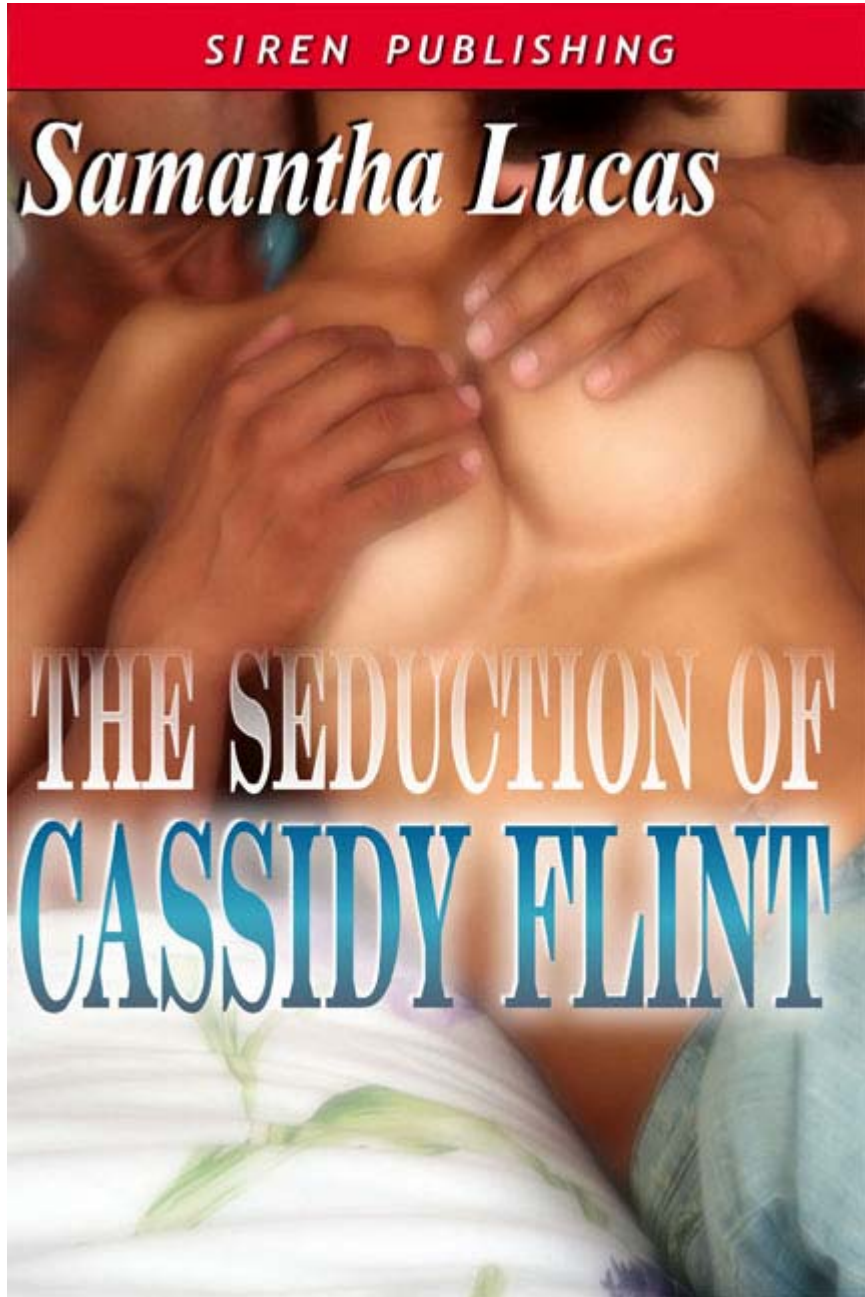


SIREN PUBLISHING

Samantha Lucas

THE SEDUCTION OF
CASSIDY FLINT



The Seduction of Cassidy Flint

Twelve years after her no-good ex walked out on her, Cassidy Flint is slowly coming to realize that life is passing her by. Problem is, she has no idea what to do about it. Lucky for her, Aiden Grand, her sexy new boss, has a few creative ideas bound to help with her dilemma.

Though an affair with Cassidy breaks all the rules, Aiden is willing to risk it for the opportunity to awaken her sexuality and introduce her to all the pleasures and sensations of seduction. The fact that he suspects she will alleviate some of his perpetual loneliness has nothing to do with it.

Temptation becomes seduction, seduction becomes passion, but will that be enough to convince a man afraid of love and a woman afraid of passion to build a life that will last forever?

Sensuality Rating: **SCORCHING**

Genre: Contemporary Erotic Romance

Theme: A menage a trois scene

Length: Novel (38,300 words)

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Samantha Lucas

EROTIC ROMANCE



**Siren Publishing, Inc.
www.SirenPublishing.com**

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Chapter One

Sex.

As far as Cassidy Flint was concerned, sex was the biggest, most confusing, irritating, frustrating, and annoying subject on the planet.

At forty-three, she figured there was little hope she would ever understand it, but that hadn't stopped her from picking up the magazine in the hotel break room and bringing it back to the front desk with her. An article on being in charge of your own orgasm had snagged her attention. She thought of her short-lived marriage over thirteen years ago. She hadn't even been in charge of the groceries, let alone her own orgasms, which—not to disparage her poor deluded husband, Charlie—had been few and far between.

It wasn't Charlie's fault she'd decided to wait until marriage. And it hadn't been Charlie's fault that she'd come to their marriage not only a virgin, but an ignorant virgin assuming her husband would teach her everything she needed to know. That had been her own doing. Staying quiet about her lack of satisfaction between the sheets and otherwise, had been her fault as well. However, Charlie walking out on her without warning for that flaxen blonde with the bad boob job...*that* was his fault.

The thing that always nagged at her though was that as a teen, she'd always been interested in sex. She remembered getting aroused looking at photos she had no business looking. She remembered wanting to be sexy, wanting men to look at her, touching her own body, dreaming it was the hands of her lover as she stood at the

window in full view of anyone who'd dare to look up to the second story window.

Hell, she remembered when her big goal in life was to be a stripper and pose naked for Playboy.

So what happened?

By the time she'd gotten married she'd transformed into the textbook good girl. Even when she found sex sorely disappointing, she hadn't said anything. One day at a time she'd given up her sexuality, her sensual side, her passion, and for what?

She stood behind the counter at the check-in desk of The Grand By The Sea and flipped through the pages of the women's magazine, feeling extremely frustrated and not caring that she was breaking more rules than just the one prohibiting reading while on the desk. To be precise, she was breaking about half a dozen.

The front desk uniform for women consisted of a cream-colored suit and a champagne silk blouse with a big bow tied at the neck. In her own defense, she didn't have the stupid bow untied. She did, however, have her jacket off and her shoes kicked under the counter. She was also leaning on the desk, but it was three in the morning, for crying out loud!

Other than the night crew dead-heading flower beds and vacuuming, she hadn't seen another living soul in the past two hours.

She reached under the desk and popped a few more pretzels into her mouth, utterly fascinated by the magazine article and the accompanying photos. She ran her finger slowly over the curve of the woman's breast then the nearly bare ass of the man and sighed. She'd kept herself in a glass bubble for years, not experiencing anything and she was truly beginning to wonder why. She may not be cover model beautiful, but a few men had expressed interest over the years.

Then it hit her hard, all the things Charlie had said. All the times he told her she couldn't satisfy a man. All the times he'd complained about her weight, or her hair, or her cellulite. He was the only man she'd ever given herself to and she'd found the act belittling and

wholly unsatisfying and though a little voice at the back of her mind shouted it'd be different with the right man, she simply wasn't brave enough to risk another round of humiliation. Fantasies were all she would ever have and she'd just have to accept that.

Glancing up to make certain no one was watching her, she took in the vista of the old Spanish style lobby and the large mural depicting the California missions. Employed as the night clerk for over six years at the old hotel on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, she'd seen a lot of people come and go on this shift. Most couldn't take it more than a month, but she'd never once thought of leaving. She loved everything about the place, from the Spanish-style architecture, to the gardens that included the three-tier fountain out front and the koi pond in the back. What she liked most of all, was that this hotel was sort of a romantic get-away hotel.

Just because she wasn't getting any, hadn't made her petty enough to wish the same on others. Seeing couples in love and clinging to one another like a second skin gave her hope. Hope that maybe, despite her experience, despite her shyness, that maybe someone might love her anyway. It wasn't that much to ask really, was it?

Bringing her focus back to the article, she began to read about the three positions a woman would most likely orgasm in.

Dok-al-Arz

"Well, that sounds kinda lame."

Or, pounding on the spot.

She laughed. "Much better, and self explanatory."

She began to read the definition, becoming completely lost in the written words.

...then the woman begins a slow grinding movement, being able to stimulate her clitoris and G-spot simultaneously.

"Hmmm, I'm still not entirely sure I *have* a G-spot, but whatever."

She popped another pretzel in her mouth and pulled the magazine closer to her face. Primarily because once again she'd left her glasses

at home, but also because she couldn't quite believe it actually said what she'd thought it did.

The orgasm then comes quickly and with great intensity.

"Oh good lord, I want to come with great intensity."

A faint snicker was her only warning that she was no longer alone. She froze, feeling her cheeks heat meant one thing, that the crimson tide was washing over her face, probably making it blotchy as well. Some women were beautiful when they blushed, not her, she looked like a woman with a bad rash.

"Miss Flint, I could have your job for the amount of violations you're currently exhibiting."

Instantly recognizing the deep, sexy voice of her boss, a man who'd been favorably featured in more than one of her late night fantasies, only made her embarrassment deepen.

"Oh, you'll do no such thing. She isn't hurting anyone and it must get incredibly lonely on the overnights."

Cassidy looked up over the top of the magazine. The face of her boss, Garrison Lancaster, was visibly displeased. It was almost a crime for a man with such a chiseled jaw and straight white teeth to scowl like that. Standing beside him was another man she'd never seen before and if Garrison was handsome, the new guy was the epitome of gorgeous. He looked like a picture right out of the very magazine she was still managing to hold onto despite her fingers going limp.

A flash of the naked man in the magazine and the memory of her fingers trailing his butt caused her to imagine her fingers on the new guy's ass. Taut mounded flesh that would gently give beneath her touch, her fingers just barely dipping into the crevice between his cheeks, the vision was so erotic, she had to consciously catch her breath.

It was just because she'd been thinking about sex so much tonight. It had to be, because she never reacted to men like this, but right now, she wanted to jump both of them!

From where she stood, they looked like bookends. Garrison's brown hair was cut short and gelled on top to give it some flare. She imagined the spot on the back of his neck where his hairline ended. She wanted to push her fingers into his hair right there and play with his neck.

The other man's hair seemed impossibly thick and black as night, it had just enough wave to give it a casual look regardless of his short, efficient, management cut. Her fingers twitched, aching to touch it. Both men wore flawless pinstripe suits, Garrison's black, the other gray. It simply was not fair to the women of the world for these two to be in the same room together.

She drew a breath and demanded her wayward mind out of the gutter and back to where it should be. As angry as Garrison seemed, the other man's eyes held amusement, sadly it was directed at her, but when she met his gaze, it somehow eased the tension.

Self-consciously tucking her unruly curls behind her ears, she wished the second man would quit looking at her so intensely. It gave a girl ideas and she didn't need any more ideas.

"Besides, Garrison, didn't we come all the way down here at precisely this time of night so I could meet the incomparable Miss Flint, your most dependable front desk clerk?" His deep eyes met hers again "I thought you said she was indispensable?"

Cassidy watched the muscle in Garrison's jaw tic furiously. She realized she'd embarrassed him, and felt awful. Surreptitiously, she slipped one of her shoes back on, but the other seemed to have gotten away from her. Her stocking-clad foot casually searched the ground for it, but it seemed to have vanished. She simply could not let her gaze drop from Garrison's, she was hoping her eyes express her very real apology. Because she had the impression that regardless of how dependable he thought her, he'd like nothing better than to fire her right this very second.

"Mr. Grand, this is Miss Flint. Miss Flint—" Garrison's tone was icy. The sound made Cassidy stop squirming for her other shoe and

just tuck the bare foot around behind the shoed one. “This is Mr. Grand. *Owner* of this hotel.”

She felt sick, but covered embarrassment with humor, even though she instinctively knew this wasn’t the time for it.

“You should find a better photographer. That photo in the employee break room makes you look *a lot* older.”

He laughed, then quickly regained his composure, though not without a very definite smirk on his lips. “That would be my *father*, Miss Flint and *he* would technically be the owner of the hotel.”

“Oh.” Cassidy smiled contritely, her one bare foot still around her ankle. She felt extremely self-conscious and just wished Mr. Lancaster and Mr. Sexy would leave...*now*. Instead, she was appalled when he dropped to one knee before her, his head tilted back, his gaze meeting hers, a teasing smile on his lips. Long fingers wrapped seductively around her ankle. She’d had no idea the ankle was an erogenous zone, but from his touch she was breathless and more than a little turned on.

Grabbing her wayward shoe, he slowly slipped it back on her foot. It was a long, torturous moment, that she wished would last forever, and yet couldn’t end fast enough. It was the worst and the best thing, in that this was something she could never have, not really, and yet something she wanted desperately.

For the briefest of moments, she allowed herself to imagine his hands running along her leg, under her skirt. Maybe he’d prop her up on the counter, tear off her panties. Her thoughts were scandalous and completely inappropriate, but then, he started it by getting down on one knee and touching her.

His eyes met hers. “Your slipper, Cinderella.”

In spite of, or maybe because of, how turned on she was by his touch, Cassidy knew when she got home she was going to have to look up a new word for humiliation because that one simply wasn’t strong enough any longer for how she was feeling now. She gave him a shy smile, pulled her foot from his incredible hands, and took three

steps back, hoping the waves of his magnetism wouldn't reach that far and that in no way could he read her thoughts.

"Thank you, Mr. Grand."

Before he could make a big deal about her magazine, she not-so-discreetly tucked it behind her back. His smirk in response was hard to miss.

"Miss Flint."

The stern address brought Cassidy's attention immediately back to Garrison, who still looked livid, maybe more so now. "Come to my office when your shift ends this morning."

"Yes, Mr. Lancaster."

I don't suppose it's so you both can ravish me?

Her sudden renegade thought startled her. What was wrong with her tonight? She was feeling a lot like a dam about to explode and that could only be bad...and messy.

Her pseudo-prince-charming gave her boss a slap on the back. "Leave it be, Garrison." He looked back to Cassidy and smiled. "We all had a bit of fun and that never hurts. It was a pleasure, Miss Flint."

He bowed his head briefly then sent her a charming smile. It was one of those smiles that she'd seen in movies, and her heart fluttered. All white teeth and dimples and too good to be real. Even his eyes seemed to sparkle as he smiled, and Cassidy felt *that* all the way to places she thought long dead and decayed. She wasn't at all sure how she felt about knowing that they weren't.

Before she could respond, they both left. She watched them leave, torn between her erotic fantasies and the reality of the situation and began to wonder if she'd still be employed at The Grand By The Sea come morning.

* * * *

Cassidy turned her old broken down Honda onto the gravel drive beside her half of the duplex she'd rented for the past twelve years. It

was a Spanish-style home that had been spilt into two very small units years ago. Her side thankfully had the second floor, which provided not only another bedroom and two fireplaces, but also a nice-sized kitchen and living room.

She huffed in disgust when she saw the very expensive sports car parked out front. Her neighbor for the past three years had been Melissa, a young woman who Cassidy thought would be better off still living at home. The child showed no signs of maturity whatsoever and Cassidy figured—considering the quantity and caliber of men that traveled through Melissa’s home—not many morals, either. Money seemed to be her only standard. Cassidy had seen sports cars, Mercedes, BMWs, even a Rolls once. Melissa was a car chick, she guessed.

She grabbed the bag of groceries from the back seat and shoved the door shut with her poor old-aged hip. She wasn’t sure why she always felt twice her age whenever Melissa got a new boyfriend. Maybe it was simply because she’d never really had a boyfriend, not the romantic, sexy variety that Melissa attracted anyway, and now she figured she was too old to get one. She released a sigh at having to admit to her own petty jealousy.

It wasn’t as if she couldn’t have dated over the past thirteen years since Charlie left her, but she hadn’t. At first, everything had been too overwhelming, then she felt too insecure, now...well, now she imagined she was just comfortable. The thought of putting herself out there on the dating market, at her age, scared the bejeebers out of her.

“Ahhh!”

A man’s hand delicately grabbed her elbow causing Cassidy to jump and drop the bag of groceries on the carport spilling its contents in all directions. She watched three oranges roll under the bougainvillea growing up the trellis between the two units.

Damn, it has thorns, too.

Catching her breath, she turned and warily eyed the man standing before her who had arguably just scared at least five years off her life.

“Mr. Grand?”

She’d truly lost it if she were hallucinating her good-looking boss on her doorstep. She closed her eyes, shook her head, but nope...still there.

“What are you doing here?”

He couldn’t have come all this way just to fire her, and besides he’d been the one on her side earlier. He bent down to pick up an orange that rolled his direction and landed against his shoe. A perfectly polished, very expensive shoe, if she didn’t miss her guess.

He rubbed his hand around the back of his neck. He seemed different than when she’d met him, not quite as sure of himself, but still deliciously, dangerously attractive. She was torn between feeling insecure and unsure and feeling giddy with anticipation of what might happen.

“It’s Aiden, first of all. And quite frankly, I’m not sure.”

She took the orange when he handed it to her.

“Oh.”

Her brow furrowed. Not exactly the great romantic fantasy answer, but at least it was honest. Still, this was truly surreal. She figured she’d pick up her groceries while he tried to decide why he was standing outside her house. He quickly joined her and in only a few moments they had all the items corralled and re-bagged.

Standing in the morning sun on her driveway with one of the most attractive men she’d ever seen in her life, was more than she knew how to handle. She wanted to run and bolt the door and remain hidden until life as she knew it resumed.

“Well, I guess I’ll just go inside then. Nice to see you, Mr. Grand.”

She should have invited him in, but in all honesty, despite the wicked thoughts her mind was freely inventing, she was who she was and that was an old, shy, insecure woman who in no way could handle herself with a man like this.

She gave him a shaky smile and turned quickly, hoping to be inside with the door bolted before he figured out she'd even left.

Of course, that didn't happen. In fact, he beat her to the door at the end of her tiny porch and held his hand out.

"I'll either take the bag or the keys. Your choice."

"I...oh, hell." She shoved the bag at him and opened her door, surrender was all she had the energy left for anyway. She considered for a second standing in the doorway and demanding the bag back. However, she was too tired for games she hadn't a chance of winning, so she walked in, pointing in the general direction of the kitchen, if he wanted to push his way inside, he could make himself useful.

As she was removing her jacket and laying her purse on the table by the door, she said, sounding much calmer than she felt, "Kitchen's that way. Please put the freezerables away, thanks."

She let him go and moved into the living room. Space was a good thing, she hoped she'd regain her common sense by the time he got through. She had no idea what came over her. Her entire world felt topsy turvy and now she was acting like a prima donna. Maybe she just wanted to annoy him so he'd leave. Of course there was still that insidious other part of her mind that wanted him to get naked, but she was trying to ignore that part. Fantasy was fantasy. Life was life. Never the two shall meet.

* * * *

Aiden had no idea what had come over him. This was very like the boy who'd grown up in Italy feeling insecure and out of place. The boy who knew he wasn't good enough simply by way of his birth. It wasn't the man he'd become since. For one thing, he didn't do nerves. He also didn't just drop in on women he barely knew, and he didn't put away groceries.

He shoved several Lean Cuisine meals for one inside the small freezer, thinking that apparently today, he did.

He not only put away her frozen items, but he went ahead and put the juice in her fridge and the oranges in a fruit bowl on the small kitchen table. Maybe he was simply buying himself time, hoping his smoother façade would resurface before he had to face her again. He felt a bit more at ease as he looked around her very sunny kitchen and liked what he saw. It was small. There was no getting around that. The stove must have been fifty years old, but the room was clean and cheery. The stucco walls were painted pale yellow with white trim; she had a vase of multi-colored daisies on the counter and the bowl of fruit on her kitchen table. Large windows looked out over the hillside the bungalow perched on, overlooking the ocean in the distance. There were no curtains or blinds. *She must love the sunshine.*

He frowned when he saw only one chair at the table. The thought occurred to him that maybe she was as lonely as he was. Lonely was not something he liked to think about or admit to, but it was fact, he *was* lonely. He lived a life of being accepted on the surface, yet not really fitting in anywhere and it was getting old.

That brought back the memory of the conversation he had with his father's wife two mornings before. Apparently she had decided to find him a wife. He shuddered at the thought. Eventually he knew he would have to accept his fate and marry some woman his family would approve of, but not today. Lonely was a far better option for the time being.

When he ventured back into the living room, still not sure what his intentions were, he rethought his idea of her being lonely. At the moment, however, she certainly didn't *appear* lonely. A small white mop of a dog was enthusiastically licking her entire face while she giggled with pure delight.

She'd taken off her jacket and undone that ridiculous bow, kicked off her shoes again and this time her hose, as well. His attention caught on her bare feet as she sat on the floor. A pure punch of lust assaulted his gut and cock simultaneously. He envisioned a very

naked Cassidy laying on his deep red, satin sheets as he lay at her feet, sucking each toe until he drove them both to the brink of ecstasy.

His equilibrium took a hit. Her face covered in dog drool should have by all rights disgusted him, but somehow he couldn't find that emotion. He looked from her bare feet to her face and wondered if he could take over the licking action for a while. Then before he could make this situation any worse, he badly blurted out, "Miss Flint, I was wondering if I could take you to breakfast."

She blinked up at him, as if she'd forgotten he was there. After a moment, she picked up the little dog and stood beside her blue floral sofa looking at him as if he'd spoken in another language.

"Excuse me?"

He swallowed hard, ran his hand over the back of his neck again, then locked eyes with her.

