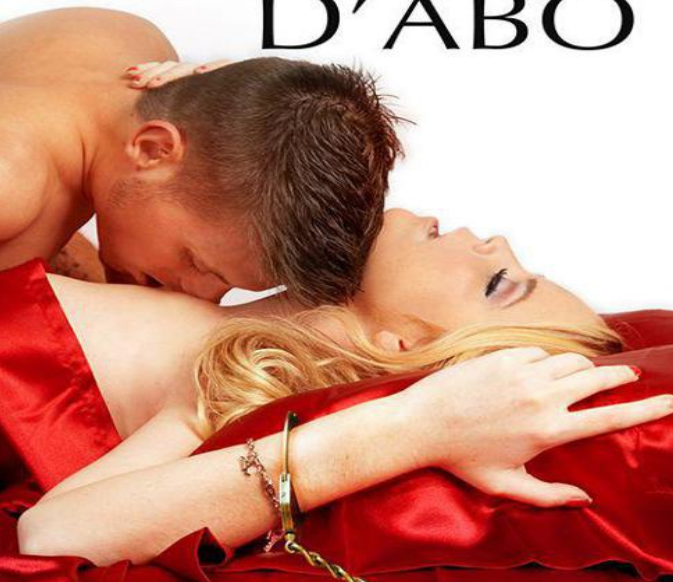


CLUB

Wonderland

CHRISTINE
D'ABO





Club Wonderland

By Christine d'Abo

Alice White isn't used to being ignored. So when the object of her lust does just that, she's bound and determined to get his attention. Her pursuit leads her to Wonderland, the kind of club she's only read about, and suddenly Alice is craving something she never knew she needed.

Gael Hernandez wants to be the youngest

partner at his prestigious law firm, and not even a certain tempting legal assistant can distract him from his goal of financially helping his family. Until she shows up at his favorite club and surprises him with an interest in being restrained. But the BDSM lifestyle is no game to him, and he won't take things further until Alice is schooled into submission.

After a taste, Alice wants more. She offers to be Gael's sub for one weekend, with nothing forbidden and no boundaries. In a few short days, he gives her the strength to be the person she's always wanted to be. Now Alice just

needs to convince Gael that he can dominate in the bedroom, *and* submit to love.

58,000 words

Dear Reader,

It's possible I say this every year, but I love October. To me, this is the month that signals the start of a season of hot apple cider, evenings by the fire, and curling up on the sofa with a good book, dressed warmly in sweatpants and a comfy shirt and snuggled under my favorite fuzzy blanket. We at Carina Press can't provide most of those things, but we can provide the good books, and this month we have more than a few good books!

In *Running Back*, the highly anticipated sequel to Allison Parr's new-adult contemporary romance *Rush Me*,

Natalie Sullivan is on the verge of a breakthrough most archaeology grad students only dream of: discovering a lost city. Her research points to a farm in Ireland, but to excavate she needs permission from the new owner: *the* Michael O'Connor, popular NFL running back.

If you're like me, there are certain tropes in romance that you fall for every time. One of mine is the main theme of Christi Barth's newest book, *Friends to Lovers*. (Gee, can you guess what it is?) Daphne struggles with revealing her longtime lust for Gib, sparking it all off with a midnight kiss on New Year's Eve—only

Gib doesn't know it's Daphne he's kissed! Also in the contemporary romance category is *First and Again* by Jana Richards, which has a special place in my heart because this emotional story takes place in my home state of North Dakota.

For months, this Red Cross head nurse has been aiding Allied soldiers caught behind enemy lines, helping them flee into the neutral Netherlands. It's only a matter of time until she's caught in *Aiding the Enemy*, a historical romance by Julie Rowe. If you're a fan of *Downton Abbey*, be sure to check out the rest of Julie's historical romances.

We have two mysteries for readers to solve this month. British crime author Shirley Wells returns to the sleepy northern town of Dawson's Clough with her popular Dylan Scott Mystery series in the next book, *Deadly Shadows*. And in Julie Anne Lindsey's *Murder by the Seaside*, counseling is murder, but it's never been this much fun.

Erotic romance author Christine d'Abo brings us the story of Alice's obsession with a brooding lawyer at her firm, which takes Alice on a journey of self-discovery through the rabbit hole and into the world of BDSM in *Club Wonderland*. Also this month, the *Love*

Letters ladies, Ginny Glass, Christina Thacher, Emily Cale and Maggie Wells, round up five sizzling-hot stories to finish off their sexy stampede through the alphabet with *Love Letters Volume 6: Cowboy's Command*.

Edgar Mason is losing Agamemnon Frost despite everything they've been through—the passion, the torture, the heat. Frost's fiancée Theodora is back, and Mason can feel his lover gravitating toward her. Every day he sees them together, it tears at his heart. Don't miss *Agamemnon Frost and the Crown of Towers*, the conclusion to Kim Knox's male/male historical science fiction

trilogy.

Because October is the perfect month for the paranormal, we have a wide selection of fantasy, urban fantasy and paranormal to share with you. In Jeffe Kennedy's fantasy romance, *Rogue's Possession*, neuroscientist Gwynn's adventures in Faerie continue in the long-awaited sequel to *Rogue's Pawn*. And in the sequel to *Soul Sucker*, a powerful magic user is stealing people's faces in San Francisco, and empath Ella Walsh and shifter Vadim Morosov have been called in to investigate in *Death Bringer* by Kate Pearce. Also returning with another book in her Blood of the

Pride series is Sheryl Nantus, with her paranormal romance *Battle Scars*.

Combining futuristic fiction, fantasy and urban fantasy, *Trancehack* by Sonya Clark is a compelling cross-genre romance. In a dystopian future where magic is out in the open and witches are segregated, a high-profile murder case brings together a police detective and a witch with unusual powers that combine magic and technology. But dangerous secrets, a political cover-up, and the law itself stand between them. Don't miss this exciting new world of witchpunk!

Carina Press is pleased to introduce three debut authors this October. Science

fiction erotic romance author Renae Jones gives us a *Taste of Passion* when lust strikes hard for Fedni, an empath who can taste emotion, but her off-worlder neighbor is horrified by the caste system that the former courtesan holds dear.

Two urban fantasy authors debut with us this month. In Kathleen Collins's *Realm Walker*, a realm walker hunts a demon intent on destroying both her and the mate who left her seven years ago. Also debuting in urban fantasy is Joshua Roots with his book *Undead Chaos*. When warlock Marcus Shifter performs a simple zombie beheading, he soon

finds that the accidental framing of an innocent necromancer, falling in lust, and burning down a bar are just the beginning of his troubles.

Regardless of whether you're discovering these books in October or in the middle of summer, any time is the perfect time for reading, and I hope you enjoy all these titles as much as we've enjoyed working on them.

We love to hear from readers, and you can email us your thoughts, comments and questions to generalinquiries@carinapress.com. You can also interact with Carina Press staff and authors on our blog, Twitter stream

and Facebook fan page.

Happy reading!

~Angela James

Executive Editor, Carina Press

www.carinapress.com

www.twitter.com/carinapress

www.facebook.com/carinapress

Dedication

For my writing buddy Del, who had to listen to me over IM every damn day I was writing this. You totally win at writing.

And always, for Mark.

Acknowledgments

Some books are gifts from the mysterious muses. Others you have to drag into existence kicking and screaming. This book wouldn't have happened without the keen eye of my editor Alissa (the zombie test was BRILLIANT), and the constant moral support from my writing friends. Kristina, you're awesome and my buddy for life. Del, you know why I love you.

Contents

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Copyright](#)

Chapter One

Alice White walked from the elevator and into the air-conditioned chill of her law firm's office. She'd been a legal assistant at Gibson, Murphy and Dow for seven years now and couldn't have been happier. She enjoyed the challenge of the job and loved the people she worked with. But one call from her mom before she'd even had her first coffee had her questioning everything she'd worked toward. This was the first time in recent memory that her mother had presented her with a modeling offer that

addressed nearly every issue she'd ever had with her prior career. She'd actually considered it for all of five minutes before saying no.

God, this was stupid.

The mirrored hallway practically begged her to turn her head and study her appearance to ensure she looked perfect as she passed. It was an old habit, one that liked to rear its ugly head from time to time, especially after she'd had a call from her mother. And yep, that had been the first thing she'd had to deal with this morning. *Hi, Mom. Love you too. No, I don't want a shot at being the face for Regal Fashions. Yes, I'm certain I like working for lawyers. No, I won't*

change my mind.

Of course she liked her job. It was stupid to even think about going back into modeling, considering how much it had screwed up her childhood. She wouldn't start second-guessing things now.

Ensuring her gaze was locked onto the door at the end of the hallway, she kept going.

She'd spent longer than normal getting dressed, discarding everything she'd tried on before she was finally able to settle on something. Despite the weather predictions that the day would hit thirty-five Celsius, Alice had seriously debated putting on pants and a long-

sleeved top that wouldn't draw attention to her body.

Dammit, she shouldn't *still* have these hang-ups. She didn't want to be *that woman* who always needed to be put together perfectly and would make adjustments throughout the day to keep the image up to par. She wasn't, not really. But some habits were harder to break than others.

Why the hell had her mom called her this morning to tempt her this way? She wasn't an actor, model or anything else her mother had aspired for her to become. Alice liked facts, loved digging through the flotsam and jetsam of the Canadian legal system, finding

precedents that would be able to assist in her bosses' cases. It gave her a sense of security, and in the end, she was helping people.

Still, her mother hadn't given up the dream of having a famous daughter. Someone she could point to and say *That's my baby. Isn't she beautiful?*

"Hey, Alice." Brian, one of the shipping guys, waved as she approached. "Lookin' good."

And just like that, she was pulled back into reality. "Thanks, hon."

"Have you decided to take me up on my offer and run away with me?" The older man smiled at her, the lines around his eyes crinkling. "You know I love

you, right?”

“And I love you.” Alice made sure to bat her eyelashes at him and sigh as dramatically as she could manage. Her earlier panic and pressure started to wane, allowing her to be herself once more. “But it’ll have to remain forbidden love for now. Your wife might get upset with me if I steal you away.”

Brian sighed and shook his head. “She tends to ruin all my fun. Another day, then.”

It was an old shtick between them, mostly corny, but completely comfortable. Alice and Brian had started working at Gibson, Murphy and Dow on the same day, and had forged a quick

work friendship despite their very different roles. In spite of his teasing about her appearance—or perhaps because of it—Alice was more comfortable around him than anyone else in the office.

Brian paused, tapping his hand on the side of the parcel he was holding. “I think I should let you know that Mr. Gibson is on the rampage again. Someone screwed up his brief and he had to ask for a delay from the judge. At least that’s what I thought he said. He was screaming and not enunciating clearly.”

“Shit.” Thankfully, Mr. Gibson wasn’t her lawyer. But if he was in a snit, it

wouldn't take long before she'd have to deal with him. She did tend to get stuck cleaning up the messes. "Thanks for the warning."

"I think Mr. Hernandez was trying to get the situation under control, so it might not be as bad as you think. The poor guy has had to deal with a lot of crap since he started." Brian shrugged before patting the box again. "I better get going. This needs to go out on the morning courier run."

She barely remembered to give him a smile before they parted company, her mind already latched on to his words with a death grip. Mr. Hernandez was in fact Gael Hernandez, the firm's most

recent associate lawyer, and the man who haunted Alice's dreams.

She hated him.

Loathed him.

Wanted to rip off his clothing and beg him to fuck her.

It was possible Alice's feelings toward Gael weren't entirely rational.

Her hands grew sweaty at the idea that she'd be coming face-to-face with the object of her obsession far sooner than she did on a normal day. Petra would get a kick out of seeing her squirming this way. Hell, Pet would probably give her a boot to the ass for mooning over Gael. *Shit or get off the pot.* Gross, yet sound advice. Not that

Alice was going to follow it.

Taking a steadying breath, Alice pulled her shoulders back and walked into the main office as if she were on a fashion runway. All those years as a child beauty queen had given her the ability to look confident in pretty much any situation, even if she felt anything but.

“And I don’t care whose mistake it was, I expect you to be the one to fix it!”

Alice kept her gaze averted as she walked through the office, over to the nest of low cubicle walls that housed her desk. She was situated on the outside of the square, meaning her back would be turned on most of the action. Poor Gael

was currently face-to-face with a very angry partner.

“Mr. Gibson, I’ll make sure we get this sorted.” Gael’s voice was calm, smooth and in control. “I know what you need and I’ll work with one of the assistants or the clerks to help put everything in order for you.”

Throwing him a look once she was safely out of Mr. Gibson’s line of sight, Alice mouthed *help?* before she dropped her purse to the desk, and got poised for action. Gael gave a barely perceptible shake of his head before he fully returned his attention back to Mr. Gibson. Stupid idiot was going to take all the shit himself when he was most

likely not even to blame.

Typical him.

Alice quietly got into her chair and turned her computer on while she listened to Gael speak. She'd been trying for months now to figure out exactly what it was about him that appealed to her. Sure he was good-looking, but so was the mystery man from the coffee shop she and Petra frequented. Even when Alice caught that man's gaze, she didn't feel the gut-clenching sensations roll through her that Gael could elicit with a single look.

"You damn well better, Hernandez. If I'm left looking like a fool to the judge and this case is blown, I won't be the

only one to suffer.” *Oh ouch.*

Alice looked up in time to see Mr. Gibson march past her toward his office down the hall. The moment he left, the room gave a collective sigh and the palatable tension vanished. Within a few minutes, the normal rattling of paper and the mutter of voices kicked back in.

Just another day in the office.

Gael had quickly engaged Mr. Gibson’s assistant, and Alice could only imagine what was being said to the poor woman. Janine hadn’t had the best time recently, and it wasn’t a complete surprise that things had gotten past her. She’d need help, and Alice had no doubt it would only be a matter of time before

she'd be asked to step in.

More messes for her to clean. *Well, challenge accepted, baby.*

As Alice shoved her purse into the bottom drawer of her desk, her email dinged. Petra's name popped up and Alice could only imagine what was on her friend's mind this early in the day. God, she hoped she wasn't about to get a description of her friend's recent vibrator acquisition.

Hey! You'll never guess
what happened! Stop
trying, 'cause you
won't. I got a call

yesterday after I got home from our coffee outing. Sexcapades has been selected as a finalist in the Toronto Web Awards!! I'm *still* shaking I'm so excited. But I need your help more than anything. I have to go to the reading of the nominees and pretend to be PC. Can we go shopping tomorrow?

Alice loved Petra like a sister. She

was the closest person to her who wasn't family, and Alice would do anything to help. But what Petra had in intelligence and wit, she lacked in fashion sense. If Alice didn't prod her into changing out of tank tops and shorts, she had no doubt that Petra would wear that combination all year round. Not wise at all for a Canadian girl.

She hit the reply button, already mentally putting together some ideas of what her girl would look good wearing, when a shadow fell over her desk. Whatever she'd been planning to say poofed from her brain as if somebody had blown away the cartoon thought bubble over her head. One minute she

was mentally involved in an episode of *What Not to Wear*, and the next she was staring into the rich brown eyes of Gael Hernandez.

“Good morning, Alice.”

God damn, he had the sexiest voice...

Her cheeks got hot and her hands trembled. “I’m glad you’re still able to say that. Sounds like it’s been a rough start to your day.”

That’s the way she had to do it. Keep calm and keep things light. Alice shouldn’t read into any little looks he gave her—the way his gaze would linger for a few seconds longer than it should, or how he’d accidentally brush his fingers against hers. She’d learned very early on

that of all the women in the office, she was the one in whom Gael seemed least interested.

But a girl could still dream.

“Case files were apparently moved on Janine, and she lost track of them. She didn’t realize it was due up.”

Petra claimed men with brown eyes weren’t as attractive as other men. Alice loved to argue that point with her, always ending her rebuttal same way—Petra couldn’t say that until she’d looked up into Gael’s eyes.

Alice held his gaze as long as she could—an embarrassingly short period—before turning her attention to her monitor. “That’s bad news. I take it she

needs some help to get things ready to go?”

“Yes. I need you to take this file and see what’s missing. It’s for an accident claim. The client is the insurance company. We believe the driver has exaggerated the nature of his injury in an attempt to get a larger settlement. There was supposed to have been research done, social media review and the works, but it didn’t happen.”

Alice took the file and bit the inside of her cheek when his warm fingers rubbed against hers. Wow, she must be really hard up if such an innocent touch nearly sent her over the edge. She was ready to throw herself on her desk and

beg for...well, anything at this point. “I’ll clear my calendar and get it done this morning.”

You’re so easy, girl.

Gael didn’t say anything immediately, which forced Alice to look up once more. If she had one complaint about the man, it was that he rarely smiled. Even now, when she was doing him a favor, there wasn’t any hint of softness in his expression. No grateful sparkle in his eyes that said, *hey, Alice, thanks so much for saving my ass*. Not even a glimmer of something that could be mistaken as attraction.

Life really wasn’t fair.

His black hair was short at the sides

and longer on the top, allowing the weight of it to fall over his forehead and ears. His cheeks were smooth, but by the end of the day they would be covered with thin stubble. By then his tie would be loose, and if she was really lucky, he would have rolled his shirtsleeves up to his elbows. Every inch of Gael was rock hard. She had no idea if he had the capacity to be soft on an emotional level. Not that softness was necessary.

And there was no way she was going to examine what that said about *her*.

Alice gave him a little smile, hoping it would melt the ice. A few times in the past, she'd been a bit more blatant with the flirting, but that hadn't gone so well.

Better to be subtle. “Is there anything else I can help with?”

“No. Please take the file directly to Mr. Gibson when you’re done.”

Okay, maybe she was being too subtle. “Will do.”

And that was that. Gael turned around and marched back into his office, leaving Alice alone to clean up someone else’s shit.

“Thanks so much, Alice. It’s really awesome of you to do this,” she muttered, hating that she sounded like a six-year-old. If she were the type of person to feel sorry for herself, she might think that this was typical and would mope. She hated moping.

Suck it up, buttercup.

The July heat had been oppressive the past few days, making it nearly impossible to sleep and giving her an extra dose of crabbiness to fight against. Her window air conditioner couldn't quite kill the humidity in her old home, leaving her feeling sticky day and night. Now that she was faced with a time-sensitive case, the rest of her day wasn't going to get any better.

“Okay, time to pull up your big-girl panties and get to work.”

At least she would have her shopping trip with Petra to look forward to. There was nothing better than being able to force fashion on her friend—

“Alice.”

She froze, her hands hovering over the keyboard as she turned to look at where Gael stood in the doorway to his office. She shivered at the intensity of his stare, hating the way he turned her body into a quivering mass without even being aware of it.

“Yes, sir?”

He flinched.

What the hell?

Whatever that had been, the moment passed as he straightened up, his gaze locked on hers. “I forgot to say thank you. I appreciate you helping out. You’re the best person to ensure things get done properly, and I have every confidence

you'll make things right." He gave her that rare smile of his, sending her heart racing.

Whoa. "Thank you, Mr. Hernandez."

"Please. Call me Gael." He nodded once and closed the door.

Fuck.

Fuckity fuck! He wanted her to call him Gael!

Alice balled her hands into fists to hide their shaking. He'd given her permission to call him by his first name. Although being casual wasn't a big deal with most of the lawyers, Alice had always felt Gael didn't want that same level of familiarity. Well, not from her at any rate. This was huge!

Opening Petra's email, she stumbled through a response, knowing she needed to get focused on her new assignment quickly if she wanted any chance of getting it done in time.

Pet. Congratulations!! I had no doubt Sexcapades would final in the Web Awards. The organizers aren't a bunch of idiots after all. I'll take you shopping and I'll pick out something super sexy for you to wear. You

never know who you might run into while you're there.

And remind me to tell you what happened with You-Know-Who, today. I'm shaking, Pet. Shaking!
TTYL!

She was being only slightly more rational than a preteen at a Justin Beiber concert. Gael Hernandez, successful and handsome lawyer who seemed focused on his job and nothing else, had said thank you and *smiled* at her. Today was

turning out to be pretty fantastic after all.

Opening the file, Alice did her best to ignore the sensation that she was being watched, and got to work proving that Mr. Anderson was trying to take his insurance company for a ride.

Chapter Two

Gael sat at his desk and stared at the closed door. He'd begun to squeeze the edge of his desk as a way to keep from getting back up and marching out to the office to demand that Alice call him *Sir* again. It was doing nothing to stop his overactive imagination from stripping off her dress and telling her exactly how she could help him.

Fuck, he didn't need this, not now.

Six months. He'd been in the role of associate lawyer with Gibson, Murphy and Dow for only six months. In that

time he'd taken everything that had been thrown at him. Difficult clients, impossible cases, shortened time lines—he had overcome every obstacle. His uncle had made it perfectly clear the only way Gael would make partner was to put in his time in the trenches, which suited him perfectly. One year slogging it out without anyone knowing who he really was, before his uncle Stephen would put him forward for consideration.

He needed to make partner.

The call from his mother last night hadn't helped put him in a good mood. Apparently she and his father only had a few months left before their company's

bank account ran dry and they would be unable to manage their bills. His parents would be forced to sell their cottage and mortgage the house if they couldn't turn things around soon.

Gael wasn't by nature the type of man who stayed to the sidelines. He'd been a part of his parent's software company all through his time at university. He'd intended to take a role on their fledgling legal team, ensuring that everything went right. Start-ups were risky at best, but it was his father's dream. They'd put everything they owned into this company and Gael would do whatever he could to help his parents succeed. Even if that meant going to work with his asshole of

an uncle.

The rules—he had to follow every single one of them if he wanted to make partner, giving him the income he'd need to help his parents:

No telling the staff he was related to Stephen Gibson.

No complaining, arguing, or doing anything to make his uncle look bad.

No dating anyone who worked in the office.

And under no circumstances was he to let anyone find out about what he does in the bedroom. As though he'd be advertising that to the women of the office.

On several occasions he'd been

forced to take his frustrations out on several unsuspecting submissives at the club. Not that they seemed to mind, but Gael hated being that close to the edge of his control. It took him a month or two, but he'd finally been able to get a handle on himself and this part he had to play. He'd be damned if he let anything break through and ruin things for him at this stage. Not when he was halfway to his goal. Not when his parents were counting on him.

So if he had to ignore the temptation sitting outside of his temporary office, then that's what he'd fucking well do.

Even if she had flawless skin, beautiful hazel eyes and lips that begged

to be sucked on. There were plenty of other options for him. Women who would be more than willing to give him everything he needed, no strings attached.

Opening the file on his desk, Gael scanned the brief, forcing his mind to get back into the game. He might not have court this week, but he'd be damned if he let himself fall behind.

Alice had called him *Sir*.

He cleared his throat and started at the top of the file once more.

Sir.

And he'd told her to call him Gael.
Fuck.

Gael closed his eyes and mentally

recited the Criminal Code of Canada until his hard-on went away. Of course it was an innocent remark. While Alice was charming and liked to think she was intuitive when it came to other people, she wasn't into the lifestyle. He could tell by the blank expression in her eyes when he'd say a particular thing, an order that could be taken more than one way.

If she were a sub, he would have picked up on that vibe way before now.

He was convinced Uncle Stephen gave him the office he did because of its proximity to Alice's desk. She was the most beautiful woman at the firm, the one who would serve as the biggest

temptation to any man with eyes to see. But it wasn't only her physical appearance that threatened to lure him in. Oh no, that would be her generous nature. She was sexy *and* sweet.

No, it was best if he continued to ignore the way she looked at him with those big hazel eyes of hers, silently begging him to notice her. She had no idea what she was asking for.

Gael took a deep breath and let go of the desk. His rising anxiety faded away as he let out a slow breath. He was in charge and she looked to him for direction. Boss and employee. It was as simple as that.

Yes, Sir.

Pushing all thoughts of Alice White from mind, Gael opened the file he'd been working on before Uncle Stephen went berserk, and started figuring out the best way to approach the upcoming court case.

* * *

Alice loved her job, except for the days that she hated it. Today was getting dangerously close to the latter, especially when she was under a time crunch and everyone else in the office seemed to be in the mood to gossip with her.

Alice, did you hear? Gael has been seen dating that actress from the new

crime show being filmed in town.

Alice, did you hear? I saw Gael last week at The Sultan's Tent with two women. They all looked really cozy. I wonder if he's into threesomes?

Alice, did you hear? Sandy in accounting said that she saw Gael with a man who was clearly playing for the other team. Rumor is he's gay. Wouldn't that figure?

Frankly, she was getting really tired of *hearing* things.

The man in question had spent most of the day in his office, only popping out occasionally to refill his coffee mug or to duck into the bathroom. Not once did he ask her about the progress she'd made

on the file. Nor did he stop to chitchat like some of the other lawyers would—checking up on her without trying to be obvious about it. As far as Gael seemed to be concerned, Alice didn't exist.

Maybe she was being too hard on him. He wasn't trying to micromanage her like a lot of associates might do in a similar situation. And in all fairness, he'd done that little half-smile thing of his at least twice as he'd passed by with fresh coffee. Not that he'd offered to get her a mug, even when she'd had to work through her lunch to get this file together for him.

Why the hell did she always seem to develop crushes on men whose default

personality was set to *jerk*?

That wasn't completely fair either. Gael was polite, if a little distant with most of the clerks and assistants in the office. He'd even bought Alice a muffin once early on when she'd been having a particularly crappy day. She'd never forget that because he was the only one who'd noticed that she wasn't herself; the muffin and small smile he'd given her had made her day. For a while she'd been convinced he might actually like her.

Yeah, apparently not so much, otherwise he'd be at the very least wanting to occasionally talk to her. Or would want to take the lingering glances

to the next level.

Petra was more than happy to point that out for her too. *Alice darling, a man who's only going to look and not touch doesn't have big enough balls to be worthy of you.*

Speaking of her friend...

Alice checked the time and cringed. She was supposed to be meeting Petra at her condo so they could go out for supper and then shopping at the Eaton Center to get Petra ready for the nomination reading. Her friend had terrible self-confidence when it came to social situations. Alice would be shocked if Petra lasted a full hour at the event. However, she was determined to

find a dress that would wow anyone who saw Petra in it.

The file she'd been working on was nearly done. Facebook was an amazing resource when it came to proving that sometimes that back injury wasn't as bad as the claimant let on. Who the hell posts pictures of themselves waterskiing when they've been in a car accident? *Idiots*. Tucking the printed photos into the file, she gave everything one last double check to ensure Mr. Gibson had everything he needed.

There was no reason to bring all of this to Gael, though she'd have to let him know that everything was done and handed in. Maybe she'd get another

smile out of him for facing the dragon on her own. A girl could dream...

Firing off a quick email to Petra to let her know about a potential delay, Alice gave everything a final review. Yes, this was perfect. Mr. Gibson should be pleased with what she'd managed to pull together for him, and she'd be able to make her escape. It was later than she had hoped, but she and Petra should still be able to find a good place to eat before they went shopping.

She couldn't stop herself from looking at Gael's closed office door as she walked by on her way to Mr. Gibson's. At some point she'd have to admit that the odds of getting together with him

were nonexistent. Still, as long as there was hope, she'd cling to it.

Maybe this adolescent-style crush was her mentally living through those years the way she should have the first time around. Get a crush on a boy who doesn't give you the time of day. Flirt until he notices, only to reject you. Cry into your pillow, and then go eat ice cream with your best friend while she bitched.

On second thought, she really was happy to have missed that shit.

"Hi, Mr. Gibson. Here's your completed file." She smiled and gave her hips an extra little swing as she walked into the office. While most of the

lawyers were awesome, Gibson wasn't the most pleasant of men to deal with, even on a good day.

“Ah, Alice.” He held out his hand, and she smiled as she handed the file over. Not that he responded to her attempt at lightening the mood. Maybe having a stone face was a required trait when hiring lawyers? “At least Hernandez got someone who knows their ass from their elbow for this job.”

“Thank you, sir.” *Really?* This was the man who signed her paycheck.

Forced to wait as he reviewed the paperwork, Alice felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. If she was in anyone else's office, she'd turn around

and see if there was someone staring at her. No way would she give Mr. Gibson any reason to chew her out.

“I’m more than happy to stay longer if you need anything else, sir. Just say the word. I know how important the case is.” It wasn’t bullshit either. Alice took pride in her work, and even if she mentally bitched and complained about it, she wouldn’t walk away with something half done. Petra would understand if they had to postpone things for an hour.

Thankfully, Mr. Gibson actually smiled. *Maybe the Mayans got the date wrong about the apocalypse.* “I’m not as big a monster as most people around

here think. This is good work, Alice. I'll be set. Get out of here and have fun."

Well, will wonders never cease?

"Thank you, sir." With a smile and an extra little wiggle, she bolted from the office, intent on grabbing her purse and getting out of there.

The office was empty as she powered down her computer. Gael's office door was open and he was no longer behind his desk. Damn. Of course he'd take the ten minutes she was gone to pack up and leave himself. If nothing else, he always said good-night to her. Staring at the empty office far longer than she should have, Alice had to give her head a shake before she grabbed her things and made

her way to the elevators. Her cell phone rang, sending her scrambling through her purse.

“Hello?”

“We’re still on, right? Because if you’ve changed your mind or if you have to work that’s cool. I don’t really need a dress. Or to go to this thing. It’s really a dumb idea. There’s no way I can pull off being PC. I’m boring and...and frumpy. That’s what your mom always called me. Who am I kidding? You know what? Forget it. I’ll email the committee and —”

“Petra!” Alice closed her eyes. She should have expected the meltdown call to have come sooner. “I’m just leaving

work now.”

“Oh. Really? Because if you need to
—”

“I’m coming to your place. I’ll be there in thirty minutes. Maybe a bit later if I don’t make it to the subway in time. But I’m coming and you’re not getting out of this.”

“Fine.”

“You don’t have to sound so disappointed. We’re going shopping, not to a funeral.” Alice’s mother never understood how she could be friends with Petra. The fact that her friend didn’t care about her appearance, didn’t judge others on how they looked, spoke, the clothing that they wore, were the things

Alice loved most about her. Petra cared only about the things they did together, not what Alice was like on the outside.

“It feels like the same thing. I don’t think I’m going to be able to pull this off.”

She pressed the button for the elevator and switched ears. “Yes, you can. All you need to do is look the part. The rest will be easier if you can convince yourself that you’re PC, sex advice goddess.”

“Maybe. We’ll see.”

“Look, I’m about to hop into the elevator. I’ll be there soon and we can chat. If you really don’t want to do this, then you know you have my support. But

I don't think you should give up on yourself. Not yet."

"Okay." Petra let out a huff. "You know I love you for doing this. Right?"

"And you're the only one in the world I'd do this for. I'll see you soon."

Alice ended the call with a groan. She should stop by the liquor store on her way through the underground to grab a bottle of wine. Or two. It sounded like Petra was going to need a bit of liquid courage to get her to the mall. The doors dinged and slid open. Alice stepped into the elevator and turned around.

Only to come face to face with Gael.

Ah shit.

He'd been standing directly behind

her that whole conversation and she hadn't even realized. Alice tried to smile, but her lips didn't want to cooperate, twitching and pulling instead of sliding into her easy grin. It got worse as he stepped into the elevator with her and the door slipped shut.

An awkwardness she rarely felt around anyone had her feet itching, making it nearly impossible to stand still. Or for her mouth to stay closed.

“That was my friend. We’re going shopping.” Oh, brilliant. It’s not like he hadn’t been there for at least part of the conversation. “She has an event to go to and wanted help picking out an appropriate dress.”

Gael didn't look her way. Alice chanced a quick glance, surprised to see the muscles of his jaw clenching. Great, he was so uncomfortable he didn't even want to speak.

“She's really pretty, not that she thinks that herself. I wanted to take her and help her get a dress that would make her look amazing. She deserves to be happy.”

Alice pressed the button for the concourse and stepped back against the wall. Her mother had tried to drill into her over and over to learn when to keep her mouth shut. A lady didn't need to speak in order to gain someone else's attention. Her looks, her demeanor—

those were the things that mattered. Alice had often asked if her mother had been raised in the American South rather than the North York region of Toronto.

Gael leaned over and pressed the button for the parking garage level. “Your friend is lucky to have someone to help.”

That comment shouldn’t have caused warmth to ignite in her chest, but it did. “Thanks. I love her to bits, but she thinks a cocktail dress is something with a rubber phallus attached to it.”

Oh my God, what the hell did I just say? Her face grew hot. “Sorry. That wasn’t very appropriate.”

Gael faced her, his arms crossed. “I

have a few friends like that myself.”

The warmth in her chest spread lower, and now her stomach seemed to be housing a warehouse of butterflies.

Wonderful. “I wouldn’t change her for the world. Even if it makes taking her shopping a painful experience.”

When she met his gaze, she got the impression that he wasn’t exactly sure what to say next. That was odd, not only given his profession, but also based on what she knew of him. Gael might be quieter than some of the other lawyers, but she’d never seen him having any difficulties navigating through office functions, or social situations. She couldn’t imagine that a brief exchange

about Petra would throw him for a loop.

The elevator slowed its approach and dinged, announcing that they'd reached the concourse level. Alice wished she could have extended the short exchange, but at this point she'd take what she could get.

"This is me." *Yes, another brilliant statement of the obvious.* "Have a good night."

