

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Tying Tempest

ISBN # 9781419909696

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Tying Tempest Copyright© 2007 Reese Gabriel

Edited by Pamela Campbell.

Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication: April 2007

This book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

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

Content Advisory:

S - ENSUOUS

E - ROTIC

X - TREME

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

The following material contains graphic sexual content meant for mature readers. This story has been rated E-rotic.

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

E-rotic love scenes are explicit, leave nothing to the imagination, and are high in volume per the overall word count. E-rated titles might contain material that some readers find objectionable – in other words, almost anything goes, sexually. E-rated titles are the most graphic titles we carry in terms of both sexual language and descriptiveness in these works of literature.

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

TYING TEMPEST

Reese Gabriel

Chapter One

The sculpture drew her like a moth to a flame. Tempest felt the heat in her cheeks as she studied it, shocked, amazed and aroused. Was this even art? A woman, stretching her arms heavenward, fine blue silk ribbon encircling her hands and wrists, the ends dangling between her lush breasts, just grazing her full, erect nipples and a man standing behind her, skin on skin, his left hand over her sex, fingers splayed, possessive? And his right hand over her eyes, at once depriving of her sight and shielding her from every reality but him.

It was wrong, in Tempest's opinion. That much love between a man and woman wasn't really possible and besides this was a gallery for decent people, female people who wanted to see art without feeling twitches between their legs and tightening of their nipples as they imagined themselves in the woman's place, constrained by the perfect lover on the verge of delicious, compulsory ecstasy.

It wasn't that the sculptor had no talent. The way he carved, bringing life from his material, you could almost reach out and touch her long, curling tresses, or caress her soft, supple skin.

You could almost imagine the woman breathing. Who was she, what was her story?

She was aroused. Tempest got that much. The subtle swell of the lips, the slight pout made that clear and of course the nipples—proud, prominent buds.

Oh yeah, the little wench had it made with that guy. He was a carved god, the ultimate centerfold, all muscle and sinew. But no face. Come to think of it, the woman's face was largely obscured too, with the man's hand over it. Strange.

Tempest's heart was racing. This thing just didn't belong. What if kids came in here? Why couldn't the sculptor stick to his abstract pieces? Those were just fine—

tasteful, very obscure in their references to the human figure and certainly nothing sexual.

There were definitely too many people in this place. The room was hot. Too many lights, sharp angled metal walls, trick windows. Damn, she hated these post-modern buildings, she would take something Victorian any day, that was an era—subtle, respectful. This guy needed to be reported. Why the hell had she gotten roped into coming here tonight anyway? The wineglass weighed a ton in her hand. Roped... That was a poor choice of words. If a lover ever brought ropes to her bed, she would flip out. *No way, Jose. Got to get out of here*, she thought, a few more minutes to be polite and she would ditch her work contingent. Served her right taking a job in a snooty architectural firm where you had to sip wine and eat cheese after hours and look at women tied up, desperately craving sex, strong male hands on their bodies... Where were the men like that in this city anyhow? Gentlemen who were still able to identify and take what they wanted, men who were unambiguous and not afraid to let a woman be a woman?

"I see this particular piece has caught your eye," said a male voice behind her.

Tempest nearly jumped out of her skin. She whirled about in time to catch the smile—wistful, wry—upon a handsome, boyish face with dimples and a strong jaw, nice chin and the cutest baby blue eyes. She liked his hair—dark and long, in waves, begging to have fingers run through it.

Greedy female fingers like hers. How long had it been since she had had sex anyway? She had promised herself she would stop counting days, but hell, she knew it by heart—the curse of being gifted with numbers. Two hundred twelve days and honestly the two hundred or so before that weren't so awesome man-wise either.

Now if you counted orgasms—not solo—that would make—

Tempest cut off her reverie. *Not a good time to look like a ditz. Not when you're standing in front of a statue of two naked people, obviously lovers in the middle of a highly erotic and kinky game.* "Oh, it's all right." She shrugged. "I'm just waiting for my boyfriend, actually."

The smile angled sharply. The guy had on a black T-shirt and black jeans. He was built. Very nice biceps, excellent pectorals and a rock-hard stomach. Tempest didn't like to think of herself as shallow, being attracted exclusively to hot guys like she was, after all, but didn't it say something about a man, that he had the character and discipline to keep his body up nicely?

"Pardon me," he said, dimples deepening just a little. "But I don't think that's true."

She swallowed...caught. "About my boyfriend, you mean?"

Tempest always had been a terrible liar. All Daddy ever had to do when she was little was look her in the eye and she would spill the beans on anyone or anything. A born snitch, her older brothers called her but what did older brothers know.

"No. About the sculpture," he said. "You hate it, don't you? Come on, the truth will set you free."

Something about his hands, the proprietary way he had of standing, casual yet utterly in control, as if this gallery was his living room and everyone here his own personal guest.

Tempest frowned, the realization hitting her like a brick. "You are the sculptor, aren't you?"

"Guilty as charged." His smile melted her. Give her a half-hour with this guy in a dark alcove and she'd work out some of that sexual tension her roommate Danyelle was always ragging her about.

"Aiden Phillips." He extended his hand—large, capable, dynamic.

"Tempest Tyler." She let her fingers be captured. A lifetime passed in seconds. He was reading her, caressing, exploring, all quite aboveboard. She relaxed in his grip, more than she had in ages. Her toes curled. It was more than relaxing, it was a deep heating all the way up and down her spine.

He released her and she blushed. Had she shaken his hand too long? Being a woman was such a difficult thing, walking that line between respectability and desire, always keeping up the front.

"Tempest," he repeated, making her name sound sweet and saucy like an exotic dance. "So do you live up to your name?"

Her cheeks stung. *None of your damn business*, she wanted to say.

"I guess you'd have to talk to people who know me."

"I'd like that," he said, flooring her with his forwardness.

She was at a loss. He wasn't exactly appropriate but not disrespectful either. "What? Are you planning on stalking me or something?"

It was his turn to laugh. "Hardly, though I would like to get to know you better."

She wanted to know him better too. For starters, she would like to get in his pants—peel down those tight jeans to see what he was packing. He could model for statues himself and she had a feeling he would be a tremendous lover, so confident and bold.

"I'm afraid there isn't much to know," she said, trying to divert the topic. "Why don't you tell me what this sculpture is supposed to represent."

There was that smile again—rich, complicated, incredibly intense. It gave her warm, gentle chills and tingled up her spine. "Nice try. You're not getting out of sharing your opinion that easily. I'll keep you here all night if I have to."

She flushed. He was definitely flirting. Why on earth would a man like him be interested in a woman like her? There was another shoe here set to drop.

"And don't worry about hurting my feelings," he said. "You couldn't possibly zing me worse than some of my critics. My last review said I was callow, self-indulgent and derivative, whatever that means."

"Derivative means not original," she said.

His eyes widened in mock shock. "Not original? That son of a bitch! They don't come more original than me. I am hurt, truly hurt. After all the time I took ordering this

sculpture out of the catalog from Taiwan too. You must know the company? Obscene Derivative Art Replicas, Inc?"

Aiden's self-effacing remark hit a chord. Tempest laughed, a combination of embarrassment and relief. She never did like having to lie to people. "Well, this particular piece is not my cup of tea, let's put it that way."

He arched a brow. "I think you're holding out on me. Your lips are talking tea cups but your eyes are telling a different story. This piece stirs things up in you, doesn't it? Deep things."

Tempest tensed up. She had to be careful not to let her guard down too much with this man. He was far too perceptive and intuitive. "You have a vivid imagination," she dismissed.

"So you're saying you don't have strong feelings?" Aidan pressed.

She wished he would let go of this or else take her into his arms and sweep this whole conversation away with a kiss. What would he taste like, those lips so well traveled, whispering secrets on foreign continents to old women and likely seducing younger ones.

He would taste of a very old Chianti, she decided, from the rolling hills of Florence, not pretentious but steeped in artistic tradition, the air of Michelangelo and da Vinci.

Had any of their work been controversial in its day? Had they had their critics? Did they haunt galleries, looking for women who might react to this piece or that?

What if he touched her with those hands? He was talented and creative, who could deny? He would make love splendidly. Few if any men had souls to match their bodies, beauty inside and out.

"Come on, I don't even know you," she responded at length. "If I did have any strong sentiments I could hardly be expected to express them to a stranger."

"Why not?" he countered, eyes dancing in the light, passion playing about his mouth, inviting her to search, to explore and play. "Aren't strangers the safest people in

the world to share with? Nothing you say to them will ever come back to haunt you. When I travel, sometimes I will find a foreigner who can't speak English and I will tell him something, a particular thing I need to unburden myself of. It's a way to let go, you know?"

Tempest pictured this gorgeous man making heartfelt confessions to clueless strangers on some street in a far off land. How courageous...and utterly crazy. "So what do you do, stop people at random?" She tried not to chuckle. "Seems like you could get in trouble."

"I did get chased by an old woman in Greece," he admitted. "Halfway around the Acropolis one time. You wouldn't believe how fast that old woman could run, and swinging a baguette the whole time too."

"Baguettes are French," she said. "I think maybe you're making this up to tease me."

"If I made a story up, I would do a better job. Like a hundred samurais chasing me around the Eiffel Tower."

"I have been to the Eiffel Tower," she informed him, finding it harder and harder not to be charmed by the man. "I never saw any samurais."

"Were you looking for them?" he asked.

"No, I suppose not."

"There you have it," he said triumphantly. "So...are you going to tell me why you hate my callow, self-indulgent and derivative statue, or do I have to keep making up stories?"

"You said the baguette thing was true," she reminded him.

"Metaphorically, yes," he concurred. "Although maybe not literally."

She rolled her eyes again. Somehow he had managed to completely disarm her while at the same time making her feel relaxed and safe. "If you must know," she said. "I think this sculpture is kind of...obscene."

He nodded in approval. "Now we're getting somewhere. So tell me why?"

She pursed her lips. She hadn't expected this challenge. He seemed so intent on her reply too. "I just do. What does my opinion matter to you anyway?"

"Because I know you're capable of honesty," he said without skipping a beat. "Few people are."

"What about you," she replied, surprising herself with her boldness. "Are you one of those people?"

"You tell me," he said. "We'll try a test. I will tell you something and you tell me if it's the truth or not."

"Oh great, now I have to play truth or dare. Remind me never to come near an art gallery again as long as I live," she quipped.

"Are you saying you would rather I take a dare?"

"In your case, no. There's no telling what you might do," she said.

"True, there are a lot of people in here," he agreed. "Old ladies even. And they might have baguettes."

"So are you going to get this over with or not?" she asked, trying to maintain an air of disinterest. "I have things to do."

"I bet you do. You must have men lined up waiting for you," he said. His voice lowered a notch. She felt the heat in her body.

"Hardly," she replied.

"Okay, here goes," he said. "I will give you two statements—one true, one false. First statement—the reason I made this sculpture is to show the dawning of human consciousness, the awakening of the new Adam and Eve, battling the constraints of culture. Second statement—you are so sexy, it's driving me crazy."

Tempest's toes curled. "The second one has to be a lie," she dismissed. "I'm about as sexy as a doorknob."

He smiled slyly. "Actually the first statement is the lie. I made this piece because I like bondage, Tempest. I enjoy tying up willing women and helping them find their hidden submissive sides. I'm wondering if you have anything hidden behind that lovely exterior, my sweet Tempest."

Tempest felt the marble floor give way beneath her sleek black stilettos. Suddenly this Adonis she had been stripping and bedding in her mind had a whole new edge. He wasn't just her own private fuck fantasy, he was very unpredictably real and maybe a little dangerous.

"Sorry," he said, his lips thinning but still angled mischievously. "I don't usually lay my cards out like that but if I let a woman like you slip away without taking the chance on making a connection, I would never forgive myself."

"It's all about you, right?" she said, trying to regroup. "I can see why you have been called self-indulgent. In any case, you're barking up the wrong tree. I can assure you, I have no interest in...in those kinds of activities."

He laughed. "You can't even say the word bondage. That doesn't sound a little repressed to you?"

"No, it sounds to me like a woman who thinks bondage is a rude practice. There, I said it. Bondage, bondage, bondage."

Her lips tingled with each pronunciation. Was she not dangling a piece of meat in front of a lion? This man actually did this stuff for real. Still, he had to know she wasn't afraid, not of him or anything.

"Hey, relax," he trilled, his voice caressing her nerve endings. "We're just talking, not negotiating a scene."

"Negotiating a what?" Talk about scenes, she was about to create one if he kept on pushing her like this.

"A scene. It's a BDSM term," he drawled, acting like a man totally at peace and in control of his environment, including her. "When two lovers play, they talk ahead of

time about what the boundaries are. Will the sub let her Dom blindfold or gag her, will she be open to a spanking, that sort of thing."

Her eyes went to his right hand, the one he would presumably use to deliver the seductive, wicked smacks to a woman's posterior. Too late to avoid it, she succumbed to the image, the feel of his palm cracking seductively against her posterior, with or without clothes.

Damn...he had seen her. His eyes held her fast, drawing her in like a marionette at the end of his plucking strings. He was making her hot and cold and needy. He was working on every emotion. She had to get herself together. Aiden Phillips was way too hot and steamy as it was, the last thing she needed was to have any latent submissive desires awakened.

Her naked bottom, ruthlessly attended to, hard disciplined blows that left no lasting marks but managed to liquefy her pussy. Yes, she could imagine it all right. An explosive contact, skin to skin, making her moan and cry out and maybe even beg.

Aiden was standing there, amused, awaiting her response. How many others had he played this game with? Was he using her right now in his imagination, putting her through the paces?

Tempest stood straight and true, putting her best foot forward. "I can't think of anything more degrading or humiliating than a grown woman being spanked," she declared. "There is nothing at all arousing about it."

He arched a brow. "Should I have you say something true now, to go with that lie?"

"You're incorrigible," she declared. "I don't know why I'm listening to you."

"I perplex you," he said, further unraveling her by reading her mind. "Your every impulse says I'm bad news but you are still attracted and to top it all off, I come across as decent, safe."

"You are anything but decent and safe," she snorted. "Wanting to dominate your partner, tie her and spank her? That just can't be right."

"It's all in the context," he said, his voice deep and rich, like mocha trickling down her throat. "Letting go, feeling that sense of trust and play. It's the most erotic kind of foreplay, you know, way more intense than the vanilla stuff."

"Vanilla stuff?" *Blast it, girl, stop asking questions. Run like hell while you have the chance.*

"Vanilla means non-BDSM. No bondage or domination, just straight, run-of-the-mill sex."

No sex with Aiden could ever be straight or run-of-the-mill. Just one touch, she feared, would detonate her and bring her to new horizons of sensuality.

How easily he could be the male in that sculpture, the godlike figure bringing the female into bonded ecstasy, taking her sight, the movement of her limbs, robbing her of all freedom in exchange for the absolute pleasure of his touch. Knowing he was doing to her exactly as he willed, gentle or rough, soft, hard, slow, fast—the absolute object of male lust. Could any woman be more alive, more thrilled?

Could that woman in the sculpture ever be her?

Was that how he looked at her?

Never. It was impossible.

"Vanilla, yes, that describes me," she said hastily.

He arched that brow again, the tiny gesture slaying her. He had such power, such ability to get inside her, make her feel, make her yearn.

Time to bring this Romeo into line, she thought.

"What is that for?" she demanded.

"What is what for?"

"The eyebrow, as if you don't believe me again. I don't appreciate having my character challenged, by you or anyone else."

"You are right," he said, giving in far too easily. "You wouldn't lie about something like that. Especially since I could easily confirm it with your boyfriend when he gets here."

Tempest glared. He had put just the slightest ironic emphasis on the word boyfriend. Why did he have to be so smug, so infuriating and so right?

"You're mocking me and I don't appreciate it," she said. "My personal life, my bedroom interests and my art opinions are my own business and they are going to stay that way."

"Suit yourself."

"I will." Her heart pounded as she waited for the other shoe to drop. He wasn't giving in this easily, was he? A man like that wouldn't do that.

A part of her wanted him to keep after her. How confusing was that?

"I guess that is goodbye," she declared.

"Yes," he nodded. Waiting a second, he added, "You don't really have a boyfriend, do you?"

Tempest pounced on this parting shot, his latest provocation. She told herself there was a point to this, to keeping the sparring match going.

"His name is Brad." Her mind was in a strange place—bold, sassy, way out of the norm for her. She would show him how non-submissive she was. She would lie through her teeth, lay it on so thick he would drown in the stuff. "He is an airplane pilot. Before that he was in the Coast Guard and the Marines. He has six black belts and speaks twelve languages."

"Now you are mocking me."

"Wow, you're not as dumb as you look."

"I want to see you again," he said, thoroughly unperturbed by her outburst. "I want to take you to dinner."

Her knees went weak. This tall, dark, dangerous man she had been fencing with had just asked her on a date. Talk about upping the ante. What would he do with her one on one, across some candlelit table or on a dance floor, their bodies close, his hand at her back?

She wouldn't stand a chance. He would make her do, say anything he wanted. She could kiss her freedom goodbye. But wouldn't it be worth it, to be drawn against that tightly muscled body, to have that hard cock all to herself, even for one night, pushing inside her wet and steamy opening or between her greedy lips.

They would play it his way. He was a man who knew what he wanted and made sure to get it from a woman, that was obvious. He was sexy as the devil and knew it. He was every woman's worst nightmare and hottest fantasy.

"Brad wouldn't like that," she quipped, letting him know who was boss. "He played football too, you know, for the Green Bay Eagles."

His hand moved along her arm, the feel of his fingers burning through the material of her blouse. "The Eagles are in Philadelphia, Tempest, nice try. Come out with me tomorrow night," he persisted. "We'll go to dinner then there's a show I want you to see."

His touch burned, light and soft but promising so much more. She shuddered. Before she could react, the fingers were gone. She was no longer the same. How did she begin to fight a man who attacked in such a way, making her feel so good about something so wrong?

Her pussy throbbed. She was soaking wet, her nipples screamed for attention. Aiden Phillips wanted her—she could see the swell in his jeans. He wasn't afraid to say it or to show it.

What would happen if she let him go all the way? If she let him take full possession of her body and soul?

"No thanks," she snapped, taking a step backward just in case. "Your kind of show would be smut, I am quite sure. If I want that, I can watch X-rated cable."

"It's performance art," he informed her.

"Yeah, I'm so sure."

His lips curled. "Are you always this sarcastic?"

"Only when people piss me off."

"How am I pissing you off? By inviting you out?"

"You are pissing me off by not respecting me," she said. "You know I don't care for bondage but you keep forcing the issue."

"You have had every opportunity to say no and you have certainly shown yourself capable of exercising it," he pointed out.

"And I will keep on exercising it," she declared.

His eyes twinkled. "So I will be seeing you again?"

"No, absolutely not."

He took a step forward. "I would be lying if I said this didn't turn me on, Tempest, seeing you fight so hard what you need so badly."

Tempest was backed up nearly to his infernal statue. One more step and she would be forming a ménage à trois with those two nudes. "You are reading me all wrong," she said. "I'm not interested in you and if you keep it up I will call for security."

His finger brushed her cheek. "And what will you say to them, just out of curiosity?"

She drew a breath, close to a moan. His touch was velvet and electricity, igniting fireworks. What would she say to the security men—that Aiden was getting her too hot and bothered for her own good? At this rate she was going to swoon. "I will tell them what a totally derivative pervert you are," she decided.

He chuckled, appreciating her humor in a pinch.

"You know," he said, eyes twinkling, "if we were BDSM lovers this kind of behavior would be considered bratting."

"I am not going to ask, so don't tell me," she warned.

“Playing the part of the brat is one way submissives flirt with their Doms,” he explained. “It’s a way to ask for the domination they crave, by showing token resistance, playful disobedience. They want attention, discipline and love. It’s all about teasing, Tempest, the art of power exchange. A submissive wants to be overwhelmed, made to beg for release, to be worshipped in her conquered femininity.”

His words ignited her heart, awakening secret chambers in her soul. What lay down those corridors of her own mind—mysterious, torchlit pathways to unspeakable ecstasy? How could it add up, a man worshipping a conquered woman? What kind of femininity was she missing out on? What kind of man could he be to release it?

“Oh, please.” She made a face, though everything he said was working in her mind. What would it be like to play with Aiden, to surrender to him for her pleasure and his? Why did it arouse her so, imagining herself standing before him, following his order to strip, to bare herself, a naughty girl.

A naughty, wet girl who was soaking through her panties, needing this man’s cock so badly she was ready to scream.

She fought to keep control, though the more she lost it the hotter she got. What would he do with her if he really had her completely in his hands?

“Go out with me,” he repeated. “Tomorrow. It needn’t have anything to do with BDSM or even sex. I just want to get to know you. You fascinate me.”

“I’m busy.”

“With Brad? Some karate maybe, or an expedition to find the cure for cancer in the Amazon?”

“I have to work late.” She ignored the jibe.

“The next night, then.”

Damn it, why wouldn’t he let go? Any ordinary man would. But Aiden wasn’t ordinary, far from it.

“I have to work late all week,” she said flatly.

"So we'll do it next week," he said, refusing to give in.

"You don't take no for an answer, do you?"

"If it's something I really want? No."

She felt a shiver down her spine. For a man to speak so blatantly of wanting her and in an art gallery of all places.

"And what is it you want from me exactly?" she queried, knowing she was playing mouse to his cat. "I can hardly imagine I am that fascinating."

"Oh but you are. You'll see."

"I haven't said yes," she reminded.

"You will."

"You are a cocky one, aren't you? We should add that to the list, along with perverted and derivative."