"Breakfast. I'd thought it better than dinner, with you working overnight and all. I wasn't sure of your sleep schedule, and I..."

"Mr. Grand, are you here to fire me?"

He did a quick double take, his mind quickly going back through everything that had happened since they'd met and felt like an idiot.

"No, of course not, Cassidy. Garrison has told me nothing but wonderful things about you. He finds you incredibly dependable and no one is going to blame you for getting bored in the middle of the night when you must have known you had no check-ins."

She seemed to roll that over in her mind, then looked up at him again, brow furrowed.

"Then why on earth are you here and why would you want to take me out to breakfast?"

She caught him off guard again, was he really being that vague?

"Because I thought we might enjoy one another's company."

She stared at him for so long, *he* felt like fidgeting. The she quietly asked, "Mr. Grand, are you insane?"

He laughed. Her voice was shy and uncertain and she looked shocked and appalled by his invitation. He supposed that should have

offended his sensibilities, but this woman intrigued him in a way he hadn't felt before. From the second he'd met her that morning she naturally charmed and bewitched him. Even in the moments she'd obviously felt out of her depth and awkward, he still felt drawn towards her.

Perhaps it was just he knew that same feeling himself and wasn't fond of it. Maybe he wanted to be her white knight and protect the fair maiden from anything that would bring her discomfort. It was silly, but it was how he felt, and he had to admit, he liked it and he liked her. Now, in her own environment, surrounded by her own things, he liked her even more.

"No, Miss. Flint, I am not insane. Sanity tends to run in my family. Though I do see your point. I am acting rather out of character today. "

She furrowed her brow, narrowing her eyes at him. It was more a look of bewilderment than hostility, almost as if she'd never before seen a man. She was absolutely adorable and he wanted nothing more than to pull her body against his and never let her go.

"I really don't think you do. My point was exactly this, I am a middle-aged woman with mousy brown hair, lackluster brown eyes, thirty extra pounds, and the only bed partner I've had in thirteen years has been my dog, Harold."

He held back his laughter, knowing it would only feed her insecurity, but he saw a very different picture. He saw a woman with a lush and curvy body that he wanted to put his hands and mouth all over. He saw a woman with chestnut hair streaked with natural golden highlights. He saw curls his fingers continuously reached for. He saw a mouth full and soft that he wanted to devour. He saw naturally large breasts that he knew would be soft beneath his kisses. What he saw was a real woman who was naturally beautiful and so unaware of that fact, need burned in his veins to make her see herself as he did.

He wanted to find the man who'd broken her heart and made her doubt her beauty and beat him senseless. Most of all, he wanted to

love her, body and soul and make her believe him when he told her she was stunning and sexy and everything a man could want from his woman.

“Miss Flint.” He took a step forward, aching to touch her, but holding himself back. “May I call you Cassidy?”

“I suppose.”

This time her tone declared loud and clear she didn’t trust him. He let out a long breath, determined to do what he’d set out to. “Cassidy, I’m in town for three weeks while I shore up the deal to buy that land on the other side of the hotel. I—”

“Really?” Her eyes lit up in such a way that made a man want to promise the world for a chance to see it again. “Why?”

He shook his head again, this woman kept him off balance. He wasn’t used to feeling that way anymore. It was going to be a full time job just keeping up with her.

“Because we’re going to build some honeymoon cottages and a wedding garden. The wedding business is huge and some of our other hotels have...Cassidy, may I continue with what I was originally saying?”

“Oh. Of course.”

She shifted Harold, and he tried once again to lick her face. She held him back, giving him all her attention. *Good God, she makes me nervous.* He thought about the pedigreed poodles his father’s wife would be trotting out before him. Women just like his half brothers’ wives. The thought didn’t set well at all. His gaze softened on Cassidy. His family would eat her alive, but he could enjoy her for the time he was here and still free. He could bring her such pleasure. His determination to see this through prodded him on.

“I thought, well I guess, rather, I’d *hoped*...” He released a frustrated breath and laid all his cards out on the table. “Cassidy, would you keep me company while I’m here?”

* * * *

Cassidy thought maybe he ought to check into that family history a bit better because he was definitely showing some signs of instability. She narrowed her eyes at him. She felt vulnerable and she hated that feeling. It made her unreasonable and hostile. At the same time, she found herself wondering exactly what he meant by *company* and if she really cared or not. Part of her wanted for once in her life to be free. To say yes and not care what the question was. To let all the passion of her erotic nature loose and not worry what the consequences of that might be.

She didn't answer him.

She couldn't.

Not yet.

Overloaded and overwhelmed, she turned and walked down the small hallway sandwiched between the kitchen and the staircase toward the back garden and placed Harold outside, locking the doggie door. It bought her some time and took care of the distraction her precious puppy made. When she came back she found Aiden with his back to her, his hand running the length of the fireplace mantle. The oddly sensual movement made her shiver.

This was the strangest thing she'd ever had happen to her and she had no frame of reference for it. What was she supposed to say to that?

Yes, please, ravish me for three weeks then leave me behind like last week's garbage?

She nibbled on her lower lip, *ravishing does sound good though.*

Who was she kidding, it sounded beyond belief, but she wasn't brave enough to say yes. She shook her hands out to her sides hoping the maneuver would shake off the unwanted tension she felt. Maybe it was her own sanity she should be questioning, no woman in her right mind would say no to that man, yet she was about to. It made her sad, because if she said no to him, who would she ever say yes to?

All of a sudden her life looked terribly lonely and bleak.

She walked the rest of the way into the room clearing her throat as a warning she was back.

“What, exactly, did you mean by company?”

For a while, he just stood there looking at her. It gave her time to really look at him and see if she really thought he was as good looking as she had originally. Sadly, as she noticed his little imperfections this time, like the tiny scar above his right brow and the slight wrinkles around his eyes, he only seemed more attractive. His body wasn't half bad either, and thinking of what it might look like unclothed was making her salivate.

What is wrong with you?

This was the other reason she hadn't dated—she'd never felt *this* before, and all the uncomfortable, embarrassing moments of a first date had never felt worth it. Maybe they were now and maybe, knowing it was only for three weeks, would make it not seem so daunting. She'd know going in there was no future in it, no promises. Three weeks of what she assumed would be amazing sex...of course, how amazing could it be? She'd still be a part of the equation.

She folded her arms across her chest as some sort of defense in case he laughed at her or said he simply needed someone to talk hotel shop with. Of course, why he'd pick her for that was beyond her, but why he'd pick her for anything, quite frankly she couldn't figure. She tried to push that thought away. Every time she was close to letting her walls down, to stepping out from behind a lifetime of self doubt and insecurity, it all came back and swamped her. She was in a prison of her own making and couldn't find the right key to get out.

He closed the distance between them, a half smile on his face, and a look in his eyes she'd never seen directed at her before but recognized with certainty, it was lust. She trembled in anticipation of his touch at the same time wondered if he even would. This was a man, not a boy like Charlie had been, could she handle him?

Conflicting emotions and the deepest desires of her heart warred with memories of her past. Her history was what she knew to be true,

but then she looked into his eyes, heated with obvious attraction for her, and it made her question everything. It made no sense in the safe little world she'd built around herself. She wanted to shove him out the door, leaving her alone, but safe, but she couldn't do it. Somewhere deep inside, he'd lit a spark and she wanted to see if that spark could grow into something real that would free her once and for all from the prison she'd gladly walked into on the day she said "I do".

While she tried communicating all her thoughts to him without words she knew she'd never find, he brought his hand up. His fingers brushed her cheek and sent a shiver snaking over her skin. She drew a sharp breath, surprised by the sparks his soft touch ignited. He only smiled as if he'd known all along they'd be there.

He took a step closer, engulfing her in his heat, his scent, his essence. She found it hard to breathe, felt herself wanting things she knew better than to want. When his hand cupped her cheek, his thumb brushing over her bottom lip, she let instinct take over and she slowly ran her tongue along the tip in a maneuver that made her feel like a real woman. Heat flared in his eyes a second before he brought his mouth down on hers and life as she knew it ended.

His one arm snaked around her waist, pulling her body to his. His other hand wound in her hair, leaving her no choice but to comply.

Aiden barely pressed their lips together when she felt her knees give out. He tightened his arm around her, pulling her body seamlessly against his. Slowly, he sucked her bottom lip between his, the pleasurable sensations making her mindlessly whimper. With one hand, he caressed the back of her head, while the other ran the length of her spine. Then, just the hint of tongue pressed against hers, she knew with certainty now what butterflies felt like as a million of the tiny winged creatures took flight inside her.

He pulled back without deepening the kiss any further. Cassidy wasn't sure if she was relieved or upset by that, but he physically didn't move. He continued to supply heat and frissons to her needy

body as they stood together. Hand cupping her cheek, he pressed his lips to the bridge of her nose. As he rested his forehead against hers, his deep blue gaze and his scent invaded all of her awareness until she knew her surrender was imminent.

“In my *bed*. That’s what I meant by company, Cassidy.”

Chapter Two

Cassidy's heart raced even at the thought. She wasn't entirely over that kiss and certainly was in no shape to rationally discuss his suggestion. "Are you sure you're not adopted?"

She swore she saw him wince before he smiled that time. That smile was lethal and didn't help her recover her equilibrium any. She wished he'd stop it.

"No, I'm not adopted. Why?"

She had to push herself out of his arms, because intelligent thought would not return for as long as she let him touch her. Unfortunately, being out of his arms didn't help nearly as much as she'd hoped. She fleetingly wondered if it was too late to get back in them without looking emotionally disturbed. "Because it's either that or the sanity gene you're so proud of skipped you." She turned back and locked gazes with him. "Do you know how *old* I am?"

He shrugged, as if it didn't matter. Well, to her it did. She took two steps closer, challenging him. She couldn't help herself, it was a reflex.

"I'm forty-three," He didn't even bat an eye. "That's more than *forty*."

"Yes. I did actually do quite well in math. And I'm thirty-five, so long as we're declaring ourselves."

She slapped a hand to her forehead. *Thirty-five*? That pulled her up short, giving her a whole new line of concerns to start pondering. She turned away, looking out the bay window. Maybe if she couldn't see him, the dizzying effect he seemed to have on her would lessen.

“That makes you nearly ten years *younger* than me.”

“I see you also did well in math.”

She couldn't miss the humor in his tone, though sadly she saw nothing humorous about this. Things like this didn't happen to her. She was marginally certain they didn't happen to most people. She began to feel faint and sank to the sofa, dropping her head into her hands. The speed with which he came alongside her, though gallant, merely increased the sensation. His fingers came beneath her chin, tilting her head so as to force her to look at him.

“Cassidy, you are a vibrant, beautiful, sexy woman regardless of age, and if it makes you feel any better, I almost always date older women. I can't stand juvenile behavior and insecurities. I was dating thirty-year-old women when I was fifteen.”

She felt her eyes widen in disbelief and was completely unable to wrap her mind around what he told her.

“Fifteen! That's...that's illegal!”

He shrugged again. “Yes, well, I grew up in Europe. European women are not as hung up on age as American women are.” He checked his watch. “For the most part, anyway. In fact, my first lover was thirty-seven.”

She couldn't think straight around this man. Maybe it was simply that he was the only man to ever chase after her, but somehow she thought it really had more to do with Aiden Grand simply being Aiden Grand. She paced to the front door, then spun back to face him.

“I'm the most insecure woman you'll ever meet. If you don't have the patience for that, you should leave now.”

He moved across the room to stand beside her. She watched every step he took, and her heart beat faster with each one. His hands came up to brace her elbows, and his thumbs ran back and forth over her arms. She'd hoped the long sleeves of her blouse would have offered more protection against his heat, but the silk only seemed to magnify it until she was almost begging him to tear it off her.

“I think some man ran a chain saw over your heart and your self esteem. That kind of insecurity was not what I was referring to. What he’s done to you, Cassidy, is a crime and I’d love nothing more than ten minutes locked in a room alone with the son of a bitch.” He pushed back the hair from her forehead and gently placed a kiss there. “You are so much more than you think. I see it. I wish you could see it as well.”

His words effortlessly melted the ice block around her heart. No one had ever said such kind things to her. Her own mother blamed her for the divorce, saying that if she’d known how to keep her man happy in bed, he never would have had to find someone who could. Her reality had no reference for a man like this. She had no idea how to react to such kindness.

“I’m so lost with you.”

He laughed softly.

“The feeling is mutual. I’m afraid I haven’t handled this situation at all well. I’m usually much more polished.”

Visions of the man running around the world propositioning women assaulted her mind, pushing away all the warmth his last statement had supplied. Her heartbeat sped up and panic started reasserting itself.

“So...what? You pick up a girl in every city?” She felt suddenly a little like the fly in the spider’s web, regardless that he was in *her* home. “Are you really that horny that you can’t go a few weeks without it?”

Lordy, she had no idea what had come over her. Her mouth was on a rampage. How she was ever able to speak that way to a man, and one she barely knew, one who’d just been so kind to her and who’d asked her to...well, to have an *affair* with him, she had no idea. She wished she could just shut herself up, tell Mr. Grand, thank you but no, and see him politely to the door. That would be the end of it, but she couldn’t seem to do it, this was like one of those disaster movies coming to life in slow motion and she was the star.

Finally, she said the only thing that made sense to her. “You need to leave.”

He let out a heavy sigh and checked his watch again. But she wasn’t going to be swayed or feel sorry for poor Mr. Grand being thrown out of the villager’s hut *without* his virgin sacrifice.

Okay, so not that she was a virgin anymore, but the basic principles still worked. Besides, maybe once he left, the planets would realign and life as she knew it would reassemble.

“All right. I’ve boggled this pretty good anyway.” He tipped her chin up as he’d done earlier. The move was dominant and bossy, but she liked the way it made her feel. She admonished herself to work on her independent, liberated side at some point. This man was able to turn her into a fifties movie heroine far too easily.

Except that, in the fifties, he wouldn’t have been offering three weeks of sex. She needed to remember that. He hadn’t asked for her hand in marriage, hadn’t asked for her to run away with him, hadn’t even really asked for a date. He wanted someone in his bed, and short term, at that. Really, it was degrading when she thought of it that way.

“But I’m not giving up on this, and—just for your information—I *do* have a *very* active sex drive, but I am *not* your ex. I have more respect for women than you implied, maybe I haven’t shown that very well this morning and for that, I apologize, but Cassidy...” His voice turned as warm and silky as hot-buttered rum and soft as velvet; she knew she was in trouble. “If I had you in my bed...”

Big trouble.

“You wouldn’t feel anything less than worshipped and sated. I know how to treat a woman, and I’d bet I could make you feel things you’ve,” the slight smirk tipped her off that she wasn’t going to like what came next, “only *read* about before.”

The article from this morning rushed back to her mind, her fantasies about his ass, about his hands running under her skirt and thoughts of being ravished not just by him but both men. Heat flooded her cheeks as images of them all naked, in her bed, one man holding

her, stroking her clit, the other inside her, “pounding the spot”, as it where. She took a deep breath before she passed out, surprised she was still standing, and now thanks to that kiss, she knew his touch, knew his taste. She *wanted* to lie beneath him worshipped and sated. Was it even possible to feel that way? She had a good inclination that if it was, he’d know how to do it.

Aiden Grand was a force of nature, and as hard as she was trying to stay insulted by his offer, his promises—along with words like “worshipped” and “sated”—made it far too difficult and left Cassidy far too curious.

He stared into her eyes for another long minute. She wasn’t sure if he was going to kiss her again or not. Wasn’t sure whether she wanted him to or not.

“You have the most incredible amber eyes I’ve ever seen, Cassidy.”

His voice was incredibly soft, his eyes held secrets and promises. He made her weak, brought all her insecurities into the light and made her feel vulnerable and needy. All the things she hated, but he also touched on the girl she used to be, the one who wanted to explore her sexuality which left her thinking that three weeks in his bed sounded like bliss.

He let her go and walked out her front door, which closed quietly and unceremoniously behind him. Cassidy stood there for another minute, stunned and numb. She needed to sit, but this time the sofa was too far away, so she slumped to the tile hearth before her fireplace, dazed and wondering what the hell had happened.

* * * *

Aiden rolled the black artist’s pencil around in his fingers feeling restless and frustrated. In the two days since he’d been to her apartment, he had reconsidered his decision to have a brief affair with

Miss Flint. He was immeasurably relieved that she'd had more control and common sense than he'd shown.

He reached into his bottom desk drawer and pulled out a box of colored pencils and began adding color to his rough sketch.

In fact, since that day in her home, he'd decided there were several very important things he did *not* like about Miss Flint.

He erased a few detail lines and blew on the paper to remove the eraser remnants. Okay, so they were really things he didn't like about himself when he was around her, but it all boiled down to the same thing. He wasn't like normal men. Love was not a luxury he could allow himself. The further he kept from her over the next three weeks, the better for all concerned.

He leaned back over his drawing, reminding himself of the reasons staying away was the better choice. First of all, she rattled him. He didn't like being rattled. He needed to be in control; it was how he got through life. Second, the fact that one nearly-chaste kiss had left him hard for three hours. He liked women. He found them the most satisfying distraction there was and he wasn't a novice at getting female companionship, but Cassidy wasn't like most of the women he dated and there was the very real possibility an encounter with him would hurt her. She was sweet and sensitive and, in his arms, very vulnerable to a broken heart, because he wasn't the kind of man that could stay.

Still, that delectable little brunette called to both to his mind and his body and he was having trouble ignoring or controlling his impulse to show her what her body was made for. Her innocence was seductive. Her inability to control that sexy mouth of hers, made him smile...

"Then there's the tiny little fact that you're obsessing over her."

He threw his pencil down and pressed the heels of his hands against tired eyes. Not in all his life had he obsessed over a woman. If one wasn't interested, he simply moved on to the next, no harm done.

And there was always a next.

Yes, he liked women. Yes, he had plenty of them. So, he really didn't need the shy and reserved Miss Flint then, did he?

Then why have you been in the office every morning at five, hoping she'd stop by?

His inner voice taunted him. He had no idea he had such moronic potential before Miss Cassidy Flint had appeared in his life, looking both shocked and interested at the same time over that ridiculous article.

He smiled and opened the bottom right drawer of his desk and pulled the very magazine from it. His fingers brushed over the lettering on the cover.

Be In Charge Of Your Own Orgasm.

He wondered how lame a man had to be in bed to chase his woman to an article like this one. He guessed there was some sort of empowerment for a woman, being in charge of her own orgasm, but he much preferred to be in charge of it for them. He most definitely wanted to be in charge of Cassidy's orgasms—at least for the next three weeks.

"Hey, I thought we were meeting at the restaurant."

Aiden looked up to see Garrison's face peeking around his door and quickly slammed the magazine back into the bottom drawer.

"Is it that late already?"

Garrison laughed. "Yeah, fifteen minutes ago. Thought you were anxious to try Yensen's latest creation."

"I am. My head's just in a strange place these days. It'll pass."

He stood, took one last look at the drawings he'd been working on and dropped his pencil atop them before grabbing his jacket.

"Hey, Aiden?"

"Yes?"

Garrison looked uncomfortable for a minute, and Aiden couldn't remember a time when he'd ever seen him like that. They'd met in college, frat brothers, and had been good friends since. Aiden had been thrilled when he'd convinced Garrison to come to work for him.

It gave them a chance to see one another every once in a while and catch up.

“It’s about Miss Flint.”

Aiden felt his groin react at just the mention of the woman’s name and instantly tried to think of something non-sexual, but couldn’t. “What is it?”

He waited for Garrison to tell him she’d quit, or filed a complaint against him for sexual harassment and he knew he damn well deserved it. His stomach began to churn. Garrison pulled at his tie and straightened before stating, “I guess you’ve probably figured out that I’ve got a thing for her.” Aiden needed to sit down, but he’d already moved to the door, too far from his desk chair, the visitors’ chairs, or the leather sofa that lined the back wall. So he casually leaned against the door, fighting for composure. “A *thing*?”

Garrison rubbed his forehead and walked further into the office. “I know, completely unprofessional, and don’t worry because I’d never act on it. My relationship with you and this job mean far too much to jeopardize for a woman, but the other night, I guess my thoughts went somewhere along the lines of, if she didn’t work here, no more conflict of interest. I was clearly biased and though within my rights to fire her for her behavior, I’m not certain I would have reacted quite so vehemently if it had been any other employee.”

His eyes met Aiden’s, obviously looking for understanding and absolution, but Aiden was so blown away that he could barely comprehend anything his friend was saying.

“I guess that’s why I acted so, so...like a beast the other night. I feel awful about it. I’ve already apologized to her, but I just wanted to clear the air with you.”

No two ways about it, Aiden needed to sit down. He moved as casually as he could to the sofa and sank down to it. “I think beast is over stating it, but how long have you felt this way?”

“A few years now.” He held up a hand. “I know. Pathetic, right?”

Aiden's stomach flipped. He pushed back his own embarrassment. "No. Not at all."

Well this changed everything, which was good, because now not only was Miss Flint an employee, but his best friend's... He scratched his head. His best friend's what? *Crush*? Did that hold the same off-limits sign as girlfriend or fiancée or wife? He wasn't sure, but figured he could probably look it up online. You could find anything online.

"Don't worry, I'd never do anything to jeopardize the hotel in any way. I won't ever act on it. I just figured you'd probably noticed how I go on and on about her. I wanted to set your mind at ease."

That was the one thing he hadn't done, but Aiden gave him a small smile anyway, as if he had.

"I never worry about your ethics, Garrison. You're the most solid guy I know." And that wasn't sugar coating it. Going through school Aiden had been known to bend a rule or two if he thought either his family name or money would let him get away with it, but not Garrison. He walked the straight and narrow at all times. It was one of the reasons he wanted the man working for him. "Let's just forget it and go get that lunch. All right?"

"Sure."

