

Becoming



Chapter One

REBECCA



University of California,
Berkeley - 1997

“BECCA! WAIT!”

Rebecca Cuinn slowed her pace marginally and let her roommate catch up. “What’s up, Allie?”

“Geez,” Allie wheezed. “Why do you always have to walk so fast?”

Rebecca slanted a look at her friend. It wouldn’t do her any good to point out that she had been walking at a normal pace. Allie would just accuse her of calling her overweight, and Rebecca was not about to get caught in *that* trap again.

It had been a source of contention between the two since they became roommates in their freshman year. Rebecca had been far too nervous to notice anything amiss with her new roomie and never noticed the occasional glares. It took Allie two semesters to warm up to Rebecca, finally confessing that she had been jealous of her when they first met. As time passed and the two started to know each other a little better, Allie continued to compare her short, squat stature with Rebecca’s

equally short, yet svelte build. As annoying as it was, Rebecca would do the obligatory “you’re not fat” speech—which she sincerely meant—and change the subject.

“Sorry.” Rebecca slowed down even more, though at this point she could probably sit down and be moving faster. “Did you need something?”

Allie smiled enthusiastically. “*We* have been invited to a Gamma party!”

“Allie, we have a major test coming up...”

“On Monday! It’s Friday, Becca. You can’t seriously tell me that you’re going back to the dorm to study *all* freakin’ weekend.”

Rebecca mentally patted herself on the back for refraining to comment on Allie’s dire need to do exactly that. *She’s probably going to ask for my notes Monday morning.*

“Not that I need to explain anything to you, but I’m going to study and read. It’s been a long week, Allie. I’ve really been looking forward to just relaxing.”

“You are so boring!”

“Thanks,” Rebecca deadpanned.

“I mean it, Becca. We’re in our senior year here and I haven’t *once* seen you drunk or naked.” Allie rolled her eyes when Rebecca raised her brows. “You know what I mean. You’ve never had a guy in our room. And, you’ve never spent the night with anyone. It’s like you’re a virgin!” Allie muttered to herself. “Yeah, right.”

Stunned, Rebecca stopped in her tracks. She wasn’t sure what she was most offended by. That she was being criticized for being good or that Allie literally scoffed at the idea that Rebecca could be a virgin.

“Hang on. What do you mean, ‘yeah right’?”

Allie was ten feet away before she realized Rebecca was no longer next to her. She finally stopped and backtracked to the stupefied blonde.

“I mean, you’re gorgeous. No one that looks like you is a virgin.”

Rebecca peered down at her faded Levi’s and t-shirt. Being on an accelerated course to get her Master’s in Entrepreneurship, she never put much thought into clothes or make-up like other girls. Where Allie owned a ton of products that littered their room, Rebecca was content to keep it simple. Business plans were what she was interested in. Not parties, fashion, or boys. *Especially* not boys. Though that wasn’t something she felt she needed to confide in Allie.

“Looks like me?”

Allie rolled her eyes again. A common occurrence with her. If they had been in a real argument, she would have followed it up with some muttered curse about how she had to always explain everything.

“I swear you’re oblivious to the way people look at you. You’re blonde, thin, have flawless skin, an ass for days, and those incredible eyes. Though I’m sure no guy is looking there when they can stare at your big tits.”

“Why does it feel like your compliments are really criticisms?” *And why do I feel so dirty hearing you talk about my ass and tits?*

“I’m just saying, you’re like every dude’s wet dream. And, the *only* reason I’m invited to this party tonight is because you’re my roommate and I said I could get you to go. So, do me a solid and go. You’re too serious. Get drunk, get laid, and let me ride on your damn coattails!”

Rebecca shook her head and started walking again. “I’m not going to some lame frat party. I’m sorry. Why would you want to go anyway if you think they really didn’t want you there?”

“Hello? To get laid! With enough alcohol, even someone like me could look like you.”

“You sorely need to work on your self-esteem, Allie.” Rebecca shifted her bookbag to her other shoulder. The only problem with accelerated courses was it felt like she was carrying double the books.

“Yeah, well, I can do that after I graduate.”

I don’t think graduating with a 2.7 GPA is going to help your self-esteem. “I’m just not interested,” Rebecca said aloud.

“Buff guys, drinking, grinding all up on you. Did I mention buff guys? How could you not be interested?”

This time, Rebecca rolled her eyes. *Zero interest.* “You’ve been watching too many movies if you think there are only ‘buff guys’ at these things. But, hey, knock yourself out. Go and have fun. Just be careful and don’t leave your drink unattended.”

“You’re really not going to do this? Not even for me?”

Rebecca stopped once more and looked at her roommate. Even after the years they’ve been rooming together, she couldn’t call Allie a good friend. Never once did Rebecca feel comfortable enough to tell Allie her deepest, darkest secrets. Truth was, Rebecca didn’t have *any* true friends and she was happy that she was graduating soon.

“If you knew me at all, Allie, you wouldn’t even be asking me to do this. Look, whether I go

or not, you've already been invited. You don't need me."

"You're right. I don't need you," Allie huffed. "Go be your boring self." With that last barb, Allie stormed off in the opposite direction of their dorm.

"*Being focused does not make me boring,*" Rebecca muttered as she continued towards her building. So what if she was still a virgin? That was her choice and she definitely wasn't going to lose that at some frat party with some frat *boy*.

College was about learning for Rebecca, not sex. Besides, she had promised her Aunt Willamena that she would be good. She, at least, owed her aunt that much for taking such loving care of her after her parents died.

She let out a sigh of relief as she closed the door of her dorm behind her. After kicking off her shoes, Rebecca plopped down on her bed and plucked a well-worn book from under her mattress. This book had *nothing* to do with business and everything to do with pure, unadulterated pleasure. She smiled, hoping Allie would be gone for most of the night.



"TURN IN YOUR tests as you leave," Professor Brundt announced in his booming voice. Rebecca jumped slightly at the sound and checked her watch. She had handed in her test twenty minutes ago and got caught up studying for the next one. She closed her textbook with a thud and started gathering her things.

"Rebecca? Please stay."

Rebecca looked up at the professor, making sure he was talking to her, and nodded. She checked her watch again. Thirty minutes to her next class. She could spare a few, even though she had no clue what Brundt could want from her.

"*Teacher's pet,*" Allie muttered as she passed by.

Rebecca smiled sweetly, ignoring the jab. Whereas Allie was still miffed about the party, Rebecca had been relieved to get the entire weekend alone. Allie hadn't come back to their dorm until late Sunday afternoon which gave Rebecca ample time to study, take notes, read her trashy

novels, and rest. It was perfect. She didn't even care when, as predicted, Allie asked for Rebecca's study notes. Being the dutiful roommate, Rebecca gave them to her knowing they probably wouldn't help anyway.

She turned her attention to her professor as the last student disappeared through the door. His course wasn't the most popular amongst the students. **Entrepreneurship Business Plan & Perspective** may not have been the most exciting subject. However, to someone with a mind for business like Rebecca, it was fascinating. "Is something wrong, Professor?"

The older man—likely in his mid-fifties if Rebecca guessed correctly—sat on the corner of his desk and waved a piece of paper in his hand. "You finished this test pretty quickly."

Rebecca shrugged. "I knew the material."

The professor shook his head. "It's more than that."