"Excellent." He grinned, positively demolishing her. "We are going to have a whole dictionary before too long."

"Actually, no." She feigned disinterest. "I have better things to do."

"You will change your mind once we go out."

She shook her head, afraid to trust her mouth, lest it betray her at this point.

"What if I told you it wouldn't be a date?" he asked.

"I would say you were lying," she retorted.

"Fine, I will make another statement, you sort out true from false. I want your body, Tempest. I want to rule it, if just for one night, show you what it can do...in the right hands."

Omigod, this man was unstoppable. "I'm sorry, Mr. Phillips, but it's really out of the question."

"The name is Aiden and which part is out of the question? Letting me get to know you or letting me dominate you in bed?"

Her heart slammed in her chest. She sucked at her lower lip. Oh, for pity's sake, why didn't he get it over with, sweep her into his arms, press her body against him and kiss the life from her? Why did he have to give her a choice? He had to know she needed to say no, for honor's sake. Tempest was a good girl, always had been.

"What happened to old-fashioned seduction...Aiden? You want me to just approve of your bedding me, sign a contract or something?"

"Sometimes they do in BDSM relationships but no, that is not what I want. I'm just talking, remember?"

"Yes, talking." She said the word with contempt. "At any rate, you're not my type, so it's all a moot point."

As if any woman didn't go for tall, dark, handsome bad boys who wanted to tie them and tease them to endless sexual delights.

"I'm not a type, Tempest, and you know it."

He had that right, she thought. He was more like some sleekly muscled, wild-eyed panther. She had never been more keenly aware of her woman's body, her comparatively slight frame and the way her breasts jutted under the thin sweater, the way her hips were molded by the material of her skirt. He was practically devouring her but there was no disrespect, no dishonor, not like being sized up in a bar. Oh, this guy was dangerous all right but on a whole different level.

"What are you thinking?" he asked, as though it were his prerogative to be in her head.

"That I wish I had a baguette to chase you with," she said, managing to find a note of humor.

He nodded. "Maybe if I had told you all this in some foreign language it would have gone better."

"Actually, I should have stayed home," she said.

"I wouldn't have liked that, Tempest. Not at all. My life would have been a lot poorer if I had not seen you tonight."

His sincerity and quiet intensity blew her away. This man was either the best game player in the world or he was capable of moving at super light speeds when it came to sorting out his affections for a woman.

"We have only talked a half-hour. It can't be that important," she insisted.

"Oh but it is. A single moment in the presence of true beauty is worth an eternity. So when are we going out?"

Tempest tried to clear her head from the spell he was weaving. "I don't want to argue about this," she said as firmly as she could. "I don't want to date you and that's my right."

"Yes. It is. But when you change your mind, will you promise to call me?"

"I won't change my mind," she said firmly.

"Just accept this," he said, eyes mesmerizing, soothing and enflaming all at once. "I would consider it a favor."

"I...yes," she replied as he took her hand palm up and placed the business card facedown.

"Good," he said. "Until next time."

Next time...

And just like that he was gone, leaving her breathless.

She watched him melt into the crowd. Two women were instantly drawn to him, as if he were a magnet. He was a major hottie as her twenty-something roommate Danyelle would put it. So why had he sought her out? There were blonde bombshells here, models, social climbers, with big breasts and phony smiles.

Tempest examined the card.

Aiden Phillips

Sculpting Life Studios

"Dreams Molded in the Heart"

Not your average creator. Not your average man. She bit at her lower lip. She would ditch it...just not quite yet. Stuffing it in her purse, she headed for the exit.

She was two blocks away, headed for the subway when she realized she hadn't even said goodbye to her coworkers.

How was that for being good and rattled?

Tempest continued to think about Aiden all the way home, all the more so because she was trying not to. Danyelle was sitting cross-legged on the couch, IMing, talking on the phone and watching TV all at the same time.

"Honestly," Tempest snapped. "You are so ADD."

"Don't tell me," said the perky brunette in the oversized T-shirt and panties. "You didn't get laid today either. How many days is that?"

"I'm not counting," said Tempest, heading straight for the ice cream. "And I swear, girl, if the rocky road is all gone, there will be hell to pay."

"Hey, Temp," Danyelle called out, stopping her dead in her tracks. "Who's this Aiden Phillips guy?"

Tempest made a beeline back to the living room. Danyelle was standing there, lopsided topknot, flexing pink-tipped toenails as she read from the business card—which she had obviously just taken out of Tempest's purse.

"Dreams molded in the heart..." Danyelle read.

"Give me that." Tempest snatched it from the taller girl, a natural brunette blessed with long legs, a cute fat-proof rump and the kind of breasts guys drooled over. "You are so rude. Don't you respect anything?"

"Your purse was open and this was right on top," Danyelle proceeded in typical self-justification. "You were obviously upset so I was figuring out what happened so I could help you. Some people would actually appreciate having a roommate who cared about them enough to set their own busy lives aside."

Tempest blew strands of dark hair from in front of her face. "There is no arguing with you."

"No, there isn't," said the twenty-four-year-old, who was forever oscillating between sixteen and sixty. "So are you going to spill the beans to Doctor Danyelle, or not?"

Danyelle was a psychology major. She was in graduate school and it was her express desire to have a TV show and give advice. "Offices are boring" was her reasoning. "And no one gets to see all the cool clothes you can afford when people pay you a hundred bucks an hour."

The kooky thing was, Danyelle wasn't just beautiful, she was smart as a whip and determined as hell. She probably would have her own show and Tempest would be on it every other week dragging out her pathetic personal problems.

"I met him at this gallery where some of us went after work. It was his stuff, I didn't realize who he was and we got to talking."

Danyelle blinked, bright-eyed. Her enthusiasm was contagious. "So did you guys hit it off? Did he ask you out?"

"He wasn't my type."

Danyelle looked at her suspiciously. "Is that right?"

She headed straight for her laptop.

"Danyelle, don't you even think about doing a search, I told you it's nothing."

Danyelle tapped some keys. She licked her lower lip, squinting. Surfing the web was like breathing for her, as was anything else in communication technology.

"Five-thousand-nine-hundred-eighty-one hits," she announced. "Yeah, that's nothing."

"Whatever," said Tempest, resorting to the most juvenile approach possible.

Danyelle was busy reading. Her eyes got bigger and bigger.

"Omigod," said Danyelle. "Ohmyfreaking god. This guy is like...gorgeous. No, scratch that, the word's not good enough. He's...like heaven stuffed into a pair of jeans. He's got his own web page. He's been in magazines. He was featured in a men's magazine for his abs."

"It's not all about looks."

Danyelle cocked her head. "His abs," she repeated. "In a magazine...like, hello? So you don't want to play checkers with him or make soufflé, just fuck him like a normal person and have some fun."

"You'll understand," she said. "When you turn thirty."

Danyelle snorted. "Did you say thirty or ninety? And he did ask you out, didn't he? Don't lie to me, you are for shit as a liar."

"He wanted to take me to dinner," Tempest admitted. "But...it's not that simple."

"No?" Danyelle turned the laptop around. "Let me help you, then. *This* guy asked *you* out and you said no. That, Tempest, is officially messed up."

Tempest swallowed. Aiden's face was smiling at her, catlike. He wore a black silk shirt unbuttoned to the waist. He had his hands in the pockets of his jeans. His hair was tied back in a ponytail, his face had a delicious five o'clock shadow. Danyelle had a point about the abs. That bronzed skin, drawn taut over firm male muscle—Tempest could feel the heat pooling in her breasts and pussy, as if the man were here in the room with them.

"You don't understand, Danyelle. He's...he's got...issues."

"Issues? Like what? He isn't married. I just checked it out. He has no kids, he dates women, he's not gay, he has a stable career, his folks live in Buffalo and he went to college there at a state university. Hometown named a street after him."

Tempest shook her head. "How do you find stuff so fast? If you must know, since you'll dig it up anyway, it's a sexual thing. He's into bondage stuff."

Danyelle gave a holler, straight out of her family's rebel past. "The single, successful Greek god wants to take you out *and* tie you up? Girl, you've got it made."

Tempest sighed. "I should know better than to talk to a budding psychologist. You twist everything."

"You mean I rain on your pity parties before you can enjoy them," she countered. "Face it, Temp, you're always looking for clouds around silver linings. Why not be positive? Go out with the guy, see what happens. It's not like he met you at a leather club and he's going to expect you to jump into his bed with handcuffs and a whip between your teeth."

Tempest frowned. "But I was looking at his sculpture, it had a bondage theme. I think he thinks I liked it."

"Well, did you?"

"No, of course not," said Tempest, a little too quickly.

"Translation—yes, you did," Danyelle said.

"It's a departure from his style—it didn't fit with everything else in there. I don't know why he had it there, I would be embarrassed if I was him. What did he expect?" Tempest's words were pouring out on top of each other. She didn't even know where they were coming from.

"Fuck the art criticism," said Danyelle. "Did it make you wet?"

Tempest flushed. "I'm not answering that."

Danyelle moved to instant tease mode. "It did, you little kinkozoid. It got you all hot and bothered and you're pissed 'cause you got caught."

"I didn't do anything, I was just standing there."

Drooling, for a half-hour straight...

"It's time for free association," Danyelle announced.

"No," Tempest said. "Absolutely not. You're not practicing pop psychology on me."

Clearing her throat, she began. "First thing that pops into your mind when I say these words – Aiden, handcuffs, you spread-eagled..."

Tempest could almost feel the cuffs biting at her skin, her vulnerable flesh available, helpless to his touch, the roaming of his tongue, the plunging of his cock. "My mind is blank," she insisted. "Couldn't be blanker."

"Liar, liar, pants on fire."

Her pants were on fire too, or more precisely she was on fire, twitching with the heat and need for a lover – for him – to overpower her, to tell her precisely what to do. To put her in her place beneath him, achingly full of his throbbing, hard shaft, his teeth nibbling at her nipples, her bottom lightly stinging from the friction of his hand...

Tempest was going to be masturbating tonight. And soon.

"I'm tired," Tempest said. "I'll see you in the morning."

"I'll bet you're tired. Wanna use my dildo? It's a lot bigger than yours. Sorry, I'm a little short on bondage stuff. Evan took my pink fur cuffs and my flogger. I think I've got nipple clamps, though."

"No, Danyelle, that won't be necessary. I am tired, like I said."

"Wanna link to Aiden's site?" she called out as Tempest reached her bedroom door.

She hesitated, hand frozen on the knob. "No...yes, I mean...maybe."

Danyelle giggled. "Coming right up. Happy surfing."

Tempest closed her door, never so happy to be alone in her life.

She stared at her computer on the desk. *I'll turn it on, she thought. I'll check my e-mail and then I'll go to sleep.*

No Aiden. No dildo. No way.

Thirty seconds later she was sitting in the leather seat, stripped to bra and panties, fingers trembling over the keyboard.

The dildo was in her lap, soft, lifelike plastic.

Where dreams are molded...

I'll only read the words, she told herself a final lie. I won't look at the pictures.

Meanwhile, her pussy throbbed, her cream soaking the panel of her panties. Her sex marched to a different drummer and it was not about to listen to her head.

I won't call him...I won't call him...I won't call him...

She would say it a million times if she had to. It would be her mantra.

She had her reasons and Aiden didn't have to know them. Neither did Danyelle, for that matter. Some things a woman kept to herself. To her dying breath if need be.

Aiden popped onto her screen, summoned by the arrow, by her clicking finger.

Larger than life and much more unpredictable.

Almost unconsciously, she moved the artificial cock.

"Do I have to?" she whispered to the picture of the chiseled, bronze-faced sculptor.

Only if you want to please me.

"I do," she said, in a voice too private for any living soul. "I do..."

Tempest pulled the panel of her panties aside. "Oh, yes," she murmured, slipping the dildo inside her hungry opening. "Oh, yesss."

She squeezed her legs, working her muscles to draw it deep. Quick and hard and dirty was how she wanted it, like in the gallery, when she craved him pinning her against the wall, fucking the daylight out of her, breathless as he told what else he was going to do to her. Making her come with the words in her ears, the forbidden fantasies.

From behind, spanking her as he fucked her—in her mouth, with her on her knees, in fine, Victorian lingerie, blindfolded, hands behind her back, his semen spraying down her throat—and more, so much more.

She had to cover her mouth to stifle the moans. The orgasm overtook her like a freight train, an upside-down pleasure world where every breath was a jolt of ecstasy, where every move brought heavenly chaos.

Won't call him...won't call...won't...

Some time later she crawled into bed, much later, body racked, exhausted. But not sated. Something was burning, deep and fast like an underground fire, the kind you can't root out unless you dig it up.

And digging was not a good idea, not in Tempest's case at least.

* * * * *

Aiden walked the streets until two in the morning. He had a lot on his mind – a lot about Tempest Tyler to be specific. He had gone after her pretty shamelessly. Badgered her, probably. That wasn't his style. Aiden didn't push women, he loved them. And they loved him. They came to him and that was experience talking, not bragging. Conversation, sex, laughter, he had never wanted for any of those things.

He was a blessed man, living out his dream. His art had made him decently wealthy and fairly well known, if not quite a household name. There was every reason to sit back and coast into his forties. Five years to go and he would be at the big four-o, time to retire, find a nice island somewhere and pick up a native girl.

If not for the bondage thing. He could come without it, he could even enjoy himself but after a while there would be this empty place inside. BDSM groups and clubs provided some temporary relief but he wanted a relationship and for some reason the women who liked kink weren't generally into art.

Hence his master plan, creating his *Bound Desires*, a beacon of light to attract his goddess of kink. An intelligent, soulful woman who would enjoy the same games of power he did. It was sheer genius, pure win-win in his humble opinion.

Through other eyes, however, the plan appeared misdirected, if not vaguely unethical.

Take Francis, for example, his current houseguest, who had arrived at his loft three months ago asking to crash for a night or two. Asked about his plans on a recent occasion, the rail-thin video game addict with the hot air balloon-sized afro had replied. "I'm working on some things."

Francis had been working on things since they were in high school twenty years ago. Basically he went from friend to friend, with his seventy-year-old mother picking up the slack.

Not surprisingly, he was awake when Aiden came in. "How did things go with the entrapment today?" he asked, not looking up from the flashing colors on the screen.

"It's not entrapment," said Aiden, rummaging in the fridge for a beer. "Francis, did you—"

"Had to," said Francis, maneuvering the joystick to his two millionth kill of the day in Battle Freaks or whatever other game he was playing. "You ran out of milk."

"You could buy some, you know."

Francis shook his head. "Stone Man, I'm gonna pretend I didn't hear that."

"I know, I know...you're a guest."

"Damn straight. That used to be sacred, you know. Hey! I got a squad of nasties coming in at three o'clock. Switch to death arcs, you maggots, and look alive!"

Aiden didn't bother to reply to the last part, which was directed to Francis' online buddies who were playing the same game on their own screens—or the screens of whoever was housing their unemployed asses.

Aiden got some water from the tap. He collapsed on the sofa next to Francis. "I did meet a woman, though."

"Did you tag it?"

"No, Francis. I didn't *tag it*. I asked her on a date."

"Shmuck," accused Francis. "I'd have tagged it. Definitely."

"You would have tagged squat," said Aiden. "The last time you tagged anything it was working the assembly line at that stupid stuffed animal factory."

Francis managed to take offense, briefly interrupting his fifty gazillion kills a minute. "Hey, I was a production assistant in the plush toy industry, dude, get it right."

Aiden laid his head back on the green corduroy couch, legs sawed off so he could get closer to the Zen of the floor. "She's incredible, Francis. A goddess, okay? Beautiful, sexy, with these green eyes and dark hair. And she's smart, she's smarter than me."

"Smarter than you?" Francis quipped. "That's not saying much, old pal."

"Hah, hah," said Aiden. "Very funny. Go on, why don't you, kick a man when he's down."

"That bad, huh? What? Did she turn you down?"

"Flat," Aiden confirmed.

"That doesn't happen often."

"I told you, she's different. I have to have her, Francis."

"In that case, you will have to come by her honestly. None of this accidentally bumping into her at the gallery crap."

"It's fate. I'm just helping it along."

"You're like the Dr. Frankenstein of fate. Are you kidding me? First you make that sculpture, for the sole purpose of picking up women and then you display it where they can't help but be sitting ducks and pow, you pounce right on them."

"It's not like that. I am just looking for people with common interests. It's no different than posting on a web space."

"A space you control."

"I'm telling you, this one responded. Tempest is her name and she reacted."

"Sure she did," said Francis. "And what night is it you're going out? Oh, wait, I forgot, she told you to take a flying leap."

"She said she would think about it," Aiden grumbled. "I gave her my card."

Francis handed him a controller. "Don't hold your breath, lover boy."

Aiden gripped the cool red plastic, focusing his eyes on the screen. It was the stupidest game in the world but it passed the time and quelled his restless heart. Up until tonight it had been bad enough, feeling the lonely ache, knowing a woman was

out there who would answer his prayers – smart, sassy, passionate and playful, with a heart for the intense intimacy of BDSM – now...

A slave to his Master, a lady to his knight, a queen to his king.

Now that yearning had a name, the empty place had a face.

Tempest. How well named she was. A storm of beauty and contradiction, strong-willed, fierce and proud and every bit his equal but with the secret craving inside to be taken on the journey. To discover the heart of her deepest femininity, that special brand of womanhood to be wooed and conquered. One kiss and everything would change. She would melt and he would say the words *trust me* and her hands would extend, wrists together for binding. The rope, long and coiled, soft, woven silk, with a leading end, to gently tug her to bed, to be laid out on her back, hands together over her head.

The first time – what would it be like? Her eyes glued on his, moist, soft as they had never been for another man. Would it be quick and fierce? Would he speak the command, bidding her to open her legs? What would she be wearing? Something long and flowing, the gown of a medieval princess. Nothing under her chemise, she'd gasp at the touch of his hand, she'd lift herself and he'd plunge to her core. They would be one.

Or would it be slow – taking eons to reach her depths, teasing her, making her moan, forbidding her to move, to utter a sound as he took her. Silent whimpers as he thrust in slow motion...

My prince, my Master, my lord...

The gown down over one shoulder, a single breast bared, the perfect size for her frame, he'd take it in his mouth. She could not help it, she'd whisper in his ear, reporting her status.

My lord, I must come...I cannot help it...

He'd tell her to wrap her legs about him, to draw him deep and then...

"Stone Man! Heads up!" Francis pulled him from his reverie. He flipped to external eyes, the view on the screen, looking out through the goggles of a thirty-fifth-century cyborg warrior fighting invaders from the Black Hole Galaxy. There were about a hundred Black Hole Troopers shooting X beams, covering the screen.

Too late...

He was dead and the rest of the squad to boot.

Francis pulled off his headset. "Weak," he muttered.

"Sorry," said Aiden.

Francis stood, sweatpants drooping. "I'm gonna order a pizza. What's your credit card number again?"

"I put more money in the fridge. In the margarine dish," said Aiden, figuring he owed Francis something for prematurely ending his interstellar military career.

"Cold cash," said Francis. "Nice. What do you want on your pie?"

"I'm not hungry." Not for food.

"You know," Francis told him after ordering enough pizza for a small army. "If you really want this chick, you need to be a man about it. I mean, Jeezus, what kind of Dominant are you? One put-off and you're all like 'Ooo, poor me, she rejected me, wah wah'. If it were me, I would go get her."

"Great speech, Patton, except for one thing. I don't have her address or phone number."

"So? Look her up."

"You mean on the web? Yeah, that might work."

"You could check the register book at the gallery too, if you weren't the world's biggest wuss."

The register book! Why hadn't he thought of that? If she had signed in, listing her address for the mailing list, he would have her for sure.

"Wouldn't that appear desperate, though?"

"Stone Man, look at yourself. You are desperate."

"I know but I'll come across as some lame stalker if I call her out of the blue or show up on her doorstep."

"Some of history's greatest lovers have been misunderstood as lame stalkers, my man. Take Romeo and Cyrano."

"Not more of your lectures," said Aiden. "Sorry but I'm beat, I'm going to crash."

"Yeah, sure. I got some new jerk-off mags, if you want."

"Where did you get the money?" Aiden asked suspiciously.

"You had a jar of coins on the shelf."

"Thanks for asking first. I was saving those."

"Hey, you think I enjoyed having to pay for T and A magazines with nickels and dimes? Ever thought about my pride?"

"Probably more than you have."

"Listen, I'm not the one who lets the margarine dish run empty on his guests..."

Aiden threw up his hands. "I give up."

"It's about time," said Francis. "The offer still holds on the mags, by the way."

"I don't need X-rated images, thank you."

Not when I have Tempest, he thought, already stripped in my mind, her petite body completely bared before me, her cheeks flushed, nipples hard as little buttons, her breath hot against me, the lust in her eyes mixed with wonder and anticipation. So much to learn and do and feel. The ecstasy that will come from her sighs, as my cock slips inside her, promising, titillating. The two of us bound inexorably, two hearts as one...forever.

And come tomorrow he would make it real. He would find her address and pay her a visit and there would be no turning back for either of them.

Chapter Two

At first Aiden thought he had the wrong apartment.

"Hey, sweet thing," said the precocious, Southern-sounding young woman in the doorway, who looked him up and down none too subtly. "Where've you been all my life?"

"I'm looking for Tempest? Tempest Tyler?" He tried not to stare. She was certifiably gorgeous and dressed to tease in a halter-top and tiny gym shorts, the waistband so low on her hips he could make out the color of her hot pink panties.