Alice stepped out of the elevator and was about to move on when she felt Gael's hand on her shoulder. Turning, for a moment she forgot to breathe. The intense look in his eyes had her pussy clenching and her libido clamoring to be fulfilled.

“Yes?” The word came out far breathier than she would have liked. Not that she was thinking too much about appearance at the moment.

Gael slowly blinked once before huffing. “You’re an attractive woman. You’re a competent assistant and a good employee. I don’t want you to think I haven’t...noticed. I want you to know that I’m not looking for a relationship. Not now. Probably not ever.”

In one moment, Alice was ready to fall to her knees in front of this man and beg him to make love to her. In the next, she felt as if she were going to puke. Swallowing down her embarrassment, Alice tried once more to smile. “Oh. I

see.”

“I feel it’s only fair to let you know. I got the idea that—”

“No, no, no!” Alice stepped back, breaking the contact between them. “I’m sorry if I gave you that impression. I don’t make a habit of sleeping with the firm’s lawyers.”

Most men might at least make an effort to ease the tension between them, to assure Alice that there wasn’t a problem or to apologize for embarrassing her. Gael Hernandez simply looked at her a few seconds longer and nodded. “Have a good evening with your friend.”

He let the door go and the elevator closed, cutting him off from sight.

Somehow, Alice managed to make her way to the subway station without crying. She got onto the correct platform without knowing exactly how she managed and onto the car with no problems. It wasn't until she stood in front of Petra's condo door and knocked that the walls of her self-control started to crack.

Petra swung the door open and smiled at her. "Hey." The smile morphed into a frown. "What's wrong?"

Alice couldn't stop the tears from coming. She let out a sob and stepped into her friend's arms. "Just a bad day."

One that she'd have to relive tomorrow and every day that Gael

Hernandez continued to work at Gibson, Murphy and Dow.

Maybe it was time to listen to her mother after all and consider a change in profession.

Chapter Three

Alice had just hung up the phone and her hands were still shaking. She mentally counted to ten before she jumped up squealing and did a poor interpretation of a Snoopy dance in her living room.

Earlier when she'd helped Petra get ready for her evening, Alice had no doubt her friend was going to turn more than a few heads when she showed up as PC at the nomination reading. But what were the odds that the hunk who'd been eyeing Petra from their local coffee shop would be in attendance? Astronomical?

Gargantuan? *Fuck it, who cares!* Petra was about to have amazing sex with a handsome man and it was about time that particular sexual drought was over.

She wasn't jealous of her friend's getting an unexpected offer of a one-night stand with the handsome stranger.

Well, maybe a little.

Not of the fact that Petra was hooking up with Darcy—it had been clear to her that the man had a city-sized crush on her friend—but that she was going to have a night with a man who *liked* her.

Picking up the bag of 100-calorie popcorn she'd been munching on, Alice looked at the clock and made a mental note of when Petra would be checking

in. She had lots of time to kill while Petra was getting laid, and reruns of *America's Next Top Model* would need to be enough to fill it.

At some point during the third episode, the phone rang. Alice didn't even bother looking at the call display before she hit the talk button.

"I want details, girl! Spill it."

"Alice, it's your mother."

The buzz of instant excitement was dampened in a heartbeat. "Mom. Hi. Why are you calling so late?"

"Darling, if you're expecting to hear from someone, you should consider checking your caller ID."

"I know. Sorry."

“Is the call important? I can talk to you in the morning.”

“Well, yes. My friend Petra—”

“Oh lord, not that woman. Sweetheart, how many times have I told you, a lady is judged by the company she keeps. If you persist in spending time with that girl, others will begin to compare you. They’ll see her lack of good grooming and manners and assume you are alike.”

Alice had made the mistake of having Petra and her mother in the same room only once. It had been her twenty-ninth birthday, and there was no way she *wasn’t* going to have her best friend with her. But after the snide comments directed toward her, Petra left the party

early and Alice felt like crap for ages afterward.

“Mom, what do you want?”

“What I want is for my daughter to stop being rude to me every time I call to speak with her.”

It didn't matter how old Alice got, when her mother used that tone of voice with her, she once more became six years old, standing backstage at a beauty pageant. Sitting up straight, she tossed the now-empty popcorn bag to the side and turned off her television. “Sorry, Mom.”

“As you should be.”

For next thirty minutes Alice sat still and let her mother go on about her day.

She wasn't feeling well again—this time it was her stomach, though a lady doesn't give too many of those details—and wanted Alice to drive up to Barrie to spend a week with her.

“The doctor wants to run some tests. It would be nice to have my daughter there with me in case it's something serious.”

“Mom, I can't take a week off work. I only have a bit of vacation left, and I'm going to need that at Christmas time. You wanted me to come up for Christmas, right?”

“I'm sure if you spoke with your boss he'd give you some time to check on me. They're lawyers, not animals, after all.”

There was no way she'd win this

argument. “I’ll ask Mr. Murphy tomorrow and see if there is something I can work out.”

“Good.” Now that her mother had gotten her way, the conversation turned to the next item on her list. “Are you seeing anyone?”

“No, Mom.”

“No one you have an interest in?”

Alice rolled her eyes. “Mom, of course there are men I’m interested in.”

“Well, I wouldn’t want to assume. If you’re a lesbian, you know I wouldn’t care and I’d love you regardless. Unless you’re dating that Petra girl. I couldn’t handle having her as a daughter-in-law. With your looks and talent you can do

much better than that.”

“Mom! I’m not gay and Petra is out right now with a man. She’s who I thought was calling. She was having sex.”

“Oh. Well good for her.” Alice could hear her mother’s frustration coming down the phone line. “I just don’t understand why you’re still alone in your life. You’re a beautiful, smart girl. You should have men tripping over themselves to be with you.”

Normally, Alice would brush her mother’s comments off as little more than her normal parental berating. But there was something off in her tone, not to mention the time of night that this

particular conversation was occurring. Sitting up a bit straighter, Alice switched the phone to her other ear.

“Mom, are you okay?”

“What? I’m fine.”

“You just don’t sound like yourself.”

The pause on the other end went on far longer than Alice would have liked.

“I’m tired. I’ve been having trouble sleeping recently.”

“Why don’t you take something?”

“It’s fine, sweetheart. And don’t think you can get out of answering my question that easily.”

Oh well. It was worth a shot. “I’ve been dating. A bit. I just haven’t met the right man yet.”

Thankfully, her mother wasn't here or she'd be able to tell what a complete and utter lie that was. Gael might be a bit distant and clearly not interested in starting anything up with her, but there was something about him that was just about perfect for her. Alice didn't know why, but whenever she was in a room with him she could feel a tremor resonating deep inside her chest. An invisible string deep in her chest that tightened in his presence and his alone.

“Well, I certainly don't want you to settle. Any man who isn't perfect doesn't deserve you.”

And just like that any annoyance she'd felt poofed away. “Thanks, Mom.”

“You’re my baby and I love you.”

They continued their chat much as they did every other conversation they normally had, until her mother yawned three times in a row.

“Go to bed, Mum.”

“There’s no point. I won’t last longer than an hour or two.”

“Hey, that’s better than nothing. If this keeps up more than another day or so you really should go see your doctor.”

“That man’s an idiot. If we had another family doctor taking patients in the city, I’d switch faster than—”

“Mom..”

“Fine. I’ll go. Though, I better be able to sleep. I’ve run out of books to read.”

They said their good-nights, but even after Alice hung up the phone something still niggled at the back of her mind.

Although her relationship with her mom had been a bit strained ever since she'd refused to continue her pursuit of a modeling career, Alice loved her. They talked frequently, and she made a point of seeing her whenever she could manage to make the drive to Barrie.

There was something off in her mother's voice, something that Alice couldn't put her finger on.

There wasn't much she could do about it one way or the other tonight. It was coming up on eleven and Petra would be calling in anytime now. God, she hoped

her friend was having an amazing time. If anyone deserved a little happiness, it was Petra. She'd had a rough time because of her last boyfriend, and the chance for her to have a little fun with a good-looking guy...okay yeah, Alice was jealous. But being alone was her own damn fault and she knew it.

She needed to get out there.

Once upon a time she'd known why she wasn't comfortable dating. The reason itself would change over time, giving her the necessary excuse to keep from putting herself out there.

Date? Oh, not now. She needed to focus on getting established with her career.

She wanted to enjoy herself and not deal with the pressures of a committed relationship.

She wasn't even thirty. There'd be lots of time for serious relationships later.

Men all wanted the same thing. She'd be better off waiting for the right man to come along.

The problem was the right man never seemed to show up when Alice was ready for him. Instead she was faced with a crush on a man who didn't want a relationship. She should thank him for being so honest with her. A lot of men would string her along, flirt shamelessly, maybe even have sex with her. Then

when she hoped things were about to move to the next level, boom! *Sorry, baby, I really don't think things are working between us.*

Gael had at least saved her that particular embarrassment.

Closing her eyes, she did her best to settle her mind. Her mother was right that she was a smart and attractive woman. It wasn't like she didn't have options when it came to men and dating. If anything, Alice had the problem of attracting too many men when she went out to the bars. Petra always referred to her as the jerk magnet—if there was a jerk in the bar, Alice would attract him.

But if Petra was out there having a

good time, there was no reason Alice couldn't do something like that too. If she went to a different bar, there would be the chance to meet some new and different people. Hell, she could have her own one-night stand, maybe with someone tall, dark and handsome who didn't have Latin blood, brown eyes, soft black hair and a wicked smirk.

Tomorrow was Saturday, the perfect chance for her to go out on the town. She had a few nice dresses tucked away in the back of her closet that she had been looking for an opportunity to wear. She'd do a little research, find out what the best singles bar in Toronto was, and hit it up. Surely she'd find someone to

have a little fun with. One night of passionate fucking with a stranger might be exactly what she needed to get Gael Hernandez out of her mind once and for all.

Before she could finish formulating her plan, the phone rang once more. This time she was sure to check the caller display before answering it—not that she expected her mother to call again.

“Petra!” All thoughts except for her friend flew out the window. “Is everything okay?”

“Sec, I need to shut the door.” Petra’s whispered words were punctuated by a soft click and the patting of feet. “Holy crap, that was just...I...he...I don’t have

words.”

Alice grinned as she tucked her feet under her butt. “Key question. Did you have sex?”

“Yes.”

“More than once?”

“In the shower, even.”

“And?”

“He was amazing! Hot. Funny and sexy. Hot. Did I mention he was hot?”

“I have eyes. I could see that.”

It took a little prodding to get the basic details from Petra. Her friend was being unusually tight-lipped. Still, Alice could picture the scenario. But instead of seeing Petra and Darcy, Alice imagined herself and Gael.

Being nervous as she went into his hotel room. Drinking wine while flirting with the man she'd been obsessing over for months now. Rolling around on the sheets as he licked and pinched various parts of her body.

Dropping to her knees in the shower.

Getting on all fours to let him take her from behind.

Crap, she really needed to get out and find someone for herself.

“Do you think you’re going to see him again?”

“I’ll have to. He’s another nominee.”

“Do you know what category?”

“We didn’t talk about it. I’ll check online when I get home.”

When Alice hung up, she was even more determined to hit the town. Petra would be tied up with the awards for the next few weeks, leaving Alice with more than a little free time. She could get her head sorted, scratch the itch that had started ever since Gael arrived at the office. With luck, she'd kill two birds with one stone.

Starting tomorrow, she would have her own adventure.

Chapter Four

The evening air was humid. She'd found the sexiest sundress she had in her closet, making sure that it hugged her curves in all the right spots. With the temperature the way it was, doing her hair would be next to impossible.

Instead of fighting with it, Alice pulled it up into a loose bun, letting several tendrils drop to kiss the tops of her shoulders and the back of her neck. It was a look that had always worked for her in the past.

Getting ready had taken her mind off

of Petra and the strange phone call she'd received that morning. Alice hated that Petra had brushed off her offer to help. Typical Petra, wanting to handle everything on her own. Though Alice appreciated the need to be an independent woman, sometimes it was important to ask for help. And Petra would laugh her fool head off if Alice ever said that to her. *Pot, kettle and all that jazz.*

Her friend used her PC identity online to ensure a certain measure of privacy. Sex blogs didn't always attract people who were supportive. Or sometimes the fans were a little *too* supportive. If someone had gotten hold of Petra's

phone number and matched it up with her real identity, she might need help. If Petra were home tonight, Alice would have abandoned her preparations and gone to her friend's instead. But Petra had other events to see to with the Toronto Web Awards, leaving Alice free to continue on with her plan of a wild night.

She didn't need to look in the mirror to know she looked good. The way the taxi driver kept staring at her in the rearview at every stoplight was the first indication that the effect she was hoping to pull off had been successful. Stepping out onto the street in front of Frequency was the second. A group of men,

standing in the line waiting to get in, all stopped to look at her as she shut the taxi door. At least two of them smiled and nodded her way, a silent invitation to join them. Tempting, given her goal tonight.

No, it was early and Alice wanted to give herself time to enjoy the evening. It wasn't cockiness, but the benefit of her personal experience that gave her the confidence to pick up the average man with little difficulty. Her mother had taught her how to work a crowd at the age of four. She'd learned the tricks to win over another person—well-placed smiles, giggles, when to let her gaze drop—and used them on instinct,

efficiently.

The heavy bass came from the club in front of her and mingled with the laughter and conversation from the groups both inside and out. This was the first time she'd been clubbing alone in quite some time. Hell, it had been over a year since she'd been to a club, period. Petra wasn't into the partying scene, and Alice found herself wanting to be the club girl less and less as she got older. The group of women she'd once gone out with had all gotten married in the past few years. Some of them even had babies now. Time had marched on, leaving Alice behind.

Everyone standing in line looked to be

between nineteen and twenty-two, a much younger crowd than she was hoping for. If she was going to do this, then she wanted to at least find a man who appealed to her. Someone her age or older for a start. Instead of looking for a way in, Alice started to walk down Richmond Street to check out some of the other spots.

Multiple groups of young people were out walking from club to club. The night air was filled with the *woohoos* and giggles of the university students, catcalls and whistles. The longer Alice walked, the more she realized her heart wasn't exactly into to this. Stopping in front of yet another warehouse, neon

lights and music humming within, her throat tightened around a sudden rush of unshed tears. This wasn't what she needed.

“Shit.” She closed her eyes for a moment and sighed.

Why couldn't she do this? She wasn't old or a prude. It should be easy as pie to walk into one of these places, order a drink, and start up a conversation. So far she hadn't even bothered to wait in the lines, let alone make any serious attempt to find a date.

She wanted to have some fun, right? Have sex?

Find a man who made her smile and laugh. Someone who made her shiver

with a casual caress, who made her wet with his soft whispered words. Someone who wanted to seduce her at night, but still want to watch TV with her in the day.

This was ridiculous. If she wasn't going to at least go into the clubs, then what was the point of her being here?

There wasn't.

In the end it wouldn't be enough for her, no matter how much she wanted to have a fling, throw caution to the wind in exactly the same way she'd told Petra to do the night before.

Alice stepped to the side of the street and started to look for a taxi. She'd go home, open her last bottle of wine, and

drink it. Tomorrow, she'd see if Petra could go out for breakfast and maybe a movie. If not, she'd hit Chapters and buy a few books for both herself and her mom. And if that didn't fill her day...well, distractions were easy enough to find in Toronto.

A limo stopped across the street and down from where Alice stood. Expecting to see yet another group of drunk university students tumble out, she was shocked to see the one person she wasn't expecting in this part of town.

Gael.

No way. What the hell was he doing here?

Two other men got out of the back of

the limo with him. All three were dressed in black, though one looked to be head to toe in leather. Alice blinked twice to ensure she was actually seeing who she thought she was. It could simply be a hallucination brought on by her loneliness. Closing her eyes for the count of two, she opened them once more, only to see Gael still standing there.

She had no idea that he was into the club scene at all, let alone coming out on the town in a limo with a bunch of men. But the way he looked at a group of young women who passed them on the street clearly told her all she needed to know. He was out on the prowl.

He'd assumed she was the type of girl who was interested only in getting into a relationship with a man. Okay, so maybe she projected the *pure as the driven snow* image a bit too well. He was being a gentleman by warning her off because he'd read her wrong. Maybe the idea of having a little fling wouldn't be quite so repellant to him?

Ignoring the taxi that slowly drove past her, Alice watched as the three men, led by Gael, walked down the street and the limo pulled away. They weren't heading in the direction of any of the larger clubs, which was a good thing as far as she was concerned. Taking a chance and ignoring her pounding heart,

Alice crossed the street and trailed behind them.

Was this stalking? It was pretty damn close. Creepy close? Maybe, though she wasn't quite up to movie-of-the-week stalking yet.

She hoped.

Shit.

Stopping, she watched as the trio turned the corner and went down an alley. So many of the warehouses had been changed into clubs over the years, she wasn't as familiar with what was housed in the area as she should have been. Not knowing where he was headed, or how he would react if he saw her there, was nearly enough of a

deterrent to make her rethink what she was doing. If she went in there, found him, and he rejected her once more, how was she supposed to face him at work? God, he might complain to Mr. Murphy...

Someone banged into her from behind. “Fuck! I’m sorry,” a man said, sounding more than a little out of breath.

Alice spun around, coming face to face with a man who might be in his mid-twenties. His hair was dyed pink and he had colored contact lenses, making his eyes look like a cat’s. The guy was incredibly skinny, dressed in leather pants and a tight white tank top. He checked his watch, then cringed. “Sorry. I wasn’t paying attention. I’m so

frigging late I'm going to get my ass handed to me."

"That's okay." Alice barely got the words out when the young man pushed past her and bolted for the same alley where Gael had disappeared. "Hey, where are you going? Is there a good club down there?"

"No time to chat!" And he ran around the corner.

Staring at the spot where he'd been seconds before, Alice gave her head a shake. "You're kidding me?"

Well, now she *had* to know what the hell was down there. If nothing else, she had a perfectly logical reason, one that had nothing to do with Gael, for wanting

to check out what exactly was down that alley. Perfectly logical and totally non-stalkerish.

You keep telling yourself that, Alice.

Squeezing her clutch, she strode a bit faster toward where the man had gone. The noise from the surrounding clubs faded into the background as soon as she turned the corner. With each step farther into the dimly lit alley, Alice's heart rate increased. A single woman wandering an unpopulated section of Toronto's club district. Not the wisest thing she'd done recently. Or ever.

There was no immediate indication where either the man or Gael had gone. The only thing visible was a neon sign at

the far end of the alley. Beyond was another wall of the warehouse, creating a dead end. Stopping before she got too close, Alice heard a cacophony of noise—voices and sounds that didn't quite register with her. Turning her head to try and catch the bead of the conversation, she was relieved to hear the voice of the man who'd run into her.

“Come on, man. I'm late as hell. She's going to whip my ass if I don't get in there.”

“You should have thought of that earlier.”

“Don't be a dick, Chess.”

“Go then. I look forward to seeing your red ass.”

She couldn't see either man. Alice started moving forward once more, realizing that there was an inset door, hiding them from view. This was it—she'd soon be in full view of whoever was standing there, and she'd have to either look the part to get inside or end up having her night cut short and sent on her way.

After taking half a beat to check her hair and smooth her hands down the length of her dress, she bit the bullet and went to check out the club. The red neon sign above the door wasn't as flashy as some of the other clubs in the district. There wasn't the same blare of dance music coming to her from inside, which

held the promise of a slightly more upscale experience.

“Wonderland.” She licked her lips as she stared at the harsh red letters.

“Well, hello, little rabbit.”

Alice gasped at the sight of the large black man standing at the door entrance. He was easily over six and a half feet tall and looked like he’d be at home standing inside of a UFC cage during the main event. She couldn’t believe she hadn’t seen him immediately.

“Umm, hi.” She waved and gave him a little smile. “How are you?”

“I’m just peachy. It’s a warm night with a cool breeze.”

Unsure what she should do next, Alice

took a few steps closer. The bouncer made no move to stop her one way or the other, but she got the impression no one set foot inside the club without his approval. Lying or flirting with him wasn't going to work either. One look at his amused expression told her that much. She was somehow going to have to convince him to let her go in and see if she could try and find Gael.

Alice held her clutch in front of her, tapping it against her thighs. "What kind of club is this?"

Chess chuckled. "If you have to ask, you shouldn't be here."

"I was out on the street when a guy ran into me and then came down this

way. I got curious and followed him. I didn't think there were any clubs this far down Richmond Street."

"Oh, there are one or two, little rabbit. One or two."

"Why are you calling me that?"

He chuckled again, sounding like a parent placating a child. "You have that wild terrified look to you. I expect to see you bolting off any second now."

"I saw a friend of mine come down this way. I thought I might say hello."

"A friend? Who might that be?"

"Gael Hernandez."

Chess cocked his head to the side, narrowing his gaze. "You don't say."

"I didn't want to bug him, but I got—"

“Curious.” His grin appeared to fill his face. “You know what they say about curiosity. You should run away before something bad happens.”

Disappointment clawed at her, twisting her stomach into something painful. Alice stepped back, knowing that he was probably right—she shouldn’t be here. Gael was clearly entertaining someone, maybe potential clients, and wouldn’t likely appreciate her showing up.

She managed another step away before Chess cleared his throat. “Though you did ask me a question. It would be awfully rude of me not to answer you before you went on your way.”

She smiled. “You strike me as the type of man who hates rudeness.”

“I do indeed. There are few enough good manners out in the world today.” He beckoned her closer.

Stepping into the cubby, she did her best to ignore her pounding heart and the fact that this was a terrible idea.

“I have a question for you first.” He bent down so his face was in line with hers. “What would you do for your friend, Mr. Hernandez?”

“Anything.” The word was gone from her before she gave it thought. That impulsiveness didn’t make the response any less true. “Anything at all.”

“Even if he doesn’t give you anything

in return?”

Some of the other girls in the office said the only thing that ruined Gael's good looks was his cold attitude. They didn't seem to pick up on his small smiles, or the little things he did for others. The cups of coffee that would show up on people's desks when they were having a bad day. Or the food that would arrive when people were working late on a case. Those things never happened before Gael's arrival, and Alice had no doubt they'd stop if he left the firm. He never let anyone see that it was him doing these random acts of kindness, and she was certain he'd deny it if ever asked, but she knew it was him.

There was more to him that met the eye. Maybe that was the reason for her attraction to him in the face of his obvious refusal.

Realizing she'd slipped away in her thoughts, Alice smiled at Chess. "Yes, even if he doesn't give me anything in return. He's a good man and I'd like to get to know him better."

The bouncer still hadn't answered her questions, but she got the impression that her response opened the door for her. Chess reached out and put his hand on the handle.

"The thing to remember with this club is the need for you to keep an open mind."

Alice nodded, not understanding at all. But she could do that. No problem.

“You’re going to see a different side to people in here, one that you wouldn’t see outside of these walls. It’s private. They’re baring their souls in here. Are you sure you are able to handle something like that?”

“I still don’t know what *that* is.”

“Wonderland is a club that caters to particular tastes. There’s no alcohol served here. No food. Just people and ideas. Games and rules. You need to figure out which side you’re on, little rabbit. You need to know before everyone else figures it out for you.”

“You’re not making a whole lot of

sense.”

Chess chuckled again. “I’ve been told that on more than one occasion.” He pushed open the door and turned sideways, giving Alice room to walk by. “Go on.”

Go or stay? Chess’s answer didn’t shed any light on what she was going to find inside. He didn’t care one way or the other if she stayed or went. Gael didn’t know she was here. And if she got inside and decided she didn’t like what she saw, then she had the option of leaving before he saw her. No harm, no foul.

“Thank you. I think.” She let out a small huff, then stepped inside.

The corridor was lit by the occasional pot light in the ceiling. The air was cool, giving her welcome relief from the persistent humidity outside. Her nipples hardened from the extreme change in temperature, making her a tiny bit self-conscious.

The hallway twisted and turned, giving her no indication as to where she was going or what she'd find when she eventually got there. When she rounded a curve, she finally saw an opening at the end, leading out to a large room. There was a soft rhythm that reached her, but it didn't sound like any music she was familiar with.

Alice nearly got to the room when a

loud moan stopped her dead in her track. Another reached her just as loudly. It was then that she realized what it was she'd been hearing—not the beat of a song, but the cracking of a whip.

What the hell...?

Approaching the end at a far more cautious pace, Alice had to force herself to breathe when she finally crossed the threshold and stepped out into the room. The warehouse space was wide open, with a series of bays around the sides. The mini rooms didn't have doors, which gave her easy access to see exactly what was going on inside.

And holy shit, what the hell was that?

A woman walked past her, a leash in

her hand. It was attached to a collar around the neck of a man in a black PVC suit, wearing a giant horse head. His arms and legs were covered and on his feet he wore shoes that looked exactly like horse hooves. How he was able to walk in those she didn't have a clue.

The woman didn't give her a second glance, even as Alice openly stared at the pair as they walked past. She guessed having people look at them was part of the point of wearing an outfit like that. Maybe.

Another thunder crack snatched Alice's attention. A woman was bound to the wall in one of the side bays. She was completely naked, except for her

high heels, and facing away from the main area. Alice gaped as a man, who himself was fully dressed, ran what looked to be a whip with a series of leather ends across his open palm. They were too far away for Alice to hear what they were saying. No one else seemed to be paying them any attention whatsoever. Groups of men and women stood around talking, smiling, making it look like a cocktail party. If it weren't for the random naked person kneeling on the floor by their feet, or strapped to parts of the club itself, Alice might have convinced herself that was exactly what this was.

“I’m so not in the right place.” She

stepped farther into the room, knowing she was most likely going to get herself kicked out for clearly not belonging. Until that happened, Alice figured she might as well look around.

Because she couldn't imagine why Gael was in a place like this.

The farther Alice went into the club, the more attention she attracted. At first, it wasn't obvious. She'd turn around to look at something, and she'd catch sight of people turning their face away. The closer she got to them, the less they'd mask their stares. Not that she could meet their gazes. There was something crazy intense about the eyes of many of the women. As for the men, it only took a

moment to see the possessive fire burning inside them.

This was wrong. She was standing in the middle of what was clearly a sex club, not exactly where and what she'd intended on being. This was a heavier one-night stand opportunity than she would be able to handle.

And yet, she wasn't running out of there.

“Well, well, well. I see Chester needs to have a refresher lesson on whom to let into my club.”

Alice turned around and managed to swallow down a gasp. Standing there was one of the most beautiful women she'd ever seen. Wearing a red PVC

dress laced up the front with black string was a voluptuous woman who appeared to be in her forties. She led a muscular man by a leash. His head was shaved, his body chiseled, and his blue gaze on the floor.

“You find Alex here attractive?” The woman tugged on the lead and Alex dropped to his knees. “He’s a fine specimen for certain.”

“Yes he is. Ma’am.” Alice wasn’t exactly sure why she threw that onto the end of her sentence, but it felt right. Natural.

The woman cocked an eyebrow, her lips turning up into a smirk. “I see. What’s your name, my dear?”

Returning her gaze to the woman, Alice swallowed. “Alice.”

“Alice. How sweet.” The woman dropped Alex’s leash and crowded into Alice’s space. She wanted to step away, but the woman grabbed her by the chin, chasing all thoughts of escape far away. “What a pretty little thing you are.”

Before Alice could say a word the woman leaned in and pressed a kiss to her lips. “They call me Mistress Red. Welcome to Wonderland, my dear.”

Chapter Five

Alice's gasp had Mistress Red laughing. "Oh you are precious. So innocent." Her fingernail scratched Alice's skin as she ran it down her cheek. "Now how on earth did you find yourself here? Normally my bouncer would chase a little thing like you far away."

"I was following someone." She couldn't remember to breathe. Her lungs screamed for air whenever Alice forgot, forcing her to suck in small gasps. "I saw him come in and I got curious."

"I don't think so. I pay Chester very

well to keep the curious types far away from here. There's something more to it than that for him to have let you in."

The last thing she wanted to do was put Gael in jeopardy with the owner of the club. There might be some rule Alice was unaware of, some secret code that prevented them from mentioning Wonderland and what went on here. But another look at Mistress Red and Alice realized she had no choice but to speak the truth. The other woman was carrying a rather large whip, after all, and Alice had no doubt Mistress Red wasn't afraid to use it.

"I was already coming this way when the guy ran into me. A coworker,

actually. I don't think he would appreciate me being here and seeing him like this. I should probably head out."

Sharp nails dug into Alice's arm when Mistress Red grabbed her forearm to halt her leaving. "His name." She grinned in a way that wasn't at all reassuring. "I assume it's a man you're interested in more than a friendship with, given how you haven't checked out my breasts even once."

As if trained to react to the prompt, Alice's gaze slipped down and landed squarely on the woman's cleavage.

Dammit.

"Gael Hernandez." Alice closed her eyes, not only to save herself any further

embarrassment of looking at another woman's breasts—because what the hell was up with that—but to also hide from Mistress Red's reaction to his name.

“He's one of the lawyers at the firm where I work. I saw him and two other men come this way and I—”

The rest of what Alice planned to say was cut short as Mistress Red jerked her to the side and then down the edge of the room to one of the bays at the back of the club. There was a desk in the middle with a large black leather chair behind it and a single wooden stool in front.

Mistress Red deposited Alice on the stool before she took the seat behind the desk. Steepling her fingers and resting

her elbows on the desk, the other woman glared at Alice.

“I’m sorry...” Alice laced her fingers together on her lap to try and stop herself from fidgeting, “Did I say something wrong?”

“Why are you here?”

Shit, she’d lost the playful edge to her tone. Alice was getting interrogated.

“I told you. I was out looking for a club where I could have a good time, meet some people.” There was no way in hell Alice was going to go into details about her intentions to get laid. “I was actually about to call a cab and go home when I saw Gael getting out of a limo with two other men. I got...curious.”

“I’m not going to give you any stupid platitudes about curiosity.” Mistress Red leaned forward, her gaze having grown cold as she stared at Alice. “But I want to be perfectly clear about one thing. This club is a place for people to play. I cater to a specific clientele, and Chester is normally the best bouncer I’ve ever employed. If you’re here to get dirt on Gael, trying to blackmail him into doing something, giving you perks at the office, then I suggest you march your lily-white ass out of my club right now.”

“I—”

“I’ve met bitches like you in the past. Think you can get whatever you want in life by forcing others to give shit up to

you. Well that's not going to happen here." Mistress Red was on her feet, and for a moment, Alice thought the woman was going to hit her. "This is my club. My rules and my friends."

"I'm sorry." She hated how weak she sounded, how small she felt. Ever since she was a child, she'd found it hard to take when people yelled at her. Getting to her feet and doing her best to keep her legs from shaking, she started to back away from the desk. "I would never cause any problems for anyone. Least of all him. I'll leave."

Mistress Red also got to her feet, her arms crossed and her lips turned up into a sneer. "Good."

Yet another colossal mistake to add to the pile she'd created in her life. She shouldn't have tried this, attempted to reach out and live on the wild side. Maybe her mother had been right all these years, and Alice needed to look for a man with a nice simple job to settle down with. But before she could leave, she needed to resolve one final thing.

“For the record.” Forcing herself to meet Mistress Red's gaze, Alice kept her tone even as she spoke. *Picture you're talking to a selection committee.* “I would never do anything to hurt Gael. He's been nothing but kind to me since he started working with the firm. When I saw him come in here tonight, I wanted

to understand a bit more about the type of man he is. I...like him...and wanted to know if there was a chance for me to...be with him.” Alice turned to leave.

“Stop.”

Again, her body reacted without thought. Alice was too scared to turn back around and look. Thankfully, she didn't have to. Mistress Red came back around the desk and stood beside Alice.

“Do you know what this place is?”
Gone was the harsh edge to the Mistress's voice.

Alice was finding it difficult to keep up with the changing situation. “It's a sex club.”

“Close. We're a BDSM club.

Sometimes there is sex between partners, but not always. No one underage is allowed in, and no one who looks like they might not understand the lifestyle can enter. We do have an open door policy for anyone who is interested in learning more.”

Mistress Red took Alice by the chin once more, forcing her to meet her gaze. “I think I understand why Chess let you in.”

“You do?” She couldn’t stop the bubble of nervous laughter from escaping. “I’m glad one of us does.”

“Well, princess, it’s not actually about you. Our boy Gael needs to have a few things straightened out in his life.” She

let Alice's chin go and grinned. "Oh yes, this is going to be fun. I've changed my mind. Come with me, darling. Let me give you a little tour of my playground. You can decide what you like about it, and if you want to stay."

With her mind reeling at the sudden change of events, Alice stumbled as Mistress Red took her by the hand once more and led her around the club. "I pride my club on its simplicity. There are other places in town that are more specialized, more gimmicky. Wonderland is about the fantasy, meeting others with similar interests and then disappearing to explore the dreams with your chosen playmates."

“Like a speed dating bar?”

“A kinky one. We have the playrooms where people can try things out. Masters and students can work together on techniques. Dominants and submissives can be as they are in a public setting. It’s relaxing.”

“Submissives?” Alice’s gaze slipped to the men and women on their knees on the floor, splayed over laps, getting spanked and flogged. “They choose that?”

