SCARLET

CHAPTER ONE

A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK



THE STREET LIGHTS of Monte Carlo streaked past in a haze as the dying embers of the sun dipped beneath the horizon. Excitement was in the air as tourists began to flood the streets, ready to take in Monaco's vibrant Mediterranean nightlife.

The balmy evening heat drifted in through the open window of Mike Rivers' pristine white Lamborghini Gallardo. He breathed deeply, letting the ambience fill his senses. This was how he liked it — immersing himself in the environment, literally feeling the city. He could already feel his pulse beginning to quicken as it always did on the eve of a mission. He thrived on the jeopardy, toeing the line between life and death.

Rivers let his gaze drift upwards as he casually rolled the Lamborghini into the forecourt of *Le Grand Casino de Monte Carlo*, Monaco's premiere, high rolling casino. The brand new tires gave a short, sharp squeal as he brought the high performance vehicle to a halt outside the main entrance. Immediately he was attended to by a valet who opened the wing-door for him. Rivers stepped out onto the concourse, smoothed his dinner jacket and fastened a button. He reached back into the car to retrieve a briefcase, almost as an after-thought. He gave a nod of acknowledgement to the young valet and passed him the keys to the car.

"Drive carefully."

The young man nodded and slipped into the driver's seat to park the car. The engine hummed as it pulled away.

Although a top of the range sports car and expensive designer suit were not exactly out of the ordinary at *Le Grand*, Rivers still drew a few stares. He didn't mind. An advantage to being undercover was that you could hide in plain sight. He smiled at two young ladies in shimmering dresses as they walked past, drinking in their slender tanned bodies. Tonight's mission was purely reconnaissance. There would be time enough to indulge a little.

Rivers checked his watch and gave one last look out to the bay. The Mediterranean Sea shone gold with the last few rays of the setting sun. Expensive yachts were lined up in Monaco's bay, each of them owned by some big fish wanting to prove that they



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were the biggest. Rivers knew which one he had to catch. He turned, adjusted his tie and strode confidently into the lobby of the casino.

SPECIAL AGENT THIRD-CLASS Samuel Fields drove the Lamborghini the short distance round to the back of the casino. He had watched Rivers from the rear view mirror as he pulled away. Not for the first time, Sam envied Special Agent First-Class Mike Rivers.

"That's it. You go chase the girls again while I do all the work," Sam muttered to himself. He revved the engine a few times as he pulled into a parking bay, imagining what it might really be like to put the car through its paces.

Sam turned the ignition off and sighed. He tugged uncomfortably at his valet's uniform. It itched and proved a little too hot given it was the height of summer. He quickly retrieved a case of equipment from a hidden storage compartment behind the passenger seat and stepped out of the vehicle, locking it behind him with a remote.

Sam did not attract too much attention. Staff turnaround was high at *Le Grand* and the other valets and porters just accepted him as the *new guy*, offering a pleasant smile or a *bonjour* at the most. He hurried through the lobby with the case. The hum of the social elite in conversation filled the air, punctuated by the constant rush of water from the fountain that served as a centrepiece. He could feel his nerves getting the better of him as he jabbed at the lift call button.

Sam exhaled noisily once the lift doors had shut behind him and he took several more deep breaths to help calm himself.

This is why you're only Third Class.

Sam wondered how Rivers could always be so calm, no matter what the situation. Even with a gun pressed to his head. Maybe the confidence came with the physicality. Rivers was tall, imposing and well versed in martial arts and shooting. As a tech-support, Sam did not have to fulfil the same requirements. His slender, pale frame revealed too many hours spent behind a computer.



The lift doors chimed open at the tenth floor and Sam exited into a brightly lit corridor, which led to a number of hotel suites.

The lift doors chimed open at the tenth floor and Sam exited into a brightly lit corridor, which led to a number of hotel suites. He could only imagine what they each must cost. Fortunately the Agency didn't seem to be running short on money any time soon, as Rivers' latest sports car would attest.

Sam found suite *1006* and let himself in with a key card. The room was large, with twin double beds dominating the main room and a bathroom off to the side. It was tastefully decorated and lit, matching the luxurious interiors of the main casino. He hefted his case onto one of the beds, glad to be rid of its weight, and walked over to the balcony doors. He slid the glass door open and stepped onto the balcony, the dry Mediterranean heat hitting him hard after the air-conditioned coolness of the hotel room. Sam stared up at the stars which had begun to reveal themselves in the darkening sky.

Monaco.

Sam wished he were there on pleasure and not business. His girlfriend Lenore would have loved it there. As it was, the good old *U.S. of A* had never felt so far away.

Sam went back into the room, pulled the door shut and drew the blinds. He turned his attention to the case. It was jet black, reinforced Kevlar casing, next-generation security lock encryption. He keyed in his security code, swiped his thumb over the fingerprint sensor and popped the lock. Inside were Sam›s two laptops, along with micro-cameras, motion sensors, pin-microphones... Everything a good agent could need. He cleared the hotel room›s table and began setting up.

"First things first."

Sam activated his *security blanket*, a tailored EMP device that killed all Wi-Fi and network communications within a twenty-metre radius. Everything that was, except his own equipment. It ensured no-one could listen in to his communications. Even if someone managed to latch on to a remote monitor on the casino floor, they wouldn't be able to trace it back to him.

As he continued setting up, Sam remembered the case that Rivers had gone in with. It was a level-one access case, same technology as his larger version, but made up to look like a normal briefcase. Sam smiled inwardly. Level-one access meant that it was for First-Class agents only and was coded appropriately. But since Sam had helped design the encryption algorithms, along with half the security systems at the Agency HQ, it seemed a bit of a joke. He could pop the lock if he needed to. Most likely it was a case load of money to trade up for chips on the casino floor, though occasionally the Agency would come up with some new gadget that they wanted Rivers to field test. Most of the time they didn't work, but that was engineers for you. Sam was happy to be left to his computers.

MIKE RIVERS SAT at the poker table, both arms resting casually on the green baize. He carefully checked his cards. A full-house. His opponent eyed him cautiously from the opposite end of the table. Rivers stared back, meeting his gaze defiantly.

It had been four hours since he and Fields had arrived. Whilst Sam had set up base in one of the hotel rooms, Rivers had scoped out the casino floor. He'd played some blackjack, some roulette, won some money, lost some money, but all the time getting a feel for the room. Casinos ebbed and flowed and you had to know when to come to a table and when to walk away. Rivers could have won a lot by now, but he purposely restrained himself. The last thing he wanted was for the pit bosses to start keeping tabs on him.

He'd finally approached his quarry at one of the prestigious private poker tables. He'd talked his way in, flashing a healthy bag of chips to make it worth his while. Carlos Ramirez had already won big and Rivers had taken the place of his one remaining opponent, an unfortunate Egyptian tycoon who had just been cleaned out.

Carlos Ramirez was a South American drug baron, for want of a better description. He was now classed by the Agency as a *significant threat* to the world's socioeconomic stability, owning as he did companies and operations all over the world, fuelled by his drug operations and sex-trafficking.

"He has three of a kind. I would fold. Let him get some chips back."

Sam's voice came small and tinny to Rivers' concealed ear receiver. Now that the stakes were bigger, he needed a little help to tip the scales in his favor.

"Fold."

Ramirez laughed heartily as Rivers threw his



Carlos Ramirez was a South American drug baron, for want of a better description.

cards down. He gleefully raked in the pile of chips that had accumulated in the middle of the table. To his right-hand side stood an immensely tall, well-built man with a shaved head and dark sunglasses — Ramirez's personal bodyguard known only as Gaul.

"A little too hot for you this time round I think, eh?" Ramirez quipped in his thick Spanish accent, "You win some you lose some." His black moustache bristled as he took a puff of his Cuban cigar.

It had gone on like this for the last couple of hours with Rivers and Ramirez neck and neck. Neither one coming out in front, at least not for long before the other caught up again. But that was all part of the plan.

SAM TILTED HIS chair back onto two legs as he surveyed his laptop screens. His network was fully set up now and he had tapped into the casino's entire CCTV grid. On one screen he had feeds displayed from the private poker suite where Rivers was playing against Carlos Ramirez. He could literally hear and see everything, including a full view of both players' cards.

On the other screen was Rivers' contact lens feed showing his viewpoint in both standard and thermo-image views.

For the past couple of hours Rivers had been wooing Ramirez. Psych intel on Ramirez revealed that if he won too easily in poker, he would get disinterested and bored, and start to lose respect for his opponent. Even worse was if he was beaten too quickly. His opponent would invariably meet an unfortunate accident on the way home.

Rivers and Sam used a combination of the knowledge of the cards, plus a gauge of Ramirez's emotional state using the thermo-image, to determine how Rivers should play, to keep Ramirez in the sweet spot of being both interested and respectful of Rivers. Hence why Sam had instructed Rivers to fold, despite holding a winning hand. Ramirez needed to be pulled back in a little. Sam watched as the false coloring of the thermo-image began to pick up a change in hue in Ramirez, as he settled back into his comfort zone. The angry violets and blues in his face subsiding to gentler oranges and yellows. His ever present cigar was visible on the thermo-image as a spot of pure white light.



Sam watched the camera feeds as the door to the private room opened and a vision in scarlet walked in.

"And we've got him back." Sam's headset relayed his voice to Rivers' in-ear monitor, a small electronic implant that was imperceptible to anyone except for Rivers.

Just then, something made Sam lean forward, his chair clattering back onto its four legs.

"Hang on a second Rivers, we've got someone else coming in."

Sam watched the camera feeds as the door to the private room opened and a vision in scarlet walked in.

MIKE RIVERS TURNED in his seat as the door behind him opened and a figure walked in through the smoky gloom of the poker den.

She had to be about 5'4", though add to that another four inches from her high heeled sandals which clicked across the floor as she made her way around the poker table. Long, wavy blonde hair trailed behind an elfin face beset with hypnotic eyes and full pouty lips. Her breasts, which surely had to be at least a D-cup, spilled out of a dynamite red cocktail dress, which hugged her trim body, flaring out at her feminine hips. Her legs, accentuated by the heels and the short hem of the dress were slender and toned. Rivers' gaze followed her peachy backside as it twitched its way past him.

"Eyes ahead Rivers, eyes ahead."

Sam's voice entered Rivers' ear reminding him of the contact lenses he wore, feeding his field of vision direct to Sam's laptop. He wished he could answer back,

telling him to get lost, but instead he let his gaze linger on the woman's shapely breasts as she took her position next to Ramirez. Rivers smiled to himself.

Let's see what Fields makes of that.

"Very funny, yes they're outstanding breasts, we get the picture," Sam chided through the in-ear speaker.

Carlos Ramirez grinned as Rivers took in the vision before him.

"Ha ha, you like, huh?" Ramirez's left arm encircled the young woman's waist pulling her into him. She had so far said nothing. "I purchased her two nights ago from an Algerian trafficker. I haven't even had a chance to try her out yet, if you know what I mean?" Ramirez gave a throaty smoker's cough as he squeezed the woman's backside in his large hand. She didn't react, but just kept smiling serenely and staring at Rivers. "I like you Mister Rivers, and I can tell you are a man of good business and good taste. So what do you want to offer me for her?"

This was it, Rivers thought. After drip-feeding Ramirez his cover story of being a less than honorable businessman himself, the bastard had finally let him in. He just had to keep the conversation going. If Rivers could get a handle on Ramirez's sex-trafficking it would prove instrumental in taking him down once and for all. Rivers met the woman's doe-eyed gaze as he replied.

"I'm not looking to buy. In fact, I'm looking for a buyer myself."

"You have women? Girls? Boys?" Ramirez took a fresh cigar from a case, ran it under his nose.

Rivers nodded. "I need to get rid of them. Do you have any idea what it's like trafficking *and* being a United States citizen? I can't even take a shit without some government agency breathing down my neck."

"Ha ha ha! I understand your predicament. Lucky for you old Carlos might be in a position to help you." Ramirez's face lit up in the gloom as he lit the cigar. He took the smoke down into his lungs, looking up at the woman at his side. "Antoinette! You heard the man, you are not needed here. Go back to the yacht and await my return. Make yourself... *available*..." Ramirez chuckled as he looked at Rivers. Rivers played along, smirking as best he could. Ramirez gave the woman a hard swat on her backside sending her cluttering forward a few steps. She straightened herself and smoothed her dress, before making her way back outside.

SAM TAPPED AT his laptop, taking a freeze capture of the woman, enlarging her face into crystal HD resolution. She was beautiful. It was hard to believe she was just another sex-slave. She was healthy, toned, her eyes were bright. No needle marks on her arms, so she wasn't hooked on drugs like most were. Sam had heard of some children that were born into sex-slave rings, after all pregnancy was common place among female slaves. They would be born and raised to service and pleasure, kept away from civilization and the media so that they never knew that life could be anything else. They fetched handsome prices on the black market and it made sense that Ramirez would choose one such girl for himself.

"Antoinette," Sam mused to himself, typing in her name and uploading her image to the Agency search database. He found himself transfixed by her image. He felt like there was something going on behind those blue eyes.

Suddenly there was a hard knock at the hotel room door. Sam was startled and instantly felt his heart beat hammering in his chest. It was probably just Rivers, but he couldn't help but picture Carlos Ramirez out there, a gun in his hand, ready to blow him away. The knock came again, more forcefully this time and Sam jumped. He quickly tapped into his laptop and brought up the CCTV camera to the corridor outside. He exhaled slowly. It was Rivers. He and Ramirez had adjourned their game until later so that they could take a break.

"What took you so long?" Rivers strode into the room, loosening his tie.

"Sorry, I just had to check. There *are* criminals in this building you know," Sam said as he checked that the lock to the room was secure again.

"Criminals? That's a polite way of putting it," Rivers laughed, flopping down onto one of the beds, exhausted from the concentration needed over the last few hours. He looked over, seeing the image of the blonde woman from earlier still displayed on Sam's laptop. "Pretty little thing, isn't she? I almost wish I *had* bought her. I sure wouldn't mind a few rounds with her."

Sam screwed up his face. Rivers' humor was in bad taste.

"You're incorrigible. Who knows what this woman has been through?"

"Has the search turned up anything yet?"

"No, nothing."

"I didn't think so. You're wasting your time with her. We need to focus on Ramirez."

Sam thought that Rivers seemed to be overly dismissive. He knew as well as he did to pursue any avenue or lead. He sat back down onto his chair and glanced at the laptop screen.

Search results: 0

"So far we've got him eating out of our palm," Rivers continued, "Another session and I'm sure we'll be able to get out of him where his sex-trafficking operation is located." Rivers laced his fingers behind his head as he lay back on the bed. Again Sam envied how calm and controlled he seemed.



RIVERS EMERGED FROM the bathroom having freshened up and pulled on a fresh shirt that he'd laid out on the bed. He checked himself in the mirror, as he often did, smoothing his dark hair.

"I've got an hour before I'm due back at the table. How about we head downstairs to the bar, see if we can't line up some sexy Mediterranean ass for later."

Sam sighed. Rivers' appetite for danger was matched only by his appetite for women. He'd literally jeopardized missions before by allowing himself to get distracted by the fairer sex.

"No I'm fine, you go ahead."

Rivers turned from the mirror, still buttoning his shirt. He looked at Sam despairingly.

"Oh yes, that's right your girlfriend. Lenore right?"

"Yeah."

Sam watched as Rivers patted some aftershave to his cheeks. He looked back at Sam from the mirror.

"How's that working out for you? Did the Agency check go through okay?"

"Well, ah..." Sam hesitated.

"Oh come on, don't tell me you didn't check her in! Come on, you know the rules."

As an agent Sam was required to submit any new partner's details to the Agency for a thorough background check. A full report would then come back detailing where she went to school, ex-boyfriends, hobbies, what she liked to eat... Ultimately killing the whole *getting-to-know-you* part of the relationship. He did understand the security behind it all given they were part of the country's most covert intelligence agency. But still...

"I'll get round to it. I will..."

Rivers raised a sceptical eyebrow. "Make sure you do. I don't know why you want to tie yourself down to one person anyway. You're young and there's a whole menu out there to order from. Wouldn't you prefer to dine on something different every night?"

"You know, one day your womanizing is gonna turn around and bite you on the ass."

"Hmm, sounds kinky, I look forward to it." Rivers slipped his jacket back on and patted Sam on the shoulder. "See you in sixty."

AFTER THE HOTEL room door had clicked shut, Sam settled back into his chair. He clicked through some of the CCTV channels but decided he would take a break. He tore open a cereal bar and bit into it.

His conversation with Rivers had just made him miss home even more. Lenore had recently moved into his apartment, and he could really use her company right now. It was easy enough for Rivers to *play the field*, but Sam counted himself lucky if a woman even looked twice at him. Lenore was so stunning that he couldn't believe his luck when they had met in a bar and begun to hit it off.

Sam ran his right hand through his sandy-colored hair, which hung loose and wavy over his forehead.

He needed a haircut.

A knock at the door roused him from his thoughts. Sam swallowed his mouthful of cereal bar as he got up and unlatched the door.

"What did you forget this time?"

Sam stopped. What he saw made him take a step back.

A HAND THRUST FORWARD

squarely onto Sam's chest with surprising force, pushing him backwards until he hit the nearest bed, falling back onto it.

Two high-heeled feet clipped slowly inside, legs walking one in front of the other. Sam's gaze drifted up over feminine curves to a bright red dress and a familiar face.

"Antoinette?" he whispered in shock, as she closed the door behind them.

"Mister Fields," she began, her soft voice revealing a French accent, "You and I are about to take a little trip together."

A smile formed at her ruby red lips as she pointed a gun straight at Sam. Sam's heartbeat hammered through his skull. He held up his hands as if it would protect him from a bullet.

Antoinette stalked over to him in her heels, a sly look on her face. She grabbed his wrist.

"Get up!"



"Mister Fields," she began, her soft voice revealing a French accent,
"You and I are about to take a little trip together."

Sam got to his feet, his legs trembling. The silencer barrel of her small handgun jabbed into his ribs. A voice then came from the doorway making them both look up.

"Not so fast, honey!"

Rivers stood in the doorway, tall, confident, in control. He aimed his own silenced pistol squarely back at Antoinette. Sam felt her quickly shift position behind him, using him as a human shield, the gun still sharp against his side.

"Rivers! Back off man, she's got a gun!" Sam found himself wailing desperately.

Rivers slowly stepped through into the room, holding up a finger to silence him. He kicked the door shut behind him to keep the situation contained.

"Back off! I will put him down! Lower your gun American!" Antoinette threatened.

Sam watched as Rivers raised his gun and took aim.

"Not if I put your down first."

The last thing Sam heard was a shot being fired.



SAM COULD FEEL himself drifting in and out of consciousness, catching fleeting glimpses of the room around him. A sudden sense of urgency overcame him, as if he was underwater and he knew he had to get to the surface or else drown.

Sam's back arched as he inhaled sharply, his eyes snapping open. The world coalesced around him and he found himself lying on one of the beds of the hotel room, staring up at the ceiling. He slowly turned his head. The street lights filtered in through the blinds of the window on the far wall. A car horn howled as it sought its way through the traffic outside.

Sam's head slumped back to the soft comfort of the pillow, sending long hair trailing across his face. He absently brushed it aside as he gathered his thoughts.

Antoinette... The gun... Rivers...

His mind recalled snapshots of what had happened, like pages in a flick book. Sam quickly turned to face the bed beside his to find Rivers lying there unconscious. He could just make out his partner's shallow chest movements. Sam rubbed at his throbbing head.

Tranquilizer.

With effort, Sam raised his body from the bed, swinging his legs to the side so he could sit up. His long blonde hair trailed after him, falling across his bare shoulders and back.

What?

Sam grasped at the hair, tracing it along its full, long length, right down to its tip. He felt it tug sharply at his scalp as it pulled taught. He let it go, his attention now drawn to his hands. He held them both out in front of him, flexing foreign slender digits. Most noticeable however, were his long fingernails, each painted a bright scarlet color.

Sam crossed his hands over one another, feeling his small wrists with each, then sliding up to feel his bare arms and shoulders. He shuddered as his mind rebelled against what he was both seeing and feeling. It was then that he looked down.

Down at his body...

And yet not his body...

Sam's vision blazed with red — the bright red of the garment that he wore. A garment that moulded itself to his body, following the inward curve of his small waist, the outward curve of his hips and...

His breasts.

Sam watched as his breasts heaved with his breathing, swelling and rising beneath his low cut dress.

His breasts...

Sam began to hyper-ventilate, the room beginning to fold around him as he grew dizzy. He pushed himself from the bed, trying to stand. He stumbled as he missed his footing, his legs feeling like they were mismatched and not of the same length. He groped at his right ankle, unclipping a shoe, discarding it. Barefoot now, he struggled to make it over to the mirror on the far wall, which seemed to spiral away from him the closer he got.



Antoinette.

His small hands gripped the edge of the table and he felt his way around it, finally making it to the mirror. Stars appeared at the edge of his vision, closing in. His head grew light and he fell, but not before he saw her.

There, deep in the mirror, looking back at him.

Antoinette.

"HEY. WAKE UP."

Sam felt himself returning to the world, hearing a familiar voice. He subconsciously used it as a life-line, focusing on the words as he came to.

"Open your eyes, that's it."

Sam's head nodded a few times and he woke. Mike Rivers stood over him, awake now, but dishevelled, as if he had been in a struggle.

Only he was pointing a gun straight at Sam.

Sam breathed in, his eyes opening wide. He found himself lying on his side where he had fallen, just in front of the mirror. He recoiled from the gun, sliding over into the corner, his pulse quickening.

"Stay where you are!" Rivers spoke forcefully.

Sam looked up, shaking, finally managing to utter something.

"I'm going to be sick."

Rivers flexed his grip on the gun and shifted his weight from foot to foot. He glanced over to the bathroom and back.

"Ah, okay... go. But don't try anything."

Sam bolted past Rivers, a migraine searing through his skull. As he moved his body responded in unfamiliar ways, in particular a heavy slapping against his chest. He skidded into the bathroom, pulled up the toilet seat and wretched, holding his long hair to one side.

His hair...

It all came back to him. His body. The mirror. Sam coughed a few times and pushed himself away from the toilet. He was kneeling, his bare legs cold against the tiled bathroom floor. His dress had ridden up a little and he tugged it down as much as he could. His cleavage swelled with his quick shallow breaths. He looked up to see Rivers had followed him in, a gun still trained on him, though he looked awkward, not knowing whether to be concerned or not.

"Alright, you can start talking now. Where's Fields? What have you done with him?"

"What are you talking about?" Sam's voice came dry and raspy to his throat. It was pitched higher than he was used to.

"Sam Fields, the agent I was with! Where is he?"

Sam looked down despairingly again at his feminine body, his hair falling past his shoulders to drape around his face.

"Rivers... Mike... Listen... It's me... I'm Sam!" As Sam spoke with his unfamiliar vocal chords, he detected a strange nuance to his speech which he couldn't yet place.

"Oh, the lady likes jokes huh? Well believe me, this gun pointed at you is no joke." Rivers renewed his aim for emphasis. Sam gripped the sides of the bathroom sink and pulled himself to his feet. "Easy," Rivers warned, following his movements carefully with the gun.

Sam came face to face with his reflection once more as he stood up. Bright blue eyes looked back at him, long mascaraed eyelashes fluttering as he blinked. His red-lipstick covered lips hung open in disbelief as he took in the image of his heart shaped face, framed by waves of blonde hair.

"I don't know how it happened... or why... but somehow... I'm in her body!" Sam stammered. He fully expected Rivers to laugh in his face and pistol-whip him, or whatever it was called. Instead he seemed willing to hear him out.

"Prove it."

Sam closed his eyes and concentrated, shutting himself away from the surrealism of the world around him.

"Three years ago, when I was first assigned to you," Sam began, "Your first words to me. Do you remember? I do. You said *keep up.*"

Sam kept his eyes closed as he searched his memory. "Two years ago, we were playing basketball at the Agency gymnasium. We ran into each other and you knocked me out cold."

"One year ago, that mission in Germany. You had to seduce that 67-year old countess. You made me swear never to tell anyone about what you had to do to her that night."

"Okay," Rivers piped up at last.

"Two months ago, you gave me a watch for my birthday. You didn't tell me when you gave it to me, but you'd had it inscribed on the back. It said, *stay lucky*."

"Sam."

Sam opened his eyes to his name. He looked at the reflection of Rivers behind him in the mirror. He had lowered his gun.

"Some luck, huh?" Rivers said.

SAM STOOD ALONE in the bathroom, facing off once more against the ever present reflection of Antoinette that stared back at him from the mirror. After Rivers had finally believed what had happened to him, he had asked for some privacy. He had rinsed his mouth out and splashed water over his face, feeling the softness of his cheeks, devoid of any hint of the stubble that he had felt there since adolescence.

He had looked at himself from all angles, beholding the graceful curves of his female figure — the swell of his hip and buttocks, the line of his smooth hairless legs. He had looked down at his cleavage, pulling out his dress until he was able to see

the two thick nipples of each naked breast. He had even raised the hem of his dress up over his hips, briefly catching sight of a red thong stretched tight over a perfectly flat crotch.

He was *female*.

He was Antoinette.

But where was Antoinette? Where was his body?



"I KEEP EXPECTING to wake up any minute." Sam shook his head as he made his way back into the room. His wide hips rolled as he walked and his heavy breasts bobbed under his dress, constantly reminding him of his predicament. Rivers was lying back on one of the beds and sat up with a start as Sam walked in. Sam stopped and rubbed at his throat. It was smooth with no sign of his usual Adam's apple. "My voice," he began.

"I know, it didn't seem the right time to point it out earlier, but I noticed it too," Rivers said, his eyes drifting over Sam's body.

"*French?* I have a fucking French accent?"

Rivers laughed, but quickly apologised, "Sorry, but it's pretty funny hearing you swear sounding like that."

"Fuck you," Sam retorted without malice, "I don't even know any French." He stretched his jaw, wondering why he couldn't shake off the accent.

"Are you sure? Try. Maybe you can now."

Sam closed his eyes and thought for a moment, "Bonjour, Je m'appelle Sam." He paused and then shrugged his bare shoulders. "That's all I've got."

Rivers smiled, "Well that sounded convincing at least. It looks like your body is just used to talking that way."

"This isn't *my* body!" Sam gestured to himself, irritated with the sound of his voice, "My body is out there! Somewhere..." He pointed to the door.

"Yes, we have to assume that Antoinette is in possession of your body."

Sam shuddered at the thought. He couldn't imagine why she would want to take his body. Hell, he would take a good old fashioned kidnap over this. He walked over to the table where his laptops had been set up. Aside from some left over loose cables, the equipment had all been taken. He ran his manicured hand over the table's surface. So much for any chance of checking the CCTV footage.

"What happened earlier? The last I remember you were pointing a gun." Sam recalled the fear he had felt when Antoinette had jabbed the gun into his side. He closed his eyes. "Then... there was a shot."

"She fired," Rivers began, "Put you down with a tranq. I... kind of didn't see that coming... I hesitated."

Sam detected a small amount of uncertainty in Rivers' voice. Maybe he was human after all.

"She was fast. Real fast," Rivers continued, "She got off another shot and I went down." He rubbed at his shoulder.

Sam sat down on the edge of the bed, his wide hips splaying beneath his tight red dress. He went quiet. He could feel Rivers watching him closely as he struggled to take it all in. Finally, he spoke, "How has she done this? I mean, I wouldn't have thought something like this was possible."

"Actually, and I probably shouldn't even be saying this, the Agency has been researching into something similar. Last I heard was that transference of consciousness was theoretically possible. It looks like someone has beaten us to it and actually developed the technology."

Sam couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Why is the Agency researching something like *that?*"

"Think about it Sam, it's the ultimate in espionage — literally becoming someone else."

"Rivers, when Antoinette came in the room. She... she called me by name. She knew who I was. She must know about the Agency." Sam could feel his long hair tickling the slope of his breasts. He flicked it back over his shoulders.

"I know." Rivers rubbed his eyes and sighed, "I think we're going to have to call this one in. I'm going to have to contact HQ."

SAM LOOKED OUT over the balcony of the tenth floor hotel room. It was now around *1.30* in the morning and the moon was out in full, reflecting off of the waters of the Mediterranean. The lights of Monte Carlo twinkled below and in the distance he could hear music and laughter.

The air was still warm enough, but he rubbed at his shoulders anyway, more from the exposure of his current state of dress than anything else. What faint breeze there was wafted coolly about his thighs, reaching up under his dress.

Sam could hear Rivers' voice as a murmur coming from the hotel room. Any call to Agency HQ had to be made by a First-Class agent in private, and then only from their own Agency-supplied encrypted cell phone. Rivers had told Sam to wait outside and had slid the balcony door shut behind him.

The fresh air had done him good, and his aching head had all but subsided, but he felt exhausted. He didn't know whether it was his own tiredness or Antoinette's that he was feeling. Probably both, he reflected. Body *and* soul.

Sam looked out once more to the bay and its fleet of expensive yachts. One of them belonged to Carlos Ramirez. Perhaps he was on board right now, with Antoinette and his stolen body, clinking their beer bottles together and laughing. Sam tightened his fists, his fingernails digging into his palms. He looked back, eager for Rivers to finish so that they could get going and find his missing body.



SAM SAT PERCHED on the edge of the hotel room table, folding his arms under his large breasts as he listened to what Rivers had to say. Rivers paced as he spoke and Sam found himself having to crane his neck to look up at him. Even standing up straight, Sam had to be a good ten inches shorter than Rivers now.

"Okay, here's the thing," Rivers began, "HQ have given the go ahead for me to pursue Antoinette and to bring her in. They're understandably concerned about the body of one of their agents falling into enemy hands."

"That's great!" Sam interrupted, "We should leave now, before she gets too far."

"Hold on. I said *me*..."

"What do you mean? Don't tell me I'm being side-lined!" Sam could hear his French accent coming through thicker with his exasperation. "That's my body she's got out there. I can still help... I mean, I may be a woman now, but I'm not useless!"

Rivers held up his hands, "Nobody's saying you're useless. In fact, you've been given a mission of your own."

Sam paused, "Mission? What mission?" He knew that Third-Class agents didn't just get given their own assignment like that. They were always seconded to a First or Second-class agent. Even a Second-Class would only be given an objective of his own if the Agency thought they were ready to take the next step up the ladder.

Rivers continued, "They want us to use your... *situation*... to our advantage." Sam noticed Rivers drop his gaze to Sam's chest as he spoke, making it clear which situation he was referring to. Sam instinctively draped a protective arm across his cleavage. "They want you to infiltrate Carlos Ramirez's yacht."

Sam was confused, "But isn't that where we *both* should be looking anyway? Antoinette *is* working for Ramirez isn't she?"

Rivers shook his head, "HQ believe she's working for another organization..."

"How do they know that? When I ran a database search earlier, it came up with nothing."

Rivers sighed, "Fields, believe it or not there are some things that a Third-Class agent is not privy to."

Sam felt his cheeks flush red at Rivers' condescension.

"You're going to have to trust me in this. Ramirez is probably as much in the dark about Antoinette as we are."

"Probably?"

"If we can get you onto his yacht, he won't know any different. You can travel with him, spend some time gaining his trust, see what you can learn about his operations. Antoinette has spent the last two days with Ramirez. She may have left some clues behind as to what she had planned as well."

Sam felt his shoulders drop at what Rivers was suggesting. "Rivers... Even if you're right about her... I can't do this! I... I'm not ready. I can't do something like that on my own." Sam could feel his voice wavering, his eyes beginning to glisten. Rivers clasped his feminine shoulders and looked into his eyes.

"Yes you can, you just need to take a breath and relax. You can do this." Rivers brought Sam forward from the table, slowly turning him until he faced the mirror. "Look at you," Rivers said from over his shoulder, "Ramirez would never guess you weren't really Antoinette. I mean, I'm having trouble enough myself."

Sam gazed into his blue eyed reflection, then down at the contours of his feminine body. Rivers was right. Ramirez would totally believe that he was Antoinette.

And that was exactly what he was afraid of.

RIVERS DROPPED THE four inch high heeled sandals at Sam's feet. "Here, put these on." He watched as Sam picked them up, holding them slightly away from himself like they were a pair of dead rats.

"You cannot be serious," Sam protested as he sat on the edge of one of the beds. Rivers smiled at his sexy French accent, as he reached into the wardrobe and pulled a crisp new suit from its shrink-wrap.

"Fields, you just said so yourself, we need to get out there quick so that Antoinette doesn't have too much of a head start. Plus we don't know whether Ramirez will hang around now that I've stood him up for the next round of our poker game."

"I'm not going to be able to stand up in these, let alone walk!"

"What are you going to do, wear *my* shoes?" Rivers watched as Sam looked down at his small feet, flexing his toes with their scarlet nail polish.

"I guess not," Sam decided, arranging the feminine foot wear on the floor beside him.

As Rivers changed into his suit, he could not take his eyes off of Sam. He was leant right over as he slipped each of his feet into Antoinette's red sandals, affording Rivers an unrestricted view of his breasts beneath his low cut cocktail dress.

He has absolutely no idea, Rivers mused to himself. He still couldn't get used to the idea that it was actually his partner trapped inside that gorgeous blonde's body. The body that he'd longed to fuck ever since he'd first caught eyes of her in the poker den. Even now, with all that had happened, he couldn't eliminate the urges he felt. He had tried hard not to make it obvious, but he knew that Sam had caught him looking a few times. He turned away as he felt his boxer shorts twitch, and quickly slipped into his new suit pants.

"How do I look?"

Rivers turned back around at the sound of Sam>s voice to see him standing there, ringing his hands nervously, his smooth slender legs now perfectly accentuated by his four-inch high-heeled sandals. A gruff murmur of appreciation escaped Rivers' lips.

"Can you walk?"

Rivers watched as Sam took a couple of bambi-steps forward and then toppled. Rivers caught him just in time, feeling Sam>s large breasts crushing between their bodies. Rivers looked down. Sam's face looked beautifully innocent, like a little girl lost in the woods. He coughed to break the silence and helped Sam back to his feet. He watched as he took a couple more steps and managed this time not to fall.

"Ready?" Rivers asked, pulling on his jacket. Rivers was afraid that Sam had been right earlier when he said he wasn't ready for the mission. Given what had just happened to him, and what would be expected of him now, it was a lot to ask.

Sam walked uneasily to the far side of the room, then back again, holding his arms wide beside him. Rivers noticed that Sam's backside was also more pleasingly accentuated in the heels. "Ready," Sam said at last, unconvincingly.

Rivers had between now and the time it took to drive to the waterfront to get Sam *ready*. He knew that he was about to make himself very unpopular.

SAM EASED HIS way down the brightly lit corridor outside the hotel room. His hands felt along the wall for support as he walked, in what felt like, a towering pair of red high-heeled sandals. Rivers walked slowly a couple of steps behind, presumably to catch him if he fell again.

"Here, take my arm, you look like a blind woman." Rivers offered Sam the crook of his elbow. Sam looked up, weighed up his options, and decided to take him up on the offer.

Sam felt dwarfed next to Rivers, even in his heels. He held Rivers' arm with both hands as he was escorted to the elevators. He felt enormously self-conscious away from the relative privacy of the hotel room.

The wait for the elevator was excruciating. Sam could feel his tummy turning itself in knots and he wondered if he was going to be sick again. When it finally arrived, he hurried inside ahead of Rivers, his heels clicking on the metallic floor.

The elevator hummed as it made its slow descent. "Okay Sam, when we get downstairs, people are going to see you. Men are going to look at you. Act natural and hold onto me. We're just a couple going out for a walk okay?"

Sam felt Rivers' arm slip around his small waist, pulling him closer. Sam immediately felt uncomfortable and wriggled free. Rivers held up his hands innocently. "Relax! Fields, listen, you need to calm down. You can do this. Just play along." This time when Rivers' arm slipped round, Sam let it stay there, though he'd never felt so uncomfortable.



Sam felt Rivers' arm slip around his small waist, pulling him closer.

THE ELEVATOR DOORS parted with a chime and Sam and Rivers were greeted by a wall of noise. The foyer bustled with people enjoying the late night gambling that would run on throughout the early hours. Sam felt like a rabbit caught in the headlights, instantly losing his bearings and forgetting which way it was to the parking bays. He felt Rivers' arm pushing against his lower back, ushering him out. Immediately Sam's heels echoed out across the marble floor.

He heard Rivers' voice close to his ear, "Stay calm. Keep focused."

They walked together swiftly, Sam wanting to spend as little time in the large, brightly lit lobby as was possible. It seemed everywhere he looked men were walking past, some with a woman on their arm, others on their own, some in groups. All of them looked over at him with that same look, like he was a food parcel that had just been parachuted into a starving village. He felt humiliated. He lowered his head, letting his long blonde hair curtain around his face.

Sam finally recognised the door to the parking bay and quickened his pace. He left the safety of Rivers' arm and clacked on ahead.

When Sam realised that Rivers had not followed, he stopped and swivelled round. Rivers stood there, hands casually resting in his pants pockets.

"Let's go get a drink."

"What?" Sam whispered incredulously, hurrying back over, his breasts bobbing merrily under his dress. "What are you playing at? Let's just get in the car and go, before I change my mind about this whole thing."

"Trust me, let's go get a drink. It'll be good for you, I promise." Rivers turned and headed towards the lobby bar. Sam was forced to take small hurried steps to keep up. "You're doing pretty good in those heels now, don't you think?"

Sam looked down suddenly, realising that he'd been walking unassisted, his bare legs slipping confidently one in front of the other. He hadn't even thought anything of it! He'd just... *walked*. Sam winced with pain as his left ankle suddenly buckled beneath him.

"Woah, there we go," Rivers grinned as he caught Sam's arm.

SAM SAT ON a stool at the bar; nervously toying with the hem of his red dress, wishing it was longer. He clamped his legs tightly together, feeling the predatory eyes about him. The hum of people in conversation surrounded him.

"Here we go, two Vodka Martinis." Sam watched as Rivers set the drinks down beside them and took up a stool next to his.

"Oh, we think we're James Bond now do we?" Sam quipped, taking a quick sip of his drink. "You know, this isn't exactly what I'd call *hurrying out the door.* Can't we just go?"

"In a moment, just... have a drink." Rivers motioned with his glass.

Sam took another gulp, drinking quickly with his nerves, his eyes darting left and right. Rivers seemed to sense this and tried to keep the conversation going.

"So, what's with those heels, huh? There was no stopping you back there!" Rivers smiled.

"I don't know," Sam answered, giving some thought to the matter. "It's like, when I stopped thinking about it, my body seemed to know what to do and took over." Sam crossed his legs as he spoke, smoothing his dress back over them.

"Like your accent as well, perhaps? It looks like there are some things that your body is just used to doing. Parts of the brain that instinctively know all this stuff."

"Maybe." Sam took another nervous drink. Looking around, he accidently met the gaze of a young bartender who smiled back at him. He quickly looked away, feeling himself blush.

"You know, Sam. There's going to be other things that your body is used to doing. Things that you won't be so used to."

Sam felt Rivers' left hand rest on his thigh. He flinched, uncrossing his legs again, looking around for who might be looking at them. Glasses clinked as they were set down on the bar counter.

"Shhh, don't draw attention to yourself. You're just having a quiet drink with your boyfriend. There's nothing wrong with his hand being on your leg."

"Mike, please..." Sam squirmed on his barstool, but Rivers' hand remained on his thigh. A roar of laughter came from a group of men in the corner, who were sharing a private joke.

"Smile."

"What?"

"You're having a drink with your boyfriend. You're enjoying yourself! *Smile!"*

Sam's lipstick covered lips quivered. He bit his lip.

"Close your eyes."

Sam could feel his eyes beginning to glisten.

"*Close* them," Rivers said more deliberately.

Sam nervously swallowed and closed his eyes.

It was then that Sam felt Rivers' lips covering his own, kissing him. It lasted only a second but it felt like an eternity. At the same time Rivers' left hand squeezed his thigh.

The bar stool scraped against the polished floor as Sam pushed away and got up. He fought the urge to sob as he ran to the nearest bathroom, his high heels clicking loudly. Nearly everyone at the bar turned to watch.



It was then that Sam felt Rivers' lips covering his own, kissing him.
It lasted only a second but it felt like an eternity.

SAM PULLED THE lid down on the toilet and locked the cubicle door behind him. He slumped down holding his head in his hands. His long blonde hair hung down around him. He gripped it in his hands, pulling it harshly out of frustration.

He looked down again at his body; his breasts, his tiny waist, his hips, his legs. Throughout it all, he'd tried his best to hold it together, but he couldn't keep it in anymore. He'd had enough. He growled through gritted teeth as he hammered his fists against the walls of the cubicle, stamping his heels on the floor.

Why *him?* Why hadn't this happen to Rivers? Surely, he would have been a better choice for Antoinette to swap with? Sam rubbed at his hands which now hurt.

And the Agency, acting like nothing had happened, putting him on a mission straight into the lion's den. What did they expect from him?

He drew a deep breath and rubbed at his eyes. Sam unlatched the cubicle and walked over to the sinks, running the taps to splash water into his face.

"You know why I did that don't you?" Sam looked up at the mirror to see Rivers leaning against the far wall behind him. Sam didn't answer, and busied himself with washing his hands. He knew full well that Rivers had been testing him.

"Carlos Ramirez *bought* Antoinette two days ago," Rivers continued, "You get that don't you? As far as he is concerned, you're his property. If you behave the way you just did with him? He'll kill you. Do you understand?"

Sam looked deep into the sink, losing himself as he watched the water swirl into the plug hole. He felt Rivers grasp his wrist, turning him around to look at him.

"Fields... Sam. The Agency needs you to do this, and that means *I* need you to do this. Do you realise how many people out there are suffering right now because of what Ramirez is doing? How many *women?* How many *children?* What you find out on that yacht could bring him down once and for all."

Sam raised his head, looking Rivers in the eye as he continued, "I need you to reach inside yourself. Meditate, medicate, masturbate... do whatever you need to do to cope with this. And if it ever gets too much? Just think of me with that 67 year-old countess."

Sam blustered a quick laugh out, his lips parting in a smile as he rubbed at a moist eye.

"Hey, there's that smile I was looking for earlier! Huh?"

Sam *did* smile. He had felt embarrassed at showing weakness in front of Rivers. He stood up straight, sniffing as he straightened his scarlet dress. He would try and be strong. He was still an agent. He would survive it.

They were interrupted by the sound of someone clearing their throat. A small old man with glasses and a boot lace tie looked up at them both.

"Excuse me lady, but this is the men's room."

THE STREET LIGHTS blurred into one as Rivers expertly wound the Lamborghini through the steep streets of Monaco. He glanced over occasionally to Sam who was staring blankly out of the passenger window. He hadn't said anything since getting in the car, but Rivers had left him alone. He could sense that some soul searching was going on.

Rivers took the car for a slow drive past the waterfront before turning up a side road. He pulled the car up by the kerb and killed the engine. Rivers set the variable-tint windows to blackout and the interior of the car lit up with a ghostly red glow.

"Okay you're looking for the *Oro del Diablo*," Rivers rolled his eyes, "*Devil's Gold.* Original." He handed a picture of the yacht to Sam. It should be moored on pier nine. It's a Jennings-Class personal super-yacht, so you'll definitely be travelling in style. Efficient engine, long range. He could probably get halfway round the world in that thing. It's not too big either, so crew compliment should be small."

Rivers sorted through some more photographs. "Carlos Ramirez, obviously," he said handing over the first picture. He glanced over at Sam, watching as he silently studied it, stroking his blonde hair away from his feminine face.

"This is Maria Ramirez, his wife," Rivers continued, handing the next picture over.

"He's *married?*" Sam asked, breaking his silence at last.

"Which means she's probably just as devious as he is, so watch yourself." Rivers handed a final photograph to Sam. "And this meat-head is their personal bodyguard, Gaul, who we saw back at the casino."

"I'm sure he's charming," Sam said, handing all the pictures back to Rivers.

Rivers looked at Sam for a moment, studied his flawless, elfin face, his expressive blue eyes, his bee-stung ruby red lips.

"Let's do this."



SAM FIELDS WOULD never have been ready. Not for this. He just had to do it, before he thought about it too much and ran off to find another corner to hide in. He watched as Rivers came round to his side of the car and opened the door, swinging it upwards. The salty sea air swept into the car.

The Lamborghini was sat so low to the sidewalk that Sam had to use Rivers' help to get out, especially in his tight dress and heels. Once he was pulled out, he tugged once more at the hem of his dress, which scarcely covered his rounded buttocks.

"Nice thong," Rivers commented, "You need to watch how you get out of cars in the future."

Sam felt his face flush red. He had been aware of his underwear constantly, its string riding up between his buttocks, but he had tried his best to avoid thinking too much of what was done there now.

Sam drew a deep breath, looking up at Rivers. His long hair picked up in the breeze. "Mike... My body..."

"I'll find her. I'll get your body back."

"Okay... Well, I guess this is it then," Sam turned and began to walk away, his high heels clicking on the sidewalk, his legs gracefully swinging one in front of the other. He heard Rivers call after him and turned.

"Sam... Stay lucky."





A shadow loomed before him, threatening even to block out the Moon, so it seemed. A huge, hulk of a figure, a sentinel, stood between Sam and the yacht's deck.

SAM MADE HIS way across the street, his arms folded in front of him to ward off the breeze which had begun to pick up force the closer he got to the bay. Some late night revellers were staggering back to their hotel in the distance. Somewhere he heard a bottle smash.

The wooden deck of pier nine thudded under his feet as he made his way up. He could already see the *Oro del Diablo* up ahead, its white hull reflecting the lamp lights that ran along the pier. There was no turning back now. He wouldn't stop. He *couldn't* stop.

His fingers found the railing of the yacht's gangway, and he carefully stepped across. Below him, the inky blackness of the sea lapped at the underside of the ship. A light appeared before him, dazzling him. He held his hand across his face as he heard footsteps approach.

As the torch was lowered, Sam blinked a few times, his vision gradually adjusting. A shadow loomed before him, threatening even to block out the Moon, so it seemed. A huge, hulk of a figure, a sentinel, stood between him and the yacht's deck.

It was Gaul, Ramirez's bodyguard. He stood seven foot tall, his tailor-made suit straining with his muscular build. Even in the darkness, he wore his sunglasses so as to betray as little emotion as possible.

Sam swallowed hard, then gasped, as Gaul suddenly and forcefully gripped his arm. Gaul's hand was large and his thick fingers encircled his entire arm with ease. He turned, silently heading back in to the boat, and Sam had little choice but to mince after him in rapid small steps to match the man's larger strides.

Gaul's grip was strong and hurt his arm. Sam heard his feminine voice groaning with the pain. He was dragged into the bowels of the boat, deep below the deck, down a narrow corridor. Sam tried to recall as much as he could about his surroundings, remembering the way back out and up to the deck if needed.

A door was opened and Gaul, silently and impassively, threw Sam in. He fell to the floor with a cry, watching as Gaul slammed the door shut. He heard the sound of a heavy bolt sliding and then Gaul's heavy footsteps disappearing back up the corridor.



SAM BROUGHT HIMSELF back to his feet and rubbed at his painful right calf.

"Some welcome that was."

He looked around at his surroundings. He was in a bedroom. A king-sized bed dominated the room, the covers immaculately made up with a plush white duvet. Large pine wardrobes and drawer units were set into the walls and recessed ceiling lights cast a muted glow down into the room. There were no windows and off to one side it looked like there was an en suite bathroom. The gentle sway of the yacht on the water created a disconcerting sensation. He went to the door, working the handle and pushing with his shoulder, but it didn't budge.

He opened a couple of the wardrobes. In one there hung various expensive dresses, tops and skirts. In another were racks upon racks of women's shoes, most of them with heels as tall as the ones he was wearing. It looked as though this was Antoinette's personal room. He was a little relieved. He'd feared that he might be expected to share a room with Ramirez. He still wasn't quite sure what the arrangement was with Antoinette, given that Ramirez's wife was on board.

Sam sat on the edge of the bed, and reached down to his ankles, unstrapping each of his high heels and pulling them off with a sigh of relief. Despite his rapid adjustment to high-heeled walking, his feet were still very sore and he rubbed at the soles of each of his small feet.

Sam was exhausted and yearned for the soft comfort of the bed. He didn't know if anyone would be coming for him tonight, or if he would be able to get away with a few hours of sleep, but it no longer felt like he had a choice in the matter. His borrowed body had finally given up.

With effort, Sam pushed himself up from the bed and walked over to the free-standing full length mirror that stood in the corner of the room. The carpet felt soft and deep under his bare feet. He looked at his reflection. He looked a lot more dishevelled than he'd realised. His long hair was now straggly and he had lost much of his makeup from washing his face earlier. His dress was crumpled and a spaghetti strap had slipped from his shoulder. Despite all this, Antoinette had an alluring natural beauty that shone through.

Sam turned and looked over his shoulder into the mirror, looking for the zip at the back of his dress. He saw just how rounded and feminine his buttocks were now. He struggled with the combination of his long fingernails and the tiny zipper, but managed to pull it all the way down. The figure hugging cocktail dress had cups built into the bust, to support a woman's breasts without the need for an additional bra. The sudden release of pressure on his chest felt good.

Sam watched his reflection as the dress slid down his body, needing a little persuading to clear his wide hips. He gasped as the dress puddled at his feet.

In the mirror, his breasts rose and fell with his breathing. They seemed very large for his size, but still firm and pert. His nipples were thick and pink with large aureole. He instinctively cupped them, feeling their weight in his small hands. He pinched at his nipples and instantly regretted it as he misjudged their sensitivity. His hands left his breasts and traced the outline if his small waist and his perfectly flat stomach. He felt the way his waist flared out to join the curve of his hips. Between his legs was the small triangle of his lacy thong. It was stretched tight and snug against a disturbingly flat crotch.

His *manhood*.

Gone.

Sam would have left the underwear on if it hadn't been for the irritation of the thong between his buttocks. He hooked his thumbs into the elasticated waist band and slid them down. They peeled off of him, like a second layer of skin. He shook them off



Sam did not know if he was a man with the body of a woman, or a woman with the mind of a man.

of his ankles and looked back at himself in the mirror. A small, neatly trimmed strip of blonde hair sat above the beginnings of a vertical slit that disappeared further between his legs.

His *womanhood.*

Sam did not know if he was a man with the body of a woman, or a woman with the mind of a man. His whole being, his whole identity was in turmoil.

But the turmoil belonged to another day. Not now. Sam peeled back the bed covers and slid naked between the sheets. He fell asleep almost immediately.

SCARLET

CHAPTER TWO

A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK



SAM AWOKE WITH a start, air shooting sharply down into his lungs. Something was happening. He could hear the distant hum of an engine as it ticked over, revving up a few times. The yacht was starting to move and he could feel the room beginning to sway a little. The lack of a window as a point of reference made him feel disorientated.

Deep down Sam had hoped that Ramirez would remain in Monaco, but Rivers had guessed he would soon depart. Sam did not know where they were going, or how he would escape at the end of it, but Rivers had told him not to plan too far ahead, to stay alert and take any opportunity as it arose.

Sam drew another breath, sweeping long hair out of his face. He felt like he'd slept for days.

Sam swept the duvet cover off of his naked body, still expecting to see his own male body, as if the whole thing had been a bad dream. Instead he looked down to find his large breasts rising and falling with his breathing. He watched his nipples, now exposed to the cool air-conditioned room, as they hardened on his chest. His waist tapered inwards, then widened at his hips which ran downwards to the contours of his bare legs. Between his legs, the smallest tuft of blonde hair sat above the beginnings of a vertical slit.

Sam looked over to the door, remembering how Ramirez's bodyguard Gaul had locked him in the night before. He got up, wrapping the duvet around himself, and took small, shuffling steps to the door. He reached out with his small hand and tried the handle, hefting his weight against it. It was still locked. Although he would have to figure out exactly what he was going to do about that, he was relieved that, for the moment, he still had his privacy.

Sam let the duvet fall from his body and he stretched, hearing a couple of joints clicking. He wondered what time it was, but looking around he could not find a clock anywhere. Sam's head felt heavy from over sleeping and given the late hour that he had finally got to bed, he guessed it was probably now around the middle of the day. He listened to the yacht's engine. It seemed to have settled now on a constant velocity and there was only a slight rocking sensation that reminded him he was on a boat.

Water.

Sam didn't care much for water, not being much of a swimmer. He could picture the yacht making its way out into the wide open Mediterranean Sea, the waves slapping against its hull. It may as well have been a desert.

Water...

Sam looked over towards the en suite bathroom, a sudden urge causing him to take hurried steps towards it.



SAM LIFTED THE toilet seat, standing impotently before it. He rubbed his tired eyes and took a deep breath, before lowering the seat back down and turning to sit.

He clasped his legs together and pushed, but nothing seemed to happen. He felt oddly self-conscious squatting as a woman, his naked breasts hanging down from where he was leant forwards.

He closed his eyes, wondering what Rivers was doing right now. Maybe he was already following up a lead and Antoinette would soon be caught. His body, safe and sound, would be waiting for him when he returned. They would find whatever device she had used and swap them back, and Sam would be congratulated on a job well done.

Yeah, right. Far too many *ifs* surrounded that whole scenario.

Sam sighed, hearing the sound of his rill as it trickled into the toilet bowl at last.



MIKE RIVERS SAT at the waterside café and sipped at his espresso, as he watched the *Oro del Diablo* disappear off into the horizon. Ramirez's yacht had shown no indication of changing its heading, it had simply headed straight out and away from Monaco's bay. Standard practice for someone who didn't want to be followed. Ramirez would head out to sea, away from prying eyes before changing direction.

Rivers pulled off his sunglasses and closed his eyes, letting the midday sun hit his face. He thought of Sam in Ramirez's yacht — in the belly of the beast. He felt bad for him. How could you not. Sam was certainly undertaking a trial by fire by going undercover as a female sex slave. It would make a woman out of him if nothing else. Rivers recalled Sam walking away from the Lamborghini in the early hours of the morning, his sexy ass twitching beneath his dress. He may as well have been walking away from his masculinity, for what he would likely endure on the yacht.

Rivers had played it down of course. Sam had still seemed to hold onto the belief that he might be able to bluff his way out of it, and if that helped him cope, then that was fine. It was almost a shame that he hadn't had more time to *educate* Sam. Orders were orders, however, and Rivers had his own. He checked his watch. He'd give it another hour or so. There was no rush.

Rivers ordered another espresso from a passing waiter and unfolded a local newspaper.





The warm water from the shower hit Sam's naked body, forming rivers and tributaries that snaked their way over his feminine curves and contours.

THE WARM WATER from the shower hit Sam's naked body, forming rivers and tributaries that snaked their way over his feminine curves and contours. He rubbed soap suds into his breasts, his body, his backside, and his legs which now felt slightly prickly, where yesterday they had felt silky smooth. He even briefly ran a soapy hand between his legs, feeling tender and unwanted flesh between his thighs. He had shuddered as if someone had just walked over his grave.

Sam closed his eyes and let the water soak his blonde hair. It grew heavy and tugged at his scalp. He rinsed it through, but did not wash it, as he did not really know which combination of the many lotions and potions in the bathroom he should use on it.

Stepping out of the shower cubicle, Sam pulled a fresh white towel from the rail and wrapped it around his small body, tucking and folding it tight, just above his breasts. The towel was long enough to cover his modesty, but left his long legs bare. He gripped his mane of water-logged hair and wrung it out, soaking the floor. Next time he would remember to do it over the sink.

Sam made his way back out into the bedroom, feeling alert and refreshed, when he noticed that the door to the room was now ajar. He cautiously tip-toed over, one hand tightening around the knot in his towel. He peered through the gap to the corridor outside, hearing the soft patter of

water dripping off of him and hitting the carpet below. There was nobody there, but he could just about make out some natural light filtering in at the far end of the corridor.

Sam carefully closed the door, then tried opening it again to make sure he could still get out. He glanced back to the en suite bathroom, and saw that he could see straight through to the shower. Had someone been watching him? Sam felt his skin goose-bump as he remembered how he had felt in the casino lobby with so many eyes on him. He tried to banish the thought. Either way, the message was clear. He was free to leave the room. He was probably even *expected* to come out now. Sam felt a sense of urgency and glanced down to where he had discarded his dress last night.



SAM EMPTIED A draw full of underwear onto the bed and began to leaf through it. He knew that he couldn't just turn out dressed in what Antoinette had on last night, nor did he really want to, given how little it left to the imagination.

"*Yes.*"

Sam whispered a small victory as he finally found a matching pair of plain white panties and bra that didn't look like they were spun from some silken spider's web. He sat down on the edge of the bed and held the panties out, slipping each foot into them. He pulled them up his legs and stood upright so that he could get them over his hips and backside. He let the waistband go with a crisp snap.

Sam looked down, past the obstruction of his bare breasts, to his smooth panty covered loins. They felt snug and comfortable, especially seeing as they didn't have a string running up between his buttocks.

Sam picked up the bra and turned it over in his hand to read the label — *34D*. He was more than a little embarrassed that he had a larger cup size than Lenore now.

Oh God, Lenore. If she could only see him now.

Sam took the brassiere and threaded his arms through the shoulder straps and attempted to pull the cups down over his breasts. He found it difficult, and when he did finally manage to tuck the cups under his chest, he struggled with the clasp at the back. His long finger nails didn't make the job any easier. He thought of what Lenore would do and unthreaded his arms, sliding

the bra around, back to front, so that he could more easily fasten the clasp. He then shifted it back around the right way and slipped his arms back into the shoulder straps. Finally he used both hands to heft each of his breasts, one at a time, into the ample bra cups. He filled them perfectly.

RIVERS PEERED OVER the rim of his sunglasses as he studied the generous cleavage of the girl hanging through the passenger window of the Lamborghini.

"I really like your car," she purred running a finger along the upholstery.

Rivers smiled, "Texas, right?"

"How did you guess?" The girl replied in her southern twang.

"I'm good with tongues. So what brings you to Monaco?"



"I really like your car," the girl purred running a finger along the upholstery.

"Oh, just hoping to score big."

"Well, that makes two of us."

"So, are you gonna take me for a ride?" The girl's bleached blonde hair shone in the sunlight.

"Maybe tonight," Rivers grinned. He'd take her for a ride alright. But not now. Now he had to get to work.

"Hope to see you later." The girl pouted and withdrew from the car.

"Have a good day Texas." Rivers revved the Lamborghini's engine to the max and watched the girl in his rear-view mirror as he pulled away, her round backside swaying in her tiny denim shorts.

Italy and back in a day. He could probably manage it.



SAM THREADED HIS still damp hair through an elasticated tie, pulling it taught against his scalp so that it hung over his back in a long ponytail. He stood in front of the mirror in his white underwear, noticing the even with his legs together, his wider set hips now created an inverted triangle of empty space set between his crotch and thighs.

Sam sat down onto the bed, his backside and hips splaying as he reached for the clothing that he had carefully selected.

First he slid his feet through the openings of a pair of white three-quarter length leggings. He stood up to finish pulling them up and found he had to pump his legs almost like he was on a cross-trainer to get them high enough so that the crotch did not sag. The waist band sat high on his body and covered his flat tummy. He saw in the mirror that they hugged him like a second skin, perfectly following the shapely contours of his hips and buttocks.

Sam had also chosen from the wardrobe a pastel peach colored top with short, lace trimmed sleeves. He first pulled it over his head, tugging his blonde ponytail free, before then pulling it further over his chest. He found it hugged the swell of his breasts, revealing a small amount of cleavage, but nothing too obscene. It was a long length style that ended just below his buttocks like a dress would.

Sam smoothed his top around his hips as he twisted to the side, observing his profile. Antoinette's worried feminine face looked back at him from the mirror.

"It's fine. It's fine," Sam muttered to himself in his soft female voice. In truth he had no idea what he should wear, but again he had used Lenore as a guide, thinking of the sorts of things that she would wear at the weekend.

Sam drew a deep breath as he slid his feet into a pair of flat gold colored sandals. Once more, his heart beat rocketed and every ounce of sense in his body told him not to go out that door.

But he did.

And before he knew it, he found himself gliding down the corridor outside, trailing a hand against the wall, as if in a waking dream. Something drew him onwards, but whether it was the mission, a desire to get back to his own body, or a resignation to a much worse fate, Sam did not know.



SAM'S SANDALS SLAPPED against the soles of his feet as he climbed the small flight of stairs up to the rear-most deck of the *Oro del Diablo*. The white light of the sun blanketed his vision as his eyes struggled to adjust. He held up a hand to shield himself, walking out into the heat.

He walked across the deck to the rear most railing, gripping it as he looked out beyond the yacht. On the horizon he could make out the receding bay of Monaco which threatened to disappear altogether to the crystal blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Directly below him the yacht's engine churned the waters, propelling it along at a gentle pace.

"Antoinette!"

Sam jumped at the voice, quickly spinning around and looking up. There on a veranda some twelve foot above him stood a woman. The breeze picked up her long dark hair and she gazed down with piercing dark eyes. Her bikini-clad body was the

color of mocha and she wore a sarong which fluttered at her hips. Sam recognised her immediately from the photograph Rivers had shown him.

Maria Ramirez.

She beckoned Sam with a finger.

SAM'S PONYTAIL SWISHED behind his head as he climbed the winding steps up to the mid-level of the yacht. He found himself on an open deck with wood panelled flooring and his flat sandals clapped loudly as he slowly stepped forward.

This was it, Sam thought. He would now have to do his best to pass himself off as Antoinette. Anything he said and did now could literally mean the difference between life and death.

Stay calm, act natural, try not to say too much.

Sam repeated the words in his head, finding them coming to him in Rivers' calm, measured voice.

Maria Ramirez was sat at a round wooden table that held a large umbrella at its centre as protection from the sun. Plates and bowls of fruit adorned the table and Maria dabbed her mouth with a napkin as she swallowed a slice of kiwi fruit and got up.

"Antoinette, darling, there you are!"

She held Sam's shoulders and air-kissed his cheeks. Sam glanced down, catching sight of her dark, toned body. Her breasts,



Maria Ramirez.

small next to Sam's, were scantily covered by a lime green bikini top. Her waist was washboard flat and her hips were wrapped in a semi-transparent sarong. Beneath, Sam could see she wore a high cut green bikini thong.

"Sit down, please. Help yourself to some fruit." Maria's voice oozed with a deliberate sensuality, her Spanish accent rolling her words.

"Thank you," Sam's voice was quiet and unsteady, though his French accent was still very much evident. He looked down at the plates of fruit before him, suddenly becoming aware that he was hungry. He sat down and brought a strawberry to his lips, biting into it.

Maria watched him closely as she sat opposite, her dark eyes boring into him. Her eye makeup swept up the corners of her eyes, making her appear hawk-like and predatory. A few tell-tale lines in her face placed her in her late-thirties to early forties, though she clearly looked after herself.

Sam met her gaze, suddenly feeling naked, as if she would at any moment reach forward and pull off his mask, revealing him for who he really was.

She doesn't know. She can't tell.

Again Rivers' voice echoed in Sam's head. Sam chewed, swallowing the juicy strawberry. It tasted different to what he was used to. Not unpleasant, just *different*, and not what he would consider very strawberry-like.

"So, Antoinette, did you enjoy your night out last night? Carlos tells me he nearly sold you." Maria chuckled. "That would have been a shame, don't you think?"

"Yes," Sam answered, keeping his responses short. So far so good. Maria clearly didn't seem to know anything about the swap.

"Yes Madame we agreed, remember?" Maria's eyes looked at him sternly.

"Yes, *Madame*," Sam replied, feeling his cheeks blush red.

"Good girl, I love it when you use your French words."

Sam nervously bit into another strawberry, hoping she would not press him any further on that. He watched as Maria pushed her chair away from the table, crossing her long legs.

"Please, stand before me," Maria gestured, holding out her arm.

Sam looked at her, wondering what was going on, but he was too nervous to question anything at this stage. He placed his half eaten strawberry back down onto his plate and pushed his chair back.

He stood and walked out in front of Maria, smoothing his peach top. He squinted at the Sun, wishing he had thought to look in Antoinette's room for a pair of sunglasses. He watched as Maria looked his body up and down, then circled her finger indicating for him to turn around. Sam slowly turned through three hundred and sixty degrees, holding his arms out beside him.

Maria sighed, seeming irritated.

"Antoinette... My darling... What do you think you are playing at exactly?"

"Wha...what do you mean," Sam could feel his breathing getting quicker, his breasts heaving under his top.

"Are you making fun of us? Is that it? You wish to make fun of me and my husband?"

"No, no Madame, of course not!" Sam began to panic, worrying that Maria suspected something.

She shot him a look of disgust, "Then what the fuck is *this*?" Maria got to her feet and began to circle Sam. She wore a pair of high heel sandals on her feet and stalked around him, taller, more powerful. "You



Maria circled her finger indicating for him to turn around. Sam slowly turned through three hundred and sixty degrees, holding his arms out beside him.

come out here, with no make-up on, your nail polish not even removed from last night! You do nothing with your hair!" Sam felt her suddenly yank at his ponytail, causing him to cry out in his feminine voice. She held his hair tightly from behind, pulling his head back towards her. "And you dress like you are fucking sight-seeing!"

Sam could feel tears forming in his eyes as he winced with the pain, not to mention the shock of Maria's outrage. Finally, she let him go. Sam brought a hand to his face, trying his best to hold it together.

"Go and change into a bikini now, before Carlos sees you. He will throw you overboard if he sees you like this!"

"I'm sorry..." Sam's voice quivered, "I just thought..."

"You were not purchased to *think*. You were purchased to *do*."

"Y.. Yes Madame."

Sam hurried back into the darkness of the yacht, fighting off the urge to sob. He had barely stepped foot outside and had already blown it.



"WOAH! EASY THERE!"

Sam had hurriedly turned a corner, in a frantic search for his room, only to run head-long into someone. He would have fallen if strong arms had not caught him, pulling him upright.

Sam looked up, still shocked. A tall man in his mid-thirties looked down at him,

"Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I'm sorry sir... I was just... trying to find my room," Sam gasped, struggling to catch his breath. The man's biceps flexed as he released his hold on Sam's arms.

"*Sir*?" He laughed, "That's my father's name." He smiled warmly.

"You're American as well?" Sam asked, surprised. He quickly wiped his eyes, trying not to show how upset he had been.

"As well? How many others do you know? The Sunshine State, born and raised. My name's Joseph. I'm the pilot." Joseph held out his large hand. Sam took it and he gently shook. Joseph's face was weather worn with flecks of light brown stubble across his face. Sam felt relieved that he had not run into Carlos Ramirez or Gaul, and felt oddly comforted — partly from meeting a fellow countryman, and partly from Joseph's disarming demeanor.