The color matched her toenails. She had chains on both ankles and wore bubble gum-colored lipstick. If he was her father, he wouldn't let any young man within a hundred miles.

"Good luck," she declared, rolling her eyes. "She won't be back from work for another two hours."

"But it's already after seven."

"Tell me about it. You want to come in?"

He followed her. She padded on bare feet, her posterior moving in a way that was bound to keep a man's interest. "Want something to drink? Cola? Milk?"

"No. I'm good."

"Okay." She went to the fridge. "We don't have anything, anyway. So do you know Tempest or something?"

"I do," he said. "You know, it's probably not a good idea to open the door to just anybody."

She came back into the living room and handed him a beer. "You're not just anybody. You're Aiden Phillips."

He frowned. It was like dealing with a younger Tempest, she was one step ahead of him all the way. "I didn't ask for a beer."

"Yeah but you want one anyway."

"What I want is to see Tempest."

"Well, she doesn't want to see you." The young woman plopped down on the couch, folding her legs underneath her. "I'm Danyelle, if you don't already know."

"Nice to meet you, Danyelle."

"Sit down." She patted the sofa next to her.

"I'll stand. No offense."

She shook her head. "Bad idea."

"Why?"

"Cause that won't make Tempest jealous, that's why."

"I don't want her jealous. Look, how about if I leave her a note?"

"I'm not saying sleep with each other," said Danyelle. "Just make it look like maybe you could be interested and let her see she shouldn't take you for granted."

"Danyelle, I don't want you to take this the wrong way —"

"I know," she said. "You think I'm young and you have stuff all figured out but you're here, aren't you? She turned you down and let's face it, I'm your only hope."

"How about if you just tell me a little about her," he compromised. "Maybe that would help me."

"You gotta sit down first. And then I want to know why you want her so bad?"

Aiden found a place at the opposite end of the couch. He set the beer down, unopened, on a coaster. "Why wouldn't I want her? She's beautiful, smart —"

"She's a pain in the ass too, Aiden. She's anal-retentive, hell to live with. You like having someone scream at you when you squeeze toothpaste wrong or bitch every time you leave your pantyhose over the shower?"

"I don't wear pantyhose."

"Just tell me, are you in love?"

"That's a pretty complex thing."

"Don't patronize me. Would you walk through fire for her? If I told you she was on the other side of that wall and the only way you could get her was to cut your way through with a spoon, would you do it?"

"Probably..."

Who was this Danyelle, anyway? She was like a house on fire.

"That will do for now," she decided. "You get ten questions," she announced. "Go."

Aiden scrambled to keep up. "What is her favorite ice cream?"

"It's rocky road. You're wasting time, Aiden. Ask real questions, like why does BDSM freak her out? Or are you more interested in how she has to line up all the spices in alphabetical order?"

"The BDSM," he chose, feeling like he was on some demented game show.

"It's not that anyone did anything to her, if that's what you think. She's just freaked about giving up control. She doesn't know I know this but when she was ten, she was climbing a tree with her friend. She was supposed to be helping the friend up a rope but she got distracted by a butterfly. The friend fell and broke her arm. Tempest never forgave herself. She overanalyzed it and chalked it up to some subconscious desire for vengeance because the friend liked a boy that she liked. Hence her second problem, which is a deep-seated inability to let herself be happy in a relationship. She'll talk about being happy in her work until the cows come home but she's miserable and she needs a man and you might be the one, we'll see, but I will tell you, if you hurt her or in any way act like a dick the way ninety percent of you guys do, I will slam your ass all over the Internet and trust me, babe, I am one vengeful and highly connected bitch."

"I don't doubt that. Tell me, Danyelle, what would you do if you were me?"

"I'd stop using my art to pick people up, for one thing. Tempest was right to be a little suspicious. You come across as a little desperate for a Dominant."

Aiden exhaled. "You been talking to someone named Francis?"

"I know ten people with that name. Male or female?"

"Never mind. If you don't mind, I'll skip the rest of the questions."

"Okay. I'll tell Tempest you were here."

"I'll bet you will. Any chance you will tell me where you learned any of this stuff?"

"I could tell you but I'd have to kill you or marry you, whichever seemed more painful at the time." She showed him to the door. "Don't sweat it," she said, giving him a hug. "You guys will make it."

Aiden thanked her, though he had no idea for what.

One thing was sure, he was bound and determined to see this through. If he had to walk on fire, spoon through a wall...or even deal with Danyelle again.

Tempest got home a little after eight, worn to the bone.

"Hey, girl," said Danyelle, sounding suspiciously cheerful. "How was *your* day?"

"Fine," she said. "Is there any of the Chinese food left?"

"It's in the fridge. Third shelf, next to the cookies, or would it be under 'M' for moo goo gai pan?"

"I don't alphabetize the refrigerator," she grumbled. "And why aren't the cookies in the cupboard?"

Danyelle followed her to the kitchen. "There wasn't any room, what with all your witch stuff up there."

Tempest whirled on her. "You know maybe I wouldn't be in a bad mood all the time if you did some of the cleaning around here? Am I the only one who knows how to use the vacuum?"

"The vacuum doesn't like me. It eats my toe rings. Guess who I saw today, Temp?"

"Who?"

"Oh, nobody." She walked to the sink, humming.

"Danyelle, I am not in the mood to play games."

"Oh, fine, spoilsport. If you must know I saw your little sculptor friend, what's his name? Ahab?"

Her heart skipped a beat. "You mean Aiden? How? When?"

She had Danyelle by the arm, which was not good, because she did not want to make it look like she cared at all.

"He dropped by," she said nonchalantly. "What did you say his name was? Arthur?"

"It's Aiden, damn it, and you know it. You remember the names of everyone you ever met back to third grade."

"Second," she corrected. "With the exception of this really obnoxious girl in the second row. Whiny little thing, Erica or was it Frieda?"

"Just tell me why Aiden dropped by, please? You did tell him to get lost, right? He knows I'm not interested?"

"Absolutely. I let loose the dogs and poured some cauldrons of boiling oil over the castle wall."

"What did he want? Was he pestering me about dinner again? I will never go out with him."

She tried to visualize it, Aiden here, in her place, looking at her walls, possibly sitting on her furniture. Within spitting distance of her bedroom, her lingerie drawer, her dildo. *Oh god, this is agony.*

"Oh, don't worry about it. He was here to talk to me."

Tempest's jaw dropped. "To...you? But...he doesn't know you?"

"He does now." Danyelle winked, giving a suggestive little leer.

"What do you mean, *he does now*?"

"I mean, Tempest, that he — Allen, or whoever — knows me, Danyelle."

"It's Aiden, for the last time. So he asked you out?"

Tempest was going to kill her roommate and it would be justified in any court. She had such a long list of grievances, this was just the last straw.

"No but he might."

"He wouldn't do that."

"I should think you would be glad to have the pressure off you," Danyelle pointed out.

Tempest was ill, just thinking of Aiden's hands on Danyelle, her hands on him. They weren't right for each other, not at all. There was no chemistry. He needed a woman closer to his own age, one he could banter with, a shy, passionate woman he could introduce to his world of bondage.

"It does. I'm happy for you. I bet you'll enjoy him."

"You don't sound happy."

"I'm happy inside." Tempest took the cookies from the refrigerator and threw them against the wall next to the cupboard, causing an explosion of chocolate chips. "You might want to put these where they belong."

"Sure, Temp, whatever you say."

With that, Tempest walked out, holding her hot tears until she was behind closed doors. Burying her head in her pillow, she let it all out. It wasn't fair. Too complicated. So many ways to screw up in life, never a clean chance at happiness, not one. If only Aiden were different, if she were different.

"Temp?" Danyelle was at the door.

"I'm okay," she called out.

"Temp, I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter."

"But Temp, I really screwed up. You see I didn't —"

"Danyelle, just drop it, I love you but drop it."

"Okay..."

Temp was being hard on her, not listening but she couldn't help it. There were places inside herself no one could go, she couldn't afford to let people that close.

Talk about being in bondage.

She laughed out loud, through her tears, not much humor but she would survive.

She always did.

Ellie had survived too, her arm healing up. Ellie had forgiven Tempest but her friend hadn't understood. You couldn't forgive what you didn't understand. People were too easy on Tempest. Her brothers, her father. They had let her get off time and again because she was the youngest, petite and pretty. But she didn't deserve it.

She needed punishment and the only one to give it...was herself.

Cutting out any possibility with Aiden was just the punishment she needed right now. She would do her best to encourage Aiden's relationship with Danyelle. It was the least she could do. Happiness for her roommate and for the handsome sculptor...and suffering for her.

A strange formula but it was all she knew...and all she wanted to know.

* * * * *

"Danyelle, is that you?" Aiden couldn't believe the sobbing girl on the phone was the same exuberant, confident young lady he had just visited. "What's the matter?"

"It's...it's Tempest. I've done something awful, Aiden."

Aiden couldn't imagine what. Danyelle was certainly flirty and a bit wild but she didn't seem to have a mean bone in her body and obviously cared about Tempest very much. "Awful? How?"

"I-I tried to make her jealous. I hinted that you and I..."

Aiden drew a sharp breath. "Oh, Danyelle, you didn't."

"I did. I didn't exactly say you did anything but I hinted that you might. I thought it would make her mad and she would go after you and you'd have a big fight and end up having sex but instead she just went into her room and she's in there crying and she won't talk to me or let me in or anything."

"We have to find a way for me to talk to her," said Aiden. "Would she take a phone call, do you think?"

"I doubt it. I've never seen her this way, Aiden. She's beside herself."

Aiden tensed. The thought of Tempest being in distress was unbearable. Had he become that attached to her so quickly? He had to do something to make this better. Not just for Tempest but for the obviously distraught Danyelle too. "Danyelle, I want you to listen to me very carefully, okay?"

"Yes, Aiden."

He was speaking with authority now and she was responding. People usually did, it was his nature. "I want you to go to Tempest's door, keep her talking. It will do you both good. And take some deep breaths first, don't be so hard on yourself, you meant well, you love her, she knows that. This will all work out fine, I promise. I'm heading back now. I will be there in twenty minutes."

"Twenty minutes," Danyelle repeated, the relief evident in her voice. "Deep breaths, it will all work out fine. Thanks, Aiden, I don't know what I would do without you. You would think with all the people I know —"

"Don't sweat it, I'm the man for this job."

"You know," said Danyelle, amazement in her voice. "You really are the man, for the job...and for her too."

Aiden considered those words, letting them burn deep. He was not unhappy. Far from it.

Danyelle would not leave her alone. Of all the times to want to have a female bonding session. "Danyelle, I just want to get some sleep," she complained. "I'm fine, really."

"I know you're fine, it's me," Danyelle called through the door. "I'm feeling kind of needy. If I could just see you, get a hug, if you could open the door and let me in."

"I'm not opening the door, Danyelle. I'm a mess, you heard me crying, my eyes are puffy and there isn't any point to it. I know you're tricking me. You aren't needy, you want to play nurse, or doctor or something."

"I just want to be a friend," she insisted. "Can't I do that? I'm such a bad one sometimes and I just want to make it right."

"You can be selfish," Tempest agreed. "But that's because of your age. You can't help it."

"You know, you're right about that," said Danyelle, laying it on so thick she almost smelled the BS through the door. "Maybe we could talk and you could give me some wisdom?"

Tempest snorted. "Oh, please, now I know you're humoring me. The day you want my wisdom is the day —"

"Tempest? Do you hear me in there?"

Tempest sat bolt upright in bed. *Aiden...*

"Leave me alone," she said, trying not to snifle.

"I have to talk to you, to see if you are all right."

"I'm fine, why don't you and Danyelle run along now? I'm sure you can amuse yourselves."

Oh god, that sounded jealous!

"I'm not kidding," he said all gruff and dominant, his fist pounding. "I am here to talk to you and I won't take no for an answer. You are obviously upset and I can help you."

"I don't want help."

"Let me in right this minute," he said, "or I will break the door down."

A rush of emotions hit her—fear, desire and resentment. "I already said go away, Aiden, you're not welcome in here."

"I am not looking for an invitation, woman!"

She felt the heat pool between her thighs. She had her pajamas on but she felt stark naked. "Don't talk to me like that, try your huff and puff macho wolf bullshit on Danyelle—she's the one you want anyway."

She hated herself for sounding whiny, catty. It really did suck being a woman.

"You have to the count of three. One...two..."

Crazy son of a bitch, he would probably do it too.

She leapt from the bed and ran to the door, unlocking it just in time.

The door opened from outside. "Danyelle," Aiden said, "may we have some privacy?"

"Um, sure, shall I go to my room?"

"I'd prefer you leave the apartment, to be honest."

"No problem, boss."

"Danyelle, don't go," she cried out.

Aiden swept in, closing the door behind him. "Stop that nonsense."

His face was hard, no-nonsense but it only made him more stunningly beautiful and masculine. She crossed her arms over her chest. "I don't have to stop anything, you just broke in here, remember?"

"It isn't breaking in when it's an emergency, Tempest."

"What emergency?" She held up her arms. "Single woman going to bed alone? Ooh, stop the presses."

"You wouldn't have to go to bed alone if you weren't so stubborn."

“Oh? And who’s going to fix that? You, I’m sure, Mr. Bondage Fix-It Man.”

He didn’t flinch from the scathing sarcasm. “I will take you to bed, Tempest, and we’ll do it how you like—fast, slow, ropes, no ropes. All you have to do is say the word.”

She fought desperately to hold her tongue. She couldn’t give in to him, though the apartment was empty for privacy and her bed was two feet away. “It’s not that simple.”

“Sure it is. You say, ‘Yes, Aiden, I want you...now’.”

Oh, she did, more than he could ever know. Her body itched under the baggy pajamas. She tried to shrink inside them, making her body small, invisible. No woman here, no desperate horny creature needing his attention and rough lust.

“Do you want me to tell you what to do, Tempest? Is that the key?”

“No.” Her knees were going to buckle. “That’s insulting.”

“It’s not an insult, it’s a sign of my sincere desire for you...and my respect. I won’t lie and act like I’m not miserable. I’m dying inside. I have to show you...”

The space was vanishing again. They were like magnets, a north and a south, unable to keep from attracting, connecting.

Their lips met in the middle...middle of the room, middle of the fire.

A hot press that answered, for the moment, every question in her heart, every question in her life. She breathed his name...*Aiden*. Could it be that simple?

He broke the contact. “Tempest, if this continues...”

If what continues? The kiss? Our daily sparring matches?

“I don’t want you to stop, Aiden.”

His thumb grazed her cheek. “I’ll take you, sweetheart, I’ll make love to you...it’ll change us.”

“It already has,” she said throatily.

“We’ll need protection,” he replied.

“In the bathroom. Don’t laugh, I keep condoms. I’m...thorough.”

He didn't laugh, just smiled, lighting her heart. "Go get one," he said.

She could barely move. Her body floated of its own accord. She returned with the small gold foil package, from the economy-size box – oh, how Danyelle had ribbed her for that.

Enough condoms for a small army and you keep yourself shut tighter than Fort Knox...

Almost shyly, she offered it to Aiden. He was breathing fast and she could see the outline of his erection in his jeans. Was he going to let her put it on him? He was the man, the Dominant, he would decide...

"Set it down on the edge of the bed."

She did so, her first – or was it her second? – act of obedience.

"Step back," he said, gently ushering her by the arm. "I want you to undress for me."

Tempest blushed. "Aiden, I really don't –"

"Do it," he said, firm but gentle. "Unless you want to start off with that spanking."

She backed up, in a trance. Her fingers moved over the buttons of her pajama top. What had been an unsexy, boxy garment was suddenly incredibly titillating. She had nothing underneath. Her nipples peaked. She trembled, seeing his desire. She had never seen a man so focused, so intent.

She reached the bottom button.

"Stop," he ordered. "Come here."

She held her breath as she walked into his arms. He took her tight against him. Her half exposed breasts burned. Oh god, she wanted it *all* right now. He nibbled at her lips, drawing them in, making her speed up and then slow down. He had her out of her mind already...

She arched her neck. "Oh god." He nipped at her earlobes, he kissed her neck. She sighed and then gasped as his hands followed their own plan, sliding up from her waist and palming the sides of her breasts.

"I've never wanted a woman this much," he said, the words hissed in her ear. "I'm going to show you what was on my mind the moment I saw you."

He ripped the bottom button off and pushed the pajama top from her shoulders. She helped him shake it free. Before she had time to react, he was on her, his mouth enveloping her breast, hungrily devouring. She clutched his head to her bosom.

"Oh, Aiden...Aiden." She said the name like a prayer and hadn't she waited for a man like this all along?

Aiden took her nipple into his mouth.

He bit down.

A stark reminder that he would push her to her limits.

His hand—how many did he have anyway?—slid down the front of her pajama bottoms. "This," he told her, cupping her quivering, red-hot sex, "is mine. While we are together tonight...*you* are mine."

"Yes, Aiden. Take me," she confirmed. "I'm yours."

He played between her legs, finding her clitoris. She moved against him shamelessly, on the verge of orgasm already.

"You don't come without permission, sweetheart," he whispered. "I control all of it."

She shuddered against him. She was going to shatter into a million pieces. "F-fuck me, please?"

"In time, Tempest, everything in time."

She whimpered. "Yes, Aiden."

He slid her pajama bottoms down very, very slowly. Her teeth chattered and she fought the need to explode.

“Good girl,” he praised. “That’s my good girl.”

The urge to please, to obey was overwhelming. It wasn’t degrading, not humiliating but liberating. It was play of an almost sacred kind.

The pajamas pooled at her feet.

“Step out of them,” he said, continuing his perfect orchestration.

She did so, rendering herself naked.

Aiden dug his fingers into her ass cheeks. “I’m glad it’s happening this way.”

Tempest didn’t care how it happened or why or where. She was beyond the pale, over the edge. “Your touch...” she gasped. “I...I knew...”

“I knew it too. I made that sculpture for you, Tempest, though I didn’t know your name.”

She did something quite without instructions, though she hoped it would fit with the plan. Gracefully, eagerly, she lowered herself.

“May I take out your cock, Aiden?” She looked up at him from her knees, eyes moist.

“Yes, Tempest.” He stroked her cheek, melting her all over again.

She could barely work the zipper. She felt so small in comparison to him and yet she knew that she had power too. She was answering his dreams, he had been waiting for her. He had been there with his sculpture, looking for her, before he knew for sure she even existed.

She smiled ear to ear. It was everything she had hoped for. She pulled his deliciously erect shaft from his underwear.

“Aiden...”

An unasked question, to which he replied, “Yes, lover.”

She kissed the tip of his cock, an act of definite worship. He sighed deeply. His hands went to her shoulders. She licked the length of him all along the underside, pressing the thick vein.

Aiden's cock jumped in response.

Tempest took his cock head into her mouth, sliding it in coyly, like a lollipop. A few more sly passes up and down and Aiden was raring to go. Fingers entwined in her hair, he took control of her head, guiding her to his pleasure. He used her mouth as he wished though he was careful to go slow and not too deep. He was gauging her limits, balancing his hunger and lust with her need to accommodate.

She could easily take his cum, she could swallow him down. It was something she had never done but she wanted it.

"No, baby, not like that." He helped her to her feet. She surrendered his cock reluctantly, trying to memorize his taste, his smell, the pulsing feel of his living flesh.

Had he been reading her inexperience or did he want to make sure to save himself for the main sexual act?

Another kiss. She stood on tiptoes, merging their mouths. His tongue took possession, exploring, communicating.

"Lie down for me, Tempest," he said when neither of them could stand any more.

"You won't keep me waiting, will you?" she teased, rubbing herself against his T-shirt, her hand greedily stroking his cock.

He gave her ass a playful swat, just hard enough to let her know who was boss. "It's your tough luck if I do."

She groaned in pure female satisfaction.

Tempest moved to the bed, tempting him with her ass—her freshly spanked ass.

She would be damned if she would let him hold out for one second longer than necessary.

Lying down, she felt the tingling heat from his hand—a coveted, possessed woman. His until dawn.

"How do you want me?" she said huskily, sensing he would want to dictate every detail of her taking.

“Hands over your head, palms up, on either side of your head...casual.”

She arched her back, all too aware of how she was turning him on. “And...”

“Pull your left knee toward you, the sole of your foot flat on the bed,” he said, completing his arrangement of her form. “Yes...that’s it.”

Slowly, he removed his clothes, shedding them item by item, baring his magnificent body until at last he stood stroking his cock at the foot of the bed. He was so solid and gorgeous and...available.

She could barely contain herself while watching him pull the condom over his sculpted hard-on. His balls were so full. He had so much cum inside him and it was all for her. Up to the last second she feared he would change his mind. It took all her energy to remain passive, to risk the rejection. There were so many better bodies out there, Danyelle for starters—younger, shapelier, with the power to make any man sniff after her like a dog in heat.

Why would Aiden Phillips want her? Tempest was pretty but not a knockout, timid, not a bombshell, hardly in his league.

A new kiss to fulfill the promises of the earlier ones. Her legs parted for him, her sex unfolded and his latex-sheathed shaft slid decisively home to the hilt. *Yes...he fit, they fit.* Another hurdle to the relationship—oh my, is that what this was?

Aiden took a few minutes to enjoy, luxuriating in the closeness, body to body, all the way from mouth to toes, her legs on either side of his, feeling his lean muscles, nipples burning against pectorals, stomachs—hers quivering, his calmly anticipating.

He was the man with the plan. It was in him, in every nerve ending, in every fiber of his being. So there was something to this dominance after all. It was not about tools or chains, it was something inside a man. She had never had a lover like this, who exuded direction. There was nurture in it too. A woman could feel safe with this man and that scared her because she wondered, did he know his own power? He knew women, presumably, but if no one had ever responded as intensely and with such devotion and passion as she had, then how would he know the effect he had?