Rebecca tilted her head and studied her teacher. He was unassuming, perhaps a bit conservative with his sweater vests, tweed jackets, and khakis, but she couldn't deny he knew his stuff. And she was one of his best students. That wasn't her ego talking, just frankness based off of her grades. Surely, he wasn't suggesting she had cheated.

"I don't understand," she said carefully.

"I had a chance to grade your test while the others were finishing. It's perfect."

"I studied."

"Again, it's more than that, Miss Cuinn." He put the paper down behind him and picked up a folder. "These are just a few of your business proposals, though I've examined them all. They're brilliant."

"And, that's a problem?" Rebecca still had no idea why the professor had kept her after class. Not knowing all of the facts always made her a little nervous.

"On the contrary. It's extraordinary. Your innate ability to find multiple ways *any* business can turn a profit in a significantly abbreviated period of time is a commodity people will pay a fortune for. Which is why I've recommended you to a friend of mine."

All of the preposterous scenarios that ran through her mind evaporated at Brundt's words. "Wait, recommended me?"

"Precisely. My friend owns an exclusive business here in town. Their objective is to make major revisions; however, I've seen the books, and the place is bleeding money. What they need is someone to come in with a business plan that will not only bring the place back into the black

and keep it upscale but give them the means to make these changes. I think you're that person."

"Me? But, I'm a student." She was flattered, of course. And the thought of putting more of her business solutions to the test real world was intoxicating. Was she ready? Hell, was she even qualified?

Professor Brundt shook his head. "You've done internships before, so I know you have more confidence than that, Miss Cuinn. You're about to graduate with your Bachelor's *and* Master's. Your work ethic is as exceptional as your work." He reached into the pocket of his tweed jacket and pulled out a business card. "If you are interested, call this number and make an appointment to meet with the owner. I implore you to do this, Rebecca. An opportunity like this doesn't come along very often. As you said, you're still a student. Imagine the work you will get with something like this under your belt."

Imagine what would happen to my reputation if I fail. Despite the negative thought, Rebecca stood and took the card from Brundt. The only thing on it was a number. No company name, no contact name.

"Who am I supposed to ask for?"

"Just tell them who you are. They'll know."

As confused as she was with the situation, she thanked him for the chance to prove herself.



SHE FLIPPED THE card over and over through her fingers. The anticipation of what came after a simple phone call had been enough of a distraction that she actually struggled to get through her last class. Something she didn't enjoy. Setting the card down on the table, Rebecca gave it a little spin. Of course, the intrigue was there. She'd be foolish not to be curious. Still, she had virtually zero information about who or what she would be working with.

It was meticulous research and preparation that made her good at what she did. How was she to do any of that when she hadn't a clue as to what type of business this place was? She didn't like being unprepared and here she was, being asked to go into one of the most important meetings of her young career, completely unprepared.

So, she did the only thing she could do at the moment. She picked up her Nokia and dialed.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Aunt Wills.”

“Rebecca! What a surprise! Is something wrong?”

Rebecca chuckled at her aunt’s ever-present need to be a therapist. “Nothing is wrong. Why do you always ask me that when I call you on an unscheduled day?”

“Because, you usually only call me on unscheduled days when something is wrong,” her aunt countered with humor.

“Touché,” Rebecca laughed. “To answer your question, *Dr. Woodrow*, nothing is really wrong. I simply need some advice.”

“Ah, it just so happens that I have an incredibly expensive, highly distinguished degree that gives me the ability to do just that. And, I happen to be particularly good at it.”

“I agree.” It never ceased to amaze her how her Aunt Wills could always get a smile out of her. Even at a time when Rebecca thought she would never smile again, her aunt was there to make a devastating situation slightly more bearable. Aunt Willamena wasn’t just a psychiatrist extraordinaire, she was the best aunt anyone could ever hope for. With that in mind, Rebecca described her current predicament.

“Rebecca,” Aunt Wills began once Rebecca was finished. “Life is always going to be full of circumstances that you will not be able to control. I believe you know that better than most. It won’t always be about how good you are at preparing for those events. Occasionally, you will need to discover how good you are at handling those unpredictable occurrences with grace. You are extraordinarily talented at what you do. Trust that. Trust yourself.”

Rebecca remained silent for a moment, soaking up everything her aunt just told her. “Wow. That is one hell of a degree you must have.”

“Eh, it’s amazing what you can get out of a Cracker Jack box.”

Rebecca laughed heartily. A rare occurrence when she wasn’t speaking with her Aunt Wills. “You’re crazy!”

“Ah, ah, ah. We shrinks do not approve of that word. Besides, we can’t be the crazy ones when the crazy ones are calling us.”

Rebecca shook her head at her aunt’s shenanigans. The sense of humor was the same as her mother’s and it reminded Rebecca of the times when she was a little kid watching the two women

together. Fantastically wonderful memories that never failed to make Rebecca both happy and wistful. She could never allow herself to forget that she didn't just lose her mother, but Aunt Wills lost her sister.

"I love you, Aunt Wills," she said with quiet sincerity.

"I love you, too, my sweet girl. Now, make that call and knock 'em dead."

Rebecca hung up with her aunt and promptly made her next phone call. No one said life would be easy. She learned that the hard way ten years ago when her parents died suddenly and tragically in a car accident. She wouldn't tarnish their memory by easily giving up.



THE FOLLOWING DAY found Rebecca sitting straight in a large, leather chair, ankles crossed, and hands linked in front of her. Her portfolio rested nearby, and she waited. She had been waiting—in this position—for the past ten minutes.

Inside, she was fuming. If this was the way the owners of this establishment did business, she could see why they were in trouble. Outwardly, she remained poised and relaxed. She may be young, but she knew better than to show any sign of weakness.

The tick-tock of an antique clock that sat on the shelf of an ornate bookcase ticked off the seconds in a soothing rhythm. Rebecca tapped her fingers to the tempo as she counted, allowing it to help keep her calm. She was about to hit one hundred when the door finally opened.

Her eyes locked with an extremely alluring—and unexpected—woman in her mid-thirties and Rebecca was grateful for the ability to hide her emotions. The first thing that caught her attention was the height. The dark-haired woman must've had at least six inches on Rebecca's vertically challenged five-foot-two stature. Another prominent feature was how angular the woman was. Nose, chin, cheekbones. It was as though she were sculpted out of marble. She looked... hard, but it wasn't from a muscular build that Rebecca preferred.

Her lean body was attired smartly in black slacks and a blood-red button-up shirt that flared open at the collar. It somehow matched the edgy, androgynous hairstyle the woman sported. Despite the androgyny—which Rebecca had always preferred—the woman wasn't exactly

Rebecca's type. Even so, there was definitely something about her that piqued Rebecca's interest.

She sat in her large, imposing chair and gave Rebecca a leering once-over and scoffed with an arrogant smirk. "You're the genius Jim sent me? How old are you, kid?"

Rebecca mentally patted herself on the back for maintaining her professional composure and not rolling her eyes. Her looks often got a reaction from men and women alike. Most, like Allie, thought beauty equaled stupidity. Especially if you were young. "I'm twenty-one." She tilted her head, keeping eye contact. "Forgive me, Ms.?"

"Pryce. Samantha Pryce," the woman responded. It would seem the smirk was going to be a permanent fixture on that angular face. Fantastic.