"My name is... Antoinette."

"The *pilot*?" Sam pulled his hand away.

"Yeah. Oh, don't worry it's on autopilot at the moment."

"My name is... Antoinette." Sam cast his gaze downwards, feeling awkward.

"I know, I've seen you down on the deck a few times over the last couple of days." Sam noticed Joseph's eyes flick briefly down to his body. "Listen, I need to get back up to the bridge, I'm having all sorts of trouble with the GPS at the moment, but it was great meeting you."

Joseph slid past Sam, but turned back, his voice dropping to a hushed whisper.

"And listen, feel free to come up to the bridge if you ever need to get away from things for a bit. Carlos and Maria can be a little bit... intense."

Sam gave a flicker of a smile.



THE ENGINE OF Rivers' Lamborghini roared as he sped along the motorway that ran around the outskirts of Menton, the most south-easterly region of France. Monaco was well situated to be within a stone's through of the Franco-Italian border, and at his current speed he would arrive at his destination inside of an hour.

Rivers let the driver-side window down, the air howling at his side.

He thought back to the peroxide blonde he had left in Monaco, hoping he could get back in time to see her again. He still held his reservation at *Le Grand*, so he'd be able to show that trailer trash a damn good time. He imagined his hands sliding over her scarlet red dress...

Rivers eased his foot onto the accelerator as he weaved amongst the motorway traffic. He could feel his blood pumping.



SAM STOOD IN front of the full length mirror in his room and pulled his peach top up over his head, pulling his long blonde ponytail free. His chest spilled out of the white bra that he wore.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid," he muttered in his high pitched voice.

Sam had felt fairly pleased with himself before, picking out an outfit from the sea of possibilities in Antoinette's wardrobe, but now he felt wretched about it. He screwed up the top and threw it into the corner. He shuddered remembering how quickly Maria had turned on him. He hadn't even encountered Carlos Ramirez yet, which, he imagined, could only be ten times worse.

Sam tugged on his white leggings, shimmying them down over his wide hips, then sat down onto the bed to pull them off all the way.

Joseph had seemed nice enough, though Sam knew to take that with a pinch of salt. Anyone willingly working for Carlos Ramirez had to be treated with caution. Sam looked up into the mirror, seeing Antoinette sitting there in her bra and panties, small and vulnerable.

Slave.

The word came to him at once. Who knows, maybe Joseph was being forced into service as well. Someone like Carlos Ramirez probably had a lot more enemies besides the Agency. It made sense that he would recruit using fear and manipulation.

Without really thinking about it, Sam reached behind him and effortlessly unclipped his bra, pulling it from his body. It was only after that he wondered how he had managed it so easily after the problems he had earlier. He stood up, slipping his thumbs into the waistband of his panties, sliding them down his legs.

Now naked, Sam gathered up the underwear he had unceremoniously dumped onto the bed earlier and tossed them back into the bottom drawer. He then opened the next draw up and found it contained a selection of vest tops, swimsuits and bikinis. His bare breasts swung beneath him as he sifted through them, finally deciding on a navy blue bikini that was decorated with small white polka dots.

"Blue for a boy".

Sam stepped into the bikini bottoms and slid them up over his loins. They were higher cut than the panties he had been wearing, but they didn't feel too uncomfortable. He then pulled his ponytail forward over his shoulder so that he could slip the bikini top behind his neck. He could feel the soft hair at the back of his head brushing against his hand. Finally, Sam tied the top behind his back and ran his fingers around the edges until it fit snuggly.

Sam checked himself in the mirror. The spotted bikini top left most of the upper portion of his large breasts exposed and offered nothing in the way of support or padding. He could even see his nipples poking through a little.

The waist band of his bottoms sat high on his waist, forming a sharp V that ran down between his legs. Turning, Sam could see that they left the lower half of his round feminine buttocks exposed.



It was then that Sam noticed a small mark on his back, just above the waist band of his bikini bottoms. Moving closer to the mirror, he saw that it was a tattoo of a small *Fleur de Lys.*

It was then that Sam noticed a small mark on his back, just above the waist band of his bikini bottoms. Moving closer to the mirror, he saw that it was a tattoo of a small *Fleur de Lys*. He rubbed his finger over it. Even as a man he'd never had a tattoo before.

Sam felt cold in the air conditioned room. How could women walk around in so little? It was like he was just wearing his underwear. Sam remembered that Maria had worn a sarong around her waist and wondered if Antoinette owned anything like that. He returned to the open drawer and searched through, eventually finding what he was looking for. It must have been part of a set as the semi-transparent navy sarong matched his bikini exactly. He tied it around his small waist and found that it hung down longer on his right side, leaving most of his left thigh bare.

Sam still felt like he was missing something. He opened the left-most wardrobe and inspected the multitude of shoes that occupied its shelves. Maria had been wearing heels, so he felt it probably wise that he do the same. Every color and style seemed to be

catered for and it didn't take Sam long to find some strappy four-inch high-heeled sandals that matched his outfit. He set them down, slipping his dainty feet into each of them before fastening the ankle straps. He wobbled a little as he stood up straight.

Last night Sam had found he could walk in heels providing he didn't think about it too much. He closed his eyes, trying to clear his mind as best he could and took a step forward. His left leg brushed his right as he placed one foot in front of the other, his hip cocking to the side. He walked effortlessly up and down a couple of times, still amazed that he could do it. He stopped in front of the mirror and stood with his hands on his hips, dropping his left leg a little as he pouted his lips. Although he was just messing around, Sam still surprised himself with just how convincing it looked.



"WELL, WELL, NOW isn't that better?"

Maria Ramirez's heels clicked on the wooden decking as she slowly walked around Sam, inspecting his new choice of attire. He felt like a piece of meat hanging up in a butcher's shop.

"Your hair and face still look like shit, but Carlos will be too busy looking at your tits now to notice." Maria looked down at the cleavage of Sam's large breasts. Sam could feel his face flushing red as he looked off into the middle distance, doing his best to endure the humiliation. He could feel the Sun's rays on his bare flesh as he stood there on the open deck.

"Not to mention that sexy ass, eh?" a deep voice boomed from behind. Sam suddenly felt a hard slap to his behind causing him to jump and gasp effeminately. Sam turned, coming face to face with Carlos Ramirez.



A PLUME OF SMOKE blew into Sam's face as Ramirez puffed at his cigar. He wore a loose white shirt over his well-fed body, open almost to his naval. Black hair curled from his chest and he wore a couple of heavy gold chains around his neck.

Sam's heart leapt into his throat and he felt his whole body began to shake. He could feel stars forming at the edge of his vision and had to fight to keep from passing out from the shock.

"I'd almost forgotten what a sexy little bitch we have ourselves now," Ramirez peered over dark sunglasses, drinking in the sight of Sam's breasts.

"I'm still surprised you got her for the price that you did," Maria replied. Sam watched as she seemed to lose interest, turning to lay down on a sun lounger.

"I hope you were not too disappointed last night, Antoinette. That gringo never showed for the rest of our game. Probably another fucking spy, eh Maria? After that, I had to make absolutely sure we were not being followed." Ramirez drew on his cigar again and fixed Sam with a gaze that seemed to look right down into his soul. "You would be surprised just how many people think they can fool me."

Sam swallowed hard, his heels clicking on the decking as he nervously shuffled his feet. He felt like falling to his knees, admitting everything and begging forgiveness.

"Come with me," Ramirez said, gesturing with his hand. He turned and headed to the stairs that led down to the open deck below. Sam quickly followed, his small high-heeled steps making his breasts bob under his bikini top. He gave a quick glance back to Maria, seeing her lying there on the lounger, her head turned to the side watching them both. She smiled and blew a kiss.

Sam followed down the narrow steps, grasping the handrail and turning his feet sideways so that his heels would not slip. Ramirez walked ahead of him and Sam saw that he wore a pair of small red shorts that had no business on a man of his size.

"I do not usually neglect my possessions," he began in his thick Spanish voice as they made their way to the rear of the yacht, the sound of rotor blades chopping at the water below growing louder. "When I buy something it is because I intend to use it."

Sam looked out to the sea which seemed to stretch out to infinity in all directions. He found he could not answer and his bottom lip trembled uncontrollably. Ramirez gave a final drag of his cigar before flicking the stub into the water. He walked around behind Sam, moving close, pinning him between his body and the yacht's railing.

Ramirez unwrapped Sam's sarong, and held it up, letting it fly like a flag in the breeze before letting it go. Sam watched as it disappeared over the side of the boat. He squirmed, trying to wriggle free, but Ramirez pressed into him, his hands gripping Sam's slender waist.

"From now on you will wear only thong bikini, yes? I want to see that peach of an ass I bought."

Sam felt Ramirez's hand swat hard at his backside again.

"Uh, please..." Sam winced, his buttock cheeks stinging.

"*Please?* Yes, I fully intend for you to *please*." Ramirez gave a throaty laugh.

Sam could feel the bulge in Ramirez's shorts begin to rub up and down against his backside. His eyes opened wide as he felt an uncoiling beneath the thin fabric, swelling, hardening against him.

"No!" Sam shrieked, swivelling and ducking under Ramirez's arm in a surprisingly fluid motion. He ran back to the boat, his arms swaying wide at his hips. His heels cluttered as he skidded to a halt and he gasped, looking up to find the entrance to the yacht's interior suddenly blocked, as a hulk of a figure pulled itself through.

It was Gaul.

His large arms folded around Sam's small body, and lifted him from the ground, pinning his arms at his side. Sam's legs kicked futilely as he was carried like a rag doll, back out to Ramirez.

"You do not want to be behaving like that, whore!"



Sam's legs kicked futilely as he was carried like a rag doll, back out to Ramirez.

Ramirez grimaced, his face inches from Sam's. Sam closed his eyes as he struggled in Gaul's tight embrace. Ramirez stank of cigar smoke, like some sulphurous demon. "If you grow too tiresome I will let Gaul here have his way with you," Ramirez looked up at his silent bodyguard. "Gaul is very... *imaginative*. The last girl? Well, let's just say it took us months to scrub her from the walls."

Sam heard a gruff moan come from Gaul, who was evidentially recalling the incident fondly.

Ramirez motioned for Gaul to release him and Sam dropped, landing awkwardly on his high-heeled feet. He cried out as pain radiated through his ankles. Ramirez gripped his face, squeezing his cheeks in his hand.

"I don't want to fucking see you again until tonight, understand?"

Sam nodded his head and staggered back into the yacht.

IT WAS LATE in the afternoon when Rivers found himself driving down a small country lane, deep in the heart of the Italian countryside surrounding Turin. He lamented as the sports car kicked up mud, streaking the immaculate white bodywork.

He heard the satellite navigation beep from his dashboard, a generic female voice informing him that he had arrived at his destination. Rivers pulled the Lamborghini around to park neatly alongside a pair of black four-wheel drive jeeps.

Rivers swung the wing-door upwards and stepped out of the car, breathing in the fresh Italian air. Green fields surrounded the area, and in the distance he could make out the beginnings of a vineyard. It was silent except for the rustle of leaves in a nearby tree and the distant chatter of birds. Immediately ahead of Rivers was an unmade path leading up to a dilapidated barn, which, he thought, rather ruined the scenery.

The Agency sure knew how to pick a location.

Rivers feet crunched against the stony ground as he made his way up to the barn. He stopped outside its one large door, its splintered wood barely still hanging on its hinges. He carefully unlatched the door and swung it inwards.

The barn was empty inside except for a couple of animal paddocks, long since vacated. They still faintly stank of manure and damp straw covered the floor. Rivers stepped into the nearest paddock, treading carefully and fearing for his Italian leather shoes. He reached down, feeling amongst the straw, until his hand found a handle. He pulled it, hefting a large trapdoor open. Beneath was a grey metal covering with a small computer terminal flashing expectantly beside it. Rivers keyed in his personal security number and swiped his thumb across the sensor. With a hiss of air the hatch slid sideways revealing a narrow spiral staircase leading downwards.

Rivers gave a last look around before stepping into the stairwell, pulling the trapdoor shut with a rope after him. The metallic inner hatch slid shut automatically as he descended.



SAM MURMURED IN his sleep, tossing and turning as his subconscious sought its way back from his troubled dreams. He was chasing a figure all in black, but every time he caught up they appeared less distinct, like a shadow, as if they weren't really there at all.

Finally he woke, gasping. Beads of sweat had formed over his female body. He rubbed at his chest and coughed.

Sam swung his legs from the bed and sat up, feeling gravity tugging at his breasts once more. He still wore his navy colored bikini with its white polka dots, and his loose hair fell over his shoulders and back from where he had removed his hair band.

Sam closed his eyes, hearing his heart beating, his shallow breathing — aware of the gentle sway of the yacht on the water.

He reflected on what had happened to him, how he had run off into a corner, as he always did the moment something bad had begun to happen. Would Rivers have acted that way? Rivers would probably have never allowed this to happen to him in the first place. Sam rubbed at his mess of blonde hair, remembering how he had opened the door to the hotel room and Antoinette had walked straight in, pointing a gun at him.

Idiot.

Things had to change. He had to pull it together and start coping. Maria Ramirez had insulted his clothing, saying he looked like he was *sight-seeing*, and in truth that was all Sam had really done so far. He was an agent on a mission to gather intelligence and so far there had been nothing intelligent about *any* of it.

Sam absently picked up a hairbrush from the bedside table and began stroking the tangles out of his hair, before reapplying his ponytail with a hair tie.

His mind wandered the yacht, trying to think what he could use to his advantage. His memory recoiled away from Carlos and Maria Ramirez and instead settled on the one person who hadn't made his blood run cold.

Joseph.



RIVERS MADE HIS way through the dimly lit underground corridor, his feet echoing on the steel plated floor. The bunker was not designed with comfort in mind and he had to duck his head at regular intervals.

"Agent Rivers, sir!"

A man snapped to attention as Rivers approached, raising his hand in a salute. Rivers nodded an acknowledgement back.

"Mister Tanner, I trust all is well?"

Tanner's dark hair was cropped short and he wore black combat fatigues as befitting the Agency's black ops division. His shoulders relaxed as he fell into line behind Rivers, the tight corridor not wide enough to accommodate them both.

"As well as can be expected cooped up down here."

"Hopefully it won't be for much longer."

They turned a corner, making their way deeper into the bunker. One of the lighting panels flickered with a loose connection causing Rivers to squint uncomfortably at the strobing effect. Another keypad and another fingerprint sensor later, and Rivers entered into a small room.

The guys had dubbed it the *control room*, though it amounted to little more than a shoebox with a couple of laptops set up with Agency uplinks. Power leads and network cables trailed across the floor. Along one wall there was a wide window, below which was a metal table where several semi-automatic rifles were laid, and rather incongruously, a pair of tuxedos wrapped in cellophane.

One by one, the remaining three members of Tanner's team got up from their seats (or wherever they happened to have perched) and saluted their superior. It wasn't strictly necessary as the Agency was not a military organization, but Rivers enjoyed the discipline and encouraged the practice where he could. Each of the men wore the same black fatigues as Tanner.

Rivers nodded at his men, feeling a little out of place in the dingy confines of the bunker, immaculately dressed in his suit. He stepped forwards, peering out of the window that looked into the next chamber, but only an empty blackness could be seen beyond.

"How is our guest?" Rivers asked, staring into the void, past the ghost of his reflection.

"Totally unresponsive," Tanner sighed, "I kind of think we're wasting our time with this one."

Rivers pulled off his suit jacket and tossed it onto the table. He started to undo his cuffs and roll up his shirt sleeves. "Well, I think it's about time I got in there." He leant forwards, taking a spare computer pad from the table in front of him. He tapped his security ID, establishing a wireless network link to the Agency's database, his face illuminating with the glow of the screen.

The sound of a throat being cleared made him look back up.

"Excuse me... Agent Rivers, sir?" It was Matthews, the youngest and newest member of Tanner's team. "Is there any chance you can tell us what all this is about?" His lower lip trembled, as if it had taken all of his reserve to dare to ask the question. Tanner glared at him.

"Sorry kid, you know the drill." Rivers smiled reassuringly at him. He tapped again at his computer pad. The window directly in front of him, which before had revealed nothing, began to change its tint, as a polarised charge ran through it. The one-way mirror now revealed the room on the other side to the assembled men.



The window directly in front of him, which before had revealed nothing, began to change its tint, as a polarised charge ran through it. The one-way mirror now revealed the room on the other side to the assembled men.

Rivers eyes narrowed and he took a single step forward. Panel lighting illuminated a solitary figure in the room, sat at a wooden table, his head hung low, motionless. Rivers whispered his name.

"ANTOINETTE!"

Joseph smiled as Sam nervously stepped onto the bridge of the *Oro del Diablo*, his high heeled sandals tapping across the floor. He gave a meek smile back, which soon broadened as he began to look around him. The bridge

comprised the top-most deck of the luxury yacht and, like a lighthouse, its windows stretched all the way round, affording a bird's eye view of the entire yacht, not to mention the sea and the glorious cloudless skies above.

"Wow, looks like you've got the best seat in the house," Sam marvelled, looking out over the port side of the yacht.

"Hmm, I'm not sure I quite see it that way," Joseph sighed.

Sam turned back from the window, running his hands through his long blonde ponytail. He now wore a short, white linen robe wrapped around his bikini clad body. Since he had been told to keep a low profile, Sam saw no harm in covering up a little. He could always quickly remove it if he ran into Carlos or Maria.

"So, to what do I owe this pleasure?" Joseph asked. He seemed distracted and turned to look at a computer screen situated next to the yacht's wheel.

"I'm having a bad day, so I thought I'd take you up on your offer of a visit," Sam said in his soft French accent. He had wanted to find out more about Joseph. Something about him just didn't seem to quite fit.

"You'll have a lot of those, I'm afraid to say." Joseph slapped the computer screen with the flat of his palm, "Damn it!"

"Having trouble?" Sam stepped forwards, tugging the hem of his short robe.

"This damn GPS, it went down this morning. I've been using paper maps and a compass ever since, but its slow going."

Sam leaned over Joseph's shoulder, his left breast inadvertently brushing his arm.

"Looks like a standard Linux O.S. It seems to be stuck in a restart loop. If we telnet in we should be able to reset it from the console."

Joseph looked at Sam, dumbfounded. He stepped away from the computer panel.

"Be my guest!"

Sam pulled the keyboard forward and went to type, but something made him stop. Sam could touch-type faster than anyone he knew, but now, his hands felt awkward and just didn't seem to know what to do. He flexed his slender digits with their long fingernails, his red nail polish from yesterday now chipped in places. It was like the muscle memory he had developed from years behind a computer screen had been left behind with his body. Sam looked down at the keyboard and began slowly tapping with his index fingers, one key at a time.

Although it took longer than expected, the computer screen soon flashed into life and a GPS display appeared showing their current location. Sam quickly made a mental note of where they were. The yacht had travelled east since leaving Monaco and was heading out across the Ligurian Sea towards Italy.

"There, easy." Sam stood back.

"Wow, where did a girl like you learn to do that?" Joseph asked, rubbing at his stubbled cheek.

"Oh, I just picked up a few things," Sam replied evasively.

"Well, you've missed your calling, you're clearly wasted being a... I mean..." Joseph looked away, embarrassed.



"Wow, where did a girl like you learn to do that?" Joseph asked.

"Don't worry about it, we all know why I'm here. What about you?" Sam steered the conversation away from himself. "What's your excuse for being here?"

Joseph looked out to the blue waters, "I'm afraid I'm not as innocent as I look."

"Oh? I never said you looked innocent!"

"Really?" Joseph rubbed at his cheek. "Maybe I need to shave more often."

Sam caught Joseph's smile, the muscles in his feminine face feeling unused to it. He walked over to the aft window, his short robe bouncing at his hips. On the deck below he could see Maria Ramirez making her way back inside the yacht, a drink in her hand.

Joseph came up beside Sam, fixing him with a serious look.

"Be careful with them okay?"

"Where did Carlos go?" Sam asked, looking sidelong at Joseph.

"Well, he hasn't taken the jet-ski out, so he's probably in his office. He spends a lot of time in there." Joseph's tight white t-shirt stretched as he folded his muscular arms across his chest. "There's a satellite dish up on the roof," he said, tapping on the low ceiling, "He makes a lot of calls, does a lot of business from the yacht."

Sam folded his own arms under his large breasts and thought for a moment. He knew that sooner or later he would have to get himself into that office.

SAM CAREFULLY MADE his way back down the steps, winding down through the inner decks of the yacht, being careful to walk slowly so that his high-heeled sandals did not make too much noise.

He had reached the middle deck and was about to turn to go down the steps to the lower deck when he heard the sound of a deep voice laughing. Sam bit his lip, feeling afraid, but forced himself to head nearer to the source of the noise. He found a closed door and ran his hand over it, feeling the smooth wood finish.

Sam could hear Carlos Ramirez more clearly now, though he was speaking in Spanish, and very fast, making it almost impossible to follow. Something about Italy... Sam stepped slowly backwards, keeping his eye on the door, remembering its location for future reference. Now wasn't the time. He would have to try and get in there when no-one was around.

Sam hurried the rest of the way to his room on the lower deck, his breasts swaying beneath his robe, his ponytail swishing from side to side. He felt proud of himself. He'd actually gone and done something useful.

He opened the door to his room, eager to think and plan about his next move but stopped, gasping in his feminine register. His eyes ran over high heels and long mocha colored legs that crossed over one another.

"Antoinette, my darling."

Maria Ramirez's eyes flashed and a sly smile formed at the corner of her lipstick covered lips.



RIVERS ENJOYED INTERROGATIONS. It occurred to him that they were a lot like poker games in a way. Both sides had to read each other, see past the bluff, and know when to lay on the pressure.

The man at the table sat there, not looking up, his unkempt sandy-colored hair hanging down. Rivers walked around the table, his footsteps echoing in the sparse chamber. He gave a glance to the mirror which hid the control room from view, knowing that Tanner and the other guys would be watching from the other side. Rivers relaxed in the knowledge that the room was fully soundproofed as, frankly, this was beyond the black ops' pay grade.

Rivers took a deep breath, steeling himself for the joust, as he turned, brandishing his computer pad.

"Antoinette Françoise Bellerose," he read, "If that is your real name..."

The man raised his head, looking straight at Rivers. Even though his eyes now looked sunken and his face was pale and flecked with stubble, Rivers recognised him immediately.

Sam Fields.

The face of Rivers' partner stared back at him impassively.

Except behind those eyes, a very different soul twitched and fidgeted.

"There we go, got your attention now, honey? Or should I say *pal*?" Rivers slapped his pad down onto the wooden table.

Antoinette moved her head, following Rivers as he paced back and forth like a caged tiger.

"I imagine you're pretty worked up right now, huh? Wondering how you came to be in a man's body? Wondering what we've done with *your* body?"

Still nothing as Antoinette looked back at him with the same blank expression she had perfected back in the poker den last night. Except this time it was from behind the mask of Sam's young, masculine face.

Rivers continued his attack, "Right now we've got an agent in your body doing some undercover work for us. It's genius don't you think?" Rivers walked around behind Antoinette's chair, leaning in close to her ear. "No one would ever suspect him." He straightened walking back round to the opposite side of the table.

"And that leaves you, I'm afraid, babysitting his body. The thing is — the last I heard? Our man was starting to like things better on the other side of the fence. Turns out, he's always had fantasies about being a woman. Imagine that! I guess it takes all sorts."

Rivers watched closely. Antoinette's eyes narrowed ever so slightly and she began to drum her fingers against her right thigh, as if nervously tapping out a melody that only she could hear.

"So chances are you might be left like this. A *man*. And not much of a man at that. Think about it, all that attention that you used to get, suddenly gone. You'll never again feel the touch of a man, at least not the way a man touches a woman. You'll never know what it is like to bear a child..."

"What is it you want American?" Antoinette spoke up at last with Sam's East Coast accent, her voice groggy from lack of use.

Rivers smiled. He'd finally got through to her. The guys would be impressed with how quickly he'd got results, but that was why he earned the big money.

"I want you to tell me who you're working for."

"I am just a sex-slave. I work for Carlos Ramirez." Antoinette's right hand still tapped rhythmically at her leg.

"No." Rivers dismissed her. "I want you to tell me who you're really working for." He leant forwards over the table. "I want you to tell me everything you know about Scarlet."



"I am just a sex-slave. I work for Carlos Ramirez." Antoinette's right hand still tapped rhythmically at her leg.

SCARLET

CHAPTER THREE

A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK



SAM STOOD IN the doorway to his bedroom, surprised to find Maria Ramirez sitting before him on the bed. She looked radiant with her long dark hair hanging over her shoulders and a short black silk robe wrapped around her body. Sam watched as she crossed her long bare legs, his eyes automatically glancing downwards.

"Madame?" Sam blinked, forcing himself to meet her eyes.

"Come sit down," Maria soothed, patting the bed beside her, "And close the door behind you."



Sam watched as Maria crossed her long bare legs, his eyes automatically glancing downwards.

Sam's mind raced. He considered slamming the door shut, drawing the heavy bolt to lock her in. But then what? He was on a yacht in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea with one of the world's most dangerous men and his seven-foot bodyguard. No, he would have to bide his time and see how this played out.

Sam turned, slowly closing the door behind him. He walked over to Maria, one hand nervously pulling his white linen robe tighter around his chest, and the other tugging at its hem. He feared she would rip it from his feminine body, chastising him for his poor choice of attire. He sat down with his bare legs together and began to nervously rub the palm of his right hand.

"I realise that today has not been the best of days for you," Maria began. "I do not know what is wrong with you, whether it is your time of the month, I don't know," she shrugged.

Sam balked at the thought. He hadn't even considered the fact that he might have a *period* while in Antoinette's body! Hopefully he'd be back in his own body long before anything like that happened.

"Either way, your behavior has been inexcusable."

"I am sorry Madame. I have not felt quite myself of late," Sam answered, not untruthfully.

Maria smiled falsely and reached up, sweeping a stray strand of hair away from Sam's face. "I wonder if it is because we have not made it clear what is expected of you, which is why I have decided to... *oversee* things. Just for tonight." Sam saw a glint in Maria's dark eyes. She was a strikingly beautiful woman, despite what else he may have thought about her.

"I don't understand Madame." Sam could hear the nervousness coming through his French accented voice.

"I will start by getting you ready for dinner."

"It...it isn't necessary..."

Maria's hand rested on Sam's left thigh, her thumb stroking lightly.

"Given that you have not even shaved your legs today, I would say it is *very* necessary."

Sam hung his head, his ponytail slipping down over his shoulder.



SAM POURED A scented body wash into his palm and began to rub it over his naked female body as the hot water from the shower hit his chest. He had been instructed by Maria to use this, rather than the soap he had used earlier. Even with the frosted glass of the shower cubicle, Sam felt exposed and turned his back to the glass. Every now and then the shadow of Maria Ramirez passed by as she busily got things ready for him in the bathroom.

Sam couldn't help but feel embarrassed, like he was a child being told what to do by its mother, though he had to admit that it was probably for the best. The last thing he wanted was to turn out for dinner in yet another fashion faux-pas. He *had* to go along with it. After all, who knew what he might be able to find out at the dinner table.

"Don't forget to wash your hair. It was very greasy earlier. Use the conditioner on it as well."

Sam did as he was told, letting the shower soak his long hair as he massaged in the shampoo. When he had fully washed and rinsed, he did the same with the conditioner. It seemed to do the trick. His wet hair now felt much silkier when he ran his hands through it.

Sam turned off the shower and slipped an arm out, pulling a towel from the rail outside. He wrapped it around his slender body, folding a knot above his breasts. He carefully stepped out into the bathroom to find Maria preparing some things by the wash basin.

"That is better." Maria leaned in to Sam's neck, brushing his wet hair aside as she breathed in. "You smell of flowers." She took a smaller towel and instructed Sam to lean forward so she could rub at his hair, drying it a little, before tying the towel around his head. Sam reached up, his head feeling heavy from the combined weight of his wet hair and the towel.

"Take your other towel off," Maria demanded matter-of-factly, as she began to fill the wash basin with hot water.

"Wh...What?" Sam choked at her request.

"Take your towel off. We need to shave those legs of yours."

Sam gripped at the knot in his towel defensively. Even as a man Sam would always hate showering or getting changed in the gym in front of other men. Now that he had an unfamiliar *female* body, he felt his modesty compounded.

"Come on Antoinette, we are both women here."

Sam still felt like the imposter he was, and any reference to him as a *girl* or *woman* stabbed uneasily at his subconscious. However, Maria's Spanish voice still sounded relaxed and patient, and Sam wanted to keep her that way. He could still remember

earlier on the deck, when she had suddenly flared up. He reluctantly untied the towel from around his body, pulling it from his breasts, feeling it brush his hip as it fell to the floor.

"Good girl," Maria enthused, "Now I can see why Carlos chose you. He is always teasing me about my small tits, but yours are so *big!*" Without missing a beat, Maria cupped Sam's wet naked breasts in her hands, causing him to squirm with her sensual touch. He looked down and watched helplessly as his nipples hardened of their own accord. Maria's smile widened. She let go of him, his breasts bobbing a couple of times as they settled. Sam drew a deep breath. Did women actually do this sort of thing with each other? He quickly covered his breasts as best he could with his small hands.

Maria pulled the lid of the toilet down. "Put your left leg up on here."

"Madame, please… I can manage on my own, really."

"You have clearly demonstrated that you cannot. This is not some drug den where all you have to do is put a mattress on the floor and spread your legs. We have… standards."

Sam cringed inwardly at the thought, reluctantly raising his left leg up onto the closed toilet lid. Maria began to apply shaving foam to his calf, working her way slowly up to his thigh. Her slippery hands slid along the softer inside part of his left thigh, her fingers inches from his crotch. Sam still felt awkward with his nakedness, and could see Maria looking. He began to feel a strange tingling sensation, that he guessed was from his uneasiness, like how his body would quiver at the sight of a spider.

Maria took a disposable razor and washed it in the hot water of the sink before beginning to shave his leg in long even strokes. Sam was worried that she might cut him, but she knew just the right amount of pressure to apply. Every now and then she would wash out the razor in the sink.

"Good, now the next leg."

Sam swapped legs and again Maria lathered up his leg and thigh, and again he felt a tingling sensation when she touched the inside of his thigh. He watched as she took the razor and drew it across his leg. Sam still held his breasts protectively, wishing he had at least one extra hand to protect his modesty.

"Now under your arms."

Maria lifted each of Sam's arms in turn as they were lathered and carefully shaved. He found it stung a little bit afterwards, but he was at least relieved that Maria had finished. He reached for his towel but she stopped him, grasping his thin wrist.

"We are not done yet. We still have down *there* to take care of." Maria looked down between Sam's legs. Sam instinctively brought his right hand down to cover himself, feeling the soft brush of his blonde pubic hair against his hand. Maria looked straight into his eyes as she moved his hand away.

"Keep your hands at your side."

Sam's arms hesitantly fell to his sides, his naked body now fully revealed to Maria.

Sam watched as she poured shaving cream into her right hand and then brought it to his pubic region. Sam closed his eyes and cringed, digging his fingernails into his palms. As the cold cream touched him, he felt the urge to run to the door. He uncomfortably shifted his weight between each of his bare feet.

Maria began to slowly massage the cream into his mound, seeming to take extra time and care, her hand moving in small, sensual circles. Sam quivered again, holding his breath. He tightened his thighs together, wishing she would stop.

"I actually think your little landing-strip is kind of cute, but Carlos prefers his women to be completely shaved." Maria looked deep into Sam's eyes as she finished rubbing in the cream. Her fingers drifted up over his tummy, before reaching for the sink to wash her hands. Sam exhaled at last through his mouth, a soft sigh escaping his lips. He felt a strange sensation deep in his tummy, like he had driven too fast over a hill in the road.

Sam looked down through the gap between his large breasts as Maria took the razor and carefully began to remove what little pubic hair he had.

"Keep still, otherwise I may cut you." The tone of Maria's voice made it sound as much a threat as a warning.

"There, all done. Now you will be sexy to touch as well as to look at."

Maria handed Sam back his towel and he began to wipe the stray patches of shaving cream from his body. His legs and arms felt as silky smooth as they had been yesterday, except now he had a freshly shaved pubic area to match. Sam quickly wrapped his towel around his body.

RIVERS SETTLED BACK into the driver's seat of his Lamborghini and let the air-con blow at his feet. It had been stifling hot in the underground bunker. He sighed and rubbed at his eyes, then slammed a fist down onto the steering wheel.

Antoinette had given him the silent treatment again as soon as he'd mentioned Scarlet, and instead fixed him with that damn smile again. A sly, knowing smile that Rivers had never seen Sam Fields' face make before.

How could she just sit there so calm? She'd just had her body stolen out from under her. She would have woken to find herself *hairier*... and *uglier*... and packing a whole lot more meat between her legs than she was used to. The threats to keep her body from her just didn't seem to be having an effect.

And that damn smile.

Rivers turned the ignition and let the engine hum before pulling away. He watched in the rear view mirror as the unassuming barn that hid the secret bunker receded into the distance. Rivers was still confident that they had the upper hand as long as they had Antoinette's body. It would just take a little longer than expected to make her crack. She certainly wouldn't be going anywhere anytime soon.

As Rivers wound back through the Italian countryside, he let his thoughts turn to Sam, who would by now be deep into the other half of their dual mission. Sam now helplessly trapped in Antoinette's shapely female body being made to do things he'd never imagined. He recalled the unwitting flashes of cleavage and thong, so innocent, so unknowing — no idea how sexy he looked. He remembered the taste of lipstick as he had kissed Antoinette's luscious lips at the bar, and all the while Sam was there squirming uncomfortably from inside her body. Rivers felt a familiar stirring between his legs.

What was he thinking? This was his partner. This was *Sam*. The same dweeb he'd knocked out playing basketball two years ago. He really had to get some of this testosterone out of his system.

Rivers eased his foot down onto the accelerator as he re-joined the main road, headed back to Monaco.

"Texas here I come."



THE HOT AIR of the dryer blasted through Sam's long blonde hair as he sat on the edge of the bed, the full length mirror positioned directly in front of him.

Maria had instructed him to brush and blow-dry his hair while she showered. She had trusted him to do this on his own and although Sam was glad of the respite, he worried that he wouldn't be able to get it right.



Maria had instructed him to brush and blow-dry his hair while she showered. She had trusted him to do this on his own and although Sam was glad of the respite, he worried that he wouldn't be able to get it right.

Sam stopped the hairdryer and picked up the large paddle brush he had been given, running it carefully through his hair. Every now and then a tangle would catch causing him to wince. It was certainly a whole lot different to just running some gel through his hair every morning. As Sam brushed he could hear Maria in the en suite shower. It seemed she'd also be getting ready in his room.

Sam took a deep breath as he tried to retain some perspective. All he had to do was follow Maria's lead. It was not exactly difficult, and it wasn't like he had a gun pressed into his side.

Sam looked at his reflection. Antoinette's pretty face stared back at him, her cupid lips parted a little. His towel was wrapped around his body and he was sitting with his bare legs crossed one over the other. It was something he had caught himself

doing a couple of times since swapping into Antoinette's female body. His wider set hips and lack of male genitalia meant that it felt fairly natural and comfortable. He had to admit that it felt better now that his legs had been shaved.

He flicked the blow dryer back on, running his free hand through his long hair.



"GOOD, MUCH BETTER." Maria smiled as she strode back into the room.

Sam turned and had to double-take. Maria Ramirez, fresh from the shower, was now completely naked! Sam's eyes drifted over her athletic body. Her breasts were smaller than his, or even Lenore's, placing her at probably a B-cup, and her nipples were a darker brown. Her waist was trim with a hint of musculature from hours of stomach crunches. Her legs were long and smooth and the color of a rich mocha. Her pubic region was also completely shaved, just as Sam's now was.

Sam could immediately feel the stirrings of sexual arousal deep within himself as he watched Maria gently pat her chest dry with a towel. She walked across the room, her hips and backside twitching from side to side, stopping in front of Antoinette's chest of drawers. She turned back towards Sam.

"You don't mind do you?"

Sam blushed and shook his head. He quickly turned back to the mirror and brushed at his hair, even though it didn't need it anymore. He watched Maria from the mirror and saw that she had her long dark hair pinned up high on her head. Unlike Sam, she had probably washed her hair already today. Naked, and bending lithely at the waist, she opened the bottom drawer and pulled out a lacy black thong. She stepped into it, drawing it up over her loins, the string riding up between her rounded buttocks.

Sam found the arousing effect of Maria's body mildly reassuring. He had worried that being female would make him gay or something, especially since he had stared long at Antoinette's curves in the mirror and felt nothing. But here was his good-old male libido, present and correct. He expected to feel himself harden in response, but instead just felt an impotent warmth building between his thighs. Sam absently uncrossed and re-crossed his legs the other way.

Maria walked back over to him, her hips swaying. A black, semi-transparent triangle decorated with a leaf motif now covered her mound of Venus.

"Here, you can wear these ones, then we'll be matching."

Without pausing she knelt at Sam's feet and held apart the leg openings of an identically styled thong, though this one was in white. When Sam did not respond she raised her voice.

"Antoinette, *come on!*"

Sam swallowed as he reluctantly pulled the knot out of his towel and stood up, covering his breasts once more with his hands. He nervously stepped into the thong as Maria pulled it up his smooth legs. He gasped as she pulled it harshly up to his loins, the string riding right up between his buttocks. He looked into the mirror and could see the same semi-transparent leaf decoration covering his freshly shaved pubic region, only this time in white.

"There, perfect," Maria soothed, lightly running her hand over the curve of Sam's backside.

Sam could feel his body shaking a little bit. Yesterday, the thong Antoinette had been wearing had been a constant discomfort, but now it felt oddly sensual against his still warm crotch.

"You have done a good job with your hair," Maria continued, "It looks less like a fucking bird's nest now, don't you think?" She laughed. "But I think we can do a little better still."

Maria motioned for Sam to sit back down as she fetched an electric hair straightener from the side table. Sam could only sit and watch as she plugged it in and began to lightly crimp the ends of his hair. As she released the first strand it fell hot against his bare skin, but he could see from the mirror that it now had a soft wave styled into the end.

SAM SAT PATIENTLY as Maria continued to work on him, wrapping his hair around the straighteners as she teased it into soft waves. He began to feel a little lightheaded from the heat and blinked as the ceiling mounted spotlights shone in his eyes. Time seemed to slow down and his eyelids grew heavy.

Sam's head nodded briefly as he heard Maria's voice rousing him.

"Antoinette. Open your eyes."

Sam opened his eyes, startled to find Maria holding a small brush inches from his face. Looking in the mirror, Sam could see that she had just finished blending subtle shadows above his bright blue eyes.

"Now keep still."

Maria swapped brushes, choosing a light mascara brush that she unscrewed, and steadily brought to his eyes. Sam had only been vaguely aware that she had finished his hair and begun on his make-up, and now had little choice but to sit and wait as she applied the mascara to first his lower, and then upper eye lashes, drawing them out in long even strokes.

Sam blinked a few times, watching in the mirror as his long eye lashes fluttered, now accentuated by the mascara and eye shadow that he wore.

Next, Maria took a large soft brush and gently dabbed it into a powdered rose-tinted blush. She swept it across the line of his cheek bones. When she had finished Sam could see his blemish-free cheeks now had a slight pinkish hue to them. All the while Sam struggled desperately not to stare too much at Maria's bare breasts, which hung only inches away from him.

Finally, Maria uncapped a small black tube and twisted the end. Sam watched as a bright scarlet lipstick emerged at its tip.

"Do as I do."

Maria pouted her lips slightly and Sam copied as best he could. She lent down and held his chin in one hand as she carefully began to apply the bright red lipstick to his full lips.



Maria pouted her lips slightly and Sam copied as best he could. She lent down and held his chin in one hand as she carefully began to apply the bright red lipstick to his full lips.

"I like this color on you very much. I could just eat you up now!" Maria laughed a little, stepping back to admire her handiwork.

Sam gazed at his reflection. His long blonde hair shone under the ceiling lights, looking glossy and teased into gentle waves by Maria's hair straighteners. His blue eyes sparkled, the mascara and eye shadow making them look more expressive. His full lips looked moist and luscious with the red lipstick. Although Antoinette had been wearing make-up last night, Sam had barely given it a thought. It had, after all, been the least of his worries. But now, after experiencing first-hand the care and detail Maria had given to his appearance, he fully appreciated the effect.

Sam had tried to take in everything that Maria had done. He knew that she would not be doing this for him every day, and would likely still expect him to produce similar results on his own. Most women had years of practice, day-in and day-out, but Sam had only an afternoon to learn all that he could. He could only imagine the amateurish results he would likely produce on his own, but at least for now, his make-up and hair looked professionally done.

"Take these." Maria handed Sam a small bottle of clear liquid and some balls of cotton. "I need to get my clothes and make-up from my room. You will remove all the nail polish from your fingers and toes. We will be applying the same color as before, but you should always make sure you remove what you already have on, so that you get an even finish. Carlos will not notice, but *I* will!"

Sam carefully opened the bottle of acetone and sniffed, the harsh vapors catching in his throat. Looking up, he watched as Maria slipped her black silk robe around her body, casting Sam a sly look as she let herself out of the door.



ANTOINETTE FRANÇOISE BELLEROSE sat alone in the darkened confines of the interrogation room, the faint buzzing from the panel lighting strip above her head proving mildly irritating.

She stared deep into the mirror on the opposite wall at her shadowed reflection, the face of a young American man looking back at her. She closed her eyes, breathing in, feeling the warm air fill her lungs. Her chest felt so light and free of the burden of her breasts. She felt like she'd come home.

Never again would she feel the dread of a man's cloying hands touching her flesh. Never again would she be pressed onto her back, to feel a man forcing his way inside of her.

Never again.

She could feel her own manhood now, coiled between her legs. She felt strong. *Powerful.*

Antoinette opened her eyes again and began to drum her fingers against her right thigh.



Antoinette stared deep into the mirror on the opposite wall at her shadowed reflection, the face of a young American man looking back at her. She closed her eyes, breathing in, feeling the warm air fill her lungs. Her chest felt so light and free of the burden of her breasts. She felt like she'd come home.

She looked past the mirror now, to the room that she knew was beyond. Those Agency idiots all scratching their heads and their balls, as to why she was not cooperating. They had tried to blackmail her with her body, wanting her to reveal details of Scarlet, little knowing that she was now exactly where she wanted to be. They could keep her worthless body.

Antoinette turned her head to the door and its blinking control panel, protected by a hexadecimal code and fingerprint sensor. She kept tapping her fingers rhythmically against her leg.



SAM TAPPED HIS fingernails together, checking that the scarlet nail polish was dry. He held his hands out in front of him, watching as the glossy sheen of his nails caught the light.

"Careful you do not smudge them." Maria looked at him from the mirror as she flicked her own lashes with a mascara brush.

Whilst Maria had been gone, Sam had busied himself with removing all the old nail polish from his fingernails and toenails. Maria had returned carrying her own bag of make-up, along with a pair of black high heeled sandals and a short black dress, which she had laid out carefully on the bed. They had swapped places, with Maria now at the mirror, styling her hair and applying her make-up, whilst Sam applied a fresh coat of nail polish to his fingers and toes.

Sam screwed the top back onto the bright red polish. He had actually surprised himself with how good a job he had done. He was worried he'd go over the edges, but he'd managed keep his hand remarkably steady.

Sam looked down at his painted toes, wiggling them a few times. It did indeed appear to be the same color that he had just removed, but if Maria wanted it put on afresh then he figured he should probably do it.

"I will not be long my darling, then we can get dressed in our evening wear."

Sam looked back up at Maria's reflection in the mirror. He noticed that she had used a much darker mascara than he had on, probably, Sam thought, because of her darker complexion. He watched as she used an eye-liner to turn up the corners of her eyes in the same devilish fashion that she had before.

In addition to one of Antoinette's black thongs, Maria now wore her own push-up bra that lifted her B-cup breasts into an eye-catching cleavage. Sam looked down at his own naked D-cup breasts. He had finally got to the point of not covering them the

whole time with his hands. As far as Maria was concerned, they were *both* women, so there shouldn't have been anything particularly unusual about being exposed in front of her, though Sam had definitely caught her lingering looks on more than one occasion.

"Madame? I was wondering. Well... should I maybe put a bra on?"

The words sounded strange as Sam said them, but he wanted it to appear like he was making an effort. Plus, any opportunity to cover up would be welcome.

"No, you can get away without one. Despite your size you are very firm."

Sam could feel his cheeks flushing as he drew Maria's gaze once more.

"Some of us need a little help in that department," Maria whispered, cupping her own breasts through her bra.

"No Madame, not at all, yours are...I mean...they are..."

"Thank you. I have seen you looking at them." Maria grinned devilishly as she applied a dark crimson lipstick to her lips. Sam quickly turned away, feeling even more embarrassed.



MARIA WALKED OVER to one of the inbuilt wardrobe units and opened it. Sam watched as she swept her arm through a rainbow of different color dresses, tops and skirts.

"Now, what shall we have our little French girl wear? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a sexy French maid uniform for you? Or maybe we could just have you wear nothing at all!"

Sam swallowed. He could not see Maria's face, so could not tell if she was being serious or not. He was therefore a little relieved when she pulled a white dress from the wardrobe and laid it out on the bed.

"Here, stand up. Hold your arms above your head."

Sam hesitated, biting his lower lip.

"I am tired of having to ask you things twice!"

Sam jumped, his whole body tensing with Maria's raised voice. He quickly stood up, his breasts bouncing. He raised his arms as Maria unzipped the dress and lifted it up over his body. She helped thread his slender arms through the shoulder straps and tugged it down over his wide hips. The thin fabric teased his tender flesh as it slid down, causing his skin to goosebump. Sam looked down in amazement. The thin shoulder straps widened as they ran down, crossing over one another fairly low down, creating a deep plunging neckline that left the gap between his breasts almost fully exposed. It hugged his trim waist before flaring slightly at his hips, ending about mid-thigh. He kept his arms out, feeling a sharp tug as Maria zipped him up at the back.

Sam ran his hands over his hips and backside, smoothing the dress out as Maria wrapped a thin red belt around his tiny waist. She fastened it, then stepped back to admire him.

"And now for, how is it you French say? *La piece de resistance.*" Maria opened the wardrobe stacked with Antoinette's shoes and selected a pair of scarlet high-heeled sandals. They were not too dissimilar from what Sam had worn back at the casino, except these had small imitation diamonds set into the ankle straps that sparkled in the light.

Maria knelt and helped Sam to slip his small feet into each of the sandals. She fastened the ankle straps and looked up at Sam, running her hands over his smooth calves.



MARIA'S ARM SLIPPED around Sam's small waist as she guided him to the mirror. He carefully took a few steps forward in his high heeled sandals, brushing hair away from his face.

Sam gasped as he looked at his reflection.

His bright blue eyes stared back at him, his feminine face now expertly defined by his make-up. His luxurious blonde hair looked silky, hanging in waves over his shoulders and back. His white dress hugged his body, following the curve of his large breasts, pinching in at his narrow waist, then flaring slightly away from his legs, displaying his long silky smooth thighs, his shapely calves and small feet. He was accessorized with a bright red belt and high heeled sandals, which perfectly matched the color of his lipstick and nail polish.

The effect was striking. He looked like a model. He could feel his heart beating faster in his chest.

Next to him, Maria was now dressed in a tight-fitting black dress which showed off her athletic body, closely hugging her cleavage and hips, running down to end at her knees. A split at the side showed off her left thigh. She wore a thin black belt around her middle and strappy black high-heeled sandals on her feet. Her dark hair was styled similarly to Sam's with soft waves at the end, though her make-up was harsher, giving her a wicked look.

Only now did Sam appreciate the stark contrast in how Maria had dressed them. Where Maria was dark and devilish, he was bright and virginal.

Sam was roused from his thoughts as a sweet-scented perfume was sprayed about his neck and cleavage. He coughed, the tang catching in his throat.

"Ready?" Maria set the perfume bottle back down onto the dresser table.

Sam nodded, though he'd never felt less ready for anything in his life.

THE EVENING HAD begun to draw in when Rivers found her, standing in the very same spot that he'd left her earlier in the day. He glanced over at her as he drove through the familiar streets of Monaco. She sat in the passenger seat of the Lamborghini, resplendent in a pastel pink dress, her peroxide hair styled into curls, her makeup colorful, with bubble-gum pink lip gloss. She looked like a Barbie doll.

"Y'know I was waiting there over half an hour. I think people were starting to think that I was a hooker." Her Texan voice was high pitched and ever-so-slightly whiny. She looked at Rivers disapprovingly.

"Sorry Texas, I got caught up at work."

"*Ashley*. My name's Ashley."



Only now did Sam appreciate the stark contrast in how Maria had dressed them. Where Maria was dark and devilish, he was bright and virginal.

"Mike." Rivers forced a smile as he looked at her. His eyes drifted downwards. Although Ashley's breasts were fake, they presented an eye-catching cleavage that stirred his blood.

"So where are you taking me *Mike?*" She flashed him a smile, her hand grazing provocatively against her bare left thigh.

"Have you ever been to *Le Grand Casino?*"

Rivers pulled the Lamborghini into the forecourt of the casino, which was now illuminated in preparation for the evening. Behind him the sky grew pale as the Sun once again bowed towards the horizon of the Mediterranean Sea.



"LADIES! PLEASE TAKE a seat."

Carlos Ramirez smiled broadly and held his arm out, gesturing to the table on the rear veranda of the yacht. Sam and Maria stepped forward, their high heels clicking on the wooden deck.

A cool breeze lifted Sam's blonde hair. The Sun had now turned a pinkish color and the gentle waves of the sea sparkled. At any other time it would have been the perfect vista for a meal.

Sam eyed Ramirez cautiously. Carlos seemed to be in good spirits and held a chair out, first for Maria, and then Sam, seating them next to each other. Sam nervously smoothed the back of his white dress as he sat down. It was the same table he had sat at to eat a couple of mouthfuls of fruit earlier. He hadn't eaten since and his stomach was now growling with hunger.

"You did a good job on our pet, Maria." Ramirez growled as his hands came down on Sam's shoulders. Sam jerked reflexively, then cursed himself. He had to learn to control his reactions.

"It was hard work. She seems *different* today. Distracted..." Maria glanced sideways at Sam as she reached for a bottle of wine.

"I... I'm just nervous. Last night I thought I was going to be sold to the American..." Sam quickly responded, thinking on his feet.

"You are right to be nervous around me," Ramirez continued, rubbing at Sam's bare shoulders, "One day I may tire of you, but for now you are the property of Carlos Ramirez."

Sam watched as Ramirez walked back around the table. He wore a fresh white shirt and beige linen pants, but his black hair was unkempt and he exuded a strong musk of body odor mixed with aftershave. Ramirez clearly had no concerns regarding his own appearance, despite the effort that Maria had gone to with Sam and herself. Sam glanced downwards at the plunging neckline of his dress, inhaling his own sweet-scented perfume, his breasts swelling with his breathing.

Ramirez took up a seat at the table opposite them and pulled a silver tray towards himself. On the tray was a dish filled with a white powder, along with some thin silver straws and what looked like razor blades. Taking a teaspoon he tipped a large helping of the white powder onto the tray, arranging it into a neat line with the razor's edge. He picked up a silver straw and quickly snorted the powder with his nose.

Sam was appalled as he watched Ramirez sniff and wipe at his powder stained moustache. He handed the tray to Maria who drew out a smaller line of what Sam now guessed was cocaine, inhaling it deeply with the straw. She visibly shook and pinched at her nose.

Ramirez picked up on Sam's concern and laughed.

"A small *appetizer* before dinner. It is Argentinian. From my homeland. The best that money can buy."

Sam sat silent, biting his lip, not wanting to outright refuse. He was surprised when Maria spoke up.

"Let's see how she goes. We don't want her brains falling out of her pretty nose if we can help it. If she fucks well enough without it..."

Maria turned and smiled, running her hand under the table to Sam's right thigh, squeezing through his dress.

"You are right, as ever, my beloved," Ramirez grinned.

Sam breathed a sigh of relief as the tray was pushed back to the middle of the table and Maria's hand left his thigh.

THE SMELL OF cooking filled the air as the door to the yacht's interior opened, and a young man holding a tray stepped through onto the deck.

"Eduardo! About fucking time, we are starving to death out here." Ramirez beckoned him through with a hand. Sam watched as the man bowed his head meekly, the tray rattling as his thin hands nervously shook. Despite his youthfulness, the man looked gaunt and malnourished, his South American skin tone looking almost grey.

Sam guessed he was Ramirez's cook, though he doubted this man ever got to eat any of his own creations. Eduardo's eyes flickered nervously and he refused to meet anyone's gaze as he handed out large glasses filled with what appeared to be prawn cocktail. Maria Ramirez seemed to make an extra effort to try and meet his gaze as her glass was set down.

Carlos greedily dug into his cocktail, talking through a full mouth, "I would have thrown Eduardo to the sharks long ago, if it wasn't for his cooking."

Sam's heart sank a little. He hated seafood and always had done. However, he was hungry enough at this point to eat anything. He skewered a prawn with his fork and brought it to his lipstick covered lips, wincing a little. The flavor took him by surprise. He chewed and swallowed. It tasted good. He took a sip of red wine to wash it down.

Eduardo began to refill wine glasses when the door opened again.

It was Joseph.

He held a plate of steaming food as he stepped out onto the deck.

"Excuse me." Joseph glanced briefly at Sam as he stepped forward to pick up some cutlery and a napkin from the table. Sam desperately wanted to say something to him, even just a "hi", but he had to bite his tongue.

Ramirez wiped his face of food and leant forward, his forearms on the edge of the table. "Joseph! How are we doing?"

"Well the GPS is fixed now, so we're back on schedule." Again he gave a quick glance to Sam. "We'll be able to get you to Rome tomorrow."

"Make sure we do, otherwise..."

"Otherwise you'll throw me overboard? And then who would pilot the ship?"

Sam gasped as an awkward silence filled the air. He watched Ramirez for his reaction, the tension finally broken as his face creased and erupted into laughter.

"Ha ha ha! That's why I like you Joseph! You have *cajones!* Not like Eduardo here, eh?"

Maria laughed at what Sam could only assume was a private joke. Neither Joseph or Eduardo were laughing. In fact, Eduardo looked even paler than before, if that was possible.

Ramirez leaned in, addressing Sam directly, his dark eyes glinting as he pointed a thumb back at Joseph.

"I watched this son of a bitch look straight into a man's eyes before blowing his fucking brains out. That's my kind of guy," Ramirez smirked.

Joseph looked straight at Sam, a heartbroken look in his eyes. He looked down at his plate of food, holding up the cutlery and napkin that he had taken.

"Well, I've got what I came out for. I should probably get back inside..."

He turned, heading back into the yacht. Eduardo bowed his head and followed.

MIKE RIVERS NECKED another Martini as he sat across from Ashley in the busy lobby bar of *Le Grand Casino de Monte Carlo*. He patiently listened to her, and yet didn't listen, as she relayed her whole fucking life story. Something about how daddy wanted her to be a dancer like her mother, but she wasn't good enough to pass the exams.

Mostly Rivers studied her body. Her face wasn't much to look at, but she covered it up well with make-up. Her breast implants were large and swollen beneath her low cut pink dress and her bare legs were long and shapely. His gaze lingered on the enticing darkness under the hem of her dress.

She now seemed to be talking about the shoes that she was wearing.

Rivers turned, motioning for the bartender.

"Another couple of drinks please."



Rivers patiently listened to her, and yet didn't listen, as Ashley relayed her whole fucking life story. Something about how daddy wanted her to be a dancer like her mother, but she wasn't good enough to pass the exams.

SAM SIPPED AT his red wine. He still couldn't believe what Ramirez had said about Joseph. He just didn't seem that sort of character. But then, Sam wasn't exactly who he appeared to be either. He decided he had probably been too trusting of Joseph. The only person he could, and *should* rely on right now was himself.

Sam shifted in his seat, feeling his thong rubbing uncomfortably between his buttocks. He continued to pick at his main course, keeping his ears open for anything he could use.

"We need to be careful when we reach Rome," Ramirez said addressing his wife, "I have heard from my contacts that Scarlet are active in the area."

"The one's that took out your last drug shipment?"

"Yes." Ramirez leaned back in his chair, looking out to the sea. "Those bastards!"

"Why are they targeting *you?*" Maria put her wine glass down.

"Why do they target *anyone?* They want the world to burn. *Me?* I want to *rule* the world!" Ramirez chuckled, particles of sea bass lodged in his cigar-stained teeth. «As you can see there is a conflict of interest there!»

"The sooner we can get back to Argentina the better." Maria looked between Sam and her husband.

"It will be soon, my beloved. Once this deal with the Italian mafia goes through, my ships will be able to come and go from Italy under their protection. It will open up a whole new revenue stream. Then we return home, I promise."

"I've heard those promises before," Maria jabbed back.

Sam's painted fingernails clicked against his wine glass as he picked it up again. Maria turned to him, her dark hair whipping around.

"Where are our manners? We have been neglecting Antoinette. We should not talk business in front of her."

Sam felt Maria's hand slip once more under the table to his thigh, squeezing it gently.

"Come Antoinette, let us go... powder our noses."

Maria pushed her plate away and drained her wine glass.

SAM STAGGERED IN his high heels as he followed Maria back into the yacht, his hands running along the narrow corridor walls for support. Throughout the dinner he had constantly sipped at his wine from nerves, only to have his glass refilled by either Eduardo or Maria. He'd felt fine until he had tried to stand up. He struggled to keep a clear head as he followed Maria through a door.

Maria locked the door behind them as they stepped into a small toilet cubicle that had its own wash basin and mirror. Sam gripped the basin with his left hand, steadying himself. He looked back to Maria as, without warning, she hitched up her dress and tugged her thong down to her thighs. Sam scarcely knew where to look as Maria sat herself down onto the toilet seat.

"You have been very quiet tonight Antoinette," Maria spoke over the sound of her trickling rill. "I do not want you to neglect my husband. Even if he does not want you tonight, you must still offer yourself to him."

Sam's head began to spin. He could feel the evening growing later by the second, and with it a daunting shadow — that he might be expected to submit to Ramirez at the end of the night.

Before, his mind had automatically shut itself off from those thoughts, his subconscious instinctively protecting itself, but now, with the alcohol, they began to finally seep back in. He'd always hoped, on some level, that he'd find a cunning way out of it, like Rivers undoubtedly would, but a whole day had gone by and he still had no plan. No bright idea. *Nothing.*

Maria pressed a wad of tissue paper between her legs and flushed the toilet. She pulled her thong back up over her shaved crotch, and wiggled her hips as she pulled her dress back down.

"Do you need to go?"

Sam shook his head, realising that he had been plainly staring at her. Maria returned his gaze as she moved to the wash basin, one heeled foot clicking slowly in front of the other. Sam was forced to step aside as she washed her hands, the tinkling water sounding loud as it disappeared down the plug hole. He stood behind her and watched the reflection of her beautiful face from the small mirror that hung above the sink.

Maria looked up into the mirror, adjusting her hair a little, before matching his stare once more. Sam could hear his heart beating in his ear as Maria slowly turned around, taking a step towards him.

Sam's heels scuffed as he backed up, feeling his rounded backside touch the wall. Maria pressed her body into his, her breasts crushing against his own. Her mouth hung open seductively as she looked at him, brushing blonde hair away from his face. Sam quivered, rooted to the spot like a deer caught in headlights.

Just as devious as Ramirez.

That was what Rivers had told him about Maria. Looking back, it had almost been too easy to fall under her sway, letting her make him over into her very own living doll. Maria held an erotic allure that seemed to break through any of Sam's attempts at professionalism.

Just as devious as Ramirez...

Without saying a word, Maria brought her right hand up under Sam's white dress, cupping his panty-covered mound. Sam gasped, quickly reaching to push her hand away, but her left hand came up, pinning his right hand against the wall. He pulled at Maria's wrist with his free hand, but she had already begun to massage her hand.

Sam quivered as she began to gently rub the thin fabric into him, her fingers stroking up and down. He felt his face and chest flush, unused to the new sensations emanating from his loins. He felt her index finger press inwards, through the thong, rubbing slowly but firmly.

All the while Maria stared deep into Sam's eyes as he gradually eased his grip on her wrist. She took the opportunity to slide her inverted hand under the waist band of his white thong, her fingers gliding down between his legs.

Sam gasped, his voice sounding shrill, feeling himself melt and flush with a heady wash of liquid arousal. Sam turned his head to the door. They were not too far in from the open veranda where Carlos still sat, and Sam hoped against all hopes that he could not hear them.



Sam quivered as she began to massage the thin fabric into him, her fingers stroking up and down. He felt his face and chest flush, unused to the new sensations emanating from his loins.

He turned back to Maria, stifling his whispered, effeminate gasps as best he could. Her lips hovered inches from his, but never quite touched. Her fingers moved more rapidly now against his sex. It was almost too much to bear. Sam squealed and writhed with his back hard up against the wall.

"That is enough for now." Maria slid her hand from Sam's thong, leaving him panting and yearningly molten. His heady arousal mixed with the alcohol in his system made the room spin around him.

"Take off your panties. Quickly!" Maria demanded as she turned to wash her hands once more.

Sam still fought for breath and unthinkingly did as he was told, hooking his thumbs into the waistband, tugging them down. His heels cluttered on the floor as he bent one leg back at the knee, leaning down to pull the thong free from where it had caught on his right ankle.

"Good, now hold them tight in your fist."

Sam nodded, wiping sweat soaked hair from his forehead. He balled up the tiny thong in his left palm, its moist warmth pressed tight into his hand.

Maria dried her hands and quickly helped tug Sam's dress back down over his hips. Her crimson lips widened into a grin as she unlocked the toilet door. Sam's knees trembled and he struggled to even stand up, as Maria silently took his wrist and led him back outside.



"I NEVER UNDERSTAND why women have to go to the bathroom together." Carlos Ramirez laced his fingers over his full stomach as Maria returned, still leading Sam by his wrist. The Sun was now bleeding into the horizon, the sky darkening above them.

"Girl talk," Maria smiled, "And oh, Antoinette has something for you." Maria turned to Sam. His high heels clipped on the deck from where he struggled to stay upright. "Hold out your hand for Carlos."

Sam looked down at his balled fist, shaking.

"Show him," Maria demanded.

Sam reluctantly opened his palm, watching as the tiny white thong uncoiled on his hand. Ramirez shifted in his seat, his interest very much piqued.

"Mmm, what have we here?" He looked at Sam, running his finger and thumb over his black moustache thoughtfully. He reached out and took the underwear, holding it out between his hands, turning the tiny garment over. He brought it to his nose, inhaling deeply. "I was hoping for something sweet for dessert. And these smell... *very*... sweet."

Sam was led back to his seat, though he now felt distant like he was in a waking dream. His still aroused body, mixed with the alcohol, mixed with his utter embarrassment, all combined into a heady cocktail. His face and chest felt hot and he was now acutely aware of the sensations of his body. He could feel the soft caress of his blonde hair against his bare shoulders and back, his erect nipples sliding against the inside of his dress. He could feel the tingling warmth between his legs.

When he felt Maria's hand on his knee, sliding up to his bare thigh from under the table, Sam had to put a hand over his mouth.

Ramirez pocketed Sam's panties and pulled a cigar from his shirt pocket, watching as Sam squirmed in his seat. Maria acted like nothing was going on and fell back into conversation with her husband, though this time speaking in Spanish. Her fingers slid to Sam's inner thigh. Sam clamped his thighs tight around her hand, not wanting things to go any further, but it only served to increase the pressure between his legs. He relaxed his body again, a small sigh escaping his lips, though Maria's hand was now free to gently caress the soft inside of his right thigh.

Carlos and Maria's conversation seemed to come to an end, and Carlos got up from the table, his cigar glowing as he puffed smoke into the air. He turned his back to them, leaning on a railing as he looked out to the setting sun.

Maria's hand mercifully left Sam's thigh, though his female body betrayed him, yearning to feel her touch again.

"Sometimes Carlos just likes to... *watch,*" Maria nodded at Ramirez as he smoked, gazing at the horizon. "Come. I will take care of you tonight."

She took Sam's hand and led him back into the yacht.



ASHLEY GIGGLED AS Rivers slid his key-card over the lock to room *1006*. The pair stumbled in, drunk and dishevelled, the lights automatically flicking on as they closed the door behind them. Rivers squinted at the harsh lights. He found the dimmer switch, bringing them right down to a muted glow.

He smiled, his eyelids heavy with the alcohol, as he wrapped an arm around Ashley's thin waist and pulled her into his body. His lips descended onto hers, their tongues quickly finding each other. She moaned softly beneath him.

Rivers gripped Ashley's firm backside, pulling her against his hardness. She smiled beneath his kisses, running a manicured hand down over the bulge in his pants. Rivers groaned and cupped her left breast. It felt swollen and hard in his hand from her silicone implants, but he didn't mind.

Tonight he just needed to fuck.

SAM STEPPED INTO the yacht's master bedroom, guided by Maria Ramirez. He squinted, his eyes struggling to adjust to the unusually bright white spotlights that lit the room. As he focused, he saw that a large queen-sized bed with fresh white sheets dominated the room, but surrounding it on all sides were mirrored walls. No matter where Sam looked he could see his feminine reflection; his elfin face; his wavy blonde hair; his white dress and red belt; his red heels, with their imitation diamonds; his scarlet lipstick and nails. His mouth was hung open and his eyes looked glazed.

He sat down beside Maria on the edge of the bed, his legs together, still very much aware of his lack of underwear. His emotions were mixed. Part of him recoiled from Maria Ramirez and the unusual sensations his new body. Part of him wanted to be the professional agent who would do whatever it took to complete the mission. Another part of him wanted nothing more than to submit to Maria and melt into her embrace.

Maria's dark eyes bore into his, her swept up eye make-up making her appear impish. She leant closer running a finger along Sam's soft jaw line. He could feel his heart beating faster as her soft lips met his. Their lipstick covered lips kissed, soft and delicate to begin with, but slowly becoming more passionate, their mouths parting, their tongues finding one another.

It felt strange to be kissing Maria from within Antoinette's female body, but if Sam closed his eyes, he could just about imagine he was still a man kissing a woman. That was until Maria cupped his right breast with her hand, gently squeezing it through his dress.

Sam murmured beneath her kiss, his light blonde hair brushing against Maria's dark hair. Her hand switched between each of his heavy breasts, squeezing and caressing each of them in turn. The gaping neck line of Sam's dress ran right down between his breasts, meaning that when Maria slid the shoulder straps down his arms, the dress parted in the middle, fully revealing his naked chest.

