. This woman, today, has been teacher to all of us. Follow her away from here, and know that the practice of *Lu-atey*, from this time forward is abolished."

Number seventy-eight did not go. Instead, she did the impossible. She kissed him.

Prince Jairan tensed in fury. The girl's mouth on his lips was utter insolence. Did she not know the penalty for touching a man against his will, for violating the sanctity of his body? In his grandfather's day a woman could be put to death for less. Growling, he tore off his blindfold to see the face of such a one as dared kiss the prince unbidden.

"My lord," whispered Persephone. "I have come home."

* * * * *

He ravished her in the rising tide, under moonlight, having carried her over his shoulder from the place of the dancing to the ocean shore. The waves rushed at her ears, but she did not miss the pounding of his heart as he laid her down in the wet sand, her hands still cuffed behind her back. From the look in his eye, she saw it all. He was enraged, furious, aroused. The very muscles and sinews in him were alive, animating the colored beasts upon his dark form, the moonlight giving them an eerie power, a dark reality that promised her sure ravishment.

Opening her legs to him, Persephone Landers signaled her capitulation. She expected punishment, she expected his cock, she expected to be enslaved, enraptured and entranced, and, in turn, for this night to signal the beginning of the rest of her life.

In this he did not disappoint her. But what she did not expect was that Jairan Toko-pele Menoa Rivington had grown from being not only the commanding and macho prince, but also a man willing to listen, to open his heart, to be for her what she needed and not simply what he thought he should be for her.

She did not, of course, take this for weakness, nor would he have allowed her to even if she wanted. Plunging himself deep as a man can go, Jay claimed her every orifice, turning her over again and again, pleasuring, teasing, dominating as they rolled through the shallow waves, bodies locked in shimmering silver heat. His mouth was a branding iron, his cock a rod of steel to pummel and mold and ultimately fulfill. Sefy wept and came and came again. She could not have enough, could not be held enough, controlled and adored enough.

For his part, he knew he had caught up to his destiny at last, finding for himself the perfect mate, the perfect blend of western sensibility with old world passion. Indeed as his *isina* she would wear his chains, but as his wife, she would also bask in his love for the rest of her days. And in her service, her devotion, she in turn would find her bliss and peace.

Her eternal place in The Dance of Submission.

Somewhere above, meanwhile, in the black velvet, star-tipped sky, Jay heard his ancestors shouting their chants, beating their drums and lighting their fires as he reared back for another climax.

Lu-atey, they said. *Lu-atey* forever.

Epilogue

The lovely blonde *isina* lies alone in her master's bed, bound and naked, her fevered flesh wickedly exposed against the cool satin sheets. Her every breath is jagged and short. Her body screams out in anticipation as she awaits the arrival—and the sexual whim—of her lord. She had begged him not to do this thing, telling him that she was already his and that she had proved it by the dance and later by giving herself to him at the ocean shore. But he had said the ceremony was not yet complete.

There is another act to be performed. *Ka-ah-te*, translated to English as ritual submission.

The very words made Persephone wet and eager, almost as much as did the thought of Jairan's imminent return to claim her. Three of his serving girls had seen to her preparation, washing and oiling her naked body, then placing her upon her back in the center of the huge, four-poster bed. The ropes were of braided yellow silk, deliciously soft, but strong as well. The design of her captivity was wicked to say the least. Each ankle had been tied back against her thigh and to one of her wrists; the tension being distributed by means of complicated loops along three lines of force centered at each hip. In layman's terms, this meant the naked princess had the choice of either protecting her modesty by sitting up in a modified stomach crunch that allowed her to keep her legs closed, or else to lie back, thereby spreading them wide for all to see.

As a point of honor, she attempted the former, though time and again, and with increasing frequency, she was forced to yield herself to the inevitable fatigue. Ooh, how Jay drove her crazy with his native customs. Did he think her capable of resisting him? Even without the very real threat of discipline she was his at a glance or a mere gesture. Their lovemaking on the beach had taught her that. Now that she had finally stopped ignoring the signs—and wishes—of her own body, it had been made abundantly clear. Her flesh lived to respond to this man, to please him and obey him.

For a while she fully intended to give him no end of grief as his very modern and willful wife, though there would never be any question of his mastery in the bedroom. And perhaps that was the real point of tying his small, curvy fiancée. She was his and though she might be burning for him, the time and manner of her sexual usage was his decision and his alone. In the meantime, her function was to be as she was. Helpless. And available.