Aiden noticed how relieved Garrison sounded. What had he thought? That Aiden would fire him for having a crush on one of the employees? Hell, Aiden had just propositioned said employee after going through her personnel records to find her home address. How many violations was that? He'd turned into a stalker over night. His poor mother would be so proud.

He held the door open, hoping he could choke down lunch and behave normally, something he hadn't been doing since meeting Cassidy, but he'd give it a try.

The corridor they traversed was open on both sides, glass windows completely rolled back until they were hidden in wall panels, leaving the illusion of being in one of the gardens rather than

still inside the hotel. Brightly colored blooms lined either side of the open-air hallway and the scent of climbing jasmine from the courtyard and salt air from the ocean beyond, filled the space.

Aiden was lost in thought and didn't see the very nervous brunette before she nearly plowed into them. She couldn't have seen them either because he noticed at the last minute that she was studying the ground instead of looking where she was going so he did the only thing the moment allowed, he reached out and caught her.

Her head came up instantly, her breath obviously deserted her and her eyes grew large with surprise. Aiden was having a distinctly different reaction to her being in his arms, but he purposely ignored it. He quickly released her and she took a step back, clearly rattled. As she rubbed three fingers over her forehead, her nose wrinkled and Aiden was struck with how adorably cute she was.

"Mr. Lancaster. Mr. Grand."

She acknowledged both with a slight nod, then hit Aiden hard with a full blast from those amber eyes of hers. His cock was already well aware of her presence, but that look stirred it to life even more.

"I was just wondering if I could speak to you for a minute, Mr. Grand." She took a breath, licked her lips, further hardening his cock, and then added a solemn, "*Alone.*"

Chapter Three

The soft click of the door seemed ridiculously loud to Aiden's ears as he pushed it shut behind him. The fact that being alone with a woman was making him nervous in the first place was also ridiculous, but he wasn't able to stop it. Cassidy walked straight into his office like she'd been there a million times before and stood across the room by the window, biting her thumbnail. At least he wasn't the only one with a case of the nerves. Heartless beast that he was, he was glad to know it.

Her hair was straight today and clasped at the base of her neck in an ornate clip of brass and pearls. Considering she was still in her uniform, Aiden had to gather she had stuck around after her shift, which to his mind said she was here for him, he just wasn't sure if that was good or bad yet.

He couldn't blame her if she was here to let him have it, when he thought of how heavy-handed he'd been with her the other day. He more than deserved whatever she had planned for him.

"What can I do for you, Miss Flint?"

He sounded far too formal and felt horrible when she visibly winced.

It wasn't directly her fault that she was torturing him merely by her presence. While moving behind his desk, a place he hoped would help him remember he was her employer and wouldn't be anything more, he made another attempt.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to sound harsh. Your appearance just surprised me.” He gave a small laugh. “And not much does that anymore. I guess I’ve become somewhat jaded in my *old* age.”

He raised a brow at her, knowing their age difference bothered her. Hell, her own age seemed to bother her. He wondered who’d done the number on her, because what he saw when she stood in front of him was someone who was not aware of her own worth or beauty. And that was a crime, as far as he was concerned.

Then she surprised him with the most incredible smile he’d ever seen in all his life. It left him literally breathless.

“I guess I was a bit overly sensitive about that the other day. Lately, I don’t know, I’ve just been feeling old. I can’t really explain it.” She made a fancy turn that looked like a movement right out of Swan Lake yet appeared perfectly natural and flounced down on the edge of his sofa, resting her chin on her fist. “Old and shriveled.”

Aiden laughed again. It felt good. It wasn’t that he was overly serious, but he honestly couldn’t remember the last time he’d laughed or even smiled as much as he had the few times he’d been around her. There usually wasn’t much time in his daily routine for moments of spontaneous laughter, but something about Cassidy lifted his spirits while lowering his IQ at the same time.

He came over and sat beside her, his leg pressing against hers. Not sure that was the smartest move, he still squelched a feeling of smug satisfaction when he heard the hitch in her breath. At least he wasn’t the only one suffering from a rush of hormones.

“You’re hardly old or shriveled. And if you are, then my tastes have definitely changed, because everything about you attracts me, Cassidy.”

He leaned in closer and inhaled her soft, powdery scent with just the faintest hint of rose. It was sweet and refreshing and turned him on unbelievably. He was killing himself with the attempt to keep from touching her. To run his hands over that satiny skin, and to meld their mouths and taste her.

It would have made it a lot easier if he'd just stayed on the other side of the room, but he hadn't been able to do that, either.

"You see, that's what I don't understand." She twisted her body in the seat until she faced him, their knees touching. "Nobody's been interested in me..." She closed her eyes tight. "Let's just say in a very long time."

When her eyes opened again they locked onto his and Aiden saw an innocence, a vulnerability buried in there that brought out something he'd never felt before. It was a feeling somewhere between protective and possessive, and it shook him to the core. It was dangerous grounds he was walking on here.

"I guess I'm just wondering why you are," she said. "Showing an interest, that is. I'm wondering if it's some kind of game or a joke or something."

He'd gotten lost in his own thoughts for a minute, but thought the gist was she didn't find his intentions honorable. Maybe they weren't, but he wasn't sure he had much choice in the matter. He knew the plan for his life, knew it was already written in stone and there wasn't much to be done about it. He'd essentially sold his soul to the devil for the sake of his mother's happiness. For her, he had agreed to make life with his father work, and life in his father's world had very specific rules.

Marriage meant the daughter of one of the family's friends. Someone who'd either taken her career as far as she wanted it, or had been minding the charity circuit, biding her time waiting for the perfect husband to raise a pack of perfect children with. He wasn't at all prepared for feeling anything beyond lust for Cassidy and he had nothing real to offer her even if he did.

"I mean, if it is, that's okay. I can be a good sport and all, but I'd really appreciate if this could be over now." She hesitated a minute and began studying her lap and her firmly clasped hands resting in it.

“I do have feelings after all, and I hate to admit it, but in this area, they’re a little raw.”

She thinks this is a joke?

He wasn’t sure who he was mad at, but anger started to boil deep in his belly until he noticed his hands fisting against his pant legs. “My attraction isn’t a joke, Cassidy. And quite frankly, I don’t waste my time on juvenile practices on general principle.”

He stood and walked to the window. Without turning back to face her, he asked, “Why would you think that? That this was a joke?” He turned to look at her. “That my *feelings* for you are a joke?”

* * * *

Cassidy wasn’t sure how to answer that except with complete and utter honesty. She’d obviously offended him and that hadn’t been her intention. But for two days she’d been jumping out of her skin, waiting to see if he’d follow up with what he’d started or not. Finally, she’d come to the conclusion that he’d just been playing with her, but why?

She drew a breath, “Because I couldn’t imagine any other reason why you’d proposition me. It was very blatant and left no question as to what you wanted. I just can’t figure why you’d want that from me.”

He was quiet for a few minutes. Cassidy studied his profile as he looked out the window. A muscle twitched in his jaw the way it had in Mr. Lancaster’s the other night. She really hadn’t meant to make him angry, but she couldn’t go on the way she had been either.

“You make it sound as if I was soliciting you.”

She raised one shoulder, touching it to her cheek. “Weren’t you?”

“No!”

He turned to face her, and then dropped his head back. A sharp sound of laughter rising to the ceiling before he leveled his gaze on her again and growled, “God, no.”

He came back to the sofa and took both her hands in his. “Cassidy, have you ever experienced the pleasures between a man and a woman?”

Her cheeks pinked. “I’m forty-three years old, Mr. Grand. I’m not a virgin!”

He grinned, edged closer, and brushed her cheek with his fingers. She fought hard to suppress the shiver his touch elicited. “I never said you were. I asked if you’d experienced *pleasure*. I could show you such pleasure, Cassidy.”

He reached out to grab a strand of her hair. He rubbed it between two fingers and though she *knew* hair had no nerve endings, she couldn’t help but think she could feel his touch all the same. She swallowed hard. This was one of the most surreal moments of her life. He dropped her hand, stood, and removed his jacket and tie. Cassidy panicked and stood.

“Wh-what are you doing?”

She hated sounding like a naïve school girl at her age. Hated that she was so under experienced and nervous. He didn’t answer her, just started unbuttoning his shirt, and Cassidy knew the time to run was upon her, but she couldn’t get her damned feet to move even an inch.

“Touch me, Cassidy.”

“I...I...”

She scratched her head and swallowed again, feeling absolutely ridiculous for reacting this way. It was only a man. Only a chest.

One fucking gorgeous chest, muscled with just a hint of dark chest hair and flat brown nipples. In all honesty, she did want to touch him.

“Touch me.”

His voice drew her vision from his nipples back to his eyes. She drew a long slow breath. In all honesty, she knew she’d never get another offer like this one. She took a step closer and placed her palm over his nipple, letting the heat of his body sink into hers.

He placed his hand over hers and directed it. In tandem they moved, the coarse bristles of his chest hair against her palm, the play

of muscles beneath his skin. She knew she was growing wet and was losing herself to the sensations, the emotions, and she wasn't sure she wanted to stop it.

"No man has ever shown you how truly remarkable it is to be a woman joining with a man, have they?"

She shook her head.

"Let *me*."

Those two words settled on her hard at first, but as they sunk in she began to wonder if she should or even if she could.

After all, it was what she wanted. What she'd spent months, well, years to be honest, dreaming about. She just wasn't sure she'd ever thought of herself as "the sex without commitment" kind of girl.

While she'd been lost in her own world for a minute, he cupped her face in his palms. His thumb brushed her lower lip again.

"Despite what you think, Cassidy, you are a woman of great passion. I knew it for a fact when you licked me the other day in your home."

She knew she'd be blushing furiously by now. Her cheeks burned, hell, her entire body felt heated to the point of combusting, still, he made her entire body tingle and made her want to be passionate and wild and try things she'd never even dreamt.

His arm had circled around her waist, and he pulled her body tight against his own.

"Can you *feel* that, Cassidy?" One side of his mouth hitched into a half smile. "My cock is hard and ready to slide inside you. As I told you before, I have a very active sex drive, but I don't get hard for just anyone."

She felt her eyes widen at all he implied. She knew it wasn't an attractive look, but she couldn't seem to stop. She most certainly did feel his erection pressed firmly against her stomach. Quite frankly it felt enormous and so hard she imagined it must be almost painful. She tried to pull from his arms, but he only countered her move by pulling her more firmly against him.

“That’s for you. *Only* you. I got hard almost the instant I first saw you, and it only takes me thinking of you to get that way again. So is this a joke? No. Are my feelings for you real? Absolutely. What would you suggest I do, Cassidy?”

He flexed against her, and she felt a wash of white heat steal over her.

“Ignore it? Go after some other woman in the hope of appeasing it? It wants *you*.” His fingers reached for the bow on her blouse, and he pulled it lose. “*I* want you.”

“But it’s just sex?”

She watched something flicker in his eyes. It seemed a terminally long time before he answered.

“I’ll only be here a few weeks. I travel all over the world. It wouldn’t be fair of me to ask for more.”

Aiden didn’t give her a chance to think let alone respond before his mouth came down on hers. Cassidy’s body reflexively stiffened against the assault, but she instantly stopped herself. Instead she melted into his arms, into his kiss. She took the time to explore him. She pushed her tongue into his mouth, twirled her tongue with his. She tasted lemon. Wrapping his arms gently, but more firmly around her, he groaned against her mouth.

“Please, Cassidy. Let me show you. Let me teach you how wonderful it can be.”

He sounded so sure. His tone alone nearly had her convinced. She ran her hands along his arms, using them as leverage to pull her own body closer. She wanted this, *needed* it in a way. Without second guessing herself or her decision, she gave herself up to the myriad of feelings barraging her and once again slid her tongue inside his mouth.

They both groaned at the meeting and mating of wet, slick tongue to wet slick tongue. Cassidy fell against him, suddenly not able to hold her own weight. She brought her hands up around his neck and

pushed her fingers through his hair, something she'd wanted to do since that first night.

It was glorious. His hair was thick and wavy, and the sensual slide of her fingers moving through it made her brazen. She arched her body against his, completely lost now to this man and this kiss.

"Cassidy, is that a yes? Because in another minute, anything short of the sprinkler system being activated and dousing us won't cause me to release you before I've taken everything I need and given you everything I know you want."

He pushed her a few steps until her back hit the wall. The jolt rattled the pictures hanging on it. She gasped slightly. She was standing on the edge of the most important question of her life. Should she jump or stay safely on the sidelines wondering?

"Tell me."

The entire situation was insane, but somewhere in his eyes she found her safety.

"Yes."

And she jumped.

The passion ignited in his eyes so fast and furious she was nearly frightened by it. At the same time, the gentleness with which he tilted her head back before pushing his tongue back inside her mouth made her know this was the right choice.

* * * *

She was the most sensual creature Aiden had ever known, despite how she felt about herself, her sensuality was an innate part of who she was and he was determined to make her see it before their time together ended. He took full advantage of her willing spirit and began a sweet possession he knew was going to bring them both more pleasure than they'd ever known. He moved his mouth over hers, discovering her, exploring and experiencing everything she would allow.

She met his every desire without question, and her body made promises of more as it writhed against his. Her hands caressed his neck, shoulders and back. He needed this woman naked, skin to skin, nothing between them.

He tugged open a few buttons, but her tongue swirled around his, and she sucked on it in a movement that shot another blast of heat through his body and straight to his cock. Naked could wait. He needed inside her, now.

His hand slid along her waist to her hip; she was curvy and feminine, her flesh gave beneath his fingers, her body was soft against him, she was *real* and he loved it. He'd been with enough women that had bought into the Hollywood myth of thin being sexy. Well it wasn't, not to him. He loved Cassidy's curves and softness, every damn inch of it.

He continued reaching downward, running his fingers along her skirt until he found the hem and pushed it up. His fingers glided along what felt like silk. He groaned, not sure exactly where the line between pleasure and pain was, but knowing he was rapidly approaching it. When his fingers hit lace, then the even softer, warm surface of skin, he realized she was wearing thigh highs, not hose.

He almost came right there and then.

"Cassidy." He growled her name. "This is getting serious. If you're intending to tell me to stop, you better do it now."

He pressed his body against hers, pinning her between the hard surface of the wall and the hard surface of his body. He watched the emotions flicker behind her eyes and prayed she wouldn't tell him to stop now.

"I'm not sure about the ethics of having sex with one's boss in his office, but I suppose I'll have many a lonely night to go over my indiscretion later. And somehow, that seems better than night after lonely night wishing I'd gone for it." She swallowed and closed her eyes. "I'm not stopping you."

He didn't like thinking of her alone night after night, but he also didn't like the thought of another man with her either. When she flicked her tongue out just long enough to touch her bottom lip, he lost all conscious thought and went back to devouring her lips, throat and the valley of her breasts.

"I'm sort of..." She gasped as his finger ran over her hard nipple for the first time. "I wish I'd spent more time reading those articles I subscribe... Oh!"

He was listening, but he was also removing her shirt and her bra. He smiled wickedly at her. "Go ahead."

"The magazine articles. Just wish I'd actually read some."

She smiled and blushed furiously. That blush was damn charming, he thought she was the sweetest thing he'd ever seen.

"Those magazines are for lonely women who don't know better."

She rolled her eyes and slumped against the wall. He captured her chin and pulled her gaze back to his.

"Cassidy."

"Yes."

"I'm going to *teach* you better."

She swallowed. "Good." And her voice cracked.

"Are you okay?"

He pressed his cock against her again, flattening his entire body against hers.

"Mmm-hmm"

He could tell she wasn't. She was overwhelmed and probably a bit frightened, but he saw the raw passion in her. He intended to take care of her, but he also intended to bring that passion out.

"Good." His hand ran down her jaw, her neck. She shivered. "Because I'm going to *fuck* you, Cassidy."

He saw the flicker of uncertainty in the depths of her eyes.

"Right. Fucking. No emotions. Just body parts doing their thing."

He kissed her deeply, sucked her tongue gently into his mouth and loved the soft moan she released as she eased her body beneath his.

“On the contrary, Miss Flint. You would probably prefer I tell you I’d like to make love to you.” He waited a beat. “But making love is for movies and television. It’s staged and choreographed and fake. Fucking, is organic and raw and primal. It’s *real*, Cassidy, and it involves a hell of a lot of emotion.”

His mouth ravished hers, stealing the breath from her lungs.

“I’m going to fuck you the way a woman should be fucked.”

She was breathless, and he knew she was acting impulsively. He brought his mouth back to her so fast she wouldn’t have time for second thoughts and later, he’d do everything in his power to make damn sure she never regretted taking this chance with him.

He dropped to his knees in front of her as he had the night they’d met. He slid his hands up her thighs, then tugged her panties down.

He stood back up, wrapping one luscious thigh against his hip, opening her for him. He sunk one finger into her and had to hold himself back once again. She was so hot and wet and tighter than he could have imagined. Just that exchange of wet heat against his skin had him so close, he scared himself. He’d never lost himself before, never even came close, but Cassidy was testing everything he was made off.

“You’re so wet.” His voice was thick with passion, but as he couldn’t remember another time when he’d been so turned on, it was a miracle his throat worked at all. She sucked in her lower lip, the one that was wet and swollen from his kisses.

“That’s good, right?”

Her whisper turned him on more and he closed his eyes, dropping his head against her shoulder. “Fuck, honey. That’s so much more than good.”

He was an idiot. All his great talk about teaching her how it could be, and here he was about to fuck her against his office wall. Between labored breaths he asked, “This isn’t right. Do you want to stop? Go to your place, or get a room? Something better than this?”

She looked at him with eyes so dark they were black. Her breathing was patchy, and she shook her head so hard the clasp slipped in her hair, allowing some of it to fall free against her face. “No! I want you to fuck me. Now!”

He laughed, though the potent mix of adrenaline and hormones running through his body made it difficult to even think, he unfastened his pants and freed himself.

“I’m sorry then, baby, but this is going to be over pretty fast this first time.” He looked deep into her eyes making her a solemn vow. “I *will* make it up to you.”

He grabbed a condom, mindlessly ripped it open and sheathed himself. Then he slid his hands under her soft ass and hoisted her off her feet and onto his cock, sliding deep with the first thrust. “Oh, my God.” Her breathy gasp of surprise was so endearing. His only thought was, *Heaven*.

She was even tighter than he thought so he slowed, allowing her body to adjust to him. He bit the side of his cheek, drawing blood, but he had to do something if he wanted to be all the way inside her *before* he came.

“Wrap your legs around me, gorgeous.”

She did and he slid the rest of the way in. She moaned and shifted, sending white heat all the way to the soles of his feet. He rocked hard against her. The pictures hanging on the wall jostled and banged out a rhythm for them. Within seconds he felt her contract around him. She cried out, and then sunk her teeth into his shoulder. It was all he could take, and he practically exploded, emptying himself into her. The release was longer and more powerful than he expected and for a second he wondered how three weeks with this woman would ever be enough.

He couldn’t catch his breath and was seeing stars. All he could think of was how fast he could get her to a bed so they could start round two. One arm supported her incredible ass while the other wrapped around her back, his hand slid under her jacket. Sweat had

dampened the silk, and it clung to her skin. He pulled her body as close against his as he could, holding her so tight he wasn't even sure she could still breathe.

She buried her face against his shoulder, her breathing slowly recovering. He burrowed into her hair and together they slid down the dark wall paneling until they hit solid ground.

Chapter Four

“I *bit* you.”

Cassidy softly ran her fingers over the abraded skin, having no idea what had come over her. Swept away with passion, she mused. On the one hand, there was a certain level of mortification. On the other hand, she’d spent the last dozen or so years of her life dreaming about exactly this.

Despite their currently level of undress and the fact he was still inside her, or maybe because of it, she shyly met his gaze, only to find him beaming like an idiot.

“You sure did, honey. That was a definite high point in my mind.”

He squeezed her even tighter. She wasn’t sure what to think, but the next three weeks were going to be an adventure—that much was for certain.

With her forehead pressed against his shoulder and his mouth nuzzling against her neck, a part of her wanted to burrow inside him and live there forever. “I didn’t hurt you?”

He laughed, sounding almost pleased that she’d bit him like a rabid dog. “Hurt me?” He curved his fingers beneath her chin and propped her up until she was forced to meet his tender gaze. “Isn’t that supposed to be my question to you?” He kissed the side of her head. “Mr. Finesse, I wasn’t.”

“But...” She had to swallow and clear her throat. She didn’t have much to compare finesse with. Charlie’s idea of mind-blowing sex was if he got off before the game started, then again at halftime.

Regardless of Aiden's finesse or lack thereof, she'd behaved no better than an animal. Three seconds alone with the man and she'd let him take her like a cat in a back alley. Glancing around at the plush furnishings of his office, she amended her thought. Hopefully, the fact that it was an upscale alley redeemed her a little in some small way, at least.

"I left a mark." She touched the tiny red line of teeth indentations. She couldn't imagine he actually appreciated her sinking her fangs into him.

His head fell back with a sharp bark of laughter, and he squeezed her again. If she had a clue about sex and men in a general sense, maybe she'd be able to make heads or tails of this. One thing that was for sure, she wasn't putting off enrolling in that human sexuality course over the summer at the college any longer.

"In my book, a mark is a badge of honor. Hell, honey, I hope you drew blood."

He tilted his head back again far enough so she could see into his eyes. They smoldered, holding humor as well as a strong flame of desire still burning deep within them. The look gave her butterflies, and she involuntarily clenched her inner muscles.

Aiden groaned, and she felt him flex against her.

"Good Lord!"

"And then some, honey."

She felt her cheeks heat and pressed the backs of her hands against them. His smile grew a little crooked, and Cassidy's stomach did a flip.

"But, uh..." He ran a hand up over his head and looked away from her. "...I didn't lock the door."