“Oh yes. They get off on having their Masters take control, push them to the limits of what their bodies can take, and then push them over.” Mistress Red leaned in and bit down on Alice’s

earlobe. “A good Mistress can make her sub come *hard*.”

*I’m not a lesbian. I’m not even bi.
I’ve never been attracted to women...*

“Now, our boy Gael is not a sub.” She laughed as she tugged Alice in the direction of the stairs. “Can you imagine? It makes me want to fall down laughing with just the thought.”

No, of all the men of her acquaintance, Gael was the least submissive. It was one of the things that attracted her to him, that unwavering confidence and his ability to get everyone to do what needed to be done, regardless of the circumstances.

“So he’s a dominant. That means he

likes to hit his partners?" It wasn't something Alice would have ever considered. Gael, although not a soft man, never seemed to have any issues with women. In fact, whenever an abuse case would come in, he was the first to double-check to ensure the accused wasn't guilty. If things didn't look right, he'd fight against the firm taking the client on.

"Gael only hits people if that's what they ask for. He's a very conscientious bastard. This way, princess. Let's go find our boy."

Each stair up that Alice took, the more nervous she became. Although the thought of catching Gael's attention had

been the catalyst for her coming in here, now that she had a clear picture of what went on, Alice was beginning to believe this was an even bigger mistake than she'd originally realized. This was discovering a part of him that she had to imagine he wanted to keep as private as possible. How could she face him every day at the office now, knowing what he did after hours? It would be better if she disappeared now and he didn't learn of her presence.

But as she crested the top of the stairs and Mistress Red tightened her grip on Alice's arm, she realized it was too late for second guesses. The second level was another open-concept floor. A

series of couches, beanbag pillows and benches were strategically placed around the area. Gael and the two men were sitting on three chairs all facing each other, close to where Alice and Mistress Red now stood.

There was a naked woman standing in the middle of the trio. The two men were running their hands over her hips, down her thighs and along her ass. One of them forced the woman to bend over and he gave her ass cheek a hard smack. Alice jumped at the sound, but couldn't look away from the expression on the woman's face.

Holy shit, she looked like she loved it.

Gael wasn't looking at the woman or his friends. His gaze was roaming over the rest of the room and the various groups in different positions. He actually looked a little bored, as though he were being forced to sit through another rundown of corporate office procedures.

“Fun, fun, fun.” Mistress Red chuckled before she tugged at Alice once more, sending her stumbling after her.

Shit, this was such a bad idea. Gael must have sensed their approach, because he turned around to look at them before they got more than a few steps from the stairs. His gaze landed immediately on Alice. Everything seemed to freeze—every muscle in his

body, her ability to pull air into her lungs, the sounds that filled the club—as time stretched taut. In that moment, all that existed were the depths of his brown eyes and the look of shock on his face. Then the world rushed back around her, sending her head spinning.

“Master Gael.” Mistress Red practically purred as she spoke. Alice was pulled beside the chair where he sat, forcing her to keep eye contact with him. “What a pleasure to see you once more. And you brought company. Hello, gentlemen.”

He closed his eyes, breaking the invisible hold he’d taken on her, and shifted his attention over to Mistress

Red. “They’re friends of mine from out of town. I thought they would be more comfortable here than some of the other clubs.”

Mistress Red made a sexy humming noise and began to play with her hair.

“You’re sweet to say so. But you don’t look like you’re having a good time yourself.”

“I was looking for something particular.”

“Interesting. May I ask what? I might have someone who can meet your needs downstairs.” Mistress Red put a hand to Alice’s shoulder and pushed down. “You know I’m always looking to pair the right people up.”

Her intent was clear—Alice knew what kind of man Gael was now. If she truly was interested in getting to know him more, she needed to play her part. A part that she didn't fully understand. If he was a dominant, that meant he was looking for a submissive. Remembering the men and women downstairs on their knees, how they all seemed to have an air of contentment around them as they waited for...something, that was the sort of thing she needed to do for him.

She'd have to give up her hard-fought control. She'd have to trust that she wasn't about to make the biggest mistake of her life.

Without thinking too much about what

this all meant, Alice dropped to her knees, keeping her eyes locked on Gael.

He didn't look away from her. If anything it felt as though his eyes were able to see through to her soul. "It's highly specialized. Honestly, I'd given up on the idea. Though I'm starting to think that there isn't anything you can't provide, Red."

"You know me—I'm always trying to make my boys happy." She patted Alice's head. "Is there anything else I can get you gentlemen? Some restraints and a paddle perhaps?"

One of Gael's friends grinned. "I think we are ready to go downstairs to one of your bays." He squeezed the girl's ass—

hard. “A paddle is an excellent idea.”

“Come with me, boys. I’ll get you all set up.”

No one bothered to ask Gael or Alice if they were going to be joining them. In fact, Alice was fairly certain that neither man had even noticed her there on the floor. Or if they had, they didn’t care in the least about her opinion. It was almost like being back on the pageant trail. Say what the others expect you to say, not really what you think.

Once the group had gone downstairs, leaving them alone, she expected Gael to say something to her. Demand an explanation about why she was here. Have him give her a hard time about

tracking him to the club, whether intentional or not. Anything. What she wasn't expecting, and was honestly having a hard time dealing with, was this stretch of endless silence.

She hated the quiet. It was why the television was always on in her house. Her childhood had been a state of constant noise and chaos. Quiet normally meant her mother was in the bathroom, crying. That would lead to Alice being thrust into another series of child pageants, until the cycle spun around once more.

Being on her knees in front of Gael was turning out to be no exception. The urge to talk, ask him the thousand

questions that were rolling through her mind—what was wrong, was he mad at her, should she leave—was overwhelming. But when she opened her mouth to do just that, he held up his finger and gave his head a hard shake.

“Not a fucking word. Not until I calm down.”

Shit. “It’s not what you think—”

“I said not a word. And don’t you dare move. You have no idea what you’ve gotten yourself into.”

No shit, Sherlock. But she was starting to get a pretty good picture of how things were going to play out.

She became hyper aware of her body and every ache and pain that reared up

as she sat on the floor. Her feet began to go numb as her shoes pinched into her skin. It would be easy enough to shift them to the side and stretch out her legs, but she was fairly positive that went against the *no moving* rule. As a submissive, she gathered that comfort wasn't important. She wasn't completely naïve—being in this position she'd be giving up certain comforts to make him happy.

The weird thing was that she really didn't seem to mind. Which was one of the strangest revelations of her life.

Gael finally sat up in his chair and leaned over, pressing his elbows into the tops of his thighs. “What the hell are you

doing here? Did someone put you up to this? No bullshit. Why?”

She was a terrible liar and wasn't dumb enough to try pulling anything over on him. “I was out looking for a club to go dancing in. I was actually getting ready to go home when I saw you getting out of the limo. I followed you here.”

As she said the words for the third time tonight, the explanation felt weaker to her. If she didn't know it was the truth, she would have believed it was made up in a lame-ass attempt to cover up her stalking.

Gael clasped his hands and leaned close enough that she could feel his breath on her face. “You expect me to

believe that you were out in the club district all alone on a Saturday night, wandering around?”

“I do have a social life.”

“Not much of one from the sound of things.”

Okay, that hurt.

Alice tried to get up, but her feet had gone completely numb, making the task next to impossible. Gael made matters more difficult when he grabbed her by the shoulders and held her in place. The look in his eyes had her freezing once more, arresting her in a way that his touch couldn't do.

“I told you not to move.” He cocked his eyebrow, and she shivered at the low

timber of his voice. “I know you can follow directions better than that.”

Oh. Fuck.

She licked her lips. “I don’t understand why. You clearly don’t want me here.”

His grip tightened on her shoulders, firm but not painful. She was unable to maintain his gaze, and instead contented herself by staring at his mouth. His lips were full, moist, and beautiful as he spoke. The stubble on his face had come fully in now, highlighting his cheekbones and strong jaw. God, she wished he could look like this every day. Not that she’d be able to get anything accomplished if he did.

“Why did you stay, Alice?” He swallowed, and she became fascinated by the movement of his Adam’s apple. “The second you walked out onto the main floor and realized this wasn’t a typical club, why didn’t you turn around and leave?”

Why indeed. “I was going to. I realized it was a sex club and that you wouldn’t want me to know about you being here. But then I...” It was more than simple curiosity and she knew it. Taking a deep breath she closed her eyes. “I realized that if you were here then there was a reason for it. I wanted to understand what that reason was.”

“So you could blackmail me?”

“God, no! Why does everyone think I would do something like that?” Maybe Gael thought she was shallow and was trying to find a way to make some extra money on the side. It would explain why he tried to warn her away the way he did. But she couldn’t believe anyone would think her capable of being so deceitful. “I *like* you. I thought if I understood what it was that drew you to here that I might have a better chance at understanding what you looked for in a woman.”

And there it was, the embarrassing truth. Alice had a crush on Gael. He’d rejected her once, telling her he wasn’t interested in a relationship. No, he was

apparently into having kinky sex with strangers. Now was his opportunity to reject her a second time. The only difference was this time Alice understood the full reason behind his rejection.

She was the least kinky person out there. How the hell could she compete with the women in this club?

The answer was, she couldn't. *Time to leave.*

Gael released her shoulders, but didn't completely pull back. "Do you understand what it is I look for here?"

No. "A little bit. Mistress Red tried to explain things to me. You're dominant and like your partners to be submissive."

“But do you understand what that means?”

There wasn't much point in lying.
“Not really.”

She couldn't be certain, but she got the impression Gael was making a difficult choice when he stood up and offered her his hand. “Come with me.”

“Why?” Her entire arm tingled as she slipped her hand into his and shakily got to her feet. It took a moment for the blood to start flowing once more and she was able to walk without stumbling. Gael waited patiently until she took a few steps.

“Why should be obvious. You wanted to learn about me—here's your

opportunity. You'll only get one. And if you give me time to think this over, my rational side will kick in."

She gasped as he pulled her hard against his side and pressed his mouth to her ear. "I can either take you to the front door and get you a taxi, or you can come with me. Which will it be?"

Heart racing and body trembling, she tried to get herself under control. She couldn't back down now, not after everything she'd been through so far tonight. Turning her face so her mouth brushed against his cheek, Alice whispered, "Teach me. Sir."

Chapter Six

Gael's cock went hard as stone the moment Alice called him *Sir*. It was worse than the accidental slip at the office, because this time she understood that there was a certain amount of power behind the phrase. It didn't hurt that it came out sounding so innocent, practically inviting him to slap a collar around her neck and claim her as his.

This was the single dumbest thing he'd ever done.

A whole shit-pile of trouble, given the look of excitement and lust on her face.

No woman should be able to be so alluring without trying. He hadn't given Alice much thought the first month he'd started working at the firm. She was yet another pretty face who floated around the office, someone who was savvy when it came to her job. It wasn't until that second month, when a bunch of the newer lawyers got together for Friday afternoon drinks and they started discussing the various women in the office that Gael's mind went there.

Man, did it ever go there.

Most of the associate lawyers had her on their list of *wanna fuck*. The more the alcohol had flowed that day, the more graphic their descriptions had gotten, the

more Gael wanted to beat the shit out of them. Even Uncle Stephen had more than a few choice descriptions for what he'd do to Alice given half a chance. It had turned Gael's stomach to the point where he'd gotten up and left without a word. No woman deserved to be talked about like that, let alone Alice. The sweet girl who treated everyone with the same degree of respect and kindness. The woman who never lost her patience, who never demanded anything for herself.

Alice with her perfectly done hair and makeup that actually enhanced her features rather than cover them up. Her ability to pick the perfect clothing that

made her look feminine without coming across as too soft, sexy without being slutty. It was far too easy to picture her sinking to her knees by his desk, his hand circling her neck while his other pulled her hair to expose her neck.

Gael had been forced to keep his distance from her as much as he could after that. He wasn't supposed to be looking for a submissive, especially one from the office. Uncle Stephen would have a field day if he discovered that Gael had Alice on her knees, wide-eyed and willing. That would be the reason he'd need to kick Gael to the curb, cutting him off from the income and loan he needed to help his parents' business.

So why the hell was he hauling Alice to one of the private rooms?

Because she's just too perfect to pass up.

“Where are we going?” Her words were breathy as she stumbled along behind him. He should be waiting for her, taking care that she wasn’t going to get hurt. Any other day that’s exactly what he’d be doing.

But not tonight.

“You asked for this.” He was many things—hard-ass, focused, driven—but being a selfish bastard was at the top of that list. Alice had been sitting in the back of his mind for months now, scratching away at his resolve with her

perfectly manicured nails. He tightened his hold on her arm. If this was going to blow up in his face, he was damn well going to enjoy it first. “No backing out now.”

“I wasn’t. I just wanted to know...can you slow down, please?”

“No.”

“But—”

He stopped short and pulled her hard against him. The thin fabric of her sundress did nothing to hide her body from him. As she pulled in a breath, her breasts pressed against his arm. He could feel the hard peaks of her nipples, tempting him to pull her dress down there and then so he could suck them.

She'd be shocked, but she wouldn't pull away from him. He'd felt this unexplored connection between them for months now. It was time to do something about it.

He took her chin in his hand and held her still. The mixed emotions swirling in her gaze were almost enough to make him change his mind and take her home, away from this place and its madness.

Almost.

“There are no buts. No words. I want you to remain silent until I tell you it's safe to speak. Do you understand?”

Gael half expected her to continue to prattle on. She talked when she was nervous—that was one of the first things

he'd learned about her. He should have known better. Alice's eyes grew wider, but she only nodded her acceptance. Of course she wouldn't back down. Stupid, stubborn woman...

Beautiful, generous, sexy...

"I'll answer your questions then, but not before." Letting her chin go, he kept his hold on her wrist before tugging her along behind him. As much as having her here with him was a fantasy come true, Gael wanted to keep her safe, pure, separate from this part of his life. He'd do anything to ensure no one but him would touch her.

The main floor of the club was now a hive of activity. Given the time of night,

Gael was surprised it had taken this long for many of the members to jump into the roles they all knew and loved.

Wonderland served a very specific clientele—Doms looking for a place to play with their subs. The moment most people crossed the threshold past Chess's watchful gaze, they slipped into their roles without a second thought.

That there was a lot of chatter, and not as many of the regulars in attendance, was odd.

This wasn't a no-holds barred sex club like Mavericks, the other main lifestyle club in town. Although Gael had enjoyed playing there the few times he'd gone, it didn't give him enough of

what he'd been looking for. Mavericks attracted couples or single people looking to get into relationships. He couldn't get involved with someone. He couldn't afford the distraction when he'd been going through university. But it was there that he'd met Mistress Red and gained an introduction to Wonderland. Gael hadn't looked back since.

By the time they reached the main floor, Gael was faced with a sea of naked bodies. Most of the Doms had broken off, some into smaller groups, some playing only with their subs. There would be an array of activities—floggings, Shibari, humiliations—anything and everything. Although the

crowd seemed slow to start, the energy in the room was ramping up quickly, which in turn would push the players deeper into the games. He caught sight of Marcus and Justin over by the suspension ropes. Emily wouldn't know what hit her once the boys got to work. At least he didn't have to worry about amusing his friends tonight.

Gael wanted to be a part of the main flow of the evening, but he wouldn't risk it with Alice here, in case things went too fast. And they were very likely to, especially if Mistress Red got into one of her moods.

Red loved pushing his buttons, and the temptation Alice presented was likely

too great for her to resist for long. Better for him to take charge and get Alice out the door as quickly as possible.

Tightening his hold, he pulled her through the crowd. Alice's steps slowed the deeper they went. He didn't need to look to know she was taking in the scenes around her. With his fingers pressed to her wrist, he could feel the jump in her pulse, the shudders that ran through her at the sound of the moans, the sharp snap of a whip against skin. She wasn't disgusted. That was a good first step.

Sidestepping a spanking bench and skirting around a cage, Gael finally found a free side room and pulled Alice

in. “Get on your knees in the middle of the room. Put your hands behind your back.”

The command came from him without hesitation. He was taking a chance, showing her this side of him without any form of restraint, but the time for that was long past. She was here, knew about this now, hell, there was a chance that she might actually want this for herself. However, it was just as likely that Alice would run screaming as soon as she saw the Dom he kept hidden from the world. He'd deal with that when the time came.

Gael crossed his arms and locked his gaze out on the main floor. He wouldn't force her to do anything—that wasn't the

point. If she didn't give this to him freely, then it would be best to end things before his mind latched on to the idea and refused to let go.

Too late for that.

Still, when Alice tentatively stepped further into the room, Gael's heart began to pound. He forced his body to remain rock-like, cold; he didn't want her to get any misimpressions of exactly what he had to offer. She couldn't want this. Not really.

Alice let out a small huff, moved forward another few paces, and carefully got to her knees. "What should I do with my purse?"

He closed his eyes and gave himself a

few moments to get his libido under control. That question, so softly asked, had managed to fire him up hotter than the most obedient of submissives he'd ever played with before. Beautiful, practical Alice, on her knees waiting for him.

“On the floor beside you.” He kept his back to her, not wanting to see if her hands shook as she complied. “Nothing will happen to your things.”

After another few seconds, he finally turned to face her.

Alice had tucked the loose strands of her hair behind her ears, fully exposing the side of her neck to him. The fabric of her sundress was pooled around her

knees, pulled up to expose her calves to him. From this angle, he was able to look down the front of her generous cleavage, able to see the fullness of her breasts.

He moved so he stood in front of her. Normally, he'd like to tease any new subs he played with, determining what their preferences were and how far he could push them. He'd never been faced with a neophyte, someone who didn't know what this world was, let alone what her role within it would be. She wouldn't necessarily know that there were rules, let alone what they would be. If he were going to give into this temptation, then he had to be careful not

to destroy that innocence inside her along the way.

“There are going to be rules here tonight.” As soon as the plan came to mind, Gael’s body relaxed into the role, back to being his second skin. He could do this, show her this part of him while keeping himself apart. He’d already learned the hard way about becoming emotionally attached to a sub. At least with Alice he knew her well enough to be able to see if things were getting too serious.

“I know you don’t understand what we do here, what I like. You are permitted to ask questions. I might decide to answer them. Or not. That is

my prerogative as your Dom.”

Alice nodded, as a flush colored her cheeks.

“I’ll make that rule number one. Alice must ask questions when she doesn’t understand. Say, ‘yes, Sir.’”

“Yes, Sir.” The words were spoken softly, but she didn’t seem tentative.

“Rule number two. You are to trust me. I need you to do what I tell you to, but understand that I won’t do anything that I don’t think you can handle.”

“But how will you know?” Alice pressed her lips together almost as soon as the question came out. He’d seen this reaction before in a sub. They wanted to know, to press, but were scared of

angering him.

“Did you forget rule one already?” He wanted to touch her, run his hands through her hair and offer her a small measure of comfort, but held himself back. “I won’t punish you for asking questions. Not tonight at least.”

Somehow, Alice’s big hazel eyes got wider. “There will be another night?”

Shit. So much for not getting attached. “No.”

There was a flicker of something in her eyes. Not disappointment exactly. If he didn’t know better, he would have said she looked challenged. He should have known that a woman of her caliber had boundless depths of strength to draw

from.

“To answer your question, I will know because you will tell me in a specific way. Saying *ouch* won’t cut it. Neither will *stop*. You’ll have to say *Red*. That will be the way I know things have gotten too much for you.”

“*Red?*” Alice let her gaze slip to the floor. “Why can’t I just say *stop* or *no*?”

“Because some submissives enjoy saying *no*. They like to push and love it even more when I push them back. The struggle is what’s important.”

“And how do you push them?” Her gaze was locked on his shoes and a beautiful blush now covered her cheeks and throat. “What exactly do you do?”

He had learned the power and appeal of restraint early on in his life. It wouldn't surprise those who were familiar with him in the courtroom that he took control in the bedroom in much the same way.

Perhaps it was time for Alice to learn firsthand, and to hell with the consequences.

“Don't forget that you asked for this.” Closing the distance between them, Gael stopped by her side, pleased that she didn't move her hands from where they were clasped.

Alice watched him as he reached out and slid the thin strap of her sundress across her shoulder and down her

biceps. Her skin was as soft as he'd imagined it would be, and he went slower than he would normally, liking the way her breath hitched and her blush deepened. She pulled her hands apart for a second, but when he gave her a sharp look, she re-clasped them behind her.

Goose bumps rose on her skin, trailing in the wake of his touch. The scent of her perfume and sex tickled his nose, making his cock pulse. Regardless of what happened between them here, from now on when he caught a whiff of her scent, he'd associate her with this moment—half-naked on her knees by his side.

“You know how to stop things. You

need to say *Red*. I'll back up and you can walk away. I won't think any less of you."

It would kill him, but he'd do it.

Alice shook her head. "I... No, I'm fine."

The top of her dress now pulled on the loose side, exposing her bare breast. Of course she wasn't wearing a bra. That would be too easy on him, to have that rounded flesh hidden from sight. Instead of focusing on the skin before him, Gael moved around her slowly, running his finger along the back of her shoulders.

"I know you've watched me through the day. Your flirting was obvious, but

not obnoxious. Not like some of them. I could feel your eyes on me, could practically hear your thoughts as I'd sit behind my desk. Do you have any idea what you were doing to me? Answer me."

Alice gasped as he wrapped his fingers around the back of her neck. Her skin was hot beneath his touch, her hair damp from the humidity in the club and no doubt her own anticipation. He hadn't toyed with someone like this, stretching the moment out as far as he could, in a very long time.

"I didn't realize you'd noticed. I didn't want you to think I was trying to make a play for you."

“Weren’t you?”

“No!” Alice huffed and turned her face away. “I know some of the girls think I’m working there because I’m trying to land a lawyer husband, but I’m not. It’s not like that.”

She held still as well as she could, but Gael could feel the tremors running through her body. Encouraged by her reactions, he stood directly behind her, his hand still on her neck, and pulled the second strap down her arm.

“I never once thought you were after me for my money or my position.”

“Oh.”

“You wanted something more than I’m able to give.”

“But I—”

He squeezed the back of her neck once more, cutting off further argument from her. “Quiet now.”

Another tremble rolled through her before she pressed her mouth closed.

“You sit outside my office, smiling and laughing. It would have been easier to ignore you if you were a bitch, or trying to land a lawyer husband like those fools said. But you’re too fucking sweet to everyone. You look after your friends, help your colleagues, make sure we all have everything we need to do our job. And not once have I heard you ask for anything in return. You’re selfless, and that drives me absolutely

mad.”

The top of her sundress clung to her bare breasts with determination, refusing to slide lower so he could finally see how beautiful she was beneath the surface of her stylish clothing. Stubborn and determined, as much as Alice herself was.

“I don’t let others tell me what to do.” *Except when I have no other choice.* He fanned his fingers into her hair to better cup her head. “I need to be in charge. It’s not a fad or a phase. I won’t change over time. The women in my life need to accept this because this is who I am.”

Leaning over her, Gael slid his hand down her chest, beneath the front of her

dress. That simple nudge was all that was necessary to push the stubborn fabric down. He cupped her now-exposed breast in his hand as he pressed his mouth to her ear.

“I’m not a kind man. I’m not gentle in the bedroom. I like to fuck, not make love.”

Alice was breathing heavily through her mouth. He could feel the racing of her heartbeat beneath his hand as he squeezed her breast. Sliding his hand around to the front of her neck, he gently squeezed her throat. It wasn’t enough to choke her. Hell, it wasn’t enough to do anything. But there was no way she’d mistake his intentions. She swallowed

and the bob of her throat shifted beneath his touch.

“Do you want me to show you how I like to fuck, Alice?” He kept his voice soft, but increased the pressure on her breast. “You’ve followed me this far, but do you want to go all the way?”

God, she smelled so good—the floral scent of her shampoo, mixed with the unmistakable hint of arousal—it was enough to drive Gael insane. He was expecting her to back away, to say her safeword and get the hell out of here before things went much further. A part of him hoped she would end this madness that they were both descending into, save them both from the inevitable

crash and burn they'd both be faced with in the cold light of day.

Her body relaxed against his and the side of her ear brushed his mouth. There would be no saving either of them.

“Please, Gael, I don’t know what I’m doing here. But I need...I think I need this. With you.”

He had to close his eyes to keep from flying apart at the seams. “Call me *Sir*. I won’t tell you again.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“I don’t think you understand what you’re asking for.”

Alice turned her face, so her lips were only a few tantalizing inches from his. “Then show me, Sir. Show me.”

Chapter Seven

Alice was fairly certain that she had lost her mind. When Gael's slid his hand around her throat, she panicked and wanted to pull away. But as soon as he tightened his grip on her and told her that he wanted to fuck her, a small part of her was ready to roll onto her back and let him take her anyway he wanted.

She wasn't a pushover. She wasn't one to let her bed partners treat her like crap, push her around, or anything else. With the exception of dealing with her mother, she normally had no issues

telling people exactly what she wanted from them, albeit with a softer edge than what Gael was currently using on her.

So what was it about giving up control to Gael that made her pussy wet and her heart race? Why would she do this for him, give him anything he asked for, knowing she couldn't stop him?

Except that she could.

The power of that tiny word, a single syllable, reassured her that only the things she wanted to happen would actually occur. There was always the chance that he wouldn't listen to her, that she'd say *red* and that wouldn't matter to him. Except she knew it would. Gael was many things, but a liar wasn't one of

them. If he said he'd stop, she had no doubt that he would.

Gael nipped at her earlobe, sending a sharp bite of pain through her. "I want you naked. I don't want to have even an inch of your skin hidden from me. I want to be able to stare at the body that you've been hiding beneath all that perfect clothing."

Holy shit. Could she do that? Get naked in a public place where anyone and everyone could see her? More important, was she ready to lay herself bare to him?

"Stand up."

Whatever hesitation she had evaporated as soon as he stepped away

from her. How was it possible to crave someone's touch so quickly? Her skin tingled where he'd held her breast and gripped her throat. She needed more from him, and there was only one way to get it.

It was her choice, her decision to take this next step. Strangely, it was easier than it should have been. All she had to do was follow his directions, do what he told her, when he told her to. As long as she didn't think too much about her actions, she'd be just fine.

Yup, no problems, just give up her control to a guy who'd already said he wasn't interested in a relationship with her. *No problem!*

Not certain if she was allowed to unclasp her hands or not, Alice fought against her own body to make her way up to her feet without releasing them. The material of her dress slipped lower as she moved, pooling around her hips and waist. There was no way to hide herself from his gaze, or from anyone who happened to walk past. Although she'd spent years on the runway, modeling dresses, bathing suits and anything else her mother happened to put her in, this was different.

Back then she was playing the part of child model. Now she was unable to be anyone other than herself.

Gael's gaze didn't leave her face,

even as she was now half-naked before him. She wasn't sure if he was being polite—doubtful—or if he was gauging her reaction to see if things were too much for her to handle. Maybe he'd had someone freak out on him in the past when she'd gotten to this stage?

He really didn't know her well if he thought this would be enough to make her want to stop.

With effort, she managed to get to her feet without releasing her hands. She couldn't help but step on the edge of the fabric, tugging it lower still. Alice wanted to speak, ask him what she should do next, if he was happy with her so far, but Gael wouldn't appreciate that.

She had to be quiet—which was harder than it should have been—and wait for him to tell her what to do next.

Instead, she waited while he came closer once more. “You’re too slow. Next time you’ll stand faster or else there’ll be a punishment.”

Shit. Though strange as it was, Alice didn’t seem to mind the idea of him doing something to *punish* her. “I’m sorry, Sir.”

“You have no idea what it means to be sorry, girl.”

Alice closed her eyes and fought against the mix of lust and fear that swirled inside. When she opened them once more, she saw that they’d gained a

bit of an audience. A group of three men stood in the entrance watching Gael. One of them had his pants pulled open and his cock out. He was staring at Alice's breasts as he stroked his cock.

Large hands on her shoulders spun her around so she was now facing the back of the small bay they were in. Gael stepped behind her, pressing her back fully to his front. "They're going to watch us. They're going to see you naked and everything that I do to you. There will be no hiding from them. I might even ask them to do something to you. It's up to me. Not you. This is my time to be in charge."

Oh God. She hadn't thought there was

a possibility that he'd hand her over to someone else.

“Red!” Alice spun around and pressed her face into the crook of his shoulder. “Please Gael, Sir. I don’t want them to touch me. I—I only want you. Just you. Please...”

As quickly as her fears erupted, the feeling of his arms wrapped around her were enough to calm them. “Shh, it’s fine. Now I know. You were such a good girl. You told me what you didn’t want. You knew to use your safeword when you thought things were too much.”

Gael slid his hand into her hair and gently pulled her head back. Alice was shocked to see that the hard expression

he'd originally worn was still there. He wasn't soft, and wouldn't change—he'd been honest when he'd told her that. Still, when he brought his mouth to hers, his lips close but still not touching, Alice forgot how to breathe.

“You need to understand something. In this world, the most important thing between a Dom and his sub is trust. I need to trust that you will tell me when things are too much for you. But you need to trust me that I won't do anything that you won't enjoy. This is only our first time together, so I know you don't trust me yet. But I'll make sure nothing bad happens to you.”

Gael brushed his mouth against her

lips. It wasn't a kiss as much as a meeting—skin on skin—of them. It was in that moment that Alice understood. She needed to *know*, to understand the type of man he was and the person she could become. He was trusting her with this part of his life, something so personal she couldn't imagine how people at the office would react if they found out. But more so, he was presenting her with an opportunity to learn about herself. Previously undiscovered, slightly terrifying things that she'd never thought herself capable of.

Alice tried to speak, but the words wouldn't come. She cleared her throat

and tried once more, knowing she only had one chance to get this right.

“Please, Sir. I think I’m starting to understand. I’d like to continue. I’d like to...learn from you. For tonight, just one night. I think you can give me what I need.” She wouldn’t fool herself into thinking it would be more than that between them. Hell, Alice wasn’t certain if this was something she’d want beyond tonight. But she owed it to herself to explore...whatever the hell this was turning out to be, before she gave up on things completely. If that meant giving up some of her control for him, then that’s what she’d do.

Alice had refused to put herself so

completely into another person's hands like this for a long time. It had taken ages to break out from under her mother's thumb, her needs and desires, Alice wouldn't survive emotionally if she found herself in that situation once more. So, what was it about Gael and his need to control this night that felt so right to her? Maybe she hadn't grown as much beyond her childhood self as she'd like to think.

She could tell he was second-guessing everything from the way he looked into her eyes. She'd already stopped things once when he simply suggested the idea of another person being involved with them. What would she do if he made her

do something she didn't want to? Alice didn't know herself, so she could only imagine what was going through his mind.

Gael was right in that she didn't trust him yet—not unwaveringly. How could she, given she'd only known him professionally for a few months? Sure, she had this oddly magnetic attraction to him on a level she couldn't rationally describe, and she'd watched him time and time again help his clients, but there was more about the man still concealed to her than exposed.

And yet...

If she wanted things to progress, she needed to prove to them both that she

was serious about this. It would take an act of courage to show him she was serious, one Alice wasn't certain she could pull off.

Stepping away from him, she took several deep, calming breaths. Gael didn't move, his gaze locked on her. She had no doubt he was cataloging her every twitch, trying to decipher what her next move would be. She didn't know what to do about this, so she fell back on the limited things she'd seen as she'd come into the club with Mistress Red.

Alice gathered the fabric still clinging to her waist, and tugged the material down. Now naked except for her lace panties, she picked up her dress, folded

it neatly and set it on the nearest chair. She wasn't sure she could take her panties off with the other men still watching, so she left them on and went down on her knees by his feet. If that wasn't a clear enough sign that she was ready to give this a try, then she didn't know what else would work.

Now all she had to do was to keep her brain from over-thinking this and everything would be fine.

And good luck with that!

With her gaze on the floor, she couldn't see Gael's reaction. Time ticked on in her head, the *click, click, click* of the imaginary second hand thudding in her brain loud enough she

swore Gael could hear. After several minutes of nothing, she felt the brush of his fingers in her hair. Not a possessive grab, like he'd had on her throat and neck, but rather a tentative caress. Maybe he was scared she'd fly into a panic again? Alice wasn't certain she wouldn't do exactly that if things got too heavy too quickly, but she had to try. She'd regret it for the rest of her life if she didn't.

Then again, she might regret it regardless.

“Boys, get out. Private time for my girl.”

The muscles in Alice's back and shoulders instantly relaxed. Sure, she'd

had fantasies about being with more than one man during a night of wild sex, but she wasn't ready for that tonight.

Thankfully, Gael must have understood where she was mentally. There were no protests from the men. Alice watched their feet turn and within moments, the men were gone.

“I'll keep you to myself for tonight. That will be my one concession to you. But understand this, if you use your safeword again, that ends the night. I'll pull you up, get you dressed and put you in a cab. It's your way out, so it's not to be used lightly. Think long and hard before you say it again.”

“But what if I just want to...slow

down?”

“Then you say *Yellow* and I’ll back down, give you a chance to catch your breath.”

That made sense. “Yes, Sir.”

Gael’s hand tightened in her hair and tugged her head backward, forcing her to look into his eyes once more. There were depths in those brown eyes that she’d never perceived before, something that had been hidden, now plain as day. This was a side of Gael she’d never seen in the office, that humming undercurrent she’d always felt in his presence.