"You doing all right, baby?"

"Yes, Aiden, oh, I'm good..."

He chuckled. "We'll come together, okay?"

Kisses to her forehead, mouthing away the sweat.

"Yes...together."

Aiden arched his back, depriving her for the moment. She tried to follow him by lifting her bottom but he spoke to her.

"Be still, girl."

She found it endearing, charming to be called girl. Elsewhere in the world, with a different person it would rankle but here she was proud of it. She wanted to be Aiden's girl. His special partner, the one he could do all the kinky things to.

"It's...hard," she told him, fighting every instinct to wrap her ankles around his buttocks and fuck the bejeezus out of him.

"I know," he soothed. "But you have to obey me, don't you?"

"Y-yes."

"Because if you don't..." He paused to lick her nipples, one by one. "I'll have to punish you."

She gritted her teeth as the sensation surged through her. Under the circumstances he might as well have struck her nipples with Danyelle's flogger. "Eeyikes," she yelped. "Aiden, oh, merciful heavens, h-hold me down."

"You have to acknowledge it first. You're my slave."

"S-sex only..." she stammered, determined not to sell her soul down the river with her body.

He devoured her earlobe. "That's the only kind I ever want, Tempest."

"Yes, then," she exclaimed. "I'm your slave girl...your little sex slave."

Aiden's hands moved to her wrists, pinning her. "You need me to teach you how to be a good slave, don't you? You need me to be your Master, to show you what it means. You need to have me come inside you."

To complete his conquest, he slid his shaft between her thighs, filling her slick opening, locking her in place beneath him.

Oh, thank god, she couldn't move now if her life depended on it.

"Yes, come inside me, Master," she breathed, freed at long last from herself. "Teach me my slavery."

Aiden's mouth was a branding iron, shaping, changing, owning her lips. She moaned against his hot lips, surrendering to tongue and cock alike.

He rose and fell, a steady, measured pace, the motions of a Master on his girl...in his girl. Taking his pleasure, giving no quarter, celebrating the ultimate nature of her femininity. Aiden wanted her and he wasn't sharing.

His speed increased, she clenched at him, trying neither to resist nor over-commit herself. Her body craved release and she had to fight her own instincts. She had to wait for his command and wonderfully that multiplied the pleasure. She could only imagine what it was going to be like.

"Master..." she gasped. "May I...?"

"Beg for it, sweetheart, I want to hear the words."

"Please, Master, may I come? Your girl begs you..."

He inclined his head, releasing a low, tightly contained roar, like a jungle cat. "Yes, girl. Come for me, come for your Master."

Tempest screamed out her release. She had to bite into his shoulder lest she rouse the entire apartment building. It wasn't an orgasm, it was an internal meltdown. She wasn't having it, it was having her. Her muscles had absolutely no tension, her nerve endings were responding entirely to forces outside herself, his forces.

Unable to control it, to protect herself, she let it strip her down with wicked waves of pleasure. Nice girls didn't climax like this. Not daddy's girls, first in their class in high school and college, voted most likely to put up the white picket fence by age twenty-five. If he wasn't holding her down, shielding her honor, who knew what might happen?

"Was I good, Master?" She asked the question, knowing it was scandalous in itself. Wanting to be praised for sexual behavior, especially at a man's beck and call was hardly the height of political correctness.

"Baby, you were so far beyond good," he assured. "I want you to just relax now. This is for you."

"This" turned out to be Aiden sliding down between her legs, his tongue against her clitoris—soothing, enflaming, tickling. He pressed his face against her, working her, allowing her to build back up, no responsibilities, nothing to control, just total surrender and release. Her cream poured freely and she sighed, building, higher and higher.

His tongue was wicked and knowledgeable, like a small, powerful cock—plunging, penetrating, stinging.

She cried out, writhing. She was so close but he held her at the edge, pleasure bordering on pain. She clenched and unclenched her fists. It went on and on until finally he gave her permission.

"Just come, Tempest," he instructed. "Let it all go..."

That was all the encouragement she needed. She exploded underneath him. She thought of the line in *A Christmas Carol* when the reformed Scrooge writes a whopper check to the orphanage, claiming there were a good many back payments included—well, she was getting back payments on orgasms, not that Aiden owed her.

One climax burst into the next, all of them merging but each of them distinct.

There wouldn't be anything left after this. How could Aiden know her like this? It was as if her clit was his tongue's long-lost friend, separated soul mates. Squeezing her

thighs against his ears, she rocked and bucked. He clutched her breasts as she cried and laughed. He took it all, mastered it all, mastered her.

She unwound like a coil, beautiful and fresh and sexy again, as if she had just come from some other world without hang-ups and broken hearts and dirty looks from shrewish old ladies.

"Tempest, you are something else."

"It's my turn now." He lay down on his back and she began kissing down his torso—tiny butterfly nibbles all the way to his stomach. He had a fine layer of hair, not visible to the naked eye. She let it tickle her nose. At some point he had removed the condom. "You'll let me have your cock?" she asked, not really ready to take no for an answer.

"You're obsessed with that thing, aren't you?" he teased.

She rolled her eyes Danyelle style. "Duh."

This time she took him fervently. Jaws relaxed, she pushed him to the back of her throat. It was wonderful. He was as hard as the first time, if not harder. She took hold of his balls, lightly stroking. He lifted his pelvis, indicating she was doing the job right.

"I want to swallow it," she said, determined.

"You don't have to," he said. "I wouldn't ask you to."

"You better." She slapped playfully at his chest. "In fact, I fully expect to be ordered."

He grinned wickedly. "In that case, slave girl, you will suck your Master's cock until he comes and you will swallow every drop. Miss even one and I'll pepper your ass."

She felt the butterflies in her stomach. She was drawn to the possibility of mild pain, even as her preservation instincts told her to avoid it at all cost. "Would you really do that, Aiden?"

His eyes darkened. His nostrils flared just a little. The look itself made her burn.

“Does this answer your question?” He reached across, delivering a firm, efficient smack to her feminine ass. It was much harder than before. It did something to her, putting her in a new place, an open space of clean, sharp obedience.

“Yes, Master.” She took him once more between her lips, this time under orders – a slave’s orders.

He swelled instantly. She could feel the extra heat. It wouldn’t be long.

“Up on your hands and knees,” he said.

She kept him in her mouth as she shifted positions. The new posture gave him access to her breasts. He toyed with her nipple, lightly at first and then increasing the pressure.

He grunted, giving her a tiny jolt of pain, rolling her nipples between thumb and forefinger as he came, shooting his semen to the back of her throat. She swallowed as he showed his mastery over the tiny, tender nub....his mastery over her.

Tempest swallowed every drop and then she lovingly licked him clean.

“Sleep with me,” he muttered.

She crawled up and rested her head on his powerful chest.

“Thank you,” he said, his arm encircling her, fingers splayed across her derriere.

“Thank you, Master,” she whispered, her lips grazing his nipple, her fingers feeling his skin, her ears focused on his heartbeat.

If there was a better way to fall asleep in this universe, Tempest was not aware of it.

Chapter Three

Aiden awoke to the feel of soft female flesh pressed against him—Tempest, asleep on his chest, lightly purring, her sweet body completely surrendered. A wave of emotion passed over him, a fierce desire to protect and hold and cherish this fiery little beauty.

His cock stirred to life. He needed to be inside her. What time was it, anyway?

He tried to think what day of the week it was. As an artist he was blessed not to have to keep a regular schedule but Tempest would have a job.

Damn, he didn't even know what she did for a living.

"Sweetheart," he murmured, trying to wake her gently. "You probably want to get up..."

She mumbled something and hugged him tighter. "Not now...I wanna stay and see the tigers..."

"Tempest, you're dreaming."

"Hmm?" She lifted her head and popped her eyes open. She looked delicious with her tousled hair and sleepy expression. "What...what time is it?"

He looked at the digital clock on the nightstand. "It's nine twenty-seven."

"Nine twenty-seven? Fuck!" She scrambled off the bed, dashing for the shower. "How could you let me sleep that long?" she accused.

"I just got up too." He slid his legs over the side of the bed and ambled after her.

"What are you doing?" she demanded as he followed her.

"Taking a shower."

"Not here. Not with me."

"Where then?"

"Go home and take one."

"What's the big deal, Tempest? It's not like I haven't been in close quarters with you already."

She turned on the water. "That was different. I have to get to work now. I told you."

"You're already late," he reasoned. "What difference does it make?"

"Plenty. Oh god. I have to call the office. What am I thinking?"

"I don't know." He pulled her close. "But I know what I'm thinking."

"Aiden." She squirmed. "I already told you I don't have time."

"You're right, that's why we need to get in the shower. Come on, I'll wash you – it will go faster."

"The hell it will."

His hands were everywhere, smoothing over her hips, caressing her back, tweaking her nipples. The harder she tried to cover one area, the more determined he was to get at the others.

"It's the shower or back to bed, Tempest, you pick."

"Fine, the shower," she yielded. "But I have to call the office first."

He took hold of her wrists, pulling them against his chest. "Say please," he teased.

"Bastard," she hissed, her secret love of the game revealed by her erect nipples and fragrant pussy.

"Say it," he said, pushing his erect cock against her belly.

"Please..." she was almost panting. "May I call my office?"

"May I call my office, Master?"

"Master...may I call my office?"

He let her go reluctantly. "Make it quick." He dispatched her with a quick, firm spank to her jiggling ass cheeks.

She squealed, shocked and surprised. Holding her ass, she gave him a look.

"You have something to say, slave girl?"

"No...Master."

He went with her as she made her call, standing just behind her as she pulled her cell phone from her purse. "Now what?" she asked.

"Just keeping you honest."

She sighed and shook her head.

He captured her breasts and pressed his cock into her ass as she hit the speed dial. "Oh...god," she exclaimed.

"Um...hi..." Too late to object, someone had answered on the other side. "This is Tempest. I need to talk to Bruce or Sally."

She went on hold for a second.

"Aiden," she whispered fiercely. "Cut it out."

"Cut what out?" He rolled her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers. Suppressing a moan, she leaned back against Aiden's chest.

"B-Bruce?" She tried to keep it together. "This is...this is Tempest. What? No...I'm...fine."

Aiden took full advantage, molding her breasts, kneading the soft flesh.

"I had...car trouble. A tire blew."

Aiden smiled. Good girl. He rewarded her with his finger between her legs.

"The...G-Garrison design? Yeah, it's done. I'll have it for you, sure."

"Open," Aiden whispered into her other ear.

Tempest had no choice but to spread her legs, granting him full access.

He plunged his fingers deep.

"Yeah, I'll be coming..." Tempest said. "Any time."

Aiden chuckled. She was brilliant!

"Goodbye, Bruce."

She clicked off. "I should kick your ass for that, Aiden Phillips."

"You and what army?" He manipulated her clit, leaving her no opportunity for resistance.

"*Oh, Aiden,*" she breathed. "What you do to me."

"Bend over," he ordered. "Touch your toes."

"But...but my job."

"The job will have you soon enough. You're still mine now."

Tempest complied, her hair falling forward over her face.

"Don't move," he ordered, patting her bottom.

"Where are you going?"

He liked the tone of her voice—respectful, expectant. She didn't want him gone, she was feeling dependent, worshipful, like a good sub. It made him hot and very hard, though there were implications to consider, possibilities down the road between them that neither might be prepared for.

What if she wanted this too much? What if she got too submissive?

"I just need to get something, baby...hang tight."

"Okay..."

Aiden looked on her dresser. She had all the typical female things, although she was a whole lot more organized than most women he had known. There wasn't a single thing out of place. Hair ties, pennies, jewelry, everything was in some box or container or other. Lipsticks were lined up in color order, light to dark. There were colored stickers, round dots on the edge too, just above the drawers. He had no clue what that was about. Although it made him smile, just like everything else about Tempest Tyler.

She would flip if she saw his place. It was one huge zone of untidiness, Francis included.

A hairbrush, that's what he was looking for. He picked it up—blue plastic with black bristles. There was not one single hair on it. Who took the time to remove the hair from their brush every day?

"Is this brush new?" he asked.

"No, it's five months old. I rotate them out after six months. Why are you messing with my hairbrush?"

She sounded a little suspicious, a little nervous.

Generally, when it came to sexual submissives, ninety percent of arousal was in the mind. They did the work themselves...all a man had to do was plant the right suggestions.

"I'm going to spank you with it," he said.

"What?" She whipped around, stunned.

"I didn't give permission to break position, Tempest. You'll be punished for that."

"You're crazy!"

"Bend over," he ordered. "Now."

Tempest resumed her place. He drew a sharp breath as he saw her glistening, puffy sex lips. This was turning her on as much as it was him.

"When slaves are told to do something, they must do it at once, is that clear?" He traced a very faint line over her crack, making her moan.

"Yes...yes, Master."

Aiden knew the secret to mastery was in using pleasure to make a woman helpless. The pain was only a seasoning, a gateway to a deeper intimacy. An ordinary couple explored what they liked in bed by touching. A BDSM couple had a whole different world to conquer. How much would Tempest crave? What did she need?

The time had come for a safe word.

"Before we go any farther, you need to be empowered, to stop things. You always have the control, Tempest. You will have a word—sculpture. Just say it and the scene stops. That's what this is, a scene we're playing...understand?"

"Yes, Master...I say sculpture."

"Good. That frees us both, you can go as far as you wish and I don't have to worry. I'm going to proceed now. Have fun, tell me no, protest, squirm, I'll keep going...because the word protects us."

"I'm ready, Master."

She sounded firm, secure. Aiden was impressed by her strength. Her growth. This wasn't the same woman who had shied away at the gallery.

"We'll see if you're ready." He affected a Dom's tone. A Dom's harsh resolve. "Once you've taken your medicine."

He rubbed the flat of the brush over her ass. She stiffened in anticipation.

"Nervous, slave?"

"A little, Master."

He tapped her lightly. "You should be." Pulling back his hand, he delivered a mild thwack, just enough to jiggle her ass cheeks.

Tempest gasped in response.

He caressed her pussy. "Did you like that?"

"It...didn't hurt like I thought it would."

"That's because we've only gotten started."

Actually he would continue to mix things up, alternating stimulation with hard discipline. In the end she would be whimpering and begging, craving any touch, any contact at all.

"Oh," she said.

He smacked her again in the same spot. He touched her skin and it was warm. "You'll be thinking of me when you sit down today, slave girl, you'll be sore...and horny too. I promise, you'll remember this."

"Y-yes, Master."

Another spank from the brush to the other cheek, the hardest yet. She released a small yelp. He soothed her with his fingers, working them over her labia and down into her sex. He teased her clit at the same time. "It is starting to hurt now, isn't it?"

"Yes, Master."

"That's why it's punishment. Naughty girls have to learn a lesson on their bare asses."

She began to push against him, seeking the stimulation. He removed his fingers and struck her with his bare palm to the round lushness of her bottom. "Did I tell you to move?"

"N-no, Master."

"Do you think this is about your pleasure?"

"No, Master."

He pushed the handle of the brush into her pussy—the way was easy and unencumbered. "This is about submission...and training."

She fought to keep her body still. He made love to her with the brush, requiring her to suppress her every instinct to respond.

"I want you to come, slave girl." At the sound of his voice Tempest orgasmed for him. He felt so connected to her—they were linked closer than if his cock were inside her. "That's it," he coached as the climax racked her body. "Come for Master."

"Aiden," she groaned, reaching from somewhere deeper inside herself. "I need..."

She couldn't finish the words but he understood. "Yes, Tempest...yes."

She screamed as he mounted her, plunging to the hilt.

It was the most intense and beautiful sound he had ever heard from a female.

Tempest was full...complete.

Aiden's cock was in her to the hilt. She was wickedly bent over, her ass was hot as fire and she was throbbing and melting and glowing from the orgasm. She begged him to fuck her hard and rough. She wanted to be used as a woman should, thoroughly pleasing her man.

"Master, please, come inside me," she begged. "Please, fill me with your hot cum."

He released a low growl. His cock swelled and a blast of heat followed. She strained to absorb, to feel it to the depths of her soul, all the way down to her toes.

Fuck the world and fuck getting to work...

That wouldn't last, though. In a few more minutes she would be antsy all over again.

What a wonderful relief and escape he provided. How had it all happened? The last thing she remembered clearly was that she was alone in her room, trying to mind her own business in her best sulking pajamas. Next thing she knew all hell broke loose – but a nice hell, the kind a girl could get used to.

If only there was a way to make Aiden fit into her life a little better. If he was a little more...well...regular.

She was a little ashamed to be thinking that.

Danyelle would kick her ass for that kind of attitude. Elitism, snobbery, sad conformity. But Danyelle didn't understand that you couldn't live in your sex fantasies, you couldn't keep playing like there was no piper to pay.

On the other hand, she liked Aiden and she didn't want boundaries put on things. Didn't this thing between them deserve to go where it wanted?

Tempest was confused. Maybe it was from having her head upside down, all that blood rushing to her head.

"Come on, baby, it's time for that shower."

Aiden helped her upright and then, catching her totally off guard, he swept her into his arms. He certainly did have a gift for recognizing what she needed at a given moment – sometimes better than she did.

She buried her head against his shoulder. “Make the world go away,” she sighed.

“The world is nothing but a construct,” he said, carrying her across the threshold like a new bride, into the bathroom.

“Good, then construct me a paycheck for doing nothing.”

He set her down just outside the shower. “Who signs your paychecks now?”

Tempest named the architectural firm.

“I know those guys.” He climbed in the shower and turned it on, making sure the water was warm for her.

A huge cock...and he's a gentleman, she thought dryly. Wow, I really am superficial.

“They designed one of the galleries I show in, the Foxworth.” He held out his hand, indicating the water was ready.

“That wasn’t me.” She let him position her facing forward, behind the spray.

“Good, because I hate that place. It is totally...soulless.”

“Yeah, that’s our specialty. Soulless and outrageously expensive.”

“You should quit,” he said, like it was nothing at all.

“Not everyone can afford to make a living messing around with plaster. No offense.”

“It’s not plaster. It’s Phil-crete.”

“Phil what?”

“Phil-crete. Short for Phillips concrete, I made it myself. How about you put your hands behind your neck for me?”

“What for?”

“Because we’re still scening, Tempest, and I am ordering you to do it.”

A shiver went down her spine at the intimate, erotic little reminder. "So I'm still your sex slave?" She licked her lips, moving to rub her leg against his.

"Yes," he said, taking hold of her nipple to administer a sharp pinch. "You are."

She jumped back, to the back of the shower. "Ow! That fucking hurt."

"Should have used your safe word."

"How am I supposed to know ahead of time?" she exclaimed.

"You don't. Guess you'll have to trust I'll never spring anything too bad on you without warning. Now bring your nipple back to me, I'm not done with it."

"You think I'm going to let you do that again?" She snorted. "Fat chance."

"Actually it will be harder."

She laughed. "Well, at least you're honest—certifiable but honest."

Aiden swooped in.

"Hey," she exclaimed. "No nipple pinch...sculpture, sculpture!"

"Oh, I have no intention of pinching your nipple against your will," he said smoothly, brushing her lips with his. "Of course, if you should happen to ask for it..."

"Well, I won't," she said firmly. "And that's final."

"Of course it's final." He lifted her body up onto his cock which was hard again.

"Why do I think there's a 'but' in there somewhere?" she said, all too aware of the vulnerability of her position—impaled, back to the shower wall.

"Such a suspicious creature, aren't you?" He kissed her neck, very, very faintly.

She gritted her teeth, already on the edge and he had barely started. "I know you, damn it!"

And she did too, almost like they had been together years, or was it all from some past life?

"If you know me, you know I am a man of my word. No nipple pinching, not even if you beg me."

Oh, fuck, that's what this is about. "No messing with my head, Aiden Phillips," she warned.

Aiden cupped his hands under her ass cheeks, giving himself better control of her body. "That's Master Aiden Phillips to you."

He withdrew his cock nearly to the tip, leaving her empty and aching.

"All right, I give, it's Master..."

Aiden teased her, moving the tip of his cock over the entrance to her pussy.

She clutched at his shoulders. "Master..."

"Yes?"

"Don't...stop..."

"Are you telling me what to do?"

"No, Master."

"Am I your slave?"

"No, Master. I'm your slave."

"When you want to..."

"No, I really am," she protested.

"When it's convenient."

That stupid nipple stunt she had pulled. She knew it would come back to bite her on the ass. "Master, do you still want to pinch my nipple?" She tried to make peace.

"Gracious of you to offer."

Wonderful, now he was being sarcastic. Taking the law into her own hands, she thrust her pelvis forward. Aiden was ready. Instead of capturing his cock she found herself standing in the shower, Aiden a foot in front of her.

"Arms above your head."

"I have to get to work," she whined, hoping for an easy way out.

He couldn't avoid a smirk. "Now you think of work."

She watched uneasily as he took the soap from the soap dish. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to clean you up." He presented the bar of soap at the juncture of her thighs. "Spread 'em."

"Molest me, more like," she grumbled.

He pushed the bar in, making her moan. "Tell me you don't like it. Tell me you want me to stop."

"You can be a real prick, you know that?" She couldn't help herself, she needed to get off so badly. The dirtiness of it – soap and all – was a pretty big turn-on too.

She rocked her body against the rounded corner, feeling the lather build. Her breathing quickened. "Oh, shit," she rasped. "I'm gonna...come."

Too late she realized the mistake.

Nice going, Tempest, you know he doesn't want you to actually have the orgasm.