It took a second, but the ramifications of that settled quickly into her brain. She instantly jerked her body in an effort to get away from him. Aiden held her firmly, kissed the top of her head, then slowly pulled away from her. It surprised her how vulnerable and alone she

felt when he left her. It wasn't like she was any more alone than usual, but suddenly it felt like it.

She watched him, feeling a bit starry-eyed, as he pushed himself back into his clothes, and then held his hand down to her. Feeling stupid for not standing on her own when she had the chance, she gave herself a break this one time, considering that her head wasn't working right at all. Placing her hand in his, she allowed him to pull her to her feet. She made an attempt to gracefully and subtly slide the skirt currently wrapped around her waist back down to a level required for decency. All the while she wished the ground would just open up and swallow her.

While the sex had been amazing, better than she ever could have imagined, the after part was more than awkward. She had no idea how to handle it. She seriously began to wonder if the sex had been worth this or not. This of course was the very thinking keeping her on the fence all these years in the first place?

She thought about all those books she'd bought. All the magazines she'd subscribed to just so she would be ready for a moment like this. Although, even if she had read all those articles, she couldn't remember seeing one on handling the moments after you've just allowed your boss to fuck you wildly against the wall of his office.

Remembering the sound of the pictures hitting the wall, she groaned, wondering if *banging* wouldn't have been a better word choice.

She closed her eyes tight as the memory washed over her again. The wonderfulness of it battled with the shame she felt for behaving so brazen. She wished she was more like normal women and feared maybe it was too late for her. Another thought grabbed her, only deepening her shame. She covertly looked around the floor but couldn't see her underwear anywhere. She shifted her weight and with as much dignity as she could muster, she forced out in not much more than a mumble, "I need my underwear."

She didn't look up at him, in fact, she kept her eyes glued to the carpet trying to lose herself in the swirling pattern of multiple shades of blue and green, one ankle wrapped around the other, arms folded tightly over her breasts.

"What?"

She closed her eyes and sighed. Then with granite fortitude, she repeated herself a little louder.

"I. Need. My. Underwear."

Where was that hole when you needed it? It didn't have to be a very big one, she could suck in her breath and make herself fit. Any old crevice would do. Anything she could crawl in until the humiliation passed. Say a thousand years or so.

"Oh! Right."

She watched in horror as he went into action. First searching the floor, then the sofa, then-she cringed-could a person die from embarrassment?

Literally die?

They had landed on his desk.

Maybe death wouldn't be so bad.

She couldn't look at him as he handed the cream silk and lace to her. She'd decided to burn the pair the minute she got home, even if they did match one of her favorite bras.

She could sense Aiden smirking which didn't make the situation any less uncomfortable. After she died, she thought she might come back and haunt him.

"Honey, I just had you bare assed against that wall. There's hardly anything to turn so red over now."

She groaned again and inwardly pleaded for him *not* to remind her.

He came closer and brushed his thumb along her cheek. His body was close enough now for hers to ache for him again. She felt the heat rising inside her, felt her breasts calling for his touch. She wished they

would just shut up. She wasn't making this particular mistake again. Sex—incredible or not—was *not* worth *this*.

“We have to go to your place, you know.”

“What?”

She hoped the strangled sound didn't expose how horrified she felt, but when the left side of his mouth quirked up the way it did, she imagined it had.

“We can't go back to my room.” He brushed her hair over her shoulder. “In a half hour the entire hotel would know, and I can't imagine you want that.”

“Well, no, but...” She took a step back, pushing her spine against the wall hoping to create distance, but it wasn't working. “We, we, w-we...*can't*.”

His lips brushed her temple then softly covered her lips and left her burning for more of their seductive touch even as she wanted to run. She wondered if she would always feel this way now. It was as if her body had been asleep all these years and sadly now he'd awakened it. Now every cell knew what it had been missing—*she* knew—and her head continued to argue with her body until she felt nauseous. She imagined this would make ignoring the opposite sex a lot harder from here on out.

“Why not, beautiful?”

His thumb made another pass at her cheek, and his voice was so tender she almost wanted to cry. However, even more than that, she wanted to collapse into his arms and never leave. Wanted to let him do whatever he pleased to her and never go back to life as she'd known it.

Distance.

Reminding herself ruthlessly that was all she needed right now, she pushed him back, wobbled slightly, and then stepped out of his reach.

“Can...can you turn around?”

“Why?”

She dropped her head, staring at her beige shoe against the sea green carpet.

“Because I have to...to...” She made a very small movement of the hand that held her underwear tightly at her side and he laughed...*hard!*

Haunting would be too good for him.

“I’m sorry.” He held up his hands in a show of innocence. “Truthfully. I shouldn’t laugh, but you take me by surprise. I’ve never known a woman like you. I find you charming and refreshing. I had no idea how much I longed for fresh air until I met you, Cassidy, but baby, you *can’t* be serious.”

She was appalled. Did his other women put on elaborate displays for him? Come to think of it, they probably did, and she probably seemed like the town prude about now. Sure that her skin was turning another shade of red, she recalled one of her articles entitled *Masturbating for Your Man*. She’d torn those pages out of the magazine and taken the bag of trash she’d put them in with her to the store and shoved it in the dumpster in the back. She hadn’t the nerve to read the article, but even the title apparently had been enough. So much for her inexperience limiting her imagination.

If she wasn’t going to die, she was pretty sure fainting wasn’t too far out of the question. She was naked under her skirt, and he wanted to know if she was *serious*.

“Of course I’m serious. Why can’t I be?”

He spread his arms wide and then dropped them with a loud slap against his thighs.

“Because we just had *sex*.”

Somehow she’d hit the deep end her first time in the pool and hadn’t even known she’d been out for a swim.

“I’m well aware,” she muttered under her breath.

He took a step closer, and she took a step back, banging into that damn wall again. “And I intend to take you home now, strip you naked, and examine every square inch of your beautiful body.” His

voice dropped into that sultry silky tone, causing her hormones to betray her. His eyes slowly slid down over her, leaving fire in their wake. She felt as if he'd been able to see right through her clothes.

There wasn't any way she was going to put on a show for him. She just couldn't. It wasn't in her nature. The she remembered her teen years when she wanted to put on exactly this kind of demonstration for a man. She was so confused now she didn't know what to think. She'd let everything spin too far out of control. Her body wanted one thing, but her mind demanded another.

"There won't be a freckle I'm not well acquainted with by the time I'm done with you, Cassidy."

She shivered at his erotic promise. He took a step toward her and once again brushed his finger down her cheek. "I'm going to lick my way from your lips to your toes. I'm going to suck on your nipples and eat your pussy until you scream my name, honey."

Her knees buckled, but he caught her and pulled her against him.

"Sweetheart, I made you a promise, and I'm not going to let your sudden attack of nerves push me away."

He brushed that wicked finger down the bridge of her nose. It was everything she'd wanted, but now that it was in front of her, the ramifications scared the shit out of her.

"I think..." She rubbed her forehead before speaking. "No."

He did a double take, blinked three or four times, and closed his eyes completely. "Are you serious?"

She blinked back tears, not sure if they were out of embarrassment or because he sounded so hurt. "I *can't*. I'm not the right kind of woman for you, Aiden. I'm probably not the right kind of woman for any man. I'm shy and insecure and I haven't a clue what I'm doing. I waited too long and now it's too late. I'm more than flattered and very tempted by your offer, but I just can't. Now would you please turn around?"

He opened his eyes and nailed her with a gaze that was nearly black. "No."

Cassidy inhaled sharply. “But...” She tucked hair behind her ears, for the first time realizing almost all of it had fallen from the clip. She must look ridiculous. She tore the clip from her hair, ran her hand over her head hoping to sort it a little, and grabbed her purse, shoving her underwear in it as she did. “You’re an ass.”

She ran towards the door, just barely making her way through it before the tears fell.

* * * *

Aiden stood in shock staring at the back of his closed door.

What the fuck had just happened?

He’d been with a lot of women in his life, but none of them had behaved like that one. She’d been a wild woman one minute, as hot for him as he was for her, then as skittish as a newborn foal the next.

He ran his hand over his chin and mouth. Women weren’t so fucking complicated most of the time. The sex they’d just had was hot, and their bodies fit together well. She was a little shy, but he was sure he could bring her out of it. So what was the problem? A little love bite? That didn’t seem right.

He’d never met such a dichotomy of passion and near virginal innocence. Never would have thought it would appeal to him if he had found it, but on Cassidy it was damned irresistible.

So what happened?

A part of him said to let it go, but the more he thought about it the angrier he got. *One thing’s for certain...* He grabbed the keys from his desk drawer, slamming it shut again. *I’m getting some answers.*

* * * *

Aiden pounded the heel of his hand against the leather-covered steering wheel. The sun beat down on him through the windshield, since he’d already removed his jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeves,

he went for the tie, and the first three buttons of his shirt looking for relief. All the while wondering only one thing, *Where the hell is she?*

He'd been sitting in front of her home for over two hours, but there was no sight of Cassidy. Unfortunately, the time alone had only served to worsen his condition. In his dash from the office, he'd left his cell on the desk, so the only thing he had to fill his time with was re-thinking what had happened earlier in his office with Cassidy.

Over and over again, the sound of those pictures banging against the wall filled his head. Cassidy's soft moans sounded in his ears and the memory of her scent filled every fiber of his being with need. He could still taste her kiss, still feel her hands on his back, her teeth in his shoulder. It was driving him crazy.

He pulled open his shirt collar, glancing at the purple and blue mark rising to the surface of his shoulder, and smiled. A warmth ran through him and it wasn't all lust, either. He efficiently shoved any tender thoughts aside and concentrated on the pure satisfaction he'd felt at being able to arouse her to such levels of passion.

Remembering an earlier woman, he tapped a finger against his chin and studied the clouds through the sun roof. *What the hell was her name?*

Didn't matter. Anyway, he remembered her liking to run her fingernails over his back during sex, but in a concern for her manicure she'd never become over zealous about it. Maybe it was just that he'd been lost in his father's world for so long and the women there were all so guarded and cold. He ran his fingers over the tiny indentations still there as she'd all but broken the skin thinking this was a passion he hadn't come across in a very, *very* long time. There was no way in hell he was going to allow her to walk out on what they'd discovered.

He grinned.

Not for at least three weeks, anyway.

He looked over his shoulder up the road. Cassidy lived on a dead end branch off a main thoroughfare, and from where he sat he could

see in both directions. There was a steady stream of traffic but no old blue relics. She wasn't coming.

His mind wandered back to this woman who'd captured all his thoughts from the second he met her. Cassidy Flint was real in a way that surprised him, and she was gorgeous in an everywoman sort of way, not in the manicured-and-styled-to-within-an-inch-of-her-life way. With her silky hair spilling every which direction, her amber eyes alight with desire and her cheeks flushed with a healthy dose of lust, he couldn't imagine anyone more beautiful. Passionate, spontaneous and sweet, Cassidy was an exquisite woman.

He groaned and scrubbed both hands over his face. He was toast.

The sound of gravel crunching beneath a car wheel brought him alert. Relief he didn't entirely understand washed over him at the sight of her old blue car. Then he was hit hard with a need to buy her a more reliable vehicle and a cell phone if she didn't have one so he wouldn't have to worry about her if he couldn't find her for two hours. He brushed it away as mere concern he'd have for any woman driving such an old model.

He came up behind her, instantly noticing her bare feet. This caused him to wonder whether or not she'd put her underwear back on. He couldn't stop his eyes from scanning the area in question, which only incited a rising heat and accompanying ache in his groin.

Beyond toast.

"You scared the life out of me, Cassidy. Where have you been?"

* * * *

Cassidy sighed inwardly. She thought she'd composed herself. The sight of his car hadn't totally freaked her out, after all. The sound of that sexy voice, though—even if it was thinly laced with anger—completely undid her. Without looking at him, she reached across and grabbed her shoes and hose from the passenger seat, then stood straight to face him. He was crowding her and effectively

sandwiching her between his hard body and her car. He looked like a normal man for once, his jacket and tie gone and his sleeves rolled back. His hair even looked tangled, as if he'd been running his fingers through it repeatedly. She glanced to see if he still had his shoes on.

The scent of his cologne gave her vivid flashbacks, and she was left feeling a little woozy again. But in the time since she'd seen him, she'd decided that she was stronger than this silly attraction. That very thought straightened her spine.

"I went to the beach."

She put her palm flat against his shoulder, the one she'd bit earlier. The realization almost made her blanch. She simply couldn't get over she'd done that, and doubted very much that she ever would. After a moment, she re-focused and pushed him back.

"Now, if you'll excuse me, I've had an exceptionally trying day."

She rounded the back of her car, intent on not stopping until she hit her shower, only to spy her poor azalea planted beside the porch steps and doubled back to her car. After fishing through several articles of clothing, a collection of magazines for new hair cuts, a roadside first aid kit that she thought she'd stuffed in the trunk, and a bag from the local taco place, she found what she was looking for under the front passenger seat—a half-empty bottle of water. Feeling slightly victorious she walked back to the immature plant, twisting off the cap, she poured the remaining contents over the small bush.

"I'm so sorry. I can't ever seem to remember you."

Aiden came to stand by her. Together the two stared at the little shrub.

"Not much of a gardener?"

She shrugged, feeling tired and strangely comforted by his presence rather than perturbed by it for the moment.

"Actually, I love gardens. I just never planted one here because..." She paused and then sighed. "This wasn't supposed to be permanent." With the rest of her optimism draining, much the way the water had drained from the bottle to pool around the tiny azalea, she

moved over and sank to the top step. “My life hasn’t exactly gone as planned.”

Aiden stepped around and sat beside her. As there wasn’t much room on the tiny step, his leg pressed firmly up against hers. They sat in bookend positions in the shade of a willow, elbows resting on their knees, heads down, and the sound of traffic in the distance.

Aiden carefully asked, “What happened, Cassidy? Why’d you run from me?”

“It was stupid. And embarrassing.”

He smiled and leaned into her. Shoulder to shoulder she drank in his warmth.

“You get embarrassed easily, don’t you?”

Her only response was another blush and a small smile.

“I can’t seem to help it.” She looked up. “Do you think there’s medication for it?”

He kissed her on the forehead, and she drew in a breath, accepting the moment of truce and strength he was somehow delivering.

“No. I don’t.”

“Oh.” Heat infused her as she watched and felt Aiden’s finger run a trail up over her knee.

“Talk to me, Cass.”

She gave him a sad smile. “No one calls me that. My dad used to, but he died when I was ten.”

“Sorry, I’ll try not—”

“No. It’s okay. I liked it.” It made her feel at home in a weird way. She sighed again, liking way too much the casual, comfortable way it felt sitting on her top step with him. It was something she’d never found with anyone else and it was a really nice feeling.

He reached over and twined his fingers in hers, then brought his other hand over the joined ones. Cassidy looked at the sight for an extended amount of time, her hand sandwiched between both of his. It had been so very long since she’d seen her hand held by anyone. The sight seemed foreign.

Resignation floated softly down on her. All the years she'd dreamed of a man who'd treasure her. Someone who'd kiss her on Saturday night in front of the movie theater, and then spend all day Sunday in bed with her. Someone who'd stay up until three in the morning just talking, or would walk the dog with her, or read to her, or kiss her in the rain.

She'd been so sure he was out there, a man who'd want to build a life and a future with her, and help and provide for her. As archaic as that sounded, the truth of the matter was, she'd simply always wanted to be a housewife. Sadly, that man—whether he existed or not—wasn't going to be airlifted into her bedroom one day with a big pink bow around his neck. And she was discovering that she was just too chicken to go out and search for him.

She felt the dream die. Felt herself letting it go and accepting that this was it. She was going to live out the rest of her life alone.

"Maybe I'll buy a few plants for the back yard." Her voice sounded strangely thick with surrender. "It's a decent size, and Harold loves to spend time out there. I guess if I fixed it up, I could sit out there with him."

She stared off into nothingness for a while thinking about porch swings that would only be for one—or one and a dog, she supposed—and the cedar chest in her bedroom filled with baby things that would never be used. She supposed there were sperm donors and adoption, but she was past forty, so the chances of her even being able to get pregnant now were slim, and most adoption agencies didn't want to hear from you after you were forty. She'd checked and couldn't afford the ones that would take her on.

She was so completely soaked in her own self pity that she didn't even catch a glimpse of Aiden, had no clue before it happened, before his mouth covered hers. As wonderful as it was, her first impulse was to push him away. She wasn't ready to go through another round of shame and regret, but then she paused. *If this is it, I might as well go out with a bang. What difference will it make now, anyway?*

She wrapped her arms around his neck, twisting her body on the step until she was pressed up against him. Slow and thoroughly, he kissed her until she was weak and glad she was already sitting. He moaned against her mouth, and his hand came up to caress her breast through the silk blouse.

Cassidy shivered despite the heat of the afternoon, then he pulled back just far enough to look into her eyes.

“Cassidy?”

“Mhmm?” Too far gone to think clearly, she hoped he didn’t want the theory of relativity. *Or my grocery list, for that matter.*

“If I make love to you again, are you going to run away from me when we finish?”

His tongue made a very educated pass across her lower lip before gliding inside. Cassidy couldn’t stop herself from sucking on the visitor. It wasn’t something she’d ever done before, but when he’d done it to her earlier it had just about blown her mind. Sucking on his tongue was making her hot, and she could feel moisture growing between her legs, along with that double-edged sword known as need.

Since she’d already surrendered to her fate, she pulled back just far enough to answer him on a whisper, “No. But I don’t want you to make love to me.” She placed her hands against his cheeks. “I want you to *fuck* me.”

He grinned. “Well, all right then. Prepare yourself, Miss Flint. I’m about to ruin you for other men.”

She didn’t have a single doubt that he was.

Chapter Five

Before Cassidy could change her mind—not that she was going to this time—Aiden stood and held out his hand to her. It reminded her so much of earlier that she blushed again. Taking his hand, she felt somewhat awed that such an incredible man would want her.

Some of that wonder must have shown on her face, because as he pulled her from the step and into his arms he asked, “What?”

Then he kissed her too fast to give her a chance to answer. When he separated their mouths she’d forgotten her embarrassment, as her desire was burning too hot for anything else to live beside it.

“Keys?”

She nudged them into his hand. Aiden never let go of her, his hand securely engulfed hers, as he turned the key in the lock and opened the door. It was strange how something so small could make her feel so cherished, but it did. She loved the feel of her hand in his, loved how strong and powerful he was and yet how gentle he could be with her. She also loved the way it made her feel less alone and as if she’d found something wonderful. She tried furiously to keep her brain from looking at the pragmatic side of things, the basic fact that she hardly knew the man, or that this would probably only be a one-time thing. Every part of her cried out to go for the ride, and she wanted to do it without hesitation or doubt.

As usual Harold came barreling towards her, all tongue and wagging tail. Cassidy laughed as he pummeled his soft little body against her ankles. Aiden’s laughter drew her attention. It relaxed her to know that he didn’t mind Harold. More, it made a warmth spread

through her heart, and a smile bloom on her lips. "I'm glad you don't mind him."

It was Aiden who bent down and scooped the small dog up. The furry body wriggled so much in attempts to attach his tongue to human skin that Aiden almost dropped the little guy, but carefully recovered and tucked the dog close.

"My mother has ten dogs living with her, she has a large estate in Italy and the dogs are part of the family. I've never actually had a pet, but I certainly don't mind them." He cuddled the dog against his chest. "What should we do with him? Though I don't mind his presence, that doesn't mean I want an audience for what I'm about to do to you."

Cassidy felt the shiver slide down her spine at the thoughts of what he was about to do. She smiled and took the dog from him, giving Harold kisses as she pulled away from Aiden.

"I'll just put him out back for a bit."

After she slid the lock on the doggie door, she spent a minute peering outside. It was a nice yard, or could be. She'd been foolish to leave it the way it was when she could have had twelve years to enjoy it. In the morning she planned a trip to Home Depot, but right now... She turned to find Aiden watching her. She wondered if he was afraid she'd chicken out again. With how she'd behaved today, she could imagine what he must think of her.

And she'd had the nerve to question *his* sanity. She watched in fascination as his eyes grew dark, taking a step forward he held out his hand again.

"Ready?"

Peace flowed from the top of her head to the tips of her sore feet. Those shoes might look great, but they killed her feet every time she wore them. She quickly redirected her thoughts. This was the right thing to do. "I think so. Aiden, are you sure that..."

He cut her off with a soft kiss.

"I'm sure. And I'll go slow and be gentle or anything else you need from me."

She drew a deep breath and climbed the stairs behind him, her hand in his, quivering from head to foot with anticipation. She'd never had a man in her bedroom before, the only man she'd ever shared a room with—a bed with—was Charlie. This would be very different.

They got to the landing, where Aiden quietly asked, “Which way?”

She pointed to the front of the house where her bedroom overlooked the street, and he continued to lead them into the small alcove and then through the door to her room. A room she'd spent every night of the last twelve years in suddenly took on a whole new light.

She'd always loved this room, although sometimes she wished it looked out over the cliffs out back with the ocean beyond. But she loved the pale blue color she'd painted it, and the Spanish tiles surrounding the fireplace. But now here she was with a man, about to let him do anything he wanted with her, and none of the things that had always surrounded her mattered anymore.

“It's beautiful, like you,” he whispered, and then dropped a feather light kiss on her lips.

“I've never made love to a woman in her room before, and I don't suppose you've got a box of condoms in the bedside table.” Another dizzying kiss left her speechless, so he assumed her answer. “I didn't think so. I've got a couple on me...”

He sucked at the curve of her neck, then whispered, “Do you suppose that'll be enough?”

She tried to clear her head enough to answer. She just nodded a half second before his lips captured hers again. He pulled with one hand at the long piece of silk that usually made up the blouse's bow, but now hung straight down her front, while the other hand went for her buttons.