The unconscious awareness of his dominant self.

He flexed his fingers in her hair.

“You’re mine tonight. I will do whatever I want for as long as I want. You can beg and plead, but I won’t care. I won’t be the man you see every day, but something else. Tonight isn’t about romance or love. This is about sex. Do you understand?”

Alice had to try twice to get the words to come out. “Yes, Sir.”

Gael released her hair, bent down and started to adjust her stance. “Whenever we are stopped, this is how I want you to be. Thighs apart, sitting on your feet. Put your hands behind your back. That’s it. You’re not to talk unless I ask you a question. You may watch what goes on

around us, but you are not to comment. You still have my permission to ask questions. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir." Shit, this wasn't what she'd been expecting. She'd figured they'd have a bit of kinky sex and then never talk about this again. It seemed the type of thing Gael would do. But this sounded like he was about to take her around the club.

She didn't know anything about BDSM beyond the normal preconceptions of what it entailed. In a way, this would be good. She'd be able to see things without feeling as if she had to participate. Maybe this was Gael's way of being kind to her. Of explaining

who he was without the embarrassment of trying to find the correct words. Not that he ever seemed to stumble or struggle. But it seemed he understood her well enough to know actions held more power over her than words. Though how he'd figured that out, she wasn't sure.

He was looking at her intently once more. She thought he was going to give her another lecture, more rules, anything except what he did. Instead, he reached down, grabbed the side of her panties and tore them. They came free with ease, exposing her. Alice couldn't stop her surprised gasp, nor could she tear her gaze away from the reddened skin where

the fabric had pulled against her.

The move was barbaric on his part and if someone had even suggested he might do that to her, Alice would have been angry. So why she was ready to come on the spot, she wasn't certain.

"Sir?" She hated that she sounded so desperate and confused all at once.

"I don't like my playthings to be hidden from me." He ripped the other side and pulled the destroyed fabric away. Rather than toss it aside, Gael tucked the lace into his pocket. "Come with me. Walk one pace behind me. Every time I stop you get into this position."

Alice scrambled to get to her feet and

follow when Gael marched from the room. Her body shook as she made her way through the crowd wearing only her shoes. It should have been awkward being naked in a group full of strangers. Might have been if she'd been the only one. Men and women alike were in various stages of undress. Some completely bare as she was. Others wearing only the flimsiest of clothing. She had no doubt they too would be naked as soon as it suited their Doms.

The normal rules of the outside world clearly didn't apply here. Alice had grown accustomed enough to garnering the attention and looks from others that being reduced to little more than a sex

toy was not only bizarre, but disconcerting. She was being totally ignored by most of the men and women she walked past. If people did look their way, their gaze went to Gael.

Understandable, given the air of authority he was projecting. Hell, it was nearly impossible for her to keep her eyes off him, too.

Gael had stopped to speak with a group, two women and a man. It took her a second to remember she needed to be on her knees beside him, and she carefully got to the floor. Only once she was down there did she see there was someone else on the same level as she. The man had nothing on except a leather

collar around his neck. The collar was connected by a lead and was held by the taller of the two women.

His gaze was lowered, but as Alice got into position, he looked up. There were several marks across his chest and neck, but he didn't seem to be in any great discomfort. If anything, he had a serene look that told Alice he was more than content with his lot in this situation.

Winking at Alice only confirmed matters.

Maybe being a sex toy had its advantages.

"I'm breaking a new one in." Gael's voice grew a bit louder, clearly for Alice's benefit. She swayed a bit closer

to his leg and focused her attention. “It’s been a while since I’ve done this. I haven’t decided how best to start.”

He hadn’t? Alice wasn’t sure what to make of that.

“God, I can’t believe you would even bother. It’s not like you stick around with anyone long enough for it to matter.” The woman holding the lead said and tugged it a bit tighter. “You’re a slut, Gael. And a bastard.”

He snorted. “I never claimed to be anything else.”

Memories of the muffin he’d brought her, the occasional coffee that would mysteriously appear on her desk, didn’t gel with the image he was projecting

with these people. Yes, she had seen his edges, but he wasn't as simple as he was making himself out to be.

"I say take her to the cross. It's the easiest way to see." The other woman said, before she reached down and lifted Alice's chin. "If you don't want to, I'd be more than happy to give her a go. I bet she'd be good at eating pussy."

Alice gasped. No, no, no, he wouldn't do that to her. Not after everything they'd said back in the room. Would he?

Maybe he'd get off on seeing her with another woman? She'd be able to put a stop to things with her safeword, and yet, she wasn't ready to end things. Not when she was starting to understand him

so much better. Was this a Yellow situation? Maybe. God, she felt as though she was a kid trying to hang out with a bunch of teenagers. She understood the words, but not the meaning behind it all.

“Cat, you’re entertaining, but no. My toy.” Gael grabbed Cat by the wrist and pulled her hand away from Alice.

“Don’t touch.”

“Fine. But I still think it would be good for her. You’ve always loved it when your subs went down on me in the past.”

“See. A bastard.” The other woman tugged hard on the leash. “Come on. All this talk of pussy eating has made me

horny. Time to whip your ass before you eat me out.”

The man with them hadn't said anything to this point. When the two women left he stepped closer. “May I?”

Gael tilted her head backward so she looked up at the two of them. The man built big enough to scare the shit out of anyone. He didn't touch her, but that didn't matter. His gaze pierced her, and she suddenly understood that a person could be naked with or without clothing when they were looked at that way.

“She's an interesting one for you.” The man smiled at her before standing back up and returning his attention to Gael. “The cross is certainly an idea.

The bench might be better though. Less in-your-face for a first time.”

“I was thinking the same thing. More control that way.”

“Exactly. Want me to see if Red has one free?”

“I’d appreciate it.” Gael shook the man’s hand. “Thanks.”

As quickly as the conversation finished, Gael was on the move once more. Alice was faster this time and didn’t fall behind as he walked through the crowd. Not knowing where they were going or what he had in mind meant she didn’t have time to panic. She was running on instinct and blind trust, something she hadn’t done in years.

The first thing she realized when Gael stopped once more was that she hadn't been registering the sounds of the club. She'd been so keyed up and tuned into him that her brain hadn't been able to process the confusion swirling around her. Now that they'd come to rest and she'd gotten into position once more, it felt as if a bubble popped inside her ears, opening her up to the noises around them.

The crack of a whip was the first thing that broke through. Alice snapped her head back so she was able to see where Gael had brought her. What he'd expected her to pay attention to.

Fingers once more in her hair,

directing her where to look—up at a giant cross.

“This is what they were suggesting I should do to you. Have me strap you to that so I can play with you. Your body at my mercy. I want you to stay here, watch. Learn what it really means to be submissive. I don’t want you to look away, no matter what you see. You are not to get up, to squirm, nothing. I will get you when I’m ready.”

He nipped the top of her ear and then was gone.

Leaving Alice alone and naked in a sex club.

Oh great. Thanks for that.

The man on the platform had in his

hands something Alice could only imagine was a type of whip. The handle was long and looked to be wrapped in some sort of leather. The tail was a single, thin piece, though it wasn't as long as some of the whips she'd seen in the movies over the years. No Indiana Jones punishments going on here. Though the man would totally rock the hat...

The woman was strapped to the cross, her front to the wood and her ass exposed for everyone to see. Long red marks crisscrossed across her back and over her ass and thighs. A sheen of sweat covered her, making her skin glow in the lights of the club. Clearly they'd

been at this for a while.

The man was still completely dressed—leather pants, a black T-shirt and boots—an oddly beautiful contrast to the woman's bareness. He was speaking, but low enough that Alice couldn't hear his words. Not that she should, as they were clearly meant for his woman alone.

Did he consider her a toy? Or was there something deeper between them?

The man stepped back and snapped the whip twice against her. The woman cried out, her legs beginning to tremble. Two more marks joined the others, making her skin more red than white. The man moved to her side and ran his hand down across the new additions.

Alice could almost feel the gentleness of his touch. It must be maddening to have such different sensations at odds with each other in the same spot. Unlike Gael, this man carefully moved the woman's blond hair to the side, exposing her neck. He rained kisses across it and down to her shoulders.

It was the most arousing thing Alice had seen in ages.

When he took the handle of his whip and pressed it to her pussy, Alice had to resist the urge to let her hands do the same thing to herself. Fuck, she hadn't been this turned on before in her life. It felt wrong to watch two people who were clearly about to have sex, and yet,

it was liberating. She'd been given permission to be bad, to look, see something normally private between two people who clearly had a deep connection. Maybe she was a closet voyeur.

The man was standing in profile, making it easy for Alice to see the mischievous expression on his face. The soft smile on his lips deepened as he pressed the handle into her pussy. His face lit up as he began to fuck her with the whip, and the look on his face could only be described as worship.

The woman somehow managed to bow her back and the tendrils of her hair fell across her skin to cover up the man's

handiwork. It gave Alice a peek at her face and the look of bliss that she wore. Alice's breathing became labored, and her skin tingled as the intensity of the scene before her increased. The woman was close to orgasm, she could tell. Alice wanted to come too, needed to relieve the pressure between her thighs so she could think straight once more.

Instead of giving in, Alice squeezed her fingers together even tighter. Gael wouldn't want her to get herself off. That was his job and only to be done on his time line. For now, she'd have to settle for watching this man and woman reach their bliss.

Which, thankfully, was coming to a

head.

The soft moans were now loud cries of pleasure as the man increased the pace of the thrusts into her pussy. He slipped his free hand between her body and the cross at her breast, and Alice had no doubt that he was now tormenting her nipple in the same unrelenting way he was fucking her. He leaned close to her once more and whispered something. The woman threw her head back and screamed.

God, she'd never seen anyone come that hard in her life.

Her orgasm seemed to last forever, before the woman finally slumped against the cross. The man tossed the

whip aside and went to work getting her down, taking time to rub each of her limbs as he freed it. He helped her get to her knees and for a moment Alice thought everything was finished.

Until he worked the front of his pants open and pulled out a rather impressive cock.

The woman's face was now clearly visible, and she appeared to be beyond active thought. The almost-stoned expression on her face would have been funny if she wasn't looking up at the man with complete adoration. The woman didn't move except to open her mouth and stick out her tongue as he began to stroke his cock. He grabbed her by the

hair and pulled her close as his hand flew across his shaft. It took no time for the first spurts of come to splash across her cheek, nose, across her lips and waiting tongue. Finally, they both were spent and the man pulled her to her feet. They stumbled away from the cross, leaving it available to someone else to use.

Wow.

Just...wow.

Alice's body was trembling. Could she do something like this? Let Gael tie her up in such a public location and whip her? Would she enjoy the pain before she got to the pleasure?

In a sense, the answers to any of those

questions didn't matter. She'd promised Gael that she'd trust him for one night. That she'd let him lead her down this strange path in a place she'd never imagined herself being in before. For once in her life, Alice was going to take the chance and act on her impulse. She was going to simply let go.

With her mind wandering, Alice hadn't realized that someone was now standing behind her. She'd too fascinated with the next couple who'd taken possession of the cross—two men—to be completely aware.

That was, until a hand found its way into her hair and tugged her head back.

The next stage of her trip to

Wonderland was about to take form.

Chapter Eight

“You better have been a good girl. I wouldn’t want to extend your punishment beyond what I need to do to teach you how to submit.”

The meaning of his words escaped Alice, as her mind was currently nothing more than a swirling mess of goo. Her body was a torrent of sensations—nipples aching, pussy soaked, back tingling—and the rest of her senses seemed to be overloaded. Still, when Gael ran his hand from her hair, down the side of her face to cup her cheek,

Alice could only think of one thing to say.

“Please.”

Because she was looking straight into his eyes, it was easy for her to see the shift in his demeanor. She'd been getting to know him for a few months now, and he prided himself on his professionalism. He didn't let his emotions rule his reason in any situation. That same level of control was in play now and probably the most important thing to him as a Dom.

The fleeting look on lust and desire flood his face betrayed he was as affected by what was going on as she was. Sure, he'd been vocal about not

wanting anything more than sex, but she got the impression Gael wasn't being entirely truthful with himself.

Alice took a chance and unlaced her fingers. She slowly reached up and covered his hand with hers, knowing it was going against every rule he'd set up for her.

"Please." She whispered, knowing he'd not only be able to hear her, but would understand exactly what she was looking for.

Gael's expression quickly went back to the blank look she'd grown accustomed to seeing tonight, and his grip tightened on her.

"Get up and follow me."

There was no thought process involved as Alice scrambled to her feet and tried to do what he told her. When she stumbled and swayed as the blood rushed from her head and her legs were assaulted by pins and needles, Gael reached out and caught her. Heat from his body enveloped her and she couldn't pull herself away from him. This was the closest she'd ever been with him. They didn't fit perfectly, but given enough time she'd be able to work her way into place.

Gael's grip tightened around her, holding her still. "Slowly. This isn't a race, and I don't want you getting hurt unnecessarily."

She wasn't sure, but he'd spoken the words so close to her cheek his lips brushed the skin in what could have been a kiss. But kissing and affection weren't what this was supposed to be about. He'd been more than clear on what his expectations were.

No love.

No romance.

Only sex and just for one night.

Alice took a deep breath and slowly moved herself away from the one place she wanted to be. "Yes, Sir."

Gael held her gaze for several heartbeats before he took her by the wrist, turned, and led her through the club over to a bench. At least Alice

thought it was a bench.

“Now that you’ve seen what can happen, it’s time for you to experience things. This isn’t a game, though I do enjoying playing.” Gael moved to the side of the bench and patted the flat part. “Lay down. Legs here, arms here, face over this edge.”

Not wanting a repeat performance of her stumble, or taking the chance of landing on her face, Alice was sure to move carefully while she got into position. The leather on the bench was cold against her naked body, sending shivers through her as she arranged her limbs. It wasn’t as intimidating as what she’d seen with the cross. There was no

stage here, and with her face pointing down she didn't have to worry about coming eye to eye with anyone. She wouldn't be able to see Gael either, but that probably was for the best, as well. By now she had no doubt her face was flushed and her short-lived bravery had quickly morphed into embarrassment. Why the hell would he want to look at her ass?

Okay, dumb question.

Finally in place, Alice tried to relax.
Yeah, not happening.

“Sir?” She probably shouldn't talk, but come on, she had been pretty good up to this point. And he had told her she could ask questions when she wanted.

“What will you be doing to me?”

Gael said nothing. She tried to stay still and wait as he moved around her, not giving her any indication of what was happening. It was the hardest thing she'd done in years. Somehow she managed not to jump when he took her ankle and began to wrap something around it. Metal clinked softly. He was putting some sort of restraint on her. When he moved on to her other ankle, Alice tried to move the first one. No give to it at all.

Okay...this was heavy.

Safeword. All she had to say was *Red* and she was out of here. Out of the restraints. Out of the club.

Out of Gael's personal life.

But was being in his life worth doing something like this if it really wasn't what she wanted? He'd been clear with her from the start that this was a part of who he was. It explained why he'd tried to scare her off back in the elevator as well. She had to do this for the right reasons—for herself and not just for him—if she was going to appreciate what he was trying to teach her. This was an opportunity for her to go down a different path, to be the master of her own fate, even if it meant putting herself into his hands.

Alice groaned, squeezed her eyes shut and mentally counted backward from ten

in a vain attempt to relax.

He moved to the front of the bench and repeated his earlier actions, this time to her wrists. Alice looked up at him, trying to read something into the look of concentration she saw there. For his part, Gael seemed to ignore her movements. Until she was completely secured to the bench and no longer able to move.

Alice wanted to close her eyes and simply let the sensations wash over her, but every time she tried, some noise or feeling would have them fly open once more. God, she hadn't been this jumpy since the first time she'd gone on stage for her first preteen pageant. She'd been

self-conscious about her weight, her acne, the growing swell of her breasts. Her mom had pushed her to do it, claiming the experience was exactly what she needed to come to terms with the changes in her body.

Too bad that particular outcome hadn't gone the way they'd both hoped.

“You find it hard to sit still and simply be. I suspect your mind is moving a thousand miles a minute too. Calculating, planning, and organizing people and things into a list that you can tackle.” It wasn't a question. Gael ran his finger down her spine from her neck to her ass. “Even when you're at work sitting at your desk, you're always in motion.

Tapping your foot or playing with a pen. Do you know how many times I wanted to tie you down?”

Alice jerked against the restraints, but it was no use. He'd secured her so tightly there was no way she'd be able to get off this bench without his help.

Gael repeated the path of his finger, this time using his whole hand to caress her spine. “I knew your body would be perfect. Your skin flawless.” He cupped her ass with both hands, squeezing hard. “I watch your ass every time you walk away from me.”

Alice groaned, turning her face down. Her face was hot as her embarrassment ramped up. She'd no idea he'd been

paying that much attention to her. Almost as much as she had to him.

“You want to know what it’s like to be a sub? To be *my* sub and live with me in this world?” He squeezed her ass again.

“Answer me.”

“Yes, Sir. I want to know.” It was hard to breathe, and she could feel the blood rushing to her face. “I need—”

The slap to her ass came as a complete surprise. Alice cried out and tried to move her hands to cover herself against further attack. The restraints held fast, tightening against the pull of her muscles. “Ouch!”

“Quiet!” Another slap, but this time it wasn’t so hard. “You wanted to know.

Now you'll learn."

She was shivering from the two spans. What the hell had she gotten herself into? That had hurt! And yet, the initial sting was already melting away, leaving in its wake an odd sensation that made her aware of the air that touched her skin. She could feel the blood rising to the surface of her ass, and could only imagine the shade of pink her skin would be turning.

"Pain and pleasure are two sides of the same coin. Your body reacts to both in similar ways. Pleasure can get to a point where it can grow uncomfortable. Likewise, pain can make your body sing with delight. The pain needs to be given

to you in the right manner.”

Instead of a spank, Gael pinched the skin of her ass. It didn't hurt the same way the spank did. If anything, the sensations weren't strong enough to cause her to stir at all.

“You wanted to learn. I'm here to show you, teach your body how to enjoy the pain and how to turn it into pleasure. By the time I'm done with you, you won't want to go back to vanilla.”

Oh. Shit. “But...you said...”

He squeezed her hip. “Speak.”

“You said this was just for tonight. Sir. Just sex.”

His fingers dug a bit tighter, as though he suddenly didn't want to let go.

Clearing his throat, he continued.

“BDSM isn’t simply about sex. It’s a way of thinking and feeling. You’ll see.”

Gael continued to touch her, lightly slapping, pinching and caressing her skin as he went. At no point did he ever break contact, even when he did something she didn’t expect. Unlike the first two spanks, Gael had let up on the intensity of the pain he inflicted upon her. Whenever he brought his hand down, the spank didn’t seem to bite as keenly as it had. Alice stopped tensing each time she anticipated the slap. It was odd, but it was as if her body had managed to adjust to the pain, accepting it for what it was.

“Good girl.” He squeezed her ass cheek again, this time a slight sting sunk into the flesh from the previous abuse.

“You’ve been sitting still for me. I didn’t think that was possible.”

Alice’s face flushed once more.

“Thank you, Sir.”

In truth, the experience hadn’t been as bad as she’d originally thought.

“Now that I’ve warmed you up, we can begin having some fun.”

She turned her face, trying to find Gael. “Sir? That was a warm-up?”

“You didn’t honestly think things would be that easy, did you? You watched the woman on the cross. You saw how far her Dom had pushed her,

how beautifully red her skin had grown.”

He moved around to the front of the bench, giving her a glimpse of what he had in store for her next. “This is a flogger. And it’s going to leave the most beautiful marks on your body.”

Unlike the single whiptail the man had used on his sub, the flogger had a dozen or more thick leather strands connected to a single long handle. Gael draped the leather across her cheek, tickling the skin with their soft tips.

“This will be different from the spanking. I’ll have more control over where and how hard I can hit you. It won’t just be your ass that feels this.”

One of the leather strands got stuck on

her moist bottom lip, and tugged slightly against it before Gael pulled it free.

“This is my personal toy. I keep it here for those occasions when I have someone special I want to play with.”

Someone special? He thought she was someone special?

“Relax. Focus on the sensations of the flogger against your skin. Feel how different it is from what my hand did to you. Notice how your body reacts to those differences.”

Alice didn't completely notice that he'd moved away from her head and now stood behind her. Her mind was still turning his directions over and over, trying to understand what he meant. It

was as if her ability to reason things through was slowly slipping away from her the longer she was tied down.

Maybe this place was magical and she was falling under some sort of spell.

Or she'd finally accepted this descent into madness.

The first blow of the flogger against her skin wasn't painful. Gael rained the ends across first one, then the second shoulder blade. He started up a pattern diagonally across her body shoulder to hip—right to left, left to right—until the rhythm began to relax her. There was no pain, no discomfort. It was as if she had signed up for an unusual sort of massage and she was now able to reap the

benefits.

The ends of the flogger moved lower, this time tracing a pattern down her ass cheeks and thighs, side to side once more. As Gael continued to work her over with the flogger, the contact was increasing in pressure. The pain didn't come all at once, overwhelming her the way the spankings did. This time her body had time to adjust to things, absorb the stinging into her muscles and let it warm her core.

Even more surprising was the fact she was getting turned on. It shouldn't happen and yet her pussy was as wet as before, her clit hard and desperate to be touched. It would take little to push her

over the edge.

Gael groaned and increased the intensity of the hits once again. All the resistance in her muscles bled away, giving her no choice but to let the sensations bowl her over. The pain was there, but would disappear into a haze after each strike as her skin was left vibrating. Alice was moaning uncontrollably now, her mouth seemingly unable to close as the sounds left her.

She became vaguely aware that Gael had dropped the flogger and was now standing by her head. On some level she registered that he was opening up his pants and taking his cock out. But when he pressed the tip against her tongue, she

didn't move.

“Swallow me. That's it. Be a good girl.”

Her lips closed around him, but there was little chance she'd be able to give him much in the way of suction. If he cared, Gael gave no indication. He began to thrust into her mouth, pushing so far back Alice wasn't sure if she'd be able to still breathe. His hands found her face and held her in place. His thumbs caressed her cheeks as he fucked her.

“God, so beautiful like this.” He groaned and closed his eyes. “I'm going to come.”

Instead of filling her mouth the way Alice figured he would, Gael pulled out

and stroked his cock until he came across her shoulder. She couldn't figure out why he wouldn't do that to her, when there was no way she'd have been able to stop him. A splash of his essence had found its way close enough that Alice was able to stick her tongue out and steal a taste. She'd never liked the flavor of come before, but now it was as if she were experiencing it for the first time. The bitter tang filled her mouth, making it water, wanting to lap up more.

Gael cupped her face in his hands once more. Alice managed to look him in the eye, still feeling stunned by the pace of events. For his part, Gael looked nearly as confused as Alice felt. For a

moment she thought he might actually lean in and kiss her. Instead he ran his thumb across her cheek, rubbing the come into her skin.

“You’re been so good. Not many women I know would be able to handle that level of intensity.”

“Sir?” Her mouth was dry and the word threatened to get stuck.

“At the end I wasn’t holding back. I was—” He closed his eyes and groaned. “You deserve a treat, Alice.”

He set about freeing her wrists and ankles from the bench, taking time to massage the muscles in her arms and legs as he went. It was amazing how stiff she’d gotten, even being in such a

comfortable position. Instead of taking her from the bench completely, Gael helped her roll over so her back pressed against the now warm leather.

“Gael?”

“Fuck, I can’t stop myself. Putting everything at risk.” Shoving her legs wide, he dropped to his knees in front of her. “Doesn’t matter. I can smell how turned on you are. You want this.”

Alice tried to lower her hands and cover her pussy, suddenly embarrassed. He’d seen her naked all night. Hell, the whole club had seen her walking around. Why she should feel embarrassed about him seeing how wet he’d made her was weird.

As soon as she tried to move, he slapped her hands away, followed by a spank to the side of her thigh. “Never hide yourself. You’re far too beautiful for that.”

Gael reached up and ran his thumb through her pubic hair. He rubbed the wetness into the coarse strands, pushed them to the side and exposing her clit. His thumb breached her body, scraping against the top of her pussy for a moment before going back to circle around her clit.

“I know you’re close. I can see how big and swollen you are. I want you to try and hold back. I don’t want you to come until I tell you. Understand?”

Alice managed to force herself to nod a moment before he pressed the pad of his thumb to the hood of her clit. The nearly blinding pleasure had her squeezing her eyes shut and clenching her teeth together. God, she wasn't going to be able to do this. How the hell could he expect her to hold back after everything he'd put her body through?

Having to prevent her orgasm was almost painful. She wanted the release, needed to let things go before she couldn't stand it any longer.

She'd grown so tense that she didn't notice Gael had shifted until the hot wash of his breath rolled across her pussy. That was the only warning she got

before his tongue licked a path across her mound. The soft, wet heat had her crying out and tightening her hold on the bench. Her legs shook from the strain of holding still; her heart raced as every cell in her body seemed to itch.

“Relax.” He mouthed the words against her clit before sucking on it gently. “Relax into the feelings.”

Her breath was coming now in huge gasps, timed nearly perfectly with the lapping pace of his tongue. Her hips began to buck to the rhythm, driving her closer to her orgasm, even as she tried to hold herself back.

“I...can’t.” She groaned, turning her face to the side. “Can’t. No, no, no.”

Gael chuckled. "Yes, you can."

He thrust two fingers hard into her pussy, pushing against the top of her vagina as he fucked her with them. His tongue, once teasing with its caress, now flicked hard and steady against her clit. There was no chance for her to retreat from the sensations, or escape the pleasure. When she thought there was no place for her to go, her body tensed and the first tingle of her approaching orgasm warmed her core.

"God, oh God. I'm...please. Close."

"Come for me."

Gael sucked hard at the same time he pressed his fingers in, and that was all Alice could handle. Her body bowed off

the bench and she shoved her pussy hard against his face. Pleasure erupted through her, blinding her sight and turning her deaf. Waves of pleasure mixed with the pain from her sensitized skin of her back and ass, until she couldn't tell the two apart.

She'd lost track of how long her orgasm lasted, her body far beyond her control and her mind unable to keep up. Eventually the pulses slowed until there was only the occasional burst that caught her by surprise.

Gael at some point had gotten to his feet and now stood a short distance away from her. It would have been nice to have him take her in his arms much the

same way that the Dom by the cross had looked after his sub. Alice wasn't even sure he was aware of her, standing as he was, surveying the club.

Maybe he was looking for another playmate already.

Was that how things went here? Use a woman for his needs and then toss her aside?

Her gaze locked onto his back, mesmerized by the up-down motion of his steady breathing. She'd seen him like this once before in the office, after a particularly nasty conference with one of the partners. Back then she'd admired his ability to rein in his emotions, to keep himself so detached from what

must have been a frustrating situation.
Now though...not so much.

He tried to warn you.

Alice shakily pushed herself up so she was able to perch herself on the side of the bench. Now that she was coming down from her high, the tenderness of her ass and back was starting to register. She didn't want to know exactly how red everything was back there.

Gael crossed his arms. "We need to get your dress."

Although she wasn't expecting roses and poems, having him at least pretend to give a shit about what they'd done together would have been nice.

Ignoring the churning of her stomach,

she got to her feet and tried not to wobble too much as she walked. “I’ll get it.”

“I will take you.”

“But—”

“It’s not up for discussion. I’m not leaving you alone in this place.”

Alice wasn’t sure if they were still being Dom and sub at this point, or had switched to Gael and Alice, but either way she could tell he wasn’t going to take no for an answer. “Fine.” She got into position just behind him, ignoring his hand when he eventually offered it.

“You’re the most stubborn...” He pinched the bridge of his nose before turning sharply and marching toward the

small bay where they'd started their evening.

Alice once more found herself trailing after Gael, now with a deeper understanding of who he was as a man, but seemingly more confused about where things now lay between them. She'd learned something about herself, but didn't have a clue if this was nothing more than a one-time appeal given the weirdness of the events, or if she'd now never be able to have sex any other way.

Was BDSM programmed into her now? Did that even make sense?

Laughter and moaning reached her before she stepped up behind where Gael had stopped. Alice gasped when

her gaze landed on the two people in the room. Mistress Red was sitting in the chair, her dress pulled up high and her legs wide. The man who'd run into her out on the street, who she'd followed into the club, was on his knees between Mistress Red's thighs.

Except he wasn't eating her pussy, but rather sucking her cock.

Alice's head began to spin.

"Christ," Gael muttered before venturing into the room and picking Alice's dress off the floor where it had been thrown.

"Umm baby." Mistress Red pulled the man's head from her cock. "Jealous, Gael? I'd be more than happy to let you

have some.” She bucked her hips into the air.

“You’re a man.” Alice couldn’t believe it. The way she was dressed, the lilt of her voice. “But I thought…”

“You’ve never seen a tranny before?” Mistress Red giggled. “Oh she’s precious. You’re too much of a bastard for her, Gael.”

“Fuck off, Red.” He tossed the dress at Alice. “Get dressed.”

“Oooh, someone’s got a bee up their ass.” She pushed the man’s head back to her cock, where he immediately began to suck on it. “I take it you didn’t have fun. Poor boy. I guess she wasn’t a good enough lay for you.”

“You know nothing about it.” Picking up Alice’s purse, Gael turned back to face her. “You need to leave.”

Alice pulled her sundress on, feeling odd about not having any panties beneath it. The soft cotton teased the sensitive skin of her back and ass. “I did everything you asked.”

Shit, she sounded like a pouty five-year-old.

Gael must have thought the same. “Don’t start.”

“I’m not starting anything.” Alice stepped back, no longer able to look at him. “Don’t worry—I’m leaving.”

There was no apology from him, no softness to cut the hard edge. Alice was

in a strange place with a man who didn't want her here. No matter how good the sex was, she wasn't the type of woman to throw herself into a situation where she wasn't wanted. She had too much self-respect for that.

Ignoring the giggles from Mistress Red, Alice turned her back on Gael and walked as fast as she could from Wonderland.

Chapter Nine

“Oh my, God. I can’t believe this is happening to me.”

Alice sat on Petra’s couch, a box of unopened dildos beside her, and watched her friend pace. In their phone conversation, Alice had heard only that Petra’s one-night stand was in fact her online nemesis D. Williams of the *Mantastic* advice blog. Needing the distraction that her friend’s crisis would provide, Alice skipped her Sunday morning coffee ritual and headed straight over.

“Pet, you’re going to wear a hole in the floor if you don’t sit down.”

“How the hell do you expect me to sit?” Petra’s untamed curls were a frizzy mess around her head, bouncing this way and that as she ran her hands through them. “He must have known it was me all along. That explains why he spoke to us at the coffee shop.”

Alice had been fascinated by the way Darcy had always followed Petra’s every move whenever they were in the same room. Sure Petra didn’t believe her own sex appeal, but Alice believed without reasonable doubt that Darcy was totally taken by her friend. It would only be a matter of time and circumstances

before they would be together in some fashion.

You deserve a treat, Alice.

Shifting on the couch, she thumbed the unopened box of dildos. “Hon, I don’t think he knew who you were. The way you two go at each other online, I have no doubt he’d be the first to tease you in person.”

“But he must have!” Petra growled before marching toward the kitchen. “I need wine.”

“It’s ten in the morning.”

“I’ll pretend to be Catholic.”

“God will smite you for that.”

Petra’s snort echoed across to Alice. “He has better reasons than that for

wanting to smite me.”

The spray of water and the whirl of the coffee grinder told Alice that her friend had opted for a less blasphemous option. Not that Alice would have said no to a healthy dose of alcohol, even if it was early. Sleep had completely eluded her once she'd gotten home from Wonderland. Her hour-long shower couldn't chase away the feel and smell of Gael from her skin. And the moment she'd climbed into bed, she felt every inch of the marks that she was certain covered her ass and back.

Her mind hadn't stopped racing from the second she'd walked out of the club. Memories of the trip home were blank,

instead filled with the perfect recollection of every second she'd spent with Gael.

Gael the sexual dominant.

The man she'd have to come face to face with tomorrow morning.

"Alice?"

With a slight jump, Alice looked up into Petra's concerned gaze. Taking the offered coffee, all she could do was smile. "Thanks."

"Hon, what's wrong?"

"Nothing." The only person more defensive about her than her mother was Petra. The last thing she needed was to transfer her ire from Darcy to Gael. Especially when there was nothing she

could do to fix matters. “Sorry, I had a shitty night’s sleep.”

“Are you sure? You were totally zoned out there.”

“One hundred percent.” Taking a too-large sip of the hot coffee, she made room for Petra beside her. “Now, tell me what you plan to do about Mr. Williams.”

Alice did her very best to listen to her best friend rant and rave about the man she was clearly more than a little in love with. The problem was, every time Petra would say something, all Alice could think of was Gael, Wonderland and the life-altering sex she’d had.

“I mean, yes Darcy was hot and knew

exactly what I wanted in bed.”

Gael pushing the straps of her dress down.

“And I’m too embarrassed to tell you some of the things I actually said to him in bed.”

Please, Sir.

“But there’s no way he didn’t know I was PC.”

This isn’t about romance. This is fucking.

“I need to confront him. He thinks I’m some sort of pushover because we’ve had mind-blowing sex. Well, he’s going to get a shock. I’m going to let him know that I know who he is now and that there’s no way we’re ever going to get

together. This is one bridge he won't be crossing ever again."