Sam gasped as Maria cupped him, lightly pinching his pink nipples between her thumb and fingers. Her head ducked down and her lips sucked at each of them in turn, her tongue swirling in small circles until both were left wet and hard. Sam moaned softly, arching his back, his head falling backwards. Looking straight up he could see that the entire ceiling was also mirrored, and that a topless blonde woman looked down at him, gasping as another woman pleasured her breasts.

Maria brought her head back up, smiling as she continued to massage Sam's achingly sensitive chest.

"I can tell you genuinely like girls. I am glad. We can have a lot of fun together."

Sam watched as Maria stood up and unzipped her figure hugging black dress, shrugging it off until it puddled at her feet. She reached behind and unclipped her black bra, freeing her pert breasts.

Sam could feel his heart racing. Although his head still swam from his mild drunkenness, he was still fully aware that Maria had seduced him. She had ceaselessly teased him as they had got ready in Sam's room, and now she had worked his body into such an aroused state that he would probably beg her to continue if she decided to stop.

Sam's eyes roamed Maria's body as she stepped towards him in just her thong and heels. His hands came up, sliding up the sides of her trim waist. He found himself kissing her flat tummy as Maria's hands slid into his hair, stroking softly.

Maria pulled away, a look of lust in her dark eyes as she knelt at Sam's feet, lifting his smooth calves one at a time to unstrap his high-heeled sandals. Her fingernails grazed his soft legs, her eyes fixed between his legs.

She motioned for Sam to stand so that she could unfasten his red belt and unzip his white dress. Sam soon felt the dress flutter to his feet, and stood completely naked, though unlike earlier, he made no attempt to cover himself.

"Lie back on the bed," Maria whispered in her silky Spanish accent.

Sam slid back onto the bed, one leg bent slightly as he watched Maria unfasten her own heels. She then turned her back to him, swaying her hips and backside provocatively, as she slid her thong gracefully down to her ankles, stepping out of it.

Maria turned and slid across the bed like a viper, pulling herself on top of Sam. Their breasts pressed together, their legs intertwining. Sam closed his eyes and gave a soft moan as Maria's lips locked with his, her dark hair curtaining around him.

Sam's hands roamed Maria's smooth back as their tongues explored each other's mouths. He could feel her hot loins against his right thigh where she straddled him, her own thigh pressing hard into his crotch. When she kissed at the nape of his neck, Sam turned his head, catching sight of their reflection in the mirrored wall.

He breathed heavily as he took in the sight of the two lesbian lovers, naked, moaning, writhing against one another. One was dark haired and tan skinned, older but athletic. The other was blonde and fair, younger and more voluptuous.

Maria turned her head, meeting Sam's gaze from the mirror.

"I like to watch myself too." She smiled. "Let me show you something."

Maria got Sam to sit up and switched places with him, lying back on the bed, but propping herself up with several pillows. She parted her legs and pulled Sam back so that he lay back against her. She swept his blonde hair to one side and looked over his shoulder to the mirrored wall directly opposite the bed.

Sam could feel Maria's breasts pressed against his back as he looked at their reflection. Her long legs ran either side of him and her crimson lips smiled from over his shoulder. Sam could now see his entire body, his skin glistening with pearlescent droplets of perspiration.

"Now you can watch yourself as I play with you," Maria whispered in his ear, cupping his breasts once more from behind. "Open your legs."

At this point, Sam's body did not need much persuading and his legs scissored open, though the sight from the mirror still took him by surprise.

There between his legs, pink and swollen, glistening with his wetness, the inner labia of his sex spreading like a flower, as Maria gently guided his legs wider still.



Sam's back arched as Maria's hands slid between his legs.

It had always been there of course, hidden and tucked away. Forever lurking there in the back of his mind, despite his best efforts to ignore it. But Maria had coaxed it out; stimulating it, teasing it, arousing it, until he could ignore it no longer.

Sam's back arched as Maria's hands slid between his legs. His gaze fixed on their reflection as she effortlessly and intimately began to stroke and tease with her skilled fingers.

Sam's hips bucked, his moans high pitched, still retaining the nuance of his French accent. He looked into the wide blue eyes of his reflection as Maria's hand moved faster.

A shadow. In the mirror. Moving.

Sam could feel his body tensing as Maria brought him ever closer.

The shadow again. Reaching out of the mirror.

And then it happened.

The mirrored wall directly in front of Sam slid to the side with a screech of metal on metal as the spectre revealed itself, stepping through into the room.



"I TOLD YOU he liked to watch," Maria whispered as Carlos Ramirez loomed out of the darkness from behind the mirrored wall, stepping out into the stark white light of the bedroom. Sam could only watch, his mouth gaping open in shock.

Ramirez's dirty hair looked greasy under the light, and his forehead was wet with beads of sweat. His moustache bristled as he looked down lecherously at Sam. His now yellowed white shirt was open , revealing his sagging chest and his paunch. His beige pants were unbuttoned, pulled down far enough to reveal his stubby, bent member, which he stroked freely with his right hand.

Ramirez was saying something in Spanish and Sam could hear Maria answering from over his shoulder, though they both sounded distant and muffled as Sam's mind withdrew.

His eyes flicked to the door. He could run. He wasn't restrained. He could make it. But what would be the point? He would only delay the inevitable, or worse, invite something far more painful and final.

It was then that Sam made a choice.

He chose not to run.

Ramirez drew closer, like an ogre, his pants now discarded. The bed sank under his weight as he positioned himself above Sam. He spoke, but again Sam did not hear him. All he could see was his stained yellow teeth as he grinned, the smell of his breath mixing with his body odor.

Hands groped at his breasts. It may have been Carlos. It may have been Maria. Sam was not really sure. He looked straight up, watching their reflection in the ceiling mirror as Ramirez hefted his bulk up. Maria continued to kiss and caress from behind as Carlos reached down between his legs, guiding himself.

Sam gasped.

He gripped Maria's legs either side of him, his nails digging into her thighs, as Ramirez entered him in one slow, slick lunge.

Sam looked straight up to his reflection — to his wide, unblinking eyes — seeing the shock on his feminine face as Ramirez's hips rocked, his back arching, the muscles in his back dipping like oil extraction machinery. Sam didn't feel much more, his mind slipping away to a kind of limbo where time seemed to slow down. Bodies writhed in the mirrors all around him.

Sam still held the gaze of his blue-eyed reflection in the ceiling, though now it seemed different. It was if he had taken the place of the reflection and was now looking down from the ceiling at the real world below.



Sam gripped Maria's legs either side of him, his nails digging into her thighs, as Ramirez entered him in one slow, slick lunge.

MIKE RIVERS BREATHED heavily as he worked his hips against Ashley. Her flexible legs were hooked over his shoulders as he leaned into her on the bed. Her eyes were closed and she was moaning loudly as she approached her second orgasm.

Rivers gritted his teeth. He could feel himself getting close. He looked down at Ashley as her breasts bounced on her chest. Rivers had made her keep her pink dress on, though it was by now pulled down over her chest, and pulled up above her hips. In the dim light of the room Rivers could almost imagine that the dress was red, that her breasts were real, her blonde hair natural and not dyed.

Rivers called out and he groaned, releasing inside of her. He closed his eyes, his thrusts still hard and sharp, his rhythm gradually slowing.

He pulled from her, his chest heaving as he rolled onto his back to catch his breath. He turned to face Ashley, to find that she had sat up and was searching the bed for her panties. She looked at him, her face stern and cold.

"So who *is* she then?" Ashley found her pink panties and stood up, threading her still high-heeled feet through the leg openings.

"What?"

"*Sam?* Who is she?" Ashley was clearly irritated as she tucked her breasts back into her dress, pulling the hem back down over her wide hips.

"I... don't know who you're talking about." Rivers sat up in the bed as Ashley checked her handbag and then made for the door.

"Mike, you just called out another woman's name during sex! Way to kill the moment!"



"I hope you and Sam are happy together! *Asshole!*"

Rivers watched as Ashley opened the door, turning back to face him one final time.

"I hope you and Sam are happy together! *Asshole!*"

The door slammed shut, shuddering in its frame. Rivers could hear the click of her heels as she stalked off down the corridor. He fell back against the bed, running a hand through his hair as he stared up at the ceiling.

Sam?

Rivers turned his head towards the open window and the still, night sky beyond. Somewhere out there was the *Oro del Diablo*. He just hoped that Sam hadn't gone and done anything stupid.

SCARLET

CHAPTER FOUR

A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK





Sam still held his dress to his body, caressing it in his hands as if it was all that remained of a long lost friend.

THE *ORO DEL DIABLO* WAS quiet, with only the gentle creak of timber frames and the distant wash of waves against the hull audible from its empty corridors.

Sam Fields tip-toed across the plush carpets. In one hand he carried his red high heels, the imitation diamonds of the ankle straps twinkling in the early morning light that filtered in from the deck above. In his other hand he held his white dress, which he pressed protectively to his naked body, hoping to make it to his room before anyone spotted him. He figured it was early enough that no-one would be up and about yet. Carlos and Maria had certainly not stirred when he had disentangled himself from their sleeping bodies.

Sam carefully opened the door to his room, giving a last look down the corridor, before slipping inside and shutting it tight behind him. He drew a deep breath, leaning back against the door, his eyes closing. His high heels clattered together as he dropped them to the floor. He still held his dress to his body, caressing it in his hands as if it was all that remained of a long lost friend.

Sam stepped slowly forwards, as if in a daze, and carefully laid the dress out onto the bed. He rubbed at his head which still ached from the residual effects of the alcohol, feeling a strong urge to take a hot shower.

Sam passed the free-standing full length mirror, then stopped, taking a step back. He turned to look at his naked female body. He still could not get used to the sight of Antoinette's body; her feminine face, her blonde hair and blue eyes, the swell of her large breasts, her small waist, her wide hips and long supple legs. He had, or so he thought, at least become more accustomed to the complicated mixture of feelings that welled up inside of him, every time he looked in the mirror. Except this time.

This time *everything* felt different.

If before it had felt like he was teetering on the edge of a precipice, then now it felt like he had gone over and was in free-fall. Sam's hands ran over his waist, then down to his tummy. He could feel butterflies play in his stomach.

Last night he had been seduced by Maria Ramirez. Seduced from the very moment that she had appeared in his room to help get him ready. With hindsight he could see that everything, from the shaving of his body, to the make-up and clothes, had been made to be erotic, with shared nudity, lingering glances and sensual caresses. By the time she had slid a hand between his legs in the toilet cubicle, Sam had scarcely any willpower left to try and stop her. He had then been left in such a heady state of arousal that he had eagerly followed her to the bedroom.

It was then that things had changed.

It had all been a trick at Sam's expense. He had been foolish enough to believe that Carlos Ramirez did not want him, and that he would be left to an evening alone with Maria. Instead, Carlos had watched the whole thing from behind the one-way glass of the mirrored walls of the bedroom. He had watched as Sam had moaned and writhed on the bed to his wife's touch. Finally, Ramirez had revealed himself, hard and eager to take his rightful place.

And Sam had let him. He *had* to. He was in the body of Carlos Ramirez's sex-slave. He was foolish to think that he could pose as her and *not* be expected to submit to him. Rivers had known this, of course. It was why he'd done what he had at the bar. But even that had been scant preparation for what Sam had experienced.

Sam closed his eyes, shivering with the memory, his thighs involuntarily clasping tighter together. He could still recall the weight of Ramirez atop him, his foul odor, his stained teeth.

Dirty.

Somehow, it felt as if that uncleanliness was now a part of Sam. He swallowed, feeling sick, his hands running down over his abdomen. For the first time his thoughts drifted to the womb that was now nestled within...

Sam ran to the en suite bathroom, his naked breasts slapping against his chest. He hurriedly pulled open the small cabinet that hung on one wall. His hands shook as he emptied its contents into the empty wash basin, picking up packet after packet.

Aspirin... Tampons... Anti-Depressants... Contraceptive Pill...

Sam found what he was looking for.

Morning After Pill.

He popped the capsule from the foil and took it into his mouth. He stopped for a moment, and then popped a contraceptive pill, and an aspirin as well, for good measure. He swallowed the tablets down with water from the tap. His hands massaged his lower belly, as if it might somehow speed the effect of the pills.

Sam stroked blonde hair away from his face and raised the closed lid of the toilet, remembering this time to keep the seat down. It felt cold to his backside as he sat down, his legs clasped together. He could feel it all beginning again. Another day as a woman. Another day trapped on the yacht. He just hoped that Rivers had found Antoinette and his body.



THE ELECTRONIC CHIME of Rivers' cell phone pierced the air and he awoke with a start, his arms flailing as he searched. He grasped it from the bedside table, struggling to focus on the caller I.D.

unKNOWN.

The unusual mixture of lower and upper-case lettering let him know immediately who it was.

"Shit. The Agency," Rivers murmured as he sat up. He blinked several times, slapping his cheek with the flat of his palm as he struggled back to alertness. It felt early. Too early.

"Hello?" Rivers' voice came groggy as he flipped the cell open. Then he remembered protocol and keyed in his unique ID, swiping his thumb across the touch display.

"Hello?" he repeated, his voice little clearer than before.

"Agent Rivers? This is Director Millar. Are you alone?"

Millar? What the hell was Millar doing contacting him? Rivers looked around the hotel room, remembering how Ashley had abruptly left last night.

"Yes, I'm alone."

"Rivers, where the hell are you? You're supposed to be at the bunker in Turin."

"I... had something else to take care of. I was going to head back there this morning." Rivers climbed out of bed, wrapping the bed sheet around his waist. He walked to the balcony window, peering out through the blinds.

"So let me get this straight, you potentially have the key to opening up the whole Scarlet operation sat in that bunker. And you had *something else* to take care of?" Millar's voice mocked coldly.

"She was unresponsive yesterday, I was leaving her to sweat," Rivers gesticulated with his free hand as he paced the room, "Bravo team has her under full surveillance."

"Rivers, we've been trying to contact Bravo team for the last two-hours. We've lost contact with the bunker."

Rivers stopped pacing.

"*What?*"



"Rivers, where the hell are you? You're supposed to be at the bunker in Turin."

SAM GENTLY PATTED a fresh white towel to his chest as he dried himself from the shower. Despite using nearly half the bottle of scented body wash, Sam still didn't feel clean. At least the aspirin had started to take effect, his head now feeling a little better. He finished drying his wet body, then took a smaller towel from the bathroom rail, rubbing it at his damp hair which he had thoroughly washed in the shower with shampoo and conditioner. He carefully wrapped the towel around his head like Maria had done for him yesterday.



He found himself beginning to wonder about just who the woman in the mirror really was.

Sam silently tidied away the assorted packets that he had left strewn across the bathroom, before beginning to fill the sink with hot water. He reached forward and rubbed at the mirror that had steamed up from the shower, slowly revealing his feminine reflection. He found himself beginning to wonder about just who the woman in the mirror really was.

Sam lifted his bare left leg up onto the closed toilet lid and began to pour shaving cream from the bottle into his right palm. He started to rub the cream into his leg, starting with his calf and working his way up to his thigh.

If Antoinette was indeed just a sex-slave, then Sam had received only the briefest taste of what she would have had to have put up with every day since... well, quite possibly since she was a child. Wasn't that enough motivation for her to attempt to swap bodies with someone?

Sam took a fresh disposable razor from its packet, bringing it to his leg, beginning to remove the cream from his leg in long even strokes.

Rivers had said that the Agency believed Antoinette to be working for another organisation. Carlos and Maria Ramirez certainly didn't seem to know anything about the swap, or if they did they were doing a good job of disguising it. Sam recalled how confident Antoinette had been with a gun, jabbing it into Sam's side and using him as a human shield. She'd even managed to take Rivers down before getting away. Everything pointed towards Antoinette being a professional agent, though the longer he stared into her innocent blue eyes in the mirror, the more he saw just a scared victim looking back at him.

Sam looked back to his leg and swept the razor across the last of his thigh, before washing it out in the sink. He swapped legs and began to lather once more with the shaving cream.

After the events of last night, Sam had begun to empathise with the woman whose body he now inhabited. Whereas before he had been angry, not to mention frightened, about what Antoinette had done, now he felt like he just needed to talk to her. If he could just understand *why* she had done it... But the whole thing was a puzzle with too many of the pieces missing.

Sam began to shave at his right leg until it was as silky smooth as his left. When he had finished he wiped both of them dry and ran his hands over his soft legs. He was surprised that he hadn't nicked himself at all with the razor. As a man, Sam would always shave with an electric razor, as any attempt to wet shave would invariably leave his face cut to ribbons.

Sam washed out the razor once more and looked down at his naked body. He had only his underarms and pubic area left to do.

RIVERS BARGED THROUGH the door to the parking bay, still struggling to pull on his suit jacket. He had his head cocked to one side, clamping his cell phone between his chin and his shoulder. It was the fourth time he'd tried calling Tanner and his team, but there was still no answer.

"Fuck." Rivers took his cell and clamped it shut, shrugging his suit into place. The indicator lights of the Lamborghini flashed as he unlocked it with his remote.

"*What?*" Rivers took a step back as he observed the deep key scratch running along the length of the driver side door. "That *bitch!*"

Rivers didn't have time to think about the car or Ashley right now. He quickly slipped into the driver's seat and fired up the GPS, plotting a course back to the bunker in Turin, Italy.

SAM PADDED BAREFOOT back into the bedroom, his bath towel wrapped around his slender body, with the smaller towel wrapped around his wet hair. He could feel his freshly shaved thighs brushing against one another as he walked, along with a slight zing of tenderness from where he had just finished shaving under his arms and between his legs.

Sam sat down onto the edge of the bed, next to the free standing mirror. He pulled the towel from his head, rubbing at his long hair a few times.

Sam knew that he couldn't set foot outside his room without looking anything less than immaculate. This meant that in addition to shaving his body, he would also need to apply his own make-up, *and* style his hair. Sam took a plain black hair band and collected up his blonde hair, pulling it through into a pony tail. He had decided to start with his make-up, since he figured that would prove to be the most difficult, and likely take the most time.

Sam crossed his left leg over his right as he began to arrange the various brushes, powders and colors that he would need into a semi-circle around him on the bed. He looked down, not knowing where on Earth to start.

"Come on Sam, think..." he whispered to himself, trying to remember what Maria had started with yesterday.

"Eye shadow."

Sam opened a clam-shell case which held various shades of eye shadow, each arranged into small colored squares. He selected a small brush and leant towards the mirror, beginning to apply some dark shading above each of his eyes. He could feel his brow furrowing with his concentration as he tried to keep his hand steady.

When he had finished, Sam unscrewed the cap of a black mascara brush, sweeping the brush carefully across his upper and lower eye lashes.

He leant back, taking in the finished result.

Sam's shoulders dropped with disappointment. His blue eyes looked as though they had disappeared into a murky grey mess, like some gothic harlequin. He swore, reaching across the bed for a packet of make-up removal wipes. He pulled a couple free and began to undo all that he had done.



Sam selected a small brush and leant towards the mirror, beginning to apply some dark shading above each of his eyes.

Sam readied his make-up again to start over. This time he picked a collection of more subtle beige tones for his eye shadow, dipping the brush carefully into the first color. He tried again, taking things slower this time.

As he began to work the brush into the recesses above his eyes, Sam found his mind drifting once more to what had happened in the bedroom last night, but he actively fought it, focusing instead on the mission at hand.

Last night, at the dinner table, before things had gone too far, Sam had learnt a few things. Ramirez was headed for Rome, where he hoped to strike some sort of deal with the mafia. That would be his chance to escape, Sam decided. Once they hit land he'd have to keep his wits about him and look for a chance to break away. But was that *all* he had on Ramirez? A vague mafia connection? It hardly seemed worth everything he'd been through.

Sam switched to a larger brush, using a different beige tone to blend in the color over his eyelids.

He searched his mind for what else had been said. He remembered that Ramirez had been concerned about something. *Scarab*? No, *Scarlet*. But who were they? He *had* to find out more.

Sam switched to a darker tone, blending the very edges of his eyelids, before switching to an eyeliner pencil, drawing in some extra definition around his eyes. When he had finished, he selected a lighter mascara brush and began to lightly flick across his long eyelashes.

After last night, having experienced first-hand Antoinette's plight, he wanted desperately to crack open Ramirez's sex-trafficking ring. That was the goal. If he could find out something, *anything*, that could in some way contribute, to stop the suffering of countless women and children… Then it would all have been worth it. It would even be worth enduring sex with Carlos Ramirez again. Put into perspective, it seemed like a small price to pay for other people's freedom.

Sam shook his head, throwing away the mental images that crept into his mind, and instead focused back on the present. His eyes widened as he focused back on his reflection in the mirror, slowly lowering the mascara brush. He blinked his eyes a couple of times, his perfectly tinted eye lashes fluttering. His blue eyes were now subtlely but effectively accented with shadow and eye liner. Sam's mind had been elsewhere and he had scarcely thought about what he had been doing.

Sam exhaled with relief, feeling himself relax a little. He didn't know quite how he'd managed it, but he had. After the delicacy needed with his eye makeup, Sam figured that the rest had to be easier. He set aside the clam-shell case of eye makeup and moved on, his confidence growing as he selected the large blusher that had been used on his cheeks yesterday. He gently dabbed it into a powdered light pink blush, sucking in his cheeks a little to push out his cheek bones. He lightly swept the brush over his cheeks watching as they picked up the soft pastel coloring.

Finally, Sam searched for a lipstick that he could wear. He settled on a hot pink-colored lip gloss, deciding to vary things a little from yesterday, hoping that he might curry favor by showing a little initiative. He pulled off the lid and twisted the end, watching as the pink-colored applicator swivelled upwards.

Sam pouted just a little as he began to apply the color, sweeping the lip gloss in arching strokes across his lips. He sucked his lips inward, and though the shiny gloss felt greasy to wear, it certainly looked the part. His lips now looked full and moist, glistening with hot pink.

Sam leant in closer to the mirror, using his long fingernail to wipe away a stray clump of mascara from the corner of his eye



THE WHIR OF the hair dryer subsided for the final time as Sam brushed at his long blonde hair with the paddle brush. It already looked luxurious and glossy from the mirror, though Sam still intended to use the hair straighteners on the ends of his hair to give that slight curl.

Sam unplugged the dryer at the wall point and plugged in the straighteners, leaving them to heat up for a few minutes. He shrugged off his bathrobe, sitting naked on the bed. Blow drying his hair had already made him feel hot and the last thing he wanted was to sweat off all his makeup and have to start over.

Sam took the straighteners in one hand, using his free hand to take a small handful of his hair, which he then crimped between the hot ceramic plates. When he released the hair it bounced over his shoulders, wavy, but with a slight flick-up at the end. He slowly repeated the process, being mindful of his make-up and stopping for a few minutes whenever the heat proved too much.

Sam's eyes glanced down at his naked female body, his large breasts full and firm as they rose and fell with his breathing. Between his splayed hips and thighs, Sam could see the split of his freshly shaved vagina. It felt even stranger now when he looked down at his body. All he could picture were Carlos and Maria's hands touching him. It wasn't even that he felt violated. That would have been too strong a word, as he had made a conscious decision to allow it to happen. But still, Sam felt as though something deeply intimate had been taken away from him.



SAM HAD BY now spent the last couple of hours trying to perfect his appearance. He had showered, washed his hair, shaved his body, applied his make-up, dried his hair, styled his hair, and just now, applied a fresh coat of polish to his fingernails and toenails.

Sam flexed his fingers, looking down at his pink painted fingernails. He had remembered how Maria had told him to always remove the previous day's nail polish and to apply a fresh coat. He had diligently removed every last trace of red with the acetone remover, before applying a bright pink to his toenails and fingernails, matching the color of his lip-gloss.

Sam had tried hard to copy the same style of hair and make-up that Maria had applied yesterday. He flicked his long blonde hair back over his bare shoulders, which now hung in silky waves over his back. His eye make-up looked subtle but effective, his lashes looking long and full with the mascara. His cheeks now had a slight pinkness to them and his pouting lips glistened under the light with a hot pink lip gloss.

Sam turned to the bed, picking up the pink bikini thong that he had selected from the drawer. He carefully threaded his feet through the leg openings, drawing it up his smooth legs until it sat snug against his shaved mound. He turned around and looked over his shoulder into the mirror, seeing how the string of the thong disappeared between his full feminine buttocks. Once again Sam's gaze drifted to the small *Fleur de Lys* tattoo at the small of his back, wondering if it meant anything.

Sam picked up the matching bikini top, bringing his blonde hair forward to tie it first behind his neck, and then around his back. The two triangles of pink fabric that made up the bikini seemed tiny, and he had to carefully position them so that they covered his nipples, though they still left most of his large breasts exposed.

Finally, Sam slipped his feet into a pair of pink high heeled sandals, bending lithely at the waist to fasten them at his ankles. He stepped back, his heels indenting the carpet, as he took in his reflection, cocking one leg and perching his hands on his wide hips.

Pink for a girl, Sam had thought.

This time he would get everything right.



JOSEPH LOOKED OUT to the horizon from his vantage point on the bridge of the *Oro del Diablo*. The skies were cloudless and the sea was calm. It was going to be another hot one. He gently turned the wheel to port, beginning to steer the yacht towards the west coast of Italy.

They would haul anchor just outside of Civitavecchia and wait till nightfall before mooring up at one of the piers. Joseph was glad that he'd probably get a day or two to himself while Ramirez travelled inland to Rome.

He paced the small bridge, stopping to crank up the air conditioning a couple of notches, since the bridge tended to act as a natural greenhouse. He looked out to the rear deck. On the mid-level below he could see Maria Ramirez eating breakfast as Eduardo tip-toed around her, serving fresh juice. On the lower-most level, Joseph could see the door open, as long shapely legs stepped out onto the wooden panelled decking.

Antoinette.

At first, Joseph had to double-take, as from the rear it looked as though she were naked, but looking more closely he saw that she wore a pink bikini, the bottom half of which ran right up between her feminine buttocks. Her hips and backside swayed from side to side as she walked out across the deck in her high heels, stopping to look out over the railing that ran around the edge of the lower deck.

Joseph almost felt embarrassed, like he was some seedy voyeur, though her allure was such that he found it almost impossible to look away.



Her hips and backside swayed from side to side as she walked out across the deck in her high heels, stopping to look out over the railing that ran around the edge of the lower deck.



Sam could hear him approaching first, his sandals slapping slowly across the deck, like some sort of walrus hefting its bulk to shore. Then Sam could *feel* him, his shadow, his wheezing breath.

SAM GRIPPED THE metal railing in his small hands as he looked out to the morning waters of the sea, his eyes protected from the Sun by a pair of large, white rimmed sunglasses. The propellers churned the water below with a hum and he noticed that the yacht had begun to change its heading.

Sam could hear him approaching first, his sandals slapping slowly across the deck, like some sort of walrus hefting its bulk to shore. Then Sam could *feel* him, his shadow, his wheezing breath.

Sam drew a deep breath, bracing himself. This was it. He probably didn't have a lot of time left before they reached Italy. He had to start pushing, using whatever he had to get the information he needed. The only problem was, all he had at his disposal was the body of a beautiful blonde woman.

Carlos Ramirez's hands gripped the railing either side of Sam's and he slowly pressed his body against him from behind.

"There you are Antoinette." Ramirez leant in to Sam's neck, breathing in. "We missed you this morning."

Sam struggled not to choke on the cigar smoke still very much evident on Ramirez's breath. He turned his head back towards him, though his body was pinned and he could not turn far enough to see his face.

"I wanted to make myself presentable for you," Sam answered, his eyes darting, unable to gauge Ramirez's reaction.

"Very good. I approve of your efforts." Ramirez's Spanish accented voice was low and deliberate and he audibly groaned as he slapped Sam hard on his exposed backside. Sam gasped from the shock, feeling Ramirez push his body tighter against his.

"I am... glad I have pleased you," Sam's feminine voice wavered, failing to convince. He gripped the railing, his body tensing as Carlos began to slowly rub his crotch against the exposed swell of his buttocks. He could already feel him begin to harden through the fabric of his shorts.

"My dear, you have only just begun."

Sam felt Ramirez's large hands slide down to his small waist, causing his high heels to click on the decking as he shifted uneasily.

"Monsieur?" Sam began, his French accent producing a perfectly nuanced pronunciation, "Why did you pick me? You must have hundreds of women to choose from."

"*Thousands*, my pet, *thousands.*"

"Thousands..." Sam repeated. "And yet still you bought me?" Sam bit his lip, waiting for the answer.

"The whore likes to talk today." Ramirez chuckled, his hands sliding down, feeling the outline of Sam's hips. "I make a lot of money from the trash that I sell, but that does not mean that I wish to stick my cock in it." Sam felt Ramirez lift a handful of his blonde hair. "I prefer to dine on finer cuts of meat."

Sam looked out to the sea. He could feel his heart beat pulsing as Ramirez began to roll the waistband of his bikini thong down over his hips. As Ramirez pushed at Sam's back, bending him forwards, Sam desperately thought of the *thousands* that Carlos had boasted of. He was doing this for them. He would find where they were. He would help them.

Sam gazed into the waters below, gripping the railing tightly, losing himself in the V-shaped wash produced by the moving yacht. He felt Ramirez now, his blunted tip blinding searching from behind, until it at last found purchase.

Sam's feminine voice cried out, piercing the still air. His body was unprepared. There had been no sensual foreplay at the hands of Maria Ramirez this time. Carlos gripped his hips, pulling Sam back against him, slowly and painfully entering him.

Sam closed his eyes, biting his lower lip to stifle his uncomfortableness. His mind desperately searched for a back door, somewhere safe to hide, away from what was happening to his body; away from the urgent thrusting, the rocking motion that now caused his breasts to swing beneath his bikini top.

The gold chains that Ramirez wore around his neck clinked together, keeping time like a metronome, beating out every long second.

JOSEPH LOOKED DOWN towards the lower deck, watching as Carlos Ramirez worked his hips against Antoinette from behind. He could feel his blood boiling, wanting to step out and put a bullet into the Argentinian's skull.

He liked Antoinette. She'd not been at all what he had expected when they had met yesterday. She seemed very intelligent, but naïve, like she had just accidentally wandered in from somewhere, without knowing quite why she was there. She was certainly unlike any girl that Carlos and Maria had chosen before. Most of the girls that had served Ramirez in the past were distant, drug-addicted... *Lost*. But not her. Antoinette reminded him more of the girls he used to know back home in Florida.



Sam's feminine voice cried out, piercing the still air. His body was unprepared. There had been no sensual foreplay at the hands of Maria Ramirez this time.

But there she was, being used... *spoiled*... by that pig of a man. Joseph shook his head in disgust as Ramirez finally let out a groan, audible even from the bridge, giving a last bucking thrust against her.

One thing was for sure. Antoinette would end up like the others. Carlos and Maria Ramirez would see to that. A hopeless and pointless future awaited her. Much like his own.

Joseph turned his face from the window, unable to watch anymore.



SAM SHUDDERED AS Ramirez withdrew at last, leaving an awful clammy dampness between his legs. Again, minutes had seemed like hours. Never ending. But Sam had accepted it, as he knew he must. He knew that if he had in any way resisted he would have been thrown overboard, or worse. He could hear the rustle of Ramirez's clothing as he tucked himself back in, a plume of smoke billowing back over the yacht as he lit up a cigar.

"Mmm, good girl. I could fuck that pink pussy all day, but unfortunately I have some work to attend to."

Sam straightened a little, his face burning with his humiliation. The sound of Ramirez's sandals slapping against the wooden decking grew fainter, as he made his way back towards the doorway that led into the yacht. Sam closed his eyes, his bottom lip quivering as a single tear broke free and rolled across his cheek, finally falling to join the endless sea below. He drew a deep breath and reached down, pulling his pink thong back up.

As he slowly turned, Sam was shocked to discover that he had an audience. As Ramirez disappeared into the yacht, the towering figure of Gaul turned from his post beside the door, his face as impassive as ever, his eyes hidden behind his dark sunglasses. He had presumably been waiting there the whole time, encase Sam had tried to make a break for it.

As Gaul ducked his head to follow Ramirez back in, Sam looked up to the middle deck. The silhouette of Maria Ramirez lent against the railing, looking down at him. Looking further up, Sam could also see the shadow of a figure on the bridge of the yacht, which withdrew almost as quickly as he had seen it.





"Good. Very good," Maria purred in her silky Spanish accent, stopping behind Sam. She stroked at his long blonde hair, pulling it over his shoulders so that it hung fully over his back.

SAM'S PINK HIGH-HEELED sandals clicked slowly as he made his way up the steps to the open veranda. His legs trembled and he now felt an uncomfortable soreness between his thighs. He felt his way along the railing, over to the round dining table that was now laid out with various fruits, yoghurts and cereals. He inched his way around it, holding onto its edge for support, still in a daze, the heat of the morning Sun bearing down on him. He felt shocked and numb, unable to tell if what had happened had been real or imagined.

"*Antoinette?* Are you even listening to me?"

The voice of Maria Ramirez snapped back into clarity and Sam murmured in response, still unsure as to what she had just asked of him. He watched as Maria swung her long legs from the sun lounger that she had been laying on. As she stood, Sam saw that she wore a gold-colored bikini over her lithe body, and her long dark hair hung loose over her bare shoulders and back.

Sam stood nervously before her, rubbing at one arm, still visibly shaking. Maria began to walk slowly around him, her gold high heeled sandals thudding on the wooden decking, as she inspected him from every angle.

"Good. Very good," Maria purred in her silky Spanish accent, stopping behind Sam. She stroked at his long blonde hair, pulling it over his shoulders so that it hung fully over his back. He could feel the flicked-up ends of his hair tickling against the middle of his bare back.

"Our time together yesterday would seem to have paid off," Maria continued, sliding a hand over the upper slope of Sam's buttocks as she walked back around to face him.

Sam swallowed as she studied his face, reaching to slide his sunglasses up so that they sat on top of his head. He could tell she was assessing his make-up and hoped that he had done a sufficient job. Maria lent in closer, using her thumb to wipe at the corner of Sam's lipstick covered mouth. "Very nice. Pink suits you." She glanced down at his swollen breasts which heaved from under his thin pink bikini top.

Sam drew a breath, feeling some small relief that he had passed inspection. However, he still felt an enormous tension hanging in the air from having just submitted himself to Maria's husband in full view of her.

"Come Antoinette, lie next to me."

Maria turned back towards her sun lounger, bending forward to adjust the towel that she had laid across it. Sam lowered his sunglasses back over his eyes and found his gaze drifting to Maria's firm backside, fully revealed by the gold bikini thong that she wore. He shook his head, trying to rid himself of the thoughts and memories of the night before.

A second sun lounger lay next to Maria's, with a small wooden table set between them. A half empty glass of orange juice sat on the table, gradually warming in the sun. Sam set about adjusting the towel that hung over the second lounger, before lying himself down next to Maria. The backs of the loungers sat upright, giving them both an unrestricted view behind the boat. Sam adjusted his bikini top, struggling to keep his modesty intact in the skimpy garment.

Maria Ramirez sighed as she settled back into the lounger. Almost immediately, her half-empty glass was whisked away by Eduardo, to be replaced by two fresh cold glasses, and a small bowl of fruit. Eduardo worked quickly and silently, trying hard not to be noticed, though Sam could not help but wonder if he too had seen what had happened just now on the deck below.

"I am pleased that you seduced my husband this morning. I find it usually makes him more agreeable for the rest of the day." Maria looked out to the horizon, bringing one of the glasses of juice to her lips.

Sam could feel his cheeks and chest flushing red. He really didn't want to be talking about what had just happened. He was having a hard enough time as it was trying to hold it together. He could feel his lower lip quiver once more.

Remember why you did it. Remember why you're here.

Sam sniffed, drawing a sharp intake of air down into his lungs.

"A word of advice though," Maria continued, shifting onto her side to look at Sam, the corners of her mouth turning up into a sly smile, "You may want to take care of yourself a little beforehand. It will make things more pleasant for you, and trust me, it will be the only way you ever cum from my husband's little cock!"

Maria giggled, her voice seeming to fade in and out, as if Sam's mind was continuously searching for the right station.

"Y...yes Madame," Sam felt his face burn with red heat at her uncouth words, and nervously took a sip of his own juice, the ice in the glass rattling.

"And one more thing," Maria continued, her eyes drifting down over Sam's female body. "You may also wish to change your bikini bottoms afterwards."

Sam lent forwards a little, looking down over the obstruction of his breasts to his pink bikini covered crotch. He brought a hand to his face as he gasped. There was now an obvious cloudy wet patch between his legs. He quickly brought a hand down to cover himself, horrified that Maria had noticed.

"Do not worry about it now. Today is going to be hot, so they will soon dry out." Maria watched Sam closely, seemingly fascinated as he grew increasingly more uncomfortable. "Move your hand away, let the Sun get to it."

Sam hesitantly moved his hand, exposing his damp crotch once more, though he silently wished for the ground to open and swallow him up.

Maria held a manicured hand out, briefly admiring her own polished fingernails. "Speaking of which, you really should put some sun cream on. We do not want you damaging that beautiful fair skin of yours." Sam watched as Maria reached down beside her to pick up a yellow bottle. "Here, sit up."

Sam swung his legs to the side of the sun lounger and sat upright with his back to Maria. She swept his long blonde hair forward, past his shoulders, and began to slowly untie his bikini top from the back. Sam quickly grasped his chest, holding the bikini in place as it slackened.

Sam shivered as Maria's cold, cream covered hands touched his bare skin and began to rub the lotion into his back. Her touch was sensual, the lotion making her hands soft and slippery. She slid her hands up over his bare shoulders, gently beginning to massage them. Sam's body jerked and he gasped, as Maria kneaded her palms into his knotted shoulders.

Her hands slid down over his slender arms as she whispered into his ear, "You are very tense Antoinette. Try to relax."

Sam turned his head as Maria's hands left briefly to pour more lotion, returning to his waist, sliding over the soft area of flesh where his waist ran out to meet the curve of his hips. One hand dipped under the waist band of his bikini thong, rubbing cream into the upper most swell of his buttocks.

"Turn around."

Sam swung his legs around, turning to face Maria. He could feel his heart beat pounding as she looked deep into his eyes, her hypnotic allure already beginning to affect him. Maria pulled Sam's hand away from his chest, his bikini top peeling from his breasts. He breathed heavily, his exposed chest rising and falling.

"One good thing about being on a yacht in the middle of the nowhere is that you can sunbathe topless." Maria smiled at Sam, her eyes widening as she took in the sight of his large breasts and thick pink nipples. She poured a large helping of sun lotion into her hands, rubbing her palms together before bringing them to Sam's chest. She ran her slippery hands around his flesh in large, sensuous circles, her fingers teasing his nipples which instantly hardened at her touch. Sam closed his eyes, finding himself melting once more to the sensual eroticism of her touch.

He felt Maria gently guide his body back onto the sun lounger, laying him on his back, as her cream covered hands began to slide along his silky smooth legs, causing them to writhe. Sam's eyes flickered open, looking up at the clear blue sky above. He could feel a grey cloud of despair begin to descend over him.

Despite his best efforts to control the mission, Sam felt like he was sliding relentlessly into the role of the submissive slave whose body he now inhabited.



Sam felt Maria gently guide his body back onto the sun lounger, laying him on his back, as her cream covered hands began to slide along his silky smooth legs, causing them to writhe.

THE LAMBORGHINI GALLARDO skidded to a halt, mud splattering across the white body work. The door swung open and Rivers stepped out, quickly spinning around to take in his surroundings. The fields surrounding the old barn were quiet, with hardly a breeze to rouse the trees. Even the birds seemed to have abandoned the area, casting an eerie silence, broken only by the whir of the fans cooling the car engine.

Rivers walked over to the black jeep that he had parked up alongside, cupping his hands to peer through the tinted windows. He stepped backwards.

Bravo team had been assigned *two* vehicles. Where was the *other* jeep?

Rivers looked down at the mud, finding tyre tracks leading away, back down the lane that he had just driven up. He looked back up to the barn. It looked dark and cold, as if it were sucking light from the surrounding area.

Rivers quickly shrugged off his sense of unease and began to work his way up towards the barn, his mud-stained Italian leather shoes scuffing against the stony shingle of the path.

The barn door was ajar and creaked ominously as Rivers pushed it open further. He stood silent, the sunlight casting his shadow inwards. He had taken only a couple of steps in when he saw it.

There on the ground by one of the animal paddocks.

Amongst the matted straw and mud.

A body.

RIVERS INSTINCTIVELY REACHED to the gun holster hidden beneath the left breast of his suit jacket, drawing his pistol. He held it upright, one hand clasped around the other as he cautiously approached, planting one foot slowly in front of the other. All the while he looked around, constantly reassessing the environment for possible signs of danger.

Rivers knelt at the body, recognising the black combat fatigues of Bravo team instantly. Blood had soaked into the straw around it from several bullet wounds to the back. He rolled it over, a man's pale young face staring unblinkingly upwards.

"Jesus." It was Matthews. The kid was young.

Rivers tightened his grip on his pistol as he glanced back around the barn. He could see splintered wood and bullet holes in the far wall. The gun fire had been erratic. Most probably a semi-automatic.

Rivers turned back to the boy, closing his eye lids. Before him, the trapdoor leading down to the underground bunker hung wide open, the inner security hatch slid aside, revealing the imposing darkness below.

RIVERS' FEET CLATTERED against the metallic floor as he stepped from the spiral steps that wound down beneath the barn. The echo reverberated down the length of the sparsely lit corridor. He held his pistol straight ahead, his breathing slow and calm.

Rivers walked slowly forward, reaching the turn in the corridor, backing up tight against the wall, flexing his grip on the gun. He swivelled around the corner, his aim snapping ahead.

The faulty light panel flickered as Rivers stepped forward, its harsh flashing



Rivers walked slowly forward, reaching the turn in the corridor, backing up tight against the wall, flexing his grip on the gun.

intermittently illuminating two more slumped bodies, just outside of the open door to the control room. Rivers cautiously approached, quickly identifying the men as Willis and Keyes.

"Damn it," Rivers muttered under his breath, wiping sweat from his brow from the stifling heat of the underground tunnel.

He stepped into the control room, its sparse confines revealing nothing but a metal table and naked cables trailing the floor. The team's Agency supplied laptops were missing. Rivers stood up straighter, holstering his gun.

She was *gone*. The bitch had taken the laptops and one of the jeeps, and was gone.

"Fuck!" Rivers kicked at the metal table in frustration, denting one of its legs. He ran his hand through his short hair, the ramifications of what had just happened proving too much to contemplate.

He looked to the large window that overlooked the interrogation room, seeing only an inky blackness. It was then that Rivers noticed the door to the interrogation room. It was locked shut. Every other door along the escape route had been left open.

Rivers stepped up to the keypad beside the door, tapping in his unlock code and swiping his thumb against the fingerprint sensor. The door hissed open, a rush of humid air escaping. As he entered he thought to drawing his gun again.

It was at that moment that Rivers was attacked.

SCARLET

CHAPTER FIVE

A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK



TURIN, ITALY

Four hours ago...

BLACK OPS SPECIALIST William Tanner stepped into the interrogation room, the metal slide-door hissing shut and locking automatically behind him. He walked across to the wooden table at the centre of the room, behind which sat a young man. The panel lighting above his head cast him in a spotlight and his head was hung low, his sandy-colored hair unkempt and straggly. From the slow pace of his breathing, Tanner guessed that he was sleeping.

"Water. Drink it."

Tanner slammed a plastic bottle of water down onto the table, rousing the man. He looked around, his eyes focusing, before looking up at Tanner, a smile slowly broadening across his stubble-flecked face. Tanner could feel his temper rising at the man's arrogance.

His name was Fields, or so Special Agent Rivers had said. Supposedly he worked for the Scarlet organization, though so far the asshole had remained tight-lipped. And that was about as much as Tanner knew. Any more detail had been on a strictly need to know basis, with Tanner and his team being brought in as nothing more than child-minders. The whole thing made him as angry as hell. Yet again the Black Ops boys were getting treated like thugs for hire by the Agency.

"Feel like talking yet?" Tanner looked down. He wanted to reach out and shake him up, wipe that damn grin from his face. So far he hadn't got so much as a word out of the man.

Rivers had fared a little better. Tanner had watched from behind the mirrored glass of the control room as he had exchanged a handful of words with Fields, though the sound-proofing ensured that Tanner could not hear what had been said. Rivers had certainly not been forth-coming either.



The unexpected sound of Fields' voice startled Tanner as it echoed in the sparse underground chamber. Tanner's black combat boots squeaked as he turned back around to face him.

Fields sat silent and began to tap at his leg — a nervous habit that irritated Tanner as much as the smile. He formed fists with his hands, turning to head back to the door.

"Where is Agent Rivers?"

The unexpected sound of Fields' voice startled Tanner as it echoed in the sparse underground chamber. Tanner's black combat boots squeaked as he turned back around to face him.

"He's not here right now. If you've got anything to say, you can say it to me." Tanner straightened his back.

"Oh no, you see, I was hoping for some intelligent conversation."

Tanner's nostrils flared. "Listen, I don't who you think you are. All I know is that you've betrayed your country by siding with a terrorist organization. If you cooperate with us now, the courts may be more lenient when deciding your punishment."

Tanner watched as Fields rolled his head back with mock laughter, clapping his hands together. "Ha! Did you rehearse

that? That was very good." He paused, his head cocked to the side as he briefly considered something. "Wait a minute. You have no idea who I am, do you?"

Tanner took a step forward, "Your name is Samuel Fields. You're a member of Scarlet."

"The Agency haven't told you a thing have they?" Fields tilted his wooden chair back onto two legs, teetering playfully on the balance point.

Tanner felt his anger boil over at the young upstart's condescending tone. "Okay, you need to shut the fuck up now."

"A moment a go you wanted me to talk. Now you don't. So which is it? Or is this whole operation just a bit above your head?"

"I'm warning you!" Tanner pointed a threatening finger at Fields.

Fields laughed, rubbing a hand through his hair. "Oh come on! We both know the Agency have ordered you not to lay a hand on me."

"Rules don't always sit too well with me." Tanner looked to the mirror along the wall behind him, where the rest of his team would doubtless be watching, but not hearing what was transpiring.

Fields caught Tanner's eye in the mirror, his smile maddening. "You'd love five minutes alone with me right now wouldn't you?"

TANNER STRODE BACK into the control room, the rest of Bravo team looking up from their seats expectantly.

"So what did he say? You guys were really going at it in there!" Matthews asked over-enthusiastically.

"Nothing. Forget about it." Tanner looked through the one-way mirror, back to where Fields still sat in the interrogation room beyond.

"Shouldn't we inform Agent Rivers that he's started talking again?" Willis looked up from his laptop.

"There's nothing to report!" Tanner rubbed sweat from his brow. "Listen guys, take a break okay? Fifteen minutes. I'll watch things down here.

"Agent Rivers said two eyes on him at all times. I'll stand watch with you," Keyes offered.

"No!" Tanner snapped, quickly reigning himself back in. "I mean, it's fine. He's not going anyway now is he?"



TANNER SAT ALONE in the control room, listening as the rest of the guys filed down the corridor towards the entrance to the bunker. He could hear their laughing and joking growing fainter.

Tanner laced his fingers, looking through the one-way mirror to the interrogation room. He could see that Fields was sat with his eyes closed, as if in meditation.

"Okay asshole, it's just you and me now."



ANTOINETTE HEARD THE door hiss, followed by the sound of Tanner's heavy boots stomping back into the room. She took a deep breath, filling her lungs with air as her eyes snapped open.

"Did you miss me?" She smiled, pushing back her chair to stand up. She staggered a little, still unused to the increased height of her male body. She held her arms out as Tanner approached. "So how do we do this?"

Antoinette reeled back as the sharp shock of Tanner's punch hit her jaw. She shook her head, dazed, bringing her hand up to her cut lip.

"This is how we do things in Black Ops, Mister Fields." Tanner threatened, approaching her.

Antoinette quickly regained her stance, beginning to circle around Tanner, like two boxers in a ring sizing each other up. “I’ve never had someone hit me like that before,” she grinned through her bloodied mouth, “It’s quite… exhilarating.”

“Really?” Tanner mocked, “Then you should try this.” He threw a punch to her abdomen, winding her, causing her to fall back towards the sealed door of the room. Tanner approached, his right fist raised.

“No, please!” Antoinette wheezed, shielding her face, “I’ll talk, please just… give me a moment… need to…catch my breath.”

She watched carefully as Tanner turned his back, a masculine swagger in his walk from his victory. He turned and pulled the wooden chair back, gesturing to it. “Be my guest.”

“If you insist…” Antoinette calculated that there was now enough distance between them to make her move. She hauled herself to her feet, using the wall for support, then quickly turned to the hexadecimal keypad beside the electronically locked door. The fingers of her right hand darted across the keys in a fast, fluid motion. By now she was well practised.

Antoinette had known that Sam Fields’ body held the override commands, locked deep into muscle memory from years of constant use. Ever since her capture, she had ceaselessly tapped at her leg, searching for the right combination of letters and numbers. She had found that the best state to access the latent sub-conscious processes had been on the edge of sleep, so had dozed or meditated whenever she could.

Antoinette’s thumb slid across the thumbprint sensor just as Tanner began to run at her. The door hissed open and she slid through, jabbing at the lock override button from the other side. The door hissed shut just in time. Tanner would have crashed against the door, hammering to be let out, but the sound dispersion properties masked any sound from the interrogation room.

Antoinette gasped for breath, laughing. She sucked at her cut lip, tasting blood.

ANTOINETTE UNLOCKED THE tail door to one of the four wheel drive jeeps parked just down from the barn. She hefted the laptops inside, liberated from the control room inside of the bunker. She gave a last look back to the barn, sweeping a hand through her hair.

After escaping the interrogation room, the rest had been easy. She had found a semi-automatic rifle in the control room and set up position. She had waited, crouched, her aim fixed on the far end of the corridor.

The men had eventually returned. It had been like shooting fish in a barrel in the tight confines of the bunker, but still one of them had managed to make a break for it. She had hurried after him, catching up with him in the barn above. Her usual steady aim had been wild and erratic, her body unused to the balance and recoil of the weapon, but the man had gone down all the same.

Everything had gone according to plan.

Antoinette slammed the tailgate shut and made for the driver-side door. She had Sam Fields' body, and now she had a pair of Agency laptops. Scarlet would be pleased.



Antoinette had Sam Fields' body, and now she had a pair of Agency laptops. Scarlet would be pleased.

TURIN, ITALY

Now...



"What the hell is going on?" Rivers clasped his painful right shoulder, rotating it in its socket.

RIVERS' SHOULDER FLARED with pain as he crashed against the wall of the interrogation room. He turned, bringing a hand up to shield himself, bracing for another blow.

"Agent Rivers?" Tanner stopped, backing up.

"*Tanner?*" Rivers accepted Tanner's arm as he helped pull him upright. "What the hell is going on?" He clasped his painful right shoulder, rotating it in its socket.

"I... I don't know how... but Fields knew the code to get out. He fucking knew, and then the bastard locked me in with an override!" Tanner looked exasperated, his forehead glistening with beads of sweat.

Rivers turned to look at the keypad display blinking beside the interrogation room's door, his mind racing. How had Antoinette done this? How did she know the codes?

"Where's the rest of the guys, are they still here?" Tanner asked, his voice quiet.

Rivers looked at Tanner solemnly. Tanner saw the look in his eyes and brought his hands up to his head. "Oh god..."

"Bottom line, we've fucked up, big time." Rivers rubbed at his eyes wondering how the hell he was going to explain this to Director Millar.



SAM FIELDS MURMURED in his sleep. The shadowy figure in black had returned to his dreams, though this time they were chasing him, whereas before it had been the other way around. Sam gasped, his eyes flicking open, his pulse racing.

A large seagull crowed at him from the railing surrounding the deck, before taking flight. Sam sat up with a start from the sun lounger, his naked breasts shifting on his chest. He looked down at his body. His golden blonde hair lay across his shoulders, following the curve of his large bare breasts, his exposed nipples thick and pink. His waist tapered inwards, his hips perfectly curved, his legs long, smooth and elegant. Between his legs, a small pink triangle of fabric covered his smooth female loins. Sam was relieved to find that his thong had dried out in the Sun, with only a barely noticeably white mark remaining. He also noticed that despite Maria's thorough application of sun cream, his skin was now slightly pinkish from where he had caught the sun.

He turned to look at Maria, finding her still laid out on her lounger, her eyes hidden behind a pair of dark sunglasses. He watched her bare breasts rising and falling with her deep breathing and guessed that she was still sleeping.

It felt quiet on the open deck. All Sam could hear was the gentle breaking of waves and the distant caw of seagulls. It took him a minute or two to realise that the engine was not running and that the yacht was now stationary.



Sam turned to look at Maria, finding her still laid out on her lounger, her eyes hidden behind a pair of dark sunglasses. He watched her bare breasts rising and falling with her deep breathing and guessed that she was still sleeping.

Sam turned his head, looking out to the port side of the yacht. He could just about make out the outline of (what he guessed was) Italy on the horizon. They had finally arrived. But why were they not heading in to shore?

Sam's flat stomach growled with hunger. He took a banana from the fruit bowl that Eduardo had left on the small table between their sun loungers. He peeled it and brought it to his lipstick covered lips, taking a large bite.

"Hmm, Carlos will need to be careful when you come to suck his cock. He might just lose it!" Maria laughed, sitting up.

Sam nearly choked as he swallowed a mouthful.

"What are you saying about me?" The door to the interior of the yacht opened and Carlos Ramirez stepped out onto the deck.

Sam instinctively reached for his pink bikini top, but Maria pushed his arm back. Sam left the top, feeling himself blush with his exposure.

"Antoinette was just saying how she was looking forward to sucking your cock." Maria looked straight at Sam, smiling wickedly.

"Mmm, I like the sound of that," Carlos groaned in his thick Spanish accent, walking over and running his hand through Sam's silky blonde hair. He wore a white t-shirt that stretched around his ample frame, along with a tight pair of swimming shorts. From his seated position on the sun lounger, Sam could clearly see the threatening bulge beneath his shorts. "We have some time to kill before we need to travel inland to Rome, so we will hold anchor here until the evening. I am going to take the jet-ski out, but maybe when I am back Antoinette can show me her talents."

Sam could feel his blood running cold at the thought. The door behind him opened again and Eduardo emerged, his head bowed, looking straight down at the deck as he began to fuss and tidy plates from the larger circular dining table.

This time Sam draped a protective arm across his breasts, scooting his legs up towards his body. It was bad enough that he was practically naked in front of Carlos and Maria, let alone Eduardo.

Ramirez chuckled. "You do not have to cover up in front of Eduardo. He is not interested in that sort of thing anymore. Isn't that right Eduardo?"

Eduardo's eyes darted, refusing to meet Ramirez's gaze as he nodded agreement.

Maria leant towards Sam. "One time Carlos caught Eduardo watching me getting changed."

"Yes, the filthy little rat." Sam looked back up as Carlos took up the story. "I had Gaul take him away and perform a little *procedure* on our lover boy." Ramirez's black moustache rippled as he grinned.

Sam looked to Eduardo. He looked so frantic and frightened. Carlos leant down towards Sam, lowering his voice, speaking more slowly and deliberately.

"I had his cajones... *removed*..." Carlos made a gesture with his hand, as if twisting fruit from a tree. "Gaul is a perfectionist when it comes to these sorts of things. He made sure they were brought to me completely intact."

Sam watched as the plates Eduardo held began to rattle.

"When Eduardo had recovered, I had him cook up... a *special* meal for Maria..." Ramirez looked over at Eduardo. "I made him watch as she ate."

There was a loud crash as Eduardo dropped the plates onto the floor, fragments of white ceramic scattering in all directions. Sam jumped to his feet horrified at Carlos and Maria's revelation, one arm across his breasts as he reached for his bikini top.

"I... I need to use the bathroom," Sam's feminine voice stammered, as he hurried off into the yacht.

SAM'S PINK HIGH-HEELED sandals clicked rapidly as he marched onto the bridge, his breasts bouncing beneath his bikini top as he finished tying it in a bow behind his back. He made his way past Joseph to look out over the rear of the yacht.

"They...they're *crazy!*" Sam could feel himself shaking as he looked down to the deck below where Maria still lay topless on her sun lounger. Eduardo had fetched a dustpan and brush and was now busily tidying the fragments of broken plate from the deck.

"You only just noticed?" Joseph turned, folding his arms, his biceps stretching the open white shirt that he wore.

"Did you know about Eduardo? What they did to him?" Sam's French accent came through stronger, his feminine voice rising in pitch.



Sam took a deep breath, his eyes glistening as he looked out towards the coastline of Italy. He felt Joseph come up beside him.

"I know." Joseph's eyes quickly glanced down at Sam's bikini-clad body. "And believe me, it could have been worse. He's lucky he's still alive. Most people who get on the bad side of Ramirez usually don't fare so well."

"It...it's *inhumane*..."

"What were you expecting exactly? This is Carlos and Maria Ramirez we're talking about here, not Donny and Marie."

Sam took a deep breath, his eyes glistening as he looked out towards the coastline of Italy. He felt Joseph come up beside him. He seemed tall, though in truth he was probably no taller than Sam had been as a man. Joseph unbuttoned his white shirt, slipping it from his body. He offered it to Sam.

"Put this on, before you catch a cold."

Sam looked up at Joseph's rugged face, his disarming eyes. He slipped his slender arms through the shirt as Joseph held it, pulling it around his small feminine body. The shirt hung loose around his small shoulders and came down long enough to cover his backside. Sam was glad of the coverage, his pink bikini top and thong leaving little to the imagination.

"Thanks," Sam offered quietly. He glanced at Joseph's muscular chest, toned and hard beneath the white vest that he had been wearing under his shirt.

"Antoinette?" Joseph's deep voice made Sam look up. "What are you *doing* here?"

"What do you mean?" Sam answered, worrying whether Joseph suspected anything.

"I saw you this morning, down on the lower deck with Ramirez." Joseph held Sam's gaze, despite his embarrassment, looking him straight in the eye. "I also watched you fix the GPS yesterday. You're a smart woman. Why settle for something like this?"

Sam gripped at his borrowed shirt, pulling it tighter around his chest. He could feel his still raw emotions begin to well to the surface once more.

"You think she... You think I have a choice?" Sam quickly corrected himself.

"*Everyone* has a choice Antoinette."

Sam began to fume inside. All those women and children that Ramirez was trafficking certainly didn't have a choice.

"How can you say that?" Sam began to raise his voice a little. "What about *you*? If everyone has a choice, then why are you here?"



"You think she... You think I have a choice?" Sam quickly corrected himself.

Joseph turned and walked to the opposite side of the bridge, rubbing at the back of his head. "Because I made the *wrong* choice."

Sam could sense that Joseph was recalling something painful. He walked slowly over to join him, his smooth legs brushing one in front of the other as he walked. He glanced down to where Joseph was looking, seeing Carlos Ramirez on the lower deck, lowering a jet-ski down onto the water using a powered winch, its gears grinding loudly.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Sam offered at last.

"There's not much to tell." Joseph closed his eyes and sighed as Sam waited patiently.

"I was working down in Tampa Bay," he began at last. "I had a pretty successful trade renting and selling yachts with my business partner Leon. I'm talking top of the range stuff too. Big commissions." Joseph turned to look down at Sam.

"It wasn't strictly above board. We raised the capital by borrowing from one of the big local drug gangs. In return, we paid a monthly tax and let them use one of our warehouses to store some powder. We were young enough and dumb enough to believe we could make it work."

Joseph looked down and rubbed at his hands, dirty with engine oil.

"Then one day we get a visit from Carlos Ramirez. We'd heard about him, of course. He's pulling the strings of a lot of the old gangs. Says we owe him for the loan and wants us to sign over a majority share in the business."

Sam watched as Joseph's brown eyes began to glisten.

"Now Ramirez, he could have killed us both there and then. Taken whatever he wanted. But he's not stupid. He knew that we were good at what we did. He needed one of us to still run the business."

Sam and Joseph both turned at the sound of a motor revving up below. They looked out, watching as Ramirez began to ride the jet-ski away from the yacht. Although the sea was calm, the speed of the vehicle caused it to slap heavily against the water, sending white spray up into the air.

"*One* of you?" Sam prompted.

Joseph shook his head, looking down at the floor. He moistened his dry lips with his tongue.

"Ramirez…he…uh…threw a gun down between us. Told us to decide quickly before he ordered his men to shoot us both. Leon…he…. just kept screaming at them. He was going to get us both killed…I…"

"You made the wrong choice," Sam finished for him. He didn't need to hear the rest. Ramirez had revealed that much. It would have been easy to take the moral high ground and say what Joseph should have done in that situation, though Sam couldn't say for sure what choice he would have made under the same circumstances. He had already made some surprising choices himself since coming aboard the yacht.

Joseph shook with pent up rage, surprising Sam when he slammed a hand against the window, as if striking out at Ramirez beyond.

"Joseph, listen," Sam began, his hand resting on Joseph's arm, "I'm getting out of here. Today. When we go ashore." Sam nodded to the coast line of Italy. "Come with me."

"You're getting out of here?" Joseph blew out, shaking his head with disbelief. "I really hope you do. Really. But I can't. I made my choice back in Tampa Bay."

Sam nodded, looking up at Joseph's sad eyes. He pulled his shirt tighter around his feminine body, folding his arms under his breasts as walked slowly to the stairwell.

Alone.

RIVERS TRIED HIS cell phone for the third time, keying in his ID and swiping his thumbprint before attempting to establish a secure link to the Agency HQ communications network. The line was dead. He leant back against the tree he was stood under, looking up to the jewels of sunlight that glinted through the leaves and branches above.

In the distance he could see the barn casting its mournful shadow. Tanner had been unenviably tasked with moving Matthews' body back underground until they could get a clean-up crew in.

Tanner had taken the loss of his team bad. He'd blamed himself. By the sounds of it he'd been drawn in and deceived by Antoinette. But hadn't they all? No, this rested squarely on the shoulders of the Agency. Bravo team had been kept in the dark about the whole thing and knew nothing of the swap between Sam and Antoinette. All they had been told was that they had apprehended a Scarlet agent. None of the team knew, or had met Sam previously so they had no reason to believe otherwise.

Rivers had known straight away from the top secret briefing held months ago at HQ, that the plan was far too elaborate. Too many things could go wrong, and sure enough they had. He felt angry at the Agency, but knew that they would try and pin this all on him. He was fired up, ready to have it out with Millar.

Suddenly the phone vibrated in Rivers' hand. He looked down at the caller ID. It was blank. He quickly snapped the phone open.

"Hello?"

"Rivers? This is Director Millar..."

"Sir?" Rivers was surprised. "You know this is an unsecured line."

"I'll be brief." Millar's tone was grave. "We've had a major security breach. We've had to shut down most of our systems."

"What?" Rivers began to pace, rubbing his head. Everything seemed to be happening too fast.

"Twenty minutes ago a full database download was initiated from an Agency laptop. They got well over half of everything before our security guys pulled the plug."

"Antoinette..." Rivers kicked futilely at the dirt beneath his feet. "Sir, there's no sign of her at the bunker and I have three men down here. Two laptops are missing..."

There was a pause and Rivers wondered whether Millar was still on the line.

"Our boys are still reverse engineering what happened."

Rivers looked over to the barn. He could see Tanner making his way back down the path towards the parked vehicles. Rivers rubbed at his still aching shoulder. "Do we have a location fix on the download?"

"Rome."

"I'm on it." Rivers snapped the cell phone shut and started to jog back towards the cars.



SAM STOOD OUTSIDE of the door to Carlos Ramirez's office on the mid-level of the *Oro del Diablo*, the varnished wood creating a dim reflection of his blonde, made-up feminine face. In the distance he could hear the whine of the jet-ski as Ramirez amused himself, well away from the yacht.

Sam brought a slender hand up to the door, his pink nail-polished fingers touching the smooth wood thoughtfully. He had intended to head back out to the deck before someone came looking for him, but had instead found himself drawn to the now empty room.

This was it. This was his chance.

He pushed at the door which swung slowly inwards. Part of him wished it hadn't, that it had been locked and he would simply have to retire back to the deck.

Sam stepped nervously inside, his hips slowly swaying beneath the oversized shirt of Joseph's that he wore over his pink bikini. The room was small, messy, with papers strewn across the floor. On the wall were various maps and markers, mainly of shipping routes. Straight in front of him was a small desk with a computer.

At last, something he could work with.

Sam carefully pulled the door closed behind him and sat himself down on the wheeled office chair in front of the computer. He could feel his heart beat quickening, his stomach beginning to tie itself up in knots. His hands shook as he brought them to the keyboard.

The computer lit up.

Sam's feminine hand curled around the mouse as he began to explore the desktop. He found various files and folders, but had no idea what any of it was. Then his eye was drawn to a shortcut to a database, labelled simply "market". He double-clicked it, finding it password protected.

Sam could get round it. It was just a SQL database with a web based front end, nothing fancy. He began to download some decryption tools from the internet as he brought up a command prompt and began to type.

"Come on, come on!" Sam's feminine voice whispered under his breath. He grew frustrated by his hands, still finding them unused to the keyboard. He had to concentrate and type one key at a time. Every now and then his shaking hands and long fingernails would clip the wrong key and he would have to delete and start over.

The whine of the jet-ski seemed to grow louder, getting closer to the yacht.

Sam wiped at strands of long hair that had stuck to his forehead, as he slowly, almost painfully, configured the decryption tools.

"Yes!"

The database unlocked, bringing up record after record of women... children...

Thousands...

Images of their solemn black and white faces stared blankly back at Sam, their eyes pleading.

Everything was here... names, locations... Sam's face felt hot from his elevated pulse. He just had to upload the database to the Agency servers. That would be easy enough, but time consuming given the relatively slow bandwidth of Ramirez's satellite link. Despite his nervousness, Sam felt invigorated. Finally he was back behind a computer — something he felt he had control over.



"Come on, come on!" Sam's feminine voice whispered under his breath.

Sam's celebration was short-lived. He stopped and listened. He could no longer hear the engine of the jet-ski.

His nervous hands trembled as he slowly began to jab the connection string to the Agency network into the command line.

Sam had been involved in the development of the Agency's security systems right from the beginning. He'd signed countless confidentiality documents, but that hadn't stopped him from coding his very own back door into the Agency system, just in case he ever needed it. It was low level stuff. They would never find it unless they went right back to basics in redevelopment.