"Ms. Pryce. You don't strike me as a woman who would take a meeting with a stranger about your business without knowing everything there is to know about them. And, knowing Professor Brundt as I do, he would be completely upfront with you about who he's sending." Samantha's smirk turned to something resembling admiration, but Rebecca wasn't finished. She stood. "Perhaps this is a test to see if I would be intimidated by you. I'm not. You've kept me waiting and then you greet me with insults. If this is how you do business, Ms. Pryce, I'm not interested in getting involved."

"Well, well," Samantha grinned charmingly. "Jim was right. You are spirited."

"I prefer to think of myself as driven and professional," Rebecca countered. Ever the feminist, she wasn't about to let someone belittle her will to become successful. Especially another woman.

The woman threw her hands in the air in surrender and laughed. "Okay, okay. I apologize if I offended you."

Rebecca lifted a blonde brow. For some reason, she didn't think Samantha Pryce apologized very often. Hell, she wasn't even sure it was sincere.

"Do you know what it is that we do here, Miss Cuinn?" the older woman asked, proving to Rebecca that she knew exactly who she was.

"I don't," she admitted readily. "Though I imagine that's by design as well."

Samantha stood as well, accentuating the height difference. She looked down at Rebecca with that smirk of hers. "Some would consider your candor a challenge." She gestured to the door. "Come with me. I'll show you around and tell you what I'm looking to do."

Rebecca—momentarily thrown off by the "challenge" statement—followed dutifully. She blinked, waiting for her eyes to adjust to the sudden dimness they walked into. Through the low

light, she saw exactly what she was getting herself into. The dark room—illuminated only by the soft lighting of multi-colored bulbs that lined the ceiling—was trimmed in plush, red velvet. High backed chairs and booths encircled a black, glossy stage. In the middle of that stage was a brass pole. A scantily clad, huge breasted woman strutted by as if conjured up by some spirit with a sense of humor. She gave Samantha a sexy grin and the evil eye to Rebecca.

“This is Rebecca Cuinn, Gigi. She’s a VIP. Anything she wants, you get. Got me?”

“Yes, ma’am. Should I bring drinks?”

Samantha looked at Rebecca for an answer. When she received a negative shake of the head, she dismissed the young—man, she had big tits!—woman with a flick of the wrist.

“A strip club?” Rebecca asked haughtily. Surely, her skills were better than some titty bar!

Samantha frowned. “It’s more than a strip club, Miss Cuinn. We’re a “Gentlemen’s Club” if you will. Though more than half of our clientele is women.” She paused until Rebecca looked up at her. “Women who like women. Does that bother you?”

Another test, Rebecca thought with a mental eye roll. “Why should it?”

“You sounded relatively concerned about what goes on in our fine establishment. It’s only natural to assume...”

“My *concern*, as you called it, Ms. Pryce, was more surprise. And, seeing as I’m a lesbian myself, it would be hypocritical of me to be bothered by it.”

Samantha smiled. It was a smile that Rebecca could only define as predatory and her blood heated as it traveled south. She couldn’t understand her reaction to the smug woman. It wasn’t like Rebecca to mix business with pleasure. Her “pleasure” was a well thought out, successful business plan. Shit. Maybe she *was* boring.

“What exactly is it that *you* do for fun, Miss Cuinn?” Samantha asked, eerily paralleling Rebecca’s inner thoughts.

“Is that relevant to this meeting?” she answered before thinking.

Samantha took a step closer making Rebecca feel slightly claustrophobic. And hot. “If I said it was?”

Rebecca tilted her head up and cleared her throat. “I’m working on a double degree, Ms. Pryce. There’s a reason Professor Brundt sent me to you.” Though, now that she thought about that, how in the hell did stodgy Professor Brundt know about a place like this? “I’m very good at what I do, despite my age. That means I don’t have time for much else.”

“Hmm.”

That was the only response Samantha gave before turning and walking away. Rebecca wasn't sure if she should follow or if she had been dismissed. She erred on the side of caution and jogged to catch up with the taller woman's long strides. When Samantha came to an abrupt stop in front of a row of doors, Rebecca narrowly missed running into her.

“These,” Samantha pivoted just in time to see Rebecca taking a step back. She smiled that predatory smile again and continued. “These are the rooms we use for private lap dances. I have a vision for them. I have a vision for this whole place. That's why you're here.”

“I'm listening.”

“I want to expand our horizons. Instead of just lap dances in here, I want to equip them for more... fun.”

Despite Rebecca's uneasiness with where she thought this was headed, she pressed on. “Fun?”

“Yes. Each room,” she pointed at them to emphasize her point, “will be a distinct color. Each color will represent the experience level of the occupants. Or, what they're willing to try.”

“What exactly are we talking about, Ms. Pryce?”

“I'm talking about a sex club, Miss Cuinn. Specifically, a BDSM club.” Samantha watched Rebecca closely. “Do you know what that is?”

Rebecca had never felt so naïve in her life. And completely out of her element. “I—I think Professor Brundt made a mistake. I'm not the right person for this job.” She realized she didn't answer Samantha's question, but she already felt foolish. Admitting she had no idea what BDSM was too much for her bruised ego.

“I don't agree.” Again, Samantha took a dangerous step closer to Rebecca. “I need someone with fresh... eyes. Someone who can be taught.”

Rebecca backed up. “Miss Pryce...”

Samantha smirked. “If you don't have your own ideas about what to do here, Miss Cuinn, it means we're working with a clean slate. I don't have to justify my concepts, just explain them to you. You're here to help me make this possible monetarily. What's the harm in learning a little something while you're at it?” Another step. “It could be the fun you've been missing out on. One thing is certain, it won't be boring.”

Rebecca prided herself on thriving during challenging situations. It was how she survived all these years with the void that was left in her soul. This was merely one more challenge.

“What did you mean by ‘equip them’?” she asked, thankful that her voice was steady given Samantha’s proximity.

“Does that mean you’ll stick around?”

Rebecca nodded. “I’m willing to help if I can.”

Samantha smiled. “I love women who are willing. Each specific room,” she continued as though she didn’t just say something that made Rebecca’s pulse spike, “will be equipped according to experience and comfort levels. For instance, this room will be black.” She opened the door and ushered Rebecca in. “Black will be our top level. Diverse types of whips, flogs, spreaders, clamps, restraints, and so on will be readily available for the dominant to do what they desire to their submissive.”

Why in the hell did Rebecca’s body respond to that? She swallowed hard, wishing she had taken the offer for that drink earlier.

“I, um, don’t think I need all of the intricate details.” Rebecca cringed inwardly at the waver in her voice.

Samantha turned her hard, brown eyes on Rebecca. “I disagree. I think the more you understand what my vision is for this place, the more... diligent you’ll be in writing that proposal. I need it to be brilliant enough to win over every investor you approach.”

“I approach? Ms. Pryce, my understanding was that I’m to write the proposal for you.”

“No,” Samantha interrupted abruptly. “I want you to work closely with me on this. You have the face and knowledge that investors, especially mine, will be extremely receptive to. And, you have the attitude and more that entices me to get to know you better.”

Perhaps it was the way Samantha said the word “more” that made Rebecca sweat. Or, perhaps it was the implication of the words “know you better.” Regardless of how she felt about the enigmatic Samantha Pryce, an opportunity like this would look incredible on Rebecca’s resumé.

“If it helps your decision,” Samantha said through Rebecca’s continued silence. “I will talk to your professor about giving you credit for this in his class. What do you say, Miss Cuinn? Are you ready to learn?”

“Yes.”