"Only obedient girls get to climax," he said.

She whimpered, watching him set the soap back in the dish.

"Arch your back." He slapped her hip. "Thrust out your breasts."

Tempest obeyed.

"Pucker your lips."

Her heart thundered. He wouldn't kiss her...not now.

She tried not to squirm.

"Lean forward," he ordered.

Her nipples burned. He moved in so slowly. She nearly collapsed when his lips finally reached hers. She dared not breathe...

He plucked at her, taking tiny nibbles from her lips. The urge to melt into him, to lose herself completely, was almost irresistible.

"Hold still," he warned.

His hands were on her, he was lathering her breasts. She panted in reply.

“Still want to fight me?” he said.

“No, Master...”

He trailed his fingers over her belly, water dribbling, smooth, silky bubbles teasing her flesh. “And if I want to pinch your nipples, slave?”

“They’re yours, Master...”

“You have no reservations?”

“No, Master.” The words came haltingly, her breath in short stabs. “Do...as you will.”

He took her left nipple, the swollen wet nub responding instantly to the heat. “Mine,” he growled.

“Y-yours.”

He put his hand in place at the juncture of her thighs. It was a perfect fit, like his cock. She released a soft, high-pitched little moan as his fingers entered her. “You will come,” he commanded. “You will take the pain with the pleasure.”

“Oh...Aiden...” Her eyes lit like fire. He clamped her nipple and grazed her clitoris. A hard vise grip above combined with a light-as-a-feather touch below. She felt herself being dragged in to a hot, wet hurricane, every emotion clashing, wondering how she could want this, need this so badly – good girls didn’t come like this, didn’t enjoy nasty sex in the shower with perverted sculptors but Aiden was here with her, making her come and it did hurt. Sharp stinging pain and throbs in her breast pulling a cord directly connected to her pussy which clenched and unclenched with a mind of its own. Standing outside herself she heard the screaming and begging for Aiden to please fuck her now, to put her out of her misery with his cock. At once he obliged, shoving himself deep into her, filling her with his hard cock and she was crying out and pushing her sore breast into his chest, encouraging him to clamp her ass cheeks and slam her body

against him again and again until the whole world was gone, blown away and blown down.

Finally, nothing left, just her clinging to him, bedraggled, a rag doll. *Oh, please, don't let go of me...how did I even get here*, she wondered.

Aiden turned them around, allowing the water to run off both their bodies, pure and cleansing. Yes, this was the right ending, fitting and sweetly appropriate. Aiden was good at framing their acts of mad passion.

But he would have his work cut out for him now, because they would soon have to separate and she had no idea how it would be, what she would even call him next time they saw each other.

Come to think of it, how would they both get dressed in the same room and how in heck would they both make a smooth getaway past Danyelle, who was sure to be watching like a hawk?

She was a little miffed at herself for not being able to take the initiative. She ought to have a plan in mind. She had plans for everything. And how exactly was it that this man was being allowed to see so much of her life so fast anyway? Sex was one thing but he had looked at her dresser top, probably snickered about how she organized her lipstick. Everyone always did.

"Aiden, I really have to get going." She didn't intend it to sound so businesslike, curt even but there just weren't rules for this.

"I know, so do I. How about if I just slip out quietly, let you do your thing?"

"There won't be any slipping out quietly. Danyelle's out there. This is one of her study days."

"She's obviously cool about this kind of thing, though." He didn't like her taking Danyelle's reaction for granted, or her own for that matter.

"What kind of thing is that?"

"The fact that you had a man overnight in your room," he said.

"Why? You think this happens a lot?"

"I'm not implying anything, Tempest, it's just that you're a normal healthy woman —"

"Why don't you just call me a slut," she snapped. "And get it over with."

Aiden stepped back. "I think we should let this conversation go."

"Sure, Master, whatever you say." She couldn't stand how casual he was being. She wondered just how common this was for him. What if he had been playing her along from the start — picking her up in front of his own sexy statue. What a fool she had been.

"Tempest, I'm sensing hostility."

That was the last straw. "Really? Extra points for you. Why don't you and Danyelle go into business together? Of course it's really my business you're into, isn't it?"

Aiden frowned. "Tempest, where is this coming from?"

"Me," she said. "It's coming from me. Probably shocks you because you really don't know me, do you?"

"I think I know you well enough," he said.

She pushed him away, her hands on his chest. She didn't want it anymore — it was too dangerous. He was too dangerous. "Get the hell out of here. Go trap someone else with your statue."

"I didn't trap anyone."

"Really? How many before me? 'I see this particular piece has caught your eye,'" she mimicked. "Is that your best pick-up line?"

"It's not a pick-up line, I was attracted to you, there's nothing wrong about that."

"Good, I'm so glad your conscience is clear. Now get the hell out of my shower and my life!"

"That's your choice, Tempest. I told you this was all consensual."

He took his leave, turning his back to her, denying her so much as a goodbye or a parting glance. She heard him at the bathroom door. He opened and shut it, final and methodical.

This was what she wanted, right?

She vowed she would not cry. It was one fucking night and he wasn't worth it. She let work flood her mind, the Garrison designs which she needed to get to Bruce before he had a cow. And Sally—who was Bruce's assistant but acted like everyone's boss—needed to be appeased too. Tempest would throw her a little bone, the Gracelow Condominium designs, maybe.

This job really was getting crazy. She didn't have any fun anymore and she hadn't even enjoyed it that much to start. At the time it had seemed the practical, responsible thing to do right out of architecture school. Take the plum opportunity, the position everyone else would kill for. She would have had to be pretty ungrateful to turn it down. Choices like that were make or break for a career. Little by little her dreams were dying, though and sooner or later that was going to be a problem. A nice personal life would make up for it—that white picket fence. That wasn't working, either and somehow it was her fault.

Basically, she had Danyelle, unless you counted her family, who were generally keeping score on all this rather than offering any actual help or support.

Tempest finished her shower, alone, the way you're supposed to. She ignored all her body's entreaties, its desire to be touched this way and that, to have softness and hardness, tenderness and discipline. In short, her body wanted Aiden—taking charge, turning off the water, guiding her hand to his rock-hard cock, letting her know why she wasn't going to work today.

"You've got work to do here, slave girl..."

"Yes, Master," she would whisper, her pussy already liquefying—hot, obedient.

No...all that was nonsense. Her body didn't get a vote in this. Her head was in charge. She had designs to submit, remember? Plus she was angry at Aiden. Why

exactly she wasn't sure. He had pushed too hard, been too...masculine. Something like that. The real point was that her body needed to chill. No tingling nipples, no nerve endings on fire.

Aiden had spanked her with a brush...

She still couldn't believe it. And she had liked it. He had done a lot of other things too.

Tempest dressed quickly. Trying to avoid looking sexy. She picked a long skirt, a blouse and a sweater over it. Damn it, how the hell was she supposed to use her brush?

She shuddered as she picked it up. Such a small, innocent thing. Closing her eyes, she slid it across her hip, around to her backside.

Tempest swatted herself.

Hard.

She stifled a little yelp.

"I need to have my head examined," she told her reflection.

She frowned. Her lipstick was out of order. Pink Passion exchanged with Dusk Rose. There, that was better. See, it wasn't so hard to keep on track. Aiden hadn't done anything to her she couldn't reverse. One day, two at the most and she would be back to normal.

She felt much more confident by the time she went to the kitchen. She started humming a little tune, something Top 40, not too risqué.

"Nice outfit," commented Danyelle, a half dozen books open on the table in front of her, her lithe body clothed in an oversized sweat shirt that covered her hands.

"Thanks." Tempest's heels clicked across the terra cotta tile floor as she headed for the coffeemaker. Just a little cup of java and she'd be on her way. Back to normal, in a day or two.

"I especially like the fashion statement you're making with those shoes," said Danyelle dryly. "Screw the establishment, right? Or are you running for color blindness poster child this year?"

Tempest looked down. She had one blue pump and one black.

Fuck.

"Or..." said Danyelle, cheekily, "could it be a certain sculptor rocked your world so you don't know if you're coming or going?"

"This has nothing to do with Aiden." Tempest marched off. She had all the way to her bedroom and back to think of a better response. "I am just going through a little something," she announced, back in the kitchen with the second black pump in its proper place on her left foot.

"Aiden's not 'a little something' you go through," Danyelle laughed. "He's a genuine F5 tornado, a cat five hurricane."

"This is about work," said Tempest, banging a coffee cup on the counter. "Why do you keep talking about that man?"

"I don't know," said Danyelle. "Maybe because he's the best thing that's ever happened to you...aside from me."

"We're just friends," said Tempest, really wishing she could have a dumb roommate sometimes, one who didn't know her at all.

"Sure you are, Temp. So what did you and your new friend do all night in your room? Play video games? Oh, wait, I forgot, you don't play video games."

"Okay." Tempest threw up her hands. "We had sex, is that what you want to hear?"

"Well, it's a good start." Danyelle took off her reading glasses and brushed back errant strands of hair from her glowing cheeks. "Give me details. I bet he's really hung, right? And he can kiss and I bet he makes sure his partner comes first. I can always tell when I look at a man."

"Yes, you know everything, Danyelle, as always. In fact, I think you'd make a much better match because Aiden Phillips knows everything too."

"Whoa." Danyelle screwed up her face. "You hit your first wall, didn't you? This relationship is going faster than I thought. What did he do, put his toothpaste on the brush wrong? Wait, I know, he had the nerve to ask about your feelings, didn't he?"

"I don't have feelings, remember. And I don't have time, either. If you're so keen on this, ask Aiden yourself."

"For real? You wouldn't mind?"

"What do I care? I'm never going to see him again." She hoped she sounded sufficiently blasé. Danyelle had just set a little trap for her, trying to get her to react and show possessiveness for Aiden or something along those lines.

"I'm out of here," Tempest announced. "You'll vacuum the living room today, right?"

"Sure, I have a new toe ring I'm sure it would love to eat."

"Vacuums don't eat toe rings." Tempest slammed the door behind her.

It was officially a conspiracy. The two people closest to her in the world were both driving her crazy.

She scowled as she entered the elevator.

Had she just said that Aiden Phillips, whom she did not even know twenty-four hours ago, was one of the two people in the world closest to her?

How pathetic did that make her life?

Worse still...how vulnerable did that make her?

She had a weird feeling she hadn't seen the last of the dominating, passionate sculptor. It was a prospect that did that not entirely upset her. Not by a long shot.

Chapter Four

Danyelle made good and sure that Aiden spotted her when he came in the coffee shop for their appointed meeting.

"Hey, baby," she called out, waving. A half dozen bracelets jingled on her wrists. Her nails were painted electric blue. She had her hair in braids, tied off with tiny pink ribbons. She was wearing a pink jersey dress that clung to her slim figure.

She got up from the table and gave him a big hug like they had known each other forever. She was barefoot. He had no idea what she could have done with her shoes since coming in here.

"You're so sweet to come," she cooed.

"You said it was urgent I see you," he reminded, feeling a little self-conscious as he noted basically everyone in the place staring. It wasn't that he minded being seen with such a sexy, vivacious woman, he simply didn't like for people to ever get the wrong idea about things.

Francis, on the other hand, or one of his other friends, would be drooling and more than happy to exploit the situation.

"Life and death," Danyelle agreed. "Sit down. You like Sinyang?"

"Sin what?"

"Sinyang. It's a tea. Well, not exactly a tea, more like an herb. It works on the mind, eases tensions, it's an endorphin thing. If Western science would study some of this stuff instead of ridiculing everything that doesn't come out of a corporate lab...but that is par for the course." She paused for breath, handing him a cardboard cup. "Okay. Let's cut to the chase. I can pretty much figure out what happened last night. Everything was all hot and heavy, roses and chocolate and then, poof, major meltdown

and you're left standing there like Carrie's prom date holding a chargrilled corsage. Am I right?"

He cleared his throat. "Not exactly."

She narrowed her gaze. "What does not exactly mean? Did she thank you for a lovely time, ask you to the church picnic on Sunday, because I must say, the Tempest I saw this morning after you left would make the Wicked Witch of the West blush?"

Aiden ran his hand through his hair. "Okay, so it didn't end well."

Danyelle nodded. "You pushed the BDSM, didn't you, even though I warned you not to? Don't answer—I already know. The point is what do you do now?"

Aiden tried the drink and made a face. It tasted like coffee grounds mixed with soap. "No wonder they call it Sinyang. You drink it to pay for your sins. As for what I'm going to do, Danyelle, I have no clue. She didn't exactly leave the door open for me to do a customer satisfaction survey."

Danyelle thought for a minute. "Well, it's pretty clear you two aren't capable of connecting in any slow and gentle way. You're fire and ice but we can use that. You have to make your claim, Aiden. You have to smash down her defenses, totally blast her off her feet."

Aiden tapped his fingers. "That sounds like something that might work in a movie but not in real life."

"Give me your hand," said Danyelle.

"What?"

"Your hand. Let me hold it."

He gave her his fingers. She squeezed tightly. "Tell me you wouldn't rather I was Tempest right now, making this connection, touching you?"

He pulled his hand back, like he had been shocked. "Danyelle, there's no point to this."

"Isn't there? Come on, Aiden, we're grown-ups. I know how men look at me, it's been happening to me since I was a teenager but there was something about you. The moment I saw you, it was like I didn't exist as a woman. Now you're not gay, so obviously it means you're in love—with Tempest. And she's got it bad for you, or she wouldn't be acting like such a pain in the ass. Trust me, I know her, Aiden. She is as stubborn as they come. She'll make sure the two of you are good and miserable and apart from each other the rest of your lives before she swallows her stupid pride. So it's up to you to spank some sense into her or whatever it is Dominants do in situations like this."

Aiden's heart was pounding. He had wished it was Tempest's hand. He wanted one more chance with her, an opportunity to show her what more they could have together in life. "It's complicated, Danyelle. She might not be right for me."

"Well, you won't take my word for it, so hadn't you better find out for yourself?"

"You make a strong argument. Maybe you should be a lawyer."

"Psychologists get better ratings. So are you going to go win this woman over or sit here and drink more of this crap?" She held up her cup for effect.

"You mean you don't like it either?"

"I hate it. I just didn't want you getting too comfortable. You're not getting any younger, you know. What are you, sixty?"

"Thirty-five," he grumbled.

"Is that all? Oh, well," she teased. "As long as Tempest thinks you're young."

Aiden rose to his feet, pulling a five-dollar bill from his pocket. "You're too kind. Remind me to get even with you for the Sinyang someday."

She took the money. "No problem. And thanks for the money. As a starving student, I'll spend it well."

"If Tempest and I get married we'll adopt you, don't worry."

“Tempest as my stepmother?” She cringed. “I would rather spend a day with my head in a bucket full of Sinyang.”

Aiden laughed. It was as relaxed and hopeful as he had felt since last night.

He could do this. He had to do this.

As for what he would do if he really did get a second chance with Tempest, how he would handle her wild heart and her deep submissive needs, that remained to be seen.

He had feelings for her and he would die before he ever saw her harmed.

Was that enough?

It had to be.

* * * * *

Tempest tried to focus on Bruce—his droning self-serving speech about the “fundamentals” as he called them. The gist of it—other than Bruce loving to hear himself talk—had something to do with the cleanliness of lines, by which he meant keeping any given project as mindless as possible. Treat the client like a moron, don’t challenge him to think in any way and he’ll keep the money pouring your way.

That was the firm’s philosophy.

Firm...like Aiden’s hand on her ass. He had said something to her the very first night about a certain kind of behavior from submissives—bratting, that was it. When the sub tries to get attention in negative ways.

She had been a brat that morning. Saying goodbye was awkward enough without her freaking out. Aiden didn’t deserve that. If she were him and had a sub like that, she would put that sub over her knee.

Tempest imagined that—Aiden marching right into Bruce’s leather-filled office, asking the man to leave so he could be alone with her. She would protest, she would tell him he had a lot of nerve, but in the end, when he patted his hand on his thigh she would go to him for her discipline, her punishment.

The words themselves were so naughty, so completely outside the norm. Grown women didn't submit like that but if it turned her on and Aiden too, then why not?

She would stand in front of him, under command.

"You've been a naughty girl, Tempest. You need to be put in your place."

"Yes, Master..."

"Before I spank you, you will take down your panties and do it very slowly. I want you to feel your exposure to me."

She would slide her hands under her skirt, raise the hem and hook her thumbs under the waistband of her silk underwear, the thin, dainty covering of midnight blue already dangerously soaked through. His eyes would hold no mercy, no quarter as she tugged them down over her hips, down her legs until they fell at her feet. She would step from them, having entered a new realm of vulnerability.

He would tell her to pick them up and put them to her nose to smell her own arousal. She would not wish to but his voice would be too firm to resist. She would obey.

"Are they wet?" he would ask.

"Yes, Master," she would confess.

"You're aroused. Why?" he would want to know.

"Because...of what you're going to do to me."

"Come to me, then," he would say. "It's time to deal with that insolent ass of yours."

And she would go, prepared to drape herself over his lap but there was one further order.

"Lift your skirt, lie across me bare-assed."

She would raise the skirt, exposing ass and pussy—a kind of delicious humiliation would ensue. One that spoke to fantasy and dark need.

Finally, unable to bear the waiting any longer, she would submit herself, pressing her pelvis to his, crawling over his lap, his cock hard underneath his jeans. She would make a bridge of her

body, feet and palms to the floor. She would try to keep her body above his, leaving a little gap between their sexes but he would quickly deal with her.

She would squeal as the first smack—decisive, masterful—driving her down, pussy grinding. His hand remained—rubbing, caressing. Her buttocks throbbed, she whimpered, naked sex dripping. It was only the beginning...

“Tempest, are you paying attention?”

Bruce’s clipped, typically impatient tone cut an immediate swath through Tempest’s fantasy bubble. “Yes, Bruce, you’re talking about lines—clean ones. I can really see I still have a lot to learn from you.”

She prayed he hadn’t deviated too drastically from the script. Luckily, he was always open to people fawning over him, regardless of context.

“Yes.” He nodded, his plastic half frame glasses pushed down on his nose. He thought they made him look more intelligent. The same with the beard. Archimedes wore a beard, he was fond of pointing out and Pythagoras and Socrates.

Of course none of them were ass-kissing hacks who had only managed to get a partnership because they had married the daughter of the previous owner—supposedly an even more notorious bastard.

“That’s true. Everyone can learn.” He turned his chair sideways, to the left, which he considered his best profile. His personal assistant Sally, who never missed a chance to stab him in the back, reported she had seen him one time spending hours practicing poses. “Even I must keep learning.”

The false modesty made her want to gag. He thought he knew everything. It was an honest mistake, given that he knew nothing and had no clue what he might be missing out on.

“Bruce, about the Garrison designs...” She hoped he would repeat at this point anything he had said as to what she was supposed to do with them.

"You know Lamar Garrison hunts deer." Bruce bounced off on a tangent. "Took me to his preserve in Florida. Fourteen hours straight sitting in a deer blind, waiting for a kill. Now that is something, Tempest."

"Yes, it really is something," she agreed.

"Shoulder to shoulder with your fellow hunters. That is what being a man is all about."

No, it wasn't, she thought. Being a man meant knowing how to use your hands, to work your craft, to work your woman. It meant being brave enough to make a sculpture depicting a Dominant and a submissive in a society too scared of its own sexuality to recognize or accept the richness of alternate lifestyles.

"I'll let you in on a little secret, Tempest. I didn't get a deer that day. Do you know why?"

Because you're too much of an imbecile to have figured out how to shoot the gun? "I have no idea, Bruce, tell me, why."

"It wasn't my time to kill. There wasn't a deer with my name on it. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

She tried to picture a poor deer with "moron" stamped on its hide. "Um...you're saying that you missed all your shots?"

"I didn't miss. I hit but on a different plane." He raised a finger, whirling his leather chair, fit for the Starship Booby Prize. "See, that's where a woman can't understand."

I understand fine, she wanted to scream, you're a male chauvinist pig, a macho wannabe who can't be happy in anything he does. She could never picture Aiden hunting or doing anything else he wasn't comfortable with. He was his own man, he commanded respect and damn, she missed his touch on her body. A few hours were too long, way too long.

"Bruce, I really need to get to work," she said.

"Fine. Good work on the Garrison designs, by the way."

There was a break. He had managed to forget whatever complaints he had, or maybe he was feeling too lazy to look at any corrections. It was after one, he was probably due for his nap.

"Thanks." Tempest made a dash for the door.

She was about to count her lucky stars when she saw him standing by her cubicle, her sorry excuse for an office.

"Aiden..." *You shouldn't be here*, she wanted to say but the words stuck in her throat.

"Hello, Tempest."

The way he said her name made her knees weak with desire. No one had ever pronounced her name as he did, as if he knew things about her she didn't, as if she was this wonderful prize he had discovered.

At the same time, his voice held an edge. He was here to dominate.

What could he do in public, though? He might spank her in a fantasy but not in the real world. Her relative impunity gave her courage—or was she just gearing up to be a brat.

"I'm really busy, this isn't a good time."

"I knew you wouldn't take my phone calls and I need to talk to you."

"Well, that's not my problem..." She was trying to keep her voice to a whisper.

Not quiet enough to avoid Sally's sharp ears, however.

"Aiden? Aiden Phillips?" Sally was waltzing up, ever the blonde huntress in her too-tight skirt and button-popping sweater. Every man drooled over her, Bruce included.

"Yes?" said Aiden flatly.

"It's me, don't you remember, darling? The exhibition in Paris? Last year?"

Tempest frowned. How exactly had this treacherous witch connected herself to Aiden?