Sam's surroundings began to fall away as his mind reached inwards, planning ahead; which Agency server he would connect to, which masking algorithms he would use... His typing had even begun to speed up a little, as he approached that rare trance-like state of mind when hours of coding could rush by in what seemed minutes.

Then he stopped. His feminine hands hovered over the keys, not knowing which one to press next.

Sam couldn't remember his override code!

"Merde! Je ne m'en souviens pas!"

Sam gasped bringing a hand to his mouth. His mind began to suddenly fill with French verbs and tenses.

"Non! Qu'est-ce qu'il m'arrive?" his feminine French voice exclaimed. He shook his head, almost beginning to panic, when just as suddenly his mind cleared again.

Sam breathed a sigh of relief as the code sequence finally came to him. Shaken but undeterred, Sam jabbed in the code with his index fingers. His heart sank as he read back the message on the screen.

Connection denied.

He glanced towards the door. He could hear voices in the distance. Carlos Ramirez was now back on the deck of the yacht, talking with his wife.

Sam didn't have time to try and diagnose the problem, especially given his body's unfamiliarity with the keyboard. No, he would have to upload the database to his own personal web space. He quickly opened a web browser, logged in and started the upload.

While he waited, Sam brought up a GPS map of their current position, finding the *Oro del Diablo* anchored just off the coast of Civitavecchia on the west coast of Italy. The town had numerous trade routes leading into the mainland, including Rome, where Ramirez was due to meet with the mafia.

Sam brought up his personal cell phone provider, logged into the account and used it to send a one word text message to Rivers.

Civitavecchia.

He watched the upload progress bar as it crept tortuously along.

Fifty percent complete.

"Hurry up!" His voice came high-pitched through his gritted teeth.

There were heavy footsteps now, coming inside the yacht.

Sixty percent complete.

Sam heard the squeak of a door hinge, sending the hairs up on the back of his neck. It was the door to the toilet cubicle across the corridor. He took a deep breath, hovering the mouse over the "close" icon to the web browser, ready to shut off the upload if he was discovered.

Seventy-five percent complete.

Sam's breasts heaved with his quick breathing, his forehead dripping with sweat.

He heard the flush of the toilet, the click of the latch on the cubicle door as it was unlocked.

Ninety percent complete.

The thud of footsteps now, coming closer, the wooden panelled door to the office creaking as it opened inwards.

One-hundred percent.

Sam closed off the web session, his hair whipping around him as he stood and turned, coming face to face with Carlos Ramirez.





"Who are you working for?" Ramirez growled, his teeth bared. "It's Scarlet, isn't it?"

"WHAT THE FUCK are you doing in here?" Carlos' booming voice made Sam's whole body quiver. He loomed forwards through the tight doorway, his eyes flicking to the computer. "I knew it!"

Sam cried out as the back of Ramirez's hand struck his cheek, sending him crashing to the floor, his long hair flailing, loose papers kicking up into the air. He barely had time to recover when he felt Ramirez's hand grip a handful of his blonde hair, pulling him upwards.

Sam shrieked, forced to follow the painful tug at his scalp, his high-heeled feet skidding across the floor.

"Who are you working for?" Ramirez growled, his teeth bared. "It's Scarlet, isn't it?"

Sam winced through the pain, "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"What's going on?" Sam heard Maria's voice as she came up behind her husband, tying off her gold-colored bikini top.

"I caught this little bitch going through my things. She's a fucking spy!"

"Antoinette? Is this true?" Maria looked genuinely disappointed as Ramirez led Sam out into the

corridor by his hair. Sam took small mincing steps to keep up, his breasts bobbing under his shirt. Ramirez threw him against the wall, his effeminate voice crying out once more.

At the far end of the corridor Gaul stalked towards them, his nostrils flaring, cracking the knuckles of each hand.

This was it, Sam thought. He had made the ultimate sacrifice to get the mission done. He would die here on the yacht, alone and forgotten, with not even his own body left to bury. He slid down the wall in defeat until he knelt on the floor, his blonde hair draping around his face.

It was at that moment that fate intervened.

Sam looked up through tear filled eyes, past Carlos, Maria and the approaching Gaul, to the sound of Joseph's voice as he ran down the stairs from the bridge above.

"Ramirez! We've got company. Two heavily armed boats on the horizon, one approaching from the north, the other from the south."

Ramirez looked up at Joseph, his black moustache twitching as his mind struggled to comprehend all that was happening.

"Scarlet!" Ramirez turned back to Sam casting an accusing finger down at him, "This is your doing bitch!"

"I... I don't know anything about it..." Sam sobbed from the floor. He still did not know who Scarlet were, or quite what they wanted with Carlos Ramirez, but it didn't sound as though it boded well for any of them.

"Gaul, take her away, She is yours to do with as you please." Ramirez dismissed Sam and turned his attention to Joseph. "You! Show me these boats."

Sam watched as Ramirez followed Joseph back up the winding staircase to the bridge. He wiped his hair away from his face, his bottom lip quivering as he looked up at Gaul. The giant's oversized hands reached out, plucking Sam's feminine body from the ground, hefting him across one shoulder with ease.

As Gaul's heavy feet stomped down the corridor, Sam looked back, his bent body slapping painfully against Gaul's broad shoulder with each step. He could see Maria Ramirez watching them, her arms folded across her gold-bikini covered breasts. She blew him a kiss, waving as she turned away.



RIVERS SHIFTED GEAR as he weaved in and out of the traffic on the Italian *Autostrada*, heading east before beginning the drive south towards Rome. He reached up adjusting the rear view mirror, catching site of Tanner's black jeep following behind in the distance. He took a deep breath and flicked a switch, the driver side window rolling down. The wind howled in his ear. It helped him focus.

As far as they could tell, Antoinette had made off with Bravo team's Agency laptops and used them to access the network, initiating a download of the main database. How the hell she'd managed that was anyone's guess. Even Sam, with all that he knew, wouldn't have had security clearance to pull something like that.

The Agency had managed to pinpoint the use of the laptop to a location in Rome. Rivers just hoped they could get there in time to find Antoinette and recover the downloaded data before she was able to put it to use.

Rivers' gaze was drawn to his cell phone which sat in a cradle on the dashboard of the car, a green flashing light indicating an unread text message. He reached out, touching the display, the phone illuminating into life.

It was from Sam!

"Civitavecchia," Rivers read aloud.

With all that had happened, Rivers had scarcely had the time to think about Sam. Not since last night, anyway. Rivers felt a rush of relief. Sam was still alive. He was letting Rivers know where he was.

Rivers looked at the digital clock on the dashboard, trying to figure how long it would take to divert to Civitavecchia. Could he afford the risk of delaying getting to Rome? But what if Sam was in trouble and needed his help?

He still had hours of driving ahead of him. There was plenty of time before he would have to divert and make a decision one way or another.

Rivers looked for Tanner in the rear view mirror, checking he was still within sight, before bringing his foot down onto the accelerator. The engine of the Lamborghini roared.

SAM'S HEAD NODDED and he came to, his blurred vision beginning to focus on his surroundings. He coughed, finding his throat dry and raspy.

Chloroform...

The last thing Sam remembered was Gaul carrying him off, quickly bringing a wet rag to his face. He'd gone out like a light. But how much time had passed. Minutes? Hours? In the dimly lit, window-less room, time seemed not to exist.

Sam looked around him, his straggly, sweat drenched hair partly obscuring his vision. The room was sparse, the paint peeling from the walls, the wooden door frame chipped and marked. In place of the usual plush carpeting there was bare unvarnished wood flooring. If it wasn't for the familiar sway of the yacht on the water, Sam would have thought he'd been taken somewhere else entirely. Above him, in place of the usual recessed lighting, hung a single bulb from a cord of flex. It swung like a pendulum, keeping time with the gentle rocking of the boat.

Sam looked down at his body. He still wore Joseph's white shirt though it had fallen open, revealing his breasts sparsely covered by his pink bikini top. He was sat... no *tied...* to a wooden chair. He began to struggle, finding his ankles tied to each of the front legs of the chair, his thighs slightly parted to expose his pink bikini thong stretched tight against his smooth crotch. His wrists had been similarly tied together behind the back of the chair.

Sam pulled at his bonds desperately, rocking the chair back and forth, his feminine voice whimpering with his exertion.

He stopped when he heard movement behind him.

Sam turned his head, his blonde hair falling over his shoulders, watching as Gaul's heavy shoes thudded against the bare wooden slats. His broad shoulders rolled as he stepped in front of Sam, looking down at his captive. The first thing Sam noticed were his eyes. Gaul no longer wore his sunglasses and his small dark brown eyes appeared almost black in the dimly lit room. He wore a white string vest over his muscular over-sized torso, along with a pair of dirty brown pants held up with a worn leather belt.

Sam began to panic. He remembered the horror story Ramirez had told him about the last girl Gaul had been left with, and knew he had likely been consigned to a similar fate. He watched helplessly as Gaul held up a pair of scissors, gripping them tightly in his right fist. He ran the flat of the blade against Sam's cheek, almost tenderly, his beady eyes darting like a shark's.



"Gaul... pl... please..." Sam found his French accented voice begin to plead. "You don't have to do this."

"Gaul... pl... please..." Sam found his French accented voice begin to plead. "You don't have to do this."

Sam trembled, gasping as the scissors slid down, tracing the upper curve of his breasts. With a sudden "snip", Sam's bikini top fell away exposing his chest to Gaul. Gaul stepped back intrigued, cocking his head to one side, watching as Sam's naked breasts rose and fell with his quick breathing.

He stepped forward again, gently sliding Sam's shirt away from his shoulders, tucking the remnants of the bikini to either side. He brought his left hand to Sam's right breast, pinching the flesh with his large rough-tipped fingers.

"Uh!" Sam winced with the harshness of his touch.

Gaul's mouth twitched as if stifling a long forgotten emotion. He began to breathe rapidly through his nostrils, producing an unpleasant wheeze.

He brought a hand to Sam's left breast now, cupping him, feeling the weight of it. Sam turned his head, squirming uncomfortably, desperately trying to loosen the binding that dug harshly into his bound ankles and wrists. When he glanced back to Gaul, he found that his expression had changed.

This time Gaul was smiling.

RIVERS FLICKED ON the headlights of the Lamborghini Gallardo as the evening began to draw in.

The motorway illuminated ahead of him.

The tires screeched as he changed lanes, narrowly missing the car ahead. Thankfully the Lamborghini emitted a scrambler in its wake, disrupting any roadside cameras, or speed sensors, so that his reckless driving could go mostly unnoticed.

He checked the road signs for his exit, shifting into the correct lane. There was no going back now. He had made his decision.

As Rivers drove on into the night, his cell phone flashed, lighting up from its cradle on the dashboard. He glanced down at the caller ID.

unKNOWN.

It looked as though the Agency were back in business.



TEARS FELL FROM Sam's cheeks, dripping onto the slope of his naked breasts.

"Please..."

His voice was merely a defeated whisper now, almost inaudible. He watched as Gaul readied a pair of jumper cables, hard-wired into the yacht's mains supply.

He stood in front of Sam, grinning inanely, several teeth missing. He made a show of opening the alligator clips as his black eyes glanced at Sam's protruding nipples. Gaul's shoulders jerked as he began a wheezing laugh that whistled through his missing teeth. Sam trembled as he tapped one electrode against the other, sending a shower of sparks down to the floor.

Sam braced himself...

Suddenly a deafening boom echoed through the vessel, shaking its very structure in a rapid tremor. The yacht began to list immediately, the floor tilting. Sam's chair fell to the side, the weak wood splintering beneath him as even Gaul struggled to keep his footing.

Sam felt dizzy as a high pitched ringing echoed in his ears.

What the hell was that?

Had they hit something?

Sam looked up to see Gaul slapping at his own head, clearly disorientated. As Sam's hearing returned he could hear an alarm siren wailing throughout the yacht.

Sam kicked his legs, quickly pulling free of the broken fragments of chair. With surprising suppleness, he managed to slip his legs under his bound arms so that they were no longer held behind his back.

"Gaul..." Sam began, struggling to his high-heeled feet, finding his voice still weak. "Gaul! Do you hear that? We need to get out of here!"

Gaul pushed away from the wall, standing upright, his body leaning forward against the disturbing incline of the deck. He brought the jumper leads up threateningly, as he took slow steps up toward Sam.

Sam's eyes widened as he backed up, his high heels clicking against the wooden flooring. He watched as water began to rise up under the door, quickly enveloping the floor behind Gaul.

The yacht was *sinking!*

Gaul took another lurching step forward, water beginning to lap at his feet, the jumpers sparking as he touched them together. Sam felt the far wall pressing against his back. He had nowhere left to run.

In those final moments it seemed as if Sam's body instinctively took over. He pushed hard with his legs away from the wall, vaulting himself forwards and upwards. His bound hands came up, grasping the cord of the single light that hung precariously from the ceiling.

It held his weight.

He swung, thrusting his legs forward into Gaul's body. His momentum was not enough in itself and he rebounded back onto the hard wooden floor. However, the incline of the deck, as well as the sharp jab of Sam's high heels into Gaul's abdomen, was enough to topple him.

The man-mountain slipped back, sending a plume of water up around him. Sam scrabbled up the tilted floor, away from Gaul, watching as the electrified jumper cables came down into the water.

The overhead light flickered, the water hissing with steam as Gaul's body jerked and spasmed.

Sam gasped for breath, pulling his knees up to his chest, watching as Gaul's body twitched for the final time. The water level rose, submerging his black unblinking eyes.

SAM GASPED FOR breath, quickly buttoning his shirt over the tattered remains of his bikini top. He fumbled with the ankle straps of his pink high heeled sandals, pulling them free of his small feet, watching as they slid down into the water. He gingerly stepped his bare feet forwards, testing the water with the snapped end of a chair leg.

Once he had convinced himself it was safe, Sam waded forwards, the sea water icy cold as it crept up his smooth bare legs. He struggled with the door, using every ounce of strength his female body had, to wedge it open against the weight of the water beyond.

The corridor was flooded and tilted sideways. Smoke roiled across the ceiling, the lighting panels visible as only a dim haze above. Sam's breath was shallow and rapid as he waded waist deep into the corridor, his arms held wide to balance on the uneven floor.

The alarm echoed louder throughout the yacht, mixing with the groan of twisting metal and rushing water. Sam coughed against the acrid smoke that caught in his lungs. He pulled himself to the spiral stair case, hefting himself up out of the water, the lower half of his shirt now soaked through. He didn't know what was happening, but knew he had to get to the top deck, or else go down with the sinking yacht. He hurriedly clambered up the stairs on all fours.

The mid-level was at least still dry, though still listed ominously to one side like some twisted funhouse. Sam stepped barefoot onto the carpet, looking to the far end of the corridor as the lights strobed beneath the dark smoke above him.

A figure all in black was partially illuminated. Sam watched as they stepped slowly forward out of the gloom, brandishing a weapon, their face obscured by a mask and goggles. They paused momentarily, their head tilted to one side, surprised to see him, before bringing their rifle to bear, aiming directly at Sam.

Sam was still so shell-shocked from all that happened that he froze, rooted to the spot, trembling. As much as he wanted to run, his legs now just refused to move.

A shot rang out through the corridor.

SAM SHRIEKED, BRINGING his hands up to his mouth in shock, as the figure in black slumped to the floor, rolling with the sideways tilt of the corridor.

The grey clouds of smoke parted as Joseph emerged, a smoking pistol in his hand. He looked down at the body, then up towards Sam.

"Antoinette!" He inched forward, reaching down to exchange his pistol for the dead man's machine gun, throwing the shoulder strap up over his head. "Thank god you're still alive. We've got to get out of here. We've been attacked."

"By who?" Sam mustered at last, his voice unsteady, his whole body shaking.

Joseph jogged towards Sam, his white vest now blackened and damp. He grasped Sam by his slender wrist, pulling him along behind him. Sam's legs finally began to move, taking hurried steps to match Joseph's longer strides, his unrestrained breasts bouncing under his shirt.

"It's Scarlet. Seems they've finally decided to make a move on Ramirez."

Joseph guided Sam to a ladder which led to the upper deck. His strong arms lifted Sam's small body half way up, leaving Sam to only climb a few more steps to the open deck above. As Sam ascended, he looked down. Water had just begun to seep into the middle deck as Joseph stepped onto the ladder.

THE NIGHT AIR was cold and Sam's long hair picked up in the breeze as he stepped out onto the deck. He automatically offered a hand to help Joseph as he followed close behind, though he soon realised that his small body would not prove much assistance to the larger man.

Sam's eyes struggled to adjust in the darkness. The sea below was inky black, with only the ripple of moonlight on its surface to distinguish it from the dark sky above.

The *Oro del Diablo* groaned as it continued its slow, awkward slide into the waters below. Smoke billowed from its port side, the flicker of orange flame across its hull.

Sam spun around. Piercing search lights swung towards them from two nearby vessels, dazzling them both.

"Come on!" Joseph took Sam's hand, leading him along the starboard side of the yacht, ducking out of the view of the search-lights. "We need to get to the jet-ski, it's our only chance."

"But what about the others?" Sam shouted above the roar of engines as the surrounding boats scrambled to find them. He swept a hand through his blonde hair, holding it from the strong breeze.

You mean Eduardo?" Joseph instantly dismissed their captors. "I wish we had time, but the lower decks will all be flooded by now."

Sam shuddered. He felt so sorry for Eduardo and wished that they could have helped him, but Joseph was right. They would be lucky to get away themselves as it was.

They found the jet-ski, bobbing in the water beside the yacht, still held by the now slackened chains of the winch.

"Get on!" Joseph peered over the edge of the yacht. "Before the boats come back around."

Sam didn't hesitate. Joseph helped him over the side railing, and he awkwardly climbed over the seat of the jet-ski. Joseph looked nervously around them as he released the chains of the winch from the yacht.

A bullet ricocheted above Joseph's head and he quickly ducked, bringing his rifle up. Sam watched as Joseph's determined face lit up with the muzzle flash from his weapon, blindly returning fire.

Sam reached down with a shaking hand, turning the key of the jet-ski. Its small motor hummed into life between his legs.

"Joseph, quick! Come on!" Sam's feminine voice was all but swept away with the rush of the sea and the roar of engines, as the invading boats loomed closer.

"Just go! I'll have to draw their fire away from you. They'll pick you off otherwise."

Sam couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"No, we can still make it!"

Sam jumped as Joseph traded more rounds with his unseen attacker, the gunfire snapping loudly in the night air.

Joseph shouted again, “Antoinette, I’m making a choice. The right one, this time.”

Sam could see the look in his eyes, the sadness returning. He knew that there would be no changing his mind. Not this time.

Sam’s eyes began to well as he revved the engine of the jet-ski, pulling away from the yacht, quickly accelerating up to its top speed. He didn’t look back. *Couldn’t* look back.

There was another round of gunfire.

Then there was nothing.



Sam’s eyes began to well as he revved the engine of the jet-ski, pulling away from the yacht, quickly accelerating up to its top speed. He didn’t look back. *Couldn’t* look back.

THE JET-SKI'S ENGINE whined as Sam brought the vehicle round in a wide arc. The twinkling lights of Civitavecchia began to grow closer.

Water sprayed up around him, his long hair trailing behind him, his white shirt flapping with the speed. He urged the jet-ski onwards, into the night, wishing to go faster still, away from the chaos that lay behind him.

The attacking boats did not seem to be pursuing him. Joseph had done it. He'd diverted their attention and saved Sam's life. It was a debt he would never have the chance to repay.

The coastline drew nearer. Sam could now see that the lights belonged to yachts and cruise liners, streetlamps, houses, and cafés.

Civilization.

He felt like he'd been away for weeks, not the scant couple of days that it had been. So much had happened. Sam began to scan for a pier, somewhere where he might be able to moor the jet-ski.

He didn't even see the fishing boat.

All he heard was the crunch of metal as he clipped its bow, the spinning jet-ski throwing him like a rag doll into the black icy waters.

SCARLET

CHAPTER SIX

A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK



"TIME TO WAKE up, sleepy head!"

Sam awoke to a female voice, his eyes blinking. Sunlight streamed into the room as curtains were thrown open, casting the woman in a hazy silhouette. Sam shifted in the bed, pulling himself up into a sitting position, the covers falling from his bare chest.

His body...

Sam ran his hands over his flat chest.

What the hell?

Sam stared down in disbelief, his hands roaming across his masculine body, then up to sweep through his straggly, sandy colored hair. He thrust a hand down underneath the covers, his eyes closing, his mouth forming a half-smile as he cupped his crotch, cradling his male appendage.

"Is everything okay?" The woman spoke again, stepping forwards, slowly coming into focus.

"Lenore?" Sam's voice was reassuringly masculine and rich with his Philly accent.

"Who else would it be?" Sam's girlfriend stepped forwards, her green eyes sparkling as she sat down next to him on the bed. The light from the window cast a halo around her long brown hair. She reached out with her slender hand, stroking at Sam's head.

"I... I had the strangest dream..." Sam began, trying to recall all that had happened.

"Had? Or *having?*" Lenore's voice was like silk, as if she were whispering straight into Sam's ear.

"What do you mean?"

Lenore lent closer. "Maybe you haven't woken up yet..."

Sam watched as Lenore's face began to dissolve, the room beginning to fall away around her into a black emptiness.

"SIGNORINA, MI SENTI?"

Sam awoke to a female voice, his eyes blinking. A shard of light fell across the room through a window on the far wall. He sat up from the bed with a start, still reeling from his vivid dream, feeling the tug of gravity on his heavy breasts as they shifted on his chest. He looked down at the feminine contours of his body, his long hair draping around his face.



"I... I had the strangest dream..." Sam began, trying to recall all that had happened.



"Where am I?" Sam began in his soft French accented voice.

"Grazie a Dio! Ero preoccupato per te."

Sam looked up at the woman standing expectantly before him, her hands perched on her wide hips. He tugged protectively on the bed sheets, pulling them higher over his naked female body, drawing his feet up towards him on the bed.

"Where am I?" Sam began in his soft French accented voice.

"You... speak English?"

Sam nodded.

The woman looked surprised. She was perhaps in her late forties, a little over-weight, olive-skinned with long dark hair reaching to the lower half of her back. She was dressed in earthy tones; a dark rust colored vest top and a long brown skirt that ended at her ankles.

"La mia casa... You in my house. My name is Gabriella."

Sam ran a hand through his mess of blonde hair. His whole body ached as he struggled to remember what had happened to him.

Water... Drowning...

His cough wheezed from deep within his chest.

Gabriella stepped forward, gently sitting down next to Sam on the bed. Her light brown eyes looked into his. She took his slender hand, stroking it softly.

"My husband... He pull you from water. Bring you here." Her broken English was thick with her Italian accent.

Sam closed his eyes, remembering the jet-ski and the smoking remains of the yacht that he had left behind.

"I hit something..." he recalled at last.

Gabriella looked down at the floor, looking embarrassed. "I tell him... I say Federico, you fix light on boat. He no listen." Her eyes darted, too ashamed to look at him.

"It doesn't matter," Sam reassured the woman. "I mean, I'm fine... Aren't I?"

"You sleep all night and most of day but... "

"Well, nothing feels broken." Sam swung his long legs from the bed, still holding the bed sheet above his chest.

"No, no, you rest. We look after you." Gabriella stood up, looking flustered. "You like soup? I make soup."

Sam gave a polite smile as she let herself out, closing the wooden door behind her.



SAM CAREFULLY STOOD up, the bed sheet wrapped around his naked female body. He instantly felt dizzy, his legs wobbling, feeling weak. He stumbled a few steps, his bare legs brushing together as his hands sought support from the nearest wall. He pulled himself over to a small white vanity table, leaning down to the mirror positioned along its rear edge. He wiped a hand across its dusty surface.

Sam's heart sank. His dream had seemed so real that it came as a bitter disappointment to see a feminine face peering back at him. He rubbed his hands against his smooth cheeks. There was no longer any trace of his make-up and his hair was loose and unkempt. As Maria Ramirez would doubtless have pointed out, he looked like shit.

Sam looked away, sparing a thought to Maria. To Carlos. Eduardo...

Joseph.

He did not know if any of them were still alive, and despite the awfulness of all that he had endured at the hands of Carlos and Maria, he still felt sorrow for them.

Especially Joseph. If it hadn't been for Joseph's selfless act he would never have got away.

Sam recalled his escape from Gaul, wading through waist deep icy sea water, as smoke had filled the corridors. He remembered the armed, masked man that had boarded the yacht.

Then Joseph had come for him. Taking charge, he had brought Sam to safety, buying him the time he needed to escape on the jet-ski. He owed him so much.

Sam turned from the mirror. The bedroom was small and faded pink paint flaked from the



Sam's heart sank. His dream had seemed so real that it came as a bitter disappointment to see a feminine face peering back at him.

walls. A battered white wardrobe stood in one corner, with the small bed that Sam had slept in occupying the opposite corner. He looked around for his clothes, or what little he had been wearing before the accident, but could not find them anywhere. Sam wasn't sure he liked the idea that he had been undressed by a stranger, but Gabriella had seemed harmless enough.

Sam shuffled over to the small window, his limbs aching. He felt battered and bruised. He was tired and worn out, with nothing left to give. He unbolted the window, throwing it open, a welcome breeze hitting his face. He closed his eyes, bathing in the sunlight and the fresh air. He took a deep breath, his chest swelling beneath the bed sheet that he wore.

After a full minute, Sam opened his eyes. Surprisingly, things felt a little different. He straightened his aching back, his tired eyes opening wider.

Civitavecchia.

Sam looked out of the window to the narrow road below. A moped honked its horn as it drove slowly, avoiding a group of people that walked freely in the quiet street. Washing lines criss-crossed the road with the building opposite, all yellow-walled with colourful shuttered windows. Sam could smell the salt of the sea on the air and hear the call of seagulls in the distance. They couldn't be too far in from the coast.

In his moment of rejuvenation, Sam thought instead to what had been accomplished. Despite all that had happened to him, he had completed his mission and obtained a copy of Carlos Ramirez's database. He could only imagine what the Agency would say when he presented them with the names and locations of everyone that Ramirez had been trafficking. Maybe they'd even offer him a promotion, though Sam had every intention of quitting the Agency at his earliest convenience. He'd had quite enough adventure for one lifetime. Once he had his body back, he was out of there.



SAM SAT ON the bed, still wrapped in his bed sheet as he sipped at the hot vegetable soup, holding his blonde hair to one side with one hand. He still found his body's tastes to be slightly off from what he would expect, but he was hungry and knew that he needed to eat to get his strength back.

Gabriella had busied herself around the room, still clearly distraught with guilt about what had happened. She had apologised profusely for not taking Sam to a hospital, but she had feared that her husband's fishing license would be taken away from him if the authorities found out.

Sam wasn't too worried. Aside from some aching limbs and a cough, he felt mostly fine. Well, as fine as a man could who had swapped bodies with a woman, been coerced into sex with a notorious drug baron, and then nearly killed on a sinking yacht.

Sam watched as Gabriella brought in a vase of fresh pink tulips, setting them down on the window sill. She turned, happy to see Sam beginning to eat the soup.

"You will need clothes," she began, "My daughter, she at college and leave some things." She gestured towards the wooden wardrobe, then smiled, patting at her chest. "She big on top, like you!"

Sam felt his cheeks blush. He certainly wouldn't miss his breasts when, and if, he eventually swapped back to his own body. They pulled heavily at his chest and constantly got in the way, moving and swaying with his every movement. Not to mention the stares that they had drawn from the likes of Carlos and Maria. Even Rivers and Joseph had been unable to help themselves.

Gabriella looked at Sam as he took another spoonful of soup, watching him like a concerned mother.

"When you ready, we have bathtub across the hall."

"Thank you," Sam gave a quick smile. He felt strangely unused to acts of outright kindness. He found that he had grown suspicious, expecting some hidden agenda. However, Gabriella seemed genuinely to care and Sam found himself gradually beginning to relax in her presence.

She brought a towel for him then left him to finish his soup.

SAM SAT ON the edge of the old white ceramic bathtub, swirling the water with his slender hand, testing the temperature. He turned off the steel taps and stood, unfolding the fresh white towel from his feminine body, letting it fall to the floor.

He stood naked, looking down at his breasts, his protruding nipples thick and pink. Looking down further, Sam's trim waist tapered inwards. A large bruise marked his left side, proving sensitive to the touch. His hips curved gracefully outwards, framing the shaved slit of his vagina. His long legs were shapely, though marked with a few grazes and bruises.

Sam eased his aching body down into the hot water, an audible sigh escaping his lips. He lay back, closing his eyes, as his mind wandered.



Sam took a bar of soap from the ledge at the side of the bathtub, lifting a leg out of the water as he began to rub the suds into his soft thigh. He could hear the sound of water trickling into the tub as it drained from his leg.

Despite Gabriella's hospitality, he knew that he couldn't stay for too long. For all he knew, those Scarlet soldiers were out there looking for him now. He was, after all, a surviving witness to the attack on the yacht. Sam still shuddered uneasily when he mentally pictured the armed figure on the yacht, raising his rifle at him.

Sam still didn't know exactly what Scarlet wanted with Ramirez, only that they had proved to be a constant thorn in his side. He remembered Ramirez's words — that they wanted the *world to burn* — though that did not help him very much. Surely the Agency knew something about them. Not for the first time, Sam began to get the sinking feeling that Rivers and the Agency had withheld information from him.

Sam took a bar of soap from the ledge at the side of the bathtub, lifting a leg out of the water as he began to rub the suds into his soft thigh. He could hear the sound of water trickling into the tub as it drained from his leg.

Sam hoped that Rivers had received the text message that he had sent from the yacht, letting him know where he was, though he knew he could not rely on it. For all he knew, Rivers may have chased Antoinette half way around the world by now. No, he would have to find his own way out of the country, which would be easier said than done given his lack of identity and money.

Sam lowered his leg back into the water, watching as the soap dissolved, turning the water cloudy.



SAM PADDED BAREFOOT across the hall, heading back towards the guest bedroom, leaving small wet foot prints in his wake across the wooden floor boards. He wore a white towel wrapped around his small body and rubbed at his long wet hair with another, smaller towel.

Sam could hear Gabriella downstairs and was relieved that he now had some time to himself. He closed the bedroom door behind him as he entered, and sat himself down onto the vanity table's cushioned stool. His hips splayed outwards as he sat and he automatically crossed one leg over the other.

Sam stared at his reflection, his young, female face staring back at him. His flawless skin still glowed from the heat of the bath. There were a few brushes and cosmetics left on the vanity, presumably left behind by Gabriella's daughter. Sam took the opportunity to brush his damp hair backwards, tying it with a length of pink ribbon that he found in a sewing box in one of the drawers. Now that he didn't have Maria Ramirez watching over him, Sam could afford to relax his efforts a little.

Sam turned his head from side to side, observing the angles of his face, checking his hair was smooth. He rubbed at the dark lines that had formed under his eyes, wondering if he could do anything about them.

Sam turned his attention to an old cosmetic bag and emptied its contents out onto the table. He found a small pot of concealer cream and twisted open the lid, finding its contents still moist. He dabbed an index finger into it and began to rub the beige liquid under his eyes.

That was better. His face looked fresher, more youthful, and less like he'd spent half the day unconscious.

Sam absently toyed with the other cosmetics, staring down at mascara brushes, lipsticks and blushers. Back on the yacht, Sam had surprised himself with just how readily he had managed to pick up Maria's techniques. He wondered if he could still manage

it now, after everything else that had happened. He had actually found it quite relaxing before, almost therapeutic. He could certainly do with that right now.

Sam leant into the mirror, unscrewing the cap of a light tinted mascara. He took a deep breath and began to flick the brush over his long eyelashes. He blinked his eyes a couple of times. They looked better already. He continued with each eye, first the upper lashes, then the lower, drawing them out with quick gentle flicks.

He switched now to an eye shadow brush, working in some subtle shading above each eye. He could already feel his pulse calming, his body relaxing, his mind distracted from the turmoil of the world around him.

Sam continued, using a light pink blush to brighten his cheeks a little, the soft blusher caressing his soft face.

Finally, after discarding a couple that had dried out, Sam managed to find a still serviceable lipstick. He twisted the end, and brought the stick to his lips, pouting slightly so that he could evenly apply the color. It was a subtle shade that slightly brightened the natural coloring of his lips and left them looking moist.

Sam screwed the top back onto the lipstick and looked into the mirror, taking in the finished result. His hair was now neatly tied back with a pink ribbon, which he had tied into a bow. His eyes now popped, looking defined and accentuated by the subtle mascara and eye shadows. His cheek bones now had pinkish tint to them and his lips looked full and moist.

Although he hadn't done anything much, the result was still effective. He beheld an almost innocent beauty, as if all that had happened to him had been hidden away behind a mask.

"Parfait." Sam remarked aloud, his lips forming perfectly nuanced French. Somehow he felt calmer... *lighter*... almost losing himself in a world of his own.

He barely heard the knock at the bedroom door.



SAM CLUTCHED AT the towel that he still wore around his feminine body as he opened the door to Gabriella.

She was smiling broadly and fidgeted, unable to suppress her bubbling emotions.

"Signorita! There is a man here to see you!"

Sam stopped suddenly, then took a step backwards, retreating back into the room. A *man?* He could feel the hairs beginning to go up at the back of his neck.

"It is your boyfriend!" Gabriella's smile lit up her face as she stepped to one side.

Sam was in a daze. He thought he was safe, at least for the moment. But it wasn't over. Someone had found him.

Sam's blue eyes widened as the man stepped through into the room.

"MIKE!"

Sam ran forwards, embracing Rivers, his breasts pressing into his waist from beneath his towel, his head against his broad chest. Rivers' hands slowly came up, embracing Sam's small feminine body.

"Hey honey, did you miss me?"

Sam pulled away, suddenly aware of what he was doing, feeling instantly awkward. He renewed his grip on his bath towel so as not to lose it. Rivers grinned down at him.



Sam ran forwards, embracing Rivers, his breasts pressing into his waist from beneath his towel, his head against his broad chest. Rivers' hands slowly came up, embracing Sam's small feminine body.

"Giovane amore!" Sam turned back at the sound of Gabriella's voice. She smiled warmly at them both, her hands clasped at her breast. "I leave you alone." The wooden door clicked shut, leaving Sam alone with Rivers.

"Je ne peux pas croire que tu m'as trouvé!" Sam began excitedly in his feminine, French accented voice.

"Woah, slow down! What did you just say?"

"What?" Sam hesitated. "Wait, I just spoke French again didn't I?"

"Oh yes!" Rivers beamed down at him. "Very sexy!"

Sam felt himself blush. He had almost forgotten the moment on the yacht when he had been working at Carlos Ramirez's computer. He had just started to find himself in the *zone*, his computer skills almost taking over, working on a near sub-conscious level, when it had all suddenly slipped away from him. Sam had instead been left uttering perfect phrases of French in place of his usual programming skills.

Sam shook his head, concentrating on his words this time.

"I've... I've got so much to tell you. But I did it Mike, I *actually* did it!"

"That's great Sam," Rivers clasped Sam's slender shoulders, his voice now sounding oddly muted as if he were withholding bad news.

Sam stepped back, out of Rivers reach, holding onto the tied knot of his towel. "What's wrong? Rivers? You found her right? You found Antoinette?"

Rivers sighed, beginning to pace the small room. He stopped to look out of the open window, sweeping a hand through the tulips that sat on the ledge. "We're still tracking her..."

Sam had to sit down onto the bed before he fell down. He had really thought that Rivers would have apprehended Antoinette by now. They'd been on many missions together and he had always got his man... or *woman.*

Always.

Sam looked down, seeing his cleavage swell beneath his bath towel. He had almost convinced himself that he had come to the end of his tenure in Antoinette's female body.



MIKE RIVERS WATCHED as Sam sat, his blue eyes staring into space, his cupid lips hung open as he struggled to take in the news. He stroked his hands repeatedly through his long blonde ponytail which was tied behind his head with a pink bow. Despite his concern for his friend, Rivers couldn't help but glance down at Sam's curvaceous body, wrapped in a soft white towel, his exposed skin moist from bathing.

"So what about *you?*" Rivers' picked his voice back up to its usual canter, sensing that Sam's mood had darkened. "To be honest, I was pretty surprised when I got your text. I thought you'd be floating face-down in the Mediterranean Sea by now." He grinned, knowing that it would rile his partner.

"Oh, I'm glad you find this funny! If you must know, I was nearly fucking killed! Several times!" Rivers smiled at Sam's French accented outburst. His beautiful feminine face was doing its best to look angered as he continued, "How *did* you find me, anyway?"

"Are you kidding? Half the town is talking about the mystery blonde who crash landed into shore last night. Not the most inconspicuous of arrivals if you ask me."

Rivers watched as Sam absently crossed one leg over the other as he sat. His movements seemed even more naturally feminine than he had remembered. Rivers lent against a table, the wood creaking beneath his weight. He idly picked up a tube of lipstick from the table top, then glanced over at Sam, seeing the same pinkish tone on his full moist lips. Rivers smiled to himself. Sam was really getting into this.



Rivers watched as Sam absently crossed one leg over the other as he sat. His movements seemed even more naturally feminine than he had remembered.

"Rivers?" Sam was quick to interrupt Rivers' thoughts. "The yacht was attacked last night, I was lucky to get away before it sank."

"*Attacked?* By *who?*" Rivers folded his arms, watching Sam.

"A group called Scarlet? Ramirez had seemed pretty worked up about them."

"Scarlet?" Rivers paused, his eyes roaming the room as he came to a decision. "Listen, Sam, there's something you should probably know. Antoinette is working for Scarlet."

Sam looked shocked. He uncrossed his legs as he looked up at Rivers with disbelief. "I knew it! I knew there was more to it. Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I told you we suspected her of working for another organization."

"You didn't *suspect* anything. You *knew!*" Sam shot a look like daggers at Rivers.

"The Agency had it on need to know. You didn't need to know." Rivers held up his hands defensively.

"Rivers, she *stole* my body! I think I *deserved* to know!"

"I know, I know, that's why I'm telling you now." Rivers walked over, sitting down next to Sam on the bed. He looked deep into his blue eyes. "All we know is that somehow, Scarlet learnt of our mission in Monaco. They knew we were scouting out Carlos Ramirez, so they slipped an agent in. Antoinette was just hitching a ride with Ramirez so that she could get to us... to the Agency..."

"But who *are* Scarlet? What do they want?"

"They're a group of terrorists," Rivers exhaled. "Anarchists would be more accurate. They're a growing world-wide group, rebelling against world order, governments, companies, any major organization that seeks to impose its will on others."

"Like Ramirez..." Sam pondered.

"It would seem that no-one is safe. They usually use covert agents, slipping them into influential positions, spending years in a role, slowly causing destabilisation from within. The recessions and debts in Europe? It's all been Scarlet."

"I can't believe this." Rivers watched as Sam stared down at the floor. "So that's why they've developed this screwy mind-switching stuff?"

"Exactly." Rivers carefully checked Sam's reactions, making sure he was following his lead. "Of course, it's not all covert stuff, they have soldiers as well. Sometimes they'll just use good old-fashioned brute force to further the cause."

"Tell me about it, I've still got the bruises to prove it." Sam twisted, raising his towel, showing Rivers the side of his right thigh.

Rivers' gaze lingered on Sam's bare leg, drifting higher. Sam's face flushed red and he quickly pulled the towel back down. There was an awkward silence. Rivers watched as Sam nervously went back to stroking his ponytail.

"Okay, so Scarlet want to take down the Agency," Sam continued, "But why me? I don't exactly hold an *influential position.*"

"Are you sure about that?" Rivers' knew that it was time to lay on the pressure. "Are you sure there's nothing you want to be telling me?"

Sam looked up at Rivers. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Rivers stood, beginning to pace again with his frustration.

"Damn it Sam! Yesterday, Antoinette used one of your laptops to initiate a download of the Agency database."

Sam looked visibly shaken. "Oh my god... How is that possible?"

Rivers shrugged his shoulders, "You're the computer expert, you tell me." His eyes held Sam's for a moment. "Last night, just before I arrived here, I got a call from Director Millar. After analysing the database theft, you know what they found? Your fingerprints that's what. All over the system. You coded in your own back door to the network, didn't you!"

Sam began to tremble, his voice wavering. "I... I didn't think it would be that big a deal..."

"Antoinette used that code, along with your fingerprint to hack in to the system. You've compromised the whole Agency!"

Sam rubbed at his hands. Rivers could sense that he was struggling to take it all in. He looked up at Rivers. "How did she know the code?"

"I don't know..." Rivers held up his hands. "Maybe there are some aspects of the transference that we didn't account for. Maybe you got the killer body and the *français*, and she got the codes. But does it matter? It's happened."

Rivers reached down into his pants pocket. "Listen Sam, I came here in case you were in trouble, but since then my orders have changed..."

Rivers produced a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, the metal clinking as he held them up in front of him.

"I've been asked to bring you in."



SAM WATCHED, HIS mouth hung open in shock, as Rivers tossed the handcuffs onto the bed beside him.

"Now, I know I'm not gonna have to use those... *Am I?*" Rivers' tone was serious and business-like.

"Of...of course not," Sam stammered. "You're serious about this right? This isn't another one of your jokes?"

"I wish it were, but as far as the Agency are concerned you've violated a pretty major law doing what you did."

"It was just a small piece of code... You know, just in case we ever needed it in an emergency... I never thought it would hurt anyone." Sam hung his head, his blonde ponytail falling across the upper slope of his covered breasts.

"Do you have any idea what might happen now if Scarlet expose the Agency? We're supposed to be a top-level covert organization. Even the CIA barely knows we exist."

Sam could feel his pulse rising, his chest beginning to heave beneath his bath towel. "Well maybe that's the whole problem right there. I mean... Is it even legal the way the Agency runs things?"

"Fields, this isn't the time to be debating the legality and ethics of the Agency. We waivered that right when we signed our contracts." Rivers looked exasperated. "Now look, I've got a guy waiting downstairs. You'll go with him. He'll get you out, take you back to the States."

"No!" Sam stood up, gripping his towel, his eyes beginning to glisten. "I'm not leaving until we find Antoinette!"

"If I don't turn you over, they're gonna pull us both from the mission. Then, by the time they bring in a new team, Antoinette's as good as gone."

"So you know where she is?" Sam looked at Rivers hopefully.

"The database download was initiated from a location in Rome. That was yesterday. And all *this?* What we're doing now? It's just wasting even more time."

Sam sighed. He didn't know what else to say. It was over. Even if Rivers did then find Antoinette and he got his body back, he'd likely be facing time in a Federal prison.

"I better get dressed..." Sam offered at last.



SAM OPENED THE old wooden wardrobe, using its large door as a privacy screen from Rivers, who now lay back against the bed on the opposite side of the room, his fingers laced behind his head as he waited.

For one fleeting moment Sam had felt relief and happiness at being reunited with Rivers. Sam had completed his half of the mission and he firmly believed that Rivers would have good news as well. But yet again everything had changed. Antoinette was still at large, working for Scarlet, and now armed with everything she needed to bring down the Agency. But despite all of that, Sam could only think about his stolen body.

His *identity*...

For Sam it was personal, and he'd be damned if he was going to let Rivers and the Agency stop him from pursuing her.

Sam swept his arm through the hangers in the wardrobe. Gabriella's daughter hadn't left much behind, though he could probably still pull together an outfit from what was there. He checked one of the lower drawers, finding an assortment of clean feminine underwear.

Sam adjusted the wardrobe door, checking again that he was shielded from Rivers' wandering eyes as he began to untie the bath towel from around his chest.

"So are you gonna put on a show for me?" Rivers chuckled from the bed.

Sam was about to tell where Rivers where to go, when he stopped himself, his mind quickly racing.

Sure. He could do that. He could put on a show.



RIVERS FELT TORN.

He had argued long with Director Millar in the early hours of the morning, trying to protect Sam and convince the Agency chief to let them continue on together to find Antoinette. Millar was adamant however, that Sam be brought in to answer for his crimes — namely the security breach from coding in a personal back door to the network — but to Rivers it sounded too much like closing the stable door after the horse had bolted. The important thing right now was finding Antoinette and the stolen data as soon as possible. Having Sam at his side would only increase their chances of getting the job done. Millar had then countered that Sam would now be too personally involved. If it came down to it, Rivers could be expected to kill Antoinette, and having Sam there could be a risk. Rivers had finally conceded. He would send Sam back to the U.S. with Tanner, and continue the hunt alone.

Rivers watched from the bed, tilting his head slightly. All he could really see were Sam's small feminine feet below the wardrobe door, though the sight of his white towel dropping to the floor still caused him to sit up.

Rivers moistened his lips. Sam had bent over, the outer curve of his smooth, bare backside just about visible, protruding beyond the safety of the door. Rivers immediately felt a stirring within his pants. The enticing glimpse of naked flesh soon retreated back behind the door. Rivers quietly listened to the sound of fabric being pulled up over bare skin, finding himself imagining what the rest of Sam's naked female body might look like.

Rivers shook his head, trying to shrug off his natural male impulses and focus on the job at hand.

It came as a shock when Sam suddenly emerged from behind the screen of the wardrobe.

LONG, BARE LEGS slid sensuously one in front of the other. Wide hips swung provocatively from side to side. A heaving cleavage spilled from a half-cut, lilac-colored, satin and lace bra, with a matching lacy thong stretched to barely cover a perfectly smooth crotch.

Rivers watched, dumbfounded, as Sam flicked his ponytail over his shoulder.

"You know, I think I might actually be getting used to wearing female clothes." Sam's French accented voice sounded like honey, oozing with sensuality. He ran a finger around the edge of his bra cups, hefting his breasts to ensure an even fit.

Rivers cleared his throat, trying to find something to say. He drew his right leg up towards him on the bed, hiding the erection that now swelled beneath his pants.



"You know, I think I might actually be getting used to wearing female clothes." Sam's French accented voice sounded like honey, oozing with sensuality.

"Oh, I'm sorry." Sam looked over at Rivers, then down at his body. "I kind of got used to walking around like this on Ramirez's yacht."

"It... it's fine. I'm not complaining!" Rivers smiled, his eyes roaming Sam's curvaceous body. His body was stunning and his revealing lingerie left little to the imagination.

Sam turned, displaying his perfect peach-shaped backside, the string of the lilac thong running up between his tight, smooth buttocks. Rivers murmured to himself as he took in the vision before him, his eyes drifting up to the small tattoo on Sam's back, just above his panty line.

"So, uh... did you end up... you know..." Rivers could feel his heart beat pulsing in his ears.

"Did I have *sex?*" Sam turned back around, perching his hands on his hips, his blue eyes narrowing. "Actually, it turned out to be one of the more pleasurable aspects..."

Rivers excitedly repositioned himself on the bed. "I knew it! You *slut!* I knew you'd end up liking it!"

"Hey, watch your language!" Sam's full lips smiled over at him. "You know, It's a shame you're sending me off, otherwise I could have shown you some of the things I learnt." Rivers watched as Sam absently stroked a bra strap with his right hand.

Rivers gave a choking laugh, wagging his finger. "Oh no, see you're messing with me now. This is bullshit."

Sam stepped slowly forward, his hips swaying.

SAM'S HEART BEAT raced, thundering through his body. He cringed inwardly at what he had just said to Rivers, struggling to keep up the pretence. He felt enormously exposed and self-conscious as Rivers eyed his female body dressed only in his satin and lace underwear. Even so, he did his best to move his body slowly and sensuously towards the bed. He just hoped that Rivers was buying it. His flushed face and stupid grin certainly seemed to point that way.

Sam knelt on the edge of the bed, bringing a long bare leg over to straddle Rivers' body as his partner laid himself back on the bed. "Holy shit!" Rivers enthused beneath him. "I... I've been thinking about doing this ever since you swapped."



"You're a man. I'm... a *woman*." Sam slowly lowered himself onto Rivers, his panty covered crotch awkwardly pressing against the bulge in Rivers pants.

"You *have?*" Sam's voice wavered a little and he had to quickly reign his performance back in. "I mean, that's understandable. You're a man. I'm... a *woman*." He slowly lowered himself onto Rivers, his panty covered crotch awkwardly pressing against the bulge in Rivers pants. Sam winced, despite trying his best to disguise his unease.

Rivers large hands slid up Sam's bare waist, causing him to gasp as he pressed against his injured side. Sam took Rivers hands, their fingers lacing together. He leant forwards, placing Rivers hands up above his head, next to the grilled iron headboard. The forward movement unintentionally caused Sam's crotch to rub against Rivers.

"Mmm," Rivers groaned beneath Sam. "Taking control? I like it!" He glanced to the door. "What if *she* hears us?"

Sam put a finger to Rivers' mouth, hushing him. "We'll just have to be quiet."



RIVERS LOOKED UP at the beautiful blonde woman sat atop him. Her long blonde ponytail rested over her large breasts, which spilled from a revealing lilac brassiere. Her washboard flat stomach looked sexy as hell, and her skimpy satin thong stretched tight across her flat crotch. The thong bore a tiny pink bow in the middle of the waistband, matching the ribbon that she had used to tie her hair. She was everything that Ashley hadn't been back at the hotel.

Ever since Sam had swapped bodies with Antoinette, Rivers had felt a strong sexual draw to his transgendered partner. Sam had been so naively innocent about what a little sex kitten he'd become, leaving Rivers with a strong urge to break *her* in. It was that same thrill he felt when taking a girl's virginity, but compounded to something even more erotic. He felt a fierce urge to dominate her, to bring her around, convert her, to bring her struggling mind into line with her feminine body. It was the challenge of it that drew him and sent his testosterone surging.

Seeing Sam wearing make-up and sexy lingerie just added to the thrill.

And now here she was, her every movement causing her panty covered crotch to rub against his hardness. He longed to throw her down onto her back, tear off her panties and enter her, but instead she had pushed his hands away, unexpectedly assuming the dominant role.

Her fingernails raked across his chest and she lowered herself forward once more, her breasts lightly brushing against him, her lips hovering inches from his.

Rivers heard a metallic *click*, and realised immediately that he'd been had.



SAM SAT UP, watching as Rivers struggled with the handcuffs, his wrists now bound tightly to the iron headboard. He quickly dismounted and got up from the bed, just as Rivers' legs began to kick out.

"You *bitch!* Get these cuffs off of me!"

"Mike, I'm sorry! It was the only way I could think to get you to let your guard down."

Sam hurried back over to the wardrobe, his breasts threatening to spill free of his low-cut bra. He quickly pulled a pastel pink vest-top from the wardrobe, slipping it over his head, freeing his long hair, before tugging it down over his full chest. The top hugged his body, the neck line leaving a small amount of cleavage exposed. Sam then took a ruffled white skirt from a hanger and stepped into it, sliding it up over his wide hips and backside. He reached behind to zip up, then straightened the hem, the skirt coming to rest at mid-thigh.



"You *bitch!* Get these cuffs off of me!"

Sam tip-toed barefoot over to Rivers, the head board still clattering as he struggled to pull free. Sam carefully reached into Rivers' pants pocket to retrieve his car keys.

"Sam, come on! It's too dangerous for you to go it alone." Rivers looked up at him from the bed.

"I've done pretty well without you so far," Sam quickly retorted as he returned to the wardrobe. The truth was he'd felt abandoned ever since Rivers had left him to walk out to pier nine on his own back in Monaco. In the days since, Sam had learnt to become more self-reliant.

Sam reached down to the bottom of the wardrobe, retrieving a pair of strappy white high-heeled sandals. He would have preferred flats, but there was little else to choose from, at least not that matched his outfit.

Sam held both heels in one hand as he jogged over to the wooden door of the room, pausing briefly to look back at Rivers. He looked pretty pathetic laying there, his arms above his head, his pants still tented with his erection.

"Jerk." Sam offered at last, before hurrying into the hallway.



SAM RAN ALONG the hallway, his bare legs naturally slipping one in front of the other beneath his white skirt. His high heels knocked together as he carried them. Rivers called loudly from the bedroom and Sam feared that Gabriella would soon return, wondering what on earth was going on.

Sam reached the top of the staircase, gripping the handrail, just as a man stepped onto the lower-most step below. The man paused, looking up at Sam, his head cocked to one side as if taken by surprise. Sam slowly came to recognise the combat fatigues of the Agency's Black Ops division. It was the *other guy* that Rivers had spoken of — the one that was waiting to escort him back to the States.

Sam turned immediately, his long hair whipping around him. He could hear heavy, thundering boots, powering their way up the stairs after him. Sam ran back to the guest bedroom, slamming the door shut behind him.

"Tanner! She's in here!" Rivers called from the bed.

Barely acknowledging him, Sam hurried over to the open window, looking out to the road below. It was too far to jump. As he contemplated what to do, the bedroom door burst open.

Tanner stepped in, quickly assessing the situation. He glanced quickly to Rivers laid out on the bed, then to Sam. He raised a pistol.

"Step away from the window!"

For a moment, Sam had a dreadful flashback to the yacht, when the Scarlet soldier had emerged from the smoke, his rifle aimed and ready to fire. This time there would be no Joseph to save him.

Sam didn't hesitate. He scooped the vase of tulips from the window ledge, tossing it with surprising force towards Tanner. The vase shattered against Tanner's right hand, causing him to stagger backwards and drop his aim.

Sam took his chance and stepped up onto the window ledge, throwing his shoes down onto the street below, hearing them clatter against the cobbled paving slabs.

He then gripped the window frame and vaulted forwards.



THE CLOTHES LINE held his weight, bowing in the middle as Sam swung, the nylon rubbing abrasively against his palms. The pulley wheels either side of the street squealed as they relented to the extra weight, lowering Sam enough to drop the rest of the way to the road below.

Sam swore as he hit the ground, falling onto his side from the sudden impact. Looking up he could see Tanner looking down at him from the open window, as he pondered whether he could perform the same feat of acrobatics himself. He slapped the window ledge in frustration and disappeared back into the room.

Sam quickly pulled himself to his feet, just as some passing tourists caught up, asking if he was hurt. Sam didn't have time for pleasantries. He knew that Tanner would already be hurtling down the stairs. He quickly collected his high heeled sandals and took off, half limping from a pulled muscle.

Sam broke into a run, ignoring the pain. His short ruffled skirt bounced at his hips, his smooth bare legs freely brushing together. His arms swung naturally wide beside him, partly keeping balance and partly to clear his wider set hips. His breasts jolted with each step, restricted from their natural sway by the brassiere that he wore.

Sam made it to the first turning in the road and skidded to a halt. He looked one way and could see a parade of street-side cafés and restaurants, their patrons standing outside, beckoning passers-by to come in.

He quickly turned his head the other way, his pony tail flicking out behind him. He drew a sharp breath. There, mounted on the curb of the sidewalk, its white body work reflecting the afternoon rays of the sun...

Rivers' Lamborghini Gallardo.

SAM QUICKLY PULLED

Rivers' car remote from the pocket of his skirt, the indicator lights of the vehicle flashing as it unlocked. He pulled the wing-door open and tossed his heels into the passenger-side foot-well. He slid into the driver's seat of the Lamborghini, pulled the wing door back down, and quickly adjusted the rear view mirror to his smaller body.

He could see Rivers, now free from the handcuffs, along with Tanner, as they reached the turning in the road behind him.

The engine roared as Sam turned the ignition, pumping the accelerator with his bare foot. The car hummed, sending a deep vibration through his feminine body.



Sam slid into the driver's seat of the Lamborghini, pulled the wing door back down, and quickly adjusted the rear view mirror to his smaller body.

Sam threw the car into reverse gear, backing up toward them. He drove slowly enough for them to be able to dart out of the way, before quickly shifting into forward.

Sam could feel his body pressing back into the seat as the wheels spun, the car lurching forwards through the narrow back streets of Civitavecchia.



SAM COULD STILL feel his pulse racing as he joined the main highway, heading in a south-easterly direction towards Rome. He was glad to be free of the narrow town streets of Civitavecchia.

Now that he could relax a little, Sam pulled his seat belt on, though it sat awkwardly and painfully between his large breasts. Everything felt oversized, like he was a child that had stolen its father's car. The accelerator pedal felt large and heavy beneath his small bare foot, leaving him feeling *ever so slightly* out of control. His driving had been erratic to say the least and he had only narrowly avoided a collision with a market stall in Civitavecchia. Sam thought to whether there was some truth to the old joke about women drivers. In fact, he was just unused to his body, *and* unused to the car.

Sam raised his backside from the seat, reaching down with a free hand to tug his ruffled skirt back down. His hurry to get in the car earlier had caused his short skirt to ride up. That, coupled with the irritation of his thong between his buttocks, had left him squirming in his seat for most of the drive.

Sam jumped as a dull vibration and an electronic chime pierced the air. Glancing down he saw that it was Rivers' Agency cell phone, illuminating as a call came through. Rivers had left it in its cradle on the dashboard.

Damn.

Sam knew that they would be able to trace the signal given off from Rivers' phone. He quickly checked the rear view mirror in case he was being followed, then fumbled with the phone, struggling to turn it off with one hand still on the steering wheel.

Sam breathed a sigh of relief, slotting the powerless cell phone back into its cradle.

It felt like he was running away — away from Rivers and the Agency. He had to keep reminding himself that he had passed up the opportunity to run away, and was instead heading straight into the lion's den.

He didn't even know how he would find Antoinette, assuming even that she was still in Rome. He just knew he had to try. He'd come too far to give up now.

SCARLET

CHAPTER SEVEN

A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK



LORENZO DE LUCA found his grandmother's handbag on the kitchen side and pulled fifty euros worth of notes from her purse. He could already hear her shrieking from the living room.

"Don't be spending it on drugs, you hear? We need groceries! I swear if your grandfather were still alive he'd knock some sense into you." Her Italian was old school, bringing an added harshness to her words.

"Lay off Nonna, I've got this, okay?"

Lorenzo pocketed the money and stormed out of the apartment, heading out onto the streets. The truth was he'd been off the drugs for months now. He was through with stealing from his grandmother, yet still she wouldn't trust him. Still she would pour over the grocery receipt and count up the change to make sure he hadn't pocketed any of it. To be honest he couldn't blame her, given his past history. He just needed a chance to prove himself that was all.

Above him the leaves rustled in the trees that lined the suburban streets of his home town, located just outside of Rome. The Sun was now low in the sky as the afternoon marched onwards towards evening.

Lorenzo planted his hands deep into his pockets, walking fast with his head cast downwards, his shoulders bent. There were a couple of blocks he had to cross that were still largely controlled by his old gang. They hadn't taken too kindly to him turning over a new leaf and the last time he'd run into them he'd had the shit kicked out of him.

And they'd taken the grocery money...

Lorenzo decided instead to take a shortcut through the residential building site, slipping between a well-used gap in the rusted wire fence. He'd be able to cut through to the town centre without too much trouble.

Things had begun to change for Lorenzo after the funeral. His grandfather had been a pillar of the community, and the love and support offered by the church's congregation had really surprised him. They had taken Lorenzo under their wing, pointing him in the direction of support groups to help get his life back on track.

Lorenzo fingered the small silver pendant of the Madonna, that hung on a chain around his neck. He'd even begun to attend church every Sunday with his Nonna, though he wasn't quite sure if he was yet a believer. If there truly was an all-powerful and loving God, if there were such things as angels and archangels, then why was there so much suffering in the world? And why would he get mugged for his grocery money when he was trying so hard to turn things around?

Lorenzo was relieved when he finally emerged at the other side of the estate, re-joining the busier streets of the town centre. He jogged across the road, heading towards the mini-market, but was startled by the sudden howl of a car horn. He turned, dodging out of the way just in time, as a white sports car skidded, narrowly avoiding him.

Lorenzo cursed in his finest Italian.

It was probably some flash asshole, wanting to drive through the more deprived areas so that he could lord it up over the peasants. He watched as the car indicated, its powerful engine growling as it pulled up by the sidewalk. The driver side door swung open.

Lorenzo was fired up and strode over to the car, ready to have it out with its reckless driver.

What he saw next startled him.

It was an *Angel.*

SAM FIELDS SWUNG his long bare legs elegantly from the car, making sure to keep them together so as not to flash his panties to the increasing number of onlookers that had gathered around. As he stood, he smoothed his short ruffled skirt. He flicked his tied blonde hair back over his right shoulder, causing it to glint golden in the rays of the setting Sun.

"Oh my god, are you okay?" Sam hurried over to the young man, still barefoot, his breasts bouncing from under his pastel pink top. The boy was around eighteen or nineteen, tall and slim, his dark hair shaved close to match his neatly trimmed facial hair. He wore baggy slacks and a white vest top over his toned upper body.

Sam stared up at him, waiting for a response, though he seemed to be in a daze, staring back at him with a stupefied look of wonder. Sam quickly looked down at his own



Sam Fields swung his long bare legs elegantly from the car, making sure to keep them together so as not to flash his panties to the increasing number of onlookers that had gathered around.

body, wondering if he'd accidentally tucked his skirt into his panties, or something equally embarrassing. Everything checked out. He tried again, waving his hand in front of the dumbstruck boy.

"*Hello?*"

"You… are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," he answered at last with an Italian accent.

Sam was unsure how to respond and lowered his gaze, shuffling his bare feet. "Are you sure I didn't hit you?"

"You are an angel from heaven!" The young man took Sam's slender right hand, clasping it between his palms. "It is a sign!"

Sam looked around awkwardly at the parade of onlookers. They whispered to each other in Italian, some looking at him, some at the car. Some of the more daring individuals had come closer to inspect the Lamborghini, running their hands along its body work, as if to check it was real. Despite the car's rather dishevelled appearance, it was still an uncommon enough sight in the small town to draw attention. Much like Sam himself, it would seem.

"Look, you've got me all wrong." Sam pulled his hand away. "I've got to get going… I'm sorry I startled you… I haven't quite got used to driving with this… with this *car.*"

Sam knew that any delay would only increase the chances of him being found by Rivers and the Agency. Since leaving Civitavecchia, Sam had discovered Rivers' cell phone in the car and quickly realised that they would be able to track him from its signal. Sam had hurriedly turned the phone off and then veered off into some of the quieter suburban streets on his way to Rome, rather than keeping to the more obvious *Autostrada*.

Sam turned, sweeping a strand of loose hair from his cheek as he slipped gracefully back into the driver's seat of the Lamborghini. He reached up, pulling the wing door back down behind him, the excitement of the crowd reducing to a dim murmur behind him.

"*Oh!*" Sam gasped, bringing a hand to his chest as the young man helped himself to the passenger side of the car, slipping into the low-set leather seat beside him. "What are you *doing?*" Sam quickly demanded in his feminine French accented voice.

"I cannot let you go, my angel. We were meant to meet like this, I am sure of it!" Sam watched as he absently rubbed at a silver pendant that hung around his neck.

This was the last thing he needed.

"Look… I'm no angel. In fact, I'm in a lot of people's bad books at the moment."

"Just like Lorenzo here! I have plenty of books myself. I am thinking we are here to help each other."

Sam sighed, placing his slender hands on the steering wheel, wondering if the Agency ever came up with an ejector seat for the vehicle. He glanced up at the rear view mirror, catching sight of his blue-eyed reflection, his mascara covered eye lashes fluttering as he blinked.

It was actually kind of amusing how men just seemed to fall over themselves when presented with an attractive woman. He'd been just as guilty of doing it himself over the years. And it all came down to sex. It was that vain shred of hope that the woman in question would not consider you pandering and pathetic, and instead decide to drop her panties for you. Now that Sam was on the receiving end of the attention, it seemed pretty ridiculous.

Sam knew that he wouldn't have much luck trying to forcefully evict Lorenzo from the car, but he had come to realise that he held a different kind of power now as a woman. It was the same subtle power that had spared his life several times on the yacht, and that had enabled him to escape from Rivers back in Civitavecchia. He looked over to Lorenzo, who fidgeted excitedly in his seat, his eyes darting. Sam drew a deep breath, his chest swelling beneath his pastel pink top.

"Okay, Lorenzo... Maybe you're right. Maybe we *can* help each other." Sam fixed Lorenzo with a half-smile as he turned the ignition.

AS THEY DROVE, Sam could not help but look out at the run-down buildings that made up the small town. It certainly wouldn't have made the holiday brochures, despite its proximity to Rome. He knew neighborhoods like this back in Philadelphia. Kids growing up there barely had a chance against the gangs and drug culture that pervaded.

Sam glanced over at Lorenzo who seemed to have grown fascinated with the car, working the electric windows, the radio, even the heated seats - like a child with a new toy. Sam still wasn't quite sure how he had ended up with the strange young Italian in his car, but he had the beginnings of a plan to use the situation to his advantage.

"How much money have you got on you?" Sam asked, checking his rear view mirror as he joined the main flow of traffic heading further in towards the centre of Rome.

"Fifty euros but... you do not have to sell your body to me."

"*What?*" Sam could feel his cheeks blush. "No, not *me*, the *car!*"

"The car?"

"I'll sell you the car for whatever you've got on you." Sam glanced down at Rivers' cell phone, which still sat inactive in its cradle on the dashboard.

"Why would you do that? The car must be worth thousands."

"Try a couple of hundred thousand..."

"*Mio dio!*" Lorenzo sat back in his seat. Sam could sense that he was making some calculations in his head about his potential investment.



"I'll sell you the car for whatever you've got on you."

The Lamborghini slowed as it began to get bogged down in the infamous traffic of Rome. They had reached the *Ring*, the circular motorway that ran around the entire circumference of Rome. Mopeds and motorbikes wound their way expertly through as car horns honked loudly in frustration. The streetlights were now lit and Sam could see the glow of the European city ahead of him. As the car came to an inevitable halt, Sam turned in his seat, pulling the seatbelt out away from his chest.

"There's one catch... The car is hot."

"*Hot?*"

Sam fixed his eyes on Lorenzo. "*Real* hot." He leant forwards and pressed the power button on Rivers' cell phone. The touch screen flashed into life as network connections began to re-establish.

"There are people after me that I need to get rid of. They can track the car from *this.*" Sam tapped the cell phone with the long fingernail of an index finger, his pink nail polish now faded and chipped in places. He looked back to Lorenzo, making sure the young man was following what he was saying. "If you can drive north, lead them away from Rome..."

"Are they dangerous?"

"No, no. Once they realise it's not me, they'll leave you alone." Sam kept his soft feminine voice deliberately calm.

"And then the car is mine?"

"Absolutely."

There was a pause as Lorenzo weighed up his options. It didn't take him long. He set the euros down onto the dashboard.

LORENZO DE LUCA stood patiently on the street-lit sidewalk, looking up at the tall, imposing architecture surrounding him. He hadn't travelled into Rome in a while. Not since his thieving days when the subways and underpasses would prove a prime hunting ground. That seemed like a long time ago now.