Cassidy shivered again, and her eyes met his, needing reassurance. She instantly found it. His eyes literally glowed with the

desire he felt for her, giving her strength and courage. She reached for the buttons of his shirt. Together they undid buttons and slid cloth off the other's shoulders, neither speaking, but both taking in the other's beauty.

Cassidy had never seen a man this beautiful up close before. Her hand trembled as she reached for him, first touching, then exploring the hard planes and ridges that made up his chest. She liked the coarse hairs that covered him, loved how they looked, loved how they felt beneath her palm, loved that he also shivered when she made a pass over his nipples.

"Cass." He breathed, and cupped her cheek as he did so often and she was coming to love. "I want to see you."

He kissed her breathless, and undid the clasp on the front of her bra. It took only the slightest movement to have the scrap of lace fall to the ground, and there she stood, exposed to a man that wasn't her husband, wasn't even her boyfriend, but as his eyes gazed over her and lit with fire, she felt a heady feminine power rush through her veins that told her everything was going to be okay.

"Resplendent."

He gave her a cocky smile, which she returned—albeit somewhat more shyly—overwhelmed by the compliment and amused by the word choice. Charlie had never liked her body, or at least had never told her he did. To hear such a word come from such a man now was the stuff of high-priced fantasies.

He reached out, seductively cupping one breast, while his other hand went to her hip, pulling her just a fraction closer, but close enough that he was able to lift that breast into his mouth. Cassidy felt a sharp pull of desire like she'd never known before and moaned her approval as he twirled his tongue over her erect nipple.

A moment later his mouth came back to hers, his tongue gliding across hers, exploring, mating, until she felt senseless. His mouth found the curve of her neck, his tongue slid over the shell of her ear.

His teeth nibbled on her lobe, before his husky voice asked, “Did you put them back on?”

At first she was confused, and she hadn’t a clue what he could possibly mean. But after a minute of that half smile and those nearly black eyes staring at her, it dawned. Her mouth fell open.

“Of course I did!”

She stopped herself from giving that question another moment of her time. That was a path that led farther from where she intended to go. And she wouldn’t do it, not this time. She softened, “But you can take them off again.”

His moan accompanied the siege on her mouth. Cassidy’s knees buckled, but he caught her, sweeping her into his arms and onto the bed.

It was little more than a mattress and box springs, but it would do. He took off his shoes and socks, pulled the belt from his pants, and undid the top button before lying partially atop her, his mouth devouring hers once again.

She had the fleeting thought that this was exactly how sex was supposed to feel, exciting and safe and a little nerve-wracking. His hand ran over her breast followed closely by his tongue, which drove her near mad, because he only licked and she wanted him to suck the whole thing into his mouth. But she squirmed beneath him and accepted his torture, thinking he could do anything he wanted—except stop.

* * * *

Aiden ran his hand slowly over the softest skin he could ever recall touching. His hand literally shook with the need to touch her. He watched a very similar shiver take her body, and he delighted in it. He came beside her, brushing his nose along hers, just relishing in the closeness of their bodies. Another shiver took her.

“You shivered. Is it because you’re cold?”

His mouth slowly covered hers. Her tongue came to meet his in an open-mouthed invasion of all his senses.

When she looked up at him, her eyes said everything, “I shiver because I ache and I burn.”

Their tongues caressed one another. Aiden couldn’t hold back his groan, and he pulled her lower body in closer contact. His own aching need was raging out of control. His cock was rock hard and weeping from the tip, but he wouldn’t rush her, not this time.

“I’ve never wanted anyone as much as I want you, Cassidy. I can’t explain it. It just is.”

An excruciatingly slow dance of tongues and teeth and lips occurred. Aiden wasn’t sure he’d ever gotten so aroused just by kissing before, half naked or not. He ran his hand along her spine, her breasts pressed close against him, her silky skin a perfect contrast to the coarse hairs on his chest.

He nuzzled her with his mouth, his nose. His entire face caressed hers. He drew her scent into his body until he prayed it would live there forever. His mouth moved lower, lapping at her breasts. He ignored the wild call from below telling him to hurry. This was simply one of those moments in time that was too good to rush, and he didn’t care how much agony it caused him. He intended to enjoy every inch of his Cassidy for as long as his body would hold up.

Slowly circling each nipple, he blew on the fevered skin until they stood so erect he imagined she ached as much as he did. Only then did he give her what she sought and sucked in one rosy-tipped peak, holding back his own smile when she cried out to him and practically skyrocketed off the bed.

As he languidly caressed the nipple between his tongue and the roof of his mouth, she arched into him, her body begging for completion he had no intention of giving her yet.

He waited until she went completely lax in his arms and sighed, a delicious sound of contentment. She dug her fingers into his hair,

running the pads of those fingers along his scalp. It was intensely and surprisingly erotic.

He watched his fingers run up and over the other nipple, pleased when she arched again, obviously hoping he'd take it into his hand, but he resisted. He brushed it first with his finger, watching her shiver, then cupping the side of her breast. His thumb ran over the peak, back and forth.

"You hate me...for some reason... Don't you?"

He smiled at the tightness her voice revealed.

"No, this isn't hate. Torture, maybe, but not hate."

He licked her again, and she writhed. He pushed his erection into her thigh.

"If it makes you feel any better, I'm tortured as well."

Moving back to the other nipple, he left the one he had been lathering with attention wet and cooling in the air swirling down from the ceiling fan.

He touched the side of her head, caressing her hair, kissing her temple, her throat, his hand caressing one perfect breast. He knew it was perfect because of how perfectly it fit his hand. He'd never felt as if his hand had been made to hold a particular breast before. All of a sudden, he did.

He reached around her, unfastening the skirt and then sliding it over her hips and down her long sexy legs, placing kisses on her knees and leaving her in only her panties. Ironically the *only* article of clothing she hadn't been wearing the last time they were together.

At a leisurely pace, he removed the rest of his own clothes, marveling at the amount of control he had over himself. But Cassidy watched him closely, so he took his time. First sliding down his zipper, then pushing both his pants and briefs over his hips, kicking them off when they reached his ankles. A sense of satisfaction flowed through him at Cassidy's small smile and large blush.

"Touch me."

He wasn't surprised by the need in his tone, or at the desperation he felt, though he was a little appalled by it. If she refused him, he wasn't sure what he'd do. He took a step closer, one knee placed on the bed.

Cassidy stared, first at his powerful erection, then at him. He wasn't sure how many naked men she'd seen, but something in her eyes assured him she'd never seen one that pleased her as much as he did.

Crazy though it was, that thrilled him.

"Touch me, *please*, Cass."

She came up on one elbow, reaching her beautiful fingers toward him. A bead of moisture formed on the tip in anticipation, and he dearly prayed he'd be able to control himself if she actually did touch him.

The first sensation that flooded him when her gentle touch registered was relief. He ached, his blood was flooded with need for her, but he'd held firm at her touch. He wanted to be inside her so badly half his brain cells had shut down because of it. He'd never felt this need, this much desire, such urgent longing. He needed her to make him whole as much as he needed the blood to continue to cycle through his heart.

Her fingers circled him, and he groaned and wondered at the wisdom of his request.

She squeezed and whispered, "Velvet."

He knew he had to pull back.

He lay down beside her again. This time his finger began tracing the top edge of her panties, just beneath it and across the edge of her feminine curls. Her hand touched his face. He turned his head, placing a kiss in her palm.

"I've never met anyone like you."

He met her gaze, troubled that she'd sounded so surprised. He wondered what type of idiots she'd been dating that couldn't see how amazing she was. Desire raced through his blood so strongly and so

swiftly. He circled his hand around his own cock, stroking it to relieve some of the pressure. Her eyes widened as she watched his hand run the length of him and back.

He wondered about just making himself come and letting her watch. It would give him the chance to pleasure her. He groaned, the feelings so intense they were nearly crippling.

“Can I?”

He swallowed and removed his hand.

“Please do.”

She pushed against his shoulder, and he went willingly until he laid flat on his back. She moved down the bed and straddled his thighs, the sight of her sending frissons directly into his cock. He watched intently as she reached out with one hand. One finger ran the length of his cock and gently over the tip. It was a brush so light he barely felt it, but fucking hell, it turned him on.

Her open curiosity as she brushed that one finger over the base and tip of his shaft was both endearing and infectious.

“Is it terribly sensitive?”

He choked on a laugh.

“Uh, *yes*.” He drew a tense breath through clenched teeth. “Do you ever touch yourself, Cassidy?”

Her gaze flickered away, and her finger kept brushing over his cock. He reached out and closed his hands over her fingers, wrapping them around him.

“Squeeze me. Like this.”

He pressed his hand over hers. Her eyes widened, and her mouth dropped open.

“That doesn’t hurt?”

He laughed again.

“Not hardly. Tight is goood. Trust me.” He licked parched lips. “Squeeze and move your hand to the tip, then back.”

She did, hesitantly at first. He delighted in the sweet torture she applied, needing a release desperately.

“Do you want to take me in your mouth, Cass?”

Her eyes flared, her hand stopping its movement as she stared, first into his eyes, then at his cock. He was about to take back the question when she leaned over and tentatively took the tip of him into her hot mouth.

“Oh, good Lord, yes! Fuck me with your mouth, Cass. Do you know how?”

She didn’t answer, simply settled herself more directly between his thighs and slowly sucked his entire cock into her mouth.

* * * *

Cassidy never knew there could be so much power in pleasing a man. In bringing such a strong, dominant man to his knees. She was learning quickly. Sex was fascinating, and she was becoming a very eager student.

Although still feeling awkward, she stroked him with her mouth, eventually adding her hand to the mix. He leaked semen into her mouth, the taste of him was pungent and intoxicating. She wanted more. She licked, sucked and stroked, reveling in his moans and curses. She’d never thought of herself as the type of woman to turn a man on, but she was doing exactly that. Funny thing was, the more turned on he became, the more turned on *she* became.

“It’s enough!”

She froze. His harsh tone abraded her sensitive feelings.

“Wh-what did I do wrong?”

She tried to look braver than she felt. In the space of a heartbeat he had their positions switched, and she was pinned to the bed beneath him.

“You did nothing wrong, gorgeous. But I was about to come in your mouth.”

As his words washed over her and sank in, he was removing the panties from her body for the second time that day. However, this

time, when he had them off, he settled between her thighs pressing them and spreading them wide open before burying his mouth in her wet heat.

One lick and her body stiffened. She gasped, but his tongue quickly silenced her. Another pass of his tongue over her extremely sensitive flesh and she was arching into him.

He moved her one leg over his shoulder and slid his hands up her thighs, grabbing her hips and holding her still while he carefully used his mouth to bring her to the edge.

She moaned and whimpered, tossed her head and bucked him. There was that damned wild woman again. She had no idea she could get so...so...*enthusiastic*.

He had a masterful tongue. That article about being in charge of your own orgasms didn't know what it was talking about. Apparently the editor of that magazine had never met Aiden Grand and his remarkable mouth, or she never would have allowed that article to go to print.

He brought her to the edge again and again, teasing her, and then pulling back until she thought the death of one of them was imminent.

She gasped, crying out louder than she cared to, but there was no resisting the urge as once again he brought her to the edge. Finally her need was greater than her embarrassment and she pleaded, "Aiden, please. Please, finish me."

She thought she actually felt him smile against her skin.

"You want to come, Cassidy?" His voice was smoother than silk, and she could have hit him for being such a smart ass *now*.

"Yes," she answered breathlessly, shaking her head just in case he needed visuals.

He ran his fingers down her inner thigh, placing soft kisses there before looking up into her eyes. "I want you to say it. Tell me to let you come."

She swallowed. Lifted her head slightly off the mattress to more fully meet his gaze. At first she thought to argue, but then she

thought, why the fuck should she do that? She *did* want to come. “Let me come, Aiden.”

He growled, taking a small nip at her inner thigh. “It would be my pleasure.”

His tongue went back to her, pressing between her folds, sliding inside her while his thumb moved along her clit which was beyond sensitive. Applying just a hint of pressure, but it was enough to make the tiny shivers wracking her body congeal, becoming one enormous shiver, sending her over the edge into the greatest orgasm of her life. It tore through her body, not leaving any fiber, nerve ending, nor skin cell untouched.

She closed her eyes, arching against his mouth, which kept up just enough pressure and movement to make the orgasm continue. Instead of a sharp peak and a rapid drop, it was like catching a perfect wave and riding along it all the way into shore. When she finally calmed, knowing she’d never be able to move for at least a week, he moved his tongue over her tenderness, causing a residual spasm. One more time and she came *again*, shouting out in her shock along with her complete and thorough satisfaction.

Chapter Six

“Is it always supposed to be like that?”

Lying on their sides, wrapped in one another's arms, Cassidy was still a bit breathless as she snuggled her body a little closer to Aiden's. She couldn't remember ever feeling so happy in all her life, and she wanted to climb right inside him and take up residence. He brushed his fingers over her temple and into her hair. She sighed at how tender it was and how good it felt.

“I think so.” He kissed her softly. “Although, I don't think it ever has.”

His voice was thick and slow, the need for sleep seemingly creeping in. She smiled. Sleep she understood since she was feeling the lethargy trying to steal her from this moment as well. Regardless that she'd been up nearly twenty four hours, she wasn't ready to let this moment end yet.

He kissed her nose and her forehead, and wrapped his arms a little tighter around her. She'd never felt so warm before, either. It was as if a fire was burning deep within her somewhere keeping her cozy. Still, she wondered over his last words and finally gave voice to her insecurity.

“It hasn't?”

He gave a little laugh. “Sounds like a line, doesn't it?”

She tucked her arms up against his chest, inhaling his scent, and then pressed a soft kiss to his throat. “I don't know.” She was using all her effort to simply stay awake. Figuring out whether or not he was using a line on her wasn't at the top of her “to do” list right now.

His lips pressed against hers. Ever so slowly, his mouth opened, his tongue engaging hers in a slow and highly erotic kiss that made her shiver.

Aiden smiled. “You’re shivering again.”

“I am.”

This time she kissed him, deciding she liked the shivers. In fact, she liked sex and she most definitely liked Aiden. That would be a problem at some point. At the moment, though, his naked and—unless she was more ignorant than she thought—once-again aroused body was pressed against hers. She couldn’t find a problem with that. She kissed him again, before pulling back slowly.

“I can taste myself on your tongue.”

Aiden growled deep in his throat. “And you’re the sweetest thing I’ve ever tasted. But you can’t say things like that, Cass.”

She kissed him again, deeply with intent and passion. “Why not?”

His lips pressed hers, and their tongues met. “Because there are consequences.”

She giggled, then closed her eyes as he pressed his lips to her forehead. “Like what kind of consequences?”

“Like this.” He didn’t give her even a hint of what he’d planned, and suddenly she was sitting atop him, straddling his naked body with hers. She tried to cover herself with her arms, but Aiden held them down at her sides, grinning at her like he’d won some prize at the fair.

“Uh-uh. You’re not covering them up.”

“But, but, but they’re old. And saggy! They hang down to my knees, for God’s sake.”

Aiden laughed so hard she wanted to kick him, but couldn’t figure out how to maneuver her feet into a position that would accomplish that. He still wouldn’t release her arms, so she did the only thing that came to her. She pouted.

“It’s from too many years in my misspent youth not wearing a bra. I swear, I lay on my back and they completely disappear around the side.”

After another minute of uncontrolled laughter, Aiden started gulping for air.

Serves him right.

“Oh, God, Cass.”

Another bout of laughter broke through, and it was a couple of minutes before he was able to speak again. Tears actually brimmed in his eyes from laughing so hard. Cassidy was beginning to go back to her initial impression that sex wasn't worth the aftermath. She didn't have long to consider that however, because a second later Aiden tugged one of her arms, causing her to lose her precarious balance and fall forward.

She shrieked at the fall, but the sound quickly became a gasp as Aiden pulled one of her breasts into his mouth, his tongue tantalizing her nipple, flicking it while he suckled. The gasp quickly became a moan, the moan was soon a whimper, and Cassidy started to feel that delicious ache between her thighs yet again.

When he broke away he pushed his hands through her hair and around her neck, pulling her mouth to his.

After kissing her near senseless he ground out against her mouth, “If they're old and saggy, then I guess that's my favorite kind.”

Another round of kissing had her forgetting what she'd ever been upset about in the first place. Aiden Grand had a very powerful weapon with that mouth of his.

“Sit up again, gorgeous.”

She quickly did as she was told and was rewarded with an incredible smile when she forgot to be embarrassed about her too-old breasts, her vulnerable position, or the fact that she'd never sat atop a man before.

“Slide onto me, Cass.”

“I...” She didn't know how, but wasn't sure she could tell him that.

He reached up, caressing her cheek with his fingers, then rested a hand on each of her thighs. The tender look in his eyes made her want to do anything he wanted.

“How?”

Without a word, his hands slid to her hips, and he helped her adjust herself over his long, powerful erection. She gasped at the pleasure she felt as she slid down over him and noticed he had too.

Aiden’s eyes closed.

“Cass.” He growled out a warning but she had no idea what for. Then his hands slapped down hard on her thighs.

“What?”

“Don’t. Do. That.” He closed his eyes tight. “I don’t have enough control right now.”

“Don’t do what?”

She didn’t want to do anything wrong, but she refused to let her insecurity take root.

“That!” His fingers dug into the flesh of her thighs and he groaned.

“Aiden, I don’t know what I’m doing.”

He gave her the lopsided smile again, but his eyes never opened. “You’re *grabbing* me.”

She felt completely stupid, and she held both hands up in a show of innocence. “I’m not.” Though she wasn’t sure how he thought she could be grabbing him considering he was inside her.

A sexy chortle was all she got in response. When she felt him expand inside her, she gasped. His eyes met hers as he answered her unasked question.

“Yeah, like that.”

Cassidy’s mouth fell open and wouldn’t close. She’d never... How? Why did... Oh, forget it. This was one of those enjoy the moment moments, and she fully intended to. She experimented squeezing her inner muscles. He groaned and flexed back, she

grabbed him again. This was turning her on and bringing her very close to the edge again.

“Oh God, I’m going to come.” She moaned.

Aiden grabbed her hips, his eyes burning straight through her. “Not without me, you’re not.”

He started moving her, at first slowly sliding her up and down over his shaft.

“Grab me when you slide up.” It took her a few tries but she finally got it right and had him moaning and writhing beneath her. She’d never felt so feminine or beautiful in all her life.

She moaned, coming closer and closer. Aiden’s eyes were closed again, and his head pushed deeply into her pillow. He guided her to a faster pace, a sexy sheen of perspiration breaking out over his skin. She rode him hard, and before long they were both tumbling over into ecstasy one more time.

* * * *

Aiden woke slowly, a lingering feeling of bone-deep contentment stealing over him. He couldn’t remember ever feeling quite like this before and as realization started consuming him, he remembered why.

Cassidy.

With a smile he reached across the bed for her, somewhat annoyed that she wasn’t still wrapped tightly in his arms, but he would remedy that soon enough. Sunlight was flickering through the California shutters that covered the small windows on either side of the fireplace. He briefly wondered what time it was, then made another pass with his arm only to come up empty. He forced his eyes open and as he feared, he was alone.

The sunlight, dappled though it was, pierced his eyes, causing him to shut them again. Maybe she’d just gone to the bathroom. That thought made him feel better about her not being in his arms when he woke. He had no idea what a spoiled baby he could be, but right now

he felt about five with his favorite new toy taken from him. He smiled, chuckling over the tingles that slid across his skin, remembering everything they'd done. Who could blame him for feeling a little spoiled, a little possessive?

He remembered a moment from earlier when she'd been still writhing from an orgasm, he couldn't wait another second to join with her. He'd risen up over her, his thumb pressed the tiny nub, assuring she'd still be on her glorious ride for another second, and plunged deep within her. Her inner muscles immediately grabbed him and much to his chagrin, that was all it took. He fell over the edge with her in another earth-shifting orgasm that left this body shaking as much as hers.

He remembered her in that moment, head forced back into her pillow, her nails digging into his shoulders, she cried out her rapture with such abandon he knew he'd found heaven in her presence, and in the last place he'd ever imagined—a woman's arms. Cassidy was a beautiful, passionate woman, adventurous in bed and extremely satisfying. She'd met his needs like she'd been created for him. Together they'd done things that he'd never even considered with another woman. Intimate things, things that felt sacred. Only sharing them with Cassidy felt perfectly right. Even the way she kissed, so slowly, like she was savoring him. It was hot and he wanted more, *now*.

A few minutes later when she hadn't returned, Aiden decided he could use a trip to the bathroom himself. One last squeeze of the pillow that still had her scent on it, and he swung his legs over the edge of the bed. A short laugh accompanied the thought that he never would have pictured himself in a bed with sheets covered in roses, but damn if he cared right now.

He scrubbed a hand up over his head, ruffling his sleep stuck hair.
"Cass?"

He pushed the door open slightly, but there was no response. When he opened the door fully, there was also no Cassidy. He used

the facilities and pulled on his pants before checking the rest of the house ending in the sun-bathed kitchen. She wasn't anywhere.

"Damnation!"

Aiden's fist met hard with the tile countertop. She'd left him again. And this was *her* fucking house. He blinked into the sun as a strange sound caught his attention and he followed it, first into the living room, then down the hall until he found Harold, locked outside and scratching to get in. It only took a moment to figure out the locking mechanism letting the furball in.

She wouldn't have left for good without her dog, at least that thought was comforting. He bent down and ruffled the dog's mane. "How long have you been out there, little guy?"

The only answer was a hyper spin and a few more passes of his wet tongue. Aiden laughed despite himself and the gray mood that was pushing in on him.

"Have you had breakfast?" He got up and went back towards the kitchen, Harold lopping along on the tile behind him. "Well, I haven't. I suppose you could join me."

He started going through her cupboards and in the end settled on a handful of strawberries and one of her microwavable meals. He also found the dog kibble and poured Harold a bowl, throwing an egg on top. His mother did that regularly. It was supposed to be good for their coats or something. Sitting at the small table in the only chair he began to get a feel for what Cassidy's days must be like. Then he started wondering about other men she may have had over.