Swallow me. That's it. Be a good girl.

"Alice?" Petra pressed her hand to Alice's forehead. "Are you feeling okay? You're all flushed."

"Yeah." She needed to gain some distance between them. Walking over to the air-conditioning vent, Alice tried once more to refocus on the matter at hand. "Like I said, I'm more than a little tired."

"I'm the shittiest friend in the world."

"No you're not."

Petra cut her off with the wave of a hand. "I totally am. I'm here bitching about a guy who means less to me than

free dildos and you're sitting here exhausted listening to me. I'm sorry."

"It's good, hon." It was Alice being the selfish one. Petra would kick her ass if she had any idea what was going on with her. They normally told each other everything, and yet this was the sort of thing Petra wouldn't quite get.

Although her friend ran a sex advice column, Petra's experience in the world of BDSM was as absent as her own. With Petra focused on Darcy, there was little reason for Alice to bring things up.

She'd muddle through on her own.

Pressing her back to the wall, Alice gave Petra a good once-over. "You know, I think you're right."

“About what?”

“Confronting him. When do all of the nominees get together again?”

That brief suggestion was all Petra needed. The spark that normally flared whenever she was posting on the *Mantastic* blog instantly appeared.

“Tonight at the media event for our category. We’re supposed to give a brief description of our site after they’ve plied us with wine.”

“There you go. You can take him aside and ask him if he knew who you were before your fling. I’m sure you’ll catch him off guard, and you might even get the truth out of him.”

Petra laughed, ran over, and gave

Alice a hug. “That’s perfect. I’ll know exactly where he is so he won’t be able to get away from me. You’re brilliant.”

Alice watched as Petra flew around her condo, getting ready for the event and strategizing about what she’d say and how she’d respond to him. It was hard to keep up with the ever-changing emotional tides. Despite Petra’s plans, Alice couldn’t break away from the thought of her own upcoming confrontation. Tomorrow morning she’d have to get dressed and go to work. She’d walk down the hall, smile and wave at her coworkers as she passed by, and take her spot outside of Gael’s office.

How was she supposed to act?

She had no doubt he'd be as cool and reserved as normal. Having kinky sex with someone in the office might not be a normal occurrence for him, but he was an expert at keeping his poker face in place. Which meant if there was any hope of them discussing what had transpired between them, it would come down to her.

Did she really want to go there?

Could she afford not to?

Petra came out from her bedroom wearing a far more sexy skirt and top than Alice would have assumed she'd put on without a fair amount of prodding. "How does this look?"

“It’s perfect. You look like PC, while still having a good amount of Petra showing.”

Her friend beamed. “D. Williams isn’t going to know what hit him.”

At least one of them was brave enough to confront her demons. “Go get him, girl.”

* * *

Alice spent the rest of her day walking around in a fog. Everywhere she turned she saw things that reminded her of her time with Gael and Wonderland. The grocery store had nearly killed her with its sale on wooden spoons, Twizzlers and hot cross buns. A trip to the

bookstore wasn't any better, with their huge displays for the latest big book in erotic romance.

Finally she gave up trying, got a bottle of wine from the liquor store and holed up at her house. Maybe this was for the best. She could stay hidden in her house for days before anyone would bother coming to look for her. Petra was distracted with Darcy, her mother wouldn't get suspicious if she didn't call her for a week, and work...

Well, that's what sick days were for.

The heat in her house was still too much for her poor air conditioner to handle, leaving a humid stickiness behind. Channeling her inner Petra,

Alice stripped out of her skirt and blouse, and put on a camisole and shorts. The moment the clothing slipped from her body, Alice could feel the phantom sensation of fingers sliding across her skin, covering her throat, and cupping her shoulders.

To make matters worse, she caught a glimpse of herself in her full-length mirror as she started to leave her bedroom. Faint marks still adorned her bare shoulders, disappearing beneath the thin fabric. She shouldn't look, but the compulsion was too much. A step closer allowed her to see the marks better. Lifting the hem of her camisole revealed nothing else on her skin. Not that she

needed to see the physical proof to know that the marks existed.

Gael had put them there.

She'd never considered before then the appeal of being branded by another person. How it was possible to bear the mark of a man beneath her skin, past the muscles and into the very core of her person. Somehow without realizing what he was doing, Gael had laid claim to a dormant part of her personality, awakened an animal within her she didn't even know was there.

And the bastard didn't want her.

Letting the fabric fall back into place, Alice turned her back on the mirror and marched into the living room. She

snatched the portable phone as she passed it and hit the speed dial button for her boss.

“Hi, Carmela—it’s Alice. I wanted to let you know that I probably won’t be at work tomorrow. I woke up this morning with a headache, and I don’t think it’s going away anytime soon.” For once in her life, she didn’t feel bad about taking the mental health day. “Yeah, damn summer flu. I’ll let you know how I’m feeling tomorrow. Thanks.”

After pressing the End button and tossing the phone to the couch, Alice grabbed the wine and a large glass before quickly eyeing the time.

“Four o’clock. Bottoms up.”

Sure, drinking was never the answer to any problem, but there were certain occasions when a glass was the prescription required to fix the symptoms, if not the ailment. A confused and battered heart certainly qualified. Tomorrow she'd stay in bed, watch TV, and get her shit together. Tuesday she'd face Gael. And if Tuesday turned into Wednesday...well, that wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

Chapter Ten

Gael sat at his desk, case file open on his computer, completely ignoring it. Instead he'd spent the better part of the past fifteen minutes staring at the empty desk where one Alice White should have been sitting. He'd expected her to call in sick on Monday. After the way she'd left the club Saturday night, he had no doubt she was hurting and confused. It hadn't been the first time he'd seen that look on a new sub's face, though he'd never been the one to put it there before. So he was willing to give her Monday to steel her

nerves before she had to face him.

But today was Tuesday and Alice still wasn't here.

He'd been furious after she'd left the club. Red had laughed her fool ass off at him, teasing him about his inability to get and keep a sub, even one who was clearly taken with him. Not that she understood the predicament he was in. Alice was an employee at the firm where he worked. If Uncle Stephen even suspected there might be something going on between them, Gael was screwed. Not that Gael regretted a single second of his time with Alice. If he was going to fail, at least he had the pleasure of feeling his hands against her naked

breasts, to see the look of understanding cross her face.

Uncle Stephen would lose his mind if he caught wind of what Gael had done with Alice. It wouldn't matter that Alice had followed him into the club and had all but begged him to tie her up and fuck her senseless.

Not that there'd been any actual fucking. Even if that's what he'd wanted more than anything.

“Mr. Hernandez?” Gael looked up to see Carmela standing in his doorway. “Sorry to bug you, but I wanted to let you know that Alice won't be in again today.”

That little coward.

“She sounded pretty terrible on the phone.” Carmela frowned as she leaned against the doorjamb. “I might stop by after work to check and see how she’s doing. I hate the idea of her being all alone when she’s sick.”

Dammit, he should have known things were going to go this way. Alice wasn’t into the scene, and he shouldn’t have expected her to handle alone the emotional weight of her experience at the club. He’d failed her by letting her run away without taking the opportunity to talk to her, ensure she was going to be able to handle things. Clearly, he was as selfish as his uncle accused him of being.

“Did she say what was wrong?” Gael pressed his palms flat against his desk. It was the only thing that kept him from balling them into fists. “Maybe she needs to see a doctor.”

“I suggested that, but she said it was mostly a migraine. She’s had them in the past.”

It was possible she truly had a headache. Alice could be locked away in her bedroom, the blinds drawn and a cool cloth across her eyes. Gael hated that he immediately thought the worst of her, assumed she was faking simply to avoid talking with him.

Shoving himself away from his desk, Gael locked his computer and grabbed

his keys. "I have a few errands to do. I can stop by her house and check on her."

"Oh really?" Carmela straightened, smiling brightly. "That would be awfully sweet of you. It would be easier than me trying to get over that way."

Gael made sure to glare at her as he passed. "She's one of the best assistants we have here. I want to make sure she's okay."

"Of course." He ignored the smirk she gave him. "Let me write her address down for you. Unless you already have it?"

"The address, please."

The drive through Toronto traffic only served to piss Gael off even more than

he was already. The Gardner Expressway was backed up, which meant he was forced to take the longest route through the city. Hitting every single red light along the way ratcheted his frustration up. By the time he turned the corner onto the street that the GPS announced as Alice's, Gael was ready to hit something.

“Your destination is in five hundred meters.”

He didn't need the monotone proclamation telling him of his arrival. There, walking down the street, was Alice. She was headed toward her home, a coffee cup in her hand. So it wasn't a migraine.

Alice White was a coward.

Gael pulled his Lexus up alongside her and rolled the passenger window down. Alice flicked her gaze over her shoulder at his car without slowing her pace. Either she didn't see him, or she was too keyed up by having a stranger in a vehicle following her to get too close.

A coward, but at least smart.

Gael leaned on his horn, which had her jump and turn her attention to him. The second she realized it was him everything in her demeanor changed. One moment she was poised ready to bolt for her home. The next she stumbled over a crack in the sidewalk, her gaze never once leaving his through the entire

process.

The look of panic and the way she held her coffee cup in what appeared to be a death grip, told Gael everything he needed to know about her absence from the office—she was avoiding him.

“Coward.”

Alice straightened. “What are you doing here?”

Unwilling to have this conversation in the car, he pulled up and into her driveway. When he got out, Alice was still standing in the middle of the sidewalk several houses away. He leaned against the side of his car, resting his forearms against the hot metal and continued to stare at her. The day was

growing unbearably hot, and it was only a matter of time before she'd be forced to make a choice—go back the way she'd come, or come home and face him.

For the first time in months, he couldn't tell which option she'd choose.

Alice turned and looked behind her before squaring her shoulders and continuing her walk home. There was far less bounce to her steps than when he'd first spotted her. Her shoulders were now slumped forward, giving her the look of a child who was about to get grounded. She must have found some of her nerve when she reached the bottom of her driveway, because in the next moment she'd straightened up, and the

look in her eyes was anything but warm and fuzzy.

“I said, what are you doing here? How do you even know where I lived?”

“Carmela gave me your address. Your friends are worried about you. Needlessly.”

Alice had the grace to look ashamed. “I was planning on coming back tomorrow.”

A dog barked somewhere in the background, chased by the sound of traffic and car horns. This wasn't the place for the conversation they needed to have. “Let's take this inside.”

“No.” Alice crossed her arms and stuck out her chin. “I would appreciate

you leaving.”

“Not happening.” Did she actually think he was going to do what she wanted after her little hiding act?

“You’ve been avoiding me. It needs to stop.”

“Of course it does. It’s not like I’m looking for another job.” But she couldn’t quite hold his gaze as she spoke.

“Inside. Not up for discussion.”

He had no right to be pushing her around like this. She wasn’t his direct subordinate, nor were they engaged in any type of relationship that would give him the privilege of access to her home.

“But—”

Stepping into her personal space, Gael lifted her chin with his thumb and forefinger. There was a flash of longing in her gaze, one that went straight to his cock. She'd been nothing but straightforward with him this entire time. Alice White, although clearly okay with the idea of kinky sex, was also looking for something more. Something he didn't have time to provide her.

"I'm not going to be the cause of our firm losing one of its best assistants because I didn't listen to my own good advice and stay as far away from you as I could. Now, we are going to go into your home and discuss this like rational adults. If at the end of that discussion

you decide you are no longer able to work with me, then I'll be the one who will transfer to a different office. Not you."

Alice's mouth had fallen open into a soft *O* during the course of his speech. Her lush lips were damp, making them glow in the sunlight. Her large hazel eyes were just as wide, making her look far too innocent for Gael to resist for long. Sliding his arm around her waist, he tugged her another inch closer to him. With his shirtsleeves rolled up, he could feel the softness of her apparently well-loved T-shirt against his skin. The flex of her back against him as she tried to keep herself away only served to encourage

him.

Gael shifted so his mouth was only an inch from her ear. “I’m not used to being told no, Alice. I’ll even be nice about it. Please let me into your home so we can discuss things.”

Alice stepped out of his grasp and slipped the key into its lock.

The air in the small house was a pleasant contrast to the rising outdoor heat. Gael came in only as far as the opening to the living room, knowing Alice would need a few minutes to get her bearings before he began the second part of his push.

“I had to get out for a walk. I went down to my favorite coffee shop for an

iced cappuccino.” The drink she’d abandoned on the closest flat surface to the door. “Being cooped up makes me to a bit crazy.”

“Then you shouldn’t have faked illness.”

Alice threw a glare at him over her shoulder before sitting down on her couch. “It was a mental health day.”

“Days.”

She rolled her eyes. “Days. I needed some time to myself.”

The T-shirt she had on was light grey and had several small holes on the shoulder along the seam. Her normally perfect hair was lying too flat against her head, as if she hadn’t washed it in a

while. No makeup either. It was the scruffiest he'd ever seen her, and the most beautiful.

Gael walked over and sat down on the coffee table, forcing Alice to face him. "Did you figure it out?"

She frowned and gave her head a small shake. "Figure what out?"

"If you hate me or not."

"I don't hate you." The response was knee-jerk, too fast to be honest. Alice sighed as she leaned back against her seat. "I'm just trying to figure out if I'm broken."

He understood the power of silence, knowing the pressure it could bring when someone didn't want to feel its

oppression. Instead of speaking, he held his gaze on her and waited. Alice's eyes flicked frantically beneath her closed lids, looking for answers she wouldn't be able to find on her own.

“When did you first...” She opened her eyes once more. “How did you figure out you liked sex that way?”

The memories were as clear now as that first time he'd come face to face with the reality. “In university, before law school. I went with some friends out to a club. I was trying to pick up an older woman on a dare. She would smile at me and shake her head. Told me I wasn't the type of man she needed.” He still kept in touch with Sandy through the

occasional email. She was living happily with her husband and Master out in Calgary. “We got to talking, and she helped me realize a few things about myself.”

“That you like hurting people.”

That was the old accusation, and even in its innocence and ignorance, it still cut him deep. “No. I don’t abuse anyone.”

Alice snorted. “I still had marks on my shoulders Monday morning.”

“Did you feel *abused*?” Shifting forward until his knees were pressed against hers, he wanted to make damn certain she understood this. “At any time did you think I was taking advantage of you? Forcing you to do something you

didn't want? That I was unwilling to stop?"

This time her answer came slower. "No." She let her gaze drop to the point where their bodies touched. "I knew you would if I said *Red*."

"That's why things like safewords exist. There are agreements, contracts, conversations that normally happen between a Dom and his sub before they get to the point where we were Saturday."

"I pushed you into it. I was the one taking advantage." Alice groaned and covered her face with her hands. "All because I had to follow you there."

The front of her shirt pulled tight

across her breasts. Gael could picture them in perfect detail—naked, nipples hard, pale skin—and his cock responded. *Fuck.*

“Why do you think you’re broken?”

Alice shifted in her seat, moving her knees away from his. “Do you know what I did as a kid?”

“No.” He’d done his best not to give her or her history much thought. The less ammunition he had to torture himself with, the better.

“I was a child model. My mom had me in magazine ads and kid’s beauty shows. If *Toddlers in Tiaras* had existed fifteen years ago, I would have been on it.”

Ah. It explained a lot about her. “The experience broke you?”

“Not really. I didn’t love it. Though it was fun as a kid getting to dress up and have people tell me how pretty I was. For a while I thought I was a princess.”

As she spoke, he could picture the beautiful child she must have been.

“As I got older, though, I didn’t like the pressure of having most of my life taken outside of my control. My mom had me on a strict diet and exercise routine. I was always going between school and auditions or photo shoots. When I turned sixteen I officially announced my retirement.”

“Your mother didn’t approve.”

“Hell no. She was furious. Told me I was throwing away an opportunity that most women only dream of having. But I’d had enough of having my life lived for me. I didn’t want to be a puppet anymore.” Alice bit down on her bottom lip. “So that’s why I can’t figure out why what I did, what we did at the club, why it...”

“Why it turned you on so much?”

Her single nod was the only response he was likely to get.

Alice White was having a crisis and he was the reason.

“Do you think it was a onetime thing?” Her voice had gone soft. “That I’d gotten wrapped up in...everything?”

It was possible that being surrounded by the sights and sounds of sex had punched her libido in the gut, sending her body out of control. It was likely if they were to spend a weekend, just the two of them alone in a house, Alice would grow to hate his controlling ways.

The thought of her naked in his home, a collar around her neck, knees spread and ass in the air, had him wishing there was more room in his pants.

“Do you want the answer to that question?” He must be mad even considering having a second time with her. It was a surefire way to sabotage his chances with Uncle Stephen. Worse, if he didn’t do things correctly, she might

begin to want a commitment from him that he wasn't able to give.

He'd been there. Had his expectations shattered because of his own failed attempt at reading the situation. Tina had been clear about looking for a Dom only for sex. But he was young enough to believe he could change her mind, make her want him on a more permanent basis if he gave her everything she wanted. Had he realized she was married to a man who didn't share her love of the lifestyle, Gael wouldn't have given her a second glance.

No, he sucked at relationships. It was better for both of them if he kept Alice at arm's length, showed her what it meant

to be a submissive, and then set her free to find someone else who could care for her.

He shouldn't feel any desire to wrap his arms around her, keep her beauty all to himself to cherish. And by no account should Gael Hernandez want to tie her to his bed so he could show her what it really means to be cared for.

Fuck that.

Still, when she sat a little bit straighter and narrowed her gaze at him, he couldn't help but be pleased.

“What do you mean?”

“There are things you can do to see if you were simply caught up in the moment.”

“Things with you?”

“No.” *Liar*. “Not the way you’re thinking.”

This was it, the moment when things would either be broken between them forever, freeing them both of this madness that had gotten to them at Wonderland, or drag them both down a path Gael wasn’t sure either of them wanted to take.

He stood, then crossed the room. If she were going to do this, he didn’t want her to feel he was pressuring her in any way. People needed to choose this for themselves, otherwise they’d never reach the state of bliss that could be achieved.

“Gael?” Alice had gotten to her feet, but she’d made no move to come toward him.

He couldn’t back down now. He owed it to them both to take things to the next step.

Making sure she was looking at him, Gael let himself slip into his Dom self. “Go to the bedroom and take off your bra and panties. Bring them back out to me.”

That was all he was going to give her. No long-winded explanations, no promises of anything sexual. One clear and simple order for her to follow. She either did it or kicked him out.

Alice swallowed and her hands

fluttered at her sides. “Why?”

“Because I said to.”

She took a step forward, hesitating for a heartbeat before turning and running up the narrow stairs. It took every bit of his control to keep from running up after her, wanting to catch a glimpse of her perfect body, if only for a moment. Instead, he kept himself rooted in place and cast his gaze around the tiny living room.

It was only after he'd managed to survey half the contents of her bookshelf did he hear Alice start down the stairs once more. Her arms were crossed and each hand was squeezing something.

“Here.” She held out the panties and lace bra for him, without meeting his

gaze. The blush on her face was as deep red as he had ever seen on her.

The scent of her arousal clung to the thin fabric of her panties. Gael held her gaze as he lifted them to his nose, deeply inhaling the scent. “You’re not to wear anything beneath your clothing until I tell you to.”

Alice turned her face away, her gaze landing somewhere past him. “How will you know if I do or not?”

“I’ll know.” He put the undergarments in his pocket. He’d keep them with the panties he’d taken from her at the club. Apparently he’d started a collection. “I expect you to come to work tomorrow like this. If you are wearing underwear,

then we both know that you have no interest in this lifestyle. I would ask that you respect my privacy and not mention this to anyone.”

“And if I do what you ask?” Alice recrossed her arms, sending her full breasts moving uninhibited beneath her shirt. “What then?”

He hadn’t thought quite that far. He’d have to come up with a plan. “We’ll see.”

He hated that he couldn’t keep his gaze from her. His hands itched to reach out and touch her skin, pull her hair away from her face so he could bite down on her neck. If he stayed much longer, things would quickly slip out of

his control.

“Tomorrow. Don’t be late for work.”

Gael didn’t look back as he left her house, even when he heard her soft,

“Yes, Sir.”

God help him.

Chapter Eleven

Normally Alice enjoyed when her mother came to Toronto and they went out to supper. It was an evening that they would take some time to plan out, work in a show or a trip to a museum, maybe some shopping, before they'd head back to Alice's place. But when her mother showed up unexpectedly two hours after Gael had left, taking her good panties and bra with him, Alice wanted to crawl into a corner and die.

“I need to eat and shop. You can drive.”

Alice managed to put her off for an hour while she showered and tried to figure out the best thing to wear. She'd stood in front of her underwear drawer, staring at the lacy bras and matching panties for all of ten minutes, deciding what to do. Gael wouldn't know if she cheated tonight. She could dress the way she wanted, to ensure her comfort while taking her mother out.

She'd gone so far as to pick up a bra, running the stiff lace between her forefinger and thumb.

He wouldn't know. Would he?

Of course he would. She was the worst liar in the entire world. One look at her guilty face and he'd be able to

read her every thought. *Sorry, Sir, but my mom has a mandatory panties rule. Maybe next time.*

Did she really want to give up on this without giving it a proper try?

The drawer thunked shut, the sound reverberating in her room from the hard slam of wood on wood. Gael Hernandez really was a bastard.

So *sans* underwear, Alice found a dress that would hold everything in place as best as possible, then took her mother shopping.

For the next several hours she had to fight to concentrate on what her mother was saying. They'd decided to stay close to Alice's house and took the

transit to the shops. With each step Alice's thighs rubbed against her bare pussy. The air tickled her, sending shivers through her body. Free from her bra's normal constraints, her breasts rubbed against the soft fabric of the dress, causing her nipples to harden. Anyone looking at her for all of three seconds would be able to tell how turned on she was. *Please dear God, don't let my mother notice.*

Whether through divine intervention or simply their preoccupation with the incredible sales they had managed to find, her mother had barely looked her way, content to prattle on about random things. It wasn't until they finally made

their way to their favorite Italian restaurant that it started to get more difficult for Alice.

The hard wooden chair was a solid force against her pussy. She tried to shift herself into a more comfortable position, but her constant wiggling did little more than keep her on edge. She didn't know if masturbating was against Gael's rules, but it might become a moot point in an embarrassingly short time.

Getting herself off on a chair while at supper with her mother...certainly a new one. And more than a little disturbing.

Conversation between them had died down considerably while the waiter brought them water and menus. Alice

wasn't being the most attentive daughter just then, but the building pressure between her legs was preventing more than a little rational thought.

Her mother cleared her throat. "I guess you're wondering why I showed up unannounced today."

Alice cringed. She hadn't given her mother's unexpected arrival the amount of consideration she normally would have. "I was curious. I thought you wanted me to come up and spend some time—"

"I had to come see a specialist this morning. Pain in the you-know-what, if you ask me. Why my doctor couldn't do these tests at our hospital, I don't know.

Thank you for asking, darling.”

“Specialist?” Alice looked up over the menu as her mother’s words sunk in. “For what? You didn’t mention anything about this.” God, this was so typical. Her mother loved to drop bombs like this on Alice’s lap with no warning. “Is this about your sleeping problems?”

Her mother was wearing a sundress and a large wooden bead necklace. The blues and yellows of the fabric were the perfect complement to her skin tone and brought out the color of her eyes. Alice had always thought her mother looked amazing and not close to her fifty-three years. She couldn’t imagine her mother being sick, not in a serious way. Hell,

the woman rarely got the cold or flu. It was as if the germs were too in awe of her to dare land on her body.

They would normally jump over to Alice instead.

“Yes, it was. I need to go to a sleep clinic, and they said they want to run some other tests, as well.”

“Specialist. You can’t get into to a place like that on short notice.”

Her mother had the good grace to blush. “Things have been going on longer than I might have let on. I might need someone to stay with me for several weeks after they’ve finished their prodding.”

Alice instantly stopped squirming, her

gaze snapping to her mother's. "Mom, I can't take several weeks off work."

"Of course you can." She reached for a roll and carefully broke it into quarters before buttering each one. "You can speak to your boss and tell them there's a family emergency. I'm sure they have some policy about caring for sick family members."

The thought of begging Gael for time off flashed through her mind. She had no doubt it would be a more pleasant form of begging than what she'd have to do with Mr. Gibson. Not that Gael would have any influence with the partners or HR. As an associate lawyer, he had to follow the rules the same as she did.

“I should be able to get a few days—”

“I’ll need you for two weeks.”

“That would use up all of my vacation.”

Her mother stopped moving and leveled a frown at her. “You can take it with me. We’ll be able to spend some time together, and I can introduce you around to some of my friends. Gwen’s son is a dentist who just opened up an office in Barrie. I think the two of you would get along wonderfully.”

Every muscle in Alice’s body had gone ridged. “You’re trying to set me up.”

“If you have to be with me for that long, it would be nice for you to have a

friend to spend some time with. I won't need you at my beck and call twenty-four seven. You could go out to supper, go for some walks."

"Are you even sick?"

She shouldn't have asked. Not only was it rude, but this was her mom she was talking to. The woman might be a master manipulator, but she never resorted to lies when she could make anyone do anything by beating the person over the head with the truth.

"Alice Elizabeth White."

Oh damn.

The rest of her punishment was postponed when the waiter brought their starter salad. The moment he stepped

away, her mother gently placed her napkin by her plate and clasped her hands together on the table.

“I have never lied to you, nor would I about something as serious as my health. I was simply trying to help you take advantage of the situation, putting you in the path of a nice man. Kevin is divorced and is looking for a new start. He’s attractive, knows how to look after a house and his parents. You could do far worse.”

“I can find a man on my own.”

“And yet you live alone.” Her mother sighed, her eyes falling closed for a moment. “You haven’t changed since you were a child. You’d float away if I

wasn't standing over to keep you in line."

Any desire Alice had for her food evaporated. "I am more than capable of looking after myself."

"When I arrived at your home today it looked as if you hadn't showered in days." Her elegant eyebrow lifted, saying more than her mother's words ever could.

"I've been home sick."

Liar and a coward. Gael's voice echoed in her head.

"That's an even better reason for you to come with me."

"Mom, I can't come with you. I have to go to work tomorrow."

“Alice, are you being difficult on purpose? I’m simply trying to do my best to look out for you. And I happen to need your help. I don’t ask for a lot from you.”

The old her would have simply given up and acquiesced to the request. She could easily call in sick one more day, then book the vacation time. Carmela might question her, worried that there was something serious going on, but she’d agree to the vacation.

Gael was another story.

“Well, I can see there’s no point in continuing this conversation.” Her mother picked up her salad fork and began to eat. “You seem to choose the

opposite of everything I ask of you recently. You don't want to meet a nice man, you don't want to consider trying a career that would not only give you more flexibility, but more financial security. And heaven forbid you help your mother when she needs it."

Alice stood up so quickly, her chair scraped loudly across the floor, getting the attention of the few people sitting around them.

"I'm leaving."

Her mother frowned, the lines around her mouth stretching as she did. "Sit down. You're making a scene."

Scouring her purse for her credit card, Alice tossed it on the table. "Have them

charge me. I...I can't stay here anymore. Sorry.”

“Where are you going? You can leave me here alone.”

The pressure squeezed Alice's chest, making it difficult to pull any air in, and grew with each passing second. In a blink she was sixteen again, her mother trying to direct her every move, taking the control out of her hands.

“You know how to get back to my place. There are lots of cabs around here if you need one. The guest bed is made up if you want to stay.”

“Alice—”

“Bye, Mom.”

Tears made it difficult to see the door

as she pushed her way through and out into the street.

* * *

Not wanting to take a chance of running into her mother back at her house, Alice took a taxi over to Petra's condo. She hadn't unloaded on her friend in a while, but there was too much going on in Alice's head right now to handle on her own. She loved her mother to death, but the woman had a way of driving her mad.

She trudged down the hallway, knowing Petra would find a way to make her feel better. Her friend had a way of spinning things around so Alice had no

choice but to see the upside. Although Petra might not exactly be the sex-goddess in person she tried to be online, she was grounded, and better still, understood Alice.

She got to the door and knocked several times. Where the hell was Petra? It wasn't like her friend not to be around. If something had happened to her...

Alice pressed her hand flat against the door and turned her head to better hear. Nothing. Getting her cell phone from her purse, she was relieved to find a message from Petra waiting for her.

“Hi, hon. Today has been crazy. We’re meeting with the awards committee today to figure out what the hell to do

about the complaints about Darcy and I. God only knows how that's going to end up. Oh, and he said he won't be able to pull *Mantastic* from the competition now because of his brother. Never mind, too many details for the phone. I wanted to let you know that I'm okay. I miss you. I feel like I haven't seen you since this whole web awards thing started. Let's do lunch soon. Okay? Call me."

Petra was safe but not home. It was possible she'd stayed with Darcy. Clearly their relationship was moving along, and after Alice had her chat with Darcy at the coffee shop, she suspected he'd be even more likely to keep an eye on Petra.

That brief talk had given Alice the sense that Darcy's attraction to Petra was more than about looks or good sex. She could tell he was starting to care for her. And any man who loved Petra and all of her quirks was a good man in Alice's books. If there was even a small chance they were together tonight, Alice didn't want to give Petra a reason to run away. She'd have to figure out a solution to her problems on her own.

Not that she had a clue what she needed anymore.

Before she could put her cell phone back into her purse, it rang. A quick glance at the caller ID showed it was her home phone. At least her mom had made

it back to her place safe and sound. Given the time of day she was likely to stay the night and drive back to Barrie in the morning.

That meant as soon as Alice got home she'd be faced with an angry parent who would take great pleasure in tearing a strip off her. Great, something for her to look forward to, a chance to feel like a candidate for craptastic daughter of the year. She couldn't do this, not yet. Without answering the call, Alice turned her phone off.

What she really wanted was Gael. She wanted his confidence. His touch. His subtle smiles. She wanted some Alice and Gael time, not Dom and sub.

She needed to find him. Time to go back to Wonderland.

Chapter Twelve

Without fully realizing how she'd gotten there, Alice now stood at the end of the alley that led to Wonderland. Vague recollections of a taxi ride and the concerned glances of the driver had melted into the haze of memories. What was important was that she'd managed to get herself here.

If luck was on her side, Gael would be in there already. She had no idea how he would react to her showing up again. They both seemed to be engaged in a game of seesaw, each of them shifting

between what they wanted and the other person's desires. But if she came to him as herself and not some submissive wannabe, he'd be there for her. If nothing else, she'd be able to vent and not feel as though he was going to judge her.

The sound of her shoes echoing as she walked sounded muted in her ears. The distant laughter and beat of music from one of the clubs in the district grated in a way that shouldn't be possible. There was joy to be had for those people who grabbed it by the throat and took it for themselves. Alice needed to find a way to capture that for herself.

“Well, well, if it isn't the little

rabbit.”

Alice gave her head a shake, not quite registering the large man standing against the wall. “Chess?”

“The one and only.” His smile quickly fell into a frown. “Are you okay?”

“I...I’m not sure.”

“Are you hurt? Because I’d be more than happy to deal with the bastard who did it to you. Just say the word.”

Chess’s concerned face began to blur as her eyes filled with tears. “Sorry. I’m just having a bad day.”

“And you came here?” He snorted. “I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. A lot of subs come here looking for help. The only problem, little rabbit, is that your

man isn't here.”

Alice blinked, sending a trickle of tears down her face. “Oh. I just assumed...”

“Naw, your guy only comes once a week. Usually on Friday or Saturday. He's a bit crazy, but a creature of habit.”

She'd heard Gael called many different things, but crazy wasn't one of them. “I guess I'll have to wait and see him in the office tomorrow.”

As she was turning away, Chess reached out and stopped her. “I don't think you're in any shape to be out on your own. Come with me.”

This time as she stepped beyond the main door, Alice didn't feel the same

trepidation as she had on her first visit. Rather than taking her into the main club, Chess stopped at a door that she hadn't seen before. The room was small, containing a desk, two chairs and several video monitors.

“This is the security room.” He pulled out the closer of the two chairs and helped her sit. It was a large leather chair that seemed to hug her as she sunk into the padding. “We record footage for the week in case there are any problems. The tapes get recycled if there aren't any concerns. Red likes to make sure her little kingdom is safe.”

“That's reassuring.” But the thought of her and Gael being on tape wasn't. “Do

the members know about this?”

“It’s in their membership agreements.” He shrugged. “I doubt many of them actually read that part.”

Chess made his way over to a small bar fridge and pulled out a small loaf and a bottle of juice. “Eat and drink. It will make you feel better.”

“What is it?”

“Just apple juice and banana bread.”

Alice picked up a piece, giving Chess one final look before taking a bite. “This is really good.”

“I bake when I’m bored.” He looked down at his watch. “I need to get back outside. Wait here for a bit and I’ll come back. You look like you need the time to

yourself.”

“Thank you.”

He patted her on the head as he walked past. “No problem, little rabbit.”

Alice ate and drank far faster than she normally would have if she’d stayed and eaten with her mom. Maybe the weirdness that had been building inside of her all night was nothing more than low blood sugar. Something easily fixed with banana bread and apple juice.

If only life were that easy.