He looked back to the Lamborghini Gallardo, marvelling at its slick contours. He'd only ever seen something like this in magazines, and now it was his! Sure, it was dirty and a deep key scratch ran along the driver-side door, but other than that it was perfect.



Lorenzo hummed a tune, snapping his fingers as he buoyantly walked back around to the driver side door. He found his *Angel* struggling to pull a case from the small storage area behind the driver seat. From where she was bent over, Lorenzo was afforded a glimpse of her lower buttocks and a hint of a pale lilac thong.

Of course, he knew he wouldn't keep it. The first chance he had, he would sell it to a dealer he knew. The money he would get would easily pay off Nonna's mortgage on the apartment, with money left over to donate to the Church. He couldn't wait to tell his grandmother the good news!

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He glanced skywards, shaking his finger. He knew it was a test.

Once upon a time he would have be in there like a shot, making some lewd comment, perhaps even daring to lift her skirt up further.

"Here, let me get that for you." Lorenzo stepped forward.

His *Angel* moved to one side, her heels clicking as she smoothed her skirt, her beautiful face staring up at him.

"Thanks..."

Her voice was like silk. She seemed embarrassed to be asking for help, which only served to endear her to him even more. Lorenzo reached into the back seat and easily hefted a pair of black cases from the back out onto the street.

SAM STOOD ON the sidewalk, the evening breeze playing at his bare thighs, teasing up under his skirt, making it feel colder than it really was. He rubbed at his slender arms, his white high heeled sandals clicking beneath him as he tried to warm himself.

Sam watched as Lorenzo started the Lamborghini, a broad smile spreading across his face as he took delight in the roar of the powerful engine.

Although Sam would argue against Lorenzo's divine explanation for their meeting, it had certainly proved to be a fortuitous encounter. Sam now held enough money in his feminine hand to check into a cheap hotel room for the night. Meanwhile, Lorenzo would lead Rivers and Tanner on a wild goose chase as they dutifully traced Rivers' now active cell phone signal.

What's more, Sam had found a pair of equipment cases in the back of the car. Hopefully there would be something there that he could use to help him track Scarlet. Sam still had little idea as to what he would do next, now that he had arrived in Rome. He was, after all, making it up as he went along.

"I am sure we will meet again my angel, but until then will you honor me with a parting kiss?" Lorenzo smiled up at Sam from the open window of the car.

Sam rolled his eyes. "Now you're pushing your luck. Next time, okay?"

"I will hold you to it. *Ciao!*"

Sam watched as the engine of the Lamborghini revved up, the exhaust vibrating. Lorenzo waved an arm out of the window as he disappeared off down the busy street.

Sam drew a breath, his shoulders dropping. He turned, looking up to the façade of a tall, crumbling building. It seemed to loom over him, making him feel small and claustrophobic.

A lurid neon sign hung above the entrance.

Albergo.

Sam recognised the Italian word for *hotel*, though the "o" flickered, threatening to disappear altogether to the darkness.



SAM STUMBLED, AT last, into the hotel room with his heavy cases, his feminine voice groaning with the effort. He felt mildly put out that the overweight guy on reception hadn't offered to carry his cases, leaving him to struggle up the two flights of stairs alone in his high heels. He kicked the door shut behind him, searching blindly for a lamp chord. The room dimly illuminated, casting dark shadows, punctuated by the sickening pink glow of the flashing neon sign outside the window.

As it turned out, fifty euros didn't get you very far in Rome. The room was tatty with an old musty smell, but at least he had somewhere to lay his head down for the night. Sam kicked his white heels off and fell down onto the mattress of the single bed, lying there for a few minutes as he collected his thoughts.

He had mixed feelings about leaving Rivers behind in Civitavecchia. He had been so relieved when they had reunited, but it had hurt like hell to find that Rivers had placed the Agency above their friendship. Either way, there was little to no chance of Rivers finding him now that he had sent Lorenzo off as a decoy. Yet again he was alone and would have to draw upon his own resources to get the job done.

Sam sat upright, his breasts shifting on his chest. He ran a hand up through his blonde hair and began to re-tie the pink bow that held his ponytail in place. He suspected it was too much to hope for a hairbrush from the cases he had liberated from the car.

Sam stared over to where he had unceremoniously dumped the cases onto the floor. One of them was small, made up to look like a briefcase, despite its high-tech security locking mechanism. It was the same case that Rivers had taken into the casino when they had begun their mission several days ago. Beside it lay the larger of the two cases. Sam recognised it as his own case. The only thing was, Sam's equipment had been stolen by Antoinette, whereas the case he had dragged up two flights of stairs had been very much full...

SAM PULLED THE larger case up onto the bed, sitting cross-legged before it, his skirt riding up. Now that he was alone, he didn't feel the need to worry about whether or not his panties were on show. He keyed in his unlock code and swiped his thumb across the sensor. A red LED flashed, warning of an incorrect match. Sam went to try again, but stopped and looked down at his feminine hands, turning them over thoughtfully.

"Idiot," Sam whispered to himself. "Wrong fingerprints..." Luckily, Sam had a few workarounds up his sleeve. The Agency would have revoked his access to the main network by now, but that wouldn't stop him from hacking into a simple case.

After several minutes of using his long fingernails to press at the tiny keys, the lock clicked open and Sam gently lifted the bullet-proof Kevlar casing upwards.

"What the hell?"

Sam reached in, pulling out each of his laptops in turn. USB and network cables trailed after them. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. Rivers had said that Antoinette had stolen the laptops and used them to download the Agency database. If that was correct, then why were they right here in front of him?

Sam thought back to Monaco, trying to recall all that had happened. The laptops had been missing ever since he had first awoken in Antoinette's body.

Sam pressed the power button on each of the machines, their bright displays throwing some additional light into the dingy hotel room. While he waited for the laptops to boot, Sam turned his attention to Rivers' briefcase. Rivers had never told him what was in there, but Sam suspected it had just been a supply of cash to use at the casino. Maybe an exploding pen if he was lucky. As Sam got to work on the electronic lock, he came to realise that there had been no sign of Rivers' case since the swap either, though Rivers had never mentioned anything about it.

"What the hell were you up to Rivers?" Sam's French accented voice echoed throughout the sparse room.

With an electronic *beep*, the case opened.

SAM GRASPED THE device in his hands, being careful not to damage any of the finer circuitry with his long fingernails, as he pulled it free from the foam inlay of the briefcase.

Two small, curved paddles were joined to a central, heavy power-pack with strands of optical cables of a type that Sam had never before seen in all his years at the forefront of computing technology. Each paddle was about the size of a credit card, a little thicker maybe, with delicate electrodes woven into the surface of each. On the front of the power unit were three buttons, along with an indicator display, though they failed to respond to any input. Whatever it was, the device was dead.

Whatever it was...

Sam knew what it was. What it had to be. He just couldn't bring himself to believe it.

He carefully laid the device down onto the bed and turned his attention back to the laptops. He leant forwards over the keyboard of one, his ponytail slipping forwards, as he used the track-pad to browse the hard-drive.

Sam had always made it his own personal habit to set up a camera wherever he and Rivers happened to camp, recording



Sam knew what it was. What it had to be.
He just couldn't bring himself to believe it.

the footage straight to the laptop. After all, their equipment was of a sensitive and confidential nature, and could not be monitored in person the whole time.

Sam could feel his pulse throbbing in his ears as he found the saved footage of their hotel room in Monte Carlo. His shaking finger hovered above the keyboard.

Sam tapped the play button with his fingernail, the screen illuminating his feminine face.



THREE DAYS AGO...

Le Grand Casino de Monte Carlo, Monaco

"NOT SO FAST, honey!"

Mike Rivers stood in the doorway to the hotel room, his gun aimed squarely at Antoinette Bellerose as she quickly moved to place Sam between them, a silenced pistol jabbing into the young man's side.

"Rivers! Back off man, she's got a gun!" Sam cried out. He looked as scared as Rivers had ever seen him, his forehead beaded with sweat.

Rivers stepped through into the room, closing the door behind him, his aim still fixed on Antoinette. Even in the crisis of the moment, Rivers could not help but be affected by her feminine beauty.

Her bright blue eyes bore into his, her long eyelashes flickering as she blinked. Her luscious ruby painted lips were slightly parted, giving her a seductive look. Her long blonde hair hung in soft waves over her bare shoulders, coming to rest over the swell of her large breasts. Rivers watched her cleavage swell with her rapid breathing. Her scarlet red dress was striking and hugged her curves and her trim, athletic waist, flaring pleasingly at her wide hips and pert rounded backside. Her bare legs looked silky smooth

and seemed to go on forever, perfectly feminine, her calf muscles popping from the red high heeled sandals that she wore on her feet.

"Back off! I will put him down! Lower your gun American!" Antoinette's French accent was strong and surprised Rivers with its simmering rage.

"Not if I put you down first." Rivers let his aim drop and he fired, the silencer barrel of his handgun muting the noise down to a high-pitched *thwip*. The tranquillizer dart hit Sam squarely in the side and his eyes rolled back, his body slumping. Antoinette was taken by surprise and found herself unable to support Sam's limp body with her one free arm.

Her only protection slid helplessly out of her grasp.

Rivers fired again, hitting Antoinette just above the naval. She fought it, struggling to bring her gun to bear, but it fell from her hand. Her legs buckled from under her and she fell. Rivers quickly stepped forwards, catching her. He felt her large breasts pressing against his chest as her eyes closed, succumbing to the effects of the tranquillizer.

Rivers lifted the young woman from under her arms, quickly bringing her up onto the bed nearest to the window. One of her high heels slipped from her slender foot, falling to the floor. He reached down, bringing her legs round so that she lay flat on her back.

He watched as her breasts rose and fell with her breathing. Her short dress had ridden up revealing an enticing glimpse of her lacy red thong. Rivers let his gaze linger on her feminine body for a moment, before turning his attentions to Sam.

He crouched down and, with some effort, pulled Sam's sleeping body up onto the adjacent bed. He straightened his now creased dinner jacket, a little out of breath from the exertion.

Rivers checked them both again. There had been a healthy dose of tranquillizer in each dart, probably enough to put them out for at least an hour.

Satisfied, he knelt down, reaching under one of the beds, sliding out his briefcase.

RIVERS RUBBED AT his stubble-flecked cheek as he stared down at the device, nestled within the foam inlay of his Agency supplied briefcase. He still couldn't quite believe that something so compact could do what the Agency said it would, despite having witnessed the results back at the lab several months ago.

He carefully pulled the battery pack free and set it down onto the carpeted floor between the two beds. It was heavy, despite its small size. It had to be given the amount of power it would be required to produce. He next unloaded the two small paddles, coiling the strands of optical cable beside each one.

Rivers glanced back to the hotel room door. He had, set before him, one of the most confidential pieces of technology on the planet. Something that not even Sam could be brought in on. It had to be worth millions and he couldn't shake the feeling that someone might burst in at any moment to claim it as their own.

He began to uncoil the optical cable joined to the first paddle, trailing it over to the bed that Antoinette lay on. He wiped blonde hair away from her pretty face and carefully placed the adhesive paddle across her forehead, just as he had been shown. He paused as Antoinette murmured a little in her sleep.

Rivers froze, his mind racing as he struggled to stay focused. He kept thinking ahead, to how everything would play out, finding it difficult to concentrate on the here and now.

He shook his head and took the second paddle, bringing it to Sam's bed. He used the cuff of his sleeve to wipe the sweat from Sam's brow before delicately placing it into position.

He stood back and drew a breath.

This was it.

It was time.

RIVERS FLICKED THE switch of the central power pack, watching as it hummed ominously into life, its display screen lighting up with an unearthly green glow.

"Okay," Rivers whispered aloud to himself, "Green's good. We like green."

He began to tap at the control buttons. He didn't even pretend to understand how it worked, or exactly what the controls did. He had simply rehearsed with one of the scientists until he'd got the procedure down. Once it was set up, the rest was pretty much an automated process.

The hum of the power unit changed pitch as the electrodes within each paddle began to crackle with unseen electricity, establishing an invisible connection with each participant's brainwaves.

At least that was the theory.

All Rivers had to go on was a progress bar on the unit's built-in LED display. He carefully adjusted the cabling, making sure there were no kinks in the wiring. It blew his mind to think that everything Sam was, everything he knew, was now being transmitted down these tiny wires and fed into Antoinette's body. In return, Antoinette's consciousness was fed along the return route to Sam's body.



The hum of the power unit changed pitch as the electrodes within each paddle began to crackle with unseen electricity, establishing an invisible connection with each participant's brainwaves.

Rivers was startled as Antoinette's arm suddenly twitched, but it was something he had been told to expect. It was just an involuntary muscle spasm as various electrodes in the brain fired off.

He concentrated on the LED display. Rivers had been told to keep an eye on the data transmission levels. Any sudden spikes had to be manually corrected for. Failure to do so could disrupt the data flow - memories, intellect — they could all end up confused and merged with the wrong individual. Rivers couldn't help but smile to himself, remembering what had happened back at the Agency labs...

Sam's body jerked, causing Rivers to look up.

He was fine.

If it was even still him in there...

Rivers stood up, gripping the base of his back as he stretched away the tension from being hunched over. He glanced over at the bed to his left, finding himself distracted by Antoinette's sleeping body. His eyes wandered over her feminine curves, watching as her cleavage swelled beneath her tight fitting dress, before lowering his gaze downwards, to the hint of exposed panty between her legs.

Rivers stepped closer. The red thong was delicately patterned with lace and was almost see-through. He could just make out the faint shadow of her pubic hair beneath the revealing lingerie.

Rivers looked back to the LED read-out on the power unit.

"Shit!"

He quickly knelt back down in front of the device, adjusting the impedance, to compensate for the sudden spike in data flow.

"Isn't this thing supposed to *beep* or something when that happens?"

Rivers watched, breathing a sigh of relief as the levels quickly returned to normal. It had only been for a couple of seconds.

There was no harm done.



RIVERS CAREFULLY SET the device back into the custom-made, padded briefcase. The battery pack felt hot to touch and was now fully exhausted. It was designed with only enough charge for one attempt, so it had come as a relief when the LED panel had indicated a "successful transference".

Successful transference...

That was something he would expect from sending an email, rather than the mind-boggling feat of neuro-engineering that had just taken place.

Rivers clicked the case shut, the security lock beeping softly. He reached into his jacket pocket for his cell phone and dialled swiftly.

"Tanner? I'm ready for the pick-up. Meet me outside the elevators on the tenth floor."

"Understood."

Rivers snapped the phone shut, slipping it back into his pocket as he walked slowly over to where Antoinette lay on the bed. Or her *body* at least. He reached down, sweeping a strand of blonde hair away from her soft cheek.

"You okay in there Sam?"

She lay motionless, her breathing slow but steady.

RIVERS GROANED AS he pulled Sam's body along the hotel corridor, tightly holding his arm around his neck, struggling to keep him upright. Sam's head swung, his unkempt hair draping across his forehead. He had started to come round a little, his lips murmuring, his feet making unconscious efforts to walk beside Rivers.

Her.

He had to keep reminding himself that it wasn't Sam.

It was now *Antoinette* that stumbled blindly along beside him.

The metallic elevator door chimed open and Rivers all but dropped Sam's body into the waiting arms of Tanner and Willis.

"Good work, sir." Tanner pulled Sam's arm around his shoulder as Willis did the same, the two men supporting his weight between them. The Black Ops specialists were dressed in matching tuxedos, making them appear, Rivers thought, like some double act at an awards show.

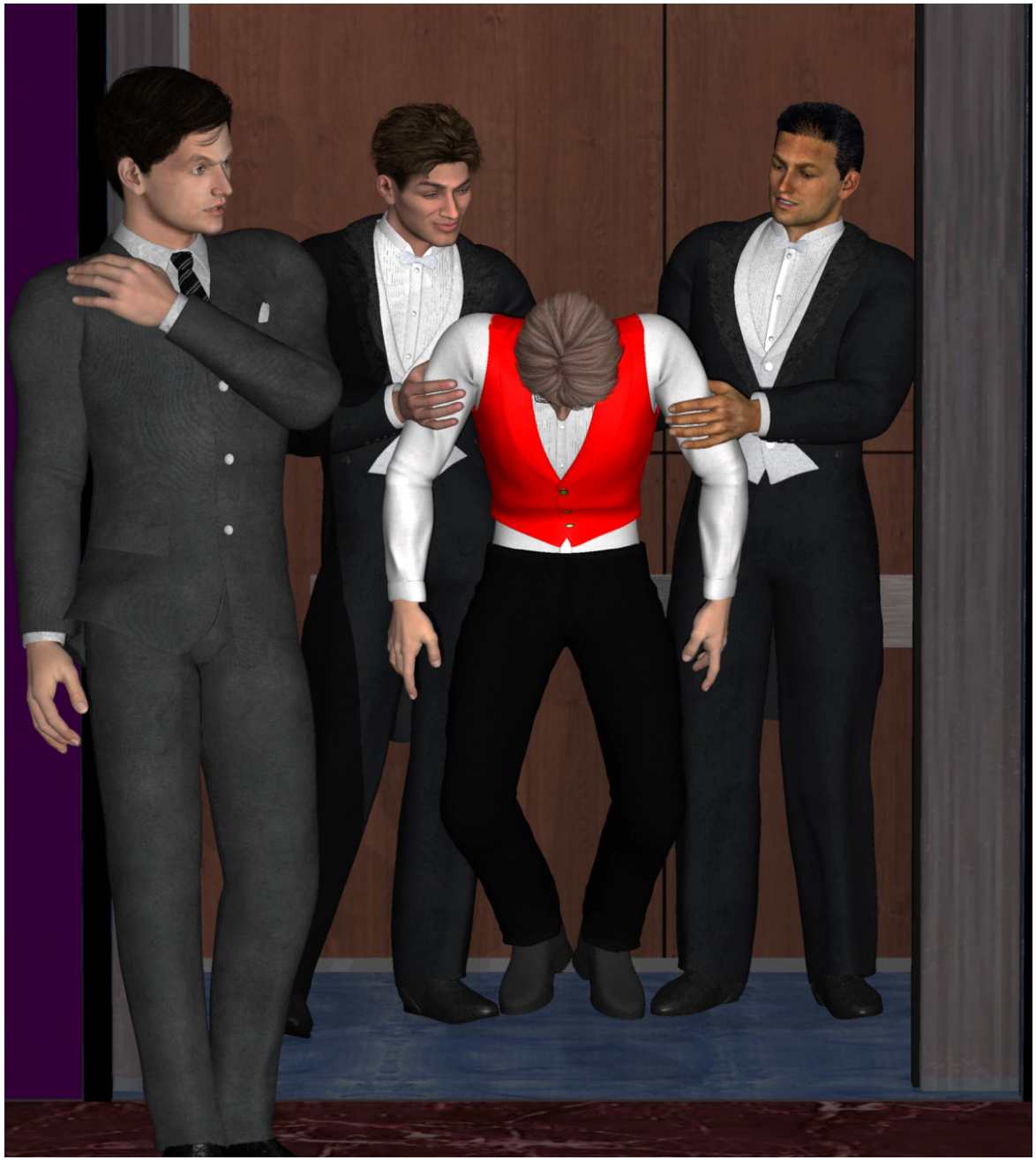
Rivers rubbed at his shoulder, glad to be free of the weight of Sam's body. "Okay, everything is to go as we planned okay? Get her... get *him* to the bunker, keep him locked up till I get there."

"He doesn't look like he'll pose much of a problem." Willis looked down at the young man's slender frame.

"Don't be fooled. He's a Scarlet agent. Highly dangerous. Remember that, okay?"

Tanner smirked, "I think we can take him if he steps out of line."

Rivers quickly pointed a warning finger. "Don't touch him, understand?" He stepped back out of the elevator, watching as Sam's eyelids briefly flickered.



Rivers rubbed at his shoulder, glad to be free of the weight of Sam's body. "Okay, everything is to go as we planned okay? Get her... get *him* to the bunker, keep him locked up till I get there."

"Should we give him another shot?" Tanner asked, straightening his back to better support his share of the weight.

"Wait till you get him in the jeep. He can just about walk now. Anyone looking would just think he had too much to drink."

Tanner nodded. The elevator juddered as the doors began to slide shut. Rivers kept his gaze fixed on Sam as if taking a mental snapshot to remember him by.

And then he was gone.

Rivers rubbed at the back of his neck, standing alone now in the corridor, listening to the mechanical whir of the elevator as it descended. He wasn't convinced that handing Antoinette over to Tanner and the Bravo team boys was such a good idea, especially as they couldn't be told about the swap that had just taken place.

Rivers returned to the hotel room, swiping his key card against the electronic lock. As he entered, his attention was drawn once again to the bed where Antoinette's body lay. He could see her beginning to stir and knew that he had to work fast before she woke up.

Before *Sam* woke up...

And then all hell would break lose.



ROME, ITALY

Now.

SAM WATCHED AS the recorded footage from the casino reached the end of its run, the computer screen politely prompting if he would like to view again.

No he didn't want to fucking view it again.

Sam shrieked, his feminine voice piercing the air as he threw the laptop in frustration. It clattered loudly against the cheap wooden floorboards of the hotel room.

He sat on the bed, his head in his hands, his shoulders beginning to heave as he broke into a sob.

Sam had watched in horror as the silent movie had played out - of Rivers using the device to swap his mind into Antoinette's female body. Rivers and the fucking Agency had done this to him on purpose! Everything he'd been through, all the fear and confusion he'd felt... All of it had been carefully planned out by the Agency all along.

Sam felt his whole body grow cold and he shivered, rubbing at his bare slender arms. He rubbed tears from his eyes and looked down at his feminine body, his breasts shifting with his staccato breathing, remembering cruelly how he had been made to submit his body to Carlos and Maria Ramirez.

He shifted his legs, standing up, raking his fingernails over his breasts, then down at his waist, ignoring the pain, pinching at his tight flesh as if he were trapped within a bodysuit that he desperately wanted to pull off.

He staggered towards the window, his fist raised, wanting to strike with all his fury, but instead he slumped helplessly against the glass.

Sam watched as rain began to lance down onto the window from the night sky above, trickling down the pane as his tears dripped from his cheeks.

He closed his eyes, the glass of the window pane cool against his forehead. The neon glow from the hotel sign outside fractured through beads of rain water, bathing Sam in specks of pink light.

He sniffed, opening his eyes again, looking down towards the lights of a small jazz club across the street. He felt like he didn't even have a purpose anymore. He'd escaped from Rivers and made it to Rome, but for *what?* Rivers had lied about Antoinette stealing Sam's laptops and so had likely lied about where she was as well.

Sam wished he could just switch off and stop thinking.

What he really needed was a drink.



THE RAIN TORRENTED down onto the streets of Rome, the droplets forming sharp daggers as they hit the ground, running into wide puddles that reflected the street lights above.

A pair of white high-heeled sandals clicked rapidly, darting across the road.

Sam ran, his arms swaying wide at his hips for balance. His bare legs slid one in front of the other and his breasts gently jolted from within his pink top and satin brassiere.

He skidded to a halt, his heels cluttering as he ducked under the safety of an archway. He turned back, wiping rain water and strands of loose hair from his forehead, watching as a sheet of rain descended down onto the streets.

Sam turned back towards the unassuming entrance of the jazz bar, which proudly displayed a poster of its star attraction, a French chanteuse by the name of "Brigitte Lavelle". He pushed the door inwards, finding a set of small stone steps leading downwards. Bursts of music spilled up from the basement bar below.

Sam tugged at his sodden pink top, pulling it away from his breasts, his wet skin feeling clammy. He looked down at his high-heeled feet, being careful to turn them to the side as he descended so that he did not slip.

The click of his heels echoed loudly throughout the narrow passageway.

A BURLY PAIR OF bouncers in dark leather jackets stood menacingly at the bottom of the stone steps, their arms folded, the lights from the club reflecting off of their matching shaved heads. They stared silently down at Sam as he nervously approached. He fully expected to be turned away, or asked for the entrance money that he didn't have, but instead they smiled, stepping to one side to let him past.

Sam walked quickly through, a hand resting just above his chest, his ruffled white skirt bouncing at his hips. The club was small and dimly lit, bookended by the stage and bar, with wooden tables and booths set out inbetween. Each table held a candle-lit lantern at its centre, adding to the atmosphere provided by the bare stonework of the walls.

Sam felt self-conscious being out in such a public place, but was relieved to find it fairly quiet with only small pockets of people, mostly couples, scattered around. He looked over to the stage, watching as a small band began to tune up, bursts of saxophone and brushed drum beats cutting through the soft chatter of the audience.

"Benvenuti... *Welcome.*"

Sam turned to see a middle-aged man in a dark suit leaning up against the bar. He peered over his tinted glasses at Sam, tapping his right hand against the counter of the bar.

"Oh, uh, thank you..." Sam replied in his soft voice, reaching up to stroke a strand of wet hair back behind his ear.

"Some weather we are having, huh? Are you here to see Brigitte?" His Italian accented voice was deep and gravelly. He smiled at Sam, chewing casually at the end of a cocktail stick.

"Brigitte?" Sam remembered the poster he had seen outside. "Oh, yes. I'm a fan."

"Hmm, at least that's *somebody.* She has a hard time pulling a crowd as you can see." The man gestured to the meagre gathering of people. "My name is Julius, I own the club."

Sam smiled awkwardly, taking his offered hand, surprised as Julius pulled Sam's hand to his lips, kissing his feminine fingers.

"Come let me get you a table." Julius made a show of holding Sam's hand, leading him to one of the empty booths. Sam didn't know quite what to make of it and had no choice but to follow his lead, teetering after him in his high heels. Sam ran his hands over his round backside, smoothing his skirt as he slid into the empty booth.

"Now, what would this beautiful lady like to drink?"

Sam looked away embarrassed, "Oh, I haven't really got much money on me, I just came for the music."

"It's on the house. Anything you want." Julius gestured to the bar, pointing with his half-chewed cocktail stick.



Sam smiled awkwardly, taking his offered hand, surprised as Julius pulled Sam's hand to his lips, kissing his feminine fingers.

Sam's natural instinct was to ask for a beer - preferably American - but instead, he remembered how he had enjoyed the taste of the wine on Carlos Ramirez's yacht.

"I'll have a glass of red wine... Thank you."

"Ah, red! Red for *passion!*" Julius chuckled as he turned and headed back to the bar, clapping his hands together to get the attention of the bartender.

Sam sighed, leaning back against the padded seating of the booth. Free entry *and* free drinks? That certainly wasn't bad going, but then again his wet clothing may have had something to do with it. Sam looked down, embarrassed to see the damp fabric of his pink top clinging tightly to the shapely outline of his *34D* breasts.

SAM BROUGHT THE glass to his lips, sipping at the Italian red wine. He closed his eyes, letting the fruity flavor fill his mouth before swallowing.

Sam's mascara covered lashes fluttered open. He reached out with his slender hand and topped up the glass with the bottle that Julius had been generous enough to leave on the table for him. The wine had certainly gone a long way towards helping to warm him up, as well as relax him.

Sam slipped is right leg over his left, pulling the hem of his white skirt over his thigh. He reached around behind his head and pulled free the pink ribbon that held his hair, letting it fall freely over his shoulders and back. He was glad to be free of the aching tug of his ponytail, plus it would help to dry the last of the rainwater from his blonde hair.

Sam had sat hunched, keeping his head down so as not to draw attention to himself, but the warm glow of the wine had now begun to ease his self-consciousness. He sat back, looking around the club, his attention drawn to a young couple that were sat at a nearby table, talking and laughing, enjoying one another's company.

He felt jealous, wishing he was back in Philadelphia with Lenore, perhaps taking in a show followed by a romantic meal. Then afterwards they would take a slow walk home, before slipping between the bed sheets together for some fantastic sex. Sam absently squeezed his thighs together, becoming aware of the vacancy between his legs, the brush of his satin thong against his female loins. He was disheartened to realise that he would not be able to satisfy Lenore in his current state.

Sam continued to watch the couple. The young man slipped an arm around his girlfriend, his strong arm pulling her closer.

Comforting her.

Protecting her.

The girl leant into his embrace, her eyes closing, looking content.

Sam found his own slender hands sliding up to his bare arms, caressing them gently.



SAM WATCHED AS Brigitte Lavelle took to the stage. She was a slender attractive woman, only a little older than he was, with short black hair cut into a bob that displayed her graceful neck and slender shoulders. She wore a shiny black dress that sparkled under the lights, as if a thousand tiny diamonds were woven into the fabric.

She moved in high heels with a graceful sensuality, sliding up to the microphone, her crimson lips smiling warmly as the band kicked in behind her. Her singing voice was like tinkling chime bells, soft and feminine.

Sam drained the last of the red wine from his glass, the bottle now half empty. He could feel his head swimming. It was just enough to enable him to forget where he was.

Who he was...

Instead, Sam found himself relaxing into the music. He closed his eyes, his head gently swaying in time with the beat, letting Brigitte's song fill his senses. Although it was a jazz-flavored cover version, reworked into something slower and more sensual, Sam came to feel as though he recognised the song. Something he'd heard long ago in his youth.

His mind drifted as he swayed with the music, his eyes still closed, remembering where he had heard the song before. He could picture a small house. Somewhere remote out in the country. Somewhere safe and comforting.

Sam heard a second feminine voice begin to sing, soft and gentle, harmonizing with Brigitte:

"Quand il me prend dans ses bras,
Il me parle tout bas,
Je vois la vie en rose."

Sam's eyes flickered open, realising that the second voice had been his.

SAM STAGGERED THROUGH into the toilets, his heels cluttering against the tiled floor as he struggled to stay upright. He had enjoyed the performance and had managed to consume the majority of a bottle of red wine to himself, resulting in an inevitable effect on his bladder, as well as his balance.

He watched as a man turned his head from the urinal, smiling as he looked Sam up and down, not even breaking his stream.



Sam heard a second feminine voice begin to sing, soft and gentle, harmonizing with Brigitte:
"Quand il me prend dans ses bras, Il me parle tout bas, Je vois la vie en rose."
Sam's eyes flickered open, realising that the second voice had been his.

The man's gaze made Sam look downwards to his own body, at the cleavage that swelled from his pink vest top, his white ruffled skirt that hugged his wide hips, and his long bare legs accentuated by the white high-heeled sandals that he wore.

"Oh," Sam found himself giggling with the alcohol, "My mistake. You see... I used to be a man, but some *asshole* did this to me..."

Sam turned, using the wall for support as he made his way back out of the men's room. He found the adjacent door to the *ladies* and tapped the symbol on the door with his fingernail.

"The one with the skirt. That's the one I need."

Sam's heels clicked as he woozily made his way through into the ladies toilet, finding it empty, giving him a choice of cubicles. He opted for the one furthest from the door and hurried over, pulling the door shut behind him, sliding the latch across.

Sam lifted his skirt, hooking his thumbs into the waistband of his lilac satin panties, tugging them down to his ankles. Holding his skirt above his waist, he sat his rounded feminine backside down onto the cold toilet seat. He kept his thighs together, but found that his high heels elevated his legs, causing him to angle his legs outwards below the knees, his thong stretching out between his ankles. Given his desperation, he did not need to wait for very long and soon heard the tinkling sound of his rill as he relieved himself.

Sam sighed as he finished, pulling a couple of sheets of toilet paper from the roll, which he pressed between his legs, then let drop into the toilet. He stood back up, reaching down for his thong, tugging it back up, feeling the caress of the lingerie once more against his female loins, the string settling between his firm buttocks. He pulled his skirt back down, smoothing the ruffles out at the front and back.

Sam had taken peeing as a man for granted and found it much more of an inconvenience as a woman; having to remove clothing, having to sit down, having to dry himself. It seemed the wrong way round considering how suddenly the urge to go would take him now.

Sam unlatched the cubicle door and stepped out, sweeping loose hair from his face. His high heeled feet stepped awkwardly forwards towards the row of wash basins that ran across the opposite wall. He was surprised to find another woman standing there, leaning into the mirror above the sinks as she applied a crimson lipstick to her full lips. Sam recognised her at once.

It was Brigitte Lavelle.

"BONSOIR!" BRIGITTE GREETED Sam, her feminine face smiling back at him from the mirror. She was even more beautiful close up than she had appeared on stage. Her eyes were large and a deep blue in color, her mascara covered lashes fluttering as she blinked. Her skin was smooth and pale, her face youthful. Her short black hair framed her cheeks , luxurious and shining under the white light of the rest room. Her black dress was flecked with silver, short and figure-hugging, coming to rest just below her rounded buttocks.

Sam staggered towards her, captivated by her natural allure. "You were amazing," Although he slurred his words from the wine, he noticed something odd about the way he was talking, as if it wasn't quite how he usually spoke.

"Oh, thank you!" Brigitte enthused as she wiped some stray lipstick from the corner of her mouth. "I saw you singing along. It's always great to see someone enjoying themselves out there."

Sam swept his blonde hair back over his shoulders as he approached the adjacent wash basin. He looked up to the mirror as he began to wash his hands. Although the beauty of his elfin, heart shaped face shone through, his hair looked a little untidy and his make-up had now either smudged or faded from the rain. He looked over to Brigitte's reflection. She looked so elegant and refined next to him.

"Did you get caught in the rain?" Brigitte asked, sorting through her make-up bag.

"Uh, yes... I look a mess don't I?" Sam quickly ran his hands through his long blonde hair, smoothing it out as best he could.

"It's nothing a little make-up couldn't fix. Here, I've got a spare lipstick." Brigitte handed Sam a small, pink tube.

"Really?"

"Of course."

Sam hesitantly took the lipstick. He had started to realise that he drew more attention to himself by *not* having perfect clothes, hair and make-up. Or at least with other women. He wondered whether he should start carrying a few items around with him. A hair brush, some make-up maybe... He looked over to Brigitte, noticing her black clutch-bag that seemed to have everything she needed.

Sam leant in towards the mirror, twisting the end of the lipstick tube, bringing the pale pink to his lips.

"So where in France are you from?" Brigitte turned towards Sam, a hand resting on her hip. Sam's mind quickly raced. He was still surprised that she was being so talkative and generous towards him, considering they'd never met before. He sucked in his lips, then pouted, noticing in the mirror that they were now pink and glossy, matching his pink vest top.

"I'm from... the *south*..."

"Well, I guessed that from your accent, silly!" Brigitte giggled, "I'm from Marseille." Although she needed no introduction, she offered her feminine hand to Sam. "Brigitte."

Sam took her hand, shaking lightly. "Antoinette..." It still felt strange to offer up another name in place of his own.

"It's a pleasure to meet you Antoinette. It's always nice to meet another French girl when out on the road. Touring can be tough when you only speak French."

"What do you mean?" Sam handed the



"It's a pleasure to meet you Antoinette. It's always nice to meet another French girl when out on the road. Touring can be tough when you only speak French."

lipstick back to Brigitte, still conscious that there was something strange with the way he was speaking, as if different words were spilling forth from his lips.

"I mean, my Italian is coming on a little, but my manager keeps saying that if I want to make it, I need to learn English. I can manage *hello* and *goodbye*, but that's about it. He wants to get me out to the U.K. and America. He says that's where the big money is."

Sam was confused. He still felt dizzy from the alcohol, so maybe he'd just heard wrong. She was speaking perfect English, how else would he be able to understand her?

"It's hard when you've only got the band to talk to," Brigitte slipped the lipstick tube back into her clutch bag. "They're great and everything, but you know what French men are like. Sometimes I just miss a bit of female company."

Sam shook his head, widening his eyes to try and combat the alcohol, his high-heels clicking on the floor beneath him. The more he thought about it, the more he came to realise that Brigitte's words sounded just as odd as his had been.

"Well Antoinette, I better get back out there." Brigitte turned, waving back at Sam, her hips swaying beneath her cocktail dress.

The rest room door thudded shut leaving him alone once more with his thoughts.

SAM'S HEELS CLACKED against the stone flooring of the club, his hands wide at his sides for balance. He found that his eyes needed to readjust to the relative gloom of the club, and that he could only just make out the dark shadows of other people around him.

"Pardon!"

Sam excused himself as he knocked elbows with another girl, causing her to spill her drink a little. He turned, disorientated, his hair whipping around him, the lights of the stage spinning.

He hit something.

Hard.

Solid.

Sam steadied himself, looking up, his eyes focusing on the shadow of the figure in front of him.



MIKE RIVERS LOOKED down at Sam, watching as his pretty feminine face struggled to comprehend, his pink-painted lips trembling as his beautiful blue eyes stared up at him.

"Pourquoi ne pas me laisser tranquille?" Sam's feminine voice cracked with emotion as he spoke. His use of French took Rivers by surprise and he momentarily paused, watching blankly as Sam turned, making his way towards the exit, his backside twitching beneath his ruffled white skirt.

"Hey, hey!" Rivers gripped Sam's small arm, forcefully pulling him back around. "Sam, listen I just want to talk."

"Va-t'en!" Sam shrieked up at Rivers, trying in vain to pull free of his strong grip, his heels scuffing against the floor.

"Hey, what's going on here?" Rivers looked over as an older man pushed himself away from the bar, striding slowly over towards them. He was expensively dressed and Rivers guessed from the way the club bouncers moved in to flank him, that he was probably the owner. Rivers quickly backed down and let go of Sam's arm.

"It's nothing," Rivers held up his hands defensively. "She's my *girlfriend.* We're just excited to see each other, that's all."

The man eyed Rivers cautiously as he brought a cocktail stick to his mouth, chewing thoughtfully.

"Ne l'écoutez pas, il n'est pas mon copain!" Sam spoke up, rubbing at his bare arm.

The man pulled the cocktail stick from his mouth, his brow furrowing.

"I'm sorry my darling, what did you say?"

"She said, you're a very charming man, but unfortunately she's spoken for." Rivers quickly slipped an arm around Sam's waist to guide him over to the privacy of one of the booths.



"CONCENTRATE. TAKE IT slowly this time." Rivers sat opposite Sam in the booth, leaning forwards across the table.

"Okay." Sam closed his eyes, taking a deep breath, focusing on his words. "Why... don't... you... *fuck off!*"

Rivers snapped his fingers, "And she's back in the room!"

Sam breathed a sigh of relief. He'd been exasperated to find that he'd been speaking French again, though this time it had seemed to take even longer to shake it off. He hadn't even noticed when it had started. It was only when Julius hadn't understood him that he had realised that something was wrong. Sam thought back to his strange conversation with Brigitte, slowly realising that he had been speaking in French the whole time...

He sat back against the backrest, folding his arms across his breasts, feeling mostly sobered now by his unwanted encounter with Rivers. "I mean it Rivers, I've had it okay? I've had it with you and the fucking Agency." Sam could feel his voice beginning to waver once more. "I know what you did!"

"What do you mean?" Rivers' voice was low, his smirk fading from his lips.

"The *swap? You* did this to me! And... and you didn't even tell me." Sam reached up, dabbing an index finger to his glistening eyes. "I thought we were friends!" Sam could hear his French accent coming through stronger, though thankfully still in English.

"The laptops..." Rivers leant back, rubbing at his forehead.

"Why Mike? Why?" Sam whispered, gazing down at the table.

Rivers exhaled into his cupped hands, then rubbed uneasily at the back of his head. "We shouldn't be talking about this here. I've got a hotel room in town. Come back with me and I promise I'll explain the whole thing. No more secrets."

"How do I know you're not gonna just hand me over to your Black Ops friend?"

"Well, because right now I've got him following the Lamborghini half way across Italy. The decoy trick? It was a good try. It's just a shame that I'd come up with it first..."

Sam's shoulders dropped. Rivers was right. Sam had just re-used the same tactic they'd used together last year to get rid of some interfering Russian agents. How could he have been so stupid?

"Hey, don't beat yourself up about it. It fooled Tanner anyway." Rivers placed the flat of his palms down onto the wooden table, as if finally coming clean. "So, it's just us okay? You and me."

"And what on Earth makes you think I would want that?" Sam stared past Rivers as a murmur of applause echoed around the club. Brigitte Lavelle had just taken to the stage for her second set.

"Because I know the location of the Agency database download, and you don't."

Sam's attention snapped back to Rivers. "You mean she's really here? In Rome?" Sam could feel his pulse beginning to rise. "I... I thought you might have made that up as well..."

"Well, *hopefully* she's still here. But at least we know where to look."

"Where?" Sam leant forwards, his natural inquisitiveness drawing him back in.

"A mansion. On the outskirts." Rivers leant forwards, staring deep into Sam's eyes. "So what do you say? Give me a chance to make this right again."

Sam could feel his guard lowering as his hopes began to rise once more, but he quickly checked himself. He was supposed to be angry at Rivers, but so far wasn't doing a very good job at it.

"I ought to knock you on your ass for what you did to me."

"Take your best shot. I'm all yours." Rivers leant back again, smiling broadly, his arms outstretched.

Sam paused for a moment, his pink lipstick covered lips breaking into a smile of their own.

"If you insist."



The owner looked back over at Rivers, his expression quickly darkening. What the hell had Sam just said to him?

RIVERS WATCHED AS Sam slid back out of the booth, smoothing his white skirt before walking off in the direction of the bar. Rivers turned his head, his gaze following the tap of Sam's high heels, drinking in the sight of his partner's long shapely legs and his peach of an ass.

He kept watching as Sam stopped to speak to the owner of the bar, pointing back towards Rivers, though the music from the stage prevented him from hearing what was being said.

He'd always hated jazz.

The owner looked back over at Rivers, his expression quickly darkening. What the hell had Sam just said to him? Rivers quickly pulled himself out of the booth in time to see Sam's ruffled skirt bouncing at his hips, as he began to climb the stairs leading out of the club.

Rivers went to follow when two large men blocked his path.

SAM STOOD OUTSIDE the club, his heels slowly clacking against the sidewalk as he paced back and forth. He folded his arms across his chest, finding it helped to ward off the evening chill. At least it wasn't raining anymore.

He looked up to the hotel across the street - to its crumbling brick work and garish neon sign - to his room on the second floor where he had discovered the transfer device and the camera footage. He still didn't know the full story about why the Agency had done what they had, but Rivers was right, they couldn't discuss something like that in a public place.

He still had so many questions, and like it or not, he needed Rivers to get his answers and to find Antoinette.

Sam turned at the sound of the club entrance door opening. He stood back, watching as the bouncers pulled Rivers from the stairwell. One had a firm grip on his jacket, the arm sleeve now torn along the seam. The other readied a closed fist, bringing it swiftly to Rivers' face. Rivers flew backwards, hitting the side of a parked car before sliding down into a large puddle of rainwater.

Sam grinned and nodded a thank you to the two doormen. They chopped their hands together as if they had just finished taking out the trash, before disappearing back into the club.

Sam looked up at the star-lit night sky as he slowly made his way over to Rivers.

"I told them you tried to touch me up in the booth."

Rivers grasped the wing mirror of the parked car, using it to pull himself upright. Sam couldn't help but wince at the sight of his now swollen and bruised eye. His suit was torn and soaked from the wet ground, though he still tried to maintain some composure as he stood and straightened himself.

Rivers sighed, "So are we even now?"

Sam's blonde hair gently blew in the breeze.

"Not even close."

SCARLET

CHAPTER EIGHT



A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK



Mike Rivers walked behind Sam as they climbed the two flights of stairs leading up to the hotel room, the old wooden steps creaking ominously as they ascended.

MIKE RIVERS WALKED behind Sam as they climbed the two flights of stairs leading up to the hotel room, the old wooden steps creaking ominously as they ascended. He gently patted at his bruised eye with a handkerchief as he watched Sam's white ruffled skirt swishing enticingly against his backside. From his lower angle he could almost see up to his panties.

"You know, you could have picked somewhere a little nicer." Rivers' eyes roamed the dark, narrow hallway as they made their way along to Sam's room. Sam had checked himself into a cheap hotel room just across the street from the jazz club, though it left a lot to be desired.

Sam looked back at Rivers coldly as he wiggled the key against the rattling lock.

"Do you need some help with that?" Rivers stepped forwards.

"I've got it." Sam quickly answered, his feminine voice sounding irritated.

The door shuddered in its frame as it opened. Rivers followed Sam through into a small, dimly lit room, a single lamp illuminating the corner by the bed and little else. The first thing he noticed was a laptop on the floor, its screen smashed. He turned, closing the door behind them before kneeling down to pick it up.

"Good to see you're looking after your things..."

Rivers set the laptop back down onto the bed, noticing his own black briefcase which housed the Agency's transference device. He looked back to Sam, his pretty blonde face looking distant as he sat himself down onto the bed, his skirt fanning beneath him.

Rivers rubbed at his head and exhaled. "Okay, I guess it's time you knew."



SAM SAT EXPECTANTLY, toying absently with the ends of his blonde hair which draped down over his shoulders, following the curve of his breasts. The lamp light cast a long shadow of his feminine form across the bed.

Although he felt mostly sober now, Sam felt tired and wanted desperately to roll over and fall asleep, preferably not waking up until he had been swapped back into his own body. But he had to hear Rivers out. He had to know the truth about what the Agency had done.

Sam looked up, watching as Rivers slid out of his torn, damp jacket, tossing it over the back of a chair. He began to pace, his shoes thudding loudly against the floorboards.

"Can you *not* do that?" Sam spoke up with his French accented voice, "You give me neck ache when you walk around like that."

"Hmm? Oh, right." Rivers grabbed the wooden chair, turning it around to sit opposite him. Sam watched as his brown eyes darted, never quite looking him in the eye. Rivers slapped his hands down onto his thighs. "Right, okay... Let's see... The beginning... "

Sam sat patiently, without interrupting, as Rivers spoke.



SAM SAT WITH his head in his hands, rubbing at his tired eyes, his blonde hair draping down around him. His head felt like it was swimming, overloaded with more information than he could process. He replayed what Rivers had just told him, trying his best to make sense of it.

As he had suspected from the laptop footage, it had been Agency scientists, and *not* Scarlet, that had hit upon the scientific breakthrough of transference of consciousness between two individuals.

Rivers had told of how the Agency had been at once excited, and fearful, of what they now had in their hands. *Excited* that the world of espionage had opened up before them; like a curtain being lifted, beyond which lay a sea of new possibilities. *Fearful*, that the technology would not be contained, that their efforts would soon be duplicated or fall into enemy hands. It was like any other arms race that would soon escalate; whether it was knives, firearms or the atom; though rather than the impending threat of a nuclear winter, there would be a world in which no-one could be sure of who their neighbors really were; an intense paranoia that unchecked could be just as devastating.

In short, it had the potential for *anarchy*.

"And this research was *legal?* Government approved?" Sam spoke up at last, his voice small and quiet.

Rivers looked at Sam, rolling his eyes. "What do *you* think?"

Sam sighed, his breasts swelling beneath his figure hugging pink top. "Okay, so why *me?* And why wasn't I told about any of this? And don't give me any more of this *need to know* bullshit, okay?"

Rivers' eyes flickered downwards to Sam's chest, then back up to meet his gaze. "The Agency scientists found out the hard way that not everyone can be swapped. As you can imagine the trauma on the mind and body is pretty intense. Only individuals of a certain psychological profile can survive it."

"A certain *profile?*" Sam rubbed at his hands. He'd never considered himself particularly out of the ordinary.

"Let's just say, you have to be a little crazy to start with. That's the way the shrink explained it to me. You know how you're always telling me how nervous you get before a mission? That makes you a perfect candidate. Your mind and body are used to dealing with the elevated levels of adrenalin and neurotransmitter chemicals that the swap induces."

Sam thought back to the start of the mission in Monaco, how nervous he had been smuggling the equipment into the casino, how his life had flashed before his eyes when Antoinette had aimed her gun at him. He'd always known that his nerves had held him back as an agent.

"So what happens if you're *not*..."

"*Crazy?*" Rivers smiled at Sam. "I don't know. Brain aneurysm. Something like that. It wasn't pretty." Sam watched as Rivers gazed past him to the window, lost in his memories.

"I can't believe this." Sam absently stretched out his fingers, looking down at his faded pink fingernails. "Okay, so I'm *crazy* enough to be swapped. And Antoinette?"

"A perfect match."

"So why not just bring me in on the plan?" Sam asked incredulously, "Surely that would have been better than all of *this?*"

"I wanted to. Believe me, I tried. The Agency had to test the technology in the field, and you were the only one on the Agency payroll who measured up. The only problem was you're a Third-Class agent. The top brass could barely conceal their contempt when *I* was brought in on the plan, let alone you. There's not a whole lot of people they trust with this sort of thing."

"What did they think I was going to do? Start telling the whole world about it?"

"Maybe. And if you did, it would be better that you blamed Scarlet for it and not the Agency. Let's not forget, you're the same guy who failed to submit his relationship details to the Agency, and coded in his own security hole into the network. You haven't exactly proven yourself in the trust-worthy stakes."

Sam felt his anger rising. He stood up from the bed, pointing a finger down at Rivers, his voice shrill and strong with his French accent. "Don't you turn this around on me! I'm not the bad guy here!"

Rivers smirked, "Actually you're not even a *guy* anymore."

"That's it, I've heard enough." Sam held up his hands, restraining himself from the strong urge to hit Rivers. His heels clicked as he strode indignantly towards the door, his bare legs brushing together, his breasts bobbing beneath his top. He pulled the door back open, the handle almost coming off in his hand. "Get out!"

"Sam, come on." Rivers got up from his chair. "I'm sorry about what I did. I... I guess I'd just got too used to following Agency orders. But I'm here now, aren't I?"

Sam stood by the open door, folding his arms impatiently across his chest. Rivers stood in a dark silhouette from the light of the lamp behind him. He stepped forward, his darkened face coming into focus once more, his eyes looking pleadingly down at Sam.

"When the Agency find out I've dropped off the grid, my ass is gonna be busted down to Second-Class quicker than you can say *au revoir*. I came here to *help* you!"

"Oh, well I'm glad this has proven to be a career-ruining experience for you, as opposed to the life ruining experience it's proving to be for *me!*"

Rivers reached out, placing his hands on Sam's bare shoulders. Sam quickly shrugged away from his grip.

"Sam, it's not over. We can still find Antoinette and get your body back. Then we can both tell the Agency where to stick it."

"Well you've certainly changed your tune from earlier." Sam remembered back to Gabriella's house in Civitavecchia, how Rivers had been all ready to turn him over to the Agency. "Look, you said you knew the download location? A *mansion?* Just tell me where it is and get out of my life already!"

Rivers placed his hand on the door, slowly pushing it shut once more. "You're not going there alone. If you want to know where the mansion is, you're just gonna have to work with me on this."

"I don't need your help. I'm warning you Mike, don't make me call someone up here. I imagine I can scream pretty damn good now."

"Oh come one. Setting those bouncers on me was a pretty smart move, but that fat guy on reception? Just getting up the stairs would be enough to finish him off."

"Fine, well *I'm* leaving then." Sam turned from Rivers, his hair brushing over his shoulders and back.

"And where are you going to go exactly? You've got no money, no car. Not even a change of panties."

Sam stopped and closed his eyes. He hated Rivers for being right. He sensed Rivers come up close behind him, not touching him this time, but speaking more softly now.

"The mansion is out in the country... Just north of Rome. Come on, what do you say? Let's do this together, one last time."

Sam opened his eyes, looking down at the floor, reaching down to brush at a mark on his white skirt. He felt frustratingly helpless. Like it or not, Rivers held the vital piece of information that he was missing — the location of the database theft, and with it, his body. He turned his head, speaking back to Rivers from over his shoulder.

"Alright, but we're still not finished here, okay?"

Rivers kept his face neutral, holding up his hands innocently. "Whatever you say, but... Can we get out of here now? It's like the *Bates Motel* in here. We can get a cab from here to my hotel."

"Fine." Sam reached for the door, "But you can carry the cases."

SAM SAT NEXT to Rivers in the back of the cab, his throbbing head resting against the window, absently watching as the street lights flickered past. He could make out the ghost of his own feminine reflection staring back at him in the darkness beyond. He felt *cold*. Cold and alone. He could hear Rivers exhaling and drumming his fingers impatiently against the seat next to him.

Sam turned to Rivers, wiping a stray strand of blonde hair away from his cheek. "Do you know, you haven't once asked me how I am. How I'm feeling..."

Sam had been through so much since the swap, and most of it Rivers still had no idea about, nor did he seem particularly interested. Not that Sam would want to divulge all of the details of what he had endured. But that wasn't the point.

Rivers sighed, looking ahead to the Italian driver as he weaved in and out of the traffic, making sure he wasn't listening too closely to their conversation.

"There's just been too much going on. I haven't had an easy time of things either you know." He turned to look at Sam.

"You put me on that yacht, knowing full well what lay ahead of me. What would be expected of me. And *still* nothing? Not even a shred of concern?"

"Sam, you're a big girl now. What do you want me to do? Put an arm around you and tell you 'there, there', and that things will get better?"

Sam shook his head as he turned back to the window.

"Forget it."

He could feel a cold shiver working its through his body at Rivers' use of the word "girl". He looked down, his hair curtaining past his face, watching as his breasts shook with the motion of the car. Was it really so hard for Rivers to see past his body?

Sam rubbed at his bare shoulders.

Maybe he *did* just need to be told that things would be okay.



"HEY, THE COLLESEUM is coming up on the left." Rivers repositioned himself in the back seat of the cab, peering out to catch a glimpse of one of his favorite European landmarks by night. He turned to look at Sam, who sat motionless, his arms folded, looking straight ahead. "Trust me, you're gonna want to see this."

Sam turned, his blue eyes casting a withering look at Rivers.

"You know, you have a really good pout," Rivers sighed, leaning back again in his seat. He had to admit, he had probably pushed things too far with Sam. It was just that Sam had never been so damn emotional before, making it harder to gauge how he was going to react. He was going to have to come up with a different approach to win him back round.

As they drove, Rivers could not help but think back to Civitavecchia and the moment when Sam had stunned him by dressing in provocative lingerie. The same lingerie, Rivers noted, that Sam still wore under his pink top and white skirt. Sam had then seduced him, using every ounce of his French, blonde sex appeal to catch him off guard. He could still recall the feel of Sam atop him, pressed against his crotch, his soft breasts brushing his chest. Even when he had realised that it had been a trick, Rivers had been left awestruck at Sam's new-found confidence with his feminine body. It was certainly a far cry from the nervous girl he had kissed in the bar back at the casino.

The change in Sam had been partly responsible for Rivers' deciding against turning him over to the Agency. Before, Rivers had considered it would be for Sam's own good, to keep him out of the way, so that he would not be a danger to himself or the operation. But now, Rivers had witnessed first-hand a fierce drive and determination in Sam that he had never seen before. He had almost been convinced when Sam had said that he didn't need any help. He could almost believe that Sam could go through with the whole thing on his own.

Of course, this difference in Sam also had the adverse effect of making him even more attractive to Rivers.

Rivers gave a lingering, side-long glance at Sam. His breasts looked even larger from the side than they did from the front. His eyes drifted over Sam's bare legs, down to the white high heeled sandals that he wore on his small feet. He could not help but also notice the fresh pink gloss that shone from his luscious lips with each passing street light. It was getting harder than ever to think of Sam as a man.

Maybe he was going about things all wrong with Sam. If Sam looked like a girl, talked like a girl, and acted like a girl, then maybe Rivers needed to start *treating* him like one.

Women were, after all, Rivers' specialist subject.



It was getting harder than ever for Rivers to think of Sam as a man.

RIVERS STEPPED OUT of the cab, draping his torn suit jacket across one shoulder. He stopped, looking past the iron gates ahead of him, to the courtyard of the *Hotel de Russie* beyond, smiling to himself at the extravagance that he would charge direct to his Agency credit card.

"This is more like it, huh?" Rivers stepped around to the other side of the car to help Sam out, only to find him already teetering up the steps towards the entrance of the hotel. Rivers stopped, watching as his blonde partner strode through the open gates, oblivious to the wandering eyes of the immaculately dressed doorman that stood guard. His heels clicked noisily against the cobbled stone work, his hips jerking from side to side, his blonde hair swishing across his back.

"You a lucky man, you treat her good, yes?" The cab driver came up beside Rivers, looking with him towards Sam and the hotel's entrance.

"I'll try." Rivers turned to the driver, producing his leather wallet from his back pocket, offering a generous tip.

SAM STEPPED THROUGH into the brightly lit hotel suite, his heels echoing on the marble flooring. Immediately he was drawn to the view which stretched out before him. Glass slide-doors led out to a terrace which overlooked the night-lit vista of Rome. He cupped his hands, peering out through the glass into the darkness beyond, before turning, marvelling at the grand paintings that lined the high walls. It was like a small, self-contained apartment with a separate lounge, bedroom and bathroom. No expense had been spared.

"I guess it's a little nicer than my place," Sam admitted, running his hand along a mahogany sideboard.

Rivers tipped the bellboy as he deposited their cases in the centre of the reception room, before escorting the young man back out.

"All courtesy of the Agency!" Rivers beamed as he closed the door, walking over to stand beside Sam.

Sam looked up at him. Maybe Rivers had actually meant what he'd said about *sticking it* to the Agency. "They'll go mad when they get the bill."

"Let's hope so."

Sam felt Rivers' hand graze lightly at his lower back as he excused himself, walking over to a sideboard to discard his jacket.

"Hey, champagne!"

Sam jumped at the sound of the cork popping, bringing a hand to his chest as he caught his breath. Rivers walked back over, offering Sam a bubbling glass.

"What's the occasion?" Sam's long fingernails clicked against the crystal as he reached out to take the glass.

"Well, the card over there says *happy honeymoon*, but I'm not sure you'd be quite into that..."

"No." Sam cut across him quickly. He looked down at the glass, the smell of the alcohol turning his stomach. His head was still sore from the red wine that he had consumed earlier and he was in no mood for Rivers' joviality.

Sam stepped through into the lounge area and set the glass down onto a low table set between a pair of expensively upholstered couches. He straightened, turning to find Rivers standing in the entrance way, watching him. Sam could feel his cheeks blushing and tugged at the hem of his white skirt, wondering whether he had exposed himself when he had bent over. He quickly filled the awkward silence between them. "So tell me about Antoinette, why did the Agency want me to swap with her?"

"They didn't. Not at first anyway." Rivers took a gulp of his champagne. "Having you infiltrate Carlos Ramirez's yacht was always the original plan. The Agency were thinking you would swap with either Gaul or Maria Ramirez."

Sam shook his head in disbelief and smoothed his skirt, sitting himself down onto one of the plush couches. "I'm not sure which of those would be worse." He kept his legs together, turning them to one side to reach down, beginning to unbuckle the ankle-straps of his white high-heeled sandals.

"Well, lucky for you then that it didn't end there." Rivers sat down opposite Sam, placing his champagne glass onto the table between them. "The Agency found out that Scarlet had a similar idea and were also in the process of slipping an agent into Carlos Ramirez's operation."

"Antoinette." Sam discarded his heels and rubbed at the balls of his feet, before sliding his legs up beside him on the couch.

Rivers leant back, lacing his fingers behind his head. "They found out that she would be posing as a sex-slave. For the Agency it was too good an opportunity to miss. They could swap you with Antoinette and *still* infiltrate Ramirez's yacht. It would be even better for you. As Antoinette you would be a newcomer, and not expected to be as familiar with Ramirez as you would have posing as Gaul or Maria. And, of course, there was the added bonus that we would get a confused, frightened Scarlet agent in return, trapped in your body, hopefully willing to spill all her secrets to get her own body back."

"I take it that didn't quite go to plan." Sam slid a loose bra strap back over his shoulder, tucking it under the thin spaghetti strap of his pink vest-top. He noticed Rivers' gaze drifting, and quickly brought his hand back to his lap.



"I take it that didn't quite go to plan." Sam slid a loose bra strap back over his shoulder, tucking it under the thin spaghetti strap of his pink vest-top.

"Looking back now, it was all too convenient," Rivers continued, his eyes once again meeting Sam's. "A Scarlet agent coming in at the same moment as us, a perfect candidate for the swap, her psyche profile checks out and everything... She was *playing* us. Right from the beginning."

"So she knew about the device? That you planned to swap us?"

"Had to be. She was too confident, too in control for it to be anything else." Rivers leant forwards, reaching for his glass to take another sip. "She wanted what you had up *here.*" Rivers tapped at his forehead with his free hand.

"My computer codes..." Sam's heart sank.

"That's how she got away from us. She's good. *Really* good." Rivers looked away, tapping at his glass.

"But how did she even know I had a back door to the network? Not even you guys knew that."

"I don't know. There's still more to this that we haven't figured out yet."

Sam closed his eyes. "This whole thing is making my head hurt. All I know is that I don't trust *anyone* right now."

"The Agency is on the brink of being exposed to the world." Rivers voice was grave. "I know you don't give a shit about that anymore, but you should. Scarlet are anarchists, they want the United States to get caught with its pants down. When the world finds out that a low level, secretive organization like the Agency exists, that they've been using mind switching technology, it's going to destabilize *everything.*"

Sam sighed, leaning his head against one hand, his long blonde hair falling to the side. "I just want my body back."

"That's fine. Either way, we're after the same man." Rivers stood up, draining the last of the champagne from his glass.

"You mean, *woman*," Sam corrected.

Rivers ignored him, his eyes roaming across the length of Sam's folded legs.

"Rivers?" Sam cleared his throat, directing Rivers' attention upwards once more. "Why are you not turning me over to the Agency?"

Rivers looked down at the floor, thinking for a moment.

"I figured you deserve a shot at this asshole."

Sam watched as Rivers turned, heading back out of the lounge, his footsteps slow and weary.

"We should get some rest," Rivers called back, stretching his arms out beside him, "Tomorrow's gonna be a big day."

SAM IDLY WANDERED the apartment, his bare feet padding against the smooth flooring, his white skirt bouncing gently at his hips. In the main reception area, he found a touch-screen panel that seemed to control everything from the lighting to the TV. He found himself naturally drawn to the technology, and absently played with it, using it to remotely draw the curtains. Setting the device back down, he carried on, his curiosity leading him to an open door and the darkened room that lay beyond.

Sam pulled the cord, the bathroom brightly illuminating before him, causing him to bring a hand up to shield his sensitive eyes. He stepped forward, noticing immediately the generously sized hot tub, and a large walk-through shower off to the side. A large mirror stretched across the entire width of one wall, below which were a pair of matching white wash basins.

Despite all the luxury and extravagance surrounding him, Sam was drawn, as always, to his reflection. He stepped slowly forwards. His face looked young and vulnerable, his blue eyes wide and innocent. His blonde hair hung in unkempt waves across his shoulders and back.

Sam gripped the edge of one of the sinks with his feminine hands and leaned in closer to the mirror.

He was beginning to forget what he really looked like. Something so simple, that everyone took for granted. As a man, Sam didn't even spend that much time in front of a mirror. A cursory glance before leaving the apartment, to make sure his hair looked okay. Nothing more. And yet, he was so intimately familiar with how he looked, a sense of self hat he carried with him wherever he went.

Instead, he was starting to become more used to the young woman that now stared back at him from the mirror, his own male identity seeming to slip away with each hour, like a fading photograph.

Sam looked down, noticing a large wicker hamper set beside the left-most sink. There was a card attached.

"Happy honeymoon," Sam read aloud, unamused, turning the card over in his small hand.

He carefully unlatched the hamper, the wicker-work creaking upwards as it opened. It was full to the brim with men's and women's toiletries, cologne, perfumes, even make-up. Sam sorted through and pulled out a small hairbrush, bringing it to his tangled mess of hair. He had to do something with it before he went to bed, otherwise he'd run the risk of a bird setting up nest in there overnight. He began to brush through his long hair, wincing as a tangle caught.

Sam began to think of what Rivers had said earlier, how he had changed his mind about turning him over to the Agency, and that he thought he deserved a chance to find Antoinette. The truth was, Sam wasn't even sure he was that angry with Antoinette

anymore, despite his eagerness to find her and swap back to his own body. It had been Rivers and the Agency that had used Sam like a puppet for their unethical experiments. Why wasn't he giving Rivers a harder time about that?

Because he's manipulating you, Sam concluded at last. It was true — Rivers seemed to have a way with words, spinning everything with a wink and a grin. He'd never really noticed it before, but Rivers had a natural charm that was all too easy to get swept up in.

"Ow!" Sam felt his hair tugging sharply at his scalp. He set the hair brush down and used his fingernails to gently tease apart some matted blonde hair.

Sam decided he had let Rivers off too easily. He was still playing his cards close to his chest by withholding the location of the database theft, and he had been less than forthcoming about the details of Antoinette's escape. Sam could feel his heart beating faster. He looked determinedly back at his feminine reflection, tossing his smooth hair back over his shoulders.

SAM COULD HEAR Rivers in the bedroom and strode through the short corridor from the bathroom, his bare feet silent against the plush carpet, his wide hips jerking beneath his short white skirt. He stopped when he reached the open door, a hand resting on the door frame, standing silent and unnoticed.

The room was tastefully lit and modern, with a silver-sheeted king-size bed positioned in the middle of the room and a matching sofa-bed off to one side. Rivers had his back to Sam and kicked off each of his muddied Italian leather shoes in turn. He unclasped his wrist watch and set it down onto the bedside table. Sam glimpsed Rivers' face from the side, noticing that he seemed different. His usual energetic charisma seemed to have slipped, as if the weight of all of the world's problems had suddenly landed upon his shoulders.

Sam could not help but feel a sudden empathy for his friend. Rivers had said that things hadn't been easy for him either, and Sam realised that he hadn't even thought to ask what *he* had been through. He had been too caught up in feeling sorry for *himself.*

Sam continued to silently watch as Rivers unbuttoned his shirt sleeves, slipping his arms out one by one. His broad bare shoulders and back flexed with his movements. Sam could clearly see the tight, toned muscles of his shoulders shifting beneath his flesh.

Rivers looked up towards the mirror that sat atop a mahogany vanity table. He immediately noticed Sam's reflection in the doorway behind him.

"Oh, hey. I didn't see you there," Rivers turned back towards Sam. "Admiring the view were you?" Rivers' expression changed in an instant, his eyes sparkling with mischief once more.

Sam felt his cheeks flush red as Rivers stepped forwards, still topless, his pectoral muscles flexing. Sam's heart was beating fast and he struggled to keep his eyes looking up at Rivers' face.

"...You wish," Sam blustered in his feminine French accented voice, "I was just wondering where you were going to sleep, seeing as there's only the one bed." Sam perched his hands on his hips, silently cursing himself. Rivers had caught him off guard and yet again derailed his train of thought.



"Oh, hey. I didn't see you there," Rivers turned back towards Sam. "Admiring the view were you?"

"Same as always," Rivers pressed down on the bed causing his biceps to pump, the tight springs of the bed creaking. "One at either end?"