Chapter Two

REBECCA



The Pryce of Success – 1997

“I REFUSE TO work with that... that *woman* again!”

This was the sentiment of almost everyone Rebecca had spoken to since beginning her work with Samantha Pryce more than two months ago. Her answer was always the same.

“Then work with me. Look, Ronnie, I know Ms. Pryce can be difficult...”

“Difficult? She constantly complains about our markups and she’s abusive to my employees. I will not tolerate that.”

“Which is completely understandable. I know it’s not an excuse, but Samantha is under a lot of pressure with this relaunch. And we couldn’t do it without you. You’re the best liquor distributor in the county.”

Apparently, Rebecca wasn’t above groveling a little to stay on track and on budget. Ronnie wasn’t the best, but Samantha had already depleted most of their options *before* Rebecca even came on board. If they lost Ronnie, the club and its relaunch were going to fail.

“You pay 20% more markup and I’ll think about it.”

Rebecca closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “You know I can’t do that,” she said calmly. “We keep the current pricing and I guarantee that you and your employees deal with only me as long as I’m here.”

It wasn’t much of a deal, but it was all she had to bargain with. Samantha had given her autonomy and authority, but even in her brief time working with Samantha, Rebecca knew that there were limits. She also knew that Ronnie couldn’t afford to lose their business any more than they could afford to lose his.

“Fine, Rebecca,” Ronnie answered after a pause. “But I won’t be so generous the next time.”

“Understood. Thank you.” She hung up the phone and sat back in her chair with a sigh. It seemed all she had been doing since agreeing to work for Samantha was putting out fires. How the woman stayed in business this long was a mystery. Personally, Rebecca found her to be charismatic, witty, and intelligent. Professionally, she was abrasive, arrogant, and callous.

There was a learning curve working with someone so mercurial. It was a whirlwind of information to take in. Luckily, Rebecca was a fast learner. The most sensitive subject was money. She quickly found that out when examining the books and making suggestions to stop frivolous spending. It seemed an easy decision for Rebecca. The club was swimming in the red, but even minor changes could only help. However, Samantha was repeatedly offended by Rebecca’s advice and would continue spending as though the money was pouring in. Contrarily, when it came to the things they actually needed—like a liquor distributor and licenses—Samantha couldn’t be bothered.

Thinking of licenses caused another sigh to escape from Rebecca’s lips. She checked her watch, noting that she had a mere twenty minutes before the person she needed to speak with left for the day. Nothing like a bit of stress to keep her on her toes. With that in mind, she picked up the phone.

“Mr. Schumer, it’s Rebecca Cuinn calling for Samantha Pryce,” she said when a man answered the phone.

“Miss Cuinn, I’m heading out in a few minutes. So, unless you’re calling to tell me you’ve come up with the past-due fees, there’s nothing more to discuss.”

Rebecca pinched the bridge of her nose. *Remain calm.* “Mr. Schumer, we’re set to open in less than three months and you’re threatening to revoke our zoning permit. This club has been selling

alcohol in this area for over five years. You can't just pull the rug out from under us."

"I can, and I will. Blame your boss."

Oh, Rebecca *did* blame Samantha. But that wouldn't help her out of this situation. "Surely, we can find *some way* to settle this. I know that you and Ms. Pryce had found compromises before." Those compromises consisted of unlimited time in the private rooms of the club in exchange for extensions on liquor license fees. After doing her homework, she discovered that good old Mr. Schumer had a wife that would be none-too-pleased to learn of that arrangement.

"Are you trying to blackmail me, Miss Cuinn?"

"Of course not. I'm merely trying to find a solution that works for everyone."

"I cannot in good conscience keep this up, Miss Cuinn. Ms. Pryce has exhausted all of her extensions and owes in excess of \$30,000 in fees and penalties."

Extensions of which you approved of and penalties you ignored for some kicks of your own, Rebecca thought with disgust.

"I understand that, Mr. Schumer. However, I have to assume that if you hadn't been so lenient before, she wouldn't be in this position. Were your arrangements approved by your superiors?" *Or your wife?*

"You're just as bad as her," he spat back.

"I'm sorry you feel that way. But, since we're trying to find a resolution before the relaunch, here's what I'm proposing. We will pay half of the back fees and penalties. In return, you will make the necessary adjustments to show that we are caught up and in good standing. I will then request a new representative. After that, we move on with a fresh start."

"What makes you think I'll agree to this and not just block you?"

"Video surveillance," Rebecca answered simply. Hell, she didn't actually know if the private rooms had video. It didn't matter if it was true if he believed it. Obviously, blackmail was another skill she had to learn quickly.

"Half," Mr. Schumer grunted. "By the end of the week." Click.

"Great. Now to find \$15,000 in four days," Rebecca muttered to herself. It was going to be another long night. That was something Rebecca was getting used to. It wasn't easy. Not by any stretch of the imagination. She still had classes to attend. She couldn't let her work here negate everything she'd done in college. Especially with less than a semester left. Yeah, all of her free time was spent here, but it wasn't so bad. She had her own office, cramped as it was. And it wasn't

like she had a personal life to ruin anyway. *This* was her life. For now. She opened the side drawer of her small desk and randomly grabbed a take-out menu.

“Rebecca!”

Rebecca banged her head on her desk. “So close yet so far away.” Eating would have to wait. Again. She rose and made her way two doors down to Samantha’s office. Instead of entering, she stood in the doorway. “Yes?”

“Come in here and sit down. There are things I want to discuss.” Samantha absently waved towards the guest chair. “I have some changes that I need you to take to the contractor.”

“Changes?” *She can’t be serious. We barely have the money to do what we’re doing now.*

Samantha looked up with a proud smile. “A cigar lounge.”

“What?” The older woman pushed a piece of paper towards Rebecca. Yep. She had heard correctly. A cigar lounge. Complete with humidior cabinets and whiskey bar. “Samantha, this is impossible.”

“I don’t want to hear that. Just get it done.”

“Please listen to me. Not only are you asking me to tack on thousands of dollars that we don’t have, this will add at least another month to construction. We simply don’t have the resources.”

“This is what I hired you for, Rebecca. Call the investors and do what you need to do. Hell, fuck them if you have to. I want this room.”

Rebecca was speechless. Groveling she could handle. Blackmail? That was fine, too. But, it would be a frigid day in hell before she offered her body.

“No.”

“Excuse me?” Samantha’s voice turned to ice at Rebecca’s refusal.

“You hired me to help you and that’s exactly what I’ve done. I have jumped through hoop after hoop and nailed the goddamn landing every time. But, you telling me to sell my body for something you don’t need? That’s bullshit! The plans were drawn up, sent to the city, and approved. This isn’t just an investor problem. If you want to piss away your money you can do it without me.”

They stared each other down for what seemed like an eternity. Surprisingly, Samantha was the one to break first. She gave Rebecca a tight smile. “Very well, Miss Cuinn. No changes.”

Rebecca let out a sigh of relief. Well, she wasn’t fired, and she won. This round at least. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me. I will get this room at some point. You better be *that* good. And, the next time you decide to speak to me in that manner... well, we will have to think of a good punishment.”

A light knock sounded at the door and Rebecca looked over to see Gigi—scantily clad as always—standing there.

“You may go.”

Samantha had dismissed Rebecca like a child. Unfortunately, Rebecca wasn’t finished. She still needed to talk to Samantha about the money they needed by the end of the week.