"Bad idea."

Harold cocked his head at him. Apparently even her dog thought he was crazy. The odd pair finished their meal, and Aiden went back into her living room, rooting through her desk, looking for paper and a pencil if he were lucky, but didn't expect much, knowing few people ordinarily kept pencils anymore.

Armed with a small pad of paper, apparently from a local realtor, and a pen, he went back outside, Harold dogging his every move. He

laughed. He was beginning to like the silly little dog. Every summer spent with his mother and her dogs had never bred this kind of affection in him for a critter, but one afternoon with Cass did. It was really bad if he was even falling for her dog.

That thought made his stomach roil. He couldn't fall for Cassidy, as nice as the thought might be. He had a plan and a very busy life and a step-mother planning his wedding at this very moment. Plus, a woman who felt she had a special place in his life would start demanding things from him—like time, for one thing—and he didn't have any spare time to give. Whatever marriage arrangement he came to, he knew the woman in question wouldn't expect a lot of his time. It was a rather bleak future, but he'd already invested too much of himself into being accepted into his father's world to rock the boat now.

He sat in the dirt, the morning breeze starting to give way to the afternoon heat, and began sketching.

* * * *

Cassidy followed the breeze through the open back door to find Aiden sitting in the dirt, little bits of paper all around him and her dog in his lap. Her heart stopped for just a moment at the domesticity of the sight. After swallowing back the silly lump in her throat, she went outside to join him.

"Hey."

He raised his head slowly, giving her a long, slow-burning look that was mixed with something in his eyes she hadn't learned to read yet. When he said nothing, only stared at her, Cassidy had to clear her throat again before she could speak.

"What?"

Even Harold hadn't moved. The little dog—that for eight years had been nothing less than a ball of energetic fur that couldn't wait to

greet her the second she came home—was sitting as peaceful as anything in Aiden’s lap. She’d been replaced.

Grabbing all his papers, he placed Harold off his lap and stood.

“So, you decided to come back?”

His voice had a needy thread to it, and he almost seemed angry.

“I was at work, Aiden. And by the way, you’ve created quite a stir. No one seems to know where you are, and the rumors are flying everywhere from alien abduction to—my favorite—that you’ve donned a disguise to spy on them all.”

She folded her arms across her chest, and her voice held a hint of insecurity when she added, “Of course, Garrison thinks you’re just holed up with some hot woman somewhere. Wouldn’t he be disappointed to know it was just me?”

“Fuck! Work.” He ran a hand through his hair. “Believe me, *disappointment* was probably the least of what Garrison would feel if he knew.” He absently added. “How could I have forgotten work?”

She watched the little lines furrow between his brows. Harold was still standing loyally by his new best friend. Starting to see the humor in the entire thing, she forced herself to hold back her giggle, seeing as Aiden was obviously upset. He glanced at his bare wrist, the wrinkles deepening.

“What time is it?”

“Around noon, I think.”

His gaze met hers, and he seemed to utterly relax. Taking a step toward her, he tugged playfully on a strand of her hair.

“Your hair reminds me of the sand after the waves have receded.”

“My hair looks like wet sand? Thanks.”

He laughed, dropping his head back, and then pulled her into his arms.

“It’s the color of wet sand, yes.” He looked into her eyes. “But haven’t you ever noticed the way the sun makes it glitter as if diamonds were hidden in it? That’s what your hair reminded me of. It has specks of gold in it. They glitter in the sunlight.”

“Oh.”

Cassidy felt silly and a little unsteady. The man did have a way with a compliment. A giggle bubbled up and out before she could stop it.

“I have to make a few calls. May I use your phone? I left my cell on my desk yesterday.”

“Yeah, you can. Then will you help me?”

Aiden gave her a wicked grin “I’d love to help you, little girl.”

Cassidy felt the blush all the way to her toes and chose to ignore the underlying sexual implication. “I have a Tasmanian tree fern in my car and a shovel. Oh, and some dirt.”

He brushed his thumb over her bottom lip. “Why, Miss Cassidy, have you all of a sudden decided to make yourself at home?”

Last night, she’d made the decision because it had seemed like her life dreams were over, but after all the times and different ways Aiden had loved her, it seemed silly to think that now. And, in a way, Aiden’s presence was making her place *feel* more like a home.

“I guess. After what I said last night about this not being permanent, I realized twelve years is a long time to sit in limbo, waiting.” She shrugged. “So I bought a few things.”

He kissed her.

“It’s so strange how you and I seem to travel the same path. I spent the better part of the morning sketching these for you.” He handed her the papers he’d been lost in when she came home. “They’re rough.”

He let go of her, took a step back, and ran a nervous hand through his hair. “What do you think?” He rubbed the toes of one bare foot over the top of his other.

Why that turned her on she wasn’t sure, but it did.

“You have good light back here,” he said, “and enough space to make something really intimate and special.”

Cassidy was lost in the sketches of her little plot of dirt. He'd utterly transformed it. It was the most amazing thing she'd ever seen, and she was about to tell him that when he grabbed for the sketches.

"Never mind. It was stupid."

"No."

She took a step back, reflexively reaching behind her with his sketches so he couldn't get them.

"Why did you do this?"

His posture went defensive, one arm folded around his waist, his other hand tugging at his ear while he stared at his bare foot shuffling the dirt. "Crazy impulse, I guess."

With the tension that had been radiating off him ratcheting down some, she took another look at the black and white sketches. They were rough, pen marks feathered out and scattered over about twelve little pages, but she could see it all the same. The rich lawn she ached to curl her toes in, the trees and the flowers overflowing from the periphery. She could almost hear the bees humming from bloom to bloom, and the sound of water trickling over rocks into the small pond he'd figured in.

"It's beautiful," she whispered, almost reverently. "No one's ever done anything so thoughtful for me before in my life, Aiden. I *love* this."

His head slowly raised, his deep blue eyes meeting hers, and for just a second she saw how much her words had meant to him. She saw a vulnerability she'd never expected from him.

"Really?"

She looked again from the notes to him.

"Yes."

She moved a little closer, pressing her palm against his cheek.

"It means the world."

He smiled like a small boy and her heart squeezed.

"We can customize the colors, whatever you like, maybe blues and yellows like the colors you've used inside. We could concentrate

a particular color in a particular bed, or we could just use a scattering of different colors all over. And wait until you see the dog house I'm going to build for Harold. It goes over here."

He reached over her, pointing to a corner tucked under a large shade tree where he'd marked the words *dog gravel*. He looked shy again, and she didn't have the heart to tell him that she could never afford all this. She looked over her shoulder to the corner of the yard where he'd sketched in a tree swing. How she longed for hot summer nights laying on the swing in Aiden's arms, but by summer he'd be long gone and she'd be wise to remember that.

A second later and she was in his arms, surrendering to his passionate kiss, and despite all her warnings to herself, all of her other thoughts were momentarily forgotten.

"Didn't you have calls to make?"

He gave her a quick kiss and a dizzyingly handsome smile. Those dimples were going to be the death of her, she was just sure of it.

"I do. And actually I should probably go to the hotel, pick up my cell..." He started toward the back door as if everything else had been forgotten. On the landing, he turned to look at her.

"I know this thing between us kind of came up out of nowhere, but..." He started looking shy again, and she thought she'd never get enough of that look. "Would it be all right if I brought a few of my things over here?" He held up a hand to stop whatever she might have said. "Never mind. Too pushy."

He smiled one more time and then disappeared through the door. Cassidy quickly ran after him, catching up to him as he headed up the stairs.

"Aiden."

He stopped and looked down on her with another beautiful smile.

"Um, three weeks, right?"

A sadness swept the smile from his face, but his eyes never left hers. She saw the truth in them before he answered.

"Yeah. That's all I have, Cass."

She nodded. Folding her arms around her waist to fend off the sudden coldness trying to swamp her heart.

“It’s all right.” Even though it wasn’t. “But...” She couldn’t quite believe she was about to be so forward. “Go ahead and bring your stuff.” She intended to live a lifetime in the next three weeks and refused to regret it when he left. Aiden was a gift, the lifeline she’d needed all these years and after the way he seemed in her garden just now, maybe he needed her as well.

Chapter Seven

Hours later, they lay sated and happily drowsy in one another's arms again, Aiden lightly tracing figures on her back. There had never been a time in her life when she'd felt so content.

"When do you have to leave?"

His voice startled her, bringing her head up.

"What?"

"For work. When do you leave?"

"Oh." Work had been the farthest thing from her mind, but she managed a glance at the clock and winced. "In about an hour."

"Stay."

His voice reverberated with need. A need she more than understood. If she had it her way, neither of them would ever leave this bed again, or at least her home. They'd barricade themselves in here from the world, just the two of them and Harold.

He brushed the hair from her face and shoulder, baring it for his soft kisses.

"Stay. Don't go to work."

"Aiden, I can't."

He snuggled a little closer, wrapping her even tighter in his arms and capturing one of her legs between his.

"Why not? Garrison won't mind."

She sat up a little, propping herself on her elbows.

"But I would. *You're* not planning on calling in sick, are you?"

"Cass I don't call in sick, I own the place, but besides that, I can't. The only reason I'm in California is to see to this land purchase."

She pressed her palm against his stubbled cheek.

“Right, and in three weeks when you leave, I still need to have a job.”

He rolled over, staring at the ceiling pouting like a child. The distance he put between them rushed around her like a tangible force leaving her feeling cold and lonely.

“How’s this going to work then, Cass? There’s your work and mine, and we’ll need sleep at some point.”

She watched him close his eyes and give his head a small shake before he rolled over again, pulling her body back to his.

“I’m sorry. It was completely pig-headed of me to ask you to call in, and you’re right.” After another lengthy kiss he pulled his head back to look down at her. “I’ll see how much of my work I can do from here. What time do you usually get home in the morning?”

“Um, I get off at seven, then I usually run errands, then...”

“Ah-hah! I can run your errands.”

Cassidy laughed, then sat up, pulling the sheet around her bare breasts, still uncomfortable with his looking at them, regardless of all they’d done.

“You’re going to run my errands?”

Aiden sat up beside her, taking one hand and twining their fingers.

“Yes. Why not?”

Cassidy shook her head, not sure she could think of a good enough reason why not. Looking thoroughly satisfied, Aiden seemed to warm to his project of finding them time together, and over the next twenty minutes he had her entire schedule, from sleep to food to cleaning and errands all memorized and was busy reorganizing both her things and his until he got them a large chunk of time between ten in the morning and four in the afternoon.

Cassidy shook her head, looking at the quick notes he’d made and wondering how her life had completely changed overnight. She ran her hand through her thick hair and drew a breath.

“Aiden?”

He looked up from the notepad, his eyes sparkling and dimples showing.

Cassidy leaned over and kissed him, and before she lost her nerve, plunged in. "I can't let you buy me all that stuff for the yard."

Aiden grinned. "I was wondering how long before we got to this. Well, sit back, honey, because I have my argument already formed. And it's a damn good one, at that."

"Aiden, you..."

Smiling, he pressed three fingers over her lips, and Cassidy was a little shocked at the urge in her to suck them into her mouth. She went with it, and heat flared in his eyes. He slowly pulled his fingers from her mouth, then proceeded to slide them down her body. He ran them over her clit and slowly pushed them inside her.

She groaned.

"I already talked to your property manger. He said we could do anything we wanted to the place. You've been a very good tenant, Miss Flint, and they trust you. Now if you ever move, most of the stuff stays, you can't very well pull up a thirty-foot jacaranda, and though the Jacuzzi is movable, it's a real pain in the ass and you might not want to. So really, I'm buying all this stuff for your landlord." He smiled, smugly satisfied. "Not you."

He pulled his fingers out slowly then ran them across her bottom lip.

"Suck them, Cass. I want you to taste yourself."

Cassidy knew she should feel annoyed at his high-handed maneuvering and his seeming belief that he could take over her life for the next three weeks. But with a statement like that, there was simply not enough blood left in her brain to make a rational argument.

He applied pressure to her lips and she acquiesced, slowly sucking his finger into her mouth. She pressed them between her tongue and the roof of her mouth. The scent and flavor of herself overwhelming her senses.

She figured she'd earn the plants with every crack in her heart once he left, and it wasn't like she didn't want to spend every minute of the day with him anyway, so the schedule thing really was mutually beneficial. After all, he had compressed his own schedule quite a bit in the process, so it wasn't as if he was expecting her to do all the changing.

With very little reluctance, she gave a small smile as his eyes overflowed with lust. He pulled his fingers back out slowly.

"I do love the jacarandas." She pulled in her lower lip. "And the grass. I've never had a lawn before."

He ran those fingers over her bottom lip again, then started the trip back down her body. This time after filling her and withdrawing, he ran them over one nipple, before sucking it into his mouth. She arched, feeling so incredibly aroused.

"So, we're settled?"

Far too aroused to think straight, she would have said yes to anything. She nodded, and he smiled. He slid his body over hers and down until he was settled between her legs, lascivious intent glittering in his darkened eyes.

She watched him. Their gazes riveted to one another as he made a long, slow pass over her. She spread her legs wider without even thinking on it. His fingers pressed into her hips, pulling her more firmly against his mouth. She writhed and moaned. Then he surprised her by taking her hand and placing her fingers against her clit.

"Touch yourself, Cass. Show me how you like it."

She froze for a minute. She had found masturbation a lonely, unsatisfying activity and hadn't done it much, but the look in his eyes made her brave. She reached down, further dipping her finger inside and pulling her juices out, spreading them over herself. She watched him watch her and became unbearably heated.

She moaned in unison with him, circled her clit, and then dipped back inside.

"Do you ever use toys, a vibrator, or the shower head?"

Shock must have shown in her eyes because he laughed softly, then rose up to kiss her nose. “Oh Cass, the things I’m going to teach you.”

His wicked smile stole her breath. In the next second he was inside her again, riding her until she reached undeniable bliss.

* * * *

Cassidy was lost in a daydream. This past week had seen her entire world change. She hardly recognized herself or her home anymore.

Aiden had blown through her life with tremendous force—even Harold sat at the door waiting for Aiden’s return everyday.

She smiled, thinking of all the wonderful moments she’d shared with the man. Besides working on the yard everyday until they ached, they ate together, played board games and talked, a lot. She loved sharing silly little things with him like her fiendish love of Oreos or her addiction to Survivor. She had to stop herself from laughing out loud remembering his shock over eighteen people who would willingly spend a month without a proper bathroom.

She in turn had learned a lot about him. He talked freely about his mother and her home in Italy. He talked about her gardens and the few members of staff who lived there. He talked about horses, which he had a love hate relationship with, and he talked about all his ideas for the wedding gardens at the hotel, but he remained very guarded about his father. At times she thought he was about to confide some big dark secret to her, but he always stopped himself and distracted her with sex.

The most surprising and wonderful turn of events actually, *was* the sex. They were having *lots* of sex. Honeymoon sex. If she thought about it, she’d probably have to admit that she’d had more sex in the last week with Aiden, than she’d had in the whole seven years of her marriage.

Aiden seemed to enjoy the things they did together and more, didn't seem to mind her. Didn't mind that her body wasn't perfect, that she had flab in unbecoming places, or that her breasts... Well, enough said there. But he also didn't laugh at her when nearly everything he did to her surprised her.

She felt stupid and naive, much like a gawky teenager in bed a lot of the time, but Aiden was always patient, always gentle, and always ready to show her new things. Her body responded to his as if it was made to. When she thought of all the money she'd wasted on those stupid magazines when all she'd needed was Aiden. In the past week, he'd answered nearly every question she'd ever had about sex and then some.

"You seem happier than usual lately, Cassidy."

She jumped a little and turned to find Garrison standing in the doorway between the front desk and the back office. Placing her hand over her heart she protested, "You scared me."

"I said your name three times. You seemed lost in thought."

He brushed past her to grab the ledger from under the desk. Cassidy suddenly felt guilty, but she wasn't exactly sure what for. "You're here early."

Garrison looked at his watch and shrugged. "Only an hour or so. Couldn't sleep. I figured I'd catch up on the quarterly reviews."

"Oh."

Cassidy's fingers went to the tiny silver heart hanging at her neck. A small gift Aiden had surprised her with at dinner last night. She'd thought about refusing it, but then she thought about how fast their time was flying by and couldn't be bothered wasting even a second of it fighting with him. The door opened again and a small, dark-haired woman stepped through, smiling.

"Hey guys. Beautiful day out there. It's days like this that make me jealous of you, Cassidy."

Cassidy tried to clear her head and focus on what Miranda had just said. The young girl replaced her four days a week, but they

barely exchanged more than stilted pleasantries. She was coming to realize how shut away she'd kept herself all these years, but she could no longer remember why.

"What?"

"The sun, the warm air. Doesn't the beach just call to you?"

"Uh, I guess."

"Yeah," Miranda continued. "Being off just when it starts warming up, having the whole day to linger in the water while the rest of us..."

Whatever else she said was lost on Cassidy, because just then she noticed a tall gorgeous man walking up to the front desk, with that sexy smile on his face and both dimples calling to her. Cassidy found herself wiggling just to try and keep from vaulting the counter and throwing herself into his arms.

Way to keep the relationship a secret, Cassidy.

"Morning. Beautiful day out there, but then they all are this time of year aren't they?"

Aiden was a man of many faces, and she liked all of them. But this one she saw the least of—the all-business Aiden. Clean-shaven instead of the sexy growth of stubble she saw so often around her house, he was dressed immaculately in a dark suit with a cornflower blue tie that made his eyes seem bluer, if that was possible. His hair was perfectly combed and in place, not at all like she'd seen it last night when she had her fingers in it, holding his head over her left breast.

He made the briefest eye contact with her, but it was enough to send her blood pressure skyrocketing. She wondered how he could act so calm and normal. She imagined if she tried to speak right now she'd stumble all over her words and blush furiously.

She sucked in a breath, causing the others to turn towards her. She smiled stiffly. "Miranda, will you cover for me a minute?" She turned her smile on Garrison. "Ladies room."

With Miranda's consent, she made a mad dash. In truth, she realized she probably *was* blushing furiously and really didn't want anyone to figure out the truth, or at least the part that would have been obvious, that she had a major thing for her boss.

Closing the door to the woman's restroom, she checked both stalls and was relieved to find she was alone. She pulled a few paper towels and ran them under cold water. Pressing them to her forehead and neck, she admonished herself to behave like a grown-up, like Aiden.

"This was an inspired idea, Miss Flint."

She jumped and spun around, any relief the cold water had given her long gone now. The quick snick of a lock told her Aiden had just locked them in the women's restroom and panic flooded her few remaining brain cells.

"What are you doing?"

With that damn sexy smile, he started towards her. Cassidy backed up until her back hit a wall. Memories of that first day in his office flooded her mind until she couldn't see straight.

She held out her hand, arm straight, trying to stop him and asked again, "Aiden, what are you doing?"

His fingers brushed the side of her face. Her hand that had been meant to stop him now only seemed interested in caressing his chest. And in the quick moment she'd lost her focus, and he grabbed her and propped her up on the bathroom counter.

"What does it look like I'm doing, Cassidy?"

He made quick work of the bow at her neck and the first five buttons on her shirt before the haze started to break and fear of being caught washed in.

"Aiden, you're crazy!"

He nuzzled her neck, stopping only long enough to say in a distinctly pleased tone, "I know. You've been telling me that since the day we met."

His hand slid up her thigh, over her thigh-highs to bare skin, making Cassidy jump. When he hit the silk of her panties, he moaned. She placed both hands firmly on his shoulders and pushed hard.

“Aiden, we can’t do this here. I’m *working*, for one thing. And for another—”

His mouth silenced her and momentarily made her forget completely what her objections were. But the sound of the toilet flushing from the men’s room next door brought her mind back, and she shoved against him again.

“Aiden!”

His body went lax and he pulled away, running a hand through his hair.

“Okay, you’re right.”

“I am?”

She slid off the counter and started buttoning buttons.

“Yes. It’s just that from the second I saw you in that hot uniform of yours, I wanted you. And when you left saying you were headed here...” He shrugged. “I followed out of instinct. I just wanted to hold you for a minute.”

Cassidy relaxed completely and went into his arms. “Aw. That’s so sweet.”

She couldn’t get over how different Aiden was from Charlie. But every day, in so many ways, he proved it over and over again. Before long, they were lost in one another and regardless of both of them deciding it would be wrong and too risky, the bathroom walls soon heard their muffled cries of passion.

* * * *

Aiden finished tucking back in his shirt and looked at Cassidy, who was redressed and looking impeccable, except...

“Cass.” She looked up, and he smiled at her. She was slipping under his skin more and more every day, and he was seriously

wondering if he'd be able to walk away in another two weeks. "If you don't stop blushing, they're going to know something's up."

She strangled a frustrated scream, throwing her hands in the air, letting them slap against her thighs.

"I can't control it. It has a life of its own."

He placed a soft kiss to the bridge of her nose.

"Stay here for a few minutes after I leave and if anyone says anything to you, just pretend you're not feeling well." He gave her a devilish grin. "That would give you enough cover to call in tonight."

Cassidy gave him a disapproving frown. He hadn't brought the work thing up again since that first time, and the schedule they'd agreed upon was working out perfectly, but a part of him still wanted her full time. In all honesty, a part of him wanted to take her to Italy. Before he did something foolish, like throw away his entire life, he kissed her again and snuck out the door.

* * * *

"I have presents."

He looked like a child at Christmas, but something about the gleam in his eye as he came through the front door unsettled her. Placing her book aside, she sat up on the sofa eyeing the bags warily.

"Presents?"

He held out two large paper bags with ribbon handles. They obviously came from an upscale shop. Wal-Mart, they weren't.

"Miss Flint, are you wearing panties?"