She was his *isina*, after all, and that had a meaning, a potency that cut to the heart of things. She would spend a lifetime learning this. But why, she thought in bitter frustration, did he have to start his teaching tonight? For her whole life she had waited for her captain, the one who would command her heart and soul. Unendurable

loneliness had been hers to bear, as had the bitter pain of denial as she sought to turn away from her deepest needs. After so much, how could he leave her now, even for an hour?

Suddenly the idea of rebellion crossed her mind. But what could she do in her current state, except maybe to turn onto her side? She had no idea what that might accomplish, except to signal her displeasure. Possessing and dominating was one thing, but teasing her like this, having his servants tie her for lovemaking only to leave her alone for what felt like hours, that just wasn't fair.

Even an *isina* had rights, surely.

Turning wasn't as easy as it seemed. The ropes held her fast. She had no leverage to push off. She tried arching her back, but that only put more pressure on her straining, aching breasts, the tight nubs of her nipples pushing out even further into the cool, night air wafting through the open window.

Desperately, she fought the seductive sounds and smells entering from outside.

Oh, why was this island so endlessly charming? The lulling of the waves, the sound of laughing dancers and booming drums at the festival in the palace courtyard, the odor of pineapple and roasting pig for the midnight feast. How could a woman keep up her resistance in such an environment?

"Greetings, *isina*."

Sefy's heart snapped around. *Would she ever get over that?* she wondered. The total soul-wrenching thrill of hearing his voice.

"I am very cross with you," she turned her head to the window.

"Look at me," he commanded, not unpleasantly.

Sefy resisted for all of ten seconds. She knew it would be the end of her, but she looked anyway.

Sure as anything, he was more gorgeous than ever. His hair was slicked back, freshly washed and tightly bound in a ponytail. The look brought out the lines of his face quite clearly – the strong jaw, the sculpted cheeks and hawk-like eyes. This was an athlete, a hunter, a warrior.

And a lover. This much was clear by the smoothly scrubbed skin and the mild scent of jasmine. Not to mention the silk robe, both for what it displayed and what it concealed. Discretely belted round his lean waist, it revealed nothing of his sexual anatomy. She could see the bottom of the snake on his muscular thigh, below the hem, and above, in the 'V' between his pecs she could make out the edge of the sun tattoo on his breast.

The black robe was a delicious compliment to his cinnamon skin.

"This is the ancient way," he reiterated what she already knew. "On the first night the princess is taken in bondage."

Sefy tried to hold her stomach up, pretending she was in aerobics. After a few pathetic seconds, she collapsed back to the bed, scissoring her legs wide apart. The barely contained smirk indicated he was enjoying the view.

As did the rapidly rising cock hidden behind the flaps of black silk.

Persephone became wet, hot and weak, thinking how that endowment would soon be inside her to the hilt and there was not a blessed thing to stop him.

"Jay," she whispered. "You're so beautiful."

He untied the belt, a smile of amusement still in place. "I believe that's my line."

Sefy clenched her fists, hating the colored ropes that held her prisoner. He was taking the robe off, slipping it off his broad shoulders and over his sculpted torso. He was baring his body and she wanted to go to him, to kiss every muscled inch, to lick each tattoo like it had a flavor, and then to use the whole of her body to fuck him. Her hair and nibbling teeth. Her toes, her ass and her pussy, too.

This wasn't just a man. He was what a man was supposed to be. In the perfect specimen catalog, or maybe in the original designs for Eden. Genetically perfect, but designed just for her. Strong enough to take on anyone who ever wanted to hurt her, but also clear eyed, smart as a whip, and more than a little devious. And he still retained just a touch of the mischievous the little boy. Her perfect man.

Sefy licked her lips. There was already a glistening drop of white on the end of his cock. The member strained proudly towards her, calling out to her. So, too, his ridged abdomen, a pure mass of muscle, covered in smooth skin. And his hips, sloping around to his firm ass. She had to get at him, had to weigh those heavy balls in her hand, had to stand on tiptoe and touch those ruby lips, firm and no nonsense. She had to kiss and nibble and invite him to have his way with her.

But that wasn't her role. She was tied, the object of his desire and he would do with her precisely what he wanted.

"Tonight begins your lessons, *isina*. You will learn devotion and take your first steps in obedience."

"I'll obey anything, Jay, just make love to me. Please, I need you inside me so bad."