“I need to discuss...”

“Unless you want to drop to your knees and suck my clit, you need to get out.”

Rebecca stood abruptly, hating the fact that she tasted that now familiar bitterness of anger and jealousy. It wasn’t the first time she was sent away, ousted by Gigi. It wouldn’t be the last. If only she hadn’t *wanted* to be the one to drop to her knees.



REBECCA PRESSED A hand to her stomach as it growled loudly. Once she had gotten back to her office after that disaster with Samantha, she got right to work. It was typical of her to forget to eat, even when she was starving. But, since Samantha would rather have a *playdate* than discuss business, it was up to Rebecca to figure out the impossible. In the grand scheme of things, fifteen grand should be the easy part. *And, it could be*, she told herself silently.

She jumped at the sound of a throat clearing and looked up to see Samantha leaning against the doorjamb. It would help matters enormously for Rebecca if she didn’t find the woman sexy and intriguing.

“May I come in?” Rebecca nodded, and Samantha folded her long frame into the uncomfortable guest chair. “I wanted to apologize for earlier.”

Blonde eyebrows shot up in surprise. She had been on the receiving end of Samantha’s bad moods quite a few times. Never once had the woman apologized.

Samantha smirked. “I shouldn’t have said what I said. It was inappropriate and rude.”

“I’m not sure what to say.”

“I think you said it all when you put me in my place,” Samantha answered. She held her hand up when Rebecca opened her mouth. “If you’re thinking of saying sorry, don’t. I deserved it.”

“All right.” Truth was, Rebecca still wasn’t sure what to say. She wasn’t sorry for what she said, but perhaps she could have been a bit more tactful.

“I would like to make it up to you if you would allow me to.”

“Samantha, there’s no need.”

“I insist,” Samantha interrupted. “How about dinner?”

Rebecca tilted her head. “What would your girlfriend think about you taking me out?”

“Girlfriend? You mean Gigi?” Samantha laughed heartily. “Gigi is merely a means to an end. I’m in between... companions at the moment. Gigi assuages any needs I may have.”

“I see.” *I’m not jealous.* “Even so, I have class in the morning. I should have left more than an hour ago.”

“Yet, you’re still here. And, from the noise I heard coming from your stomach when I came in, you need to eat.” Samantha leaned up in her seat. “Come to dinner with me, Rebecca.”

Part of Rebecca begged her to say no. Another part, the one that was consistently intrigued by Samantha, begged her to say yes. Her stomach chose that moment to growl again and she made her decision.

“Okay.”

In Retrospect - 2000

HINDSIGHT IS TWENTY-TWENTY. Isn’t that what they say? There are those moments in life when you had to ask yourself; if you knew then what you know now, would you have done it all differently? Rebecca’s answer was a resounding yes. If she *had* known then what her future would be, she never would have said yes to having dinner with Samantha that fateful night nearly a year ago. But she did. And that was something she now had to live with.

She couldn’t remember now if it was the attention Samantha gave her? Or maybe it was the

fear that she really was boring? Or perhaps it was the intrigue of letting go and giving herself over to someone completely? Had she been lonely and never realized it? Ever since Rebecca's parents died, she had pushed herself to be the person she thought they would be proud of. The demanding work never allowed for much of a social life, but Rebecca hadn't cared much about that.

Fact was, whenever Rebecca was feeling particularly horny, it was easy for her to take care of it herself. She didn't need anyone, and honestly, she thought that was the way she preferred it. From what she had observed around her, relationships were messy and falling in love couldn't be an option for her at this point in her career or life. However, that one dinner had changed everything. She told herself it was bound to happen eventually. Working so close with someone as sexual as Samantha had Rebecca yearning for more for the first time in her young life. How could she resist the pull she felt every time the woman was near?

God, how she had thought she fully understood what getting involved with Samantha would mean. She knew the sex would be anything but conventional. She knew that if she gave in she would be submitting to Samantha and everything she thought a lover should give. Having heard all that entailed on her first tour of the club, it was perhaps the one major element that had caused Rebecca's hesitation to get too close. She hadn't known if she had it in her to be a submissive. The thought of the pain that she was told came with pleasure was daunting. Nevertheless, in the end, the attraction was too strong to resist.

Eyes—once silver and bright, now dull—looked up and Rebecca stared at herself in the mirror. How had she ended up here? How did something that started off as incredibly erotic turn into something so sadistic? Rebecca untied her silk robe and gingerly peeled it away from her skin. She winced as the fabric caught on a fresh wound. Tossing the robe aside, she turned to see what the damage was this time. Angry red welts crisscrossed her back and a trickle of blood rolled down slowly. She followed its progress until the steam from the running shower fogged the mirror enough to obscure her view.

This was the worst it had ever been. In the beginning, the pain—as hurtful as it was—had been bearable because it was always followed up by incredible pleasure. As time went on, Samantha became increasingly stressed out about money and the club. The pain increased, and the pleasure stopped. It was as though torturing Rebecca somehow eased Samantha's anxiety. When Rebecca would beg for Samantha to stop, it would get worse.

In an attempt to save herself—save her soul—Rebecca did something drastic. Something she

never thought she would do. She went to her aunt and asked for an advance in her inheritance. That wasn't an easy conversation. As things declined with Samantha, Rebecca's phone calls to her aunt declined as well. She was afraid her Aunt Wills would hear something in her voice that would give away what her life had become. Rebecca had to explain exactly what she wanted to do. That it was not only to help her girlfriend, but it would be beneficial to her career as well. It wasn't exactly a lie. She didn't have a hefty amount, but if she could just buy the club, bring it into the black, things would get better. They had to. She looked at her back again and thought about how wrong she was.



IN RETROSPECT, REBECCA probably should have discussed her plan with Samantha. Unfortunately, they didn't have that kind of relationship. Once they got involved physically, Samantha's respect for Rebecca and her abilities dwindled drastically. Every idea, whether it was made to save money or make money, was rejected as though some silly schoolgirl was making them. So, Rebecca kept her plan to herself, opting to surprise her lover once she could hand a thriving business back over to its rightful owner.

It was a good plan. At least it had been in Rebecca's mind. Regrettably, she neglected to take Samantha's ego into account. Of course, she knew it would be hard for Samantha to give up control. After all, that was the epitome of who Samantha is. But Rebecca made considerable effort to ensure the change of owners was private from the employees, and Samantha remained in charge as the manager. Nevertheless, the older woman saw losing ownership of her club as a failure. And Samantha's defeat meant Rebecca's agony. There were many times when Rebecca faltered and nearly confessed everything she had been fighting to do for Samantha. But, she couldn't do that without having something to show for her efforts or her pain. So, she waited. And endured.

It took more than two *excruciating* years for the club to start seeing a significant profit. It was during that time that Samantha began her love affair with heroin. A long-time patron had introduced her during a particularly stressful time. It didn't take much for Samantha to become as addicted to this new hobby as she was to being a Dominant. It soon overtook her love for

practically everything else.

Of course, she justified her frequent using by arguing how it helped her get through the pain of losing the club. She also claimed sex became euphoric and more heightened, though Rebecca was never “allowed” to share in that experience—something she was secretly grateful for. The only thing that helped Rebecca in the bedroom was the charade that Samantha was solely responsible for all of the club’s success. Stroking her ego was easily accomplished when Samantha was in an altered state.