Aiden allowed her to hug him and kiss both cheeks.

Tempest wanted to tear her eyes out. Aiden was taken. Even if Tempest didn't exactly want him, he was not on the market.

"We had such a marvelous time, didn't we?" Sally continued to ingratiate herself. "I was with Bruce—we were getting ideas for the Foxworth Gallery. Turned out wonderfully, didn't it?"

"I'm really not a judge of architecture," Aiden said.

Tempest smiled inwardly. Translation—he hates it, you blonde bimbo.

Sally was oblivious to the weak compliment. "Aiden, we simply must get together. Are you free for dinner?"

"I don't have plans," said Aiden.

Tempest's heart dropped through the floor. Why wasn't he telling Sally he was busy...with her?

Because you told him you weren't interested, that's why.

Tempest cleared her throat. Time for a little white lie. "But, Aiden, aren't you forgetting something—the play?"

Sally and Aiden both looked at her.

"The play?" asked Aiden.

Tempest laughed, covering her nerves as Sally dissected her. "Men are so forgetful, aren't they?"

"Yes, they can be," said Sally, watching like a vulture as Tempest hooked her arm in Aiden's, giving a clear "he's mine, bitch, stay away" signal. "So what play are you going to see?"

Tempest squeezed his arm. "Tell her, Aiden. You remember now, don't you?"

"No," said Aiden. "Sorry, I still don't."

"Oh...well, it's called...*The...The Firm Hand.*"

Nice going, girl, there's a subtle title.

"I haven't heard of that one," said Sally.

"Yeah, it's kind of underground. Um, Sally, would it be all right if I took the afternoon off? You don't think Bruce would mind? Because we need to get the tickets. I mean, we need to get in line..."

"Must be a popular play," said Sally.

Why don't I just shoot myself now? thought Tempest.

"What Tempest means," Aiden came to her rescue. "Is that the play is out of town. A friend of mine is producing it upstate. I can't believe I forgot it was today. I was thinking next month. Guess I shouldn't have my head in the clouds so much, huh?"

He gave Sally such a charming smile that she forgot all about being suspicious. "Oh but Aiden, the results are so worth it in your case."

"I do it for my public," he said. "People like you."

Sally batted her eyelashes. "Tempest, take all the time you need. Aiden is not a man we keep waiting, is he?"

"No," Tempest agreed. "He isn't."

"Come along, Tempest." Aiden hugged her close, hip to hip. She had a feeling she was in trouble.

"Aiden, you're a lifesaver," she said when they got to the street.

He didn't say a word as he ushered her to a small sports car. "Wow, this is beautiful, Aiden." She tried to get on his good side. "I love this color. British racing green, isn't it?"

Opening the passenger door, he helped her in. Her heart pounded as he settled his sleek, masculine body into the driver's seat. His legs in those jeans, the way his arms bent to clutch the wheel—she could do things to him right now.

"Aiden, you're not upset, are you?" She kissed his cheek. "About what I said back there? I just couldn't let Sally near you."

"You need to sit back, Tempest, and buckle your seat belt."

She stopped short of saying *Yes, Sir*. Screw him if he thought she would knuckle under. As a matter of fact, as memory served, she was the one mad at him, the one with grievances. And unfounded though they might be, they gave her power.

"You're lucky I'm riding with you at all. You show up at my job, you embarrass me with Sally and that stunt last night, forcing your way into my bedroom so you can have your way with me—"

"Tempest, I really don't want to have this discussion now. You will remain silent until spoken to."

Her pussy felt a hot stab at the sudden act of male control. He didn't dare tell her when to talk...did he?

"Fuck you, Aiden, it's a free country."

"But you're not free when you're alone with me. You're my submissive."

"I'm not anything to you," she snapped. "Except very pissed off at you."

"You lied back at the office," he said, trying to turn things against her. "You put me in the awkward position of covering for you or exposing you. And this morning—where do I even begin with this morning."

Tempest pursed her lips. "I got a little carried away but I can explain."

"No, you won't explain. You'll obey."

The tone of his voice got to her at a deep level.

She offered no reply.

They drove a few miles out of the city.

She began to squirm in her seat. She was very wet. Aiden was treating her as his submissive and she had a feeling things had just begun to heat up.

Aiden exited the highway and took a smaller road, leading upstate. "Since you manipulated for us to spend the rest of the day together, Tempest, we will do just that. But I promise you, by the end of it, you'll think twice about ever pulling a stunt like that again."

She swallowed hard. Was her safe word still in effect? She couldn't imagine he would suddenly put her in a captive position. On the other hand, she did feel very much at his mercy. She wanted to please him. She wanted to be a good girl.

"Take off your panties," Aiden ordered.

The command hit like a hot slap, warming her cheeks, her breasts, her belly. "H-here?" she said, stalling for time.

Aiden turned and gave her a look. "Do you really want to be in more trouble than you already are?"

"No," she replied.

"You may call me Master."

"Yes, Master." Her pulse raced. They were slipping right back into their roles, hot and wild but it was different today, more wide open.

She lifted her bottom off the leather seat. She had to brace her feet on the carpeted floor. It was easier to take her shoes off first. Tempest wriggled, pulling down her underwear. The air hit her pussy, making it burn.

She kicked the panties off, leaving them on the floor.

"Pull your skirt up to your waist," he instructed. "I want your naked ass on the seat."

His voice was harsh, his words coarse. The submissive urges flooded her body in response. "What are you going to do to me?" she said huskily.

"Did I give you permission to speak?"

"No, Master."

"Unbutton your blouse."

She was in trouble.

She opened it down to her waist.

"Lean forward."

Tempest did so. With maddening ease, Aiden reached across and inserted his fingers under her bra.

She whimpered as he punished her nipple. "I'm sorry, Master."

Too late she realized that was a violation too. What a terrible slave she was.

"Legs wide apart," he commanded.

Tempest thrust her thighs apart, offering him unobstructed access, letting him know she remembered that she was his.

He released her nipple. "In the glove box there's a pair of handcuffs. Get them."

Her mouth was dry as a desert. If she had any doubts that Aiden was a real Master, this blew them out of the water.

Then again mastery wasn't about steel or ropes or commands, it was about presence, attracting and holding a woman in one's orbit.

She bent and reached for the glove box. Her legs would stay spread until Aiden said otherwise.

The handcuffs were gleaming silver. Her heart raced as she encountered a fleshy dildo next to them. The material made her fingers tingle. She wanted that cock. She wanted to be filled. Better yet, she wanted Aiden to take her himself.

"Attach both cuffs to your left wrist," he ordered. "I want you to taste bondage. I would never chain you in the car for safety reasons but later you'll be naked and helpless, your sweet body covered in chains. I know a place where a man and a woman can live out every fantasy."

The metal cuffs clicked in place. She shuddered, knowing they could not be removed without a key. The symbolism of ownership was clear.

"You felt the dildo while you were looking for the cuffs?" he asked.

"Yes." Her voice was barely audible.

"What do you think I want you to do with that dildo, Tempest?"

"P-put it inside myself," she replied.

"Are you nice and wet to take a dildo, slave girl?"

"Yes, Master." Her answer left her no option but to be the horny wench she was inside.

"Only a submissive would be aroused by all this, you know that."

"Yes, Master." He'd made his point. She hoped he wouldn't drag out her torture too much longer. But that was his prerogative, wasn't it? Not too mention her own twisted pleasure.

"I want that dildo wet ahead of time," he commanded. "How do you think we could do that?"

Her heart reverberated with her burning need. "I could...suck it, Master."

"You would like that, wouldn't you?" he asked, picking up speed. The air was so much clearer out here, it made her feel primeval, as if he was some kind of caveman taking her away to his lair.

"Yes...I'd like to...for you."

"Show me," he said. "Show me how you service a cock."

The chain on her wrist jingled as she raised the large, artificial shaft to her lips. The road was empty but what if a car went by?

"Very slowly, Tempest. Lovingly, like it's a real man's cock. If someone comes along, I will tell you to take it out."

"Yes, Master..."

She closed her eyes, trusting he would protect her privacy, her honor. At the same time, she gloried in being on the edge, doing something she would never dare to do alone. He wanted her to—he was hard, he was enjoying it—that was enough to arouse her, to drive her out of her mind with lust.

She kissed the rounded head of the dildo, feeling wanton. Her lips trembled. Was he watching? Her breath quickened, she opened wider, just sliding the tip inside.

Oh god, he was touching her, his right hand possessively on her thigh—naked for him, smooth, warm skin. Thank goodness she had shaved her legs just yesterday morning. He seemed pleased. He kneaded her flesh very slowly, as if he had all the time in the world. She sucked in a ragged breath as his fingers crept to the juncture of her thighs.

Time to show more affection to the dildo. She ran her tongue along the underside, letting him know what she wanted to do to him.

His fingers parted her pussy lips. She moved forward against him.

He delivered a stinging slap to her inner thigh. "Don't move, girl."

She whimpered, consoling herself with the dildo. Like a pacifier, she pleased it.

Meanwhile Aiden continued to have his way with her—teasing, exploring.

Tempest felt herself dripping on the expensive leather seats.

She imagined him having her lick it up when they got where they were going, long sensuous slides of her tongue, catlike along the material as he stood above her, with a whip in his hand ready to flick it or snap it across her bare ass, depending on how good a job she did.

Wow, she really was creating this slavery stuff in her own mind, just like he had said.

Tempest demonstrated her helplessness, her hot, needy frustration. She deep-throated the dildo, slurping loudly.

"You're a hungry little thing, aren't you?"

"Mmmm..."

"Use one hand to play with your nipples," he ordered.

Tempest moaned. He was too cruel, a sensual sadist but she had asked for all this, naughty girl that she was.

She worked her fingers under her bra. Her nipple throbbed, hot and rubbery in her grip. She gave it a little twist, half wincing, half moaning.

"You're catching on," he chuckled.

Not moving was the hardest part. She didn't want to be disciplined again but her every instinct was to writhe, to free her body by seeking contact with his.

Twice more she earned slaps to her thigh. He knew how to work the soft skin, delivering just a hint of real pain. More than anything, her ego was singed. He was really doing it to her, treating her like a slave, in his car, no less.

"Take the dildo and put it inside yourself, Tempest," he instructed. "And as you do so, tell me, have you ever been used anally?"

Every last remaining ounce of strength drained from her body. The way he spoke of the act, as if such an intimacy were of no more importance than giving someone a stick of gum.

Or was it the way he said it—not "Have you had anal sex?", but "Have you been used anally?"

"No, Master," she replied breathlessly, gently inserting the dildo into her aching cavity. Her pussy lips easily parted, glistening with evidence of her submission. She couldn't hold back the groan as she possessed herself with the shaft—correction—as he possessed her, through her own guiding hand.

"Is it something you've wanted?" His hand was at her mouth, his fingers moist with her fragrant liquids.

"I-I've always been too scared," she admitted, taking his fingers into her mouth to suck clean.

He let her tend to them, taking full advantage of her sweet servility. She kept her lips soft against him, her mouth pleasingly gentle. He was Master, he was owner.

"But you're curious?"

"Mmm..." She nodded.

"It will feel right the way we do it," he promised. "It will come naturally as part of your submission. You won't want to hold back anything from me."

The swaggering confidence of his statement made her spasm. Not arrogance but a complete assuredness.

"Do I have permission to climax?" she asked. She was not begging, she was informing him of the state of her body, that he might command it more fully.

"No. You will leave the dildo in place and settle back against the seat."

"Y-yes, Master."

Breathing was difficult.

"I'll try to go easy on the bumps," he teased.

"Thank you, Master." With every little jolt, every bump in the road, she was being fucked, pushed over an edge that no woman was ever meant to resist.

"M-Master, I want to be good..."

"I know you do, that's why you have to fight. Your orgasms don't belong to you, Tempest, they are mine to summon, to hold back, to use for my own ends."

Her head fell back against the seat. "I never thought...a man could do this..." she exclaimed in wonder.

"It takes the right man." He held her hand. "And the right woman."

"Aiden?" She sighed dreamily, full and empty at the same time.

"Yes, angel?"

"I...love you."

The realization only hit her as the words came out. Was it true? Yes, it was. It might not make sense but she simply had to say it, there was no other way to proceed through this.

His grip stiffened and instantly she knew she had said something wrong.

"Master, I didn't mean to —"

"It's all right," he said. "There's something between us, that's obvious."

If occurred to her now that she shouldn't really have to apologize for saying something like that but this was BDSM, maybe there were different rules for appropriate context and all? Maybe slave Tempest wasn't supposed to love Master Aiden, just Aiden and Tempest, the people?

"Come, Tempest, climax for me."

In the back of her mind she thought this might be some kind of diversion to change the subject but her mind had very little to do with what was going on at the moment. It was her body at the forefront and Aiden had tripped the trigger.

"Oh...oh...god..." She reached for him. He clutched her left hand in his as she brought herself off with the right. She nearly levitated, her body straining at the lap belt. Her teeth chattered. The car was racing along and she was plunging into an unknown ravine...made a million times more uncertain by her confession and his guarded, fairly negative response.

Never tell a man you love him first, it gives him all the power. But wasn't he supposed to have all the power? He was the big bad Dominant. *Damn it, Tempest, why can't you ever keep your mouth shut? You've as good as scared this one away like all the others.*

She pushed the dildo in and out, trying to savor every second, trying to live in that moment, that eternal instant of pussy throbbing, spasming bliss. One orgasm quickly exploded into the next, an unexpected crescendo.

She held him all the tighter.

"That's it, baby," he crooned, giving no indication he was anywhere but with her...fully. "Oh, yeah, I love to see you this way."

That was enough to keep her going. She supposed she really must be in love, because she was climaxing for him, finding pleasure in whatever it did for him. His hard cock, his fast-beating heart.

No wonder she had tried to push him away. Talk about laying yourself wide open for someone.

Tempest rested her head against his shoulder when the last of the quakes passed through her. Her pussy continued to echo the powerful motions of the dildo, which now rested on the floor, safely on top of her panties to prevent any stains from getting on the carpet.

After all, she already had her work cut out for her with the seat.

"You please me very much, Tempest, you know that?"

She purred against him.

"Are you hungry?"

"Mmm..." She lowered her head to his lap playfully, indicating just what she was hungry for.

His hand gathered in her hair, forming a fist. He pulled her upright. She liked the pressure, the keen animalism of it. Her eyes were hot on his.

"You really do need to learn not to touch without asking," he scolded.

She nibbled his ear. "Sorry, Master."

"Don't worry about it." He winked. "I will get even at dinner."

She bit her lower lip. She didn't doubt it, not for a second.

Chapter Five

Asgaard's Inn was a retreat for the kinky. A place where those who practiced Dominance and submission could let their hair down.

It could also be a place of intense sexual stimulation and dismay for a newbie like Tempest.

Aiden was stunned at the sight of her at the entrance to the dining hall. The transformation from beautiful professional woman to wanton slave girl had been incredible, not to mention arousing as hell.

Lydia, the co-proprietor along with her husband and lifestyle Master, Grantham, had dressed Tempest in red—a short, diaphanous covering rather like a negligee, with a gold chain about her waist. The garment was cut low and covered only about half of her thighs. It was not the sort of dress in which to bend over too far or sneeze too violently, lest one end up completely uncovered.

Aiden's cock swelled just thinking of the possibilities. Everything he wanted to do to that pale, sweet body of hers. From the swell of her ass darkening the silk, to the graceful movements of her legs, to the way she tried in vain to conceal the tight buds of her nipples, she was a pure wonder.

Lydia had left her barefoot, as a good slave girl should be. She had bells on her ankles and thick gold bracelets on her wrists, like shackles. She also wore a necklace of coins. It hung to the tops of her breasts, advertising the sweet curves of her bosom.

Tempest's hair was long and loose, a flame down her back. She seemed vaguely lost, a little irritated...until she laid eyes on him.

He saw the wonder in her eyes, the way she was gauging his reaction. There was no mistaking the meaning of that grin on his face.

She put her head down, blushing.

Lydia ushered her forward after whispering something in her ear.

Tempest approached the cushion on which Aiden was sitting cross-legged. Grantham, the only other person in the room, offered his quick approval.

"She's stunning, old man," he said with his crisp English accent. "You've done splendidly for yourself."

"She's not really mine," Aiden felt obligated to say.

"Are you sure about that?" said Grantham. "I saw the way she looked at you. She's yours, whether you're aware of it or not."

His heart clenched like a fist, squeezing. There was no denying Tempest's attraction. She had already confessed her love to him and he had little doubt if he called upon her, she would follow.

What was it they said about getting what you want? When this had been a hunt—a theoretical game played in the gallery with statues for bait—it had seemed so clear that he wanted a woman like Tempest more than anything in the world. But now he was unsure, though his lust remained. If anything, it was more intense than when he had met her.

Another question he had was who was really calling the shots? Were they here at this romantic, remote castle of kink because of his will and drive...or hers? He had only planned to talk to her, to have coffee as he had with Danyelle.

Things had taken on a life of their own. She had thrown him a curve ball when Sally showed up and he had had to race to catch up and stay ahead. You certainly couldn't be a lazy or dull-minded Dominant around Tempest, that was for sure.

The idea of the dining room—and this was a really amazing spectacle when it was full—was to duplicate a kind of medieval or Oriental experience, with all-powerful men on their cushions like princes or sultans and serving girls at their beck and call.

Aiden had enjoyed himself thoroughly here in the past and he intended to do so with Tempest. If past performance was any indication, they were in for quite a show.

The one thing he had warned her about was that they would be playing in front of another couple. Tempest said she had no problem with that, though she wanted to know if the safe word was still in effect.

"It is and I want to add one thing more," he said. "If you are unable to speak, for whatever reason, you may raise your right index finger. If you can do neither of those, raise both eyebrows together in a repetitive motion. I will be watching at all times."

He could see her brain working overtime trying to figure out why she wouldn't be able to talk or signal with her hands. She would find out soon enough.

The floor was made of slate. He could imagine how it felt to her, walking barefoot.

Aiden considered it a good piece of luck that the Inn was empty tonight. Lydia and Grantham had actually planned on a private evening but when their old friend had shown up they had insisted on showing hospitality.

As Tempest approached, he could see the anticipation building. She stopped just before the carpeted area, on which was spread a large Oriental rug—a jetliner-sized flying carpet. She took a deep breath, accentuating her peaked breasts and lowered herself to her knees.

Oh, yes, this was what Aiden dreamed of late into the night—the perfect slave girl, his before he would know her name. His pulse quickened as she crawled forward on her hands and knees.

"Wonder if you might be interested in sharing?" Grantham teased.

"No, sorry, not on the menu," said Aiden, feeling a surge of possessiveness. Therein lay the rub, even if he did not know exactly how to proceed in a relationship with her, it was becoming more and more impossible to imagine her with another.

She knelt up as she reached his bare feet. His legs were crossed. He wore comfortable pantaloons and a brocaded, open vest. The costumes were meant to accentuate the exotic feel...and the need to dominate. "Master, how may your slave serve you?"

"If you mean food," he said, "that will have to wait." He patted his hand on his lap, ordering her to come and sit. She crawled up to him, sensuous, erotically tense.

She was aware of Grantham, aware of Lydia, aware of every sight and sound. He kissed her cheek and her neck, nuzzling. She sighed, settling against him. The act of sweet and delicate trust on her part swelled his heart...and his cock.

Aiden took her hand and slipped it beneath his pantaloons. She gasped at the feel of him—raw, powerful and erect. Her lip disappeared between her teeth. She turned her head, a little surreptitious glance at Grantham. She was a little self-conscious.

He cupped his hand on her breast, redirecting attention where it belonged.

"Fruit, Masters?" Lydia approached, kneeling with a tray.

Aiden reached for a sweet, ripe strawberry. "Open," he ordered Tempest.

She parted her lips. He gave her a bite of the strawberry. It was juicy—a tiny line of red ran down the corner of her mouth. He licked the juice from her cheek.

She smiled, releasing a little sigh.

Aiden fed her the rest of the strawberry.

Then he took her ripe, red lips. She clutched at his cock and gave her mouth hungrily.

Lydia had set the tray down and was feeding her own husband and Master. Grantham was taking bites of an apple from her hand as the Rubenesque Lydia knelt between his legs, her long platinum hair in a braid down her back like a Norse goddess. A slave goddess, to be precise, complete with golden gown and silver collar and bracelets on each wrist.

Noting Aiden's interest in metal confinement, Grantham pulled a pair of steel cuffs, covered in fur, from the pockets of his long robe-style jacket.

"Much obliged," said Aiden, taking the opportunity to bend his slave forward and cuff her hands behind her back.

She whimpered, deprived of the chance to play with his cock. He would redirect her soon enough, though.

"Have you any of that spiced meat I like so well?" Aiden inquired.

"Indeed, we do. Splendid idea for a second course." He snapped his fingers and Lydia immediately responded, off to do his bidding. She returned in a few moments from the kitchen with a large bowl of delicious-smelling meat—long strips of marinated steak, tender and succulent. The meat was cooked over an open flame, encrusted in sesame seeds and coated with a light layering of seasonings absolutely unique in all of Aiden's travels.

Grantham simply would not reveal the secret recipe no matter how hard Aiden tried to induce him.

"Master Aiden," said Lydia. "I assumed you would want this as well?"

"Yes, you read my mind." He smiled at the sight of the black blindfold, sized just right for a woman's head.

He took it from Lydia's gold-ringed fingers and placed it over Tempest's head. "Can you see?" he asked.

"No, Master." The blindfold smoothed over her eyes. It was a perfect sign of slavery, the perfect instrument of power.