She blushed furiously. She'd almost taken to never wearing any. She shook her head as her cheeks heated further. He turned her on the sofa and placed her legs around him, pushing up the summer skirt she wore until she knew he could see her pussy. His eyes flared, and without tearing his gaze away, he reached into one of the bags.

"I bought toys."

"Is that..."

She reached for it, then stopped herself. She should be mortified, but for some strange reason, she wasn't.

"It's a vibrator, my dear. Not top of the line, though. I figured I'd start you off with the basics. We can always shop up from here."

She watched him as he opened the package and placed the batteries inside. His fingers ran up the inside of her thighs, and she knew she was wet with anticipation. He turned the vibrator on. She swallowed and bit her lower lip.

At the first touch of the hard plastic against her soft, sensitive skin, she flinched.

"Relax."

"I've got lotions and oils and adult games and fur-lined handcuffs." He winked at her. "It's going to be a long night, gorgeous. I'm just warming you up."

Nervously, she laughed, but she had to admit she was incredibly turned on by the idea. He slid the length of the vibrator inside her. The heat in his gaze held her steady as he found her g-spot and pressed the device against it.

"Oh, my God!"

His smile only grew more wicked, while she attempted to catch her breath. He pulled it back out slowly and ran it between her folds. The vibrations soaked into her bones. Then he rubbed her clit with it, and she all but arched completely off the sofa.

"Mmm, glorious view."

She didn't care. Whimpering and writhing, she accepted every manipulation of her body he dealt her. All the while, he watched. Somehow that made it even more arousing. He slid the vibrator back inside her, found her g-spot again and ran kisses along her inner thigh. It was too much. The stimulation sent her into a powerful orgasm not quite like anything she'd ever experienced.

White light blinded her behind her eyelids as she screamed out her release and then fell limp on the sofa, knowing she'd never move again.

“Good Lord.”

“Definitely.”

She laughed as she caught his wicked grin. He came atop her, pulling her body close and engulfing her in his warmth and safety.

“Let me know when you’re ready for round two. I want to watch you use it on yourself.”

She blushed again, but somewhere found the boldness she needed to express her very wicked thought.

“Only if while I’m using that, you use your hand on you.” She drew a shaky breath. “I want to see you come.”

He made a strangled sound at the back of his throat, then ran his finger beneath the lace neckline of her tank top, causing her skin to tingle.

“I’ll come for you, gorgeous. Over those exquisite breasts.”

His eyes dared her to blanch, but she refused to. The idea made her hotter.

“Deal.”

His mouth took hers with a frenzied hunger, and she met his eager mouth with moans and teeth and lips and tongue, tearing the top button off his shirt as she tried to undo it. She froze. He looked at the shirt, then at her.

“Fuck the shirt.” He growled. “No, fuck *me*!”

Her breath caught. She smiled and tore the rest of the buttons as she tore the shirt from his body. He pulled her shirt over her head and pushed her bra aside without unfastening it. At the first feel of his lips and tongue against her nipple, she inhaled so sharply that she almost started to choke. He laughed, and bit her nipple. She laughed too, even through the sweet erotic pain he was applying. This was the wildest ride of her life, and she was enjoying every second of it.

* * * *

“I’ve decided I like your days off.”

Aiden was straddling her naked hips. Cassidy lay face down on the mattress as Aiden's magic fingers rubbed any tension from her back and shoulders. She lightly thought that if he ever wanted a different career, masseur might be a calling. She groaned in pleasure as his fingers went to work on a knot she hadn't even known she had.

She decided she liked her nights off as well, and had made a decision earlier when they'd been making love, but was a little skittish to tell him about it. They were more than halfway through the three weeks, and she was beginning to feel a little panic and more than a few regrets.

"Aiden."

He leaned down, placing kisses along her shoulders. "Mmm?"

"I'm thinking of taking vacation days for the rest of the time you're here." She spat all the words out fast before she could change her mind. "Ow!" He had hit a particularly stiff spot. One thing she'd decided with certainty, yard work was a bitch.

They'd hauled dirt and plants and rocks and tools and bricks, and the list went on. And she'd been enjoying every second of it. The quiet unison they'd work in, the playful camaraderie they shared. The feeling of accomplishment as each new thing was completed. She'd still be grateful, though, when her body wasn't wracked with pain every second of the day and night.

He placed a kiss where he'd just pressed too hard, then whispered in her ear, "Sorry, your words made me forget what I was doing." He slid off her and lay beside her, brushing away a few tendrils of hair that hung loose from the ponytail.

"Are you serious?"

"Yeah. Are you okay with that?"

She watched him try to contain his smile, but his eyes were lit up with childlike enthusiasm.

"Yeah, that would be all right. You think Garrison will give you a hard time?"

She drew a breath. It would be hard to go in there and ask for time off so suddenly, especially since she had no intention of telling him the truth, but she hoped he'd be reasonable.

"It still isn't that busy during the week, and if I can't get all the time off, I thought maybe I'd agree to just work the weekends when all the lovers come in."

He brushed her hair again, placing a kiss to her temple. His eyes burned with the fire of promise. "I'd like that a whole hell of a lot, Cassidy."

His kiss was tender, and maybe it was because they'd both been working their bodies into oblivion, both in the yard and in the bed, but the lovemaking that followed was slower and more tender than before. Aiden's kisses were softer, deeper than usual. His hands traced every curve on her body, leaving Cassidy shaking with need, but he simply continued his torture.

As his hands softly touched every inch of her skin, his mouth trailed slowly behind them leaving wet skin behind to cool in the night air.

Cassidy knew without a doubt she'd done the unthinkable, she'd fallen in love with Aiden Grand.

Chapter Eight

Aiden was sleeping.

Bared to the waist where the sheet was tucked loosely around his hips.

Cassidy's eyes shifted to take in the length of him and found herself enjoying the rare moment and the time to really look at the man she'd fallen in love with. He was beautiful by anyone's standards, but to her in particular, physically she loved his thick hair and his sexy dimples. She liked the taut muscles buried under soft skin, she loved the length of his back, and as he slept on his stomach, she was able to freely run her hand all the way down to his incredibly sexy butt.

It amazed her how comfortable she'd become with him. She sat completely naked beside him and didn't feel the tiniest inkling of embarrassment, but then, knowing Aiden—however briefly—had changed her in so many ways. She remembered him jokingly telling her one night that he intended to seduce her into believing what he did, that she was a smart, sexy, vibrant woman, and while she did find his tongue very persuasive, something more than that had changed inside her.

She felt beautiful now, and she couldn't remember another time in her life when she had. Her lopsided, sagging breasts didn't bother her near as much any more. The extra weight, the wrinkles forming around her eyes, none of it seemed to matter now because Aiden saw beyond all of that and made her feel like the most beautiful woman on the planet and wherever she was, she kept that feeling with her.

Whether at work behind the check-in desk or in the grocery store or in the garden center, she truly felt as if no other woman on the planet was as treasured as she was, and that feeling bred in her a new confidence to face the world without the insecurities that had always shrouded her so well.

She ruffled her hand through his hair and kissed his temple gently, “Thank you.”

A groggy, “For what?” came at her, startling her so much that she jumped back with a shriek, only narrowly missing tumbling right off the bed by the fact that Aiden’s hand reached out and grabbed her at just the right moment. As far as she could tell he hadn’t even opened his eyes.

“We really need to get you a bigger bed.”

He rolled over rubbing his eyes, then slowly opened them, reaching out for her and pulling her close.

“Though there is something to be said for the limited space.”

After kissing her into a ripe state of passion he lowered his head, staring thoughtfully into her eyes. “Now what were you thanking me for?”

She closed her eyes, not sure how to respond. She didn’t want him to know how deep her feelings were becoming.

“Today I guess. Among other things.”

He occupied his mouth with the curve in her neck, which made it very difficult to think or finish her sentence.

“Standing on the bluff looking out at the ocean, listening to your ideas for that property, it was wonderful.”

He propped himself up on one elbow, his fingers roaming aimlessly over her skin.

“I wanted you to see what I dreamed for it. I knew if anyone would understand, it would be you.”

“It’ll be beautiful.”

Sadness swam across his eyes. She was getting used to seeing it now, but she still had no clue what it was about.

“It would be, but my ideas won’t have a chance. In fact, I won’t even present them.”

Cassidy lifted her head to view him better, confused by that statement.

“Why not?”

His lips tensed. It wasn’t the smile she was used to seeing, the carefree one. This was more of a terse expression. She grew concerned.

“My area is land purchase and bringing order out of transitional chaos when there’s a take over. Brant’s the creative one. He’s in charge of landscaping and design.”

“Your brother?”

He’d mentioned him briefly one afternoon, but he never talked about it again. In fact, he never discussed his family, period. She assumed it was because she wasn’t going to be a part of his life anyway, so there was no need to discuss family. Right now, however, she began to think that assumption had been wrong. She tensed, waiting to hear the rest.

“*Half* brother. I don’t have any full siblings. My mother isn’t my father’s wife. Never was.”

She swallowed hard. Even in the pale moonlight, she saw the pain in his eyes as he made that admission.

“Your mom and dad weren’t...”

“No, though I didn’t really understand the implications of that until I was ten.” He released a long sigh, lay closer to her and pressed their bodies together. “You don’t want to hear this. Let’s spend our time more productively.”

His wicked smile and tempting fingers almost had her saying yes, but he did this all the time. She was beginning to realize that whenever he began to open up to her, he always seduced her. Maybe in the big picture, getting to know him wasn’t necessary, or even a good idea. Maybe it would only make her miss him more when he was gone, but damn it, she loved him, she *wanted* to know.

She pulled back and sat up, staring down at him with a tenderness that she felt deep in her soul.

“I do want to hear.”

That was all she said. She waited, hoping it was enough. He looked at her a long time, but when he pulled her back down into his arms, she figured that was her answer.

Saddened by the missed opportunity, she just lay there. Aiden didn't try to have sex with her. He held her, his fingers stroking softly up and down her spine. Cassidy burrowed into him wishing she could get in deep enough to know all his secrets.

“Brant and I are only four months apart in age and we went to the same private school.”

His voice startled her at first, but she held still, nearly holding her breath, not wanting to break the magic that was allowing him to open up to her.

“Hell, I had Christmas at my dad's, summer vacation. It was just like other divorced kids I knew, so it didn't seem all that strange to me, but apparently Brant saw a different side of it. He heard his mother's tears for days before I'd arrive. After I left she'd just pull away from everyone, sometimes for weeks at a time. He blamed me for taking his mother away from him. One day he was in an unusually foul mood and started harassing me. Got his other friends involved. They called my mother a whore.”

He paused. She heard the emotion in his voice getting thicker as he went on and prayed he was just regaining composure.

“Anyway, we got in a horrible fight on school grounds.”

She felt him shrug.

“I knocked out one of Brant's teeth. I'll never know all that went on but it was shortly after that when Mom and I moved to Italy, though I still spent every summer in Palos Verdes with my dad and his family. Funny really, because now I work for him and spend my summers with Mom.”

Cassidy was quiet for a long time. He'd spoken that last part as if none of it mattered but she couldn't imagine the pain of that ten-year-old boy. She reached up and touched his cheek gingerly.

"I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about, beautiful. It is what it is. My mother still loves him. That's the sad part, I think. She's lonely. Oh, she has her friends in the village and Magda, her housekeeper, who lives with her, and of course, all her animals. Dogs, horses, goats, pigs, you name it, she's got it, but it's not the same as this." He squeezed her tight. "Is it?"

Cassidy sighed. "No, it's not."

But then wasn't he planning to give *this* up in just over a week?

"So, and I don't mean to be dense, but I still don't understand why all this means you can't put in your ideas for the hotel."

He placed a kiss on the top of her head.

"It's just the way it is. I suppose my contributions are appreciated but it's hard to get past years of feeling like the outsider, the one who had to prove they belonged. I guess I just don't like to make waves."

She squirmed out of his arms, propping herself up on one elbow until she could look down into his incredibly deep blue eyes. Oh, she was going to miss those eyes. She shook her head, getting it back on track.

"Do you enjoy what you do now?"

He pulled a strand of her hair away from her face and stared at it as if the answer was written there, then finally admitted, "Not particularly, but it's the job I have. I get to participate, be a part of my father's company in a real everyday way. There were a great many years where I wasn't so sure I would. I'm grateful for what I get and it means the world to my mother."

"Grateful?" She sat the rest of the way up. "*Grateful!*"

Aiden laughed.

"I appreciate you outrage, darling, but it really isn't necessary. I've had thirty plus years to deal with and accept my reality. I've made peace with it."

He moved his fingers over her lips, smiling tenderly at her.

"Shhh. It's not a big deal, beautiful."

"But you're talented. Look at my garden. And what about all those sketches you did for the wedding gardens?"

Aiden wrestled her back into submission with a few long, wet kisses that left her dizzy, but her heart ached for the pain he shared with her. He folded her into his arms and she wished she could think of some way to help, but he wasn't playing with her for keeps. She had very few options.

"I love my father, darling. Though I don't at all approve of how he's treated the women in his life, he's always been good to me. I like being able to work with him, but his whole family, his *real* family, also works for the Grand hotels. My half-sister, Stephanie, runs the Grand in San Francisco. I have a couple of cousins who travel the globe sizing up potential sights for new properties. Even my father's wife is on the board. Seriously, there are more Grands than I can count. I'm just one illegitimate kid who doesn't really belong, and if I raise too much of a commotion, someone might realize that. I'm happy, Cass. Leave it at that."

She snuggled against him, quiet for a while, thinking about everything he said and reminding herself that she wasn't his wife, or even his girlfriend, so she really had no right to tell him what she thought of his so-called family, but she didn't like them one bit. She was even considering finding another place of employment. She was so mad.

She tried to calm herself and just absorb Aiden's warmth. She had so few nights ahead when she'd have him lying beside her. She remembered her decision to not spend it fighting. Still, her heart ached for this incredible man who nobody really saw and no one really appreciated.

* * * *

Aiden was busy sketching another view of the wedding garden that would never be considered. It was a complete waste of time because he knew that despite Cassidy's conviction that he should show them to his father, no one would ever see them.

While he considered the sketch in front of him, Cassidy slipped inside the door.

"I'm not staying." She held up a hand before he could speak. "Glasses?"

He quickly took them off and shoved them in a desk drawer.

"No."

He stood up, nervously running his hands along his pant legs. She bust out laughing. He figured it served him right after all the times he'd laughed at her self conscious idiosyncrasies. Still, he knew how to immediately silence her. He closed the distance between them and pulled her into his arms, but only for as long as it took him to come up beside her and take her in his arms placing a kiss to her forehead.

"It isn't funny."

She looked up at him, obviously trying hard to control the giggles that still threatened.

"No, but it is funny that I have to wear them for reading myself, but I've refused to ever since you moved in on me."

God, she made him smile more than he had in a lifetime. He was so close to telling her everything he felt, but held himself back. Emotionally he needed to start bringing closure to this relationship, and he wasn't doing a very good job of it.

"Okay. Maybe it's a little bit funny." He hugged her even closer. "So, why are you here?"

"I missed you."

She pushed out of his arms and moved to his desk propping her oh so tempting ass on the edge. She gave him a wicked smile before

spreading open her thighs to give him the quickest flash of sweet pink folds. He went instantly hard. Nothing—certainly not common sense—could have stopped him from dropping to his knees before her.

“Open them, Cass.”

She smiled sweetly and slowly opened to him. He grabbed her ass and pulled her to the desk edge, burying his mouth against her, pushing his tongue inside. He was a quick study, and by now he knew exactly where and how to lick her, when to graze her clit with his teeth, when to suck and drive her over the edge of ecstasy.

He’d never known a woman’s body as well as he knew hers. He was ashamed to admit that he’d never wanted to. With Cassidy, every nuance fascinated him.

“Mmm, Aiden, stop.”

He smiled up at her.

“Why gorgeous? You don’t want to come?”

She giggled, and he flicked his tongue over her clit.

“You didn’t lock the door.”

She was right, but no one ever came back here. He nipped her inner thigh, making her squeal and tug his hair.

“Sweetheart, you’re so close that I’ll have you over the edge before I could get up lock it and come back.”

He pushed a finger inside her.

“Mmm. Okay, okay.”

Good Lord, she was the sexiest woman he’d ever known. He sucked her clit, worked her with his finger, and in moments had her biting back a scream out of what modesty she had left.

* * * *

Cassidy was beginning to wonder if having sex fed off itself. It seemed to her, the more of Aiden she had, the more she wanted. Even now, sitting on his desk, exposed to him, eagerly waiting him freeing

himself from his pants so he could fuck her, she knew the second he finished, she'd want him again.

"I'll never get enough of you."

He sheathed himself and pressed his hard cock at her opening and paused.

"I feel the same, beautiful."

"Just fuck me!"

He laughed, "You're impatient."

"I'm horny. I want it now! Fuck, Aiden, I'm so turned on."

He kissed her. A hot open mouth, wet, devouring kiss that set her soul ablaze. She was so on fire. She felt crazy and impulsive. He slid into her, grabbed her ass and pulled her hard onto his straining cock.

He reached up and tore the buttons from her blouse as he groped at her breasts and quickly unfastened her bra. She pulled her feet up onto the desk for leverage, allowing her to meet his thrusts with more force.

His groans of pleasure, mixed with her own exposed state, brought her right back to that wild teen she used to be. She imagined them at her bedroom window, faceless neighbors watching them as they fucked.

"Aiden, fuck me harder!"

He growled at her and came at her faster and harder, his thumb abrading her clit. She felt herself right on the edge, knowing she was going to scream out when she went over.

"Oh God, Aiden, I'm so fucking hot, I'd do anything right now."

She dropped her head back, waiting to come.

"Anything, Cassidy?"

Aiden froze, Cassidy's eyes flew open as she brought her head back up to meet the heated gleam of Garrison.

"How about letting me join you?"

Chapter Nine

Cassidy went instantly numb.

“Oh my God. I’m so fired.”

Aiden pulled out, shoved himself haphazardly back into his pants and stood protectively in front of her. She lowered her legs and yanked her shirt close in front, but there were no buttons left to close. Still tingling and intoxicated from Aiden’s sexual assault, the idea made the quickly cooling flame sizzle back to life.

“You’re most certainly not fired. This is my damn hotel. Garrison, let’s go outside and let Cassidy dress.”

“We’ve shared women before, Aiden. Why not Cassidy? You know I’m attracted to her. Apparently, so are you.”

Garrison’s smirk and lazy once over of her body in the old days would have sent her scrambling for the nearest exit. But right at this moment, despite the nerves trying to take over, she grabbed Aiden’s hand and tugged lightly until he looked at her.

“Is that true?”

“I’m not sharing *you*.”

His possessive growl went straight to her heart.

“Why not?”

“Cassidy!”

She wasn’t sure who was more shocked, him or herself, but one step after the other she was easing herself down a path she knew she’d never walk with anyone else, and it intrigued her.

Garrison came closer and brushed his hand through her hair. His touch didn't do to her what Aiden's did, but it was definitely better than nice.

"See? She's intrigued, and apparently a lot less reserved than I ever gave her credit for."

His eyes scanned her face and dipped into the opening of her shirt. He slowly moved his hand and pulled back one side, exposing one breast.

"I've never, I mean, I don't know how..."

Aiden slapped Garrison's hand away and tugged her shirt closed again.

"It doesn't matter. You are not having sex with Garrison. Or any other man for that matter."

She had no response. On the one hand, his sudden show of possessiveness and, dare she say, jealousy, was exhilarating. On the other, he was leaving her in barely a week and had no right to tell her what she could or could not do or with whom.

She let Charlie do that. She wasn't about to ever let another man have free reign over her life.

"I want to."

She slid off the desk. She looked first at Garrison, then pressed her palms against Aiden's warm chest.

"I want to know what it's like to have two men's hands on my body, two mouths running over my skin. I want to know and I trust you enough to try."

"Cass, partaking in a ménage a trois is not something to take lightly. It can be very physically and emotionally overwhelming."

Garrison's fingers where twirling in her hair and gliding along her neck. Aiden had pressed his hands over hers, their combined scent intoxicating. These were two big beautiful men and this was a situation that she would never find herself in again.

"I trust you."

Garrison moved closer behind her. She felt his erection press against her from behind.

“Aiden, I want to. I want you both. Please, you’re leaving in a week. Leave me with this.”

She was trembling. Her nerves were gaining on her, and if someone didn’t touch her soon, she might not be able to go through with it.

Aiden slid his hand through her hair, pushing away Garrison’s hand and curving around her neck. He pulled her close and kissed her soundly until she melted.

“For you.” He searched her eyes. “But only if you are certain.”

In a strange, twisted way, she had never felt more loved in her life.

“I’m certain.”

At least she hoped she was.

“Not here though, and not at your house either.” Aiden tugged her around behind him. “We’ll go to your place. And we’ll go together.”

Garrison moved towards the door.

“Perfectly acceptable, although if we expect to get out of the hotel without scandal, something should be done about Cassidy’s breasts. They are exposed again.”

Garrison’s sense of humor seemed lost on Aiden as he placed his jacket around her. Cassidy wondered for a second if she was getting in over her head, but as they left the hotel, she figured that ship had already sailed.

The ride to Garrison’s house was mostly silent. Aiden sat in the back with Cassidy. She loved that he held her hand the entire time, his thumb softly moving back and forth.

When they arrived, she was immediately impressed by the old, well maintained home on the beach. She heard the ocean waves rolling onto the shore as they walked to the front door. Once inside, she took quick notice of the interior. Deep purples and black seemed to dominate, the furnishing lush. She felt suddenly out of her element,

but when Aiden kissed her, then swept her from her feet, she forgot everything else.

He carried her up to the master suite and placed her gently on her feet. Garrison brought wine and poured for three. Cassidy drank hers a little fast, but her nerves were starting to edge in again.

Aiden stroked her arm.

“Are you still sure?”