It only helped marginally as soon as the drug use became a daily occurrence and Samantha became increasingly aggressive. Rebecca’s appearance in the club had been reduced to nothing more than Samantha’s stress reliever in the black room. Those times when Rebecca physically couldn’t take more, Samantha would find other willing participants. Despite Samantha’s vow to remain loyal, her unfaithfulness no longer fazed Rebecca. The reality of that depressed her. Perhaps she had been naïve to think whatever she and Samantha had would grow into something resembling love. Now, all she could hope for was mutual respect.



SHE LOOKED AT the stripes that marred her once smooth back again, and for the millionth time, she wondered why she stayed. What was this hold Samantha had on her? Did she feel indebted to the woman for giving her an opportunity? Did she feel bound as Samantha’s sub because she knew no other way to be other than a slave to her lover’s every wish?

Why did she keep trying to make things better? Why did she ever think anything she did would make a difference? These were the questions that swirled inside her head each time things got too excessive. Which is exactly what happened tonight. All she had wanted to do was make things better. She cooked a romantic dinner, dressed in something she knew Samantha would like and had the papers on hand to sign the club back over. She had hoped it would be a joyous occasion that would end in the two making love for the first time. Or, at the least, bring the pleasure back after the pain.

Hindsight is twenty-twenty. If only Rebecca had known Samantha had spent the day shooting

up. If only she had grasped the extent of Samantha's ego. If only she hadn't tried so hard to win Samantha's love. But hindsight never helped anyone. The reality was dinner sat cold and untouched on the table. Candles were long ago burned out. And the contract was in shreds all over the dining room floor. Instead of the elation Rebecca had expected and hoped for, it was anger she was met with.

"Those are going to sting in the hot water."

Rebecca lifted pain-filled eyes and met a smirking Samantha. No longer did she see a charming, clever woman. Instead, she saw a vicious bully. Rebecca's weary eyes stayed with Samantha as the woman stepped closer. When Samantha leaned in, she felt that hot breath on her neck. It used to excite her. Now, it instilled fear inside her.

"*It'll teach you never to lie to me again.*" She bit Rebecca's ear painfully, but the younger woman remained quiet. She had learned earlier in the night that trying to explain only brought on more pain. Every "excuse" was met with another strike on her back. "Get in."

As much as Rebecca didn't want to get in the shower with Samantha watching, she didn't argue. All she needed to do was will herself not to react. If she cried from the pain, she would be giving the older woman exactly what she wanted. And Rebecca refused to be humiliated even more tonight. She felt a hard smack on her bare ass when she failed to move fast enough.

"I said, get in."

With her head held high, Rebecca walked over to the shower and took a breath. *Do not cry. Do not cry.* She kept that mantra in her head as she stepped in. The bite of the steaming water nearly caused Rebecca to gasp and her knees to buckle. Tears pooled in her eyes but they never fell. She knew Samantha was watching carefully. She could see her smiling at Rebecca's obvious discomfort. Once again, she wondered why she was still here. She even wondered how she was still alive.

"Hurry up. I'm hungry," Samantha said finally and walked out.

Rebecca released the breath she had been holding, and with that came the tears. Yet, she never stepped out of the spray of the shower. She welcomed the pain, knowing that each splash against her skin meant the blood of the night was being washed away. How fitting that she should feel as though it was her life circling the drain.

Please - 2001

“REBECCA!”

Samantha’s agitated voice carried through the apartment, causing Rebecca’s entire body to shake. She closed the book she was reading and set it aside. It had been months since Rebecca had told Samantha about buying the club. Since then, their relationship declined even further. Samantha stayed high more often than not. Her temper became out of control. The only fortunate thing was her memory was lapsing. Rebecca had gotten away with never mentioning the ownership of the club again. Fortunate because Rebecca couldn’t imagine giving Samantha control in the state she was in.

“In the bedroom,” Rebecca called out as calmly as she could. *Where I always am. Every night.* It was another lesson learned after that horrible night. The sight of Rebecca in the kitchen only served to piss Samantha off. The blonde had been all but banned from the club. And when Samantha came home, Rebecca was to be waiting in the bedroom for her, ready for whatever mood Samantha happened to be in.

“What the fuck are you doing in here?” Samantha staggered into the room, hitting her shoulder on the door jam. “Shit!”

“I was...”

“Shut up!”

Fantastic. Nights like these were the worst. Samantha would come home completely wasted and Rebecca would take the brunt of her wrath. The only good thing was there were times she was too wasted to do anything sexual. Words and insults were bad, but they were far better than the physical pain of the whips.

“Would you like me to run you a bath?” Rebecca suggested softly. If she could get Samantha to calm down, there was a chance the night would be short and painless. *Maybe she will fall asleep in the tub.* Rebecca cut off that line of thinking.

“No, I don’t want a fucking bath.” Samantha threw her small bag on the bed, hitting Rebecca’s shin. “I want you naked.” She unzipped the bag revealing needles, a tourniquet, and vials of

black tar heroin.

In a ritual Rebecca had seen many times before, Samantha took out the tourniquet and wrapped it around her upper arm. She remained silent as she watched Samantha fill the syringe with a precise dose. With the state Samantha was in already, Rebecca could only hope that another shot would incapacitate her enough that Rebecca would get the night off.

“Did you hear me? Undress.” With great care, Samantha stuck the needle in a plump vein. She closed her eyes, and Rebecca could only assume she was feeling whatever euphoria the drugs brought her.

“Samantha, maybe we could just relax tonight. It sounds like you’ve had a rough day. I think,” Rebecca began. Pain exploded in her head when Samantha back-handed her.

“I don’t want your goddamn opinion! You do what I say when I say.” Samantha staggered towards the bathroom. “You had better be ready when I get out.”

Rebecca wiped blood from her chin and slowly lifted her nightgown over her head. Every inch of her body still ached from the night before. If only she had called her aunt as she was desperate to do. If only Rebecca could find it within herself beg her aunt to convince her that she deserved more.

“Rebecca!”

Rebecca heard a crash coming from the bathroom and braced herself. She had no idea what had happened that day to make Samantha so angry, so she had no idea how to fix it. Rebecca scoffed silently. *Like I could fix it anyway. My mere presence pisses her off.* She quickly made her way to the bathroom and knocked timidly.

“Samantha? Are you okay?”

The door swung open violently. “What the fuck is this!”

She threw a toothbrush at Rebecca’s face, narrowly missing her eye.

Rebecca frowned in confusion. “It’s my toothbrush.” She did all she could to stay calm as she was confronted with Samantha’s unfounded wrath. “Is something wrong with it?” She wracked her brain, trying to remember if she had left the toothbrush out, or failed to put it back in its “rightful spot.”

“Bullshit! Your toothbrush is not this color. Who the fuck has been here?”

Rebecca shook her head. “No one. I swear. I bought new brushes for us both the other day. Remember?”

Another backhand caught Rebecca off-guard.

“Don’t fucking lie to me! Where is the bastard, you fucking whore!”

This time it was a punch that made contact with Rebecca’s jaw, causing the young blonde to crumple to the floor in pain. She curled her naked body up as Samantha continued to wail on her. Each kick, each punch, was like being branded with a hot-iron. She wanted to argue, wanted to beg Samantha to stop, but she couldn’t catch her breath and was pretty sure her jaw was broken. Temporary relief only came when Samantha turned her attention to destroying the room looking for the “bastard” Rebecca was cheating on her with.