With the food gone, Alice turned her attention to the screens in the room. The flicker of the black and white images gave everything a surreal feeling. It was as if she were watching one of those

strange art house films Petra loved to drag her to, only this one was an odd pantomime. Naked bodies were twisted and turning this way and that as people came together.

Three people were around the cross where she'd sat and watched the man and woman. This time there was no obvious audience, just three people engaged in pleasure. A special kind that they could only achieve together.

Perhaps she'd been looking at her life in completely the wrong manner. Rather than thinking there was something wrong with her, maybe it wasn't exactly that. It was more along the line of her missing a critical piece, the part that makes

everything click together. She was broken, but not in the way she'd always assumed.

All Alice needed to do was find the missing piece and she'd be able to function.

Time got away from her as she continued to watch the screens. Slowly, she pulled her feet up so they were tucked under her and lowered her head to the arm rest. She hadn't realized how tired she'd gotten. The whirlwind turn of events from talking to Darcy in the coffee shop, to her mom's unexpected visit, to her arrival here, was finally starting to wear her out.

Maybe she'd close her eyes for a few

minutes. Chess would be back any time and she'd have to go home.

Within seconds, Alice slipped into a fitful sleep.

* * *

Gael found the closest parking spot he could manage to Wonderland. He'd been more than a little surprised when Chess had called him, telling him he had to come fetch his frightened little rabbit. Gael had learned better than to question the enigmatic bouncer over the years, and simply grabbed his keys.

Gael turned the corner, coming face to face with the man in question. "What the hell is going on?"

“You lost something. I found it.”

He didn't have time for cryptic bullshit. “If you've called me out here for nothing more than one of Red's little games—”

“Your girl Alice is here.”

Whatever else Gael had been planning to say quickly disappeared. “Alice? Is she okay?”

“She was looking pretty shaken up about something. I brought her in to the security office. Didn't think she was in any shape to handle Red and the club.”

Gael was moving forward automatically. “Thanks, man.”

But Chess had other thoughts. As he was standing in front of the door, there

was no way Gael would be able to get past. He glared at the larger man.
“Move.”

“That Dom shit doesn’t work on me and you know it.” Chess leaned down until he was well inside Gael’s personal space. “If you do anything to hurt that girl, I will personally beat your ass into pulp. And not in the good way.”

“You don’t even know her.” The thought of doing anything to intentionally hurt Alice turned his stomach. “Why do you care?”

“She reminds me of my kid sister. Don’t fuck her up.”

“I wouldn’t.” The words weren’t empty promises, either. Gael couldn’t

explain why he had this uncontrollable need to get inside and wrap Alice in his arms. That wasn't true either. He knew exactly why, and he didn't know what that said about him.

Gael was scared he'd been the one to push her to this.

Chess still wasn't moving, and Gael was losing what little patience he had. "I swear to God if you don't move I'm going to show you exactly what I can do with a whip. And I guarantee you won't like it."

One moment the bouncer looked as if he was about to rip Gael's head off, and the next he was chuckling. "Just making sure. You know where the office is?"

“Yes.” And without another look at the other man, Gael jerked the door open and went in search of Alice.

Gael stepped in quickly, not wanting to unexpectedly draw attention from anyone who might see him. The last thing he needed was to get pulled into the craziness that was Wonderland. Not when he had more important matters to work out.

It took his eyes a moment to adjust to the darkness of the room. The flicker from the security monitors drew his immediate attention. He’d spoken to Red about the implications of having the video footage, and had even gone so far as to draw up the waiver each member

had to sign acknowledging the cameras. He'd forgotten about them over the years, as no doubt many of the members probably had. Making a mental note to follow up with Red in regard to her procedures, Gael shifted back to the reason for his visit in the first place.

Alice was curled up on a chair, her beautiful hair draped over the side. Walking around her, Gael squatted down next to her. Now eye level with her face, he could tell she'd been crying at some point during her evening. Had that been because of him? Had he pushed her too far by demanding she do what he wanted?

No, that didn't make sense. Gael

prided himself on his ability to read the tells of other people. Alice had been embarrassed when she'd handed over her panties and bra, but she'd been turned on as well. Without looking, he touched the outside pocket that held the garments in question. After leaving her home, Gael had gone directly back to the office, where he'd stayed until Chess's call.

Fuck, she looked beautiful. Makeup a mess, hair flat, and sound asleep, but it didn't matter. Alice was still one of the most stunning women of his acquaintance. Her appeal had to do with so much more than simply her appearance. Not many women would

have been able to handle the idea of Wonderland, let alone walk into the belly of the beast. Alice had taken everything in stride, taken him in stride. For the first time in a while, he hadn't felt judged for his sexual preferences.

If anything, she'd been more than intrigued.

Which meant Gael was in some serious trouble.

Not normally one to hesitate, Gael did so now as he reached out to brush away the hair across her cheek. Her skin was soft beneath his fingertips, reigniting that spark of possession within him. He needed to get her out of here, take her back home so she could have a proper

night's sleep. Or before he changed his mind and took her into the club.

“Alice.”

Her eyes fluttered behind the lids, and she licked her lips before making a soft cooing noise. Gael's cock, which had already taken a keen interest in events, pulsed as blood filled it. It had been several hours since he'd last seen her, giving her plenty of time to have put on a fresh bra and panties. It would be so easy to reach down and cup her breast to see, to know if she'd been serious about trying, about him and what they could be for each other.

Taking in a breath, Gael rose to his feet, needing to put some space between

them. He gently shook her by the shoulder, ignoring the way her hair tickled his fingers as it shifted.

“Alice, you need to wake up.”

The fluttering increased before her lids slowly opened to reveal sleep-drunk eyes. She looked up at him and smiled in that way of hers that made every man feel like a god for having caught the attention of this beautiful creature.

It wouldn't last. Her mind woke up, and it was clear from her face that she realized it was him standing there. Alice shifted quickly, stumbling to her feet far faster than was wise. Gael managed to step in and catch her before she tripped.

“Slow down. Your legs are probably asleep.”

“What are you doing here?” Blinking her eyes rapidly for a few seconds, Alice slowly regained her composure. “Chess told me you didn’t come to the club on Tuesday nights.”

“I don’t. He called me to come get you.”

Their bodies were pressed together. She was wearing a blouse and skirt that would have held her unbound breasts securely in place. Shifting his hand to the center of her back told him all he needed to know.

“You’re not wearing a bra.”

Alice flushed, the pink barely visible

in the dim light of the room. “You told me not to.”

That little confession poked his inner caveman hard enough to send it screaming. Fuck, why did this have to happen now when he needed the money and this job? He wanted nothing more than to make this woman his. Now.

Ignoring her struggles, Gael kept her body pressed to his. “But are you wearing panties?”

Alice sucked in a breath as he reached down and pulled up her skirt with his free hand. “I wonder if you were able to do that. Leave your house without anything underneath. What am I going to find? Hmm? That pussy of yours? Or a

charming pair of panties? Let's see, shall we?"

He wanted to swallow her little gasp as he moved his hand closer to the object of his desire. It was Gael's turn to groan when his fingers brushed against soft hair and warm flesh, free from their cotton barriers.

"Well, well. You were a good girl and listened to my instructions." He leaned in until his lips were only a hair's breadth away from hers. He circled her clit with his thumb and forefinger, relishing the way her flesh grew swollen beneath his touch. He'd never been with a woman as responsive as Alice. So beautiful and strong, willing to put

herself in his hands.

“I—yes.” Her eyes closed once again.
“I wanted...”

“What was that?” Increasing the pressure, he set up a steady stroking against her clit that was certain to drive her mad. “What did you want, Alice?”

She groaned and dropped her forehead to his shoulder. “Please.”

“No.” As quickly as he’d begun his seduction, Gael stepped back. “Not here. I don’t want this to be about this place and what it does to people.”

“But—”

“Not *here*.” He was shocked by the force behind his words. Wonderland had been his safe haven for years. To

suddenly have such a strong desire to flee it didn't make sense. What was it about this woman that made him question everything he thought he wanted?

For her part, Alice didn't look scared or annoyed. If anything, she looked concerned. "Okay. Not here."

"Let me take you back to your place."

"No!" Alice took her own step back. "I can't go home."

He'd been so wrapped up in his attraction and the eroticism of discovering she'd followed his command, he'd forgotten what had brought him here in the first place.

"What happened?"

"I..." She sighed. "After you left my

mom showed up. She was having some tests done today. We had a fight at supper, and I left her at the restaurant. She's at my house waiting for me. She doesn't like to drive on the 400 at night."

Gael knew little about Alice's personal life beyond her close relationship with her friend Petra and her brief mention of being a child model. Having a good relationship with his own mother, he couldn't imagine a reason for avoiding her. Regardless, it left her in an uncomfortable situation. One he didn't plan to abandon her in.

"Then you're coming home with me."

Chapter Thirteen

When Gael had insisted she come back to his place, a number of scenarios raced through Alice's mind. Him telling her to get naked and crawl across the floor. Him strapping her to a special wall in his basement where he could flog her at his whim. A cage that he'd demand she needed to crawl inside so he could play with her whenever he felt like it.

What she wasn't expecting was to be driven through the city into The Annex, a neighborhood well above her own cost of living, to a home that no new

associate lawyer should be able to afford. Gael's demeanor grew stiffer the closer they got to his home. By the time they pulled into his double-car garage, his attitude had grown as frigid as a January morning.

He'd said little to her as he led her inside his home. Not that Alice would have been able to say much. She'd been too busy gawking at the modern elegance that encompassed the house.

If there was a wall in the basement he meant to tie her to, she had no doubt the rings would all be platinum.

"Red or white?" Alice spun around to face him. Gael held a bottle of wine in each hand. "I didn't know which you

preferred.”

“Red, please.”

He nodded once and disappeared into the kitchen. He didn't look pleased, which in itself made no sense to her. It hadn't been her idea to come here. She would have eventually sucked it up, metaphorically put on her big-girl panties, and gone home. Facing her mother would have sucked, and she would have done some major groveling before her mom forgave her for leaving her alone, but she *would* have done it.

If he hadn't wanted her here, why did he offer?

The only way to find the answers to her questions was to talk to him. She

kicked off her shoes and followed him.

“You have a beautiful home.” *Nice understatement there, Alice.* “Are those countertops granite?”

“Yes.” He pulled out a cork opener that with two simple moves effortlessly pulled the cork free.

Gael continued to move around his kitchen, avoiding looking her way as he aerated the wine, took two glasses down, and generously filled each of them. It wasn't until he turned to offer her the glass that he finally looked her in the eyes.

Alice didn't accept it. “Why did you ask me here if you didn't want me in your home?”

“Because you needed a place to go.”

Well, he sounded sincere, but Alice was smart enough to know there was more to the story. Taking a fortifying sip of the wine, she paused long enough to enjoy the smooth roll of the spicy wine down her throat. “This is nice.”

“It better be, considering how much I paid for it.”

“Nice to know I rate the good stuff.”

Gael made a noncommittal noise as he took another sip. Whatever trepidation he'd been feeling must have disappeared, because he held her gaze until she was forced to look away. Alice was starting to appreciate that his hard edge was part of his appeal to her.

“What happened to you tonight?”

They didn't know each other well enough for her to spill the story and yet other than Petra, he was the only other person she'd want to share this with. Kinky sex was apparently a great equalizer when it came to confessions.

“I had a bit of a fight with my mom.”

“You told me that.” Another sip of wine. “What was it about?”

Cupping her wineglass, Alice let out a sigh. “Honestly, you're going to think I'm an ass.”

“I doubt that. You're not normally the type of person to intentionally hurt others.”

Sure, go all sweet on me. Make this

even harder.

“It’s just...I love my mom. More than anything. But my entire life she’s been the one in charge of things.” She took another large sip, and gave herself a moment to let the alcohol start to work its way through her body. “I told you I was a child model.”

“And she was upset when you retired at sixteen. The world’s loss.”

Alice felt the blush spread across her cheeks once more. Dammit, she hated that he could make her do that so easily. “Thanks.”

“So she showed up and you had a fight. About what?”

“She wanted me to take some time off

and spend it with her.” Saying that out loud made her feel even more of a shitty child. “I don’t know exactly what’s wrong with her. She’s had some tests recently, been complaining about health issues without going into specifics. I think she’s lonely and is looking for an excuse for me to stay with her.”

“Would that be so bad?”

“She wanted me to come to Barrie for two weeks so she could set me up with a friend’s son.” Alice took another large sip of wine. “Bad enough.”

Gael kept his gaze locked on hers. Every place it touched, her skin itched from the attention. She wanted it to be his hands, scratching and caressing her

instead. She wanted to remove the fabric barriers between them and throw herself into his care.

“I don’t like the idea of her handing you over to another man.”

Oh my. “I...okay.”

“I know we haven’t talked about where this thing between us is going. I don’t even know if you want it to go anywhere now that you know what I look for in a sexual partner.” Gael leaned closer, and she lost the ability to think. “But I think it’s only fair to warn you. Now that we’ve acknowledge this connection, I won’t let you go to another man without a fight.”

Wow.

How the hell was she going to explain that one to her mom? *Sorry, I can't go on that blind date. No, no, my Dom doesn't approve of me flirting with other men. Maybe next time!*

Gael was starting to speak when his phone rang. Growling, he marched over to the wall and snatched the receiver from the cradle. "Yes."

Alice didn't want to listen in, but she couldn't help doing so, especially after Gael's entire demeanor shifted.

"Of course, sir. The file will be ready for court next week. Yes, I have everything you need. Yes. Certainly. I'll make sure there won't be any issues. Bye, sir."

He replaced the receiver, but Alice could tell the erotic pressure that had been building between them, had now bled away. “Who was that?”

“Mr. Gibson.”

“He calls you at home?”

“He can call me whenever the hell he wants. He’s my boss.”

“I don’t get you.” She pressed her hand to the side of her neck, which immediately drew his attention. “You’re an associate lawyer, and yet you can afford to live in a place like this. You’re almost the corporate whipping boy for the partners, and yet you have this whole other part of you that needs to be in control. I thought the more time I spent

with you, the more I'd understand the type of person you are. I'm just getting more confused."

"I do what I have to, in order to get what I want. I have things I need to prove to my family and myself."

Yes, and he was the type of person who wouldn't back down. "Is that why you like to be a Dom? So you can take what you want?"

"BDSM doesn't work that way." He crossed the distance between them to stand beside her. At this proximity, she could feel and smell everything about him. The mix of the wine, his cologne and a hint of sex. Though it was possible Alice was imagining that last bit.

“BDSM is a power exchange.”

She blinked a few times. *Pay attention, girl.* “What?”

“I might be the one in charge, but that’s only because you have given me permission.” He took her hand that was still touching her neck and gently pulled it away. Replacing it with his own, he shifted his fingers so they curled around the front of her throat. “When we were at Wonderland and I told you I was going to share you with the others, what happened?”

“I said *Red* and you stopped.”

“That’s part of the promise between a Dom and his sub. You agree to put your trust in me, to listen to what I say, to

accept the things I do to your body. In return, I agree to listen to you. I need to understand, to learn what makes you tick, gives you pleasure, scares you. It's my job to push those boundaries, to take you places you'd never go on your own. I'm in control, until you tell me that I'm not."

Alice's lungs had stopped working halfway through Gael's speech. Not only was that the largest amount of words she'd ever heard him string together at one time, but the implications of what he was telling her had her reeling.

"But..." His grip tightened on her, sending a bolt of pleasure straight through to her pussy. "How is this

different from...?”

“From your mother?” He squeezed harder still, making it difficult to pull air in. “Say *Red*.”

“Red.”

The pressure disappeared and Gael took a step back. There was no big dramatic explosion, no arguments about why she should continue on, nothing about how he was disappointed in her for not trusting him.

He simply stopped.

“What’s the one thing you’d always felt was missing from your life, Alice?”

“Control. The right to make my own decisions without being questioned.” It was why she’d turned her phone off the

second she'd left the restaurant. Why she would conveniently forget to check her voice mail when things were tense between them. "I love my mom. I'd do anything for her."

"But you can't live your life for her. That's a line no parent should ask a child to cross."

"You say that as if you're speaking from personal experience."

For the first time since they'd first arrived, Gael broke eye contact with her first. "Not exactly. But I'm doing something that they don't approve of."

"So your parents know you're a Dom and they don't approve?"

"They know. My mom has even given

me a few tips over the years.”

Her mouth had fallen open. “No way.”

“My mother is a Dominatrix. Dad might run the family business, but she’s the one in charge at the end of the day. They didn’t parade it in front of me growing up. She didn’t have him tied up in the kitchen. But as I got older, I started to notice things were different between them. Their dynamic was not similar to my friends’ parents. It was after I’d met Sandy and we’d played around for a bit, I realized this was a part of me. I started to recognize the same traits in my parents. Thinking back, I realized why mom was so proficient with the strap.”

Alice couldn’t quite wrap her head

around that. “Wow.”

“Now, their business is suffering and they need extra money to keep it afloat. I was able to convince my uncle to put me forward for partner, but I have to jump through his hoops before he’ll do it. I need the extra income so I can cosign my parents’ loan. My parents don’t approve. He’s my mom’s brother, and they haven’t gotten along for years now.”

“That’s hard.” She’d put up with shit while trying to help a parent. It also explained a lot about him, his serious streak and his frustrations. “So your mom and her brother fight a lot?”

“He wouldn’t dare. She’d kick his ass.”

Gael's smile reached his eyes, sending Alice's heart racing. "You need to smile more."

"It's been a rough few months. I haven't had much reason to smile." He inched closer to her again. This time Alice could feel the shift between them. He wasn't going to simply educate her about BDSM. No, there was something else there, something deeper calling to her. "I've had to put my focus on this new position. I was told by my...Mr. Gibson that if I wanted any hope of making partner, then I had to keep my nose clean. Do my job, don't get involved with the office gossip."

"Or with the legal assistants?" Ouch.

Well, now at least she understood why he'd tried to keep his distance from her. And in the next moment, everything clicked into place. "Oh shit. Mr. Gibson is your uncle, isn't he?"

The muscle in Gael's jaw jumped. "One of his rules is that no one was to know. Please don't say anything."

"I won't. I'm sorry. I never meant to put you in such a bad position."

Gael reached out once more, only this time he cupped her cheek. "I've come to the conclusion that you're worth gaining his wrath."

"But not jeopardizing your parents' business."

"We can be careful."

Dammit, she hated that he always managed the perfect thing to say. “I wouldn’t want you to blame me if he found out.”

“I make my own decisions and deal with my own consequences.”

It was clear what he was offering. This was her chance to explore a side of her she’d never been aware of. Only this time she couldn’t blame being caught up in the insanity of Wonderland. This was her choice, and she’d have to accept the consequences.

“So do I.” Desire spread throughout her body, making her nipples bead and her bare pussy wet. “And I want to learn more.”

Gael's gaze narrowed. "We need to establish an agreement. A contract of sorts. I need to know what your hard limits are, the things you absolutely won't do. The things that you're nervous about that I might be able to push you toward. I also need you to understand what I'm looking for. What I need to get out of this."

She'd assumed what he got out of it was kick-ass orgasms. "Sounds fair."

"This isn't something we can do quickly. It will take time."

"How much time?"

"I want three days."

The thought of spending so much uninterrupted time with Gael, learning

what fueled his desires, was a siren's call she wouldn't be able to avoid. "I think—"

"Tomorrow. Give me your answer tomorrow at lunch. If you say yes, I'll make the arrangements for you to have the time off. Friday to Sunday."

"Tomorrow at lunch."

"You can crash here tonight if you want. I have a spare room."

The thought of being so close to him without touching wasn't a temptation she wanted to face. Not if she was going to give his proposal serious consideration.

"No. I should go home and face Mom. She didn't deserve me walking out on her the way I did."

Gael nodded. "I'll take you."

Alice regretted the decision as soon as she slipped into his car. What the hell was she thinking, saying no to the opportunity to sleep under the same roof as the man of her dreams? Clearly she was a bigger idiot than she'd originally thought. Petra would no doubt give her hell.

Petra, shit. She'd forgotten about her friend. Tomorrow she'd need to give her a call and find out what the hell was going on between her and Darcy. She'd never gotten all the dirt on their one-night stand. Though they couldn't call it that anymore. Alice would give Petra a call tomorrow, and she'd be able to help

her figure out what to do about Gael.

Because the idea of becoming his submissive was a thought she couldn't get out of her mind.

Chapter Fourteen

Alice's morning hadn't gone according to plan. The night before, she'd managed to sneak into her house. But her mother, who had in fact decided to stay the night, had taken up residence in Alice's bed rather than use the guest room. Left with no other options, Alice had grabbed her nightgown and tried to sleep without her normal comforts.

Not that she'd been able to sleep. She'd spent most of her nighttime hours tossing and turning, while her mind raced through all of the possibilities of

Gael's proposal. Regardless of his current role with the firm, he was still a lawyer on the path to becoming a partner. Did she really want to be one of *those women* who started an office romance with a boss? It didn't matter how their relationship started, there would always be people on the staff who would look down on her for chasing after Gael.

And it didn't matter that he said he wouldn't hold things against her; if their being together was discovered by his uncle and ruined the opportunity to cosign the loan, Alice would feel like absolute shit. So as she tried to doze, her mind went back and forth on the idea of

spending a long weekend with him. At one point, she gave up trying to sleep, grabbed her smartphone, and did a search on BDSM.

There was some really scary shit on the Internet. But she managed to track down a few sites that were more about education and less about the kink itself. They even recommended a few books on what it meant to be a Dom and a sub. She'd bought copies of each for later reading. The end result was an overload of information that refused to allow her mind to shut down, making what little rest she'd been able to get fitful.

The lecture she'd received this morning at breakfast hadn't helped

either.

It had been a long time since she'd truly pissed her mother off. Alice had been sixteen and had just told her that she was quitting modeling.

Her retreat to the office hadn't provided any relief. As usual, Gael was at work early. She'd been hoping to have at least a few minutes with him before the office filled up, so she could ask him a few questions. Get a bit more perspective on what exactly he was offering her.

But no, the fates wouldn't even give her that today. Within two minutes of her arrival Carmella stepped into Gael's office to chat. The conversation quickly

turned to a whole bunch of extremely obvious flirting on her part. And the more apparent Carmella got, the more Alice contemplated the various merits of starting an office cat fight. She could totally take Carmella out.

Instead of discovering more about what a weekend in Gael's capable hands would involve, she was forced to keep her annoyance in check. Not something she normally had to account for.

“Package for the most stunning woman in the office.” Brian dropped a courier envelope on her desk. “Why the long face, sunshine?”

“Just having a bad morning. Thanks, hon.”

Brian looked behind him at Carmella, who now stood directly in front of Gael's desk, blocking her view. "Boss lady giving you a hard time?"

"No." *Boss lady is making the moves on my guy.*

"Oh. She's pissing in your pot without permission. My wife always told me never get between two women who are after the same man."

Alice snapped her gaze back to Brian. "I'm not—"

"Sweetie, everyone here knows you've got a crush on Hernandez. Especially that one." He nodded toward Carmella. "She should know better than to play with fire. Anyway, it's time for

my next drop-off.”

Having lost the ability to speak, Alice could only watch as he left. *Everyone* knew she had a crush on Gael? How was that possible? Shit, did Mr. Gibson suspect? She'd never said anything to anyone besides Petra. She'd never chased after him in an obvious way, not even the type of flirting that Carmella was embarrassing herself with right now. Alice would smile, make a little small talk, and help him out. The same thing she'd do for anyone in the office.

“Thank you for bringing this to my attention.” Gael's voice snapped her out of her funk and brought her attention back to the matter at hand.

“I saw that it was important and would need to be dealt with quickly.” Carmella smiled at him. Dear God, was she trying to bat her eyelashes too? Oh honey...

“I never doubt your expertise in these matters.” Gael followed Carmella out of the office and stood by his doorway.

“Thanks. I’ll get Alice to look after the file—”

“Unfortunately,” Gael said, his voice loud enough to draw a few curious glances, “I require Miss White’s assistance on another matter. I’ll leave the Gruber file with you. Miss White, can I see you for a moment?”

“Of course, sir.” Okay, so calling him

sir wasn't exactly playing fair. Alice was tired and annoyed enough that she honestly didn't care. "I'll be right there."

Gael held his ground while she got herself organized, watching her every move. She had no doubt it was his way of getting even for the *sir* comment, and she had no intention of letting him know he was getting under her skin.

In fact...

Grabbing her cell phone at the last second, she marched past Gael without a second glance. Ignoring him as he closed the door behind her, she hit the speed dial for Petra.

"Hey hon. I'm sorry I haven't answered your calls. I'm...going to be

out of town for a bit. And out of cell range. Something, ah, came up and I have to handle it. Don't worry, I'm fine. I'll tell you about it when I get back. Bye!"

Gael crossed his arms. "I take it you don't need until lunch to make your decision?" The note of amusement was so unlike Gael, she was caught off guard. "You don't even want to know what my plan is?"

She did. Desperately. But she was so pissed off—at her mother, Carmella, herself, her lack of undergarments—there was no point in pushing things. "This is supposed to be about trust, right? I trust that you won't do anything

to hurt me.”

“No, I won’t hurt you. Not in the way you mean at least.”

“Then the only way I’m going to figure this out is to put myself in your hands and hope for the best. I don’t have a clue as to what I’m doing, but you already know that.”

Even though she was silently begging him to close the distance between them and work his Dom magic on her, Gael didn’t move. Instead, he sat down behind his desk and pulled his keyboard closer.

“Tomorrow I’ll arrange for you to leave work early and pack a bag. Just the essentials. No clothing. I’ll pick you up at four-thirty.”

That was a dismissal if she'd ever heard one.

“Wait, no clothing? Do you plan on keeping me naked the entire three days?”

Gael simply cocked an eyebrow.

Bastard.

“I’m fighting the urge to fire off a smart-assed comment about you not being the boss of me.” She chuckled. “But I’d be wrong about that on both counts.”

“Go work, Alice.”

She snorted as she turned and marched back to her desk.

Oh sure, easy for him to say. He wasn’t the one who had to sit around wondering what the hell she’d gotten

herself into. It was only three days. Of sex. Kinky sex that she didn't quite get the rules of. With the man of her dreams.

And look, an email.

Groaning, Alice leaned forward, pressing her forehead to her desk. It was going to be a long two days.

* * *

Carmella had simply smiled when Alice told her she was leaving early and gave her the okay. It was strange considering how badly she'd been flirting with Gael yesterday. Not that her boss would have any idea what was about to happen between them. She might have kicked up a stink otherwise. Or begged for further

details.

Packing was more than a joke. Her toiletries took up a pitiful amount of room in her overnight bag. Strangely, she'd grown comfortable going *sans* panties, though she still missed her bra, and the absence of the rest of her clothing was almost freeing. For once she didn't have to be concerned about what to wear, if she looked appropriate, or what he would think of her.

No, she'd simply be walking around buck naked instead.

“Fuck.”

Four-thirty came and went with no sign of Gael. There could be any number of reasons he wasn't there yet. Traffic. A

late meeting for one of the cases. He'd changed his mind. Yeah, no reason at all for her to worry. The more time that passed, the more she had to fight the urge to call him. Or Petra. Or her mom. It was too quiet, too still, and that only made her more nervous.

He wouldn't have changed his mind. Not after everything they'd done and said to this point. Gael would have called her and let her know. He *should* have called her if he was going to be this late.

At ten after five, she was ready to take her things back upstairs, put on a sports bra and her granny panties, and watch reruns of *Grey's Anatomy* while drinking

wine. God, how pathetic a thought was that. But as she was mentally tracking down where her slob clothing was hiding, she heard a car pull into her driveway.

He'd come.

Thank God.

She wasn't sure if she should go out to meet him or wait for him to come into the house. *Take the initiative, girl. He needs to know you're serious.* Alice grabbed her bag and her keys, and stepped out into the warm evening air.

Gael hadn't gotten out of his car, and she couldn't quite see him through the windshield. Fumbling with her keys in the lock, she gave herself a few seconds

to pull her shit together before she took the final step and got into the car, heading off into the unknown.

“Okay. Let’s do this.”

Before she lost her nerve, Alice strode as quickly as she could over to the passenger side, and jumped into the car without looking.

“Hi there. I didn’t think you were...”

The words dried up in her mouth as she turned to see Gael sitting behind the wheel. Gone were his dress shirt, tie and suit pants. Instead he was wearing a tight black T-shirt and leather pants. That was...

“Wow.” Alice swallowed hard and tightened her grip on her bag. “Uh, hi.”

“Sir.”

Alice frowned. “Sorry?”

“From this moment on you are to call me *Sir*. You will do what I tell you to do. Do you remember your safeword?”

Gael was wearing leather. Alice swallowed again. “Red.”

“If you say *Red* at any point in the next three days, we stop. *Yellow*, and I know you need a break. You’re still permitted to ask questions, but there will be times when I won’t want you to talk. Listening and understanding sometimes can only come about in quiet moments. Do you understand?”

She was stunned by this sudden change from what she’d been expecting

and the current reality. “Yes.”

Gael reached over and grabbed her chin, forcing Alice to look him in the eye. “I didn’t hear you.”

In that moment, Alice began to understand what the next three days meant to him. He was risking not only the change to help save his family’s business, but he was putting his heart on the line. This wasn’t a game, or a whim and she needed to be careful.

“Yes, Sir.” Her voice took on a breathy quality. “If I say *Red*, then things stop. *Yellow* slows us. Questions can be asked. Sometimes I’ll need to be quiet.”

Gael relaxed his hold on her chin, lingering for a moment to caress her skin

before letting her go. “Good. We have a bit of a drive ahead of us. In that time I want you to think over your hard limits for our time together. The things you absolutely will not do. When I ask you, I want a list.”

He then faced the front, put the car into reverse, and took Alice toward the unknown.

How the hell was she supposed to come up with a list if she didn't know what her limits were? Or what he was planning on doing to her?

The one thing she was excellent at was digging up information. Taking her smartphone out of her purse, Alice continued her early research. Come hell

or high water, she was going to make the next three days memorable for both of them.

Even if the information she had to read made her question everything.

Yup, large butt plugs are going on the list. Alice turned her phone sideways.
Maybe.

Chapter Fifteen

Gael fought to keep his eyes on the road once they cleared the heavy traffic on the 401 and started heading south on the QEW. Their destination was a cottage in Niagara on the Lake, one that had everything he would need to ensure Alice would get the full sub experience.

Uncle Stephen had stared at Gael for several long minutes before agreeing to give him Friday off. He had no doubt that his uncle suspected there was something going on, but would wait until he had proof of Gael's crimes before

bringing them up. Despite looking for opportunities to find a way to renege on his deal to cosign the loan, Uncle Stephen couldn't go against basic employment rights, such as vacation time.

Gael was well aware that as far as his uncle was concerned, he was just as bad as his father. His mom hadn't told him everything that had gone down in the family when she'd agreed to marry his dad, but it was no secret that Uncle Stephen didn't approve.

Well fuck them. His parents were the happiest couple Gael had ever known. It was no one else's business what they did in the bedroom. Perhaps if his uncle

were more honest with himself and what he wanted in life, he wouldn't be on his third marriage.

Alice made a soft *huh* noise and clicked a few more buttons on her phone. She'd been engaged in her browsing from almost the moment they'd pulled away from her house. Gael had assumed she'd go down that route, and was pleased with his increasing ability to read her. The better he was at that meant the better he'd be at anticipating her needs. Pushing her beyond the limits of where she thought her body could go, to a place of bliss.

Based on the dark circles beneath her eyes, Gael could tell she'd had a rough

night. He'd had his own restless night, trying to work through the chaos that had become his carefully laid plan. Having this weekend with Alice would put his plan in danger. But for the first time in years, he wanted something for himself first. No, finding a partner who shared his particular kink in the bedroom hadn't been a priority for him. He had his choice of any sub he wanted at Wonderland any night of the week. If this had simply been about sex, he wouldn't have come within ten feet of Alice.

This wasn't about sex. This was something more.

And it scared the shit out of him.

The sun was still in the sky as they

turned onto the final leg of their journey. Alice had been a perfect sub, taking his order seriously and making sure she'd be able to fulfill his request. He'd watched her get like this before. That intense scrutiny she'd put against a problem, worming her way through mounds of information until she got to its heart. A swell of pride rolled through him as she put the same level of care into this task.

She wanted to make him happy. In turn, he wanted to blow her mind.

“We'll arrive in fifteen minutes.” His voice felt odd from not having been used for the past few hours. “For the next few minutes, let's make this Gael-and-Alice

time so there's no confusion about what either of us expect. Tell me your list."

Alice looked up at him and blinked with that doe-eyed way of hers. If she wasn't careful, Gael would have her sucking his cock in the car as they drove.

"Umm...okay." She clicked a few buttons on her phone. "Hard limits. No blood play. No scat or golden showers. That's just disgusting. No branding." She shuddered. "For now, I'm not comfortable having sex with anyone but you."

Gael saw the blush rise on her cheeks. "Easy enough. I don't intend on sharing you." That was a kink to explore when they were both more comfortable with

each other.

“Okay. Um, what else?” She scanned her document some more. “Anything with electricity scares the shit out of me, so none of that. I’m also terrified of needles. I think that’s it.”