She nodded, fearing her voice wouldn’t work if she tried.

Aiden kissed her before leading her to the bed. He pushed her down until she was sitting on the edge. Slowly he took his jacket back, went to his knees and looked up at her.

“You are the most incredibly sexy creature I’ve ever met in all my life. And your trust awes me.”

His words along with the soft loving expression on his face warmed her. She leaned down and kissed him, feeling more certain now. She pulled away, stood and peeled off her torn shirt. Knowing she had the riveted attention of both men made her bold. She slowly undid her skirt and pushed it down over her hips until it pooled on the floor. Standing in only her panties, thigh high stockings and a pair of sexy shoes that tied at the ankle, she felt sexy and feminine.

“Good Lord, you’re gorgeous.”

Garrison’s adoration made her blush. She was just barely used to Aiden saying things like that. She self-consciously tucked hair behind her ear. Aiden came up behind her, wrapping his arm around her waist and pulling her firmly to his chest.

Garrison stepped toward her. He kissed her, his tongue sliding deep into her mouth while Aiden’s hand massaged her breast, his mouth sucking at the curve in her neck. It was almost too much, but it was also the most amazing thing she’d ever experienced.

Her blood started to boil, nerves completely forgotten. She pulled back from Garrison and turned to Aiden. She undid the buttons on his shirt, pushed it off his shoulders, then turned to do the same to Garrison.

They were magnificent. She explored Garrison's chest with childlike enthusiasm. Aiden captured her mouth in a searing kiss. Garrison's hands roamed up her arms, then she felt his mouth on her breast. Aiden held her from behind again, while Garrison suckled on her. Aiden's fingers sliding down and inside her panties.

He slipped between her folds and tantalized her clit. Garrison fell to his knees, pulled off her shoes, stockings and panties. His fingers glided over her skin while Aiden held and kissed her.

Completely naked, she felt a touch of insecurity, so she reached for Aiden's buckle. He allowed her to undo it and unfasten his pants, but when she went to remove them, he scooped her up and laid her on the bed. He pushed her thighs apart so she was displayed for both men. Her breath deserted her as they stood at her feet, their eyes scorching her skin with their combined heat.

"Someone touch me. Please."

Each man came to her either side, running their hands up her thighs. She swallowed hard.

"I want to touch you as well."

Aiden climbed between her thighs. His hot mouth slowly licked her pussy as he began to eat her. Garrison confidently removed his pants. She was overwhelmed at the sight. He more than lived up to any fantasies she'd had of him.

He kneeled on the bed beside her as she writhed to Aiden's ministrations with his tongue. She reached out tentatively, but the flare in his eyes told her not to be shy. She wrapped her fingers around him and massaged, loving the power she felt from hearing him groan.

"Come closer."

Despite her soft tone, he obviously knew exactly what she wanted. He moved one leg over her so he straddled her. She took him in her mouth, one hand digging into his hip while the other held his cock steady for her mouth to move over it.

Aiden had her on the brink. She writhed trying desperately to hold on. She pulled her mouth away, rolling her head from side to side as she fought the orgasm. Garrison climbed off, lay beside her and suckled on her nipple. She moaned, but the moans quickly became screams as together they pushed her over the edge.

Garrison continued to lick and kiss his way down her body. She was peripherally aware of Aiden taking off the rest of his clothing. Neither gave her the opportunity to recover before Garrison was pushing his fingers inside her while he licked her clit and Aiden was holding her, kissing her, touching her softly on the face.

“You are amazing, beautiful.”

His hands slid over her breasts. He pinched her nipple, then brushed his finger back and forth rapidly over it until she was squirming again.

“I want to be inside her, Aiden.”

“She can’t take both of us.”

She raised her head enough to catch the stern looks being exchanged.

“I’m fine.”

“We’re not double penetrating her.”

She gulped. She knew what that was. The naughty little girl inside her thrilled at the idea, even as the woman she’d been before meeting Aiden pushed for her to run. She kissed Aiden. He was her safety, her calm. She loved him and knew with him here, she could do anything.

“Can we go slow?”

“Cass, you don’t know what you’re saying.”

Her rebellious streak kicked in.

“I do so. Just guide me through it.”

Garrison came up beside her, suckled at her neck and played with her breast. She pulled away, pushed Aiden down and straddled him. He kissed her ferociously, pulling her down against him, his fingers moving over her spine to her ass and back.

“Stop protecting me and give me all of it.”

She was finding her footing, easily demanding what she knew she wanted. He stared into her eyes for a long moment before adjusting her body until she slid down easily over him. She watched as he exchanged a look with Garrison and he moved behind her.

He nuzzled her neck while she rode Aiden's cock.

"I can't believe you're here, Cassidy. I've had some very wicked thoughts about you. There have been times I've jacked off in my office. Knowing you were nearby, fantasizing about taking you right there on the front desk, daring everyone to watch you as I made you come."

The thought more than heated her. She'd had similar thoughts herself. They shared a deep kiss as he reached around and squeezed both breasts.

"Lean over, baby. Lean down close to Aiden."

Her stomach did a flip, but she did as she was told.

Aiden kissed her mouth while Garrison kissed her shoulder and back.

"Are you ready for me?"

She nodded and instantly felt his tip pressing against her. She instinctively tensed and held her breath. Aiden brushed his hands through her hair, holding her face, forcing her attention on him.

"Breathe. You won't enjoy it like this. You're too tense."

She drew a long slow breath as Garrison entered her slowly.

It was overwhelming at first. She felt full in a way that was almost uncomfortable. Both men stopped moving. Aiden's eyes were solely focused on her.

"Okay?"

She swallowed, then nodded.

They started to move, Aiden in front, Garrison at the back. It was too much.

"Aiden, I..."

"Shhh." He moved his hand through her hair again. "It's ok, just breathe."

Garrison rubbed her back. "You're so tight, Cassidy. Do you have any idea how hot that is?"

Aiden maneuvered until he had her breast in his mouth, gently sucking her nipple. She moaned. The sensations started intensifying. The men started moving in a rhythmic balance. She began to relax and allowed herself to melt into the moment.

She had two amazingly gorgeous men inside her, touching her, kissing her. It was astonishing. There were barely words for what she felt, but when Aiden reached between their bodies and began stroking her clit, it took only moment to push her to the edge.

* * * *

Garrison's movements became more desperate. He was near coming. Aiden though, she knew, was waiting for her.

Garrison's low groan reverberated through her. He leaned over and hugged her tight, pressing his lips hard against her shoulder. Slowly he pulled out.

Aiden had her flipped on her back beneath him so fast she hadn't seen it coming. Garrison came beside her, wrapped his arms around her. She felt comforted and sheltered by his tender action. He kissed her, slowly pushing his tongue inside her mouth.

Aiden was working her clit with his fingers, ratcheting her high and closer. When Garrison's kiss ended, she looked down at Aiden. He was working his own cock with one hand while priming her again with his other. He winked at her.

Garrison went to sucking her one nipple and squeezing the other between his fingers.

"Now Aiden, come now!"

He plunged inside her within a second. The feel of his hard cock invading her again was so welcome. She squeezed him the way he'd taught her. Garrison continued to suck her nipple, but he went to

playing with her clit with the other hand while Aiden fucked her wildly. Within moments she was riding the biggest wave of her life.

She was very nearly over stimulated, but Garrison's soft touch on her clit kept the orgasm going. She felt Aiden's body stiffen, heard the muffled profanity he so often used when he came, but everything else drifted away as she submersed herself in the ecstasy.

Moments later, Aiden came along beside her and she found herself sandwich between the two men who had just been her lovers. Sleep called to her. She rested one leg over Garrison's but snuggled in closest to Aiden.

No one had ever given her anything close to what she'd just experienced or all that Aiden had given her in the past few weeks. She had no idea how she would ever go on once he left.

* * * *

The yard was completely transformed now, and a sense of pride like Cassidy had never felt sank deep into her soul. They'd done everything themselves, from the flower beds, to the small brick patio, to the koi pond with its beautiful little waterfall. They'd worked themselves to the bone, but it had been worth it.

Tonight Aiden barbecued steaks, t-bones specifically, so there'd be something to give Harold, but he'd been quiet again. She watched him, worried. He'd been different for the past few days, ever since the threesome really. She could still hardly believe she'd done that and though she wasn't anxious for a repeat, she had to hold back a wicked giggle every time she thought about it.

She sat on the swing, watching him walk toward her with a glass of wine for each of them. Without a word, he handed her a glass and sat beside her, pulling her body close into his. For a while they just sat there—connected, but not really connected. Cassidy watched Harold wrestle with a bone nearly the size of his body and continued to wonder what had changed. Maybe it was simply that their time

together was drawing to a close. He'd settled the land purchase last week, and though he didn't know it, she'd overheard him making flight arrangements over the phone with his assistant. He was leaving in two days. She wondered when he was planning on telling her.

"Why are you all alone, Cass?"

It had been so quiet, the sound of crickets and trickling water drowning out nearly everything else. If you listened carefully, you could hear the swell of the ocean when the distant drone of traffic paused and every once in a while their little frog they'd bought at the pet store when they'd purchased the koi made his presence known from the pond, but Aiden's voice had been stark in contrast to the other sounds, pulling her right out of her musings and drawing her attention completely to him.

She fiddled with the strap on her sundress and tucked her feet up onto the swing.

"It just sort of happened, I guess. I moved down here after my divorce was final, planning on a whole new life, but I got sucked into the day-to-day stuff to the point that that's all there was. Most of the people I work with now are much younger than me. The few around my age have kids. I just don't seem to fit in anywhere."

A warm breeze blew over them, promising summer was on the horizon. Cassidy thought it was going to be a terribly long and lonely summer. Everything would be lonely in just a few days.

"What about men?"

She wanted to laugh, but was just barely able to contain it.

"Ah, I've never been a big hit with men. My age, plus I'm very shy, in case you hadn't noticed with my constant blushing. I'm not the type of woman to see a guy at the grocery store and accidentally-on-purpose run my cart into his."

He gasped in mock horror. "Women actually do that?"

She gave him a soft punch.

"Maybe not in your world. Maybe there they accidentally drop their stock portfolio and bend over very slowly to pick it up."

He laughed so hard that she couldn't resist joining him. For a moment it felt like old times. Then he came up with his next round of questions.

"What about your mom? She doesn't visit?"

Cassidy cringed at the thought. Her relationship with her mother was complicated and not really something she wanted to discuss with him on one of their last nights together.

She caught him raise his glass to his mouth from the corner of her eye. The dark liquid glittered in the soft garden lighting.

"We're not close, so no."

His fingers started playing with the hair at her neck.

"I have to leave, Cass. My business here is finished."

Even though she already knew it, the words hit her like a punch to the stomach. The contents in her glass swirled around in an angry motion mimicking the movement of her hand, then she tossed the contents of the entire glass down her throat.

They only had two more nights together, then she might never see him again. The desperation was feeding her need, bringing it to a fever pitch.

Then his mouth burrowed against her shoulder. "Let me love you, Cass."

She dropped her head back against him. "I'm not stopping you."

He stood, placing their glasses on the ground, then swept her from her feet into his arms, carrying her the entire way to the bedroom.

Setting her on the bed, he looked down at her with so much emotion shining in his eyes it humbled her. Slowly, he undressed her, taking his time as if memorizing every inch of her. He traced every freckle with his mouth until goose bumps raised along her arms and stomach and she shivered.

She moaned and writhed beneath the attention of his mouth. Tonight was different. She could feel it, and she knew he was saying good-bye. She wouldn't cry, wouldn't let him know she knew. She'd accept this last gift, memorizing everything about his kiss, his touch,

so that on the days to come she could wrap the memories around her like a warm quilt and relive them.

She knew she'd never love like this again. She sensed the coming tumult his mouth was eagerly bringing her, and when she jumped this time, it was with the knowledge that she was alone, and it made everything different.

* * * *

The world somehow held less color when the sun rose the next morning.

Aiden had loved her several times through the night. Neither had said a word. They only clung to one another with a desperation that grew as they moved closer and closer to the morning. Cassidy woke alone in the bed, but she felt his presence still in the room. She opened her eyes to see him, wearing only jeans, staring out the window, but she could tell he wasn't seeing the street or the gigantic willow, or anything else out there. Slowly she rose up on her elbows and admitted the truth she already knew.

"That was good-bye, wasn't it?"

She refused to cry, but the unshed tears were burning her eyes and clogging her throat.

He turned to face her, looking desolate and destroyed as he tried a small smile and answered with one word. "Yes."

Cassidy smiled through the pain as Aiden came and sat beside her. Kissing her one last time, deeply, intensely, until she felt it to her very soul. He brought her body close to his, tucking her head under his chin.

"I'll never be free of you," he said.

Then why?

But she wouldn't ask, because she'd learned one thing about Aiden during their time together, he walked a road he didn't like, but

felt it was his due and nothing she'd done or said to him in the time they'd been together seemed to change that.

She pulled out of his embrace, solely because if she didn't the tears would come. She grabbed for her sundress and slipped it over her head, rising from the bed that still had his scent—*their* scent—on it. She turned to him with forced bravery, wanting for some reason to make this easier on him. "I have no regrets."

He looked at her as if he didn't believe her, but then he, too, stood.

"I won't ever..."

He stopped, their gazes held. The mattress they'd shared so much in between them, now as a bridge neither could cross instead of the place they'd become one in over and over.

Stay with me, Aiden.

She rubbed her arms, trying to chase away the cold that was settling in deep. She tried another smile. "I'll let you dress."

As she walked past him toward the door, she prayed he'd grab her, pull her against his chest and swear to her he'd never leave. Her footsteps faltered as she came within reach. His hand twitched, then fisted at his side, and she knew he wasn't going to reach for her no matter how much he might want to.

Chapter Ten

The long, hot summer was coming to an end with a bang. Cassidy cringed, nearly pushing the mascara wand into her eye, as another crack of thunder rent the air. A pocket of hot air being moved by the Santa Ana winds had brought in a rare and unnerving thunderstorm.

Finishing her art work on her eyes, she gazed at her reflection in the mirror.

“Not bad.”

She dropped the mascara back into the small basket on the vanity. Make-up was new. The red wrap dress was new, the highlights were new... She sighed. Everything was new, and yet her heart didn't seem to care.

It was nice to find her girly side—cosmetics and clothes and hair and men. Well, not a lot of men, but she'd had a few dates, including the one tonight. None of it, though, made her heart ache less. She felt guilty because every man she went out with she measured by a new set of standards than she'd ever had before, and it was a whole lot harder to measure up to Aiden Grand than it was to measure up to Charlie Flint.

She and Garrison never mentioned the threesome, which she found strange, yet felt relieved at the same time. She'd noticed recently he'd been dating a petite brunette regularly and she sincerely hoped he'd find happiness with her.

Harold followed her down the stairs to the living room. She peeked out the living room window, watching the sunset. The wind was blowing like crazy and...she jumped at the next crack of thunder.

She went to the drawer, starting her pre-date ritual, and pulling out the two postcards Aiden had sent her—one from Italy and one from Belize. Both broke her heart. Even though they weren't much more than "thinking of you", both had raised her hopes just as she'd begun to accept that he was gone. But nothing ever followed the postcards, and eventually she was right back to square one, in love with someone who didn't want her anymore and with her heart obliterated.

She tried not to think of the nights she'd cried herself to sleep. Then the bargaining and the anger and how she alternated between hating and willing to give up anything—including a kidney—if it would bring him back. It was during that phase that she couldn't even bear going out into the garden they'd created together, and she was overdosing on the music of Toni Braxton and Celine Dion.

Inevitably, she'd resigned herself to the fact that although she loved him, he was gone. It didn't have to mean her life was over. In a way, Aiden Grand had actually been the beginning of her life. He gave her confidence and courage, and it was experiencing him that made her finally realize that perhaps she actually had something to offer. Maybe there was a man out there who would appreciate the small things about her that Aiden did. The way she laughed, the way she ran her fingers over his back. She smiled.

The way I bit him.

She ran her fingers over her shoulder, remembering that first time with him. Then she closed her eyes tight and shoved away the memories. She had a date in twenty minutes, and she couldn't let her memories of Aiden ruin it.

She shoved the post cards back in the drawer and rubbed her hands together. Another crack of thunder sounded, giving her second thoughts about going out. The thunder was unnerving her. When the doorbell rang, she drew a deep breath and shoved the last remnants of Aiden's memory to the back of her mind.

Until she opened the door and found him on her doorstep.

"Why are you here?"

As many times as she'd imagined this moment in her head, she never imagined the anger she now felt raging in her heart.

"I missed you. Cassidy, I..." He tugged at his ear, looking almost sheepish. "Can I come in?"

She stared at him, unable to utter a single word. Harold brushed past her, jumping excitedly at Aiden's ankles. He scooped the little dog up, and Harold instantly covered his face with doggie kisses. The scene attempted to melt her heart, but despite what she wanted, she'd worked too hard to go back. Even if he was in town for a week or a month, he'd still leave, and then she'd be heartbroken again. She wasn't willing to go back to that kind of pain again.

"I have a date, Aiden. Now's not a good time."

His gaze snapped to hers. She allowed the annoyance to penetrate. His shocked look, as if she couldn't get a date other than him, fed her anger and that was the best defense she could think of.

"A date?"

She stiffened. "Yes."

They stood staring at one another. She wanted so badly to fidget, but wouldn't allow it. She held his stare, serene in the knowledge that she'd done nothing wrong and wouldn't feel guilty, even if he did look hurt. She couldn't imagine he'd been celibate since he crawled out of her bed.

The sound of tires crunching on gravel drew their attention. She held her resolve and looked back to Aiden. He gave her a sad smile and handed her Harold just as Jerry climbed the stairs, looking confused.

"Jerry, Aiden. Aiden, Jerry." She gave a tense smile as the men shook hands. "Can you just take Harold inside, Jerry? I'll be right in."

Although he seemed somewhat confused, Jerry took the dog without question and went inside. When she stepped aside and got close enough to Aiden to catch the scent of his cologne, she nearly had second thoughts.

The wind and thunder welcomed the first few drops of rain. It was nearly dark now, so she reached in and flipped on the porch light before pulling the door closed, holding the knob behind her back, trying to keep her distance and sanity.

“If you’d called...”

He drew a long breath and ran his hand through his hair which was beginning to glisten with rain drops.

“I’m a bastard, Cassidy.”

A small laugh escaped without thought. She stopped herself from apologizing. He gave her a wry smile that enhanced one dimple and left her breathless.

“I meant literally.”

She shook her head, confused.

“I know that Aiden. I remember.”

She remembered, of course she remembered. She remembered everything he’d told her, everything they shared, but she wasn’t going back.

Another loud crack of thunder interrupted him. Cassidy decided it was for the best. She didn’t want to hear whatever it was he was about to say.

“Look Aiden, I need to go.”

He took a step towards her, wrapping his arms around her and grabbing both her hands. She lost her ability to breathe and found herself battling her intense desire to fall into his arms.

“I was afraid, Cass. Of everything I felt and of my family. They grudgingly allow me into their ranks because my father demands it. He loves my mother to this day, but Cass, they can be exceptionally cruel. I didn’t want to...”

“Aiden, it doesn’t matter.”

She wasn’t entirely sure where he was going with this, but she was weakening and that was dangerous.

“It does matter! I love you. *Love* you! There hasn’t been a single day I haven’t thought of you, missed you, craved your touch, your

kiss, your scent. I'm not whole without you, Cass. I realized the Grands, the whole damn lot of them aren't worth losing you over. I need you. I want you. I *love* you."

She was numb. The wind and the rain weren't distracting enough that she missed what he'd said, but it was so out of left field, she had no idea what to do with it. It was everything she'd dreamt, but...

"I've got a fucking date inside, Aiden!"

He took a step back. She missed him immediately, but stood her ground. "When you left me, you destroyed me. I've never felt so much pain in all my life. I cried every day, every night for weeks! You can't just come back, say 'I'm a bastard, and I love you' and expect everything to be the way it was."

The rain was starting to drip from her hair, she wiped it away.

"I can't do this now. I'm sorry."

She went inside before she changed her mind. He'd more than just broken her heart when he walked away—he'd obliterated it and cracked her soul as well. He didn't get to just come back and say I'm sorry... Wait, had he even said he was sorry?

She wasn't sure. His words all blurred now.

"Are you okay?"

She looked up at Jerry blankly, as if she'd never seen him before this second. She heard Aiden's car engine rev. "He's leaving."

"Good, I really wasn't in the mood to share." He smiled.

Even though she knew he meant it flirtatiously, all she could think was that Aiden was leaving, *again*, but this time it was her own damn fault. "I'm sorry."

He took a step closer and reached for her. "Don't be, we still have the entire evening."

She opened the door, headlights still shone on the driveway, it wasn't too late. "No, Jerry, we don't. I'm sorry." She ran out heedlessly into the rain, which was pouring now, but she hardly cared.

"Aiden! Wait!" By the time she'd gotten to the driver's side door he was already climbing out. "I love you, too."

Both dimples flashed at her just before she flung herself into his arms. He held her so tight she wasn't sure how her lungs were still able to expand, but it felt so damn perfect she didn't care.

As the rain drenched them, he whispered in her ear, "I love you, Cass. Spend your life with me."

She pulled back enough to look into his eyes. Rain dripped off his hair and ran down his face. He kissed her. A deep passionate kiss that lit her desire, stirred her soul, and sent the butterflies tumbling over themselves.

When he pulled back, he rested his forehead against hers. "Marry me."

She shivered and not from the fact that she was now dripping wet. He gave her a wicked smile.

"You naughty girl. First, say you'll marry me, second, get rid of Larry..."

"Jerry."

"Whatever, he's outta here." He kissed her again, and then whispered against her lips, "Then fuck me till the dawn breaks."

Her breath stuttered as erotic images raced through her mind.

"I can't think of anything better. *Yes*. To all of the above."

THE END

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