"I'm not sharing with you. Not like *this.*" Sam folded his arms across his chest as he looked up at Rivers. Without his high heels on, Rivers seemed taller than ever.

"Afraid I might try something?" Rivers grinned back down at him.

Sam looked away, his cheeks burning now.

Rivers lifted his chin gently upwards with a finger. "Hey, *relax,* okay? There's a sofa-bed here. I'll sleep on that if it makes you feel better."

Rivers turned back towards the bed, reaching down to pick up a neatly folded bundle of clothing. "Here," Rivers tossed the bundle to Sam. "Complimentary PJ's!"

Sam rolled his eyes as he unfolded the garment. Knowing Rivers it was probably some see-through negligee designed to embarrass him further. He was instead pleasantly surprised to find a light blue t-shirt and matching boxer briefs.

Rivers unfolded a matching blue set for himself and set it down onto the bed, before grasping his belt buckle, unthreading the leather belt from around his waist.

"I... uh, I'll get changed in the bathroom then." Sam awkwardly held the pajamas to his chest and turned, keeping his head down as he hurried back out of the bedroom.

SAM STOOD ONCE more in front of the bathroom sink, his tired blue eyes looking back at him from the mirror. His pink painted lips were hung slightly open as his gaze drifted downwards to his breasts which rose and fell beneath his figure hugging pink top. He crossed his arms one over the other and gripped the bottom of the garment, pulling it up and over his head in one fluid movement, being careful to pull his long blonde hair free.

What the hell was all *that* about? Why had he been unable to simply walk up to Rivers and say what was on his mind? Instead he had been left looking like a silly little school girl, sent off to bed by her father.

Sam irritably tossed his pink top to one side, his cleavage swelling within the revealing cups of his satin and lace brassiere. He reached behind, finding the clasp, unclipping it with ease. He sighed, feeling the pressure release on his chest as he peeled the bra from his shoulders. He watched in the mirror as his naked breasts jostled gently on his chest. They were full and round, with large



He could feel the string of the thong between his buttocks, though he was by now starting to become more used to it. Sam hooked his thumbs into the waist band and slid the panties over his hips.

aureole, his pink nipples standing to attention in the air conditioned room. He turned, looking sideways into the mirror, wondering if they sagged too much. It probably couldn't be helped considering their size. Sam ran his hands down over his flat stomach. He had barely eaten over the last few days and felt like he had lost a little weight.

Sam breathed in and reached behind for the zipper of his skirt, using his long fingernails to his advantage now. He lowered the zip, feeling the ruffled skirt sliding down over his wide hips, finally landing in a puddle at his feet.

From the mirror he could now see the lacy waist band of his lilac thong, along with the small pink bow at its centre. He could feel the string of the thong between his buttocks, though he was by now starting to become more used to it. Sam hooked his thumbs into the waist band and slid the panties over his hips, lifting each leg in turn to pull them from his feminine feet.

Now naked, Sam laid out the t-shirt and briefs onto the side next to the sink. He would be glad to not have to wear something feminine for a change; to not to have his breasts on show, or to have to worry about whether anyone could see up his skirt.

Sam held out the blue cotton briefs and stepped into them, sliding them up his long bare legs. As he pulled them up over his thighs, he realised that they were a tighter cut than he had realised. They stretched snug around his wide hips and round backside, pinching in tightly at the crotch. The leg openings were also cut short, leaving most of his feminine legs exposed. Sam turned, looking over his shoulder into the mirror. He was at least relieved to find his backside fully covered by the briefs, though he was left in no doubt that they were designed specifically for a woman. Sam smoothed his hands over the curve of his buttocks, turning his attention now to the matching light blue top.

Sam bunched the t-shirt up and first threaded each of his slender arms through, before slipping it over his head. Once he had threaded his hair through, Sam tugged the shirt downwards over his body. He found to his dismay that the t-shirt was cut differently as well. It was wider at the top, following the outward curve of his breasts, but pinched inwards at the waist. As if he needed any more attention to be drawn to that region, the hotel's logo was now emblazoned in gold lettering across his chest.

The upside was that the pajamas felt snug and comfortable, the soft cotton feeling particularly nice against his bare skin. Sam looked back to his blonde reflection in the mirror, his hands resting on his hips. He looked like a teenage girl ready for a slumber party.

Sam reached into the hamper where he had found the hairbrush earlier, finding a navy blue elasticated band. He scooped his blonde hair backwards, threading it through the band, pulling it through into a ponytail once more.

It was then that he heard a knock at the door.



"HEY SAM, CAN I come in?" Rivers called through the bathroom door. He waited, listening closely for Sam's soft, French accented voice.

"Yes... It's not locked."

Rivers smiled to himself. *Not locked?* Sam couldn't have been too worried about whether he would be walked in on. He turned the handle and pushed inwards, his eyes adjusting to the brighter lighting.

He saw Sam directly in front of him, bending forwards slightly in front of one of the sinks as he cupped running water with his hands, splashing it to his face. He was now dressed in the hotel's pajamas which pleasingly hugged his feminine curves. His ass looked particularly delicious in the blue briefs from where he was leant over.

Rivers walked up to the sink beside Sam, leaning in to the mirror to check his still swollen eye. He himself now wore the men's variant of the hotel's pajama set; a loose fitting blue t-shirt with the *Hotel de Russie* logo, along with a matching baggy pair of briefs that ended mid-thigh.

He looked back to Sam from the mirror, noticing how the t-shirt moulded itself to his firm breasts, the outline of his nipples clearly visible beneath.

"You look... *comfort-able,*" Rivers remarked.



Sam was now dressed in the hotel's pajamas which pleasingly hugged his feminine curves. His ass looked particularly delicious in the blue briefs from where he was leant over.

Sam pressed a white hand towel to his face, patting it dry, before looking over at Rivers through the reflection of the mirror.

"I think mine must have shrunk in the wash."

Rivers smiled, then looked down, catching sight of the clothing that Sam had left strewn across the floor. "What did I say about looking after your things?" He crouched down, scooping up Sam's pink top, his skirt…

His panties.

Rivers stood upright, Sam's lilac thong hanging from his outstretched index finger.

"Give me that!" Sam quickly snatched the clothing from Rivers' hands, setting the garments down onto the side next to the sink. He tucked his panties and bra underneath the small bundle of feminine clothing.

Rivers watched as Sam's cheeks once again flushed bright red. It was getting almost too easy to embarrass his female partner.



AS THEY BRUSHED their teeth together, Sam couldn't help but be amazed at the sight before him in the mirror. It was a scene that had played out a hundred times before, in a hundred different hotel rooms, both of them lost in their own thoughts about the mission ahead.

Except this time it was different.

Sam looked up at Rivers, his masculine physique dwarfing Sam's petite female body. It was amazing how something as simple as gender could bring about such a huge change in perspective. Everything from the way he walked and sat, to the clothes he wore, to the way he related to other people and the way they treated him.

Sam stared at Rivers' stubble flecked face, his hazel colored eyes looking long and hard at his own reflection, as if he were having an inner conversation with himself.

Even his own partner seemed to barely acknowledge that he used to be a man.

Used to be…

Sam's gaze returned to his own feminine face, pondering the significance.

RIVERS PATTED THE pillow down onto the sofa bed and climbed beneath the silver patterned sheets. His body still ached from the hours he'd spent on the road, cooped up in the tight confines of the Lamborghini. He groaned and repositioned himself, the mattress feeling hard and uncomfortable beneath him.

Rivers looked over to Sam. He looked small, lying there alone in the king size bed, the silver sheets pulled tightly up under his chin.

"Comfortable?" Sam spoke, his pretty face smiling down at Rivers.

"It's perfect. I never needed my spine anyway..."

Sam laughed. Rivers hadn't heard that laugh in a long while, so lilting and feminine, bringing an endearing beauty to his feminine features.

"Well, I'm gonna have to turn out the light before I pass out." Sam yawned, reaching for the lamp cord beside the bed.



"Well, I'm gonna have to turn out the light before I pass out." Sam yawned, reaching for the lamp cord beside the bed.

"Sure. Goodnight Sam." Rivers smiled back at Sam, fixing the image of the blonde beauty in his mind before it disappeared to the darkness.

"Goodnight," Rivers heard Sam's voice reply from out of the dark.



SAM ROLLED ONTO his side, pulling the covers tightly around him, his eyelids finally yielding to his tiredness. His ponytail lay across the pillow behind him, keeping his hair away from his face.

It was the first time that he'd gone to bed in days, and not felt petrified; whether it was from being locked in his room on the yacht by Gaul, or forced to sleep between the naked bodies of Carlos and Maria Ramirez. His active mind still raced with worry about what lay ahead for them, but for now, he knew he was safe, with Rivers sleeping only a few feet away from him on the sofa bed.

He still had so much he wanted to say to Rivers, but he just didn't have the strength of will to argue with him anymore. Not *tonight* anyway.

Sam brought his legs up towards him, curling into a fetal position. His figure-hugging pajamas stretched with his movement, the soft cotton sliding against his sensitive skin.

Perhaps some things were best left unsaid. After all, he just had to work with Rivers for a little longer to help him get his body back. There would be plenty of time afterwards to give Rivers a piece of his mind.



RIVERS LAY ON his back, staring up to the ceiling, his fingers laced behind his head. His eyes had begun to adjust to the dark a little, his vision bathing the room in a hazy black and white static. It had been about fifteen minutes now since turning in. He had listened out for Sam's movements in the bed, his breathing. He had to be nearly asleep by now.

It was time for Rivers to make his move.

Despite all that he'd put Sam through already, Rivers couldn't resist the urge to toy with his transgendered friend a little more. It was just in his nature. It was who he was.

"Sam?" Rivers called out quietly into the dark.

"Mmm?" A feminine groan came from the bed next to Rivers.

"Are you still awake?"

"No..."

"Good. I just wanted to let you know..."

"Huh?"

"I wanted to tell you... I'm sorry about what I said earlier... in the cab."

Rivers listened, his eyes darting. There was a pause and he heard Sam reposition himself beneath the covers of the king size bed, turning towards Rivers' sofa bed.

"Can we talk about this tomorrow?" Sam's voice was muffled and sounded achingly tired.

"I imagine you had to do some pretty awful things on the yacht..."

"I was just doing what I had to do..." Sam breathed a heavy sigh, his feminine voice barely audible now, "What any agent would..."

"What any *female* agent would, you mean."

There was more silence. Rivers gently bit down on his lip, stifling a grin. It was true then. Sam had had sex with Carlos Ramirez in Antoinette's body. Things were looking up. As far as Rivers could tell, his chances of bedding his sexy blonde partner had just gone up drastically.

"You're coping really well, you know. The way you're accepting and embracing your femininity. It's definitely the right way to be going about things."

"*What?*"

Rivers noticed the shadow of Sam's head rise up from the pillow.

"It's true. I mean, look at that stunt you pulled back in Civitevecchia. I could see the look in your eyes. It's nothing to be embarrassed about."

A couple of minutes more silence.

"Mike? What you said back then. Did you mean it?" Sam's feminine voice was clearer now.

"What?"

"You said you'd been...uh... *thinking* about it..."

Rivers smiled. At last he'd taken the bait. "Sam... There's something you need to realise. Who you were a few days ago... That isn't who you are now. You need to realise, you're not a man anymore..."

He paused for emphasis.

"...You're a *woman.*"

Rivers heard Sam quickly turn back over in his bed, away from Rivers, sweeping the covers up over his head. Rivers settled himself back into the sofa bed.

Mission accomplished.



SAM'S WHOLE BODY shook with a shiver that ran from his shoulders down to the base of his spine. He couldn't believe it. His own partner, his *friend*... had practically just admitted to... To *wanting* to...

Sam pulled the covers tighter around himself, feeling his flesh goosebump, his nipples inadvertently hardening beneath the cotton of his t-shirt.

Of course, Rivers had said as much in Civitavecchia, though Sam had managed to convince himself that he'd just said it in the heat of the moment. But no, it appeared that Rivers had no qualms about having sex with someone who used to be a guy.

Used to be...

The words came to Sam again, the shiver spreading deeper throughout his body now, vibrating down through his thighs and loins.

Sam closed his eyes, finally feeling himself slipping away into a troubled sleep.



SAM WAS RUNNING.

Running from the masked man that had haunted his dreams ever since he had swapped into Antoinette's female body. The figure was almost upon him now, emerging from the white smoke that billowed up around him.



Sam rolled onto his back, watching as the masked man came into focus. He saw now that the man wore a heavy breathing mask and was dressed in black fatigues.

The Scarlet soldier from the yacht. He had finally found him.

Sam slipped.

Damn heels.

He fell forwards onto the floor, struggling to get back up, but his body felt too heavy. Too heavy to move. He tried to crawl, his feet skidding beneath him.

It was too late.

Sam rolled onto his back, watching as the masked man came into focus. He saw now that the man wore a heavy breathing mask and was dressed in black fatigues.

The Scarlet soldier from the yacht.

He had finally found him.

The soldier knelt down before Sam, looming up over him. Sam cried out, his female voice weak and barely heard in the void surrounding

him. He could see a pair of eyes looking down at him through the window of the mask, his breath sounding mechanical through the breathing apparatus.

Sam futilely pushed at his chest as the man positioned himself above Sam, his gloved hands pushing Sam's bare thighs open.

"No please!" Sam quivered, his breasts heaving on his chest.

The masked man looked down, fumbling with his belt. Sam struggled again with every ounce of strength, but was powerless to stop the man as he pulled Sam's skirt upwards.

Sam stared deep into the unblinking eyes behind the mask as he felt a blunt pressure, probing silently between his legs. It pressed forwards, Sam's body yielding, betraying him, taking the man deep inside of him.

Sam's back arched and he gasped as the man worked his way in. The intruder began slowly, his breath still wheezing beneath the mask, his gloved hands holding Sam's legs apart. He had to make it stop. He reached to the man's mask, pulling at the straps that held it to his face, finally dislodging it, the attacker's face revealed at last...

Carlos Ramirez!

Sam could smell the ash on his breath as his yellowed teeth grinned, his hips still rocking against Sam's body.

Sam closed his eyes.

He would endure it.

He was doing what he had to do. What any agent would...

Any *female* agent...

He opened his eyes again, his shrill voice gasping. The figure had now changed! Instead of Ramirez's leering grimace, it was now Joseph's warm disarming eyes looking down at him, his naked, muscular body beaded with sweat.

Sam gasped, a cooling wash of relief spreading throughout his body, his muscles gradually relaxing, allowing Joseph to move more freely inside of him. His large hands groped at Sam's heavy chest, looking deep into his eyes. Sam gripped Joseph's strong arms, helpless to prevent the waves of arousal and pleasure spreading from his loins, a moist warmth that now eagerly welcomed the man. He brought his legs up, wrapping them around Joseph's waist, spurring him onwards.



Sam's eyes rolled back and he began to rock his hips in time with each thrust, the sound of his own feminine moans piercing the air.

Sam's eyes rolled back and he began to rock his hips in time with each thrust, the sound of his own feminine moans piercing the air.

He was close.

So close.

Just a little more...

Sam opened his eyes, so that he could look into his lover's eyes as they approached their climax together.

Only this time it wasn't Joseph's face that he saw.

IT WAS THE early hours of the morning and sunlight had begun to filter in through the curtains of the bedroom. Mike Rivers rolled over on the sofa bed, his lower back aching.

The sound was quiet at first. A low, almost feline purr. Rivers raised his head from the pillow looking over to the bed where Sam lay.

There it was again!

Small, feminine gasps were coming from Sam's sleeping body! Rivers kept watching as Sam rolled over onto his back, the covers sliding off of the top half of his feminine body. Rivers could see his face now, his closed eyes, his cupid lips hung open, his chest rising and falling rapidly beneath his sky-blue pajama top. Sam continued to moan softly, his head rolling against the pillow, his arms now wide beside him on the bed.



Small, feminine gasps were coming from Sam's sleeping body! Rivers kept watching as Sam rolled over onto his back, the covers sliding off of the top half of his feminine body.

Rivers couldn't believe what he was both seeing and hearing. With every effeminate sound that Sam made, Rivers could feel himself harden just a little more. He quietly watched, not daring to make a sound as Sam's thighs scissored beneath the covers.

Rivers immediately thought back to last night. How he had waited until Sam had been on the edge of sleep before pressing him for details of what had happened on the yacht, guiding the conversation to their *oh-so-nearly* intimate moment in Civitavecchia. He had done it on purpose so that Sam would have some interesting thoughts to go to sleep with. He'd never in a million years imagined something like this happening!

Rivers carefully slid his right hand down beneath the covers of the sofa bed, his fingers slipping under the waist band of his briefs.

Sam gasped again, sounding as though he couldn't quite catch his breath. Rivers had to be careful as Sam could wake himself up at any moment. He curled his hand around his hardness, beginning to softly stroke. One of Sam's hands came up, resting against his right breast, as an enticing milky white thigh escaped from the protection of the covers.

Rivers began to breathe harder, his hand pumping faster, watching as Sam's thighs scissored inwards and outwards of their own accord.

Suddenly with a loud, shrill gasp, Sam woke, sitting bolt upright in the bed, his blonde ponytail whipping forwards, his breasts jumping under his pajama top. Rivers quickly closed his eyes, dropping his head back onto the pillow, but it was too late. He tensed his lower body, trying to restrain himself but he was too far gone. He rolled his body away from Sam, grimacing through clenched teeth as he emptied into the bedsheets.

SCARLET

CHAPTER NINE

A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK





Sam could hear a rapid, dull pounding and began to look around for the source of the noise, suddenly realising that it was his own heartbeat thundering in his ears.

SAM SAT UPRIGHT in the bed, the covers in a tangle beneath him. He gasped, struggling to catch his breath, his surroundings slowly coming into focus. The large bedroom of the *Hotel de Russie's* luxury suite was now dimly lit by the morning sunlight that filtered in through the crack in the curtains.

He reached up, sweeping a hand along the length of his blonde ponytail, feeling confused. He could hear a rapid, dull pounding and began to look around for the source of the noise, suddenly realising that it was his own heartbeat thundering in his ears. Had he been *dreaming?* He brought a hand to his chest.

More like a *nightmare...*

Sam swept the covers away and swung his legs off of the bed. He sat upright, his toes brushing against the plush carpet beneath him. His breasts heaved beneath his pajama top and seemed to ache. He rubbed a hand across them, his nipples stiff and sore as they brushed against the inside of his t-shirt. He gripped his head in his hands, his eyes closing as he struggled in vain to recall what he had been dreaming about.

Sam noticed that his whole body seemed to be tingling. He held his feminine hands out in front of him, watching as his slender fingers quivered. He pushed himself up from the bed and yawned, stretching his arms up above his head. Even his legs felt unsteady, trembling like they were made of jello.

Looking over, Sam noticed that Rivers was still asleep in the separate sofa bed, his body turned away from him, his shoulders gently rising and falling with his breathing.

Sam tip-toed quietly out of the room, carefully walking along the short corridor towards the bathroom, trailing one hand against the wall for support. His bare legs brushed together, a faint tingling warmth noticeable between his thighs.

SAM LET THE hot shower soothe his body, the high pressure of the water massaging into his soft skin. He poured a generous helping of strawberry scented body wash into his hand and began to slide his hands over his body; first his shoulders, then his arms, before working the sweet smelling suds into his heavy breasts.

Sam sighed. His breasts still felt unusually sensitive and his nipples soon hardened to his touch. His hands slid down, rubbing the body wash over his tummy, then his hips, his backside, finally down to wash his mound, the flat of his palm disappearing down between his legs.

Sam gasped, quickly pulling his hand back as if he had just touched a live wire. He paused, looking down suspiciously at his feminine body. He was still unused to the many different sensations that his body could produce, and did not know if it was normal to feel like this, or whether something was wrong. Perhaps it was just the last of the alcohol from yesterday, working its way through his system.

Yes, that was probably it.

Sam leant over, his soapy hands running over his upper thighs, his heavy breasts swaying beneath him. He could feel the prickle of his legs from where he had not yet shaved.



Sam's hands slid down, rubbing the body wash over his tummy, then his hips, his backside, finally down to wash his mound, the flat of his palm disappearing down between his legs.

Sam could still hear Maria Ramirez's stern words to him, chastising him for his lack of effort with his feminine appearance. Even though she was gone, her voice still seemed to echo in his head, sending a panicked shiver down his spine. He was left with the realisation that as long as he was in Antoinette's female body, he would need to present himself as a woman as best he could. Anything less than his best effort ran the risk of drawing unwanted attention and suspicion.

Sam raised his left foot up onto a low shelf set into the walk-through shower, his thigh now raised so that it ran perpendicular to his body. He swapped the bottle of body wash for shaving cream and poured it into his hands, rubbing it between his palms before sliding his hands over his long left leg. He took the fresh disposable razor that he had found in the honeymoon hamper and began to carefully remove the cream in long, even strokes.

Sam swapped legs, lathering his shapely right thigh, working the shaving cream down into his calf, before expertly removing all trace of hair with the razor. He ran his slender hands over his freshly shaved legs. They felt soft and silky smooth, causing a tingling sensation to play throughout his body once more.

Sam's hands drifted upwards, his fingers briefly grazing against the faint stubble of his mound. He had found that it had begun to itch down there and figured that, since he didn't plan on occupying Antoinette's body long enough to let it grow back out, he should probably continue to keep it shaved as well.

Sam took another handful of cream and rubbed it into his mound, exhaling, feeling his nipples hardening once more on his chest. He began to remove the cream from around his vagina, flicking the razor in small, rapid strokes, being extra careful as he shaved either side of his *labia majora*. Sam pulled the shower head from its cradle, aiming it between his legs to wash away the last of the cream.

Sam's feminine voice gasped at the sudden pressure of the water between his legs. He quickly aimed the hot water away, shocked at his sensitivity. He hesitantly brought the shower head back, being more careful this time, but had to bite his lip and was soon forced to turn the water off altogether.

Sam sighed, his chest rising and falling as the final droplets of water dripped from his body to join the wet floor of the shower.

Just what *was* that? It was like he had the girl equivalent of *morning wood*. It was the only way he could think to describe how he was feeling down there. Sam looked down at his body, sweeping his wet blonde hair off of his breasts, noticing how thick and swollen his nipples were. A brief, probing index finger against his left nipple soon told him everything he needed to know.

He hadn't felt this way since...

The yacht.

Sam could remember all too well how Maria Ramirez had expertly aroused him back on the *Oro del Diablo*. Her touch had been electric, exciting and intoxicating. She had known just how to tease his unfamiliar female body, and yet at the same time Sam had felt deeply ashamed of taking pleasure from Antoinette's body. When Carlos Ramirez had finally stepped in and taken his own pleasure of Sam, he couldn't help but feel like he'd got what he'd deserved for abusing Antoinette's body.

The very thought of Carlos Ramirez pierced Sam's consciousness like ice water. All trace of body warmth seemed to leave his body in an instant, his nipples softening once more as his smooth flesh prickled with goose bumps.

Sam closed his eyes and breathed in, reaching for the shower dial, bringing the temperature right down into the blue. He opened his eyes and switched the water on, letting the cold water shock him back into the present.



SAM STOOD IN front of the bathroom mirror as he gently patted the plush bathroom towel over his naked body. He stared deep into the blue eyes of his feminine reflection, stopping to take in the sight of his young, heart shaped face. His full lips were slightly parted and his wet blonde hair hung limp over his shoulders and back. His gaze drifted over his pert rounded breasts and his large pink nipples, then down to his flat stomach. Sam turned to one side, his fingers drifting around the outline of the bruise that had marked his side. It had nearly healed already.



From his reflection Sam could see that his underarms were now smooth and slightly pinkish from where they had been freshly shaved.

Sam tossed the bathroom towel onto the side next to the twin-sinks. He stretched his arms up above his head, his palms pointing upwards, his fingers touching, groaning quietly as his lower back clicked into place. From his reflection he could see that his underarms were now smooth and slightly pinkish from where they had been freshly shaved. After sobering himself with cold water from the shower, Sam had been able to raise the temperature of the water enough to finish washing and shaving without incident. His entire body was now silky smooth and completely hairless. Sam's gaze lingered on his baby-smooth mound and the pink split that bisected his groin.

Since swapping with Antoinette, Sam had done his best to ignore his new sex. To start with it had very much been a case of *out of sight, out of mind*. Now he found himself much more conscious and aware of it. His experiences with Carlos Ramirez had awoken a new-found sense of vulnerability that he carried with him now wherever he went. He felt it in the presence of *any* man now, whether it was Rivers, or even someone relatively unthreatening like Lorenzo. It was the deep-rooted, sub-conscious idea that he could be taken — *used* — all with little say in the matter. He couldn't help but wonder whether all women felt like that.

Sam shook his head and took a hairbrush from the honeymoon hamper, beginning to sweep it through his

long wet hair, finding the routine of it comforting. He could smell the sweet scent of the shampoo and conditioner that he had used in the shower.

Sam glanced past his reflection to the locked bathroom door behind him. It would soon be time to go back out there, though he wasn't quite sure he had the energy for another day with Rivers.

The man who was responsible for his predicament.

The man who now lusted after him, in spite of everything wrong about that whole idea.

Sam could feel his tummy begin to tie itself up in knots. There was that vulnerability again, kicking him right where it hurt. He looked back to his image in the mirror, narrowing his blue eyes as he practiced his best poker face.



"YOU TOOK YOUR time."

Rivers looked up at Sam from the bed, his eye still a little swollen, though nowhere near as bad as it had been last night. Sam stepped gingerly through into the bedroom, nervously tightening his grip on his white bath towel. His partner sat on the edge of the sofa-bed, his blue pajama top tight against his toned body as he stretched his arms up above his head. Sam could feel his own heart beat racing.

"It takes longer to get ready as a woman." Sam struggled to relax his shaking hands as he stroked a strand of wet hair back behind his ear. He felt strangely self-conscious and nervous, despite having more than held his own with Rivers the day before.

Sam could feel Rivers' eyes on him as he tip-toed over to the king-size bed. He sat himself down opposite him, making sure to keep his bare thighs tight together.

"Oh, so you're finally admitting that you're a woman now. That's a good start." Rivers grinned, letting his gaze linger on Sam's glistening wet legs.

"That's not what I meant." Sam could feel his cheeks blushing.

"It's okay, really," Rivers held up his hands, "It's definitely going to help us. Especially today."

"What do you mean?" Sam pulled up on the tied knot of his towel. He was irritated that he was already caught on the back foot.

"While you've been away having some girl time, I've been making some calls."

Girl time? Sam swallowed, thinking back to his *morning wood* moment in the shower. Did Rivers know? Could men somehow sense stuff like that? Sam shook his head. He was just being stupid. "Calls... what calls?"

"I've made us an appointment at the mansion for 12.30 this afternoon."

"An *appointment?* You mean we're just gonna walk in through the front door?"

"Of course. An agent never goes in blind. This will be reconnaissance. You remember how to do that, right?"

"But what if someone recognises me? I mean... *Antoinette*..." Sam flicked his damp blonde hair back over his shoulders. He could feel droplets of cold water snaking their way over his bare back.

"The woman I spoke to was part of an events agency. It turns out the mansion is let out to the public whenever the owner isn't around. It's perfect. We'll literally get a guided tour of the place."

"It's *suicide* is what it is. What if..."

"There's always a 'what if'," Rivers interrupted, "That's why the Agency employs people like us, so we can deal with that when it comes. Just relax honey, we've done stuff like this before."

Sam opened his mouth to protest at being called *honey*, but quickly bit his lip when he saw Rivers grinning back at him. He was doing it on purpose. Sam realised that he was going to have to do his best to ignore stuff like that, otherwise it would just encourage Rivers to do it even more. Sam let Rivers off with a harsh stare instead. He pushed himself away from the bed and walked around to the bedroom window, his wide hips rolling beneath his bath towel. Sam peered through the curtains to the streets below, the natural sunlight harsh against his eyes. He could already see tourists going about their day, oblivious to the two secret agents in the luxury hotel suite high above them.



"Well, I'm going to need something to wear." Sam was a little surprised to find that he spoke his thoughts out loud.

"Well, I'm going to need something to wear." Sam was a little surprised to find that he spoke his thoughts out loud.

"I've already thought of that."

Sam turned back to face Rivers, watching as he stood, threading his pajama top up over his head, revealing the taught musculature of his body. "My favorite designer works in Rome, I put in a couple of orders for us both."

Sam quickly turned back to the window, frustrated at the sudden awkwardness of Rivers' half-nakedness.

"You... *chose* an outfit for me?" Sam sighed and wiped a hand against the condensation on the inside of the window. "Great..."

Sam could hear Rivers bare feet padding across the room and soon he was in Sam's personal space, close behind him, speaking down over his shoulder.

"Relax. I was very well restrained." Sam winced as he felt Rivers hands at his waist. He quickly spun around, breaking his grasp, his chest heaving beneath his towel as he stared up at Rivers.

"Will you... will you go get ready some place else?" Sam's French accented voice wavered and his eyes darted, finding it difficult to keep his eyes on Rivers' own.

Rivers smiled down at Sam before turning, walking slowly back to the bed. He swept up his pajama top, turning it around in his hands before slipping his arms back into it.

"You know, this is *exactly* why I stopped taking on female partners."

"What do you mean?" Sam folded his slender arms across his chest.

"It just gets too awkward." Rivers looked irritated as he tugged his top back down over his chest, "You have to constantly watch what you say... You can't even get ready in the same room together..."

"Well I'm sorry, but you're the one who chose to swap me with a woman, remember?"

Rivers looked up at the ceiling as he spoke, as if recounting a well-rehearsed speech. "And then there's the arguing, the barely disguised sexual tension. Eventually you *have* sex and it just makes the whole thing even more awkward."

Sam almost choked. "Well, you definitely don't have to worry about that ever happening!"

"That's what they *all* say." Rivers gave a wink before turning towards the door. "I'm gonna go get showered."

As the door closed behind Rivers, Sam gave a frustrated growl and threw a pillow ineffectually after him. Why did he always manage to get the last word in? He knew that Rivers had said those things to wind him up further, but what worried him was that Rivers actually believed all that bullshit.

Sam wearily sat himself down in front of the mirror on the dresser table. His feminine reflection looked back at him from three different angles, looking more exasperated in each one.



SAM CAREFULLY DREW the hair straighteners along the length of his long blonde hair, drawing it out in sections into long, silky smooth strands. He even executed the little trick he'd learnt from Maria, of crimping a slight curl into the ends. He watched in the mirror as he let go of the hair, the wavy ends bouncing at his feminine shoulders.

He could still hear the faint roar of the shower coming from the bathroom and was relieved to be away from Rivers' relentless teasing for a while. As before, Sam came to find his new feminine regime quite relaxing, and it didn't take much blow-drying and brushing of his long blonde hair to lighten his mood.

Sam unpinned the final section of his hair so that he could draw the straighteners through. As the ceramic plates hissed, he closed his eyes, gently humming a tune to himself. His lilting high pitched register took him by surprise at first. It could almost have been Brigitte Lavelle herself, singing the tune to him.

"Il me dit des mots d'amour
Des mots de tous les jours
Et ça me fait quelque chose."

Sam's sensual French voice lifted above the ambience of the room. His eyes opened in time to watch his lips mouth the final words. Something about the song comforted him, taking him back to a happier time, but he knew not when or where.

A buzzer shrieked its way through the apartment causing Sam to gasp. He quickly caught his breath and unplugged the straighteners. He listened out for Rivers, but the shower water could still be heard in the distance.

The buzzer wailed once more.

Sam cursed to himself and stood up from the dresser table, quickly re-tying his bath towel for safety before hurrying along the short corridor to the main reception room, his breasts bouncing beneath his towel with each step.

He paused in front of a long mirror, evening out his freshly styled hair, just as the door buzzer rang out again.

"J'arrive!" Sam called out before hurrying to the door, his small hand curling around the brass handle.

"A delivery for Mister Rivers." The bellboy from yesterday stood expectantly at the door, a pair of suit bags draped over one arm. Either side of him, Sam noticed a couple of large full bags, each from designer stores. "Just sign here please."

Sam took the clipboard and pen, and after some consideration, marked his name with a bold 'X'. He looked up at the bellboy, expecting the young man's eyes to be wandering his scantily covered body. Instead he stared blankly ahead. At last, someone who knew how to behave around a woman.

Sam handed the clipboard back and stepped to one side as the boy entered. He watched as he carefully laid the suit bags over the back of a chair before returning to the corridor outside to fetch the bags.

"Merci," Sam smiled as best he could. He closed his eyes and shook his head, gripping his temples between a thumb and forefinger. "I mean... *thanks*..." Sam opened his eyes again. "Sorry, I don't have any money on me..."

"It okay," the boy smiled, "Your husband will leave big tip."

Sam nodded awkwardly and closed the door. He exhaled, alone once more. "*Husband?* He'd be lucky!" Sam spent a moment concentrating on breathing deeply. He had found himself slipping into French again, which always caused him to panic a little afterwards. Each time it happened it felt like he was losing something of himself. It was as if Antoinette were still inside him somewhere, fighting to take over.

The marble flooring was cold to Sam's bare feet as he padded over to the protective suit bags laid across the chair. He took the smaller of the two, guessing it was meant for him.

"Okay Rivers, time to find out what's in that perverse mind of yours..."

Sam reluctantly unzipped the bag and gasped.

"I don't believe it!"

"SOMETHING WRONG?"

Sam turned at the sound of Rivers' voice, watching as he emerged from the bathroom, a white towel wrapped around his middle. His naked upper body still steamed from the hot shower.

"Mike! I... I can't believe you *actually* picked this!" Sam reached into the suit bag and carefully pulled the clothing out. On a set of hangers were a tasteful, crimson-red woman's blouse, along with a fitted charcoal grey suit jacket and a matching skirt. Nothing too short or obscene. It was actually something any smart business woman might wear.

"You like it?" Rivers beamed as he walked over, casting only a cursory glance to Sam's clothes, before taking his own suit bag and unzipping it. "Ah, excellent!" Rivers enthused as he unwrapped his own suit, "Volandro never lets me down!"

"I can't believe you picked something... *normal!*" Sam hugged the outfit to his body.

"Hey, do you know how much that suit costs? There's nothing *normal* about it." Rivers ran his fingers over his own designer shirt.

"You know what I mean."

"I know you'd probably prefer something a bit more girly and feminine, but we need to look like we mean business."

"No, no... this is fine, believe me." Sam was confused. Why on earth would he prefer something *girly* and *feminine?* "If you're talking about what I was wearing before... I was in a rush..."

"A very pink, coordinated rush, wouldn't you say?" Rivers looked side-long at Sam, grinning mischievously.

He was doing it again. Sam cast his eyes skywards, doing his best to ignore Rivers' comments.

RIVERS CAREFULLY ADJUSTED his suit cuffs before leaning in to the bathroom mirror to adjust his new silk tie. He always loved putting on a crisp new suit. Out of the many luxuries that life as an agent could afford, a designer suit was one of the ones that he would miss the most. He stood upright, shrugging his shoulders into the jacket. It fit him perfectly. He reached up, making careful micro-adjustments to his short hair.

Rivers reached down to the designer bag he had brought in, unboxing a brand new pair of black Italian leather shoes. Sitting down onto the edge of the hot tub, he carefully slid each of his feet, in turn, into the plush new shoes.

Rivers looked up to the closed door, his mind wandering off around the corner, to the bedroom, where Sam would be getting ready in his own outfit. He wished he had some surveillance gear set up for *that* particular little scene.

Sam had seemed so cute the way he had been excited about his new outfit. It seemed like he couldn't wait to get all dressed up.

Rivers reached down, tying his shoe laces.

He could still picture Sam in the bed earlier, rolling onto his back, moaning effeminately in his sleep. Part of him kept thinking what would have happened if he'd just slipped into the bed and started caressing Sam's feminine body in his sleep. Then, by the time he'd woken, he'd have been too far gone to stop anything else.

But it wouldn't have happened like that. Rivers knew it would have been too soon. He'd managed to coax a girly wet dream out of his partner, and that was enough for now. There was certainly more fun to be had in moulding his sexy little French girl.

The only problem was how much longer he himself could hold out. He'd pretty much soaked the bed sheets earlier, and even relieving himself a second time in the shower had done little to stem his surging testosterone.

Rivers stood, straightening his suit jacket. He gave one last look to the mirror before reaching down to adjust his crotch.

It was time to see how Sam was coming along.



THE LIPSTICK TUBE popped open and Sam carefully turned the end, watching as the crimson color swivelled upwards. The honeymoon hamper had certainly come well-stocked, allowing Sam to take his pick from a whole variety of make-up to best compliment his new outfit. His eyes were now darker and smokier than they had ever been before, his long black mascara covered eyelashes fluttering as he blinked. He pouted, gently smearing the crimson gloss across his full lips, before sucking them inwards to help even out the color. His lips now perfectly matched his freshly painted nails.

Sam's eyes refocused on the mirror, catching sight of Rivers in the doorway to the bedroom behind him. He looked like he was ready for dinner at an expensive restaurant. His new suit looked sharp and his hair was now neat and freshly styled.

"Jesus, you're not ready yet?" Rivers sighed, walking through into the room.

Sam swivelled on the dresser table stool, pulling up at his bath towel, conscious that it was only thing still protecting his modesty.

"What do you expect? You want me to look the part, right?" Sam spoke up in his French accent.

"Not as much as *you* evidently do."

"This isn't as easy as it looks you know." Sam set the lipstick back down onto the dresser table and leant in closer to the mirror to wipe at a stray clump of mascara. "Anyway, I'm finished now. I just need to get dressed and then we can get going." Sam stood up, then stopped, suddenly remembering something. "Oh *shit*..."

"What is it?"

"No, no it doesn't matter..." Sam looked away, feeling his cheeks beginning to blush with embarrassment.



Sam's eyes refocused on the mirror, catching sight of Rivers in the doorway to the bedroom behind him. He looked like he was ready for dinner at an expensive restaurant. His new suit looked sharp and his hair was now neat and freshly styled.

"Come on. Tell me." Rivers settled himself down onto the edge of the sofa bed as he watched Sam.

"Well... I only came here with the one set of underwear." Sam stroked his luxurious hair back over his shoulders, his eyes darting, not wanting to look Rivers in the eye.

"That's okay! I thought of that. Take a look in *there*." Rivers gestured to the designer bag that Sam had brought through with his suit.

Sam looked at Rivers sheepishly, then hesitantly stepped forwards, reaching into the bag. He first pulled out a couple of large boxes , before reaching in further, finding a smaller, pink boutique style bag that was tied with black ribbon.

"Victoria's Secret?" Sam let the small bag dangle from one finger, one hand perched indignantly on his hip.

"Go on. Open it," Rivers prompted excitedly from the sofa-bed.

Sam could feel his heart racing as he pulled open the ribbon. To say it felt *weird* would have been an understatement. He'd never had anyone buy underwear for him before, and now that he was a woman, it felt even more strangely intimate.

He reached into the bag, slowly pulling forth a lacy black bra. He felt so embarrassed. Even though he was just holding the underwear, Sam felt like he was giving a full strip tease. At first glance the bra seemed too small and delicate to cover his large breasts. He quickly checked the label. He was wrong.

"Oh my god, you *know* my cup size?" Sam instinctively brought a protective hand to his chest.

"Yours weren't so difficult to figure out." Rivers stretched back out on the sofa-bed. "They've got that fullness to them, definitely bigger than a *C*, whilst still being quite firm and pert, which you don't tend to get with a *double-D*."

"You're unbelievable." Sam tossed the brassiere into the unmade bed sheets, feeling suddenly self-conscious at Rivers' appraisal of his breasts. He was eager to move on and get the rest over with as quickly as possible. He reached back into the bag. "And a thong? *Really?*" Sam held out the skimpy black lace underwear with one hand.

"I know you like wearing them."

"*Like* them?" Sam could hear his French accented voice going up in pitch with his disbelief.

"And I know the suit isn't very feminine, so I figured you could wear these and still feel girly underneath."

Sam began to stammer, still in shock about the whole thing. "Mike... As you've *clearly* already noticed... I've got *34D* tits and... and a..." Sam gestured to his groin, unable to make himself say the word. "And you think I need help to feel *more* girly?"

Sam watched as Rivers' eyes began to roam his body, making him instantly regret drawing attention to himself.

"There's more..." Rivers brought a hand to his mouth, as if stifling a smirk.

Sam looked at Rivers angrily, then back down at the boutique bag. He reached in with his feminine hand, his fingers curling once more around something soft and delicate.

He pulled the lace garter belt free, watching as the six spider-like straps dangled freely beneath it.

"There's a couple of packs of stockings in there as well... *Hey!*" Rivers raised his hand deflecting the thrown garter belt, followed swiftly by the Victoria's Secret bag.

SAM STOOD WITH his ear to the bedroom door, listening to make sure that Rivers was now far enough way. He could hear the dim murmur of a television set coming from the lounge on the other side of the apartment. Satisfied, he stepped away from the door and carefully untied his bath towel from around his body. The towel peeled away, leaving a faint impression of the fabric against his delicate naked skin.

Sam walked over to the bed, his exposed breasts gently bouncing at his chest, his smooth, shaved legs brushing freely against each other. He searched the bed covers, finally finding the black lace thong that he had discarded there. He stretched it out between his fingers, finding the delicate pattern to be almost transparent against his hand.

To think that Rivers had *almost* done a good job in getting him a sensible outfit, only to ruin it all with a typically macho approach to feminine underwear. Still, Sam had almost become used to wearing thongs now, and it wasn't as if Rivers would ever see him in the provocative lingerie.

Sam sat his naked backside down onto the edge of the bed and carefully threaded his long smooth legs through the leg openings of the thong panties. Standing up, Sam wiggled his hips as he pulled them up further. He could feel the lacy fabric settle against his shaved crotch, the string riding up tight between his smooth peach-shaped buttocks. He ran his thumbs around the waistband, ensuring an even fit.

Sam scooped up the matching brassiere and threaded his slender arms through. He eased each of his heavy breasts into the cups, before reaching behind to effortlessly fasten the clasp. He immediately felt the pressure against his breasts as they were lifted and supported. The bra was half cut, leaving the upper slope of his breasts exposed whilst providing an eye-catching line of cleavage. Again, Sam had to remind himself that no one — least of all Rivers — would ever see him in it. Sam ran his fingers around the edges of the brassiere and hefted his breasts a final time in his small hands. Although he'd been angry at Rivers before for knowing his bra size, he now felt quite glad that it fit comfortably.



The garter belt was clearly part of a matching set with the bra and thong, but there was still no way he was going to wear it. Sam carefully folded it and slipped it back into the pink bag.

Sam glanced to the sofa bed, noticing the garter belt and boutique bag still there from where he had thrown them back at Rivers. Curiosity got the better of him and he found himself walking over to pick it up. The garter belt was clearly part of a matching set with the bra and thong, but there was still no way he was going to wear it. Sam carefully folded it and slipped it back into the pink bag.

Now dressed in matching black lace bra and thong, Sam carefully unclipped the charcoal grey skirt from its hanger. He stepped into it, pulling it upwards, finding

it unusual that the skirt sat so high on his trim waist, coming up to fully cover his flat tummy. He reached behind for the zipper, using his fingernails to grip it and slide it upwards. The skirt closed around him, perfectly following the curve of his buttocks and hips, the hem coming to rest just above his knees. Although he still would have preferred a pair of pants, Sam was at least relieved to be wearing the longest skirt he had so far worn.

Sam next unfolded the deep red blouse, the color and fabric reminding him of rose petals. He carefully slid his slender arms through, the delicate fabric caressing his skin as he pulled it over his small shoulders. The sleeves were short and the blouse hugged his body closely. As he fastened the garment, he soon found that he ran out of buttons, the neckline not running quite as high as he would have liked, leaving a small hint of his cleavage exposed.

Finally, Sam unhooked the jacket from its hanger, pulling his arms through the narrow sleeves. The jacket seemed to be perfectly fitted, as if the tailor had used his precise measurements. The chest of the jacket even seemed to have some extra give at the front to accommodate his breasts.

Sam brushed his hands down over his new jacket and skirt, sweeping away a couple of loose threads. He leant over to peer into the dresser table mirror, but it was too low and small to be able to take in the full effect. It certainly *felt* comfortable.

Sam sat down onto the edge of the king-size bed, feeling his hips gently stretching his skirt. He swept his hair back over his shoulders and turned his attention now to the two boxes that he had found within the large bag. He pulled the lid from one, removing a handful of packing paper.

"More heels..." Sam sighed as he pulled free one of the four-inch high heeled pumps, turning it over in his hands.



RIVERS FLICKED THROUGH one TV channel after another, his head resting against one fist, bored with the awfulness of Italian daytime television. He glanced at his watch, wondering how Sam had managed to waste another fifteen minutes in just getting dressed. He clicked the TV off and tossed the remote onto the sofa next to him. The silence was short-lived and he could soon hear the loud click of high-heeled shoes against the marble flooring of the adjacent reception room.



"Well, how do I look?" she asked, a hand on her hip with one leg angled to the side.

Rivers smiled to himself and rolled from the sofa onto his feet, quickly straightening his suit and tugging at his shirt cuffs. He stepped through from the lounge into the next room, his leather shoes scuffing to a sudden halt as he beheld the vision before him.

An elegant young blonde woman, her make-up and hair striking and made to impress, stepped through from the corridor that led from the bedroom. Her bare legs slid one in front of the other, her black heels clicking confidently against the hard floor. Her hips jutted from side to side beneath a fitted charcoal grey skirt. She wore a matching jacket, held with a single button around her ample chest that jostled gently within a shiny crimson blouse.

"Well, how do I look?" she asked, a hand on her hip with one leg angled to the side.

SAM WATCHED AS Rivers shook his head, audibly clearing his throat before answering.

"Turn around... let me see."

Sam swivelled on the spot, his arms wide at his hips.

"Hmm, well it kind of makes your ass look fat." Rivers planted his hands deep into his pockets as he stepped closer.

"*What?*" Sam found himself replying in an incredulously high register. He quickly teetered over to the full length mirror by the door, his heels clacking beneath him. The hem of his skirt was narrow with only a small split at the back, causing him to shuffle in small mincing steps.

Sam turned his back to the mirror, looking back over his shoulder as he smoothed his hands over his backside.

"Relax, I'm just messing with you." Rivers' voice came from behind him.

Sam turned from the mirror, embarrassed that Rivers had caught him out. He felt awkward and cast his head down, absently checking his crimson painted fingernails.

"If you must know, I'm kinda proud of myself for picking something like that out." Rivers boasted.

Sam looked back up. Like it or not, Rivers' motor-mouth could always be relied upon to break any awkward silences.

"Oh really?" Sam smiled up at him. "Then maybe you should have been the one who swapped with Antoinette. Then you could have gone shopping for girl's clothes to your heart's content."

"Hey, I like *looking* at girls in this stuff. I don't want to *wear* it!" Rivers absently brushed a fluff from the shoulder of Sam's suit jacket.

"It's just as well, you can barely dress yourself as it is." Sam took a step towards Rivers, reaching up to straighten his tie and smooth the lapels of his jacket.

"Thanks..." Rivers turned away.

This time the silence went unbroken.



WHILST RIVERS CALLED them a cab to take them to the mansion, Sam returned to the bedroom, busying himself with tidying away the various bags and packaging that had come with his clothes and shoes. It was then that he noticed another box, still unopened.

"What now?"

Sam carefully lifted the lid upwards, finding inside a small leather woman's handbag colored a deep red, presumably to match his blouse. Sam lifted it free, unclipping it to peer inside, the smell of real leather filling his senses.

Rather than feel affronted at yet another attempt to feminize him further, Sam felt quite pleased. If there was one thing to be said about women's clothing it was the distinct lack of pockets or anywhere to keep anything. At least with this bag he'd be able to keep a few things with him. He looked around the bedroom wondering what he could put in the bag.

Sam walked over to the dresser table, his high-heeled pumps indenting the carpet beneath him. He collected up the various items of make-up he had used earlier; lipstick, mascara, eye shadow, blush, nail polish. He packed a small hairbrush and a packet of make-up removal wipes. Given all that had happened to him so far, he knew that he would do well to be prepared for anything.

Sam slid a palm across the smooth surface of the dresser table, his searching fingers curling around a small perfume atomizer. He picked it up, bringing it to his nose. The scent was subtle, but pleasant, like a flowering meadow in the spring. He lightly sprayed at his neck and chest, before slipping the bottle into the bag.

Sam clipped his new handbag shut, adjusted the strap and slipped it over his shoulder.



SAM RETURNED TO the reception lounge of their luxury apartment, his red leather handbag now bouncing at his side.

"All packed? Rivers turned from the mirror, his eyes glancing down to the handbag.

Sam nodded in response, sweeping an arm down to tuck his handbag behind him.

"Good," Rivers continued. "The cab's downstairs now. I just need to go drain the lizard, then we can get going."

"Nice," Sam mocked, rolling his eyes. He quietly lamented the fact that he no longer had a *lizard* of his own to drain.

Sam watched as Rivers disappeared into the bathroom, the latch clicking shut behind him. Suddenly he felt his heart beat race as an idea began to form in his mind.



SAM GAVE A last quick glance to the closed bathroom door, before hurrying to the apartment's exit, his heels clicking rapidly across the marble flooring. He made his way out to the corridor outside the apartment, almost stumbling as he skidded to a halt in front the elevator. He jabbed repeatedly at the call-button.

"Come on, come on!" Sam nervously glanced back to the still open door of the apartment.

The elevator door chimed open and Sam hurried inside, his breasts jolting with his sudden movements. The carriage began its slow descent, an irritating tune drifting in from a speaker behind him.

As soon as the elevator reached the ground floor, Sam hurried out. He still had to take short steps due to his tight skirt, his heels clicking rapidly against the floor. He darted across the *Hotel de Russie's* lobby, desperately trying his best to ignore the stares from the receptionists and other hotel patrons who had stopped to take in the sight of a young blonde woman hurrying through. The relentless bouncing of his breasts beneath his suit jacket did little to ease his self-consciousness.

Sam pushed through the rotating door to the forecourt outside, stopping as the bright sunlight dazzled him. He could feel the oppressive midday sun bearing down at him, making him feel hot and flustered. As Sam focused he saw a cab parked over to his left. A gruff looking, moustached Italian man was leant against its hood.

"Signore and Signora Rivers?" The man pushed himself away from the car. Sam noticed that the driver's forehead was beaded with sweat and his lurid shirt was wet under the armpits.

"There's a change of plan, it's just me now." Sam teetered over to the car as the man opened the rear door for him. As Sam approached, the man's body odor was more evident. He could feel his lecherous eyes on him as he sat down onto the rear seat, bottom first, before swinging his legs inside.

What a pig, Sam thought to himself. After the additional efforts he now had to go to, to get himself ready in the morning, he really saw little excuse for a man to have such poor personal hygiene.

Sam watched as the cab driver closed the door after him, slowly walking around to the driver side door.

"Come on, *hurry!*" Sam muttered through gritted teeth. He quickly turned, his blonde hair whipping around him as he glanced backwards through the cab's rear window. There was still no sign of Rivers.

After a night's sleep in a comfortable hotel, Sam realised that he had all too readily sided back with Rivers. Part of it had been the distraction of his morning routine, as well as the arrival of his new outfit. Had Rivers *planned* it like that? Was he really so easily won over by a shower of gifts, wanted or otherwise? He had to keep reminding himself of Rivers' betrayal. Sam doubted very much that he cared about helping him to get his body back. As far as Sam could tell, Rivers just wanted to crack open Scarlet and reap the rewards that the Agency would doubtless bestow upon him.

The driver-side door opened and the cab lilted to one side as the odorous man settled into the driver seat.

"Uh, can we hurry please? I've got an appointment to keep." Sam's feminine voice now had an added urgency to it and he could feel his heart beat hammering in his chest.

The man leant back addressing Sam from over his shoulder.

"We go long way. I need money up front. Your husband will pay, yes?"

"I can pay you after, I'll figure something out. *Please*, can we just go?"

Suddenly there was a loud thud as a hand slammed hard against the window beside Sam. He shrieked in his feminine register, feeling his whole body tense, almost to the point of losing control of his bladder.

Sam looked up through the window, watching as Rivers peered down at him, looking irritated as he motioned with his hand for Sam to move up. Sam drew a breath, struggling to recover his now frayed nerves. He reluctantly scooted over to the adjacent seat as Rivers opened the door and got into the cab.



"I THOUGHT WE were past all this now." Rivers looked over to Sam who sat quietly beside him in the cab as the vehicle wound through the heavy traffic of Rome. "I can't believe you ran off like that... *Again*."

"You really think you can buy me frilly underwear and expect me to forget everything you did to me?" Sam looked up as the driver chuckled to himself, his eyes glancing back at Sam through the rear view mirror. "What are *you* looking at?" Sam quickly snapped back.

"Of course not, but I thought we agreed that we were going the same way, and to at least work together on this?"

"I know... I just... I don't know..." Sam ran his hands over his bare knees. The cab was at least well air conditioned and provided a welcome respite from the hot Italian weather outside.

"This new impulsiveness of yours... In one way it's great," Rivers began, shifting in his seat to face Sam. "It's quick thinking like that that's gonna save your life. But one day? One day it's gonna get you in trouble — *big* trouble — if you don't learn how to control it."

"Is this another Agency pep talk?" Sam turned to look at his suited partner.

"It's a friend giving some advice."

Sam breathed in, his chest heaving within his crimson blouse. "I think you left your friend lying unconscious on a bed in Monte Carlo."

There was silence and Sam turned back to the window, watching as the sights of Rome rolled by the window.

"Well then, I need to go find him and bring him back," Rivers answered at last.

THE CAB ROLLED up onto a long gravelled drive, beginning to snake its way past a long parade of trees and bushes towards its final destination. After nearly an hour of driving, the environment had changed drastically. The urban claustrophobia of Rome had now opened out into sprawling verdant green countryside. It reminded Rivers of Turin, making him feel uneasy in spite of the stunning scenery.

Rivers leant forward in his seat, just as Sam did the same. They were leant close as they both peered forwards, hoping at any moment to catch sight of the mansion. Although Sam seemed to be oblivious to their closeness, Rivers could smell the intoxicating freshness of his perfume.

Rivers was still amazed at Sam's ability to surprise him. He had become fiery and unpredictable. He'd known a few women like that in the past and figured it was probably down to their hormones.

"So, have we got a cover story?" Sam spoke softly from his side.

Rivers turned to look at Sam, entranced at his feminine beauty, his make-up and hair making him look like a fashion model.

"Oh yeah, I almost forgot about that." Rivers reached into one of his jacket pockets. "Hold out your left hand."

"What?"

"Just do it."

Rivers watched as Sam hesitantly brought his hand up. His fingernails glistened with a deep red nail polish. Rivers took Sam's hand in his. It felt so small and delicate. With his free hand he slid a ring onto a slender digit.

"What the hell is this?" Sam held out his left hand, watching as a diamond ring sparkled from his finger.

"We're engaged okay? We've come here to discuss booking the mansion for our wedding next year." Rivers grinned at his stunned partner.

"Our... our *what?*" Sam's French accented voice stammered.

"It's a cover story... Okay?" Rivers looked deep into Sam's blue eyes to make sure he didn't lose it again. He watched as Sam studied the sparkling ring on his finger. "I'm afraid it's not quite as expensive as it looks, but it will be enough to see us through." Rivers glanced forward again out of the front of the cab. "Look, we're here."

SAM STOOD ON the gravel outside of the grey stone-walled mansion, looking up at the ornate architecture. He held a hand to his brow to shield his eyes from the bright sunlight.

The path had opened out into a large turning circle, with a huge flowing fountain at its centre. The mansion itself was only a couple of stories tall, a welcome departure from the towering casinos and hotels they had so far stayed in, though it sprawled outwards with many wings and adjoining outhouses. It was surrounded on all sides by well-tended gardens.

Sam looked over towards the car, watching as Rivers counted note after note into the cab driver's outstretched hand.

Although Rivers had made another one of his tiresome jokes by posing them as an engaged couple, Sam couldn't help but think what a great venue it would have made for a wedding. Who knew, maybe he and Lenore would get married in a place like it one day.

Sam looked down at the diamond ring that Rivers had placed upon his feminine finger, watching as it refracted the sunlight into a thousand glistening points.

Lenore.

Sam couldn't help but picture them both arguing about who would wear the wedding dress. Sam's thoughts had occasionally darkened, imagining a scenario in which he never recovered his body and was left with Antoinette's body for good. He wasn't even sure how *he* would cope with that, let alone Lenore. The reality would be that she would leave him and Sam would once again be alone.

Sam looked up to the large engraved oak door that protected the mansion from the outside world.

According to Rivers, this was where the Agency database theft had originated from, which meant that Antoinette *had* to have been there. She could still be in there now. Could he really be *that* close to her? And what would happen when they did finally catch up with her?

Sam suddenly felt such anxiety and uncertainty, that it was making it hard to concentrate. He was actually starting to feel glad that he was there with Rivers, rather than going on alone.

Sam turned to the sound of gravel crunching underfoot as Rivers stepped up beside him.

"Ready, sweetheart?" Rivers beamed down at him.

"Don't get too carried away, okay?" Sam looked down at his body. His blouse and jacket hugged his firm breasts, flaring as they joined the upper curve of his hips. His tight fitting skirt followed the graceful line of his thighs, ending just above his knees. His shiny black pumps raised his feminine heels by four inches making him feel like he was teetering on tip-toe.



They walked forwards towards the mansion's large door. Despite the betrayal of Rivers and the Agency, despite all their disagreements and arguing, they approached the next stage of their journey together.

Sam's eyes closed as he felt Rivers' arm slip around his small waist. Suddenly he was back in *Le Grand Casino de Monte Carlo*, making his first tentative steps out into the world as a woman.

They walked forwards towards the mansion's large door. Despite the betrayal of Rivers and the Agency, despite all their disagreements and arguing, they approached the next stage of their journey together.

RIVERS GENTLY GUIDED

Sam through into the grand entrance hall of the mansion. Their footsteps echoed between the walls. Rivers' steps were heavy and dull sounding, whereas Sam's heels clicked in a more piercing register.

Both Rivers and Sam craned their heads upwards as they took in the sight before them. It was like they had stepped back in time. Large portraits adorned the walls; of kings, queens

and naval commanders. Large banners of an unknown family heritage hung from the upper galleries. Directly ahead of them a wide carpeted staircase rose upwards before splitting in two, providing access to the upper levels.

They found that they were not alone. Men and women in white uniforms hurried back and forth. Some were setting up long tables with jugs and glasses. Others were arranging freshly cut flowers. Yet more were positioned on the upper balcony as they struggled to fix a huge plasma screen into place.

"Signore Rivers!"

Rivers turned at the sound of a feminine Italian-accented voice. He watched as the young woman approached, hurrying in high heels. Her large breasts bobbed within a white blouse, her long brunette pony tail swishing behind her head. Her long legs were accentuated by her short black skirt and shone from within a pair of sheer pantyhose. She had an olive complexion to her skin and her eyes were dark.

In short, she was *stunning*.

Rivers soon realised he was gawping and quickly picked his mouth up from the floor.

"Hi... *Ciao.*" He waved his right hand, feeling immediately foolish about it.



Rivers watched as the young woman approached, hurrying in high heels. In short, she was *stunning*.

"A pleasure to meet you," the woman greeted Rivers warmly. He took her offered hand, her bracelets jangling as she gently shook. "I am Sofia, I help organize events here at the mansion."

"The pleasure's all mine." Rivers smiled, fixing his eyes on her, letting his hold on her feminine hand linger before letting go.

Rivers winced as he felt a sharp elbow jab against his side.

"Oh, this is... *Antoinette*..." Rivers turned to find Sam looking irritably up at him.

Sam turned back to the woman.

"Hi." His voice was small and uncertain.

Rivers watched Sofia's dazzling smile as she greeted Sam. "The blushing bride to be! Etes-vous francais?"

Rivers watched as Sam reluctantly nodded back. He noticed that the two girls were almost the same height in their heels, both blessed with a natural beauty and a stunning pair of tits, though Rivers found his gaze drawn more to Sofia, whose skirt was shorter, her white blouse displaying far more cleavage.

"Monsieur Gerard, the owner of the mansion, is French also. You will find much of your homeland within these walls." Sofia gestured upwards, drawing Rivers' gaze once more to the upper gallery of the mansion. He noticed that there was a platform that overhung the lower level, as if designed for a band or other performance.

"We really feel that this is the place for us," Rivers began, hugging Sam's small body towards him. "But if we could take a look around, that would be great."

"Of course," Sofia smiled back at him, her breasts swelling pleasingly beneath her blouse. "If you would like to follow me?" She started to walk off towards the main staircase, her heels clacking loudly.

Rivers stopped for a moment, taking in the sight of her round backside twitching from under her short black skirt. He drew a breath then turned back to Sam. Sam's blue eyes narrowed and he indignantly folded his arms across his chest before stalking off after Sofia, leaving Rivers wondering what on earth he had done to offend him now.

THE SOUND OF two sets of high heels rang out around the cavernous entrance hall of the mansion, as Sam followed Sofia to the staircase. His red leather handbag bounced gently at his side with each step.

"As I explained on the phone, we do not usually admit visitors at this time of the year." She turned back to Sam, grasping his arm, her voice dropping to a whisper. "But your fiancé is a *very* persuasive man."

"I find the trick is to ignore him," Sam answered, tugging on his suit jacket.

Sofia broke into a soft giggle. She stopped at the foot of the stairs, allowing Rivers a chance to catch up with them. "If you choose to have your wedding here with us, you will have access to the main area here for the ceremony. We can decorate it just how you want."

"I'm sure you'd like some pink flowers, wouldn't you honey?" Rivers hand slid over the small of Sam's back, causing his whole body to tense.

Sam bit his tongue. He couldn't start arguing with Rivers in front of Sofia. He managed, at least, to force his lipstick covered lips up into a smile.

They began to climb the staircase. As he ascended, Sam could feel his tight skirt brushing against his thighs, along with the string of his thong rubbing between his buttocks.

"Looks like you're pretty busy today." Sam asked, looking around as the various uniformed workers busied around them like bees.

"Yes. Monsieur Gerard is currently in residence, so the east-wing is closed off today, I'm afraid. He is hosting a big event tonight for his... organization."

"Organization?" Rivers glanced sideways to Sam.

"Yes, it is a private event. I really cannot say any more." Sofia gave them an awkward glance back. "We can at least view the guest rooms in the west-wing, including our exclusive honeymoon room."

"Oh, that would be great," Rivers eagerly responded.

Sam watched Rivers, noticing that his eye-line was fixed firmly on Sofia's backside as she continued up the stairs.

"AND THIS IS our honeymoon room."

Sam noticed that Sofia carried a large bunch of keys at her waist and flicked through several before finding the right one. She unlatched the wooden door and it creaked inwards.

She stood to one side, allowing Sam and Rivers to enter. The room was made up to look like something regal, with long elegant drapes across the walls. A four-poster bed dominated the middle of the room. Large windows were positioned either side to catch as much daylight as possible, with a door leading through to a balcony that overlooked the rear gardens of the mansion.

"This is perfect, don't you think honey?" Rivers made a play of walking around the room, marvelling at the décor.

"It's very nice." Sam walked through, his arms folded across his chest.

Rivers sat himself heavily down onto the bed at the room's centre, the springs bouncing beneath him. "We're going to be spending a lot of time in here, right babe? We can barely keep our hands off each other as it is."

Sam's mouth hung upon as he stared down at Rivers in disbelief.

Sofia smiled at them both. "I can imagine that Antoinette is a very lucky woman." She glanced at Sam, winking.

Rivers pushed himself back up from the bed and walked back over to Sofia. "Do you mind if we have a little time alone to discuss?"

"Of course, Signore. Your wedding is the most special day of your lives, it is a big decision to make, but I do hope you will consider spending it here with us." Sofia's Italian-accented routine was well practiced and she smiled warmly with every sentence. She hefted the heavy door shut, her high heeled footsteps disappearing back down the corridor outside.

"YOU'RE UNBELIEVABLE!" SAM began at once in his feminine voice, his heels tapping as he walked right up to Rivers.

"What?"

"You know what! You were practically drooling at the sight of her!"

"Oh, come on!" Rivers swept back the sides of his jacket, his hands on his hips. "You can't tell me she's not one sexy piece of ass."

"She's... *attractive*," Sam answered hesitantly, "but that doesn't mean you have to salivate around her like some horny dog. You know, women can tell when you're looking straight at their tits!"

"She was loving the attention." Rivers turned, walking towards the glass door that led out to the balcony. He swung it open, a welcome breeze sweeping into the room. "If you ask me, you're starting to forget what it's like to have a pair of balls between your legs."



"She's... *attractive*," Sam answered hesitantly, "but that doesn't mean you have to salivate around her like some horny dog. You know, women can tell when you're looking straight at their tits!"

Sam could feel his cheeks burning, as his temper began to fume inside of him. He quickly followed Rivers out onto the balcony. He had to hold his long blonde hair to one side as it began to pick up in the breeze.

"That's got nothing to do with it. I thought you were serious about helping me to get my body back. So far you're treating this like a *holiday*." Sam looked out to the gardens. The lawn had obviously just been mowed and he could smell the freshly cut grass carrying on the wind. "Plus, I thought we were supposed to be engaged?" Sam found himself toying with the ring on his finger. "You're not doing a very good job of it, chasing after other women like that!"

"Someone sounds jealous." Rivers turned, his hands coming up to Sam's sides. Sam brushed his arms away, his heels clicking as he made his way back into the bedroom.

Rivers followed through. "Look. I *am* taking this seriously. This is just part of how I do things, you know that."

Sam looked down at the floor, his hair falling back into place over his shoulders. Rivers was right in that respect. He wasn't behaving any differently to how he would on any other mission. It was just that their current objective was so personal to Sam that he desperately wanted Rivers to take it as seriously as he did.

"I feel like we're just wasting time here. We're no closer to finding out what's going on here than we were before." Sam could feel his voice cracking with emotion, his eyes beginning to glisten.

"That's where you're wrong. Whilst I've been *salivating like a dog*, as you so eloquently put it, I've been keeping my eyes and ears open." Sam looked back up as Rivers spoke. "This Gerard character who owns the mansion, and this event being held tonight for his organization..."

"Scarlet..." Sam's eyes widened as he continued Rivers' line of thought.

"You can bet your peach of an ass on it. Did you notice how cagey the girl was when I asked her about it?"

Sam nodded. He was actually still surprised that Rivers' mind had been working on the mission all along, despite his immature behavior.