Rebecca did her best to protect her stomach with the arm she could still move. The other arm lay limp at her side. It was tough to determine what was hurting worse. Her ribs ached so much she could barely breathe. There was a pain in her stomach that made her wonder if Samantha had caused internal bleeding with the multiple kicks to the area. Her left eye was swollen shut and the right had blood dripping into it.

This is it. She’s finally going to kill me. I love you, Aunt Wills. I’m sorry. Maybe I’ll be able to see mom and dad again. Please don’t let them be disappointed in me.

“Who is it, huh?” Samantha grabbed Rebecca by the hair, yanking her head back. “One of the vendors? Maybe an investor? Is that how you get things done? By spreading your legs?” She wrapped a hand around Rebecca’s throat and squeezed. “What? Nothing to say? You always had something to say. You know, the only reason I let myself be with you is because I wanted to punish you for thinking you could talk to me the way you did.” Samantha let out an evil laugh when a blood-stained tear rolled down Rebecca’s bruised cheek. “Did you think I really wanted you? That I could love someone as pathetic as you? Fuck no. I wanted you to know *exactly* who the boss is and always will be.”

Regardless of what Samantha thought, Rebecca wasn’t crying because of the words Samantha was spitting out at her. She couldn’t deny she had had her suspicions lately as to why Samantha was with her. No, what was causing the tears was the inability to breathe. Samantha’s large hand squeezed against her throat, cutting off her air supply.

“*Please,*” Rebecca managed. She grabbed onto Samantha’s wrist but didn’t have the strength to fight off the bigger woman.

Samantha raised her free hand, poised to strike again. “That’s right, beg me, bitch. Beg me to…”

All of a sudden, Samantha's grip loosened, and she stumbled backward. Her glassy eyes widened as she clutched at her chest. The exertion she had displayed by trashing the place already had her breathing hard, but this was different. This, to Rebecca, was more like the inability to catch her breath.

Rebecca scooted herself back as far and as fast as she could. Before she knew what was happening, Samantha began retching. It seemed as endless as the beating did. When Samantha started vomiting blood and convulsing, Rebecca instinctively reached for the phone. Adrenaline must have dulled the pain as she pulled herself up off the floor, and with her fingers poised to dial, Rebecca met Samantha's wild gaze.

"Help me," the older woman wheezed in between heaves.

Every hit, every whip, every kick, every slap, every bite, every harsh word that Samantha did to Rebecca came back with a vengeance. It was like reliving it all over again. Not to mention, Rebecca stood there bleeding and broken, contemplating helping the woman who did it to her. *Why should I?*

"Rebecca."

For the first time, hearing her name come from Samantha's mouth didn't sound like a demand, but a plea. Rebecca held Samantha's frightened gaze as she lowered the phone.

"No!" Samantha gasped and doubled over, her hand beating weakly at her chest. *"Please!"*

Unable to stay standing, Rebecca sank onto the bed. There was an abundance of things going through her head that she wanted to say to Samantha. How saying please never helped her. How Samantha deserved what she was going through right now. How ironic it was that Rebecca was the one with unanswered pleas just moments before. Yet, she said none of those things. She simply sat there and watched as Samantha's eyes rolled back into her head. Rebecca exhaled softly as Samantha's last breath left her body.

Chapter Three

REBECCA



Taking Back Control - 2001

FEAR OR HOPE—possibly a combination of the two—had Rebecca’s good eye riveted on Samantha’s chest. She counted. One, two, three... all the way to fifty. There was not one rise or fall. Not one breath, not one beat. Samantha’s eyes were open, but Rebecca could no longer see the hard, brown that seemed to always look right through her.

The phone felt heavy in her hand. Or perhaps that was the guilt weighing down on her. She should have called for help. She should have done *something*. Right? The problem was, it wasn’t only guilt she felt. There was something else there. It was the unmistakable feeling of relief. Should she feel guilty about that as well?

A sharp, shooting pain caused Rebecca to gasp. Adrenaline began to wane, and agony set in. As the prickly fingers of unconsciousness began to pull her under, Rebecca quickly sent a text to the first person she thought could help.

Need help. 911. Home.



“REBECCA?”

Her head was pounding, her body felt as though she’d been run over by a car. Twice. All she wanted to do was sleep. But *someone* kept calling her name and touching her.

“Rebecca, can you hear me? I need you to wake up.”

“*Don’t want to.*”

“With the way you look, I bet you don’t. Come on, sweetheart.”

It took significant effort, but Rebecca managed to open one eye. Recognition of the familiar face in front of her took a moment.

“*Lou?*”

Detective Lou Chi. One of L.A.’s finest. And one of the club’s most frequent guests. Rebecca had met the man more than a year ago when he stepped in the middle of one of the many arguments between her and Samantha. Of course, Samantha was high, and Lou threatened to bust her for possession. Rebecca, having noticed the man coming from inside the club, offered a deal instead. Look the other way and use of the club would be free. Sex is a powerful negotiating tool. Since then, he became a friend. He never made it a secret that he wasn’t fond of Samantha or the way she treated Rebecca, but he promised to never interfere unless asked. Now, Rebecca was asking.

“Yeah, it’s me. Can you sit up?” Rebecca shook her head. “Okay, that’s okay. I’m going to call for an ambulance.”

“No! Please, don’t.”

“Rebecca, you’re bleeding. You were unconscious when I got here. I’m not a doctor, but I’m pretty sure you have some broken shit. What the hell happened here?”

“Is she dead?”

“Yeah, I checked on her when I got here. There was nothing I could do.” He grabbed a pillow from the bed and gently lifted Rebecca’s head. “That should help a little until the ambo gets here.”

“They’ll ask what happened.”

“*I’m* asking what happened.” He cut off her response, speaking quickly and precisely into his phone. “Help is on the way. Let’s use this time to work things out. I know it hurts, Rebecca, but I need to know how to fix this.”

It took most of her dwindling strength, but she told him everything that happened. Even the part where she didn’t call for help.

“Okay.” He scrubbed his face. “This is a clear-cut case of abuse and an overdose. You were unconscious, and therefore, unable to administer any type of aid.”

“Texted you instead of calling 911,” Rebecca countered weakly. Her breathing was becoming more labored, and the darkness lurked close by.

“You should have been a damn lawyer,” he grumbled. “You did nothing wrong, Rebecca. You contacted me because you can trust me. I’m a cop. If you were trying to hide something, you’d call someone *not* involved with the police force.”

Rebecca turned her head slightly in the direction of Samantha’s body. Because her vision was compromised, she couldn’t see her. But she knew she was there. The image was seared into her brain.

“I didn’t help her.”

“Judging by how much pain I’m positive you’re in, you shouldn’t have. Why didn’t you tell me it was this bad, Rebecca? I would have helped you.”

“Couldn’t.” She lost her battle with consciousness then, this time welcoming oblivion.



HER EYE FLUTTERED open and was met with bright fluorescent light. *Ow*. She could hear the beeping and whirring of machines around her. *I guess the ambulance showed up*, she thought, taking stock of what she could and couldn’t feel. Loopy? Check. Pain? Eleven out of ten. She couldn’t be sure because she couldn’t move her head, but Rebecca was pretty certain she still had all of her limbs.

“Welcome back.”

Rebecca’s head automatically turned towards the smooth tone. An extremely attractive, kind-

looking woman in a white coat stood close by. Her vision wasn't that great, but from what she could see, the woman had shockingly blue eyes.