She dropped the phone in her lap and grinned. Fuck she was too cute for her own good. And his.

Gael reached over and spanked her bare thigh.

“Ouch!”

“Here are my rules. If you break them there will be punishments. You are to address me as *Sir* or *Master Gael* at all times. At. All. Times. You will do what I say, how I say, and as quickly as I say.

There will be no arguments or I will punish you. If you don't move fast enough, I will punish you. If you refuse to do anything, I will punish you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir." He didn't need to look over to know she was aroused. Alice sucked in a breath. "What kind of punishments?"

His cock immediately reacted to her soft words. The timing for everything was coming out in his favor. It was time to put the next phase of his plan into play as they made the final turn toward their destination.

"Spankings, floggings, me bringing you to the brink of orgasm and holding

you there.” He squeezed her thigh before shifting his fingers upward. “Anything I want.”

Alice sucked in a breath, but she didn’t respond.

Gael-and-Alice time was over. “Take your shirt off.”

Alice’s surprised gasp was expected. As was her slight hesitation in carrying out his order.

“This is a private road. No one will stop us. Now take it off.”

This is it. Gael could only keep his eyes forward and wait as Alice began to shift in her seat and remove the blouse she’d put on that morning. The first sight of her round breasts sent another pulse

of blood pounding through his cock. He would need to take the edge off soon if he wanted to concentrate.

“Fold the shirt. You won’t need it again.”

She complied, folding the shirt with shaking hands. “Is there anything else, Sir?”

“Not yet.” The list he had was quite long. No need to scare her before he began. “Here we are.”

He’d always been amused when applying the term *cottage* to his family’s retreat. It was more upscale private home than rustic escape. The building had been in his mother’s family for years. It was secluded and had

everything he wanted for both Alice. He hadn't needed to explain anything to his mom when he'd called asking for the keys. She'd smiled as she handed them over to him.

The light wood and large windows gave the cottage a warm glow. The trees had been cleared out around the building, and a large wildflower garden put in place. Gael had always enjoyed the peace of the place as a child. The paved driveway led to the garage.

“I need to turn the security alarm off. Get out of the car and go to the front door.”

He didn't wait to see if she'd listen, instead getting out and heading over to

the keypad. The *thunk* of the car door shutting and the clicking of her shoes on the pavement had him smiling. Things were going the way he wanted. And if he played his cards right, Alice would be his for the keeping.

* * *

Alice stood by the door, nipples hard and face flushed, praying she wasn't making the biggest mistake of her life. She was standing outside topless waiting for a man who sounded more than a little excited about the idea of punishing her to let her in to a secluded cabin.

Alice was fairly certain that was the opening to a horror movie she'd seen

recently.

She couldn't deny that she was equally as excited about what the next few days would entail. The moment she saw Gael had gone into Dom mode, she couldn't keep her mind from their first night together at Wonderland. They hadn't had intercourse, but what had happened between them was far more intimate than the sex she'd had in the past. This wasn't about getting off. This had to do with knowing another person so well, you would do anything in the world for him.

Having spent the last three hours reading hadn't helped quiet her imagination either. Page after page on

the dynamics of power, sexual enticements, using pain as a means to reach pleasure—all information she had to read and do her best not to picture Gael doing these things to her body. She'd stopped caring after the first hour.

The fantasizing started at the hour-and-a-half mark.

Gael's footsteps echoed through the house, followed by the sounds of the door being unlocked. Opening the door revealed that he'd taken off his own shirt somewhere between the garage door and here. This was the first time she'd seen him in any state of undress. Hot damn, it was something she could get used to.

“Come inside. Take off your skirt and

shoes. Then get on your knees in the middle of the living room.”

Why thank you, Mr. Hernandez. I would love to see the inside of your little love nest. “Yes, Sir.”

Alice didn't know if it was the result of having spent so much time reading up on the workings of a BDSM relationship and her brief exposure to what could happen when she was at Wonderland, or if being out here alone with Gael helped her move past her mentally constructed barriers, but she didn't hesitate. Being naked in a strange environment didn't bother her. She'd had to do enough costume changes in hallways and backstages over the years to get past that

embarrassment. Even having Gael watching her every move as she complied with his wishes didn't freak her out.

None of this was setting off any of her internal alarms. For the first time in years, Alice felt a sense of calm wash over her as she kicked her feet free from her sandals and got to her knees on the hardwood floor. Wanting to do this right, she put her hands behind her back as he'd instructed her at Wonderland.

The challenge was turning her mind off.

She thought it had been hard to kneel in front of the cross at Wonderland, watching the couple as they went about

their business. But that had proven enough of a distraction she hadn't been aware of the pain in her knees, the cool air on her skin, the feeling of Gael's eyes watching her every move as she tried to settle in to the position. At least now she'd read enough to have a sense of what he was doing.

This was a test. A way of seeing what her buttons were and how best he could push them. He had her list of hard limits, and she knew he'd respect them. Everything was now in his hands, the control she'd freely given him.

She jumped when he reached out and ran his fingers along the back of her shoulders. The air in the cottage wasn't

cool, so the spread of goose bumps across her skin could only be blamed on Gael.

“There are so many things I plan to show you.” Something had changed in his voice as he spoke. The intensity was still there, but there was another note Alice hadn’t heard from him before.

“The next three days I will push you. You’ll know for certain if this is what you want. If I’m what you want.”

Oh she wanted alright...

“The first thing you need to learn is what I expect from you. Like at Wonderland, when we are in a room together you get on your knees. Sit back on your heels, spread your legs. You’re

gorgeous and I want to be able to see every inch of you.”

Alice shifted her body into his specified position, hating the way she felt exposed. “Yes, Sir.” God, she was so wet he’d easily be able to see.

“The second thing you need to realize is that this weekend is all for you. This is my chance to show you about my life, what I like sexually. But it’s more about us learning about each other. There will be times over the next three days where we won’t be in a scene. That’s what this is called. It will just be Gael and Alice. It will be our opportunity to see if we are compatible in other ways.”

The idea of sitting down and chatting

with Gael had always been one of her greatest desires. He'd fascinated her since his arrival at the firm, and that had only deepened in recent weeks.

“Right now we're going to start things off on familiar territory.”

Gael walked past her, over to the large black leather couch on the opposite side of the room. Funny, she hadn't even been aware of it when she'd first come in. He pushed it around so it now faced a large set of windows, and sat down on the middle cushion.

His naked chest and arms were a stark contrast to the black leather of both his pants and the cushions. Alice would have been content to simply stare at him

for hours. Gael had different ideas. Patting his lap, he beckoned her over.

“You haven’t followed my instructions as quickly as I expect. What did I say that would result in?”

“Punishment. Sir.” She’d liked his form of punishment the last time she’d been in this position. But unlike at Wonderland, there was no bench and no restraints to keep her in place. He wanted her across his lap, as if she were a naughty child who needed to be taught a lesson.

In a way, she was.

“Now, Alice.”

The sharp bite to his voice had her stumbling to her feet and walking over to

him as quickly as she could manage. Sure, nothing intimidating at all about scurrying around naked in an unfamiliar house. Everything status quo here, thanks for asking.

Stopping by his side, she hesitated. It was one thing to read about this online and how exciting it sounded to do. But to actually stretch across his lap to expose her naked ass for him to spank...

The last thing she wanted to do was push her luck so early on in their time together. So she took a deep breath, prayed she wouldn't look too awkward, and bent over his legs. Gael took over, helping her into a comfortable position. Her feet were still touching the floor,

though she was now bracing her hands on the opposite side. The blood had begun to rush to her face, making her head spin.

Whack!

Alice cried out at the unexpected force of his spank. Not only had he hit her far harder than he had their first time together, he hadn't said a word to her. The pain morphed into a strange heated burning until only a lingering vibration seemed to live on in her skin.

“I’m going to start with only ten.”

The second spank was to the opposite cheek, and no less forceful than the first. Alice clenched her teeth and did her best to keep her cries locked inside her.

“Every day I’m forced to watch this ass as you walk past me doing your job. Do you know how fucking hard it’s been to be so close to you and not touch?”

The third and fourth spans came in rapid succession, landing close together. Her ass had started to go a bit numb and the blood rushed to the area, heating everything. She wanted nothing more than to reach back with her hands to protect herself from further contact, but she needed the leverage to keep from landing on her head.

Talk about being between a rock and a hard place.

“Then you had to start with your flirting. Those looks you’d throw my

way, begging me to pay attention to you.” As he spoke, he caressed her skin with his fingertips, occasionally pinching as he went. “Did you know what you were doing to me? Answer me.”

“No, Sir. I didn’t think you’d even noticed.” If she had, Alice didn’t know what she would have done.

“I noticed.” Three more spanks, though not as hard as the first. “Of course I noticed.” Another pinch. “Every.” *Whack!* “Fucking.” *Whack!* “Day.”

“Gah!”

“That’s ten. You did well.” Gael maneuvered his hand between her legs, pushing her thighs wider. The first brush

of his fingers against her pussy chased away the last bit of Alice's control.

“Don't move or else I can't give you a treat.”

Right. Treats are good. Don't move.

With one smooth stroke, he pressed two fingers deep into her pussy. “Nice and wet. Your clit is so big right now.” He pinched the engorged flesh, sending a shudder through her. “It would be so easy to make you come.”

“Please. Sir.”

“Not yet.” Without any warning, he pulled her up so she was on her feet. The blood that had pooled in her head rushed south so quickly, Alice nearly lost her balance. Thankfully, Gael was there to

catch her. “Do you want your treat?”

Nodding only served to make things worse. When he guided her to the floor to take up a position between his legs, she was thankful.

“I’m going to let you suck me. If I like what you’ve done, then I might consider letting you come.”

Coming was a good thing. Alice lurched for the fly of his pants, only to have her hands batted away.

“I don’t trust you to be careful. Sit back.”

Forced to watch, Alice was sure to pay extra attention to him as he slowly popped each button of the fly. The head of his cock bounced free from its

confines, revealing that he too had gone without underwear. Shit, they could have had a ton of fun in the car if she'd known that.

Maybe on the way home.

She didn't need to be told to lean forward and run her tongue up the length of his shaft. The hand in her hair only confirmed he liked the way she sucked on his head, teasing the sensitive spot of his tip with her tongue. She went so far as to work her hand past the opening of the pants so she could scrape her nails across the small part of his balls that were exposed.

“Sir, would you take these off?”

“No. Make me come like this.”

Of course he wouldn't make things easier for her. She suspected as much as Gael liked being in control, he also enjoyed the prolonged tease. The more he made her work for things, the longer it would be before he found his own satisfaction.

Well, submissive or not, two could play at this game. Alice wanted to make him come as fast as she could, wring out every ounce of pleasure from his body until he was left with nothing but an empty and completely satisfied husk. She wrapped her hand around his shaft and started up a punishing rhythm with her tongue. Slowly at first, she increased the tempo with the suction, until she could

feel his legs shake beneath her.

“Stop.”

Fuck that.

“Alice...”

“No. Sir.”

He tried to tug her away by the hair, but she wouldn't relent. Soon the tugs matched her beat and it wasn't long before the taste of pre-come filled her mouth.

“Fuck!”

Come exploded across her tongue and she swallowed down every spurt he gave her. It shouldn't have felt as good as it had to push him the way she did. Following his commands and still making her own desires known. Maybe

this being a sub thing wouldn't be as scary as she'd first thought.

The grip in her hair tightened, until she was forced to look up into his less-than-amused expression.

Oh shit?

“Bad girl.”

Gael picked her up as if she weighed nothing and threw her down to the couch. He pulled her legs apart, cupping her inner thighs with each of his hands, exposing her to him once more.

“Bad girl.”

Heat from his mouth enveloped her clit as he sucked hard. The pressure and rush of pleasure made it difficult to breathe. With her mouth gaping, Alice

did her best to fight against the sudden sensual onslaught. He pressed three fingers into her pussy and curled them so they scraped against the top of her vagina. That was it—there was no way she'd be able to stop herself from coming.

The first waves of pleasure took away her vision. Her world became nothing more than the roll of release, the pain/pleasure mix as her sore ass was rubbing against the leather. When the sensations grew to be too much, she tried to push him away.

He wouldn't budge.

The pressure on her clit lessened for a moment, but the reprieve was short-

lived. Much as she'd done to him, he set up a rhythm, licking her clit as he fucked her with his fingers. This wasn't what she wanted. She would have preferred to feel that thick cock of his filling her, driving her hard into the floor until she screamed her release.

But she hadn't been a good girl, had she?

If this was more punishment, there were worse predicaments to have.

"Gael..." She carded her fingers through his hair, knowing he would do what he wanted to her. "Sir."

His growl echoed through her body, and he starting to increase the pace. Licking around her labia, he added

several random pinches to the insides of her thighs. The brief explosions of pain helped increase the pleasure. Within minutes, she could feel a second orgasm approaching.

“God.” She rolled her head side to side, knowing it was all too much. They’d never kissed, and here she was legs spread for a man she’d wanted to go out to supper with, talk, get to know before maybe getting to this stage.

Sex is the easy part.

Flailing, Alice lost control of her body as her pleasure surged inside her, cresting once more in a powerful rush. A scream ripped from her as she was torn apart from the inside out. All rational

thought was gone, and she instead existed in a world of pure sensation. But like all good things, the pleasure ebbed until she was left a sweaty, disheveled mess.

Gael slowly got to his feet, but Alice was barely conscious of his movements. Keeping her eyes open required too much effort, so she didn't even bother. Everything that had happened to her in the past two days, compounded by her lack of sleep and great orgasms, was more than she could handle.

“Alice?”

She should probably answer him. It no doubt went against one of his rules. *Fuck it*. Instead, she let out a sigh and let her

mind drift off to oblivion.

Chapter Sixteen

Gael sat outside on the back deck and watched the sunset. He'd had to go searching for a blanket when he realized Alice had fallen asleep. Although the warm July air would have been enough to keep her comfortable, he didn't want to risk her getting a chill.

That hadn't gone quite the way he'd intended. The plan had been to give her a quick spanking, have her suck him for a bit, then take her upstairs to the master bedroom where he would tie her up. His intent was to see how she'd respond to

him, his demands, and encourage her where he could. He hadn't expected her to be such a confident and pushy bottom. Far from the timid and confused woman who'd followed him into Wonderland, this Alice knew what she wanted.

And yet he suspected things weren't going to pan out the way either of them expected.

The slide of the patio door being pushed open drew his attention, but he didn't turn around. Alice stepped past his chair so she could lean against the railing. She'd wrapped the blanket around her shoulders, but her ass was visible from beneath the fringe.

"This place is beautiful."

The backyard had been designed to require only a little maintenance as his parents couldn't always come up. The in-ground pool had been an addition in recent years, but the small row of grapevines that edged the yard had been there since before he'd been born.

"I loved coming here in the summers. Mom always told me I was too serious, but when I was up here I felt as though I could relax."

"I can see why." She looked over her shoulder at him. "Is this Gael-and-Alice time?"

"Yes." Being himself with her made him feel more uncomfortable than it should. "I was talking with my mom last

night. She said they might be selling this place to help keep the business going.”

Alice turned around. “Oh no. That’s terrible.”

The thought of losing the cottage had made him ill. “I promised her it wouldn’t come to that. I’d sell my home first and give them the cash. I can always rent.” His parents had given him the initial down payment, so for him, it was the only fair thing to do.

“But your house—”

“Isn’t as important as this place. That’s just a building. This is home.”

Alice looked at him for several more moments before turning back around.

“You’re a good man, Gael.”

Needing to get away from the sudden weight of the moment, he stood up. “I imagine you’re hungry. I brought some groceries. I put them in the kitchen while you were napping.”

“Sorry about that.” Her blush was as endearing as ever. “It’s been a while since I’ve come that hard. I’m slightly terrified about having actual intercourse with you.”

“I’d hate to disappoint you.” The rumble of Alice’s stomach reached him. “Let’s get some food.”

She padded behind him, stopping to look at things as they went. Gael turned on the lights and immediately went to the fridge. “I have eggs and ham. I brought

some rolls, but I didn't grab bread."

"That sounds good." She slid onto one of the stools at the island. "I didn't do things right. Did I?"

"You were fine."

"For a lawyer, you're a terrible liar."

He chuckled. Alice was one of the few people who could actually make him laugh that way. "I'm on vacation."

"Then tell me the truth."

"It's not that simple."

"Then make it simple. I'm still trying to wrap my head around everything here."

The butter sizzled in the pan for a few seconds before he cracked four eggs.

"For me, part of the appeal is the

planning. The control comes from the preparations.”

“And I threw off the plan.”

“You’re a pushy bottom.”

“Is that bad? I’m pretty sure I read somewhere that was bad.”

“It depends on what your idea of good and bad is. And no, you weren’t bad. You surprise me, which hasn’t happened in a long time.”

“I’m glad.” She smiled down at the counter.

She wasn’t like any submissive he’d spent time with before. He could simply write that off as having known her outside of the club. But watching her toy with the salt and pepper shakers on the

counter, fascinated by the way her delicate fingers played with them, he realized it was more than that. Alice spoke to something in his soul.

No one had ever done that before.

The eggs cooked quickly, pulling his attention away from her for a few minutes while he finished with the plate. “Here we go. I promise I’ll make something better tomorrow.”

“Thanks.” Alice pushed the egg around for a minute, toying with the unbroken soft yolk before she stabbed it with her fork. “We haven’t had intercourse yet.”

“No, we haven’t. There is a lot more to sex than fucking.”

“I know that. We haven’t kissed either.”

A prickle marched its way down his spine. “Kissing is what people in relationships do.”

“And you’re not looking for a relationship.”

“I wasn’t. Before.”

Alice stared at him for several heartbeats before scooping up the remains of her egg and swallowing them down. “So what do you have planned for us for the rest of the night?”

Originally, he’d intended to reintroduce her to his flogger. She’d responded incredibly well to that at Wonderland. Maybe there was a better

option.

Abandoning his food half-eaten, he went in search of his bag of tricks. “I’ll be right back.”

* * *

Alice watched Gael leave, her gaze drifting to his ass and the sinful way the leather hugged him. She’d been unable to shake his words from her mind. *I wasn’t. Before.* Did that mean that things had changed for him? That he was willing to risk getting the loan for his parents, simply so he could be with her?

She had occasionally been accused of being self-centered in the past, even when that was far from true. Some men

were attracted to her looks and would do some outrageous things to make an impression. Gael had never fallen into that category. She couldn't believe that despite having known each other for several months now, he was ready to throw everything away just to be with her.

I wasn't. Before.

Gael's return was punctuated by a weird metallic clunking sound. As he emerged from the hallway, she saw he now had a large black duffel bag slung over his shoulder. *That had potential.*

"Come with me."

"Are we back to Sir and sub?"

Because I don't want to get in trouble

needlessly.”

He smiled again. Damn, he looked good. “We’re still Gael and Alice. Come with me.”

The main living room of the cottage was now lit, highlighting exactly how beautiful this place was. Far from any cottage she’d ever seen in her life, this home would have looked perfectly in place in any of the better neighborhoods in Toronto. The oak staircase was snuggled against the side of the wall. As they went upstairs, Alice squeezed her toes against the polished wood, enjoying the way it felt.

“We’re staying in here.” Gael pushed the French doors open and flicked on the

light to the master bedroom. “The sheets are fresh.”

Alice clutched the blanket around her naked body. Although she wasn’t cold in the least, she was ready to cover herself up. There was such a thing as being too naked. “Mind if I grab a robe?”

“Yes I do.” He threw the duffel bag to the bed.

“I thought you said we weren’t being Sir and sub right now?”

“We’re not.” He looked her over from top to bottom. “Or else I’d be spanking your ass for still having that blanket around you.”

Alice gasped. Her ass was still a bit tender from before. There was no way

she'd be able to handle another one of his *punishments* so soon. "Thanks for that."

Apparently, it wasn't as big a deal as he'd made it out to be, because he'd turned his attention to the bag, taking items out and placing them on the bed.

"So...what's in the bag?"

"A lesson."

"Kinky lesson?" This might be fun.

Gael didn't respond, but she could make out his smirk. *Too handsome for his own good.*

With nothing else to do, she sat down on the corner of the mattress and watched him unpack his implements of doom into neat rows. Leather, metal—

was that a dildo? No, a butt plug. She'd seen more than a few pictures of those in the past two days. And there was one in real life. Yes, it did look as big and painful as she thought it would be.

Woohoo!

Tossing the now-empty bag to the floor, Gael finally turned his attention to her. "Welcome to Kink 101."

"Thank you, Sir."

He growled. It was kind of fun being a pushy bottom.

"I thought you might appreciate knowing what some of my favorite toys and tools were to use before I subjected you to them." He picked up a large flat paddle that looked as if it was meant to

take bread out from an oven. “This is a pretty basic paddle.”

He tossed it back on the mattress and reached for the next item. “This is a flogger. The same one I used on you at Wonderland.”

She had fond memories of that. “Can I see it?”

Gael handed it over. The leather tendrils were soft against her fingers. It was hard to believe that something so delicate could bring such pain in the hands of the right person. Pushing the blanket away from her thigh, she tried striking her skin.

“It’s all in the wrist.” Gael moved so he stood beside her, placing his hand on

her wrist. He pulled her arm up, then just as quickly, snapped it forward. The leather stung as it connected with her skin. “See.”

Dammit, her pussy was getting wet again. “What else do you have here?”

He didn’t release his hold on her immediately, taking an extra moment to run his thumb across the back of her hand. “Dildos, butt plug, handcuffs, rope, nipple clamps, blindfold and a ball gag.”

Alice hated how easily she reacted to his proximity. He’d become a drug to her, and it was going to be a painful withdrawal when the time came. She needed to regain some control over her

libido if she was going to survive this weekend with her soul intact.

“Rope? Were you a Boy Scout?”

He picked up the bundle, unraveling it until it covered many of the other items on the bed. “I was. I excelled with my knot badge too.”

Think boring thoughts, girl. Beige pants, dirt, empty rooms that don't have rope used for tying you up with. “So you tie your women up to chairs?”

“Not my women. My subs. And I don't need a chair.”

Helping her to her feet, Gael took the blanket she'd been clutching and let it drop to the floor. “Arms up.”

Alice was embarrassed how quickly

she responded to his command, shocked at how seamlessly they'd shifted from Gael and Alice, to Sir and sub. And that shift had indeed taken place. Something in the air sizzled between them, a spark that ignited a heat that would consume them both.

Gael passed the nylon length around her chest, above her breasts, twice, before repeating the action beneath her bust. Within seconds, her nipples were peaked and her skin tingled. Things only got worse when he looped the rope between her breasts, securing the two parts together.

“This type of binding is simple enough. It was one of the first things I

learned when I became fascinated with ropes and suspension.”

“You took a class?” Dear God, she hadn’t considered there were actual classes you could take to learn this sort of thing.

“There are a variety of get-togethers in the city. One or two a month where people can go and learn from people who have mastered certain techniques. Jon isn’t a Dom, but he loves tying women up. It’s practically artwork for him. He spent a lot of time teaching me the basics.”

He hadn’t been idle as he’d been speaking. The remaining length of rope had been working into a series of knots

that now dangled freely from the binding below her breasts. He dropped it so the rope now teased her pubic hair. Alice wanted nothing more than to move, force him to do something with this, do something to *her*.

Holy hell, he was turning her into some sort of sex fiend.

Resisting the urge to squirm, Alice let out a breath and met his gaze. “What would you normally do next?”

His eyebrow lifted into an elegant curve. “Nipple clamps. But only after I took the rope between your legs and bound your hands behind your back.”

“Between my legs?” Her heartbeat had picked up into a full-scale riot,

pounding in her chest. “How would that work? I mean, I’m curious. From an educational perspective.”

“Educational?” He nodded once. “It’s always wise to be well educated.”

Without being told, Alice moved her legs apart to give him room to work. Gael didn’t give her exactly what she wanted, and passed the rope between her legs without touching her skin.

“I then loop it beneath the binding around your chest. Normally I would have added additional rope around your waist, but I think you get the idea.”

“And my hands?”

“Again, I normally have more rope to work with. However...” He turned her

around, his large hands on her waist.
“Hands behind your back.”

Her whole body shook, but whether it was from nerves or anticipation, she didn't have a clue.

“There's a lot that can be done to a person bound like this. You can be suspended from the ceiling with the right rigging. I can lead you around like a pet, showing everyone my property.” Gael tugged hard, securing her hands at the small of her back. There was no way Alice would be able to get free. She was at his mercy. “The knots can be strategically placed on your clit. I can tug on them, teasing you for hours if I want.”

Shit. “But we’re not being Sir and sub right now.”

He bit down on her shoulder, sucking the abused skin afterward. “Says who?”

Alice closed her eyes and shivered.

“I changed my mind.” Gael nipped again, harder this time.

“But your plan—”

“Was to seduce you. To teach you. To fuck you.”

“Oh.”

“BDSM isn’t simply about spankings and floggings. What’s it about, Alice?”

Her mouth had gone dry as he ran his tongue up the side of her neck to her earlobe. Biting down, Gael chuckled.

“Answer me.”

“Power.” The word exploded from her. “And control.”

“Who has the power, Alice?”

“I do.” It was important for her to remember that.

“And who has the control?”

“You. You have it.” Equally important.

Gael stepped back and gave her a soft push. Caught off guard, Alice landed on her side on the mattress, giggling in shocked surprise. Somehow she managed to miss the remaining items on the bed. Gael kicked his pants off while she watched. It was the first time she’d seen him fully naked, and she more than appreciated the view. Instead of joining

her, he went over to the abandoned duffel bag and retrieved one final item.

A box of condoms.

She groaned. “Yes, please. Sir.”

Lying on her side with her hands tied behind her back made it difficult for her to shift around. Squirming only served to pull the rope tighter, putting additional pressure on her pussy without giving her the satisfaction she craved. It wouldn't be enough to simply come this time. She wanted Gael. All of him.

“I can control you easily with the rope.” He tugged on the nylon that bound her hands. “I can move you any way I want to ensure both our pleasure.”

The sound of a condom being torn

open had her groaning once more. Yes, this was what she'd needed, to feel the press of his body against hers, to feel him claim her in the most intimate of ways. Alice scissored her legs, trying to give him the room he'd need to press his cock into her.

“I don't think so.” His large hands were once more on her body, pulling her up until she was on her knees, ass in the air and face to the mattress. The rope now pressed directly on her clit and covered her vagina. “Yes, this is what I want.”

* * *

Instead of moving the rope away from

her pussy, Gael pressed his fingers against her ass. She tensed, announcing to him that she'd never had anal sex before. He'd have to go slow, be gentle long enough for her to relax, before he could make this good for both of them

“Relax.” He stroked her back, loving the feel of her soft skin.

She let out a breath.

“This is about trust as well as control. You have to trust that I know what I'm doing. That I'm going to make you feel wonderful. I might use pleasure or I might use pain. Either way, you'll love it.” He reached for the bottle of lube that was nestled beside the nipple clamps. She was still so new at all of this, the

last thing he wanted to do was hurt her.

What he wasn't expecting was for his hands to shake as he squeezed the lube onto his fingers. In the past there'd always been a rush for him when he was with a sub, but not this overwhelming need to care for, to consume. He wanted Alice in a way he'd never experienced before. Was willing to sacrifice everything for the opportunity to have her as his.

It was too close to how he'd felt with Tina. After her he'd cut himself off from the idea of having a relationship with a sub. It was one of the reasons he'd needed to ensure they had Gael-and-Alice time, not just Sir and sub—to give

himself a chance to mentally regroup and catch his breath. If he gave everything to Alice and she rejected him, he'd lose a piece of his heart.

Alice moaned as he continued to work her body. He added another finger as he grabbed hold of the rope and tugged, increasing the pressure on her clit.

“Fuck!” Her body shuddered.

“Eventually.” He clamped down on his racing emotions and focused on the task at hand.

Sweat broke out across her back, and her toes curled against the comforter. She couldn't fight him, resist, do anything to stop him. He had no doubt her mind was spinning as she tried to

come to grips with everything. If this had been a sub at Wonderland, Gael would have pushed her hard and fast. He'd have been able to remain detached, almost clinical in his approach. But he clung to every hitch of Alice's breath, needing to make this good for her. He petted her skin, whispered his encouragement, until he felt her body relax beneath his touch.

"That's my girl." He tugged the rope again. "You're being so good for me."

Gael withdrew his fingers, but he didn't give her much of a reprieve. Three hard spanks landed on her ass; the force of them drove her face farther into the comforter. Alice opened her mouth

and her moans too flowed freely.

“I’m going to fuck your ass.” He squeezed her cheek hard. “You’re not allowed to come until I tell you to.”

“Please, Sir.”

He continued to pull and stretch her ass, adding more lube as he went until he was certain she would accept his cock with few problems. Still, when he finally got behind her, her entrance felt tight. The skin stretched open to accept him, filling her at the same time the weight of his body pulled the rope even tighter against her pussy. The pressure was consuming, the way her body drew him in intoxicating. He’d never get enough of her. Never. He’d come here

with the intention of introducing her to BDSM. What he hadn't expected was to be the one falling in love.

Love?

Fuck.

“Sir?” Alice gasped. Gael swallowed past the sudden tightness in his throat.

“No coming until I tell you to. Understand?”

“Mmm.”

Another hard slap. “Understand?”

“Yes, Sir.”

With each thrust into her ass, he had to fight his body's desire to come. To distract himself, he increased the frequency of his tugs on the ropes, matching the pace of his thrusts. Alice

was moaning uncontrollably now, her body shaking as she drew closer to her release.

Shit, she really was going to come soon. So was he for that matter.

“No.” She started muttering. “Won’t.”

“That’s my girl. Fight it off. Don’t let it win.”

Gael ran through as many of the Canadian legal statutes he could remember. It worked for a few minutes, until Alice started thrusting back against his body. It drove him deeper into her ass, the muscles squeezing so tightly around him he could barely breathe

“Gael. Too much.”

He landed another spank on her ass.

“Sir.”

“Sir! Please. Need to come.”

“No.”

“Please! I can’t...”

“Just hold on, baby.”

Gael didn’t slow down, crying out as he came hard. His cock pulsed inside her body, matching the pounding of his heart and the silent chant of *mine* ringing in his head. After an eternity, his pleasure subsided, leaving him wrung out as much emotionally as he was physically.

He needed to show her, prove to her what she meant to him. Even if he couldn’t say the words.

Gael released his hold on the rope

and slipped from her body slowly.

“Don’t move.”

He got up from the bed and went over to the ensuite to quickly clean himself

Upon his return, he released the ropes that bound her hands behind her back, taking a few moments to rub her wrists and get the circulation flowing once more. Carefully, he moved her onto her back, finally able to look into her eyes for the first time since they’d begun.

Unable to look away, he pushed her thighs up and apart, so her knees were dangerously close to her armpits.

Reaching for another condom, Gael looked over every inch of her body, making note of everything. The flush

across her breasts, the rapid in-out of her breathing, the faraway look in her eyes. He'd done that to her, took her to the edge of bliss.

Now it was time to push her over.

Fresh condom now in place, he shoved the rope away so it wouldn't impede them. "Not until I say."

Alice swallowed hard and nodded.

In one stroke, he filled her pussy with his hard length. For the first time in his life, it felt right, as though he'd reached a homecoming he hadn't realized he'd been looking for.

Gael held his position until her breathing slowed. He wouldn't be able to hold her here for long. He cupped her

inner thighs with his hands and held them wide. Leaning into her he started a steady pace. Her arousal coated his cock, her thighs, clung to her pubic hair. He felt her losing control of her body, unable to stop what was happening. God, he didn't want her to. He was ready to see her, the unguarded look on her face that would let him read her soul. To know if she could be his, if he would fit into her life.

Gael reached for her clit and pressed down on the hood. Alice opened her mouth to scream as Gael pulled out of her body. Her eyes grew wide as her orgasm exploded from her, sending her come squirting from her body. This was

Alice, stripped bare for him to see. She was beautiful. Even after her orgasm subsided, and her body continued to tremble as she drifted off to sleep, Gael couldn't look away.

Despite everything—his obligations, his family, his career—he knew this: Alice White was going to be his.

Chapter Seventeen

The next three days were little more than a hazy blur of sex, food and inappropriate conversations. Alice had learned things about Gael she would never have guessed in a thousand years. He was scared of heights—sorry, uncomfortable in high locations. God forbid he admit to being scared about anything. He hated spinach, loved brussels sprouts, and preferred reading to television.

Those moments of conversation came between rounds of imaginative sex.

She'd never look at kitchen utensils in quite the same way again, that was certain. And although she was more sexually satisfied now than any time previously in her life, Alice kept coming back to those conversations, needing to have more of them. Learn more about *him*.

Currently, she was wearing the nipple clamps as she made them each a sandwich for a snack. Fucking for two days straight was hard work, and she was eating more than she normally did. Petra would be thrilled if she saw the food Alice had consumed. No dieting allowed when Gael was such an amazing chef. As she reached for the

mayo, the chain between her breasts pulled, sending a jolt of pain through the oversensitive flesh. He said she'd grow to love these—she still wasn't convinced.

They'd decided to head home around four o'clock. That would get them back to Toronto before it was too late, which would give Alice time to recover. She'd wanted to discuss about what was going to happen between them once they returned to reality, but Gael wasn't ready to go there yet.