His handsome face remained expressionless, his beautiful eyes implacable. "You may open your legs wider," he informed her, as though it were some great honor and not a fresh humiliation.

Sefy gaped her thighs as much as the rope allowed. "I'm so ready for you, lover."

Jay placed one knee upon the bed, coming close enough to touch.

"There," he singed the inside of her left thigh with a pressed index finger. "That is where the first picture shall go. It will be the bird of paradise, petals opened in submission. It shall remain hidden at all times, save when you are submitting yourself to me."

"Oh, yes, Jay," she arched her back, seeking to turn toward him with her dripping sex and tightly pointed nipples. "I will wear your marks proudly and happily."

His cock brushed her hip. Pulsing and hard, iron wrapped in hot skin, the tip ready to spear her, to spill its hot juices from the tiny hole in the end. She craned her neck to meet it. "Jay, let me suck you."

"Another will go here," he ignored her.

She shattered at his touch, soft but commanding upon her breast as he traced the outline of the second design.

"A bird in flight," he declared. "To indicate the beauty of your soul."

Jay wrenched a breath filled moan from her as he paused to tease the nipple, bright and coral pink.

"F—fuck me," she thrashed her head.

"You're not paying attention." A quick pinch of the sensitive nub was enough to get it back.

Wide-eyed, in awe, she regarded him. "Forgive me, Jay."

"And your belly," he continued, showing no mercy. "We shall place there a tiny emblem of fertility. The symbols shall serve to open your womb to me."

"It is open, Jay. All of me is open."

"I shall teach them," he rubbed the tight drum, indicating the home of his still to be conceived babies. "To be strong and just."

"They'll have the best father, Jay."

"And the best mother."

Sefy threw back her head as he snaked a single finger inside her unprotected sex.

"Look at me," he ordered for the second time.

She did and saw her future in his eyes. The devotion she was to receive—the kinky pleasures and delightful tortures making her blush.

"By dawn, you will be changed. If we were to be separated after this night, I would still be burnt forever in your heart and you in mine."

"I wear your brand, Jay Rivington. On my soul."

The words seemed to spur him into the action she so desperately needed.

"You are a most distracting wench," he accused, climbing between her spread legs. "There was supposed to be another ten minutes of ceremony."

"This," she pushed her pussy up against him as he slid his body along hers to meet her eye to eye, "is all the ceremony you need."

She was shamelessly working him, trying to draw him in on her own terms. As usual he was having none of it. For the moment, at least, her pussy was not going to be filled.

"Beg," he instructed, his skin like a fire over hers, his gently pressing muscles making a mockery of her feminine resistance.

"I—oh, Jay, please, just untie me."

His face lit with a wicked smile—a snake dancing across perfect lips—and his eyes lighting with a mischievousness that threatened to turn her insides entirely to liquid.

“No,” he thwarted her will with a simple whisper.

And then he took her breast, the nipple between pearl white teeth. His little blonde captive, the object of his eternal devotion reduced to helpless moans, wanton and blatant. Her sex ached and cried out as he tugged other bonds, invisible ones connecting them to the captive nipple.

“Beg,” he repeated, though this time his hands were reaching down to undo the ropes. How masterful and skillful he was, not even needing to break eye contact as he accomplished his task. Her limbs feel free, more those of a rag doll than a living female.

And yet she was all about life. Life drawn from the intensity of his presence, poised above her, imperious, but incredibly gentle, waiting upon her words.

Eyes moistening, her body aglow in lust and love she dared to put her arms around his shoulders. They barely reached. The mere touch of his skin, dark and powerful reminded her of what he was. To her. To the world.

“My lord,” she whispered, her limbs held by bonds stronger than rope or steel. “Take me.”

And Jairan did, slipping between her nether lips, his long, proud cock, hard as iron, claiming its natural home, its inevitable conquest. With her sighs, Sefy welcomed him. Inside of her. And over her.

His modern wife, who would fight and vex him to no end in every arena. Except for this one.

“You are the beating of my heart,” he said, belly to belly.

“No,” she dared deny. “Here and now, I am your slave girl. Only your slave girl.”

Something new lit in the man’s eyes and she knew she had fulfilled his deepest dreams. This alone was enough to push her over the edge.

With a great roar then, that of man and prince and lord, he ravished her, mouth and hands upon her body, the body that he owned, carrying them both to heights no other would ever know.

And to think it was only the beginning.

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.

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