"On your knees," he ordered. "At my feet."

He helped her down into position, her knees pressing into the patterned carpeting, soft and erotic. She leaned her body against his thigh. Her mouth was only a few inches from his cock. He would have her sample that after they shared some of the meat.

"Do you smell that, slave?"

"Yes, Master," she rasped.

"I want you to find my mouth, take the steak from between my teeth."

Aiden took a piece and bit down gently. The little tidbit was just long enough to make the game fun. He leaned forward, waiting for his clever slave to find him.

Tempest wrinkled her nose, trying to sniff out the meat. Aiden teased her with it, brushing her lips. She opened her mouth. He pulled his head back, forcing the chained slave to throw herself against him.

He let her chew the meat from her end. They met in the middle.

Aiden seized her upper arms, positioning her for a deep kiss. She surrendered softly as his tongue claimed her mouth, exploring its contours, marking them.

He put a piece of meat in her mouth now and had her bite down, so he could nibble the exposed end. He made a slow go of it, sensuously chewing. She ate from her end, practically panting.

Next Aiden fed her a small piece as he played with her breasts. Her head swayed to and fro. She could barely concentrate on her chewing.

“Pay attention.” He tweaked her left nipple through the thin slave garment. Her body shivered as she sought to obey.

He gave her another piece, this time touching her as he did, playing with the folds of her labia, teasing the opening. Her sweet liquids dripped from swollen pussy lips. Tempest laid her head on Aiden’s shoulder, in a sign of affection and surrender. Feeling an overwhelming sense of nurturance, he whispered in her ear, asking her if she was still hungry and would she like some more.

“Yes,” she said tenderly. “Thank you, Master.”

He gave her a couple more pieces, enjoying how she chewed so appreciatively. He really did care about her. She fascinated him and it would be very hard to imagine this being their last time together.

On the other hand, the way forward – together – was just as cloudy. A real woman confessing love... That was a lot more difficult than a statue.

He wished he could freeze things, hold them as they were, so he could mold them and make them into art.

Why wasn’t life like the medium of his work?

"Tempest," he said. "Will you do something for me? Here, in front of the others? If you don't want to, I understand and I won't be disappointed."

In her artificial darkness, she leaned in and rubbed her cheek over his cock, reading his mind. "Yes, Master, I will pleasure you. I want to."

Groaning slightly, he stretched out his legs.

He guided her into place and took out his aching shaft. On a whim, he took a finger full of the marinade and rubbed it over his cock head. She made a hungry little mewling noise. Following the scent, she applied her lips, licking off the juice. He smiled, putting his hands on her shoulders. She worked her way up his shaft, wasting no time.

Aiden was as anxious as she. He was very near the point of climax.

"Yes," she gasped. "I want...to swallow."

He gritted his teeth, releasing. Her sweet mouth sucked at him as he released all his hot pent-up cum between her lips to the back of her throat, very much a sign of his devotion for her, his trust.

"Mmm," she sighed, licking him clean. "Now that's what I call a balanced diet."

Aiden drew her to his lips for a kiss, their lips quickly melding and unifying as they communicated to one another their thanks, their mutual pleasure and future lusts. "That was phenomenal, baby. You're phenomenal. No one has ever responded like you, moved like you, it was like we were breathing together, sensing each other completely."

This would have been a good opportunity to tell her he loved her. He owed her one, didn't he? But you couldn't count love that way. It had to come spontaneously, not as tit for tat.

"You're not so bad yourself, Master."

"Tempest." He had a brainstorm. "Are you open to something different?"

"With you," she said, melting his heart. "Anything."

He stood, released her cuffed wrists and took her arm. "That's my girl."

He was proud of her, right here in front of his friends. He had done well, hadn't he?

Aiden led the still blindfolded Tempest to the center of the room. "Put your hands over your head," he said.

She smiled, showing not the least bit of fear.

His hand circled her waist. "You're making me hard again already, sweetheart."

She pushed against him. "Good."

There were chains built into the ceiling, at regular intervals. He pulled a set down. They were attached to leather cuffs. Aiden fit one snugly around each of Tempest's slender wrists. A couple of minor adjustments and the chains were drawn taut.

His dream slave girl was on tiptoes.

"I'm helpless," she said, pointing out the obvious.

"How does it make you feel?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

"Open your legs, we'll find out."

She moved her feet apart as best she could.

Aiden observed her glistening inner thighs, the dripping liquid from out of her labia. "You're very aroused."

"Yes, Master."

"You're a good little girl, open for Master."

She shivered. "Yes..."

"I think we'll lock those legs in place with a nice spreader bar."

"Yes, Master."

"A slave girl doesn't close her legs whenever she likes, does she?"

"No, Master, her body is owned."

"I like to view my property." He ran a hand over her hip. "I like to play with it too."

She moaned softly.

"I'm going to flog you, Tempest."

She stiffened—the reaction caused his cock to leap to attention. The power was what did it for him and the mutual connection it implied.

“Yes, Master.”

Lydia brought him the flogger. He would never leave Tempest at a time like this. He would keep his hand, or his whip, on her body at all times.

“I’m proud of you,” he reiterated.

“Th-thank you.” Her body jolted as he ran the flogger along her side. It had a braided black handle and was tipped with strips of soft leather. It could be used to tease or sting...or both.

“I want to see your breasts turn pink,” he said. “And your ass cheeks.”

She thrust her bosom out to him. “Mark me, Master, make me look the way you desire.”

Lydia had also brought the ankle spreaders. He knelt before her, affixing one dainty ankle and then the other. He took the time to caress her calves, to run his hands along the tops of her feet. She shifted slightly from the contact.

The reality of her predicament was brought home to her. “My pussy...it’s totally vulnerable.”

“Yes.” He ran his fingers over her mons. “It belongs to me. You know I would never hurt it, never hurt you.”

“I know that, Master.”

But how could she know? How could she be sure of things he didn’t know himself? This was human flesh, not stone. She wasn’t some creature of Phil-crete he had just whipped up.

Aiden stood. The open sex in front of him was too irresistible a target. He breezed across her belly with the flogger, all the way to her breasts.

Not yet...

"This is the most sensitive part of you." He returned to her pussy, dragging the soft tips across the pulsing flesh. "Except for your heart..."

Aiden snapped the whip very gently, giving her a taste.

She threw back her head, absorbing the novel sensation, the pleasure mixed with the sting. A submissive grew to crave such things under the right nurturing. Aiden was not without experience. He knew the practical things, he was good at BDSM. But the heart, as he had told Tempest, was a hell of a lot more fragile and complex than flesh and bones.

Once more he teased, than slapped her pussy again. Her entire body writhed against the bonds, the perfect picture of beauty in bondage.

Aiden stood back. A brief flick across her nipples was all the warning he gave.

Thwack, over her breasts. At once her skin blushed, heat rising, reacting.

He flogged them again. She thrashed her head.

"How does that feel?"

Tempest moaned. "I...it..."

He smiled. She was unable to form the words, unable to think straight. Good. She was having fun. He certainly was.

Back and forth, enjoying the motions as she extended herself, needing the contact even as it messed with her senses.

Aiden took the handle of the flogger and put it between her legs. "My hot, whipped girl. Ready to come for Master?"

"Yesssss..." She hissed the word, her teeth bared, her chest rising and falling, a sheen of sweat covering her.

He pushed the handle inside her. She began to spasm at once, a tide overcoming her.

"Yes, that's it," he encouraged. "That is what I want to see."

The orgasm spiraled itself out, all while tightly confined, hands still overhead, legs obscenely spread.

"Tempest," he sighed. He went around behind her, trailing his fingers around to her buttocks. It was time to turn them pink as well.

"Count for me," he said.

"One," she gasped as he swatted her posterior. He continued through to five, enjoying the continued little twitches, the movements of her toes in a little dance, flirting with the pain.

He rubbed her bottom. "Feels nice, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Master. I'm tingling all over."

"Later," he reminded her, "I'm going in your ass."

"Yes, Master..." Her words were a sigh of seduction, enough to spur on any Dominant.

He slapped at her five more times, enjoying her increasingly tense voice as she counted to ten. Tempest was mildly uncomfortable. Tempest was following orders. Tempest was his.

"Grantham," said Aiden. "Lydia. I think we are ready to retire for the evening."

"Of course," said Grantham.

Aiden undid the cuffs. Tempest fell into his arms. He lifted her off her feet. He would carry her. She was his responsibility. She'd surrendered to him, given everything. And now he wanted more.

There was balance to the universe. As an artist, he knew this. Even with Dominance and submission, there was an occasion when one did not take without giving. Was the balance being maintained with her? Pleasure-wise, yes. The rest remained to be seen.

Sooner or later they would have to have that talk Tempest had managed to postpone.

* * * * *

Tempest was lost in her own world. A world with Aiden as center, a force of gravity, a rock, a sexy god of Domination. At present he was carrying her to their room at this remarkable inn. She liked Grantham and Lydia—they were creative, offbeat people. Lydia did weavings and Grantham made pottery which they sold in the off-season, in the winter, when few people came to their little hideaway.

Apparently, they were well known in the BDSM community and highly appreciated for their wisdom and leadership. Tempest could see how people would feel safe here to explore. She had surprised herself by feeling comfortable enough to behave in such sexy ways in front of the two of them. They were close to Aiden, that helped but also there was something about taking on that submissive's role.

She was able to let go of things, to let her actions be dictated by Aiden's will. The fascinating thing was she knew it would end in pleasure for her and the very act of submission itself was titillating.

The flogger was good, a wicked little device that definitely brought things out in her. She'd wanted to crawl, she'd wanted to beg...she'd wanted to jump on top of Aiden and screw him senseless. Maybe that could be worked into the agenda?

He'd had other things in mind, though. Warming her ass and breasts with the flogger had been one of those things. It really turned her on how when he said something, he did exactly that, no more, no less. That appealed to her order-loving side. The consistency was good. Men generally ran hot and cold and growing up she'd seen a lot of male chaos inflicted on their poor mother, who never strong enough to assert her feminine sensibilities.

Tempest loved Aiden. That was a fact she was comfortable with. How he'd ultimately respond, she couldn't control. The best she could do was to be honest. That was a strength submissives had. She could see that now. Being the Master, the one in charge was probably a lot harder. You had to make all the choices, think for two people and not one.

It was tough enough in the bedroom. What if someone had to run another's life twenty-four/seven? Imagine running Danyelle's life—that was a heart attack waiting to happen. Danyelle was kinky, she owned handcuffs. Would she ever submit to a man? It would be fascinating to see. She would never give up her will or identity but she might well find herself tamed, her body made into the playground of a loving man.

Aiden laid Tempest down on the bed. She felt the bedspread under her sore bottom—the soft velvet soothing, arousing and tickling all at once.

"You are so gorgeous, Tempest," he said throatily.

I love you, she wanted to scream but she knew she had to cool her jets. He would bring the subject up when he was ready.

"Please, Master," she said instead as he took her wrists one by one and bound them to velvet ropes. "Use me."

"Oh, I will." He spread her ankles, binding them to another set of velvet ropes.

She was tied down, open.

"Try to free yourself," he ordered.

Tempest pitted strength against her bonds. They held firm. "I can't, Master."

"That's right. I want you tied down and you'll stay that way."

"Yes, Master." She acknowledged his power, his position over her.

"Lift your bottom off the bed, show me your pussy."

Tempest displayed herself, her sex thrumming with need.

"Would you like to be penetrated, slave?"

"Yes, Master. Please, penetrate your slave." She was wheedling, playing into the cadence of his control.

"I already told you, you'll take it in the ass."

"Yes, Master. Thank you, Master."

So why was she tied up on her back?

"We're going to play a little game first."

"Master?"

He sat down on the bed beside her. "I have a candle, Tempest. It's furnished in the room for this one special purpose. Do you know what that purpose is?"

"No, Master." Tempest squirmed, anticipating something potentially painful.

"To drip hot wax," he said matter-of-factly, "on the bodies of slave girls."

She held her breath.

Trying not to imagine, not to think.

The first drip landed on her belly. It stung for only an instant before turning into a hard little drop, a warm knot on her skin.

"I wish you could see how this looks," he said.

She smiled. He could let her see, if he wanted to take the blindfold off.

Another drop on her stomach, another tiny sting.

She sucked in her tummy.

He dribbled more of the hot wax into the little valley, toward her belly button. Her entire body was flushed, alert, desperately seeking the next sensory assault.

Tempest thrashed as he dripped wax on her thigh. Was he going after her pussy?

Aiden dripped several more drops on her other thigh, just to the right of her sex.

"M-Master?"

He caressed her hip. "I want to see the wax on your breasts. Lift them to me."

She offered her body, a living sacrifice to his will, his art. "Mark me, Master. I want to be your wax goddess."

Tempest cried out as the wax splashed on her firm, tender breast. He kept the candle in place, letting more and more of it run over her breast. She felt like teeth were biting her, hot little vampire teeth. Aiden trickled more over her other breast.

"Wh-what color," she asked, suddenly needing to know, "is the wax?"

"It's white," he said. "Colored wax hurts like the dickens."

"Have you been marked much," she teased, "by your mistresses?"

"No. I test everything on myself."

She giggled, imagining the big strong Dominator dripping wax on his breast.

"What's so funny? I have to make sure that I won't be harming my subs."

"Your subs? Do you have a stable of them?" Tempest didn't like that idea very much. He could test on her if he wanted.

"You're jealous," he teased.

"I am not."

He tickled her. She screamed in laughter, joy and frustration. "Aiden, I swear, if you don't stop it—"

"What? What will you do?"

She frowned. "I'll use the safe word and spoil all the fun."

"I'll gag you so you can't talk."

"I'll do the little eyebrow thing, then."

"Damn." He feigned annoyance. "I knew I shouldn't have told you that."

"There are a lot of things you shouldn't have told me."

"Like what?"

She raised her head. "I don't kiss and tell."

He took her puckered lips, his mouth hotter than the wax. Her pussy muscles clenched at the empty air, her nipples molten little points of need, craving attention.

If he didn't fuck her soon...

"Know what I think?" He delivered a series of maddening little kisses over her cheeks and eyebrows.

"I'm...afraid to ask," she breathed.

He chuckled, slapping her hip. "I think it's time I fully exploited you like the little wench you are."

"You better, or I'm going to report you to the Masters' Union for dereliction of duty."

Aiden clamped down on her nipple with his teeth, just hard enough to make her whimper. "Care to rephrase that?"

"Yes, Master..." She fell into character, the conquered, bound slave. "I yield to you—exploit me."

"Beg for it," he said. "In the ass."

"P-please." The words poured, hot like wax, from her mouth, direct zaps to her pussy. "Fuck my ass, Master. Use it...own it."

He undid the velvet ropes. "Get on all fours," he said.

She turned her body, weak as a kitten but charged with electricity.

On her hands and knees, she waited.

Aiden's palm came from midair and smacked her ass. "Head down," he commanded. "Legs spread."

She complied, pussy dripping. "Yes, Master."

A few seconds passed.

He spanked her again, saying nothing.

"Sh-should I spread wider?" she asked, unable to bear the silence.

"No," he said. "That one was just because I can."

Tempest whimpered slightly, put in her place.

He smacked her again. That time she took it quietly.

Her cheeks continued to throb as she heard him move away for a moment. "I'm not going anywhere," he said.

"Yes, Master. Thank you, Master." She couldn't imagine being without him right now. The things he'd done to her, he'd made her so helpless, such a complete prisoner of her own sexual needs. She wanted to be fucked in the ass so badly. She had begged for it sincerely.

A drawer opened and closed. She started. Her senses were extremely heightened. She could feel his warmth, smell the deep, soapy scent of his cologne.

"This lubricant will help you," he said, applying the cold, squishy gel. "You'll be able to take more of my cock more quickly."

"Yes..." This is what she wanted. To take Aiden's cock, to be his anal wench, his good slave girl.

"Your ass is fantastic," he praised. "Especially when I've just spanked it."

She pushed her bottom out proudly.

He laughed lightly, pinching her. "You're a vain little thing."

She moaned as his finger worked its way in and out, loosening her tight hole.

"I want you to relax, Tempest, you're giving yourself. You're giving me a beautiful gift."

She smiled, he was so wise, always knowing just what to say. "Yes, Master...Aiden...take me. I want to feel you inside me, inside my ass, oh god, please."

Her words excited him. He moved into position and she felt his cock head pressing. He breathed deep and long and then he was inside her. In her ass.

"Oh, Tempest..."

He sounded so very satisfied, she couldn't help but open. It was like she had a second pussy. She was amazed. He felt tight going in but it didn't hurt. He was moving at just the right pace, gently and evenly thrusting in and out, pushing a little farther each time.

She clenched the comforter with her fingernails. She was going to want it harder, faster, very soon.

"You doing okay, baby?" he wanted to know.

He was so tender, even at a time like this.

"Yes, Master," she assured him. "Now shut up and fuck me."

He punished her ass with a hard smack, making her wince. It was worth it.

"See if I mollycoddle you again," he grumbled.

She cried out as he pushed deeper. At the same time he reached for her clit. "I can see you're ready to move right up to advanced torture," he proclaimed.

"No, Master, I'm just a poor little beginner slave girl."

"Like hell you are." Aiden rammed himself home.

"Nnnnn," she gasped.

He flicked his fingers over her clitoris. He had her impaled.

"What do you want?" he asked.

A trick question if ever there was one.

"I-I don't know, Master."

"What? My genius slave girl is actually at a loss?"

"I want to submit, Master."

"Good answer," he approved.

Aiden withdrew and pressed home again. He repeated the motion. He was fucking her for real now.

"Yes...yes...yes," she encouraged.

Aiden took hold of her hair, tugging at it, just hard enough to ratchet up the pleasure.

"Going...to...come..." he proclaimed.

She surrendered to the rhythm, the pounding jackhammer, like her ass was born for this, like she'd been waiting her whole life and why not? Had she ever had this kind of sex before, this kind of pleasure?

"I want you...to come too," he said, the words like machine gun bullets from his mouth.

She went off on command, his word and touch more than enough. Aiden erupted inside her, releasing with sheer abandon and pummeling lust. She was his perfect vessel, the object of his thorough domination. She tried to memorize every pulse, the way his cock felt, the way it communicated, swelling as his semen jetted out into her.

He groaned, deep and low and masculine, squeezing out the last drops.

Exhausted, Tempest collapsed to the bed. "Thank you," she murmured. "Master."

She felt drunk too weak and happy to speak.

She dimly remembered him taking off her blindfold, cleaning her up, gently soaping her with a cloth, taking off the wax and the layers of cum between her legs.

"Under the covers," he ordered.

Tempest fell asleep in seconds. She was pretty sure she said it as he kissed her forehead – the forbidden words she had tried so hard to hold back.

"I love you."

"Get some rest," he whispered back, putting her to sleep with a happy body but a potentially broken heart.

* * * * *

Aiden didn't sleep a wink. After putting Tempest to bed he wandered off to Grantham's studio to work out his frustrations on the wheel. Flinging the wet clay like dough onto the stone, pumping with his foot, setting everything into a whirl, his hands finding the rhythm.

Sometimes when Aiden watched people talking sign language it occurred to him there was a language in his hands, one he barely understood himself but which was worked out in the medium – fingers precisely communicating in the clay, turning mere lumps into life, or at least a good imitation.

He wasn't a potter by trade—sculpture definitely captured his heart—but he certainly understood the draw. He felt the same about Tempest. A man getting his hands on a woman like that, he was a fool to ever let go. But she needed to have the best brought out in her, as a stone or rock needed the right artist.

Once upon a time, he remembered hearing from a teacher, you could make two choices in life. Live for art, or people. Choose people and you'll bounce grandbabies on your knee and get a gold watch after forty years but you'll never be an artist. Choose art and sooner or later you'll live alone and everyone will admire you and call you a raving bastard behind your back.

Aiden had hoped to split the difference, attracting a woman with his statue. He thought about the story of Pygmalion, the sculptor turning his art into a real female, perfect in every way. The problem, as always, was the heart. What if Aiden's heart was stone? There was a reason a man got to be his age still living with his old buddy, playing video games.

Tempest found him brooding the next morning.

"Guess who?" She came up behind him, slipping her hands over his eyes.

"Tempest," he said, his view from the window of their quaint bedroom overlooking the forest now blocked.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing."

She didn't buy it, no woman ever had.

"This isn't 'nothing'." She made him turn to face her. "You're...different."

"I just want to get going," he said. "Don't you need to go? You have work, right?"

"I'm quitting my job," she announced.

"You're what?"

She looked excited. "I'm quitting the firm. I hate it and I deserve better."

"But...how will you survive."

"I don't know." She shrugged. "I have a lot of savings. Not like I spend much. Something will come my way. I will find my art, like you."

He frowned. "Not many people make a living at art."

She creased her brow. "I didn't expect this reaction."

"Well, you can't determine people's reactions."

"Thanks, Mr. Dominant, I'll remember that."

"I just want you to think this through. I mean, when did you come to this decision? You've been asleep all night."

"I decided a long time ago, I just didn't want to admit it."

He ran his hands through his hair. "I guess it's just a little bit of a shock. I'll have to adjust."

"Adjust to what?" She seemed cross. "It's not your life. You only just met me, not like you're married to the idea of me doing that job."

He winced inwardly at the word marriage. "Tempest, just chill out. You're really pushing things."

"I'm pushing things?" She looked hurt, confused. "Aiden, what the hell are you talking about? Can't you just be happy for me?"

"I am."

"Bullshit." She walked away, slamming the bathroom door.

Fuck.

"Tempest?" He knocked lightly. "Tempest, let's talk about this."