"So what are going to do?" Sam asked, feeling his heart beating faster in his chest.

"We're coming back here tonight." Rivers facial expression changed, looking fully serious for the first time since they had arrived at the mansion. "We've just invited ourselves to the party."

SCARLET

CHAPTER TEN

A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK





Gerard carefully adjusted his bowtie, ensuring it sat perfectly perpendicular to his neck, finally satisfied that his appearance was as perfect as he was going to get it.

RENÉ GERARD CHECKED his appearance one last time in the mirror, turning his face from side to side, inspecting every last pore in his moisturized face. Of course he was vain. He freely admitted to it, though he felt no shame in it. The body was a temple that needed to be nurtured with good food, vigorous exercise and impeccable hygiene.

He swept a comb once more through his slick black hair, ensuring it was perfectly symmetrical. He checked his temples, massaging them gently with an index finger. His hairline had begun to *ever-so-slightly* recede in recent years. He decided he would book an appointment soon for a hair transplant, to recover what he had lost. Other than that, he had fought against the ravages of the last forty years with great success.

Gerard carefully adjusted his bowtie, ensuring it sat perfectly perpendicular to his neck, finally satisfied that his appearance was as perfect as he was going to get it. He stepped away from the mirror, turning back towards his study.

A large antique desk was positioned in front of a wide window that overlooked the rear gardens of his personal mansion. His computer screen was positioned in the exact centre with his notepaper arranged into neat piles either side. A pot of perfectly sharpened pencils was positioned precisely fifty centimetres in from the top edge of the table.

Gerard paused, looking out into the blackness beyond the window. It was now evening and he could already hear the distant throng of his assembled guests in the main lobby. Tonight would be a welcome celebration for both him and his brothers and sisters in arms. Much had been achieved over the last few days.

Gerard stopped in front of a sideboard, pulling a wooden drawer outwards. He reached in, picking up his handheld digital video camera, switching it on to check the charge. He wanted to capture as much of tonight's events as he could. He preferred to film events himself whenever he could. He particularly delighted in capturing people's reactions to what he had to show them. It was fascinating to watch the human psyche in motion, writhing from beneath a complex mixture of facial tics and expressions.

And tonight he had so *very* much to show them.



THE NIGHT AIR was warm and muggy, and crickets chirped from the bushes surrounding the mansion's gardens.

Mike Rivers gave the signal and Sam Fields quickly hurried under one of the mansion's rear windows, keeping as low as he was able whilst running in a pair black high heeled pumps. He came up close behind Rivers. Both were tight up against the wall of the mansion as they peered around a support column that protruded from the flat of the mansion's wall.

"Okay, the guards have just turned down the east-side of the mansion. This is our chance," Rivers whispered back to Sam.

Sam looked up at Rivers' masculine face which was partially illuminated by the full moon above them. Rivers still wore his expensive designer suit from earlier, though he now wore a heavy duty back pack that they had loaded with all of the equipment from their Agency supplied cases.

After their visit to the mansion earlier in the day, Sam and Rivers had discovered that a celebratory function was being arranged that night for an unknown organization. They suspected that it had to be something to do with Scarlet. They had returned that

evening, equipped with everything they needed. It had proved easy enough to sneak around to the rear gardens of the mansion where it was still relatively quiet. Now they just needed to get in there.

Rivers cautiously stepped away from the safety of the mansion's wall. Sam quickly followed, his breasts bobbing beneath his blouse and suit jacket, his legs moving quickly beneath his figure hugging skirt. The soft grass at least masked the sound of their footsteps, although Sam found it much harder to walk on with his heels.

They gazed upwards to the balcony of the guest honeymoon room on the second floor.

"Are you sure no-one's in there?" Sam whispered in his soft feminine voice.

Rivers squinted upwards, angling his head to one side. "I can't imagine the guest rooms will be in use while the mansion's owner is in town."

The entire west-wing was cloaked in darkness, each window glinting in the moonlight with an inky-black sheen. It gave the old building an ominous feel, as if it were purposely hiding something from them.

"So how are we supposed to get up there?" Sam nodded his head to the balcony above them. He looked nervously about them, fearing that the patrolling guards would soon return.

Rivers jogged forwards so that he stood directly beneath the balcony. He slipped the back pack from his shoulders and then crouched, cupping his hands just above his knee.

"C'mon, I'll give you a boost up."

Sam's shoulders dropped.

"Unless you'd like to *swap?*" Rivers prompted.

Sam reluctantly stepped forwards. He could scarcely lift his leg due to the tightness of his skirt and was forced to raise the hem half way up his thighs, so that he could lift his left foot up onto Rivers' waiting hands.

Rivers took Sam's weight and tensed his body, straightening his back to lift Sam upwards. Sam wobbled uneasily, his hands unapologetically gripping Rivers' head for support.

"Watch the *hair!*" Rivers warned, still keeping his voice low.

Sam brought his right leg upwards, stepping up onto Rivers' shoulder now. The heel of his shoe dug into Rivers' shoulder blade causing him to groan with pain.

"Sorry..." Sam whispered as he reached upwards, his hands grasping the stone balcony above him. As he pulled against it, Sam was surprised at his upper body strength, his slender arms tensing as he raised his female body upwards. He finally managed to lift himself high enough to rest his upper body on the edge of the balcony, his legs now dangling free from Rivers' support.

"That thong looks really good on you." Rivers' hushed voice came from below.

Sam groaned at Rivers' comment, realising that he was in no position to preserve any ounce of dignity. He pulled himself forwards, rolling down fully onto the tiled floor of the balcony. He lay there for a moment on his back, his chest heaving as he gasped for breath. He stared up at the twilit sky above him. Out in the countryside, the stars were densely packed, forming an undeniably impressive vista. For a moment it felt like he was laying on the very edge of the world.

"Sam? Are you okay?"

Sam sat upright, his breasts shifting beneath his blouse. He peered back down over the side of the balcony to Rivers below, raising his hand in acknowledgement.



"That thong looks really good on you." Rivers' hushed voice came from below.

"Look around, there should be a fire ladder. Most old houses like this have them."

Sam searched the balcony and soon found a sealed red metal box bolted to one corner. He quickly unlatched it finding a coiled rope ladder within. He tossed it over the side of the balcony, the ladder tumbling in rapid circles as it unfolded itself to the ground.

Sam kept a careful watch, checking for any sign of the guards. Below him, Rivers shouldered his back pack once more and hefted himself up the rope ladder.



SAM FOLLOWED RIVERS cautiously, keeping close behind, as they let themselves into the room through the glass balcony door. Unknown to Sam, Rivers had wedged some hardening gel against the lock earlier that day, so that they would be able to get back into the room from the outside. Once again Sam had been surprised at Rivers' forethought. He had accused Rivers of letting himself become distracted by the female events organizer, rather than concentrating on the mission at hand. However, it was becoming increasingly apparent that Rivers had everything planned out all along.

Sam quickly closed the door behind them and drew the curtains, as Rivers turned on a lamp. The four-poster bed revealed itself in front of them.

"Well, at least we'll have something to do if we get bored." Rivers commented, shrugging his back pack from his shoulder down onto the bed.

Sam ignored Rivers and stepped over to the door that led out to the corridor, checking that it was locked. He paused, listening at the door, hearing the distant rumble of voices coming from the main entrance hall.

"Sounds like the party's in full swing." Sam blew out, trying to calm himself. He slipped his red leather handbag from his shoulder and set it down onto the table beside him. "Okay, so *now* what do we do?"

Sam looked back over to Rivers, hoping that he had an answer.



RIVERS FASTENED HIS leather gun belt around his shoulders and chest, making sure it was secured tightly over his shirt. He pulled his pistol from its sheath, screwing the silencer barrel into place.

"You're... you're not gonna be using that... *Are you?*"

Rivers turned at the sound of Sam's feminine voice. He looked down, finding his blonde female partner sat facing him, his jacket now discarded over the back of his chair. He looked up at Rivers with large innocent blue eyes, his hands resting in his lap, nervously rubbing at the hem of his skirt.

"Not if I can help it," Rivers replied, sliding his gun back into its holster. He reached for his own jacket on the bed, sliding his arms back through. He was worried that Sam seemed to be pinning all his hopes on finding Antoinette in the mansion.

"You know we're looking for the stolen Agency data here, right? If Antoinette *is* still here, then consider it a bonus."



"You're... you're not gonna be using that... *Are you?*"

Rivers eased his shoulders into his jacket and smoothed his lapels. He checked his reflection in the mirror on the wall, satisfied that his pistol was not noticeable beneath.

"*You* may be looking for the Agency data. *I'm* just here to get my body back." Sam shook his head, his lilting French accent coming through stronger.

Rivers sat down onto the edge of the bed, sitting himself directly opposite Sam. Sam's pretty face was lined with worry and his breasts had begun to heave from under his red blouse with his increasing exasperation. Even though Sam had developed into a sassy, sexy young woman, Rivers could still understand his desire to get back to his own body. Even still, Rivers had to try and make Sam see some perspective.

"Listen, Sam. I know we haven't spoken too much about what happened to you on the yacht. I know you took one for the team back there..."

Rivers' comment caused Sam to turn away, shaking his head in disbelief.

"...Now hear me out," Rivers kept talking, despite Sam's obvious discomfort. "All I want to know is what made you *do* that? What made you decide to go through with it?"

Rivers watched Sam's eyes begin to glisten, his eyes darting as he looked down at the floor.

"It was like you said," he answered at last, stroking a strand of blonde hair away from his cheek, "all those women and children that Ramirez was using. I *had* to help them..."

"And did you do that?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you *help* them?"

Sam sniffed, "Mike, I've got a database with the details of everyone Ramirez has been trafficking sitting on my personal web space."

Rivers could sense that Sam was becoming defensive, his voice rising in pitch.

"Okay, okay... So you've got some addresses. Now, who do you think is going to use that data? Who's *actually* gonna go out there and bring those people home?"

Rivers watched as Sam connected the dots in his head. His eyes looked up at Rivers once more, his long mascara-covered lashes blinking innocently.

SAM LEANT FORWARDS over the table, plugging in a final USB cable, before straightening himself. He stood with his hands perched on his wide hips, waiting as his laptops logged themselves in. One of the screens had a deep crack running along the middle of the screen, a victim of Sam's frustrations from the day before. He glanced at his reflection in the screen, the crack fracturing his feminine image into two.

Damaged but still serviceable.

Sam couldn't help but feel that it applied to him as much as the laptop. Despite all the mental scars that he bore, he was still managing to hang on in there.

Yesterday, Sam had dismissed Rivers' concerns about the Agency database theft. Why should *he* care if they were exposed to the world and went under because of it? This was the same underhand, unethical organization that had swapped his body, and that now wanted to arrest him for breaching security.

What he had failed to realise was that without the Agency, his data from Ramirez's yacht was all but useless. It would be the Agency that would act on the information and instigate a mission to rescue the enslaved women and children from Ramirez's sex trafficking rings. Everything he'd endured and put himself through would be for nothing if the Agency was exposed.

He couldn't have that. His actions *had* to have meaning.

It was therefore, with some reluctance, that Sam had agreed to help Rivers find the stolen data. In return, Rivers would do his best to find Antoinette and get his body back.

Sam watched as Rivers struggled with his micro-camera contact lenses, tilting his head backwards in front of the mirror.

"I forgot how much these things hurt," Rivers said at last, blinking his eyes. "Are you getting a signal?"

Sam turned, leaning back over the laptops as he jabbed at the keys with his index fingers, being careful not to damage his painted fingernails. Finally, the screens flashed into life with a wash of distorted pixels. Sam made some adjustments and the images gradually

sharpened into high-resolution focus, perfectly displaying Rivers' field of vision.

"*Hey!*" Sam quickly stood upright, bringing his hands around to shield his backside from Rivers' wandering eyes.

"At least we know they work!" Rivers grinned back at him.



"Hey!" Sam quickly stood upright, bringing his hands around to shield his backside from Rivers' wandering eyes.

SAM LEANT BACK in his chair exasperated, sweeping his mane of blonde hair back over his shoulders.

"What is it?" Rivers' voice came from the bed behind him.

Sam turned sideways on his chair, crossing his smooth bare legs one over the other. "At this range I should be able to pinpoint the residual signal from the device that was used to download the Agency database."

"But..."

"But, they've got some pretty screwy signal jamming going on in here."

Rivers stood up, beginning to pace the room as he rubbed thoughtfully at his stubble flecked cheek.

"Let me guess... Not what you'd expect from your regular rich mansion owner with a soft-spot for weddings..."

"Uh-uh," Sam shook his head, smiling at Rivers' joke. It felt strange to be back behind a computer as Rivers readied himself for the mission ahead. If it hadn't been for the constant reminders of his femininity, he could have believed they were right back at the start of their mission in Monaco.

As it was, Sam could feel his breasts, tightly held within a black lace brassiere, rubbing against the fabric of his blouse with every breath he took. He could feel his hair tickling at the back of his neck each time he turned his head. He could feel the string of his lacy thong riding up between his rounded buttocks and the cool air of the room against his smooth bare legs. He was constantly aware of Rivers' eyes roaming his curves with a lust filled look in his eyes. He was sensitive to every use of the word *woman* and *girl*. When he walked his heels clicked, like a rhythmic metronome, counting out the relentless march of his womanhood.

It all proved to reinforce the full reality of all that had happened, reminding Sam of just what was at stake.

"So what are we gonna do about this?" Rivers' deep voice roused Sam from his thoughts.

Sam cleared his throat.

"Well... I've managed to configure your in-ear receiver to double as a remote detector." Sam watched as Rivers' reached up to his right ear. "As you move about the mansion I should be able to tell if you're getting closer to the source of the signal." Sam toyed absently with the ends of his long blonde hair.

"That's brilliant!" Rivers enthused, "So you're not just a pretty face after all!"

Sam turned back to look at his laptop, hiding his blushing face from Rivers. He wasn't quite sure whether to be pleased with the compliment or not.

RIVERS STRODE CONFIDENTLY along the winding corridor that ran the length of the west-wing of the mansion. He straightened his silk tie as he walked, tugging on the cuffs of his suit jacket. The roar of the assembled guests began to grow louder as he approached the main hall.

"Testing... one, two. Can you hear me, beautiful?" Rivers spoke quietly. He wore a pin microphone at his collar which was sensitive enough to pick up his own voice as well as anyone he might happen to converse with. That, coupled with the contact lens cameras that he wore, ensured that everything he saw and heard was relayed straight back to Sam's laptop in the honeymoon room.

"Loud and clear. Can you hear me okay, *asshole?*" Sam's feminine voice came through into Rivers' in-ear receiver.

"Like music to my ears..." Rivers smiled. There was something quite sexy about having Sam's French-accented female voice whispering directly in his ear. "Okay, he we go. Stay sharp."

Rivers pushed at the pair of heavy oak doors that led into the main hall, a wall of noise rushing to greet him.



RIVERS STEPPED OUT onto the carpeted balcony that ran around the circumference of the main entrance hall of the mansion. Although he and Sam had got a good look at the place during their reconnaissance that afternoon, it still surprised him now that he saw the place full with people.

It was like all of Europe's high-society had gathered into one place. Expensive tuxedos and suits mingled with cocktail dresses and gowns, all to the accompaniment of a string quartet. Rivers could spot the designer labels a mile off. He rested his hands on the balcony railing, looking down at the throng below, still trying to take it all in.

"Any sign? Can you see her?" Sam's voice came excitedly from within his ear.

"Nothing yet. Try and take it easy. We're taking this nice and slow, okay? How are we doing with the tracker?"

"I'm having to compensate for the interference, but... You're getting closer."

Rivers smiled at Sam's lack of precision. "Alright, keep me posted. Rivers out."

Rivers pushed away from the railing and began a slow stroll around the balcony, nodding and smiling warmly at a passing couple that had come up to get away from the crowd below.

For the most part, the assembled guests certainly didn't look like they belonged to a criminal organization. Old, respectable looking gentlemen laughed heartily below him as they drank from their wine glasses, whilst young couples fawned over one

another in the corners. He began to have doubts about whether this really was something to do with Scarlet, though he couldn't bring himself to voice his concerns to Sam at this stage.

It was only when Rivers had walked around to the opposite side of the balcony, and found two armed guards stationed either side of a pair of closed doors, that he was convinced that all was not as it should be. Security patrolling the grounds outside was one thing, but this was something else.

Rivers calmly approached the guards, slipping his right hand casually into his jacket pocket. He was mildly amused as they began to nervously glance at one another.

"Good evening," Rivers greeted the pair, confidently standing between them. The guards were dressed all in black and each cradled a semi-automatic rifle in their arms. "That's some firepower you're carrying there. I guess I must have missed the 'bring your own weapon' part on my invitation."

Rivers watched as the face of one of the guards creased into a grimace, whilst the other seemed to nervously look over to his partner for reassurance.

"Well aren't you guys the life and soul of the party." Rivers continued to walk on by, but turned to speak back over his shoulder. "Can I bring you guys up a drink? A margarita perhaps?"

Rivers grinned to himself as he reached the top of the carpeted staircase. He drew a breath, letting the ambience of the room soak into him as he began his descent.



SAM STARED INTENTLY at his laptop screens, twirling the end of a strand of blonde hair between his fingers. He watched Rivers' contact lens camera feed as he eased his way through the crowd of people on the ground floor of the mansion's main hall, checking each and every face that he saw in case it was Antoinette.

In case it was *him*...

Sam still wasn't sure quite how he would react if he saw *himself*, but it proved a constant source of anxiety that turned his stomach.

He checked the read-out from Rivers' in-ear monitor. The proximity sensor had indicated the source of the Agency database download to be beyond the guarded door that led through to the private east-wing. If Antoinette was indeed there, she would probably be keeping a low profile, making the east-wing a pretty good bet for her too.

All the same, Sam still felt the need to check the crowd in the main hall, just in case.

Sam uncrossed and re-crossed his smooth, shaved legs, tugging down at the hem of his skirt. He could now see that Rivers was surveying the room, his eyes darting between all the windows and exits, searching for another way in.

So far it wasn't looking very hopeful.



RIVERS POSITIONED HIMSELF to one side, leaning against a pillar over by the string quartet's band stand. He spent a moment observing the flow and bustle of the guests. He smiled pleasantly to those that noticed him, but didn't feel the need at this stage to start a conversation.

His gaze drifted upwards to the large plasma screen that hung from the upper balcony where he had just been standing. Its screen was now lit, broadcasting a simple message down to the gathered crowd.

Welcome, brothers and sisters.

It was sounding more and more like they had stumbled into the middle of some sort of cult.

"Would you like a drink, sir?" A female voice roused Rivers from his thoughts and he turned, almost staggering backwards at the sight before him.

A young woman stood before him, offering a tray of champagne glasses. She was dressed in a stunningly revealing French maid's uniform. The lacy black material hugged her body, the corsetry squeezing her large breasts up into a cleavage that threatened to burst from her outfit. Rivers' eyes swept downwards from her chest, to her pinched in waist, the uniform flaring into a stylized ruffled skirt, decorated with a frilly white apron. It was short enough to display her garter straps and the lacy tops of her stockings. Her shapely legs shone with black silk, her towering heels pushing her up onto tip toes.

"Signore *Rivers?*"



Rivers finally looked up at her face, recognising her immediately.

"Sofia?"

Rivers finally looked up at her face, recognising her immediately.

"Sofia?"



"WHAT ARE YOU doing here?" Sofia's smile beamed from her scarlet lipstick covered lips. Her Italian accented voice was smooth and sensual. Rivers found his gaze dropping once more to the swell of her breasts, which she seemed to be offering upwards as much as the tray of drinks that she held.

Rivers could hear Sam sighing from within his ear, but ignored it. It was like having his conscience sat on his shoulder. He reached a hand out to take a glass of champagne.

"I was invited." Rivers took a sip of his drink, pleasantly surprised to find it was *actual* Champagne and not some Italian sparkling wine substitute.

"You didn't tell me that earlier!" Sofia pushed playfully at Rivers' shoulder. "If I knew you were a member of Scarlet I would have offered you a discount on the room." She paused for a moment, her heels clicking beneath her as she teetered. "Or maybe your job was to check up on me?"

Rivers laughed, raising his eyebrows. “Believe me, if there was a job for checking up on you, I’d take it.”

Sam’s feminine voice groaned despairingly from the receiver in Rivers’ ear.

“You are a *very* naughty man Signore Rivers,” Sofia giggled.

“So I’ve been told…” Rivers gazed past Sofia as a parade of identically dressed French maids filed out from the adjoining kitchen, each with their own trays full of champagne. Their high heels echoed throughout the large hall. Behind him, Rivers could hear the excitement of the room suddenly go up a notch. “That’s a very… *interesting* choice of uniform.”

Sofia looked down at her body, acting as if she were surprised to find herself wearing such a provocative outfit. “Oh, this is Monsieur Gerard’s choice.” She reached up, adjusting the white lace headpiece that she wore. “I am just helping out. It is double pay tonight.”

“Any time you want to help me out, I’ll pay you triple.” Rivers grinned, finding that he just couldn’t help himself.

Sofia’s brown eyes bore seductively into his. “I am not sure Monsieur Gerard would be too happy about that… Or your fiancée for that matter.”

“Well, they’re not here. Are they?”

“Monsieur Gerard will be along later. He is very excited about tonight. He has a big surprise in store.”

“I bet he does.” Rivers took a careful step closer, enough to be able to smell Sofia’s perfume. “Where is he? I have a few ideas I’d like to run past him before he gets too caught up with other things.”

“That is quite impossible. He is not to be disturbed. In fact, nobody is allowed into the east-wing.”

“Nobody… except *you?*” Rivers downed his champagne and set it back down onto Sofia’s tray.

He noticed Sofia reach down, absently fingering the set of keys that she wore at her waist. She grasped Rivers’ arm and stepped up onto tip toe to whisper into his ear. “I need to go down to the cellar to get some more champagne…” Her gaze lingered on Rivers, her eyes darting between his eyes and his lips, before pulling away.

Rivers watched as she walked away, heading back in the direction of the kitchen, her drinks tray still very much full with champagne glasses. Her backside jerked from side to side, the lower curve of her buttocks almost visible beneath the hem of her maid’s dress. Her garter straps stretched with the movement of her legs, tugging at the silky fabric of her stockings.

She looked back at Rivers from over her shoulder, seductively fluttering her mascara covered eyelashes.

"MIKE, WHAT ARE you doing?" Sam's French-accented voice spoke up at last from Rivers' in-ear receiver.

Rivers kept his voice hushed as he spoke, acting casual. He knew that he didn't have to speak particularly loudly for Sam to be able to hear him.

"What do you think? I'm going to get us into the east-wing."

"Let me guess, by first getting into Sofia's *panties?*"

Rivers winced as the volume of Sam's shrill voice went up a notch.

"I'm not going to *do* anything. I just need to... *work* on her a little." Rivers figured enough time had now passed and turned, slowly making his way towards the kitchen door.

"Just remember why we're here okay?" Sam sighed, "You're not fooling anyone. I can see exactly what you're looking at from here, remember?"

Rivers grinned to himself. Sam was certainly starting to have issues with him directing his attention towards another woman. He'd meant it when he said he wasn't going to do anything with her though. Sofia was clearly smitten enough with him already, and it wouldn't take much more of the old Mike Rivers charm to get what he wanted from her.

RIVERS CAREFULLY STEPPED onto the stone steps that led down into the mansion's wine cellar. A dim electric light provided a minimal amount of lighting. He turned, carefully easing the door shut behind him that led back out into the kitchen.

He'd managed to bluff his way through into the kitchen easily enough, acting like a spoilt rich brat wanting to know when the food was going to be brought out. The staff had placated him with a slice of French toast and caviar, and then left him to it. It had

then only taken a few seconds (with Sam's help), to find a moment when no-one was watching him, allowing him to slip unnoticed through the cellar door.

Rivers made his way down the narrow steps, biting into the last morsel of French toast. He reached the bottom, ducking his head under a low beam.

He swallowed.

The basement cellar was lined from floor to ceiling with racks upon racks of dusty bottles. There had to be thousands of euros worth of vintage wines in front of him. Under different circumstances, he would have loved to peruse the collection. As it was, there was something even sweeter than the finest Italian dessert wine that now demanded his attention.

Sofia was perched on the edge of an old wooden table, one of her long shapely legs outstretched, the other bent upwards slightly, offering Rivers a magnificent view of her stockings and garters, and even a hint of her black panties beneath her maid's dress. She smiled as Rivers approached, holding up a pair of champagne glasses, her dark eyes glinting in the dim light.

"Unbelievable..." Sam sounded exasperated in Rivers' ear.



Sofia smiled as Rivers approached, holding up a pair of champagne glasses, her dark eyes glinting in the dim light.

"Shut it!" Rivers whispered back.

"I'm sorry?" Sofia cocked her head to one side, looking confused as Rivers approached.

"Ah... The cellar door... I shut it so we wouldn't be disturbed."

"Mmm, good thinking," Sofia purred, handing Rivers one of the glasses. Rivers couldn't help but glance down at her swollen cleavage as he knocked glasses with her, the crystal ringing out through the cavernous basement. "I was worried that you wouldn't come. After all, why would you? You have a very beautiful fiancée."

"I've always been drawn to things that I can't have," Rivers eyes glanced down to the set of keys at Sofia's side. "It's a failure of mine."

"Well, one man's failure is another woman's gain." Sofia sipped at her own glass, her eyes fixed on Rivers' own. "I know what you want..."

"You *do?*" Rivers was so close to Sofia now, her feminine curves writhing in front of him, her sweet scent filling his senses. He could feel the surge of his testosterone, despite his best efforts to remain professional.

"You came down here to try and convince me to let you into the east-wing."

Rivers laughed, setting his glass down onto the table behind her. "That's right... You got me!"

"Monsieur Gerard would be very, *very* disappointed in me if I did that," Sofia purred, dipping her finger into her champagne before bringing it to her lips. She closed her eyes, slowly sucking on the end of her finger. "So it would have to be worth my while..." Her eyes flashed open, looking up at Rivers lustfully.

"What did you have in mind?" Rivers moistened his dry lips.

Sofia set her glass down behind her, then gripped the lapels of Rivers' jacket. She pulled him down to her, her luscious red lips closing on his.

SAM FIELDS QUIETLY fumed to himself as he sat, watching the scene play out before him across his laptop screens. All along he had been worried about Rivers pulling the moves on Sofia, but instead it was the other way around.

She was all over *him!*

Sam watched in disgust as Sofia all but sucked Rivers' face off, her lipstick smearing across her face. As far as Sofia knew, Rivers was spoken for and was planning to get married next year. Sam glanced down at his hand, finding the fake diamond engagement ring still glinting from his finger. Did the woman have no morals?

Sofia certainly seemed to be enjoying herself. Sam looked over at the thermo-image feed from Rivers' lenses, noticing that her face and chest were now flushed with heat, the false-coloring of the image portraying her skin as a bright purple.

Rivers certainly didn't seem to be putting up much resistance either…

"Just get the keys already," Sam silently willed Rivers, folding his arms impatiently across his chest. He watched as Rivers' hands came up, circling around Sofia's small waist pulling her closer, her keys jangling beside her. She moaned beneath his kisses.

Sam crossed his bare legs, feeling embarrassed at the lewd noises that had begun to escape from his laptop speakers.

Sofia broke away from Rivers, her hair now slightly dishevelled beneath the white lace headpiece of her outfit. "I want you to show me how much you want these." She playfully held up her keys, letting the ring dangle from her index finger. "Show me how… *badly*… you need them." She leant forwards, kissing at Rivers' neck as her hand slid downwards, cupping his crotch through his pants.

As Rivers moaned at her touch, Sam uncrossed his legs again, becoming increasingly more uncomfortable with his voyeurism.

Of course, Rivers had done stuff like this before. Sometimes it was necessary, sometimes it wasn't. Sam would just switch off his laptop feeds and take a break. But something about Sofia began to draw Sam's interest. She was just so confident and forward, seemingly oblivious to her provocative state of dress. She was a woman who was totally at ease with her sexuality and knew just how to use it.

Sam gazed at the flickering images from Rivers' contact lens cameras, watching as her hand continued to massage Rivers through his pants.

Sofia's boldness was certainly a far cry from Sam's own awkward behavior on the yacht, and even his deceitful seduction of Rivers in Civitavecchia looked amateurish in comparison. Sam watched as Rivers' right hand came up to cup Sofia's left breast. She certainly seemed to be getting what she wanted from Rivers.

Sam blew a stray strand of hair away from his forehead, the room beginning to feel warm around him. He watched as Rivers fondled each of Sofia's heavy breasts in turn. When she sighed and leant back against the wooden table, Rivers took the opportunity

to duck his head down to kiss at the exposed swell of her cleavage.

Sam's fingernails grazed at the flat portion of his own chest, just below his neck, absently unfastening a button on his blouse in response to the heat of the room. As Sofia and Rivers moaned and sighed from the laptop in front of him, Sam slid his hand lower, dipping beneath the silky fabric of his red blouse, his fingertips brushing the lace trim of his black brassiere.



Sam's fingers began to trail a little further into his blouse, across the lace covered swell of his breast. He reflexively squeezed his thighs tighter together and audibly exhaled.

Sam closed his eyes, finding himself listening to the rustle of clothing and the smacking of wet kisses from the laptop. His fingers began to trail a little further into his blouse, across the lace covered swell of his breast. He reflexively squeezed his thighs tighter together and audibly exhaled.

Sam's eyes snapped suddenly open and he cleared his throat, sitting up straight, giving a guilty glance over his left shoulder. He kept his hands at his sides now, drumming his fingers with frustration against the wood of the chair.

Rivers and Sofia continued to writhe and moan from the laptop. Sofia had now turned, leaning herself forwards against the wooden table. Sam watched as she raised the ruffled hem of her maid's dress, revealing her black panty-covered backside, framed by the straps of her garter belt.

"Show me..." she soothed back to Rivers, holding her ring of keys just out of his reach. "Show me how much you want it..."

If Sofia represented a woman fully in control, then Sam now felt like a woman slipping helplessly out of control. His heart beat threatened to burst from his chest as he watched Sofia offering herself to Rivers, her loins now presented as a fiery deep violet by the thermo-image feed.



"Pourquoi ne puis-je pas parler anglais?"

"Ça suffit!" Sam cried at last, closing the lids of both laptops in turn. He held his head in his hands, his long blonde hair curtaining around him. He took a minute to compose himself, taking long deep breaths, his pulse gradually calming.

Sam finally lifted his head, stroking his hair out of his face, his hand quivering with pent up tension. He stared blankly at the silenced laptops.

Just what did he think he was *doing?* First there had been the shower this morning... And now *this?* Despite being alone, Sam›s face flushed red, feeling ashamed and angry at himself.

"De quoi est-ce que je souffre?" Sam's eyes darted and he brought a hand to his throat. "Pourquoi ne puis-je pas parler anglais?" He began to panic, pushing his chair back to stand on unsteady legs.

Sam tried again.

And again.

But try as he might, he could no longer speak English…



MIKE RIVERS COULD feel his pulse racing as he stared down at Sofia. She was leant forward over the wooden table, offering herself to him, the hem of her skirt raised to proudly display her black panties.

Rivers' eyes flicked between the sight of her round, firm backside and the ring of keys that she grasped in her right hand. They were within his reach. He could easily lean forwards and take the keys from her. And yet, Sofia's caress had been agonising, leaving Rivers swollen and aching. He could almost feel the testosterone in his blood, urging him to yank down her panties.

Rivers looked up, the dim lighting of the wine cellar casting dark shadows around them.

He had promised Sam that he wasn't going to do anything with her. He was just going to get the keys. He'd made, and broken those sorts of promises before, but this time he couldn't help but picture Sam's beautiful feminine face, looking heart broken and disappointed. It almost felt as though he'd be cheating on her…

On *him*…

How crazy was *that?*

Rivers gazed back at the swell of Sofia's buttocks, her broad hips, her lace garter belt and the smooth, sensual grace of her legs wrapped within her silk stockings. He moved in, gripping Sofia's hips causing her to yelp with delight. His hands ran over her smooth backside before gripping the waistband of her panties.

"Mike! Vous devez m'aider!" Sam's voice was loud and piercing in Rivers' ear. He winced, taking a step backwards, bringing a hand up to his ear.

"Aidez-mois!" Sam cried out again. Rivers could hear that he was sobbing beneath his broken words of French.

"What's wrong?" Rivers turned away from Sofia, cupping a hand to his right ear.

Sofia spoke in her Italian accented voice, "What is *wrong?* I am waiting for you... Do you not *want* me?" She pushed herself back up from the table, her uniform falling back down over her hips.

"Shhh!" Rivers brought up a hand to silence her as he listened for Sam, his eyes darting with worry.

"S'il vous plait... venez vite!" Sam's voice sounded desperate.

Sofia stepped towards Rivers, her heels clicking on the stone cellar floor. She rested a hand on his shoulder. "Signore Rivers? What is wrong?"

Rivers turned, his mind racing. He grasped Sofia's shoulders, looking down into her dark eyes.

"I... I need to go lie down..." Rivers' rubbed at his head as he made for the steps that led back up to the kitchen. Sam's muffled, distressed voice was almost intelligible now and soon disappeared altogether into a haze of static. He had to get back to him. Something was very wrong.

"Lie down? Oh, I like your thinking." Sofia excitedly followed Rivers, her heels tapping after him as he bounded up the steps.



SAM GRIPPED HIS blonde hair in frustration staring down at his laptop keyboard. He tentatively jabbed an index finger at the space bar. In his desperation he had inadvertently cut off his feed to Rivers.

If he could just remember how to get it back...

Just... *remember...*

Sam hammered his balled fists down onto the table. Why couldn't he remember? He pushed away from the table, stumbling in his heels as he gripped his aching forehead. His head felt like it was buzzing, as if an overload of information seethed and writhed beneath his temples.

"Non! *Non!*" Sam, fell to his knees, his face creasing with discomfort — not with pain — but with an overwhelming sense of helplessness, as if all sense of control were slipping away from him.

He tried again to gather his thoughts and focus on something... *anything*... but his thoughts now came to him in Antoinette's soft feminine voice, every imagined word spoken with perfectly nuanced words of French. Even after the swap, Sam's inner monologue had continued on with his regular male, Philly-accented voice. He had found it to be a reassuring anchor to who he really was.

Now he felt as though he had been cast adrift, spiralling endlessly into an abyss.

Sam felt his mind closing off, finally unable to cope, the ceiling lights flaring brightly, consuming him.



RIVERS JOGGED ALONG the deserted corridors of the west-wing of the mansion, winding his way further into its labyrinthine depths. He trailed a hand along the wall, checking the rooms as he went. Some distance behind him, Sofia ran as best she could in her platform heels, sending her large breasts bouncing wildly on her chest.

Rivers skidded to a halt, finding the honeymoon room at last. He hammered his fist against the door. There was no answer. He tried again, calling out through the door this time.

"Sam?"

Rivers threw his shoulder against the door, the old timber frame splintering with the second attempt.

"*Sam!*"



Rivers checked for signs of life, breathing a sigh of relief as he noticed Sam's breasts gently rising and falling with his breathing.

Rivers slid down onto his knees, cradling Sam's unconscious female body, lifting his limp head upwards, sweeping long blonde hair away from his feminine face. He checked for signs of life, breathing a sigh of relief as he noticed Sam's breasts gently rising and falling with his breathing.

"What is *she* doing here?" Sofia's Italian accented voice came from the doorway behind Rivers, "I thought you said you were alone?"

Rivers turned back, seeing Sofia standing in the doorway, her arms folded over her chest. He'd been so desperate to get back to Sam that he hadn't really thought about what he would do with Sofia. She stood there, still scantily clad in her French maid's outfit, though she looked irritated, especially now that she had noticed the damaged door frame.

"Just get in here and give me a hand, will you?"

Rivers grasped Sam's body, supporting him from under his arms, as Sofia teetered through into the room. Despite her anger and confusion, she was still concerned enough to take Sam's feet, helping Rivers to lift his feminine body.

"What is wrong with her?" Sofia questioned as they carefully laid Sam out onto the bed.

"Maybe it was the champagne?" Rivers commented wryly.

"Very funny..." Sofia straightened her outfit, pulling up on the plunging neckline of her uniform to keep from exposing her breasts. "I can't believe you led me on like that, and she was here all the time!"

"Look, just calm down..." Rivers reached inside of his jacket.

"Do not tell me to calm down, mister hot-shot American! I should have known better than to..."

Sofia's eyes widened and her legs began to buckle. Rivers slipped an arm around her small waist, guiding her to the opposite side of the bed as she struggled against the effects of the tranquilizer dart. He let her fall ungracefully forwards onto the bed next to Sam.

Rivers immediately turned his attentions back to Sam, slipping his tranquilizer pistol back into the holster beneath his suit jacket.



SAM COULD HEAR a voice calling his name. It was a low, even, measured voice that he subconsciously associated with reassurance and confidence. He wanted to move towards it, to bathe in its comfort and protection.

Sam's long eyelashes flickered as his eyes opened.

"Easy... Take it easy."

Sam jerked awake, shifting his body upwards on the bed. His chest was heavy with the weight of his breasts beneath his crimson red blouse.

"Mike?" Sam's feminine voice was groggy. He reached a slender hand out, which Rivers took, clasping it between his own warm hands.

"How are you feeling, honey?" Rivers was leaning over the bed, his masculine features warm and welcoming.

"Like someone took a sledgehammer to my head." Sam winced at the harsh lighting from the ceiling above him and rubbed at his eyes.

He was speaking English…

Moreover, he was *thinking* in English!

Rivers helped him to sit up, allowing Sam to swing his bare legs around until his high heeled feet rested on the carpet. He turned back, finding Sofia lying on her front, unconscious on the bed beside him. The hem of her maid's dress had fallen upwards revealing her panties and garter belt.

The memory of what had happened came flooding back. How he had watched Rivers and Sofia in the wine cellar…

"So what happened to you back there?" Rivers asked casually, turning away to look at the static filled laptop screens.

"I… I was running a diagnostic on the laptop. You know, while you were… *occupied*." Sam turned his blushing face away from Rivers, still feeling ashamed of himself.

"Hmm… Doesn't sound too exciting."

"It happened like that before…" Sam quickly covered himself, "On the yacht… when I was using the computer there… But never as bad as this…"

"You know, you actually had me pretty worried back there."

Sam watched as Rivers turned back to face him. To his surprise his face betrayed no trace of irony.

"Really? You… *worried*…" Sam held his arms out so that Rivers could help him up.

"I know you think I'm the world's biggest jackass…" Rivers grasped Sam's hands and pulled him upwards. He didn't seem to know his own strength and Sam was pulled forwards, causing his feminine body to press tightly against Rivers. "But I still… care."

Sam stared up into Rivers' eyes, feeling his breasts against his body. He could feel his heart beating faster. He cleared his throat and quickly pulled away.

SAM STOOD IN front of the tall mirror that hung on the wall of the bedroom. To his embarrassment, he found that his feminine cheeks were stained with mascara. He found his handbag, remembering that he had thought to bring some make-up removal wipes with him.

Sam still felt shaken by his ordeal earlier. He cast his mind back to all the occasions when he had found himself slipping into Antoinette's French language. He came to realise that each time it had happened, he had been busy doing something else — something that engaged him, occupying his attention — whether it was working on a computer, or even the relatively new experience of applying his make-up. It was almost as if a part of Antoinette crept back in whenever Sam had his back turned.

His most recent experience had certainly been the most distressing of all, making him feel as though he were losing his mind. It seemed to be getting worse the longer he spent in Antoinette's body.

Sam glanced back at the bed, to Sofia's sleeping body. The confident, sexual energy of the brunette girl now lay silenced and dormant.

"Let me guess... tranquilizer?" Sam nodded to the bed as he rubbed at his face with one of the cleansing wipes. "I'm beginning to think that's your new way of picking up girls."

"I had to do something. She was beginning to freak out on me," Rivers answered.

"Hmm, I wonder why. Ever think it might be *you?*"

"Always." Rivers walked across the bedroom to the drawn curtains, peering out through the gap to the blackness beyond. "Someone's got their sense of humor back..."

Sam knew that if he didn't laugh, he would probably cry. He gazed at his reflection in the mirror and drew a deep breath, his breasts stretching the fabric of his blouse. He had now removed the last of the make-up from his face and had begun to brush out his blonde hair with the small hairbrush from his handbag. He glanced back at Rivers from the mirror as he peered out through the balcony window.

Sam had been adamant that Rivers take the mission seriously, that he take accountability for his actions and help him to get his body back. But then, what had Sam gone and done? He'd hardly proven to be a shining example of professionalism. He still felt enormously self-conscious and embarrassed of allowing himself to become so... *distracted*.

Rivers turned away from the window, strolling back over to stand beside Sam. Sam found it difficult to look his partner in the eye and instead busied himself with his handbag, tucking his hairbrush back into one of the inner pockets.

"Do you think you're ready to carry on?" Rivers voice was quiet and sincere.

Sam meekly nodded, flicking his blonde hair back over his shoulders.

"Good." Rivers smiled and threw Sofia's keys up into the air, catching them triumphantly with one hand.



SAM SMOOTHED HIS charcoal grey skirt over his backside and sat himself down in front of his laptop screens. He brought his feminine hands back to the keyboard. He hesitated, his fingers hanging above the keys.

"Something wrong?" Rivers came up behind him, leaning over the back of the chair.

Sam turned, looking over his shoulder at Rivers.

"I... I don't know what to do..."

"What do you mean, you don't know what to do?" Rivers' voice sounded irritated as he stood back up straight.

"*Please*..." Sam pleaded in his high-pitched voice, feeling increasingly more upset, "I'm telling you, I don't know what to do!"

"Come on, Sam! You just need to monitor the camera feeds and keep an eye on the tracker." Rivers reached over Sam's shoulder, bringing up the feeds to his contact lenses, the laptop screen producing a disconcerting infinite mirror effect. "And...you know, compensate for the interference..." Rivers waved his hand, looking upwards as if addressing the unseen network signals that permeated the air.

"Interference... right." Sam settled himself back against the chair, sweeping a strand of hair back over his ear. "And how do I do that?"

"You're joking, right?" Rivers paced the room, sounding exasperated.

"Do I look like I am joking?" Sam flexed his slender fingers outwards as if waiting for sudden inspiration to hit him.

"Well, what *do* you remember?"

Sam closed his eyes, thinking for a moment. "*Merde*..."

"What is it?"

"French... I still know French..."

Sure enough, Sam could remember all of it. Every verb, every conjugation, every subtle pronunciation. He gripped his head in his hands, fighting the wave of panic that threatened to take him.

"Dammit!" Rivers lightly kicked at the edge of the bed in frustration. "We need someone to work that tracker, otherwise we'll be going in blind. We can't go searching every last room in the east-wing, the place is huge!"

Sam pushed himself up from his chair, turning to squarely face up to Rivers. "Mike, I've just lost years of computer courses, exams and study! I'm having a pretty hard time with this okay?" His feminine voice was stern and heavy with his French accent.

"Sam... look I'm sorry, I didn't mean..."

"You work the damn tracker if it means that much to you!" Sam stepped away, folding his arms across his chest, feeling annoyed and frustrated with Rivers' lack of sympathy.

Rivers sat down at the table, rubbing at his cheek as he stared thoughtfully into the void of the laptop displays.

"Actually that's not a bad idea..." he spoke at last.

"What?" Sam rolled his eyes.

"I mean... it's been a few years since I took the signal processing course back at the academy, but I'm sure I can work it out."

"Then who's going to go out *there?*" Sam perched his hands on his wide hips. Rivers grinned up at him. "Oh no. No, not me!"

"Why not? Come on Sam, after everything you've done already, this is going to be child's play."

"Child's play?" Sam shot Rivers a disapproving look. "Mike, there are guards out there with machine guns!"

"I know, that's what makes this even better," Rivers enthused, becoming increasingly more animated, "You see, you'll be able to go in *disguise!*"

Sam followed Rivers gaze, turning to look towards the bed where Sofia still lay, fully clothed in her French maid's uniform.



Sam followed Rivers gaze, turning to look towards the bed where Sofia still lay, fully clothed in her French maid's uniform.

SCARLET

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A story by

JESSICA DREW

Featuring artwork by

CBLACK



"THIS IS A really bad idea." Sam stood with his hands perched on his wide hips, watching as Rivers quickly checked the corridor outside of their room.

"There's no-one around, we've got time to do this." Rivers stepped back into the room, wedging the door awkwardly shut against the now splintered door frame. He took a spare chair from under the desk and wedged it against the door handle.

"Oh, like *that* will stop them." Sam commented dryly, folding his arms across his chest. He began to nervously pace the bedroom in his high heels, catching a brief glimpse of his worried feminine face in the mirror.

Rivers slumped down into the remaining free chair, tugging at his bottom lip thoughtfully as he gazed at the laptop screens. "No-one's looking for us..."

"But how long before someone comes looking for *her?*"

Rivers turned, following Sam's gaze to the bed where Sofia lay sleeping, sedated by a tranquilizer dart.

"Did you see how many girls they had dressed up like that? They won't miss her." Rivers looked over at Sam, his eye-line drifting slowly along the length of his legs, his hips and his chest, before finally looking him in the eye. "And they won't notice an *extra* one in there either."

"You're actually suggesting I go out there dressed like *that*?" Sam's French accented voice wavered as he pointed a hesitant finger towards the bed. "You think I can just walk out in that outfit and no-one will notice?" Sam clutched protectively at the neck of his blouse.

Rivers pulled himself from the chair, walking over towards the bed. "I actually think it's quite tasteful." His gaze drifted down to where Sofia's ruffled maid's dress still indecently exposed her black lace panties.

Sam strode over and reached past Rivers, tugging the Italian girl's uniform back down over her backside to protect her modesty.

"Relax." Rivers plunged his hands into his pants pockets, clearly amused, "You've got a much hotter ass than her anyway."



"You're actually suggesting I go out there dressed like *that*?" Sam's French accented voice wavered as he pointed a hesitant finger towards the bed.

Sam could feel his cheeks burning. "You're loving this aren't you? If I didn't know better, I'd say you'd planned for this to happen from the start!"

"*What?*" Rivers pointed at his own chest incredulously. "Oh right, so I made you forget all your computer stuff so you'd be forced to go out there dressed as a French maid?" Rivers shook his head and reached down, beginning to tug at the threaded laces of Sofia's uniform.

"What are you doing?" Sam grasped Rivers' arm.

"What do you think?" Rivers turned, his brow furrowed in confusion.

"You can't just go undressing a woman while she's unconscious!"

"Sam, come on, she was all ready to show me the goods anyway."

"That still doesn't give you the right." Sam looked sternly up at him. "You're a man… it's just… *wrong!*"

"Fine, well *you* do it then!" Rivers glared back at Sam then strode over to the balcony door, resting an arm against the glass as he gazed out to the darkness of the gardens beyond.

SAM GAVE A last look back towards Rivers, to make sure he wasn't looking, before turning his attentions to Sofia. He watched as her back rose with her soft breathing, gently stretching the lace corsetry of her French maid's uniform.

He began to pick apart the laces with his long fingernails, threading them out through the eyelets. He could see the pressure ease from the sleeping woman's waist almost immediately.

Sam would have protested some more about using the uniform as a disguise if it wasn't for the thought of the two Scarlet soldiers that guarded the east-wing of the mansion. They were dressed identically to the soldier that had boarded Ramirez's yacht

and nearly shot him two days ago. The memory still caused his whole body to tense, almost to the point of paralysis. The thought of getting by the guards any other way seemed almost impossible.

Sam unthreaded the laces through the final eyelet and tugged the back of Sofia's dress open, revealing her bare olive-skinned back. He took her right arm, being extra careful as he rolled her over onto her back. Despite the fact that the tranquilizer would keep her well under for an hour at least, Sam still paused to check her for any signs of consciousness.

As he leant over her, Sam couldn't help but appreciate what a strikingly beautiful woman she was. It was little wonder really that Rivers had been all over her. He watched as her breasts swelled with her breathing, as large and as firm as Sam's own. Sam gave another quick glance back to Rivers, who still gazed out of the window, seemingly lost in his own thoughts.

Sam reached for the top of Sofia's dress, briefly hesitating. As a woman, Sam had figured it would be more appropriate for him to undress Sofia, just as Gabriella must have undressed him back in Civitavecchia. But as he pulled Sofia's dress downwards, exposing her swollen naked breasts, he came to wonder whether it was quite the right thing to be doing.

Sam continued to tug at Sofia's now loose dress, wiggling it down over her wide hips and out from under her backside. The bed bounced and Sofia's large breasts swayed on her chest, though there was something surprisingly non-sexual about it. It made Sam feel a little better about what he was doing to the poor girl. He managed to lift her thighs and slide the dress off of her long shapely legs.

Sam carefully folded the ruffled maid's dress, which now seemed tiny in his arms, setting it down over the back of the chair. Finally, he lifted each of Sofia's small feet in turn and unfastened her obscenely tall platform heels, leaving her lying there in just a black lace garter belt, matching panties and lace-topped silk stockings. Despite her near-nakedness, Sam found that he was more concerned with the woman's modesty and folded the bed sheet over, wrapping her in it, then reached over to sweep a loose strand of hair away from her mouth.





"The last time I saw a woman wearing a pair like this I'd taken a wrong turn into the red light district."

SAM SAT AT the foot of the bed, turning Sofia's platform heels over in his hands. They were black open toe heels with an inch thick platform under the toe which increased the size of the heel to a towering five-inches. He set them down onto the floor next to his own high heeled feet, finding that they would be about the right size to fit him. When he looked back up, he found that Rivers had turned away from the window and was now watching him.

"They'll look good on you."

Sam rolled his eyes. "The last time I saw a woman wearing a pair like this I'd taken a wrong turn into the red light district."

Rivers smirked, "See, to me that's a *right* turn!"

"You're disgusting. And please don't tell me you've paid for sex..."

"Hey, I never pay for anything I can get for free. But it doesn't hurt to do a little window shopping."

"Window shopping? We're... *Women* are not objects you know! I bet none of them *chose* to be working the streets."

"Look at you! The feminist crusader!" Rivers grinned back.

Sam took a deep breath, flexing his fingers to help calm himself. He knew that it was pointless to keep at it. When Rivers got going he was like a dog with a new toy. He just wouldn't let go.

It was true that he now had a fresh insight into how women were treated by men. In fact, he'd experienced the very worst of it. Sam knew that when he swapped back to his own male body he would certainly be more considered and aware of how he treated the opposite sex. If only the same could be said for Rivers. If anyone could have done with walking a mile in a pair of heels it was him. Sam smiled inwardly at the thought.

"Here, you'll need these." Rivers set his back pack down onto the bed, reaching an arm deep into one of the side pockets. He pulled out a familiar looking pink boutique bag and dropped it into Sam's lap.

"You *actually* brought this with you?" Sam untied the Victoria's Secret bag, peering in at the folded garter belt and stockings.

"I figured you were just playing it cool when you said you didn't want to wear them."

"And I suppose I've got no choice now, have I? How very convenient..."

"You still think I planned this don't you?" Rivers sighed, looking down at Sam.

"No, of course not." Sam glanced upwards, "I just think that someone up there's got it in for me." He stared down into the bag then turned it over, emptying its contents out into his lap.



SAM TUGGED THE curtains closer together, making sure that there was not so much as a hint of a crack between them. He was now alone in the bedroom, having banished Rivers to the corridor outside.

He was still not entirely comfortable with the fact that the damaged door now sat awkwardly in its frame, the light from the corridor streaming through gaps around the edges. He tip-toed over, listening at the door. Thankfully Rivers seemed to have wandered off. All the same, he wedged the spare chair back under the door handle.

Satisfied, Sam kicked off his heels and began to unbutton his red blouse. He peeled the silky fabric from his shoulders, sliding it over his back, freeing his slender arms. As he looked down, his hair fell forwards, tickling the exposed swell of his cleavage. The sight of his breasts heaving in his black bra reminded him of how he had touched himself earlier, how he had let the sensations of his borrowed body get the better of him. It had ultimately put in motion a chain of events that now required him to dress as a French maid and infiltrate the east-wing of the mansion. He couldn't help but feel he was being punished once more for his indiscretions.

Sam reached behind, unclasping the bra, sliding the shoulder straps from each of his arms in turn, though he still held the lace trimmed cups protectively to his chest. Although Rivers was nowhere in sight, Sam still felt the need to turn away from the door before discarding the brassiere altogether.

Sam's heavy breasts bobbed free, the release of pressure feeling more than welcome. He reached behind, finding the zipper of his skirt with his fingernails, easing it downwards over his wide hips, finally letting it slide down to his bare feet. Although he now stood wearing only his black lace thong, the room still felt comfortably warm. He took the opportunity to tug the string of the thong out from his buttocks, letting it settle back more comfortably.



Sam found that the delicately patterned lace garter belt fit him perfectly, just as all the clothing that Rivers had bought him had.

Sam made his way over to the bed picking up the delicately patterned lace garter belt. He held it up, turning it around, watching as the six garter straps dangled beneath.

"You've got a lot to answer for," Sam mumbled, looking down at Sofia as she slept soundly beneath the sheets of the large bed.

He wrapped the lace belt around his tiny waist, finding that it fastened with a hook at the back, much like a bra would. He found that it fit him perfectly, just as all the clothing that Rivers had bought him had.

Sam sat down onto the edge of the bed next to Sofia, the garter tabs fanning out beside him. He carefully opened a fresh packet of seemed silk stockings, surprised that in their natural state they seemed tiny, almost the size of a pair of socks. He pushed his fingers against the fabric of one, stretching it, noticing that it was sheer against his hand. A band of patterned lace ran around the tops of each of them.

Sam brought his left leg upwards, his thigh pressing into his chest so that he could rest his heel on the edge of the bed. He carefully bunched up one of the stockings and wiggled his toes into the end, before drawing it upwards, over his calf, then his knee. When it seemed as though the stocking would not make it as far as his thigh, he returned once more to his foot, tugging the excess fabric over his heel, then rolling it upwards. It seemed to do the trick. Sam straightened his leg outwards and found that he was now able to pull the lace top of the stocking right up to his thigh.

Sam fumbled with the first garter tab, finding it tricky at first to pinch the stocking between its plastic clasp. Finally, it clicked into place and his stocking held, making the task of affixing the remaining two garters a little easier.

Still seated on the bed, Sam took a moment to run his hand along the length of his silk covered leg, starting at his calf, sliding all the way up to his shapely thigh. He was surprised at how soft and sensual it felt against his smooth skin.



RIVERS LEANT AGAINST the wall just down from the doorway to the honeymoon room where Sam was busy getting ready, wondering just how long he would be left to wander the empty hallways. Given how long Sam had taken to get ready that morning, he figured it could be a while.

Every now and then, Rivers had strolled to the first turning in the corridor, listening carefully for any intruders, but they were deep within the west-most side of the mansion, well away from the party in the main hall. It appeared that their comings and goings had gone unnoticed, or at least without arousing suspicion.

Rivers felt a little frustrated at being side-lined by Sam's condition. He loved being on the front line and getting into the thick of the action, and did not relish the thought of having to be sat behind a computer screen. The only compensation was that he'd get to see Sam turned out in yet another killer outfit.

That one stimulating thought caused Rivers to push himself away from the wall and begin a slow stroll back over towards the door, his footsteps silent against the plush carpet. He decided he would knock and at least ask how Sam was doing, but he paused outside of the door when he found that he could see through a gap in the buckled frame.

He brought his eye closer, silently peering through into the bedroom.

He could make out the four-poster bed, the bed sheets moulded to the feminine curves of Sofia's sleeping body.

And there sitting beside her on the bed...

Rivers drew a breath.



SHE SAT WITH her back to the door, her long blonde hair trailing over her back. It took Rivers a moment of watching to realise that she was topless, though now that he was aware of it, he could make out fleeting glimpses of the underside of her large breasts.

She seemed occupied, looking down at her legs, but soon stood, using both hands to ease a silk stocking up along the length of her right thigh.

Rivers watched, taking in the sight of her perfectly formed backside, full and pert, the string of a lacy black thong running tight up between her buttocks. Her left leg was already clad in a delicate seemed stocking, the shine of the sheer fabric adding definition to the perfect contours of her feminine leg.

Rivers lips felt dry as he watched the elegant blonde fasten the garter tabs to the lacy band of her stocking. She smoothed her palms over her thigh, tugging on them one last time, before standing upright, the garters pulling taught against the curve of her hips and backside.

At any moment she would turn and Rivers would see her. He would see her beautiful face, so innocent to the provocative nature of her lingerie. He would watch, enraptured, at the sight of her firm, round breasts and perky nipples. He would gaze longingly at her small, trim waist and her curvaceous hips.



Rivers lips felt dry as he watched the elegant blonde fasten the garter tabs to the lacy band of her stocking.

Rivers closed his eyes, and with what felt like a monumental effort, rolled himself away from the door, his heartbeat hammering in his chest.

He'd seen enough.

He couldn't torture himself anymore.

Could this woman, who clearly so desperately wanted to return to her old male body, really, *ever* reciprocate his feelings?

Rivers stared blankly at the wall in front of him.

His *feelings?*

Wow. That was a new one...

SAM STOOD IN front of the mirror twisting his hips to either side, watching how the garter tabs pulled at his stockings. The belt seemed to accentuate the curve of his hips and backside, its lace trim perfectly matching that of his thong panties.

He'd always assumed that women wore stockings primarily to please men. Lenore had worn them once, but only in the bedroom as a special surprise. She'd shown little interest in wearing them other than that, preferring to wear pantyhose or leggings. Now that Sam thought about it, so much of a woman's wardrobe was designed to entice and ensnare the opposite sex; tight fitting garments that drew attention to every curve, endlessly displaying provocative flashes of leg and cleavage. By contrast men's clothes were loose fitting and plain allowing them to get away with very little effort in their clothing choices. It seemed to Sam to be a very one sided arrangement.

Sam flicked his long blonde hair out and turned, his silk sheathed legs brushing against one another as he took Sofia's French maid's dress from the back of the chair.

The fabric was shiny, like black satin, with a frilled white lace apron at its front. A couple of layers of white lace ruffles lined the short flared hem of the dress. Sam reluctantly held the outfit out, bringing it down low enough for him to dip both of his stocking covered feet into it. He slid it along the length of his legs, up over his hips, finally tugging it over his chest. He then reached awkwardly behind, to try and find the laces that tied up at the back, though he found it near impossible to find the eyelets to thread them back through. Sam tried again, turning away from the mirror to look back over his shoulder at his reflection. Frustratingly, as soon as he let go of the front of the dress it began to slip back down.

Sam turned his head towards the door, the light from the corridor outside glinting through the cracks in the frame.



RIVERS HAD BEEN in the middle of disassembling and then reassembling his gun — something he'd seen in movies — when he heard Sam pull the chair away from the door, followed by the softest, quietest voice calling out to him.

"Mike? Can you come in here?"

Rivers quickly slipped the remains of his pistol into his jacket pocket before straightening his lapels, steeling himself for what he was likely about to see.

The damaged door shuddered as he stepped through into the bedroom, finding that Sam stood with his back to him. His eyes widened as he took in the sight of his blonde partner, struggling to hold his maid's dress in place. Sam's legs were wrapped in silk, Rivers' gaze running the length of their black seems, up to the delicate detail of the lace bands, and the enticing whiteness of his thighs above.

"Is there a problem?" Rivers found that his throat was dry, his voice rasping.

"I need you to help tie me up." Sam turned his head, talking back to Rivers from over his shoulder.

Rivers stepped forwards, clearing his throat, fighting the urge to bite at Sam's choice of words. He took a deep breath, trying to clear his thoughts. He tried his best to think of Sam as a man. How he used to look. How he used to act. Anything to dampen his rampant desires.

Rivers exhaled slowly as he swept Sam's blonde hair away from his neck, so close now that he could smell the lingering fresh scent of the perfume that he had used that morning. His eyes roamed the graceful line of his soft neck and back, finding that he had to fight the urge to just lean in and kiss at his enticingly delicate smooth skin.

Rivers gritted his teeth, forcing himself to take the laces of the dress, crossing them and threading them through the first set of eyelets.

SAM GASPED SHRILLY as Rivers pulled the laces tight.

"Did I hurt you?" Rivers' voice came from over his shoulder, his breath hot against his neck

"No, no it's fine... Keep going."

Sam winced as the laces were threaded higher and higher, each sharp tug causing his waist to pinch in further. The push-up cups built into the uniform soon grasped his breasts tightly, forcing them up into a rounded swell of cleavage.

As Rivers tied off the laces, Sam gasped and struggled to take a deep breath, his chest not quite able to push out far enough to take a full lungful of air.

"How does that feel?"

Sam turned around, his hands grasping his tight waist.

"Fine if you're not too worried about *breathing.*" Sam blew out, trying to find a new rhythm, taking shallower but more rapid breaths.

"You'll get used to it. If it's any consolation you look..." Rivers eyes darted and he almost looked embarrassed, "*Wow*..."



As Rivers tied off the laces, Sam gasped and struggled to take a deep breath, his chest not quite able to push out far enough to take a full lungful of air.

Sam tip-toed over to the mirror, finding that the dress now perfectly hugged his petite body, though his breasts now looked like two over inflated balloons. He tugged at the ruffled hem of the uniform in vain, wishing it were longer, finding that it was only just long enough to cover his broad hips and backside.

"It's obscene..." Sam muttered, absently scooping his blonde hair away from his neck, holding it up behind his head.

SAM LEANT INTO the mirror, pouting his lips as he reapplied his crimson red lipstick. His eyes were once more lined with shadow, his lashes full and long with a dark mascara, his cheeks pink with rouge. He had also now pinned his hair back, leaving a couple of loose strands of blonde hair stylishly framing his feminine face.

Sam forced himself to stand straighter, sweeping his hands over the back of his French maid's uniform. He was continually aware that leaning forwards, even a small amount, caused his backside to protrude out from under the scant safety of his dress. He glanced back at Rivers through the reflection of the mirror, hoping that he hadn't noticed, but luckily he was busy removing the contact lens cameras from his eyes, carefully washing them out with a little drinking water from one of the bottles they had brought with them.

Sam sucked his lips inwards, the lipstick feeling a little sticky. He screwed the top back on the tube and took a step backwards. Suddenly his left ankle wobbled and he had to quickly twist and grasp one of the wooden posts of the bed for support. He now wore Sofia's five-inch platform heels and although he had pretty much mastered walking in four inch sandals and pumps, these were proving to be something else entirely.

"Easy there!" Rivers smiled back at him. "Are you ready to put these in?" Rivers held an upturned finger out, the tiny lens balancing on the tip.

Sam nodded his head, walking unsteadily over, his arms wide at his sides for balance.

Whilst he had been busy with his make-up, Sam had desperately racked his mind for any hint of his old computer skills. Anything that meant that he could stay in the room and have Rivers go out there in his place. But it wasn't to be. It was as if the room in his mind that held all that information had been vacated, only to have a blonde French girl move in instead, filling the wardrobes with her own possessions.

RIVERS JABBED HIS index fingers against the keyboard, one keystroke at a time, finally managing to establish a connection to the contact lens cameras.

"Yes, I've got it! Ha! See, this stuff isn't so hard!"

The screens flashed into life, one displaying Sam's viewpoint, the other showing the same, only in a wash of lurid colors from the thermo-image.

Rivers stood up from the chair, turning to grasp Sam's shoulders, staring down at his pretty face.

"Now, are you sure you want to do this?"

"Mike... I *have* to do this."

Rivers nodded, knowing what his answer would be before he'd even asked. He glanced down to check the concealed pin microphone at Sam's chest.



"Mike... I *have* to do this."

"It's fine..." Sam's hand came up to cover his swollen cleavage.

"And the earpiece?"

Sam nodded, pressing at his right ear.

Rivers suddenly felt quite protective and wanted to hold Sam, to shield him from the dangers surrounding them, but he knew he had to let him go. He had to give Sam the chance to try and find Antoinette.

"Here." Rivers handed Sam Sofia's keys, watching as his feminine partner hooked the ring around the waistband of his white lace apron.



SAM'S FIVE-INCH PLATFORM heels thudded against the empty carpeted hallways that snaked their way throughout the west-wing of the mansion. His hips jutted as he walked, causing Sofia's keys to jangle at his side. His silk stocking covered legs swept one in front of the other and with every step his garters pulled taught, reminding him constantly of his state of near-undress.

He pulled again at the hem of his maid's dress, fearing constantly that his panties were on show. His anxiety caused his breathing to become labored and he soon found that he had to stop to try and get his breath back.

Sam stood with one hand resting on his corseted waist, giving sharp, quick breaths outwards. He gazed along the length of the corridor, at the double-doors that now loomed before him. He could hear the guests beyond, like the roar of a tsunami that threatened to wash him away entirely.



SAM TOOK HIS first step out into the main hall, closing his eyes to help calm himself and to allow his ears time to adjust to the noise. The music from the string quartet wavered amongst the din of conversation from the guests below him.

"Alright Sam, good. Now just act natural, okay?" Rivers deep voice crackled through the receiver hidden in his right ear.

Sam's eyes flicked open, his pupils dilating to adjust to the bright lights that sparkled amongst the chandeliers above him.

"See the guards on the other side of the balcony? They've seen you."

Sam glanced over to the far side of the hall, noticing that he was indeed under scrutiny.

"What do I do?" Sam whispered, grasping the top of his dress, speaking downwards towards the pin microphone.



"Go downstairs. Get into the crowd. Find some drinks to serve or something, so it doesn't look too suspicious."

"Go downstairs. Get into the crowd. Find some drinks to serve or something, so it doesn't look too suspicious. And for Christ sake stop speaking down into the mic. I can hear you, okay?"

"Right." Sam looked awkwardly back up, sweeping a strand of hair back behind his ear. He trailed a hand along the wooden rail of the balcony, making his way to the staircase. He turned his feet, stepping down each step side-ways to help keep his balance on his tall heels.

The finely-dressed guests swarmed about the main hall as Sam approached, leaving the safety of the staircase, his heels clicking loudly now against the stone floor.

It felt as though he were moving in slow motion. Faces turned to look at him, men and women alike. The men all had that lust-filled look in their eyes, ignoring his face for the most part and gazing straight to his breasts and legs. The women looked

irritated, watching how their partners reacted to Sam's presence. He may as well have been walking naked down a catwalk for all the attention that he drew.

To Sam's relief, the unwanted attention soon dissipated and time seemed to speed back up again. He could see now that several similarly dressed waitresses busied themselves amongst the crowd, handing out drinks and bite sized appetizers, and that they all drew their own fair share of lustful stares. The girls even seemed to encourage it. He noticed one bending forwards with a Marilyn Monroe style "oops" expression on her face, as men stared longingly at her exposed backside.