He'd have to sooner or later, because there was no way Alice would be able to pretend that this weekend hadn't happened. She was the emotional

equivalent of a billboard, and it wouldn't take long for the people at the office to know there was something going on between them.

Petra would know something was up the second she laid eyes on her. God, Petra was likely to kill her for abandoning her friend in her time of need. Not that Alice was too worried. After her chat with Darcy at the coffee shop, she had no doubts that Petra was in good hands. Sure, she'd promised Gael she'd keep her cell phone turned off, but maybe she should check to see if there were any messages. They were heading home in a few hours anyway.

Finishing the sandwiches, she put

them both on a plate and snagged her phone from her purse as she walked by. She stopped halfway through the living room when she realized there were ten messages there for her. She never had that many unless there was a problem.

The first one was from Carmella, telling her to enjoy her time off and that she'd have to tell her all about it on Monday. The next four were from her mother.

“Alice, I need you to come up here.”

“Alice, where are you? I know you weren't happy with me, but I need you to come to Barrie.”

“Honey? Are you home?”

“Baby, I think there's a problem.”

Alice dropped the plate when she heard the fourth message. “Hello, Miss White, this is the emergency room at the Royal Victoria hospital in Barrie. Your mother was brought in this morning and has been asking for you. Please contact us at—”

“Alice?” She looked up to see a naked Gael standing on the step above her. He reached out and cupped her cheek. “What’s wrong?”

She didn’t know what to say to him. Everything had tilted on its side, nothing making sense. How could she explain that she’d ignored her mom’s complaints of not feeling well, chalking them up to nothing more than her looking for a way

to keep Alice close? He wouldn't understand the confusion and guilt, the sickening dread that now filled her stomach. So she said the first thing that came to mind.

“Red.”

He took the phone from her hand and replayed the message. His gaze never left hers, even when he ended the call. “Alice, I want you to go sit on the couch. I'll get your things and I'll take you home.”

Numb, she did as he told her. Her mom was sick, had been in the hospital for over a day all alone, waiting for Alice to come. Shouldn't she have known that there'd been a problem? Why

hadn't she listened?

“Alice, you need to get dressed.”

Gael stood there with her clothing. She'd gotten so used to being naked the past few days, she'd forgotten about them. “Oh.”

“I need to take those clamps off. I'm sorry, this might hurt a bit.”

Under normal circumstances, it might have been painful, the rush of blood back into the tips of her nipples. But she'd grown so numb, she was beyond noticing. Or caring.

It's the least I deserve.

With her bundled into the car, she watched Gael turn on the alarm and march back to the car. “Get some sleep.

It's a long drive to Barrie."

Whoa. "What?"

"You need to get to your mom. There's no sense in detouring to Toronto. I'll take you."

"I can't ask you to do that."

"You're not." He turned his attention to the road. "So you might as well sleep."

It was now easy for her to pick out when he'd slipped into Dom mode. The set of his chin and the tight grip on the wheel were more than enough to let her know that there was no point in arguing. Not that she had the energy anyway. Alice turned on her side and looked out the window at the passing scenery,

wondering if her mom was going to be okay.

And if she'd ever be lucky enough to come back here with Gael.

* * *

The adrenalin Gael had been running on had been fully consumed an hour before they arrived at the hospital. The remainder of the trip had been fueled by black coffee and indigestion. Alice had barely spoken, though he was fairly certain she'd slept at least a part of the way. He was well aware of her guilt over being away while her mom had been sick, though there wasn't a damned thing he could do to make things better

for her. He'd called ahead to let the staff know Alice was en route. But beyond her soft, "Thank you," she said nothing else.

He wasn't used to feeling this helpless. Although not all of his cases had the result he desired, at least he had the benefit of knowing he'd done the best job possible. That he'd taken into account all angles. Somehow he'd failed Alice by not paying enough attention to her relationship with her mother. He'd simply taken advantage of the situation when it had presented itself. Now he needed to do whatever it took to make amends and fix things between Alice and her mother.

Pulling into the hospital parking lot gave him a renewed sense of purpose. He'd help her with this, try to make things right. Alice was the type of person to take everything on herself. He'd learned enough about her to know she needed his help.

Once the car was stopped, he leaned over and gave her shoulder a gentle squeeze. "Alice?"

"I'm awake."

"We're here."

"I know." But she still didn't move.

For the first time since being with her, Gael wanted nothing more than to take her in his arms and simply hold her. No sexual connotations, no possessive need,

nothing beyond wanting to give her comfort. He'd never felt like this with any of his previous subs. Hell, he'd dated enough over the years to know his attraction to Alice had gone well beyond his normal attraction to women.

He was developing feelings for her at warp speed.

Now was not the time to figure out his emotional state. Alice needed him to be the stable rock, her Dom who would get her through this. They'd figure everything else out later. He got out of the car, and walked over to her side. When he opened the door, she looked up at him with those big red-rimmed hazel eyes of hers. He held out his hand and

waited.

“I’m coming with you.”

Alice accepted the offer for what it was, reached out and took his hand.

“You don’t have to.”

He snorted, shut and locked the car.

“Let’s find your mom.”

The hospital was still a hub of activity even this late into visiting hours. They were quickly given directions to her mom’s room and Gael took the lead. He wasn’t sure what he should do beyond being here for Alice, so as they approached the room, he took her hand and gave it a squeeze. “Do you have any idea what might be wrong?”

“Not really. She said she’d been

having problems sleeping recently. Mom always seems to have a problem these days. I used to brush most of them off as her trying to guilt me into moving home with her.”

Gael squeezed her hand tighter. “Is she that sick?”

“I didn’t think so. I don’t know anymore.”

Slowing down, Gael tugged Alice’s hand. “Is there a chance she’s doing this to get your attention?”

“What?”

“I don’t know your mother, but from what you’ve told me it’s something she might do.”

“I can’t believe...” Alice shook her

head. “No, she wouldn’t do something like that.” Alice tugged her hand free from his.

There was only one way she’d know for certain. “Let’s go see your mom.”

The sound of a television came through the door. Stepping inside, they passed by the first bed in the semiprivate room. Gael stayed a step behind Alice as she pulled the curtain back. “Mom?”

“Well. It’s about time you showed up.”

Gael would have said something to the woman, except he caught sight of her face. She was sporting a bruise along her cheek and her bottom lip was swollen. Alice gasped and ran to sit by

her mother's side.

“What happened?”

Her mom ran her hands across her lap, smoothing out the blankets. “I fell.”

“Did you slip?”

“No. I passed out in the bathroom and hit my head.”

“Oh my God. Are you okay?”

“It's a little late to be asking me that, isn't it? Who's he?”

Gael stepped further into the makeshift curtain room. “Gael Hernandez.”

“A lawyer, I assume.” She looked him up and down. Gael had no doubt she could mentally calculate how much his clothing cost down to the penny. “Is he

the reason why you didn't come when the hospital called? Did he try to convince you that your mother wasn't as important as what he wanted?"

"Mom! We were out of town and I didn't have my cell turned on. I'm really sorry."

Gael wasn't the type to be intimidated by another person, but Alice's mom was making a valiant effort to do just that. Her glare would have made the strongest of men squirm, something Gael was trying to avoid.

Alice was either oblivious to the death glares her mother was shooting his way, or she'd simply chosen to focus on the matter at hand, knowing he was

capable of looking after himself.

“Why are you still here?” She fussed with the blanket for a minute before taking one of her mom’s hands in hers.

“Are they running some tests?”

“Because of my history and how hard I hit my head, they want to make sure I didn’t form a blood clot.” Her mom returned the squeeze. “I will need some help when they send me home.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll call Carmella in the morning and tell her I need to take the rest of my vacation.”

Gael would do anything for his parents, especially if one of them were hurt. Alice wanting to take a few weeks off to stay with her mom made sense. But

the hackles on the back of his neck stood up when he saw the older woman smile at her daughter. It was a look he'd seen many times by Doms at the club. It was a look of victory.

“It will be so nice to have you here. Maybe I'll be able to convince you to be able to stay longer. Maybe a month.”

“Unfortunately, we need Alice's keen eye back at Gibson, Murphy and Dow. The place would fall apart without her.” It was more than a bad idea to get in the middle of this, but he couldn't help it. Alice was *his*. They were both figuring out exactly what that meant, how things would work, but she was his. He wouldn't lose her before their time

together began.

“What?” Alice was on her feet again.

“Can I see you out in the hallway?”

“No.”

“Gael—”

“I can let the office know you need your vacation time. But I’m sure two weeks will be enough to help get your mom back on her feet.”

“Are you trying to tell me what to do?” With her gaze narrowed and her chin lowered, Alice looked like a she-wolf ready to pounce. “Are you seriously trying to put our few days together ahead of my mom’s health?”

“You know I’m not.” He was trying to save her from herself.

Alice dropped her mom's hand.
“Hallway.” This time she didn't wait for him to argue.

Fine, she wanted to play things this way.

The second the door to the room shut, Gael crossed his arms and widened his stance. “Your mother is trying to manipulate you. If you weren't so emotional at the moment, you'd see that.”

“I'm well aware of what she's trying to do. That doesn't change the fact that she's sick in the hospital. If there was nothing wrong with her, they wouldn't keep her here.” Alice mirrored his stance, and for the first time he wasn't

able to see the gentle woman he'd come to know. "Besides, she's been trying to manipulate me for years. It hasn't worked then and it's not working now. If I stay or go will be my choice."

"Your choice. Fine. I'm here to help you as a friend and a lover. Sometimes helping means telling you the things you don't want to hear. You know she wants you to come live with her. To give up your life. Are you willing to walk away from everything you've struggled to build the moment things look bad?"

She stepped forward and took him by the arm. "Please leave."

It would have been easy for him to resist her, but there was little point. If

Alice didn't want him here, then he'd go. Better to cut his losses before things went beyond the point of no return.

Still, he couldn't stop himself from taking Alice and pressing her to the wall, trying one more time to get through her guilt and fear. "Don't do this."

"Do what?" She stuffed a strand of hair behind her ear. "Stay and help my sick mother?"

"Make a decision while you're emotional that you will regret later. Take your vacation time, help your mom. But don't make any other plans until you've had time to think them over."

Alice shoved past him and went back inside the room, leaving Gael alone in

the hallway.

Well. That was that.

Ignoring the ache in his chest, he pulled his keys from his pocket and went off in search of the cashier to pay for his parking. If he got on the road now, he'd be back to Toronto before midnight.

Alice was clearly where she wanted to be.

Chapter Eighteen

Alice sat on the back steps of her mom's house trying to contemplate her escape. She'd brought her mom home the next morning with only a brief detour to the store so Alice to pick up some essentials, once the doctors had been able to confirm she was clear of any clots. They'd connected the fainting spell to her mother's insomnia and her two skipped meals. Relief wasn't a strong enough descriptor for what Alice felt when they were finally able to leave. Her mom was going to be okay.

For the first four days, they'd gotten along wonderfully. So much so, Alice thought the idea of moving back home wasn't so bad. There were a few law offices around town where she might be able to get some temp work, get her name out there. Worst case, she could keep her job at Gibson, Murphy and Dow and commute to Toronto. She wouldn't be the first to do it.

It wasn't until her mother invited Gwen and her son Kevin the dentist over for supper that things started to go downhill. Alice should have known this time would come sooner or later. She remembered meeting Gwen during a few of her visits, but it was the first time

she'd been introduced to Kevin. He was a nice enough man, good looking, polite. He would stand up whenever she came into the room, would pull her chair out for her to help her sit. Hell, he even offered to do the dishes with her.

It wasn't until they were side by side, hands wet and coated in bubbles that they had a chance to talk. Kevin plucked a plate from the rack and started to dry it. "I get the impression our mothers are trying to set us up."

"They've been pretty obvious about the whole thing. Sorry about that."

He smiled. It was a nice smile, but it lacked a certain devilish charm she now looked for. "No worries. To be honest,

I'm not looking to get into a relationship right now."

I want you to know that I'm not looking for a relationship. Not now. Probably not ever.

"My divorce is still pretty fresh, and despite what mother thinks, getting back out there isn't what I need. I hope you're not offended?"

She forced a smile. "Hell no. I'm not really looking for something myself."

"I thought so. You have that look about you. Like you're trying to forget someone."

Setting the plate back down in the water, Alice turned to face him. "You're very perceptive."

“I’m familiar with what heartbreak looks like. Bad breakup?”

“More of a breakup before we had a chance to see where it could go. We were just figuring things out when Mom fell.”

“Well then, you still have hope. Once you head home you can try again.”

The conversation had moved on to other topics, but Alice’s mind had latched on to that tiny thread of hope. Could they try again? It had only been two weeks; though Alice hadn’t spoken to Gael. Carmella had checked in a few times, reassuring Alice that she could take the time she needed to make sure her mom was okay. But there’d been

nothing from him.

Not that she'd left him any reason to call.

After that her mom had jumped into full matchmaking mode. She would leave real estate books lying around, opened on pages of homes close to hers. She started telling people they met that this was her daughter, oh and she might be moving home. *Yes, I'm so happy to have her back with me.*

It quickly grew to be too much for Alice. Gael had been right back at the hospital. She'd been running on guilt and fear and had been in no condition to be making life-altering choices. What she needed to do was to make sure her mom

would be fine, then go home. Back to the life that waited for her.

“What are you doing out here?” The bang of the screen door echoed as her mother came out onto the small landing. “It’s going to rain.”

“The breeze is nice. It’s been a hot few days.”

“Alice, what’s wrong? You haven’t been yourself all day. All week for that matter.”

The problem with contemplating escape was that eventually, a person either had to put her plan in action, or else give up and accept her fate.

“I love you, Mom.” She looked up into the concerned face of the woman

who'd given so much to her. "You know that, right?"

"And I love you. Now what's this all about?"

"I think I'm going to head home tomorrow."

Rather than fly into a tirade of reasons Alice needed to stay with her, her mom nudged her over and sat down on the step beside her. She took Alice's hand and gave it a soft squeeze. "Okay."

Alice frowned as she cocked her head. "That's it?"

"Well I'm not going to lock you in the basement, if that's what you mean."

"No, but you're not upset that I want to go?"

Her mom smiled. It wasn't one of the ones she normally put on when she was trying to impress another person. This one was smaller, more contained, and put a soft spark in her eyes. "I would be ecstatic if you told me you wanted nothing more than to live with me for the rest of my life. But I'm not a fool. I can see how being here with me is making you miserable. I...I'm sorry for that."

"I'm not miserable—"

"Don't lie to your mother."

"Sorry."

Her mom sighed. "I'm selfish. When your father left us, you became my whole world. I promised you I would give you a special life. I'd make you feel like a

princess instead of poor little Alice whose bastard father walked out on her. When I started getting your modeling jobs, I thought that was the way to do it, while being able to keep you with me.”

“I’m sorry you’re lonely.”

“It’s my fault. I’m more than capable of making friends. I simply chose not to. I realize now that I’ve been pushing you away as I tried to bring you closer.”

“I want to spend time with you, Mom. But I’m happy with my life. I love my job, my friends. I’ve offered to help you find a place in Toronto so you can be closer.”

“Too noisy. And I love my house. No, I think it’s best for me to stay here and

you to live there. But you need to promise me you'll visit more."

"I promise."

"Good." She patted Alice's lap.

"Now, have you spoken to that man of yours?"

There was something about the way she said *man* had had Alice giggle. "I take it you're not a fan of Gael."

"He had that same look about him that your father did. Always needing to be in charge. You should stay away from men like that. And really, three days of sex? That's a bit excessive."

"Mom!"

"Not that I can tell you who to date."

"No, you can't." She wasn't even

certain Gael would want anything to do with her after the way she'd reacted in the hospital. "Mom? I was wondering ____"

"Apologize, but don't grovel. You're a lady and he should be willing to accept your word as being sincere." Getting to her feet in one smooth move, her mom started for the door. "I was doing your laundry. I'll start packing for you."

"No, I'll come." She stood and pulled her mom into a hug. "I want to spend some more time with you before I go. Love you."

"Oh baby." She pressed her face into Alice's neck. "I love you too."

They'd pack and she'd have

something quick to eat before starting the drive home. Maybe along the way she'd figure out what to say to Gael that could make everything right between them.

* * *

The crowd at Wonderland seemed on edge as Gael prowled around. This was his fourth trip of the week, as he tried to take his mind off of the remnants of his carefully constructed plan. Chess had given him a concerned look as he'd granted Gael admittance, but the bouncer said nothing.

Today had served as the precipice of his week from hell. He'd been fielding questions about Alice and her mother all

week. No one wanted to bother her, but everyone wanted details. After the tenth time, he'd snapped at the next person to ask. Carmella hadn't deserved his shitty treatment. He'd ordered a flower delivery to arrive for her after he left.

Then he'd been faced with Uncle Stephen.

Gael should have known it was only a matter of time before rumors about his time with Alice started to circulate. The blistering accusations were still under his skin, even if some of them were true. Although he hadn't taken advantage of Alice in any way, the fact that his uncle believed that was the case was all that mattered.

“And you can forget about becoming a partner anytime soon.”

He'd walked out of his uncle's office to his, picked up the phone and called the real estate office, then his mother. The equity in his home would be enough to keep them going for a while. Tomorrow he'd meet with them to discuss his coming back to the software company. Sink or swim, they'd do it together.

It would mean the next few months of his life would be crazy, but that challenge sat better with him than the idea of continuing to prostitute himself out to his uncle. When he'd told his mom, she'd been ecstatic.

“I love my brother, but he’s an asshole. I told you—we don’t need him.”

“Mom, you needed the loan.”

“We needed a buffer. And I don’t like the idea of you selling your place.”

“You wouldn’t be in this mess if you hadn’t given me the down payment to begin with. I’ll find a place.”

And he would. Tomorrow.

Tonight he had other demons to excise. Specifically, one named Alice. Pushing all thoughts of her from his mind, Gael walked over to the St. Andrews Cross and watched a Dom working on his sub. He recognized them from previous visits, admired the way

they fit together. It was easy to see that they were in a committed relationship, could tell by how the Dom cared for her after he was done with his torture. And the way she looked up at him, as if there were no other man in the world, was nothing less than unfettered love.

He hated this.

“Hernandez!” Gael rolled his eyes at the sound of Mistress Red’s voice. “My office.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Don’t give me any of that shit. Just move your ass.” She spun around in a way that shouldn’t be possible in stilettos, leaving Gael to trail behind her.

The inevitable tirade was easy to

predict, obvious before they even stepped into the office. It was better to have a good offense than be on the defensive when it came to this place. “I know what you’re going to say.”

“That you’re a fucking idiot who should be kicked out of my place until you get your head on straight?” Red picked up a riding crop that was lying on her desk and slammed the end down across the wood hard. “You’re fucking right!”

“Is Ryan late again? No one to suck your dick?”

Red narrowed her gaze. “Don’t try and screw me in my home, Hernandez.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Why are you here?” She began to lightly tap the end of the crop against the wood. “This isn’t like you.”

“I’m looking for something.” The less ammunition he gave her, the better this would be for all of them.

“Yes, I see that. You’ve done nothing but look for two weeks now. You haven’t taken a single sub, spanked anyone, not even a flogging.”

“I’m being picky.”

“No, you’re being bitchy. Stop it. You’re scaring people.”

“Fine.”

“Not fine. Wonderland is an active club.” She tossed the crop back down to the desk and crossed her arms. “If you

don't hook up with a sub tonight, then I want you to stay away for a while. Until you know what you're looking for."

That wasn't the issue. The one he wanted wasn't here.

"Fine." He left without looking back.

There were enough people at Wonderland who'd be more than happy to let Gael play with them. It didn't matter that Alice had ignited something in him he'd never felt before. Things weren't going to work between them. Although he would never make her choose him over her mother, he refused to constantly be in competition for her affections. The woman wanted Alice all to herself, and until Alice learned to say

no, then there was no place in his life for her.

He'd find someone to flog to appease Red, then he'd go home.

There was a blond woman naked on her knees in the middle of the main floor. She had her back to him, so he couldn't make out her face. Her hands were resting demurely at the small of her back as she waited. There was something familiar about her, the way she held her body. *You're seeing Alice everywhere you go now. Get over it—she didn't want you.* It was possible this woman subbed for him in the past. It would make for an easier time than trying to find someone new.

Gael walked up behind her, but only close enough to make her aware of his presence. “Are you waiting on your master?”

She shook her head.

“Come with me.”

He didn’t wait to see if she’d follow, heading upstairs. There would be fewer people on the second floor, which would make this less a spectacle. He’d keep things simple, just enough to take the edge off mentally, while giving her what she wanted.

The back corner on the top floor was available. It was a favorite place for him. The O hooks were high enough on the wall most women would have to

stretch up. It gave him room to work uninhibited.

“Back to the wall, arms over your head and legs spread. I want to see all of you.”

She walked past him, and did as he directed. But as she lifted her head, her hair fell away and he stopped breathing.

“Alice?”

“Yes, Sir?”

He needed a minute to calm down.

“Why the hell are you here?”

A faint blush covered her cheeks. “I missed you, Sir.”

“Is your mother okay? I thought you’d decided to stay with her?”

“I was angry and scared. We talked

things over, and while I don't think she's quite able to handle the idea, she says it's time she let go and gave me a chance to live my life the way I want."

There wasn't any hesitation on her part. Even as her hands shook from holding them above her head, she didn't look as though she were ready to take off running. She'd come back to him.

I missed you, Sir.

Something in his chest thawed, and for the first time in days, Gael started to feel normal.

He stepped in and picked up the wrist cuffs that were resting near the wall. "I told you a while ago that I had no interest in getting involved. In having a

relationship.”

Alice hadn't moved, but he could feel her attention locked on him. He stood behind her and secured first the left, then right wrist together. Her arms were trembling from the strain of staying still, arms up.

“I thought I had to choose between helping my parents and having a personal life. I don't have to worry about that anymore. I quit the firm today.”

“What?”

Grabbing the chain that was attached to a pulley rig high on the wall, Gael tugged the lead and secured it in place. Alice had no way of escaping him. Not

now. “I’m going back to work for my parents. I’m selling my place and putting the money into the company. I’m going to be an equal partner.”

Circling around, he stopped when they were face to face. Her lips were swollen, as if she’d been biting them. A nervous habit of hers. “How did you know I was here?”

“I didn’t. I remember Chess saying you only came once a week, usually on Fridays or Saturdays. I took a chance that you’d be here.”

“Why? Why did you want to find me?”

“You were right about me and Mom. Our relationship is more than a little

dysfunctional. It's not going to be easy for her, but I think we'll be able to work things out. I'm not going to move to Barrie. I have too many things that I love here in Toronto."

"You finally get to be a grown-up?"

"Not too grown up. I'm discovering that I like to play." She gave the restraints a tug. "But only with the right person, Sir."

Gael growled before pinching both her nipples. "No one plays with you but me."

"Of course not, Sir." She tugged the restraints again. "As long as you *do* plan to play with me."

"When did you get so cheeky?"

“Around the time I learned what it meant to be a toppy bottom.”

Gael spun her around so he could slap her ass and the backs of her thighs. “That might not work out the way you were expecting.”

“My new motto is don’t knock it until you’ve tried it, Sir.”

“Really?” Gael wanted to push her, stretch her out so she knew exactly what she was in for. “What if I went and got some of my friends, and told one of them to fuck you?”

Alice sucked in a breath. “I’d say I have my safeword. If I don’t like the look of him then I’d say it.”

“What if I wanted to fuck you

senseless right here, right now? You wouldn't be able to get away from me. Anyone would be able to see.”

Alice looked over her shoulder at him. “As long as it's you, Sir. I'm starting to think I'd be willing to do anything for you.”

A few onlookers slowed as they passed, but with a few sharp glances from Gael they moved on. He didn't want anyone touching her but him. Being here did give him an opportunity to publicly mark her, claim Alice as his and his alone. He'd finally be able to show the world that here was a woman who could match his desires, even when they scared her.

Alice White had never been a part of his plan.

Perhaps it was best to come up with a new one.

He spun her around once more so they were now chest to chest. He held her gaze as he withdrew a single condom from his pocket and held it up for her to see.

“How long have you been carrying that around, Sir?”

“For two weeks. I couldn’t find anyone who met my list of requirements.”

“And what are those?”

“Very specific set. She would have to be you.”

Alice sighed. “Sir, I hope you’re planning on using that. Right now.”

He popped the buttons to his fly and shoved his pants down as soon as he could. The condom went on smoothly, though his cock was harder than he ever remembered it being and the thin latex was stretched tight.

“Lift your legs and wrap them around my waist.” He helped her get into position, supporting her ass with his hands. “Hold on to the chain with your hands. It will help relieve the pressure.”

That was all the warning he gave before impaling her on his cock.

Alice cried out, bucking against him, trying to gain some measure of control. It

was futile, and in a matter of minutes she stopped trying and let him be in charge.

“This is how I deal with a topky bottom.” He thrust up with sharp motions. “I tie them up so they can’t move. I put clamps on their nipples until they beg me to stop.” Gael lowered his face to her nipple and sucked it hard.

Alice threw her head back. “Fuck!”

Squeezing his fingers as hard as he could into her skin, he pulled and kneaded the flesh of her ass, allowing him to penetrate her as deep as he could.

“Come for me. Hard. I want to hear you scream my name so everyone in this fucking club knows you belong to me.”

Her moans became timed with his

thrusts. Her body trembled, her control slipping so obviously it was clear she couldn't hold back any longer. He waited, hoping, his body tense until he heard the sweet sound of her surrender.

“Gael!”

With his name still echoing in his ears, the last of his control was snapped. Crying out, he slammed into her as hard as he could, using her body weight to his advantage. The orgasm didn't fade, coming in waves until he didn't think he'd be able to maintain his hold on her body. Finally, the pleasure was done and he pressed his face to her sweaty shoulder.

“Gael?” Her voice barely reached

him, despite their proximity.

Helping her put her feet back down on the floor, he made short work freeing the restraints from the chain. It was too much effort to take those off of her, so instead he scooped her up in his arms and carried her over to one of the oversized chairs.

“Oh,” she said in a wistful way before snuggling against him.

He was going to need a few minutes before he'd be able to do anything. Sitting here with a woman he loved was a perfect end to his night. The perfect start to something else.

Gael looked up in time to see Mistress Red standing at the top of the

stairs. She gave him a smirk and a little wave. That bitch had known.

“Alice?”

“Mmm?”

“Did anyone else help you tonight?”

“Maybe.” He could feel her smile.

“I’ll tell you about it later.”

“You better.” Nodding towards Red, he mouthed *thank you* before cradling Alice closer to his chest.

Yes, perhaps this was the beginning of something better.

Chapter Nineteen

“Petra, did you want one burger or two?”

Alice danced her way over to the window, skipping around the cardboard box Darcy had left abandoned by the fridge after having shifted his beer to a cooler location.

“One!”

“Two!”

Darcy and Petra mock glared at each other. They were getting into the too-cute-for-words stage of their relationship.

“I can’t eat two.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll help you.”

It was strange seeing her normally shy friend openly flirting with the man who’d been battling her online for over a year. Petra deserved every happiness that came to her. And Darcy was exactly the man who would keep her smiling for years to come.

The sound of Alice’s front door opening pulled her attention from her friends. “Mom?”

“Don’t yell, Alice. I’m not deaf.”

She rolled her eyes. “I know. How was the drive?”

Her mother came into the kitchen and immediately gave Alice a kiss on the

cheek. “Too many cars driving too fast. Including him.”

“If I went any slower the police would have pulled me over for being a traffic hazard.” Gael’s voice was cool, but Alice saw the slight crinkle at the corner of his eyes.

Two months they’d been together, and she still felt as if she’d never learn all there was to know about this man. He could still surprise her both in and out of the bedroom.

“Mom, Petra and Darcy are out back starting up the barbeque. I was just about to bring out the salads.”

“That woman.” Her mother huffed. “I don’t know how someone as charming as

Darcy can put up with her.”

“Mom. You promised to behave.”

“And I will. A lady always keeps her promises.” Setting her purse on the counter, she took the bowl of potato salad and went out onto the deck.

“Hello, Darcy. Petra.”

Gael chuckled. “Wears her heart on her sleeve that one.”

“Like your mother doesn’t? I swore she was going to pull out her flogger the last time I was there.”

“She had a new toy she thought you might appreciate.”

“Kinda creepy, hon. Not the conversation I want to have with your mother.”

Gael grabbed her around the waist and pulled her in tight. Sliding his hand up her back, he paused where her bra strap normally would be. “Still being a good girl, I see.”

“Yes, Sir.” Leaning in she nipped at his jawline. “Though I can be bad if that would make things more interesting.”

It had taken some trial and error after the night at Wonderland when she’d surprised him. Gael had decided to take on a partner position with his father’s company. There’d been a lot of financial struggles they’d been forced to contend with, but based on what he’d told her after their last audit, things were finally looking up. That was around the time

he'd started smiling more.

Though that could be due to the obscene amounts of sex they'd been having.

“Good. Bad. It doesn't matter.” He took her by the chin and tipped her head back. “Either way I'm spanking your ass tonight.”

She grinned. “Of course, Sir.”

“That reminds me.” He released her and took a step back. He pulled a medium-sized box from a bag he'd placed on the floor when he'd first come in. “I want you to open this.”

She wasn't sure why, but her heart started pounding. It was too big to be a ring of any sort, and way too early for

that sort of thing. Still, whatever this was, it was important to him. Carefully taking the lid off the box, Alice gasped.

“Oh wow.”

Setting perfectly on a stand was a leather and gold collar. Her name was engraved on a gold plate that would nestle perfectly in the hollow of her throat.

“This isn’t to be worn out, except for maybe our trips to Wonderland. So much has happened in the last few months, you’ve given me so much, taught me about myself, I wanted to show you how much you’ve come to mean to me.”

He reached into his pants pocket and took out a second box, smaller than the

first. “This you can wear anytime.”

The chain was heavier than any of her other necklaces, as was the small padlock attached to it. Without waiting to be told, Alice turned around and lifted her hair so he could place it on her neck.

“Now anyone who looks at you will know you belong to me.” His words were hot against her ear. When she tried to turn around, he held her still. Kissing the side of her throat, Gael reached up and covered the lock with his large hand. “I love you.”

Tears filled her eyes as her emotions clogged her throat. “Love you too,” she whispered.

“Hey, we need the meat out here,”

Darcy called through the window. “The natives are getting restless.”

Turning in his arms, Alice cupped the back of his head and kissed him hard.

“More later.”

“Bossy.” He nipped her nose.

“Of course, Sir.”

They each grabbed a plate of food and joined their friends on the deck to enjoy good company the first evening of autumn.

* * * * *

Embracing their sexuality is what these women are all about. See where it all started with Christine d'Abo's *Sexcapades*, available now!

Sexcapades



Petra Clark's blog Sexcapades inspires women to embrace sexuality. What readers don't know is that her advice isn't based on personal experience. Despite erotic fantasies about the hot guy

at her local coffee shop, social anxiety keeps Petra from connecting with real men in the real world. She's more comfortable as PC, sparring online with her nemesis, the cocky D. Williams.

When Petra runs into her coffee-shop crush at a blog awards party, sparks fly—and so do their clothes. Only after multiple orgasms does she realize who Darcy really is: the competition. Now they're facing accusations of fraud, with stalking and blackmail thrown in. But perhaps most frightening of all are the feelings growing between them...

Connect with us for info on our new releases,

access to exclusive offers and much more!

Visit CarinaPress.com

We like you—why not like us on Facebook:

[Facebook.com/CarinaPress](https://www.facebook.com/CarinaPress)

Follow us on Twitter:

[Twitter.com/CarinaPress](https://twitter.com/CarinaPress)

About the Author

Multipublished author Christine d'Abo loves exploring the human condition through a romantic lens. A self-professed optimist, romantic and sci-fi junkie, Christine can often be found chatting about her favorite shows and movies. When she's not writing, she's chasing after her children, dogs or husband.

Christine is published with Carina Press, Ellora's Cave, Samhain Publishing, Cleis Press and Berkley. Please visit her at her website, www.christinedabo.com, and come chat with her on Twitter [@Christine_dAbo](https://twitter.com/Christine_dAbo).



Where no great story goes untold.

The variety you want to read, the stories authors have always wanted to write. With new releases every week, your next great read is just a download away!

Keep in touch with Carina Press:

Read our blog:

www.CarinaPress.com/blog

Follow us on Twitter:

www.twitter.com/CarinaPress

Become a fan on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/CarinaPress



ISBN-13: 978-14268-9649-1

CLUB WONDERLAND

Copyright © 2013 by Christine d'Abo

Edited by Alissa Davis

All rights reserved. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be

reproduced, transmitted, down-loaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of publisher, Harlequin Enterprises Limited, 225 Duncan Mill Road, Don Mills, Ontario, Canada M3B 3K9.

All characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the author and have no relation whatsoever to anyone bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly

inspired by any individual known or unknown to the author, and all incidents are pure invention.

This edition published by arrangement with Harlequin Books S.A.

® and ™ are trademarks of the publisher. Trademarks indicated with ® are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office, the Canadian Trade Marks Office and in other countries.

www.CarinaPress.com