"I'm taking a shower," she announced.

He wanted to order her to come out but the mood was broken. She wasn't his submissive, she was more like...a pissed-off girlfriend.

He really didn't need this. His worst fears were being confirmed. "Fine. I'll be downstairs when you're ready."

She flung open the door. “Fine.” The look on her face was anything but as she slammed it again.

“Women,” he muttered, leaving her alone.

Tempest didn’t cry until she was in the shower. Aiden was turning out to be a jerk. Finally, she’d thought she had someone different. Stupid men. And what about her, weeping like a typical female? *Grow up, Tempest. Shit happens. You quit your job, you move on with your life. Fuck Aiden Phillips.*

Oh but she had done that already—the best sex of her life. She was going to miss that. The worst part of all was that sooner or later she’d have to debrief with know-it-all Danyelle who would have colorful ten-letter words for everything, as if she’d seen it all coming. If that was the case, why didn’t she say so? She never did ahead of time. Psychologists and budding psychologists were as clueless as everybody else.

Life sucked. She only wanted to design good places to live and work, structures that could bring out the best in people. She believed that the details of how we live affect the big things. Take a place like this. Grantham and Lydia’s inn created spaces to play and stretch the imagination. She had grown tremendously in one night.

There might be a career in that—not in making dungeons and castles—but in intentionally mixing imagination into architecture. People were clearly miserable in the structures society kept spitting out for them—boxy homes, glass prison offices and fortress schools. There had to be some better way, even working within safety guidelines.

She would like to talk to Aiden about that—as an artist, an intelligent man who was clearly interested in the cutting edge of life and art.

Oh wait...Aiden was a jerk. She would have to keep reminding herself of that.

Finishing her shower, feeling surprisingly refreshed and strong, she dressed and headed downstairs. She gave Grantham and Lydia a huge hug. “Thanks for everything. I feel like I’ve known you forever.”

"You're welcome back anytime," said Grantham. "You and Aiden both."

Tempest looked pointedly at Aiden, making sure he knew exactly what he had thrown away. "Thanks," she said. "I might just do that...alone."

Aiden frowned. "We need to get going," he told Grantham.

"Yeah, sure." Grantham narrowed his gaze, studying him. Had Aiden done this sort of thing before? Was he one of those commitment-phobes? Pretty fucked up if you asked her, considering he was so obsessed with tying women down.

"Be well." Lydia hugged Aiden.

"You too."

Lydia definitely knew something was wrong. Clearly those two loved Aiden, which was good, he needed people. She was willing to bet Aiden didn't really deal with their love, though, any more than he did with the unexpected windfall she had offered.

The car ride was predictably silent.

"Mind if I listen to the radio?" Aiden asked.

"It's your car," she said.

"I'm just being polite."

"How big of you," she replied. She folded her arms. That wasn't good. She was going to get into stuff before he dropped her off.

"I wouldn't say it's all that big a deal," he replied. "Just common courtesy."

"Oh, why don't you just get off your high horse?" she snapped. "Things are all fucked up between us and you're not going to sit there trying to smell like a rose."

"I don't see what you mean." He kept his eyes on the road. "Didn't we have a nice time? I, for one, would see you again. I didn't realize you felt any differently."

"Oh, yeah, a real nice time. What exactly do you call this game anyway? Drag the woman around like a doll, chain and whip her, get your jollies, make her beg and come and grovel but, uh-oh, she had better not feel anything, because then you drop her like a hot potato."

"You're twisting everything around. You always do that," he insisted.

Tempest snorted. "You mean I talk back. Sorry, I'm not one of your fucking statues."

She touched a nerve.

"I know you're not a statue, Tempest. I am not dumb and I am not heartless. You think I like being me? You think it's easy wrestling with the stuff I do?"

"Actually," she shot back, "I have no clue. Because you won't tell me a goddamn thing."

His face turned to stone. Oh, she knew that look. Her father had it and her eldest brother, who had followed him into law. She might as well try to pick the locks at Fort Knox for all the sharing he was going to do now.

"I don't know what your issues are," Aiden said, his voice a million miles away. "But people don't fall in love that quickly. I thought your roommate said you were so practical. Could have fooled me."

Something gave way inside Tempest. She didn't have to take this, any more than she had to take Bruce's pompous, ignorant shit or Sally's stupid little power trips. "Stop the car, Aiden."

"Oh, give me a break, Tempest." He smiled smugly. "You don't have to get all dramatic on me."

She was past the point of no return. She knew he would not let her hurt herself. Maybe she was testing him, testing herself. "If you don't stop the car, I'll open the door and jump."

She put her hand on the handle to prove her point.

When he didn't respond she opened the door.

"Tempest! What in blazes!"

She had his attention now. He reached over, grabbing the door shut, even as he pulled onto the shoulder, applying the brakes as best he could.

"I'm not letting you out here all alone," Aiden announced as the car came to a halt. "But if you're that hell-bent on separation, I will let you take the car back to the city."

"Fine."

"Fine?"

"Yes, fine." She pushed him toward the driver's door. "Get out, Aiden."

Tempest couldn't believe she was doing this. But she was.

Aiden got out. "You know," he leaned in as she buckled herself behind the wheel. "Whatever it is I've supposedly done to you, I think this more than makes up for it."

She put the car in gear. "No, it doesn't," she proclaimed, adjusting the mirror and leaving him in the dust. "Not by a long shot."

* * * * *

Aiden walked the next ten miles before a group of migrant workers picked him up. He rode the rest of the way in the back of a pickup, crammed in with four other guys. By the time he made it back to his apartment it was pitch black. He smelled of dirt and compost.

"Don't ask," he growled at Francis who was watching a cartoon movie with flying, talking pizzas.

"I wasn't going to. Hey, your car showed up here about five hours ago. Some chick dropped the keys off. A real hottie. Is that the one from the gallery?"

"I said don't ask."

He checked his watch. "That's a new record for fucking up a relationship."

Aiden stripped off his shirt and jacket, throwing them onto the fire escape. "We didn't have a relationship. We had sex."

"You had more than sex. A woman doesn't get that mad at you over a mere act of intercourse."

"She's not mad at me. She's just...unstable."

"Seemed pretty clearheaded to me. Especially the part where she said, 'Tell that arrogant, chickenshit excuse for a man that I filled his gas tank and added windshield washer fluid.'"

"I checked that fluid myself," said Aiden. "It was full."

"Oh, well that solves everything," said Francis. "Obviously she is a psychobitch, just like you say."

Aiden got a beer, opened it and drank half in one gulp. "Did she say anything else?"

"What do you care?"

"I don't, I'm just asking."

"I don't remember exactly. She was crying, though, that much I figured out."

"Crying?"

"Yes, Stone Man, crying. It's what humans do when other humans fuck them over."

"I didn't fuck her over. I barely know her."

Francis shook his head. "Why do you bother starting in with women, anyway? You don't ever want them."

"I don't know what I want."

"Whatever, Stone Man, but if you ask me and I'm not saying you did, you should think twice before you let this one go."

"She stole my car!" Aiden exclaimed. "Are you kidding me?"

"But she brought it back," said Francis. "How many would do that?"

Aiden flopped down on the couch. "You know the scary thing," he grumbled. "You're actually starting to make sense."

Chapter Six

The statue showed up a month later.

"Temp, there's some dudes here with a crazy big crate," Danyelle called out. "You might want to tell them where to put it before they all end up with hernias."

Tempest came out of the back room. She was trying to design a new school at the moment. One that would combine age groups as in the old days but which would also be integrated with a whole bunch of workshops and small, artistic businesses that would use student help. No one would ever build such a thing probably, but if you didn't try to stretch yourself somewhere along the line, what was the point in living.

Ironically, it was Aiden who had given her that courage, letting her find new things in herself, letting her explore past the conventions of society.

"What on earth?" she asked the three men in gray overalls.

"It's a package from Sculpting Life Studios, can you sign here?"

She took the clipboard, heart racing. Sculpting Life was Aiden's place.

"Where do you want it?" asked the one who had given her the clipboard.

"In the living room, I guess."

"Right, let's go, boys."

They had a dolly. Together they rolled it inside.

"Want us to open it?" the man asked.

"No...yes...maybe," said Tempest, feeling like a schoolgirl about to lay eyes on her first love.

"She means yes," Danyelle answered for her.

The men pulled at the nails, ripping off the sides of the crate. They pulled out the statue, which was about five feet high, in white stonelike material, a variation of Philcrete most likely.

"Omigod," Danyelle breathed. "It's..."

"It's me," Tempest finished.

Danyelle gave them a tip out of Tempest's purse—twenty dollars each—as if Tempest could really spare that money with no job and no prospects on the horizon.

"That looks more like you than you," Danyelle marveled.

Tempest was just stunned. She couldn't talk. The woman had her arms over her head. She was bare-breasted, the most angelic look on her face. She was a little like the woman in the statue but she was alone, independent...and very much unbound. Tempest wanted to know her better, the smile was infectious. It was the highest compliment anyone had ever paid her.

Danyelle cleared her throat. "So do I have to be the one to say it?"

"The one to say what?"

"That you need to swallow your foolish pride and go after this guy like he was the last man on earth."

"Even if he was," she lied, unable to take her eyes off the statue, "I wouldn't want him."

"No? And exactly how many of his pix do you have downloaded on your computer. Don't lie, I will go check."

"One hundred-eleven," she replied, trancelike.

Danyelle sighed. "I really wish I was the kind of heartless bitch who could take advantage of this. A man like that...he's one of a kind."

"You're not his type," said Tempest.

"Is that a challenge?"

Tempest narrowed her eyes to shoot daggers. "Just try, missy, and I'll feed your braid to the blender."

Danyelle smirked. "Thought you didn't like the guy?"

Tempest frowned. "You tricked me."

"Duh." Danyelle rolled her eyes. "I'm a Mistress of the Mind—you'll never outthink me."

"I'm not thinking about life anymore, I'm just doing it."

"Doing it how? Moping in your bedroom?"

"I'm not moping. I'm making my dreams come true."

"Granted, I admire the architecture sketches. But your personal life? That sucks. It's like when you were working, so obviously work wasn't the problem. You can't just spend your romantic time masturbating and mooning."

Masturbating and mooning...

That did kind of sum things up.

And crying, sometimes she did that too.

Her body missed Aiden so badly and her heart. The way he would touch her, knowing just what she needed, knowing just how to manipulate her to bring out the pleasure. He gave her permission to play, to be naughty, to be a wench, a slave girl, anything she liked. And he was fun—challenging her, poking fun at her, never giving her a moment's peace. Like a male Danyelle, only older...and very, very male.

Sometimes, when darkness closed in, Tempest would crawl into bed, imagining Aiden there with her, slipping into bed behind her, his chest against her back, his hard cock pressing between her butt cheeks, his hands slipping around... His voice in her ear.

Tell me what you need...

And she would have to answer, confessing to him her deepest secrets, the things good girls didn't ask for—bondage, the feel of a hand, hard and punishing on her ass,

his cock, rammed hard inside her while he twisted her nipples. Oh god, it was too much. She had tried to ease the tension—handcuffing herself, even melting wax on her breasts. The results had been tepid and the whole time she had been afraid of setting herself on fire or locking herself up like some comic version of Houdini and not being able to get out.

She'd had orgasms but they were mockeries, pale imitations, two-dimensional copies of what Aiden could do to her.

As for dating other men, what was the point? He had spoiled her, marked her in ways no man would ever touch. He would be doomed from the start.

"It takes more than this for a man to get on my good side," Tempest said.

Danyelle dissected her with a look. "More than what? A one-of-a-kind, gorgeous likeness of you from the hand of one of the most talented sculptors on the continent? Wow, guess you don't have any ego problems, huh?"

"I'm not conceited," Tempest insisted.

She hated that, the way her family always put her on a pedestal, the pretty dainty girl too lovely to touch. Her whole life she had fought against it, which was damn difficult since anyone who got too close was bound to find her feet of clay.

Aiden had claimed to accept her as his slave girl and then he had tossed her away. There was no forgiving something like that. And there was no way she could explain it to Danyelle.

"Prove it," said Danyelle. "Call Aiden, apologize to him first."

"Me? For what? He's the one who cut me off cold."

"And you gave him no cause to ever be cautious where you're concerned? Seems to me you weirded out on him at one point too. Isn't he entitled to a reaction? Everything in life, no matter how positive, has its negative pole, that's how you reach the center. You guys were love at first sight, there has to be some psychic catching up to do. It's bound to get ugly at points."

"I won't be analyzed." She covered her ears. "I will not be one of your projects or papers, I will not —"

"Knock, knock."

Both women turned toward the door, which had been left open. Aiden was standing there, looking absolutely gorgeous in a half unbuttoned denim shirt and a pair of jeans, worn at the knees. He had boots on too — black, pointed ones.

Tempest got chills at the sight of the leather.

"Speak of the devil." Danyelle beamed and ran to give him a hug.

She had no qualms about pressing her scantily clad body against the man. It's just how she was, nothing sexual. But Tempest wasn't in the mood.

"Danyelle, do you mind?"

"Oh, sorry. You guys want to be alone, right?"

"No," said Tempest. "I would like Mr. Phillips to leave."

Danyelle's eyes widened. "Temp, don't be like this."

"Danyelle, this isn't your business," said Tempest, no longer caring who she hurt. "Why don't you run along and play with some of your little Internet friends."

"Tempest, that's enough." It was Aiden speaking this time.

Tempest's mouth hung open. The man had no right.

"You will apologize to Danyelle," Aiden said.

"What are you going to do, spank me?"

Aiden remained calm, very much in control. Tempest's pussy turned to liquid inside her jeans. "I'm asking you to do the right thing, Tempest, let's leave it at that for now."

Tempest's senses whirled. She felt a dozen emotions at once — none of which gave her the will, or the desire to defy Aiden's very reasonable request.

"I'm sorry, Danyelle," Tempest said grudgingly.

Danyelle kissed her cheek. "It's okay. Some people are just born mean. I'll just leave you two." Danyelle collected her purse and slipped on a pair of orange sandals sitting by the door. A questionable match to her short green skirt and halter top.

"Later, Aiden." She stretched up and kissed his cheek. "Good luck."

Danyelle closed the door behind her.

Tempest was alone with the one man who knew her sexual secrets and who had exploited them thoroughly.

She didn't dare trust him, not again.

"I don't know what you think you're doing," she said as coldly as possible. "But you're not wanted here and no amount of art will change that."

"I came to apologize," he said.

She bit her lip. She hadn't seen that coming. "Well, you've done it." She regrouped. "Now go."

"I would like a chance to explain in more detail."

She nearly swooned at those chiseled features, those gifted hands. The way he had worked her.

"I would like to win the lottery but that's not happening either."

He thinned his lips, resolution coming over his face. "You are being a brat, Tempest."

The word was like a caress to her sex—unwanted stimulation. Brats got what they deserved. Brats got attention—hard, domineering attention.

"Don't start with me, Aiden Phillips."

He sat on the couch, legs spread.

"What are you doing?" she demanded, terrified to have him settling in.

"I'm getting comfortable for your spanking."

She took a step backward. "Touch me and I'll scream."

"You need it, Tempest. It's not a bad thing, it's purgative. I need it too. I need you. I love you."

Her heart froze.

Why couldn't he have talked like that when it mattered?

"It's too late." She turned, ready for a hasty retreat to the bedroom. "It's no use. Please...go..."

Aiden grabbed her arm in a grip of steel. "No, Tempest, I am not leaving."

She struggled in vain. "Let go of me, you brute."

"I won't let you go." He took both arms, pulling her against him. "I love you, Tempest. I was afraid to say it before so I hid from you...and me. I took a coward's way out once and I can't bear to again. Tell me you don't love me, tell me your heart has changed and I will back off. But you have to look me in the eye."

She shook her head, a rag doll in his arms.

"In the eye," he commanded. "Look me in the eye."

Tempest could not resist him. She melted at the sight of those eyes of his, so intense and passionate. She was slain on the spot. "I don't...I don't," she mouthed the words but the rest would not come out. "Oh god, Aiden." She threw herself against his chest. "I do love you, I've always loved you. I...I want to be your girl, your woman...your inspiration."

"You are," he insisted. "But there is more."

"You mean the domination? Yes, I want that," she said eagerly.

"That's a given." He grinned slyly. "I was thinking of something else, something that might involve a diamond ring."

Tempest gasped. "You mean...marriage? Oh, yes, Aiden, I will...I mean...I do..."

He laughed. "I was hoping you felt that way. You don't know how hard this was for me."

"Well, you did it perfectly, as always." She hugged him. Her hero.

"I don't know about perfect...but I seem to work well enough for you."

"Oh, Aiden," she said, her mind already flying in a million different directions. "We have so much to plan. There's the flowers, the cake and where will we hold it? Do you want to go traditional or —"

He silenced her with a kiss. "I was thinking," he left her breathless, enslaved, "we could start with some make-up sex."

"Do I still get my spanking?" She grinned mischievously.

"Damn straight," he growled, unzipping her jeans.

She moaned as he slipped them over her ass, gripping her bottom through her cotton panties.

"You know," he said. "I still owe you for those blisters I got walking home the day you took my car."

She felt the anticipatory tingling. "But I did get you gas," she pointed out.

"You put in eighty-seven octane," he said. "It knocked for a week."

"You're lucky I didn't put sugar in it," she giggled.

Aiden delivered a crisp smack, restoring the sexual order. "Hands in the air, woman."

She raised them over her head, allowing him to take off her T-shirt. "So I'm a woman now, huh?"

He gave her another swat, the hardest yet. "Did I say to put your arms down? And I'll call you woman or girl or anything I like, got it, slave?"

"Yes, Master..." She was smiling, trying not to appear smug.

Aiden undid her bra, frowning as he realized he couldn't get it off with her hands in the air.

"Is there a problem?" she teased. "Oh, wise Master?"

Aiden growled, the light of the devil in his eyes. She squealed, laughing as he lifted her bodily off the floor, throwing her over his shoulder.

"Put me down!" she cried. "You brute."

He patted her bottom in satisfaction. "You love me as a brute and you know it."

She kicked her legs, trapped by her jeans. "No, I don't," she said with little conviction.

Aiden tossed her down on her own bed. "Strip and get on your belly," he commanded. "You have five seconds."

Tempest scrambled to obey. "I will protest this," she insisted. "To the Masters' Union."

"On what grounds?" He was tugging at his own clothes, practically tearing them off.

"I'll make something up..."

"I'll bet you will." Aiden fell on her, helping fulfill the command of lying on her stomach. Like a man possessed, he proceeded to pepper her behind, expert strikes to the rounded flesh of her ass, heating her deliciously. She continued to twitch—hot—a punished female as he pressed a finger to her sex, gauging.

"You're wet," he said. "Good thing for you."

"I'm always wet for you," she confessed. "When I see you, when I hear your voice, even when I think of you."

Aiden's hand caressed her back. "Tempest, I love you so much, I won't ever leave you. So help me, you'll want to leave me quick enough, the crazy life I have but I'll never, ever want to leave you."

She turned to face him, her hand on his cheek. "I just want to be by your side. That's where I feel alive. You're my heart and soul."

"I'm a moody bastard, I'll warn you."

"And I can be a bitch. So what?"

He grinned. "In my case, I have the advantage of being able to spank it out of you."

"Hey, no fair. When do I get to spank you?"

"When hell freezes over." He shed his jeans and climbed on her, sinking his cock deep into her aching, waiting sex. "Or until Danyelle gets nominated 'shyest person' in her graduating class."

"I don't think they do that for PhDs," she giggled.

Aiden made love to her as if he had never left, as though no time had passed and as if he had known her forever. Who was to say different, for that matter?

Tempest locked her ankles around his buttocks. "It's about time you came to your senses," she pronounced. "You are such a stubborn man."

"I'm stubborn?" He nibbled at her nipple, sending her over the top. "You wrote a whole new chapter in the book."

Tempest had no reply other than to cry out her surrender. There was no time to ask permission to come. She was already there but that was to be expected. She and Aiden were like natural forces, destined to collide...and combine. Who knew what could be created in the mix, the common flow?

Whatever their art looked like, or their children for that matter, one thing was certain. They would be one of a kind—originals—precious and beautiful. The best combination of taking and yielding, conquering...and surrendering.

Which at the moment was all Tempest cared about.

They climaxed together, their heat enough to melt off the stone from both their souls. They were left naked, alive, completely...open.

Aiden...and his woman.

About the Author

Reese Gabriel is a born romantic with a taste for the edgier side of love. Having traveled the world and sampled many of the finer things, Reese now enjoys the greater simplicities; barefoot walks by the ocean, kisses under moonlight and whispers of passion in the darkness with that one special person.

Preferring to remain behind the scenes, cherished by a precious few, Reese hopes to awaken in the lives of many the possibilities of true love through stories of far off places and enchanted lives.

For the sake of love and hope and imagination, these stories are told. May they be enjoyed as much in the reading of them as in the writing.

Reese welcomes comments from readers. You can find Reese's website and email address on the author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

Also by Reese Gabriel

A Centaur for Libby

Chaining His Heart

Come and Get Me

Dance of Submission

Holiday Reflections *anthology*

Kimberlee's Keeper

More Than Male 1: Nyssa's Guardian

More Than Male 2: Seria's Star Warrior

More Than Male 3: Azar's Prize

More Than Male 4: Jaxey's Master

More Than Male 5: A Dominant for Desela

More Than Male 6: Vandar's War

My Carina

Prisoner of Shera-Sa

Roping His Filly

Taming Delaney

Temporary Slave



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

www.ellorascave.com