Sam slipped between the crowd as best he could, excusing himself in his timid French-accented voice, quickly sliding through the gaps that presented themselves amongst the writhing sea of people. The hall looked even more packed now than when Rivers had been out there.

Sam glanced upwards, noticing the plasma screen that hung from the upper balcony.

"Tonight's entertainment will soon begin," Sam read. A shiver ran up his spine as he considered just *what* that entertainment might entail.

"Take this will you!"

Sam suddenly felt a sharp elbow jab against his side. He turned to find one of his fellow maids holding a tray of champagne glasses. Sam automatically reached out and took the tray from her.

"Make sure everybody's got a glass. Monsieur Gerard will be coming out soon!"

Sam nodded his head, watching as the girl teetered away unsteadily. He was glad to see that he wasn't the only one struggling with the heels. He ducked his head downwards, whispering down at his chest.

"Did you hear that? Gerard is on his way!"

"Sam, I can hear *everything*, okay?" Rivers' voice sounded off in his ear, "And stop talking to your chest! Remember I can see everything from here, and right now I've got a hell of a view..."

Sam straightened his back, keeping his eyes fixed ahead. He could feel his face and chest flushing with embarrassment.

"Right, hang around there for a moment," Rivers continued. "Let's see what happens before we make our move."

Sam drew as deep a breath as he could in his corseted dress and turned, looking to see if he could find any guests that still needed drinks. He took a step forwards, gasping as his arm suddenly knocked against a man's chest. The tray that he held tilted upwards, the glasses toppling forwards.

"Ah! You stupid bitch!"

An overweight Italian man swore, rubbing at his soaked tuxedo.

"Oh my god, I'm sorry! I didn't see you there," Sam flustered in his feminine voice. He didn't know quite what else to do and quickly deposited his flooded tray onto a nearby table.

Sam turned back, finding that the man was accompanied by two similarly dressed minders, who each offered a handkerchief for their boss to use.

"Get off'a me!" The man waved a hand, dismissing their assistance. "*She* did this! She can clear it up!" He pointed a stubby finger in Sam's direction, a series of gold rings gleaming from his knuckles.

Some of the guests had noticed the man's raised voice and stepped back, nervously giving him a wide berth.

Sam could feel the pace of his heartbeat increasing as he scoured the table for some paper napkins. He hurried back over, his heels tapping against the floor, his breasts bouncing at his chest.

"Really... I'm sorry... " Sam began to wipe at the man's wet shirt. "This wasn't expensive was it?" He winced, realising straight away that it was a stupid question.

The man's hand suddenly came up, grasping Sam's slender wrist. He pulled his arm painfully around to his back, causing him to cry out effeminately.

"Let's see if we can't teach this girl some manners."

The Italian pulled Sam's feminine body tight into his, causing his breasts to crush between them. He squirmed uncomfortably in his grasp, turning his head away as the man brought his lecherous face closer.

RIVERS STOOD BOLT upright from his chair, causing it to skid backwards across the floor. He looked down at the laptop screens, watching as Sam struggled in the grip of the large Italian. His revolting face filled the screens, his eyes small and dark, his black hair slick like oil.

"Dammit!" Rivers held his hands on his head, feeling his heart beating faster.

He had watched uncomfortably as every last asshole in the hall had checked Sam out, all of them wanting a piece. One by one the thermo-image view had lit up with testosterone-fuelled arousal, as faces and loins flushing with heat. It sent Rivers' blood boiling and he had to fight the urge to stroll right down there and tell them all where to get off.

What had he been thinking, sending Sam out there like a lamb to the slaughter? In truth, Rivers was angry at himself for putting Sam into the firing line in the first place.

"Sam, hold on... I'm coming..."

Rivers had his hand on the bedroom door when he heard the announcement coming through the laptop speakers.

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! May I have your attention please..." A calming female voice drifted over the crowd from the surrounding speakers of the PA system.

Sam felt the Italian man quickly release his arm and he staggered free of his hold, still more than a little shaken. He quickly tugged at the top of his dress where his breasts had almost threatened to spill free, then quickly smoothed a hand around the hem.

The bodiless female voice continued as the lights began to dim around them.

"I would like you all to please welcome your host for this evening... René Gerard!"

A ripple of applause began to grow amongst the crowd, until the entire room erupted. Sam followed the gaze of the crowd, looking up as the guarded doors to the east-wing of the mansion parted. A spotlight followed a tall man in a crisp, dark suit, as he strode forth, gripping the balcony rail to wave down at his admirers. A mighty cheer swelled up around the room.

Now that his attention was diverted, Sam carefully stepped away from the Italian man, disappearing deeper into the crowd. When he was sure that he had gone unnoticed, Sam looked back up towards Gerard who was now gesturing with his arms to settle the crowd. "Are you seeing this?" Sam found himself asking.

"Yes," Rivers replied at last. "Sam? Are you okay?" His voice sounded worried.

"I'm fine." Sam kept his head up, their conversation still masked by the dying waves of applause.

"Are you *sure?*"

"I've had worse... Believe me." Sam felt an involuntary shudder shoot up his spine.

"Alright... Keep your eyes open. This could get interesting."



RENÉ GERARD LET his gaze drift around the perimeter of the balcony, respectfully admiring the portraits that he kept — the great kings and queens of France, commanders such as Napoleon, and various members of his own distinguished family line. He hadn't been back to France in a while, and his *petit Chateau* on the borders of Rome provided a welcome home away from home.

Finally, he looked down from the balcony at his fellow brothers and sisters, basking in their warm welcome.

"Please, please... you flatter me too much." His deep French accented voice projected out from the PA speakers. He waited exactly fifteen seconds, letting the commotion die down to a soft murmur. He smoothed the hair at the sides of his head before continuing.

"When I first formed Scarlet, it was always my intention that this would be for the people... To *enable* people like you... To give you the tools to fight against the tyrannies of this world... to throw off the shackles of oppression... To fight for a brighter tomorrow."

Gerard closed his eyes, letting the fresh wave of applause soak into him.

"Which is why I share this celebration with you... With *all* of you." Gerard's eyes opened and he raised his arms up like a conductor. "So please, join in me in a toast. To you... To me... To *us!*" He turned taking his own flume of Champagne which had been hurriedly brought up to him. He raised the glass triumphantly.

"To Scarlet!"

"TO SCARLET!" The crowd bayed back at him.

He drank deeply, letting the sharp champagne linger in his mouth before swallowing. He began to pace the length of the balcony as he continued, the microphone on his lapel ensuring that his voice carried throughout the room.

"We have much to be thankful for tonight... Much to celebrate..." He ran his hand along the polished woodwork of the balcony rail. "Our agents positioned within the governments of Europe have been particularly successful this year." He paused allowing for cheers of approval. "We also now have an additional headquarters in New York from which to start our new line of work from within the United States... "

Yet more cheering.

"*And*..." Gerard held a finger up which had the desired effect of hushing the audience right down. "...And, most recent of all... It gives me great pleasure to announce to you that we have apprehended one of the great *scourges* of the modern world."

Gerard smiled, watching as whispers of speculation rippled out below him.



SAM COULD FEEL his heart beating faster. He had listened to every word, feeling a cold dread at the mere mention of Scarlet. It was as they had suspected. René Gerard was running the whole show. But where did that place Antoinette, and why wasn't she there?

As the crowd muttered and whispered to each other, Sam looked nervously about him, wondering if she were somewhere in the crowd and he just hadn't seen her. He teetered on his platform heels, finding that even with their added height he was not quite tall enough to see over the heads of most of the guests.

Gerard's voice soon echoed back through the hall and all heads, including Sam's, gazed upwards once more. "Before I say anymore, I would like to introduce someone who has been instrumental in helping us with this operation..."

Sam struggled with his breathing, gasping from within his corseted maid's uniform. This was *it!* It *had* to be Antoinette!

Gerard gestured downwards towards the large Italian that Sam had just now managed to slip away from.

"Bennedetto Federici," Gerard introduced the man, adjusting his French accent into a perfect Italian pronunciation, "Head of the Federici syndicate in Rome."

"Of course!" Rivers' voice returned to Sam's ear, "I can't believe I didn't recognise him before. That guy pretty much runs the Mafia in Italy now!"

Sam's mouth hung open in shock and he felt his feminine body tremble. Had he really been that close to the head of the *Mafia?* He felt both surprise, and an enormous relief, that he hadn't just been stabbed or shot for the accident with the drinks tray. He watched as the assembled guests turned as one, applauding Federici, who responded with a smile and silently mouthed words of thanks.

"Without his assistance we would have been deprived of this evening's star attraction, so thank you Bennedetto. I am hoping this will be the start of a long and prosperous partnership between *your* family... and *mine.*" Gerard smiled again, gesturing to the crowd beneath him. He paused then clapped his hands together.

"And without further delay... let us bring him out... Let us see what... *filth*... we have managed to dredge up!" Gerard snarled, his over-the-top performance reminding Sam of a pantomime villain.

Sam looked over to a couple that stood by him. He couldn't quite understand how they were so enraptured. They seemed to hang on his every word, marvelling at every grandiose sweep of his arm, holding their breath with every dramatic pause.

There was suddenly much muttered excitement, as a side-door opened over by the corner nearest to him. Sam tried desperately to peer around bodies and over heads. The crowd parted in unison, like a sea, forming a clear pathway for the new arrivals that led straight to the staircase and the balcony above.

Sam's heels cluttered beneath him as he moved with the shifting audience. He tried to find space to slip further back into the crowd, but the bodies were now too densely packed to get past. He found himself at the very edge of the clearway that had formed. He turned, giving up on his attempts to hide, and instead concentrated on standing as still as possible.

He watched as a pair of armed soldiers marched forwards, their heavy boots thudding loudly. Sam struggled to control his breathing, tugging absently at the hem of his maid's uniform.

It was then that he noticed another man stumbling awkwardly behind the soldiers, his bare feet slapping against the stone floor. He was stooped, his head low, his black hair unkempt and greasy. His tattered white shirt was yellowed and hung open, with only a pair of briefs protecting his modesty. As he approached, Sam saw that his wrists were bound behind his back and that a metal collar was fastened around his neck to which was joined a long metal pole. A final soldier walked behind him, pushing him forwards with the pole, as if he were a captive animal.

Time seemed to slow once more as the prisoner approached, ever closer, to where Sam stood. Droplets of sweat fell from the man's brow as he raised his head, his dark eyes looking straight down into Sam's soul.



CARLOS RAMIREZ.

Sam could see the recognition in his eyes, turning through a gamut of emotions, from surprise, to confusion, to anger. In that briefest of shared moments Sam could remember it all; the stench of his cigars, his lecherous smirk, the awful numbness of being used by him, not once, but twice...

And then, just as quickly, he was gone, his head turned forwards as the guard shook the metal pole that held his neck.

Sam gasped, suddenly realising that he had been holding his breath. His cleavage heaved as he took quick, shallow breaths, his lungs struggling against the constriction of his tight outfit. His head buzzed with dizziness.

"*Sam...*"

Rivers' voiced sounded distant as the roar of the crowd rose up around him. Sam staggered in his heels, pushed along by the bodies that began to move back in, filling the room once more as the soldiers and their captive took to the stairs.



Sam could see the recognition in Ramirez's eyes, turning through a gamut of emotions, from surprise, to confusion, to anger.

"Sam... come back in okay? We'll figure something else out... Just make your excuses and get out of there."

Sam tried to answer but his feminine voice caught in his throat. He watched as Ramirez was escorted up the stairs and marched along the upper balcony towards Gerard. By now the crowd were going wild, cheering and whistling at the sight before them. It was as if Sam had stepped back in time and now found himself in the middle of Rome's Coliseum, with Gerard as its Emperor.

RENÉ GERARD WATCHED with delight as Carlos Ramirez was brought up to him. The Argentinian stumbled, struggling in his bonds, his face bloodied from where the guards had obviously taken out some of their boredom on him.

As they made their way around the upper balcony, Gerard slipped a hand into his jacket pocket, producing his handheld video camera. He flicked it open, focusing in on Ramirez, catching his barely disguised look of contempt in perfect high resolution.

Ramirez's odor turned Gerard's stomach causing him to take a white handkerchief from his dinner jacket pocket and hold it across his mouth. Everything about him disgusted Gerard; from his clothes and his appearance, to his despicable world view and the vice-like grip he held on the illegal drug and sex trafficking industries.

Finally, he would be brought to his knees and made to answer for his crimes.

One of the guards kicked at the back of Ramirez's legs, causing him to groan with pain and fall forwards in front of Gerard. A mixture of sweat and blood flecked outwards from his forehead, narrowly missing Gerard's right foot. He took a step backwards.

The guard yanked at the pole that held Ramirez's neck forcing him up onto his knees. He choked and coughed, his face turning red.

"Carlos Ramirez!" Gerard pocketed his handkerchief and held out a hand, introducing his captive to his audience. The response was overwhelming. He turned the camera, panning it out over the crowd. He adjusted the focus, zooming right in on their faces, delighting in their rapt attention, their unanimous surprise and delight.

As Gerard peered at the camera's flip-out LCD screen, he noted several French maid dressed waitresses amongst the crowd.

Good. Just as he had requested.

He noticed one of the maids in particular. A blonde. She seemed to be in a hurry, slipping between the gathering, the short hem of her ruffled dress bouncing at her hips as she made her way out to the kitchen.

Gerard smiled to himself, then turned the camera back to Ramirez.

SAM HURRIED THROUGH into the kitchen, his platform heels clacking against the tiled floor, his cleavage bouncing with every step. He pushed between the white uniformed kitchen staff, making his way to the nearest sink. He gripped the edges with his feminine hands and began to cough, feeling as though he might be sick. Despite his best efforts, it had finally proven too much for Sam. He hadn't quite been prepared for seeing Carlos Ramirez again, nor for quite how deeply it would affect him.

"Is something wrong?"

Sam turned, feeling a hand on his shoulder, finding a stern middle-aged woman staring intently at him from over the rim of her glasses. She wore the same white fold-over jacket and pants as the rest of the kitchen staff, with her red hair pulled back into a tight pony-tail.

Sam straightened himself, wiping strands of blonde hair away from where they had stuck to his cheek. He shook his head, taking as deep a breath as he could.

"Good. Sofia's already gone missing on us, and I can't afford to have another girl cry off sick."

"Yes Madame," Sam found himself automatically responding to the woman's strict tone.

"Now take this to Monsieur Gerard's study. It is to be ready for him for when he is finished with his presentation." The woman turned, taking a silver tray from the side which held a bottle of Champagne and two crystal glasses.

"Yes... yes of course Madame..." Sam struggled to keep calm, his hands shaking as he took the tray, causing the glasses to clink together.

The red-headed woman clasped Sam's small wrist harshly, leaning in towards his ear. "And try not to *spill* anything this time, yes?"

Sam bit his lip, trying his best to steady the tray. He turned to head back towards the kitchen's entrance when he felt the woman squeeze his slender arms, forcefully turning him back around.

"What is wrong with you girl? Use the maid's entrance!" She pointed a thumb back over her shoulder to an exit at the far side of the busy kitchen.

"Of course, Madame." Sam gave a meek smile and hurried as best he could with the tray, the hem of his maid's dress bouncing at his hips causing his set of keys to jangle. He narrowly avoided running into one of the salad chefs and quickly excused himself, looking down fearfully at the man's sharp kitchen knife.

All eyes seemed to be on Sam now as he pushed the exit door open with his back, swivelling through into a darkened empty stairwell.

Alone at last, Sam paused, setting the tray down onto the steps, his hands on his waist as he gasped for breath.



SAM'S HEELS CLICKED loudly as he made his way up the small steps. The stairwell was unadorned, the steps well worn. The area was meant for staff use only and did not even attempt to match the exquisite décor of the rest of the mansion. He tried to keep his eyes focused on the Champagne bottle and glasses that wobbled unsteadily on the tray that he held, knowing that they would be his one alibi if he was challenged along the way.

"You are one lucky girl Sam, you know that?" Rivers' masculine voice sounded from the in-ear receiver. Sam was startled at first and momentarily stopped to steady the bottle.

"I'm sorry Mike... I just had to get out of there." Even though Sam spoke softly, his French accented voice echoed between the narrow stone walls.

"Hey, hey... don't apologise. I should never have sent you out there."

"Why, because I'm a *woman?*" Sam smiled wryly.

"Hmm, I was going to say because you have a knack of getting your well-formed ass into trouble."

Sam stopped once he reached the top of the stairs, a locked heavy oak door in front of him. He reached down to his side, carefully unclipping the keys from his apron. After dismissing half the keys straight away, it took Sam only three attempts before he found the right key.

"Well this well-formed ass has got further than you ever did."

Sam turned the door handle.



RIVERS SQUINTED AT the laptop screens, watching as Sam made his way along the deserted corridors of the east-wing of the mansion. He forced himself to sit straighter, his shoulders aching from being hunched over for too long.

"How are we doing?" Sam's feminine voice whispered quietly from the laptop speakers.

"Uh, hold on a second." Rivers rotated his shoulder around in its socket. He studied the signal output on the second laptop screen.

Before having one of his bad turns, Sam had managed to configure the in-ear receiver to double as a remote sensor. It would enable them to track the source of the Agency database theft, though Gerard operated some sort of jamming signal throughout the mansion that had to be continually compensated for.

Rivers stared blankly at the wave forms displayed on the laptop screen, wondering how on Earth he was going to manage. He flicked open the web page he had found offering a refresher course on Fourier analysis and began to tap slowly at the keyboard.

"*Mike?*" Sam's hushed voice was more urgent this time.

"Hold on..." Rivers grimaced as he concentrated, trying his best to block out any external distractions as he carefully configured the receiver. He watched as a sudden spike presented itself from the wave form. "Straight ahead! It should be coming up on the left!" Rivers sighed with relief, wiping his forehead with his sleeve as he leant back in his chair.



SAM STEPPED LIGHTLY along the carpeted corridor. His silk covered legs brushed against one another as he walked, his exposed garters tugging at his stockings with every step.

The private east-wing was even more luxurious than the guest wing had been. The carpets were immaculately brushed, the walls bright and decorated with gold framed portraits spaced evenly between the polished wooden doors either side.

"Okay, you should be right by the door now," Rivers' voice crackled in Sam's ear.

Sam stopped and quickly looked either side of him. It was then that he noticed a particularly ornate looking door a little further along on his left. He carefully balanced the tray of Champagne on the flat of his left palm and made his way over, reaching for the polished brass door handle with his slender hand. He tried it once but found it locked.

Sam could feel his heart beating faster as he flicked through his key chain, searching for something that looked like it might fit the lock.



Sam stepped lightly along the carpeted corridor. His silk covered legs brushed against one another as he walked, his exposed garters tugging at his stockings with every step.

This was it, Sam thought. He was one step away from the end of their mission. Either the stolen Agency data was still in there... or it wasn't. But more than anything, Sam hoped that he would at last find Antoinette. He didn't know what he would say or do when he found her, he just knew that he had to press onwards.

Sam slid a key into the lock and unlatched the door. He gave one last look back down the corridor before turning the handle.



"I REGRET EVERYTHING I have done."

Carlos Ramirez knelt before Gerard, his head bowed low.

"Again! Straight to the camera this time," Gerard laughed. He watched as Ramirez slowly raised his head, his black hair dripping with sweat.

He spoke more slowly this time, his Spanish accented voice growling with his humiliation.

"I... .regret... *everything*..."

"Good! That was better, wasn't it ladies and gentlemen?" Gerard zoomed his handheld camera in on Ramirez's eyes, watching them dart and flicker, trying to look for a way out. It was pointless. His hands were still bound behind his back and one of his best soldiers held his neck harness from behind.

Gerard looked out over the balcony enjoying the rippled sounds of laughter and amusement coming up from his guests below. This was exactly what he wanted. A *spectacle.*

The capture of Ramirez had almost been too easy. The Argentinian had been foolish enough to approach the Italian Mafia to make a deal to allow his drug shipments into Italy, little realising that Scarlet had got their first. Gerard had simply made Federici a much better offer, and in return Ramirez's plans were laid bare.

After ambushing the yacht, Ramirez had been brought to the mansion, detained in the hidden basement cells. Like all cowards, it hadn't taken much to break him. Gerard wielded human psychology as powerfully as any physical weapon. He was a keen student, with an eidetic memory and an unparalleled attention to detail.

"And you will sign over your operations to me? To be dissolved and disbanded at my convenience?" Gerard panned the camera back out, watching as the gears turned over in Ramirez's mind.

"Fuck you, *pendejo!*" Ramirez spat onto Gerard's shoes.

The crowd gasped and Gerard stepped backwards, aghast at the glistening stain on his perfectly polished Italian leather shoes.

How dare that pig-ignorant dictator befoul him in such a way!

Gerard summoned one the guards with a finger. They quickly stepped forwards, their rifle raised, slamming the butt down onto Ramirez's back, sending him crashing down face first onto the hard floor.

It did little to ease Gerard's anger. Ramirez had ruined the evening with his petulant outburst. He looked down over the balcony, fearing that he would have lost the crowd. To his surprise they started to clap, very much enjoying the performance that unfolded above them.

Gerard's expression slowly turned to a smile once more and he raised his arms, accepting their show of appreciation as if he had planned Ramirez's outburst all along. He swept his video camera across the gathering as they cheered, but soon found his attention distracted by a flashing warning on the LCD display of the camera.

Memory card almost full.

Damn it. Gerard had been careful to make sure the camera was fully charged, but had forgotten to swap out the memory card. It was unlike him to make such a mistake.

"Thank you," Gerard calmed the crowd with his deep French-accented voice, "There will now be a short interval, but please help yourself to more food and champagne."

Gerard clicked his camera shut, sliding it back into the pocket of his dinner jacket. He pulled the microphone from his lapel as the spotlight that illuminated him went out, the main hall lights coming back up in its place. He gave one last look down to Ramirez's slumped body, watching as he groaned with pain.

"Take him back down to the cells," Gerard pointed to the soldiers that had escorted Ramirez, "I need to pick up something from my study."

Gerard straightened his bowtie and dinner jacket. He smoothed back his hair and began to stride back towards the same set of double doors that he had entered by.

SAM FOUND HIMSELF in a large room, surrounded by book shelves and plush leather chairs, the high ceiling making him feel even smaller than he already did as a woman. His heels thudded as he made his way through to the far end of the room, his backside twitching from side to side beneath his maid's dress.



Sam cupped his face with his hands, feeling his shoulders begin to jerk with an uncontrollable sob.

He carefully set the champagne tray down onto a large antique desk, pausing to gaze out of the tall windows that overlooked the darkened rear gardens. The moon was now full and hung low in the sky.

Sam focused back on his reflection. Antoinette's female body was now perfectly mirrored in the window front of him, as if to taunt him. Sam cupped his face with his hands, feeling his shoulders begin to jerk with an uncontrollable sob. He fought it, turning away from the window, steeling himself with a deep breath as he wiped at his moist eyes.

"Sam, are you okay?" Rivers' voice sounded flat in his ear.

“She’s not here.” Sam managed at last, his feminine voice wavering.

“I know. But that doesn’t mean we have to stop looking. Is there any sign of the laptop?”

“Just… Give me a minute will you!” Sam raised his voice, stalking over to the large fireplace that dominated the room. He brought a hand to his mouth and closed his eyes, struggling to hold it together. His glistening eyes opened and he gazed down at the still smouldering embers in the fireplace.

Someone had been there recently.

Sam felt his heart beat begin to thump in his chest causing his cleavage to swell, every fibre in his being telling him to get out. He swivelled on his heels, his hands wide at his sides as he made for the door, only to come skidding to a halt when the door opened inwards.

Sam gasped, taking a step back as the man entered.

“Mister Fields I presume? I’ve been expecting you.”

SCARLET

CHAPTER TWELVE

A story by

JESSICA DREW

SAM'S FIVE-INCH PLATFORM heels clicked slowly backwards as he recoiled away from the open door, his mouth open in shock. His backside bumped against the edge of the desk behind him, causing him to jump and gasp effeminately. He had nowhere left to go.

"Please Mister Fields, try to remain calm." René Gerard held up a hand, glancing momentarily behind him to lock the study door. "Or should that be *Miss* Fields?" His eyes glanced downwards to the French maid's uniform that tightly hugged Sam's feminine body, squeezing his breasts into a firm, swollen cleavage.

"You… you know who I am?" Sam answered at last in his quivering French accent, a hand draped protectively across his neckline.

"I know *many* things." Gerard brushed lint from the arm of his jacket as he stepped forwards. He was tall, his angular features making his face look harsh and unsympathetic. "I know, for example, that you are an agent of the United States' Agency..."

Sam swallowed, feeling his feminine body begin to tremble as Gerard approached.

"Oh yes, we know all about your secret little society, just as you know of ours."

"I… I don't know what you're talking about," Sam stammered.

"DO NOT…!" Gerard's voice rose to an uncomfortable volume, though he quickly reined it back in, raising a warning finger. "Do not… *insult* my intelligence Miss Fields."

"I'm sorry," Sam found himself answering automatically. He began to shake even more as he looked up at Gerard, who now stood slightly too close to him for comfort. He watched as Gerard's eyes drifted down to the swell of his cleavage, then back up to his frightened eyes.

"Tell me… *why* are you here…" Gerard reached out, stroking a strand of loose blonde hair back behind Sam's ear.

Sam hesitated, finding it hard to form words. "You... stole information from the Agency… And you stole my *body*…" Sam gritted his teeth, feeling his eyes moisten with emotion.

"*I* stole?" Gerard pondered Sam's words, clearly amused. "That is a very serious accusation."

"Scarlet? That is *you*, isn't it?"

Gerard gave a mocking laugh, "Scarlet is not *I*. Scarlet is *we*. Were you not listening to me in the hall earlier?"

Sam looked away shocked, though Gerard turned his face back towards him with a guiding finger.

"Yes, I saw you out there." Gerard smiled. "I must say I am impressed at your resourcefulness." Gerard reached down, fingering the lace trim of Sam's sleeve.

Sam quickly pulled his arm away. "Where is she? Where's Antoinette?" His voice sounded girlish, its tone stripped of any convincing authority.

Gerard turned away from Sam, exasperated. He began to pace the study. "You Americans are all the same… Always *want, want, want…*"

"I just want what's mine… What was taken from me!" Sam held a hand against his corseted waist, trying desperately to control his breathing.

Gerard stopped, his eyes narrowing. "Well, maybe you should have thought about that before signing up to such a… *despicable* organization." Gerard strode back over to him, becoming more agitated. "Might I remind you that it was your beloved Agency that did this to you. If you ask me you have got exactly what you deserved." His eyes drifted back down over Sam's female body. He smiled, stifling the urge to laugh as he spoke. "Now… why don't you… totter along… back to America." Gerard gave a dismissive wave of his hands. "Then you can dress up like this… like a *slut*… as much as you want. You never know, you may even find a way to get paid for it."

Sam could feel his face and chest flushing red at Gerard's condescension.

"No! I'm not leaving here until you tell me where she is!" Sam's voice was now thick with his French accent, as it tended, whenever he found himself under duress.

Gerard smiled broadly. "Ah, *defiance!* Now you are sounding more like a French woman! Well then… What if I told you she were here… right now."

Sam visibly shook, digging his fingernails into his palms to try and counteract his anxiety. He cleared his throat. "Where?"

Gerard cast his gaze downwards. "We have her… *restrained*… in the basement cells."

"She… she's locked up?" Sam's lips were dry.

"I am afraid she was working outside of Scarlet's doctrine. What she did was…. unauthorized. And regrettable."

Sam looked up at Gerard, his eyes darting as he struggled to take it all in.

"Believe it or not, I am not your enemy in this instance."

Gerard stepped around Sam to pick up the bottle of Champagne from the tray on his desk, giving a murmur of appreciation at its vintage. He glanced back to Sam, scooping both of the crystal glasses up by their stems.

"Come. We have much to talk about."

"SAM… I KNOW you can't answer right now… But be careful okay? Something about this doesn't feel right."

The wooden chair that Mike Rivers sat in creaked as he leant back. The honeymoon room that he and Sam had been using as a base of operations was quiet, with only the soft purr of Sofia's breathing reminding him that he was not alone. He glanced briefly over his shoulder to the four-poster bed, where the Italian girl still slept soundly from beneath the bed sheets. The tranquillizer in her system would keep her out for a while yet, especially given her diminutive size.

The familiar, tinny clack of Sam's high heels reverberated through the laptop speakers, drawing his attention back once more.

Rivers steepled his fingers together, watching intently at Sam's viewpoint from the contact lens cameras. His female partner followed Gerard to the fireplace, taking a seat in a plush leather armchair when offered.

Sam appeared nervous and his view was downcast, rubbing at an unseen mark on his right thigh. At any other time Rivers would have relished the sight of his slender, stocking covered legs, the patterned lacy tops fully visible along with a hint of milky white bare thigh. But right now he needed to see Gerard. Rivers' poker instincts told him that all was not as it appeared. He needed to read his facial expressions, his tone of voice, check the thermo-image view for any subtle changes.

Without prompting from Rivers, Sam looked back up, sweeping a stray strand of blonde hair from his eye. Gerard stepped into view, looming tall above Sam as he set the Champagne bottle and glasses down onto a small table between them. His eyes flicked up, fixing Sam with a steely gaze.

"Be careful," Rivers whispered again.



SAM NERVOUSLY TUGGED at the hem of his dress, trying to protect his modesty as best he could. He sat with his legs clamped tightly together, the large green leather armchair dwarfing him, making him feel like a small child sat in an adult's seat. He watched as Gerard stoked the fireplace back into life, its flickering glow throwing shadows across the walls.

"There, that is better." Gerard stepped back as flames licked the fireplace. Sam did not know quite why he had felt the need to dim the lights and start a fire. It was a balmy evening outside and Sam was quite warm enough already, despite his state of dress. Gerard pulled his own leather armchair in to sit opposite Sam.

"Antoinette Françoise Bellerose," he began, settling back into the chair. His head tilted as he observed Sam's feminine face. "I first came across her working in one of the more... *exclusive* bordellos in France."

Gerard paused and Sam drew a breath. He could not help but feel deeply, intimately connected to the woman whose body he had unwittingly borrowed.

"She, like most of the other women, had been working there since she was a child…" He paused again, looking deep into Sam's eyes. "Do you know what happens when they start that young?"

Sam shook his head, his lips moving a little, though they produced no sound.

"It becomes their *world*," Gerard continued, "their whole existence. As much as you want to save them, to take them away from that awful place… you can't."

Sam watched as Gerard looked down, sighing, his arrogance and posturing slowly slipping away like a melting wax mask.

"Believe me I have tried before, on my travels, to help people like this, but each one…" Gerard raised a finger, "… each one had to be committed to a mental institute within the year.

"Now… *Antoinette*…" Gerard leaned forwards toward Sam, "Antoinette was different. She wasn't completely broken. She still had fire and spirit! I took her with me… I told her of Scarlet and how she would be able to help us fight against the oppressions of this world."

Sam found himself mesmerized by Gerard's piercing eyes as they reflected the flickering fire.

Fire and spirit.

The words seemed to resonate deeply within Sam. He had come so far, overcome so many obstacles to get to where he now was. He had done things that would have sent his old male-self running. Had he inherited those traits from Antoinette Bellerose as well? And if that were true, then just how much of the old Sam still remained?

Gerard cleared his throat, drawing Sam's attention back, sensing that he had begun to retreat into his own thoughts. "Antoinette was a keen student, learning everything she could, everything she'd been deprived of growing up. I became her mentor…" He paused looking long and hard at Sam. "And her *lover*..."

Sam felt his face flush hot and a wave of dizziness swept over him. He felt a sudden self-consciousness that Gerard had been intimate with the body that he now occupied. Sam crossed his right leg over his left, feeling his garters pull at his silk stockings, drawing a self-awareness once more to the emptiness between his thighs. His pelvic muscles seemed to tense of their own accord, as if his womanhood were reaching out and mocking him.

"But it wasn't to be," Gerard continued, turning his head, gazing long into the burning coals of the fireplace. "A great sadness came over her… She began to resent her womanhood, rejecting any kind of physical intimacy with men…

with *me*…“

Sam rubbed at his thigh, watching as Gerard gazed sadly into the fire.

“So you see… I was wrong… I could not save her after all." Gerard glanced back to Sam, giving a flicker of a smile.

Sam cleared his throat. “I’m sorry…” He couldn’t help but feel saddened; not only at Antoinette’s story, but at the heartbreak that was so plainly written across Gerard’s face.

Gerard reached for the Champagne bottle that he had set down on the table between them. “When we discovered the existence of the Agency’s mind-transference technology, she became obsessed.” He turned the bottle over in his hands to read the label. “She was bent on acquiring the technology to improve her lot. I forbade her, of course.”

Sam shifted in his chair, seeming to find his voice once more. “I don’t understand, why would you *not* want to use it?”

Gerard’s shoulders jerked with amusement as he poured the Champagne out into the two crystal flutes.

“When man starts to play God, there is seldom a positive outcome. The technology would not be contained… there would be…”

“Anarchy?” Sam finished Gerard’s sentence. “But isn’t that *exactly* what Scarlet wants?”

“*Anarchy?*” Gerard laughed. “Is *that* what the Agency are telling you about us? My dear Miss Fields, have you really been so closely indoctrinated by your country that you do not even stop to question for yourself? I suppose words like *freedom* and *liberation* never came up did they?”

“No,” Sam answered quietly, lowering his head as he blushed.

“No, of course not.” Gerard offered one of the glasses to Sam.

“I don’t think there’s anything to celebrate here, do you?” Sam folded his arms across his chest.

“Why of course there is," Gerard smiled, the expression ill-suited to his angular face. "I’m going to give you your body back.”

Sam visibly shook, his head beginning to spin. He looked away from Gerard, gazing down into the roaring fire, its oppressive heat causing his forehead to bead with sweat.

He finally looked back up to Gerard, reaching forward with a slender hand to take the glass.

RIVERS STARED AT the thermo-image display depicting René Gerard's image in a swirl of cool ambers and yellows. If he was hiding something, if he was being in *any* way untruthful, then he certainly had a talent for disguising it. Gerard's pulse was steady as a rock, his face betraying none of the classic tell-tale signs of deception.

Even still, Rivers could feel that something was wrong. His gut instinct was seldom ever wrong and he had learned to trust it over the years, even when factual evidence might point to the contrary.

"Sam… Don't listen to him… Something is way off here," Rivers leant forwards, whispering into the laptop. He rubbed at the back of his neck, feeling trapped and useless by their reversed circumstances. "Sam? Tap your leg or something if you can hear me…"

A scream pierced the air.

Rivers span around, his chair clattering to one side as he stood. He watched as Sofia slid across the bed, trailing the bed sheet after her, her face contorted with a mixture of panic and confusion.

SAM WINCED, REACHING to his ear as an uncomfortable squeal of feedback emanated from the concealed receiver that he wore.

"Is there a problem?" Gerard looked at Sam suspiciously as he sat back in his chair, sipping at his Champagne.

"No… it's nothing." Sam drank nervously from his own glass, idly reaching a hand up to brush hair from his face from where it had stuck to his cheek. His fingers hovered just below his right ear, then in a quick movement he scratched a long fingernail up, hooking out the micro audio receiver, which fell unseen over the back of the chair.

"WHAT… WHAT HAPPENED to me? Where are my *clothes?!*"

Sofia's high pitched, Italian-accented voice echoed through the room as she swept the sheet from the bed, wrapping it around her body. Her dark eyes darted, searching the room for a way out.

"Sofia! Just relax… take it easy." Rivers held up his hands, taking a careful step towards her.

"No! Get away from me you *pervert!*" Sofia began to back up, her long brunette hair whipping around her as she glanced behind to the glass door that led out to the balcony. With surprising speed she bolted, her stocking covered feet silent against the carpet.

Rivers reached into his jacket pocket for his tranquilizer gun, only to clutch in vain at a handful of disassembled parts.

"Damn it!"

Sofia was now at the door, swinging it wide open to step through onto the outside balcony. "Aiutatemi! Qualcuno, per favore mi aiuti!" She screamed into the night, still clutching the bed sheet tightly to her semi-naked body.

Rivers quickly slid up behind her, wrapping one arm around her waist, his other hand cupping her mouth to silence her. He dragged her backwards into the room, her legs kicking, hoping that the patrolling guards had not heard her. Though she struggled, Sofia was still weak from the sedative and he easily pushed her backwards onto the bed. Rivers quickly felt in his pocket for the magazine to his pistol as Sofia struggled to right herself. She took a long deep breath, her mouth opening to scream once more.

Rivers unclipped a tranquilizer cartridge, quickly jabbing it into Sofia's left thigh. Her last cry never made it, her lungs exhaling in a long sigh as her eyes rolled backwards.

RENÉ GERARD SIPPED at his glass of Champagne, watching Sam Fields closely.

His gaze swept upwards, drinking in the sight of the gender-swapped agent's dainty feet and five-inch heels, her perfectly shaped calves, her legs wrapped in sheer black silk. He paused, lingering on the blackness under her short ruffled dress, before drawing his eyes across her waist, narrow and constricted by the corsetry of the uniform, forcing her large breasts up into a heaving swollen cleavage.

And yet, René Gerard did not feel his blood quicken. He did not feel the thump of his heartbeat in his chest, or the urgent swell of testosterone muddying his mind. He had learnt to have more control than that. More than anything, Gerard was amused at what he saw; a fine, upstanding and professional agent, reduced to an overtly sexual caricature of a woman.

Her face was like a painting - a dolls head - that had already begun to swoon slightly from a combination of the Champagne and the roaring heat from the fireplace. She drank deeply from her glass, making the classic mistake of attempting to quench her thirst with alcohol.

It was time.

Time for Gerard to press home his advantage.

Agent Fields' eyes were now glazed, her forehead dripping with sweat, causing loose strands of her blonde hair to stick to her face.

Soft... pliable... open to suggestion...

"Voulez-vous plus?" Gerard smiled, offering the Champagne bottle.

"Oui." Fields nodded, adapting instantly to Gerard's use of French. She almost eagerly held out her glass with shaking hands.

SAM DRAINED HIS second glass of Champagne, his throat feeling like it was on fire. He tugged at the low neck of his maid's uniform, struggling to get air down into his lungs. He gazed listlessly at the Champagne bottle on the table between them, the light of the fire directly behind it causing it to sparkle hypnotically.

Why did he have to make it so hot in here?

"A fine drink wouldn't you say?"

Sam looked up as Gerard spoke, finding that he had to struggle fiercely to concentrate.

"One of Antoinette's vices, I'm afraid." Gerard smacked his lips, holding up his glass to swill and admire its contents. "Perhaps you have found that? Now that you are in her body?"

"I... maybe... yes..." Sam blinked rapidly, confused by Gerard's tangent, only dimly aware that they were both now speaking in French.

"You are so much like her, do you know that?"

Gerard narrowed his eyes, sipping once more at his drink. The fireplace seemed to roar behind him, casting him in a haze as he stood up.

"You said you would give me my body back." Sam demanded, struggling for focus.

"The way you talk… your mannerisms… It really is quite astounding," Gerard shook his head in bemusement as if Sam had not said anything at all. He walked casually over to a sideboard, pulling open a drawer, searching amongst its contents.

Sam turned in his seat, feeling sweat drip from his brow, running cold between the swell of his breasts.

"It really makes me miss her all the more." Sam watched as Gerard removed something from his pocket, setting it down onto the side. Sam quickly recognised it as the handheld video camera that Gerard had used out in the main hall.

"Then give me Antoinette!" Sam almost pleaded, frustrated at Gerard's stalling. "Then you can have her back, just as she was."

"No, *not* as she was." Gerard snapped back, glancing back to Sam from over his shoulder. "I told you, she has changed... become... *cold*... And she will hate me even more for forcing her womanhood back upon her." Sam could see the sadness return to Gerard's eyes and his shoulders visibly sank under the weight of his memories.

Sam pushed himself from the leather armchair, his heels scuffing beneath him as he struggled with his balance. His stocking covered legs felt almost wet with perspiration. He took faltering steps towards the Frenchman, more than anything to put some distance between himself and the oppressive heat of the fire. His head span, his vision momentarily blurring before snapping back into sharp focus. His palms felt clammy and he rubbed them against the hem of his maid's dress.

As Sam cautiously approached he craned his neck, just able to make out Gerard's fastidious hands as he swapped a small memory card into the video camera, clicking it firmly into place. He slid the drawer of the sideboard shut, pausing briefly to admire the well-worn books on the shelves in front of him.

“When she darkened… when she shut herself away from me… It broke my heart.”

Gerard's shoulders heaved with a long draw of breath. He turned around and Sam automatically stopped, taking one careful step backwards.

“The change in her was sudden… There was no warning…" Gerard looked down forlornly at the camera cradled in his hands. "I never really had a chance to say goodbye to that part of my life…"

The corner of Gerard's lips spread once more into an ill-fitting grin as he flicked the camera open, aiming it straight at Sam.

"Until now."



“SAM, CAN YOU hear me?” Rivers spoke urgently into the laptop’s microphone. He watched helplessly from the contact lens feeds as René Gerard began a slow circle around Sam, stalking him like a tiger. All the while his video camera was trained on Sam, sweeping up and down the length of his feminine body.

Sam, meanwhile, appeared unsteady on his feet, his eyelids heavy and occasionally closing altogether for seconds at a time.

Rivers cursed and slammed a balled fist down into the table. From his outside perspective he could see it all so clearly; the heat and the alcohol, married with Gerard's pathetic attempts at garnering sympathy - it was all designed to confuse and disorientate. It was something a First-Class agent had been trained to recognise. But not Sam.

Rivers tugged at his upper lip, glancing back to the bed where Sofia, once more, slept soundly. He really didn't want to have to give her another shot like that, as there could sometimes be complications, but she seemed to still be breathing normally. It wasn't like he had much choice in the matter. With a scream like that she would have brought the whole of Scarlet down upon him. Rivers gazed at the still open balcony door, watching for a second as the cool breeze wafted through the netted curtain.

Rivers turned his attentions back to the laptop, watching as Sam slowly turned through a full circle, so as not to turn his back to the predatory Gerard. Probably a wise move.

It was bad enough that Sam could no longer hear him, but now that he and Gerard were both speaking in French it made it twice as hard for Rivers to follow what was going on. He checked the thermo-image view. There was still no apparent change in Gerard's emotional state. Rivers exhaled, stretching his knotted shoulders. He felt deaf, dumb and blind. His pulse steadily quickened as he came to realise that he could no longer just sit back and watch.

SAM TURNED, WOBBLING on his tall heels as Gerard circled around him. His breasts jumped on his chest with his awkward movements, which Gerard made sure to capture with his video camera, the zoom function whirring with a mechanical malice. A single point of light next to the camera's lens dazzled him, creating blurred after-images in his vision when he finally looked away. He brought one hand to his chest protectively, the other tugging at the hem of his short ruffled maid's dress.

"Why so shy all of a sudden?" Gerard's face was silhouetted beside the camera as he took slow steps to pan around Sam. He stopped, directly in front of him now, gazing intently into the view screen of the handheld camera.

"What... what are you doing?" Sam felt himself swoon, one foot clacking forwards to keep from stumbling. His senses were fighting a punishing battle against the overwhelming heat from the fireplace and the uncomfortable brightness of the camera's spot light - not to mention the two glasses of Champagne.

"I want to know what I am getting in return for my... *generosity.*" Sam could make out the flash of bared, grinning teeth beside the camera.

"In return? But, you... you said so yourself... What Antoinette did was against your wishes... We're... we're just putting right what went wrong... for *both* of us." Sam gasped for breath, finding even a scant few sentences enough to send his chest heaving for air beneath his corseted uniform. He tugged even more firmly at the hem of his dress as Gerard swept the camera downwards towards his legs.

"Putting right what went wrong..." Gerard echoed, pondering the words. "An interesting choice of phrase of which I fully ascribe to." He stepped forward, the spot light from the video camera now uncomfortably bright, aimed straight at Sam's feminine face.

Sam could feel his body trembling at the man's proximity, close enough now to smell the alcohol on his breath. He turned his face away, his eyes closing, gasping as Gerard reached forward with an outstretched finger to catch a bead of sweat from his soft cheek.

"I ask you again, Miss Fields... Are you willing to put right where I was once so harshly wronged? To give me the closure I never had... with the woman I loved?"

Sam could feel his pelvic muscles twitch in rebellion at the realisation of what Gerard was suggesting. He shook as Gerard drew the flat of his hand along his neck, almost, but not quite making a grip around his throat, before sliding lower over his wet skin, coming to rest just above his breasts.

The light of the camera flickered upwards, illuminating his glistening skin.



"THAT'S ENOUGH ASSHOLE. I'm coming for you now…" Rivers muttered, threatening the image of Gerard that filled his laptop screen. Still the thermo-image betrayed nothing of the web of sexual blackmail that he was so obviously spinning for Sam. Obvious, at least, to an outside observer.

Rivers tightened the barrel of his reassembled tranquilizer pistol as he started to pace the room, a plan of action beginning to unfurl before him.

He would march into the main hall, make his way down to the kitchens, following the same path that Sam had taken. It wasn't guarded by soldiers and it would take time for the kitchen staff to raise the alarm amongst the initial confusion. Time enough to head up into the east wing of the mansion, through the maid's entrance, to find Sam. As for how they would get away again after… Rivers would have to think about that *en route.*

Rivers reached for the door, his hand closing around the brass handle, just as an arm wrapped itself around his neck, tightening, wrenching him backwards into the room.



"MY… MY BODY… just give me back my body..." Sam pleaded, almost delirious now, the room throwing strange shadows and tricks of light across his eyes as the blurred shape of Gerard continued to film him. He took a step back, his rounded backside bumping against the sideboard, his stocking covered legs trembling beneath him, threatening to give way at any moment.

Gerard's voice seemed almost disembodied now, filling the whole room as he loomed forward from the shadows. "Patience, Miss Fields. You've nearly done it... You are so close to walking out of here a free woman... no, a free *man!* Free at last from your soul's imprisonment in this body."

Sam raised his heavy head, the spotlight from the video camera beaming straight into his blue eyes.

So close…

So bright…

Sam blinked as the camera swooped downwards, across the length of his feminine body. His trembling hands gripped the sideboard either side of him, his long painted fingernails scratching into its wooden surface. He looked past Gerard now, to the fireplace behind him, roaring like an inferno.

"Perhaps you need further... *encouragement.*" Gerard's voice soothed from the shadows. He moved, like a spectre to the sideboard, reaching down to unlock the lower most cabinet with a key. With a heavy clunk, a familiar looking laptop was set down on the sideboard next to Sam.

For that moment, Sam seemed to rise out of his stupor, his mind racing as he stared down at the stolen Agency laptop beside him. He even reached out with a feminine hand, sliding his palm across the surface to check if it was real.

"You have my word that we have yet to take any of the data from it."

Sam looked back up into the ever present eye of the video camera.

"Think about it, you will return home a hero, having thwarted the plans of both the mighty Carlos Ramirez... and the dastardly René Gerard! And all it would have taken is... one *moment.*"

MIKE RIVERS SLAMMED back into the wall with all his effort, winding his attacker, finally giving him the chance to break free from the choke hold.

Rivers gasped for breath as he spun around, his eyes darting, quickly assessing his opponent. It was one of the guards that he and Sam had spotted patrolling the grounds of the mansion earlier. He was dressed in black combat fatigues, a mask and night vision goggles concealing his face from view. He was at least as big as Rivers, maybe even a little taller. He wore a rifle slung around his back which he now reached for, aiming it towards Rivers.

Rivers vaulted forwards, grasping the barrel of the rifle, pushing it upwards. A shot fired off into the ceiling sending a shower of plaster down onto them. They remained locked together, wrestling for control of the weapon, Rivers looking deep into the night vision goggles that the Scarlet soldier wore, making out the slight flicker of his eyes beneath.

The soldier threw his head forwards, hitting Rivers full force in the face. He staggered backwards, releasing his grip on the rifle allowing the masked man to follow up with a punishing uppercut using the weighted butt of his rifle.

Rivers hit the carpeted floor hard, his back flaring with pain. He spat blood as the soldier took a step forward, renewing the aim of his rifle, ready to fire at point blank range.

Rivers kicked swiftly at the back of his knee, causing him to groan beneath his mask and fall backwards, the rifle cluttering at his side.



ONE MOMENT.

The words seemed to linger, penetrating deeply into Sam's sub-conscious. So that was what it would take? One moment?

It seemed as if all that had happened to Sam since the swap came to him in a sequence of such moments:

Awakening to find the image of Antoinette staring back at him from the mirror; Rivers' kiss at the lobby bar; stepping out onto the decking of Pier Nine, alone and afraid... Then aboard the *Oro del Diablo*, his weak-willed seduction at the hands of Maria Ramirez; submitting to the lecherous desires of Carlos Ramirez; the torment of Gaul; the attack on the yacht...

Then, the betrayal of Rivers and the Agency, hurting him deeper than any punishment of the flesh...

So many *moments*...

Just one more...

Then the hurting could stop.



RENÉ GERARD WATCHED from the view finder of the video camera as Agent Fields fingered the hem of her maid's dress, ringing it nervously with both hands.

"Do what you feel you must. Do what... you *need* to do..." Gerard beckoned, close enough now that he could whisper.

He could finally feel his heart beat thumping with vigour from within his chest, not with arousal, but with the heady feeling of power and control, a psychological cocktail that he found more heady and powerful than any flirtations with drugs from his youth.

All the same, he kept the camera trained on the hem of the French girl's dress, for he knew there would be an audience for what would follow.



SAM COULD ACUTELY remember the sensations he had felt in the shower that morning, a simmering undercurrent of sexual heat that had been with him since he had awoken. It had seemed stubbornly unwilling to leave him for the rest of the day, coalescing itself into the soft sensual caress of lace trimmed underwear and the frisson of stocking covered legs brushing together. He would have denied it, but it was there all the same. Then there had been Rivers and Sofia - their verbal foreplay teasing him, reigniting his kindling fire, his body responding, threatening almost to overpower his rational mind.

Even now, in the shadow of someone who could only ever be called his enemy, Sam felt a knotted tension deep in his lower body, as tightly sprung as the garters that held his stockings.

He knew that he wanted out. He wanted his ordeal to end, to finally find peace within his own body once more. Gerard stood vaporous and indistinct, blocking his exit.

Sam closed his eyes, sensing Rivers' presence, despite their physical separation, as if he were looking from over his shoulder. Rivers who had been largely responsible for what had happened to him. Who, in spite of this, had pursued him... teased him... *humiliated* him...

It was then that a part of Sam sought refuge in the thought of hurting Rivers... to finally get back at him for what he had done. After everything the man had put him through, would it not be fitting to let him sweat, to let him worry, to make him...

Jealous...

Sam opened his eyes again, his grip still tight on the hem of his dress as he slowly, carefully, raised it upwards, the lace trimmed ruffles rustling softly, reminding him of the soothing wash of the Mediterranean Sea.

He felt calm.

The glare of the video camera's spotlight was almost blinding.

One moment.

RENÉ GERARD WATCHED with rapt delight as Sam Fields finally revealed herself to him, submissive and obedient.

How easily he had bent her under his whim, her psyche already fractured from her ordeals, leaving her easy pickings for a master like him.

Of course, Gerard did not want her... not in *that* way. He had wanted to see how far she would go, what she would be willing to do, and had felt a terrific rush of endorphins when she had finally submitted herself to him. For Gerard, that had been enough.

It was for *another* that he kept filming...

Gerard knelt on one knee, angling the video camera closer, enough to pick out the detailed lace trim of her black thong, which seemed to tremble with either her fear, or her suppressed lust.

“Turn around.” Gerard instructed, knowing just what tone and nuance to put into his voice to have the greatest psychological impact on the vulnerable and confused woman.

Fields' high heels clicked as she turned herself around, facing the sideboard now, her little hands seeming to hold on for dear life.

Gerard's camera panned back, taking in the complete view of her derrière, so perfectly smooth and white, bisected by the black string of her thong.

"Good girl... Lean forwards… a little *more*…" Gerard rose, pressing at her back, bending her over, making sure to capture the accompanying stretch of her garters as they tugged at the lace tops of her stockings.

Gerard zoomed the camera lens back out, taking in the full effect of her provocative attire now. She seemed blissfully unaware of her indecency and instead took to staring blankly ahead to the books that lined the back of the sideboard.



SAM GAZED AT the books arranged neatly before him. He was close enough to be able to read the French titles on their tattered spines - titles such as *Smoke and Mirrors*, *Influence and Manipulation* and *A Chemical Map of the Human Brain* - though he was not of any sort of mind to be able to comprehend their significance.

"You have no idea how this feels for me, seeing you like this ... *Antoinette*…" Gerard began, beginning to run his hand over the soft swell of Sam's backside. Sam was leant forward enough now that his breasts pressed into the wooden top of the sideboard, his arms resting limp beside him. "You see, I gave up my heart for *you*… I loved you as fully as any man could…"

Sam remained silent, the mechanical whir of the video camera hanging in the air between them as it shifted focus.

"Will you let me say goodbye, Antoinette? As it was meant to be all those years ago?

Sam closed his eyes.



RIVERS KICKED THE soldier's rifle into a corner and launched himself onto his attacker. The masked assailant braced and took his blow as skilfully as any professional wrestler. They fell sideways onto the large four-poster bed, causing Sofia's sleeping body to bounce beside them.

The solider was atop Rivers, reaching back to his leg to unsheathe a small knife. Rivers grasped his wrists with both hands as he brought the blade down, stopping it inches from his chest. He groaned with defiance, using every ounce of strength he had left to try and turn the blade, but the man was bigger.

And he had gravity on his side…

The knife slowly began to lower as Rivers struggled, sweat dripping from his brow. He turned his head to one side, seeing Sofia lying on her back beside him, sleeping serenely, so beautiful and innocent to the violence going on around her.

It made him think of Sam.

He moved one hand from the soldier's wrist, reaching out to her, sealing his fate.

SAM FOUND HIMSELF on the deck of the *Oro del Diablo*, looking out over the rear-most railing to the clear blue waters below. His long blonde hair lifted as a cool breeze played about his body, offering some respite from the sun as it beat down upon his fair skin. He reached up with a hand, holding it to one side as he turned to look behind him.

The deck was vast, stretching impossibly back to the horizon, but he could just make out an open door, a dark figure standing at its centre.

Sam turned back to the endless sea, feeling the figure approaching, his sandals clapping ominously against the wooden decking. He was close behind him now, breathing heavily, plumes of acrid cigar smoke roiling out over the side of the boat.

So much smoke…

Was there a fire?

Sam's eyes darted, waiting for the figure to say something…

Anything…

Instead, he silently pressed at Sam's bare back, guiding him, leaning him forward over the railing. Stubby, rough-edged fingers prodded at his hips, fumbling with the waist band of his pink bikini bottoms.

Sam gasped, quivering as he looked down to the sea below, seeing the shadow of his own feminine reflection broken by the chopping waters, becoming less and less distinct until it was washed away entirely.

Something wasn't right…

Why was it happening again?

Sam's fingers gripped the railing tightly, his chest beginning to heave as he took deep breaths. The cool air filled his lungs, invigorating him.

Not this time.

One moment...



"NO!"

Sam screamed in his high pitched voice, his mind crashing back into the present. He turned, swiping backwards with his left hand, catching Gerard across the side of his face. Although he had barely given it a second thought, Sam still wore the imitation diamond ring that Rivers had made him wear when they first visited the mansion earlier in the day. The stone carved a deep gash into Gerard's cheek.

"Ahhh!" Gerard staggered backwards, clutching his bleeding face, the video camera cluttering to the floor beside him. "My face! My *face!*" he wailed incredulously, looking down at the blood in his shaking hands.

Sam had expended his last ounce of energy and slid helplessly to the floor, gasping for breath, his hands on his small, cinched in waist.

Gerard looked down at Sam, his hawk-like face fuming with anger. His lips trembled as he searched for the right words, but none seemed to be sufficient for the rage that seethed within.

He leant down, snatching his camera back up, checking it for damage before slipping it back into his jacket pocket. He produced a white linen handkerchief in its place, pressing it to his face. He marched indignantly to the study door, unlocking it, staring back at Sam with disgust.

Sam lay slumped on his side, his cheeks stained with tears. He looked up as two armed guards filed into the room, their boots thudding on the carpeted floor, each of them brandishing a semi-automatic rifle. They easily brought him back to his feet, lifting him from under each of his slender arms. Sam gasped as one of the guards cruelly forced his hands behind his back, latching a pair of metal cuffs to his wrists.

"You just couldn't let it be, could you?" Gerard finally spat, his whole body seeming to vibrate. "You come to my mansion… *ruin* my party… my…. my *face*…" He looked down at the blood in his handkerchief.

Sam breathed in, his cleavage swelling, his hair now hanging loose and matted across his shoulders. "It… was my pleasure." Sam spoke in English, meeting Gerard's gaze defiantly, his head clearing with a renewed certainty.

"You are a fool. You must know you will never get your body back." Gerard beckoned one of the soldiers forward with a hand. Sam gasped, nearly choking as the man began to affix an uncomfortable iron collar to his neck. "You will live… and die… as a *woman.*" Gerard threatened, leaning in close to Sam's feminine face. He turned, walking towards the door, addressing Sam dismissively from over his shoulder with a raised finger.

"And sooner than you may think."

SAM TROTTED DOWN the corridor outside of the study, his hands bound behind his back. He was forced into a rapid cantor by the metal pole now attached to his collar, pushed onwards by the two soldiers behind him. His maid's dress bounced at his hips, his bust threatening to spill free, though he was now beyond caring for his modesty.

“You… you think killing me will make a difference?” Sam spoke up with his French-accented voice as Gerard strode ahead of them. “I’m just one agent… The Agency will find you…” His newfound brazenness betrayed just how little he had left to loose.

“My dear Miss Fields… before long the Agency will not even *exist*…” Gerard spoke back to Sam, not even turning his head as he marched towards the heavy twin set of doors that led back out into the main hall.

Sam could hear the rumble of the guests begin to build, a throbbing that made his head hurt. He watched as Gerard stopped in front of the doors, turning back to face him at last. The deep gash in his cheek still dripped blood, making him appear ghoulish. The soldiers jerked harshly on Sam’s collar, causing his high heeled feet to clack to a sudden halt.

“May I present… your *downfall!*” Gerard threw open the doors as Sam felt himself pushed out into the light.

THE RUSH OF the cheering crowd seemed to take an eternity to die down. Sam finally opened his eyes, the spotlight above him now reigned in enough for him to be able to see the writhing masses below. He found that he was now knelt, knees apart at Gerard's request, on the upper balcony of the main hall. He was held in place by the painful collar and pole, just as Carlos Ramirez had been earlier.

"Did I not promise you a spectacle this evening?" Gerard roared, throwing his hands up, his bloodied handkerchief still grasped tightly in his right hand. The crowd bayed back at him, reminding Sam of a pit of expensively dressed hyenas. He winced as the pole that held him was twisted a little too far back, causing him to splutter with a choking cough.

"But I sense that you have not yet had your fill..." Gerard stepped up beside Sam, lacing his fingers into his matted blonde hair. "Then how about something... *sweet*... for dessert..."

Sam looked up at his captor, his chest wheezing beneath his tight fitting dress.

"May I present to you… Agent Samuel Fields of the United States' Agency!"

There was much murmuring and confusion from below, even a ripple of laughter. Sam stared blankly ahead, scarcely believing what was now being revealed to the whole room full of people.

"Yes, that is right ladies and gentlemen. He was betrayed by the very organization that he works for, using illegal mind-switching technology to swap him with one of our very own agents..." Gerard stepped forward to the edge of the balcony, his natural theatrically quickly returning. "But please... do not feel bad for her. As you can see, she is settling in very well to her new life." Gerard turned, smirking down at Sam, standing directly in front of him to emphasize his dominance.

Sam's humiliation was now complete. Laughter mocked at him from the crowds below, but there was no more fight left in his tired female body. He could only endure the ritual as best he could, knelt submissively, his stockings now laddered and frayed, his thong panties plainly visible to the crowd that gazed up at him from below.

He had tried his best, but had spectacularly failed. Rivers had been right all along...

Rivers...

With effort, Sam raised his head, gazing across to the double-doors on the far side of the balcony. As if in answer to his silent call, the doors parted, the antique wood creaking outwards.

Only it wasn't Rivers...

The soldier stepped forwards, faceless, hidden behind night-vision goggles and a mask. He seemed to stare straight into Sam's soul with lifeless, mechanical eyes. He cast his head downwards, drawing Sam's attention to the stained knife in his right hand. He wiped the scarlet blade against his thigh, both sides, leaving an inky black wetness on his fatigues.

No...

All hope drained from Sam's body as he slumped into a defeated squat. That was it. He no longer cared for what would happen next. He just wanted it to end. Tears flowed freely down his cheeks as his neck was forced upwards once more with a cruel twist.

The eyes of the crowd darted and flickered between that of his own degradation, and Gerard, their ringmaster, still addressing them, whipping them into a frenzy with his words and dramatic gestures, of which Sam had long since ceased to listen. His ringing ears dimly focused back in on Gerard's address as he looked back over to stare at the soldier opposite. He stood impassive, with his arms arrogantly folded across his chest.

"My dear ladies and gentlemen, there is of course someone who could not make it to the party tonight. Someone who I know will be... *very* interested... in the fate of our young Miss Fields."

The plasma screen that had hung above the crowd from the upper balcony flickered, its words of welcome disappearing into the black ether, only to be replaced with a figure, at first shrouded in static as satellites shifted into a new alignment.

The image soon cleared and the figure stepped forwards, his head downcast at first, looking up only when he was close enough so that he filled the screen entirely. His eyes were piercing and urgent, looking out into the gathered crowd.



THE TIME BETWEEN the moment of seeing the man's face on the plasma screen, and the moment of recognition, seemed to hang in the air, stretching into an uncertain limbo. Perhaps it was his hair, cut shorter, and stylishly fashioned. Perhaps it was the day's worth of stubble that flecked his youthful face. Or perhaps it was the expensive suit that he wore, his white shirt crisp and opened casually at the neck.

Either way it took Sam Fields *seconds*... long, drawn out seconds... to comprehend and recognise his own face smiling at him from the screen opposite.

"Mon dieu..." Sam whispered to himself as he beheld the doppelgänger.

"I'm glad you could join us!" Gerard clapped his hands together with joy, grinning devilishly like a sadistic chat show host. The doppelgänger smiled, using Sam's face, the same smile that beamed from dozens of family photographs in his parent's house. "Tell me Antoinette, how is the flight?"

The doppelgänger seemed to wince in response to his name, as if Gerard had just pricked him with a knife. "Comfortable René, comfortable." He turned, looking back towards the rounded port window directly behind him. Though I will be glad when we finally reach New York." The doppelgänger shrugged, turning back towards the camera. "I just have the feeling that America will suit me better... much as this body does."

There was a ripple of laughter from the dark sea of bodies below, briefly reminding Sam of their presence.

"But, what do we have *here?*" The doppelgänger's large eyes flicked downwards from the screen, to where Sam was still slumped. He could feel Gerard's fingers snake into his mess of blonde hair, forcing his head upwards.

"This here is our young Miss Fields. She came to *see* me tonight."

Again the eyes... narrowing... widening... His *mother's* eyes.

"We meet again... *Miss* Fields!" The doppelgänger laughed, using Sam's own voice, a care-free and genuine laugh, not often heard since Sam's college days.

Sam could not answer. His lipstick covered lips trembled, unable to make a sound, tasting only the saltiness of his tears. His vision began to narrow into a hazy tunnel, his hearing muffling as he struggled to stay conscious before the surrealism surrounding him.

"Forgive her... she is shy," Gerard spoke from beside him.

"Hmm? Are you sure?" The doppelgänger's eyes drifted downwards, seeming to only just notice Sam's provocative state of dress. "She doesn't look it from where I'm standing." Again the laugh, though more forced this time.

"Yes, she does have some interesting... *tendencies*... of which I'm certain you will enjoy reviewing." Sam looked helplessly back at Gerard as he produced a small memory card from his pocket.

The video camera.

"It looks as though you were on the receiving end of one of those *tendencies* yourself, eh René?" The doppelgänger turned his face to one side, running a finger against his stumbled-flecked cheek.

Gerard stepped back, his demeanour instantly darkening as he reached to the raw scar on his cheek.

"Yes, well... She will pay for that... Won't she ladies and gentlemen?" Gerard extended a hand, bathing in the cheers that followed, recovering quickly. "Which is why I have called you... to ask if you have any requests for her demise? It is *your* body after all..."

"No! Not *my* body!" The doppelgänger seethed with his own rage now. "That *whore* there? She is nothing to me..." He looked down, disgusted, dismissive, causing Sam to tense with self-consciousness. "Send her to the barracks. Let her know what it truly is to be a *woman* at the mercy of *men.*"

"As you wish *Antoinette*..." Gerard seemed to smile as he drew emphasis to the doppelgänger's name. He stroked his hand forcefully through Sam's hair, causing him to gasp as he broke painfully through a few matted strands. "You

realise, of course, that she likely will not survive."

"Yes... But she will be *remembered.*" The doppelgänger turned from the screen, walking back, briefly granting Sam the unusual view of the back of his own head. He soon returned, brandishing an identical Agency laptop to that which Gerard had presented to Sam in the study. "When we expose this data to the world there will be a special mention for you. I really could never have done all this without your help." The doppelgänger tapped at his forehead. "Now, I must bid you... hmm... How is it you French say? *Adieu?* Am I saying it right?" His voice was rich with Sam's own Philadelphian vowels.

"Non..." Sam whimpered with a fresh wave of tears, the screen fading to black before him, leaving only the sound of his own gentle sobbing. Even the crowd below stood in a mournful silence.

She was gone...

Antoinette.

He was left feeling numb, still in shock at seeing her *using* his own body, wearing it as comfortably as the new suit on her back.

Sam knelt at the court of Scarlet, having been framed, tried and sentenced. All that remained was his punishment. But had he not been punished enough? Sam looked across the room once more to the masked soldier and the blood that stained his thigh.

The noise from the crowd began to swell once more as Sam was pulled harshly back to his high-heeled feet. He coughed, his chest wheezing, wishing his hands were free so that he could pull the collar away from his windpipe. A guard approached, an open black sack-cloth raised to smother him.

It seemed almost welcoming.

The last thing that Sam Fields saw was the demented grin of René Gerard and the shard of red that now scarred his cheek.