"I'm Dr. Vale. Do you know where you are?" The woman asked softly as if she knew Rebecca's head was pounding.

"Hospital."

"Good." The doctor wrote something on the chart she held. "Do you know your name?"

"Rebecca."

Another note with a nod of the head. "Do you remember what happened to you?"

"Beaten." Rebecca wished she could give more than one-word answers, but it hurt to speak. She had watched enough medical dramas to know the questions were important, especially with head injuries. Unfortunately, in real life, the pain was overwhelming.

Compassion filled the doctor's eyes. "A cop came in with you. Does that mean the bastard was caught?"

Rebecca closed her eye. *"She's dead."*

She missed the shocked look directed at her. "Good."

One silver eye popped open. *"You're a doctor."*

Dr. Vale held Rebecca's gaze unapologetically. "And, I have a patient with broken bones, bruises, and who just spent hours in surgery. Anyone who can do that to another human being deserves what they get."

"Hours? What...?"

"There was some internal bleeding. We had to go in and remove a couple of things. But, we'll talk more about that when you're a little more lucid."

When Rebecca reached up in an attempt to touch her face and access the damage, Dr. Vale stopped her with a gentle touch.

"Try not to move around too much or disturb the bandages."

"Will I?" Will I be scarred for life? Will my face be maimed? Is this what I deserve?"

"The scars on your face will fade," Dr. Vale answered, correctly guessing Rebecca's concerns. "I'm *that* good," she smiled kindly. Her smile faded, and she looked at Rebecca seriously. "If you would like to talk about the scars on your back at a later date, we can."

Rebecca nodded slightly.

"Is there someone I can call for you?"

Rebecca scoffed. How the hell was she going to explain this to her aunt? “*Would you want anyone you loved to see you like this?*” She sighed tiredly. God, pain really took a lot out of you.

“I would want to be surrounded by people who loved me,” the doctor answered with a gentleness Rebecca wasn’t used to these days.

“*My fault. I stayed.*” Even though her voice was merely a rasp of a whisper, the defeat was clear.

The tall doctor gingerly sat on the edge of Rebecca’s bed and took her hand. “Rebecca, abuse like this is *never* the victim’s fault. Whether you stayed or not, *you* are not to blame. However, if you’d rather, I could call someone to evaluate your emotional state.”

“*A shrink?*”

“A psychiatrist, yes.”

Rebecca smiled for the first time. “*My aunt. Built-in shrink.*”

Dr. Vale chuckled. “Is she your emergency contact?” Rebecca nodded. The doctor reached over to grab the call cord. “I’ll have Patty give her a call. She’s the head nurse around here and runs a tight ship. If you need anything at all, just press this button and she’ll be here. I’ll be back during my rounds to check up on you.”

“*Thank you, Dr. Vale.*”



“REBECCA, ARE YOU sure you’re ready?” Dr. Willamena Woodrow paced around the hospital room. Her normally well-groomed chestnut hair was mussed, most likely due to being driven crazy by her head-strong niece.

Willamena was barely in her twenties when her older sister died, and Willamena was entrusted with the care of her young niece. Despite the closeness in age—just ten years—Willamena took Rebecca under her wing and raised her in a way she hoped her sister would be proud of. It wasn’t always easy, and right now was one of those times.

“I’m sure. Hunter has cleared me, Aunt Wills.” Rebecca continued to pack the things her aunt had brought her during her stay. She’d been cooped up in this place for almost two weeks and she

was ready to get out. It wasn't all bad, of course. She had gotten to know Dr. Hunter Vale better, as well as Nurse Patty and her wife Mo (also a nurse). But, if she didn't get out of this room soon, she was going to go crazy. Though if she said those words to her aunt, she would get "the look."

"Maybe I should talk to this Hunter person. Why haven't I, by the way? Isn't she your doctor?"

"Yes. I think she's avoiding you," Rebecca answered truthfully with a touch of mirth. It was true, however. Whenever her aunt was around, Hunter tended to disappear. In the short amount of time Rebecca had known the doctor, she sensed there was something going on in her life that she may not be ready to face. Maybe Hunter was afraid Aunt Wills would see that and begin shrinking her. Rebecca chuckled silently at the thought.

"Story of my life," Willamena muttered playfully. "Fine, I realize I can't stop you from leaving." She ignored her niece's sarcastic "thank you," and continued. "But, please tell me you're not going back to that place." She had been horrified to learn what Rebecca had been going through. Guilt settled in all nice and cozy. She should have noticed something. She was a psychiatrist for chrissake. Once again, she sent up heartfelt apologies to her sister.

Rebecca's actions faltered slightly. "No. It was Samantha's place." And it was filled with ghosts of the past. "While being stuck in here with nothing to do, I was able to find a small bungalow to move into."

"I wish you would come home to New York with me." *So, I can keep an eye on you*, Willamena added silently.

"Aunt Wills," Rebecca warned softly. They had had this conversation countless times since her aunt showed up. She could see that her aunt felt the weight of responsibility on her shoulders, and that bothered her. Rebecca had done a remarkable job of hiding what was happening. Nothing that happened to her was her aunt's fault. "She can't hurt me anymore and I'm not running from a ghost. Besides, I still have the club."

Another subject of conflict. Wills wanted Rebecca to sell the club and be done with everything having to do with Samantha. Rebecca, on the other hand, had more than one reason to keep the club. None of which she wanted to discuss with her aunt at the moment.

"You are the most stubborn person. Your mother..."

"Would be proud?" Rebecca finished with a laugh. "You know I get it from her."

"I believe even she would have issues with this decision, Becca. Especially after all you've been through."

“Which is *exactly* why I have to stay and do this, Aunt Wills. If I run and hide, she wins anyway.”

“There’s no shame in taking some time to recuperate your body and soul, Becca. You’ve been on the go since, well since you were born. Take a sabbatical. Travel around the world. Do something for just you.”

Rebecca sighed and sat down on the bed. She couldn’t deny that what Aunt Wills was suggesting sounded wonderful. Especially since she could still feel the effects of the beating. On the one hand, she had been lucky enough that the only things broken were her nose, eye socket, and ribs. She had been afraid her arm was broken, but it had turned out to be a dislocated shoulder. Even so, she was still weak, and it took her a moment longer than normal to catch her breath due to the lung that had been punctured. Sutures from the surgery to remove her spleen—and mend other things inside—ached. Mentally, she was trying to come to terms with everything she had lost.

“The problem with that is it gives me time to think. If I think, I’ll wonder why I wasn’t strong enough to leave her.” She held up her hand when Wills began to argue. “I know how you feel, okay. And, maybe one day I’ll get there. I have a lot to learn about myself, but I think I need to do it in my own way. Not by traveling, but by taking back control of my life.”

Wills studied her niece. Something told her she probably wasn’t going to like what Rebecca had in mind, but she would stand by her nonetheless. In fact, she would do whatever it took to make up for not being there.

“How do you plan on doing that?”

“By doing things on my terms now. The club is mine and I intend to start doing things my way. Samantha’s hold on that place—and me—is... over, Aunt Wills. I need to know I can do this.”

Wills nodded. That was something she could understand. “Very well. I can take a couple more weeks off, stay here until you’re set.”

“Not necessary.” Rebecca hopped off the bed and immediately regretted it. Her ribs still hurt like a bitch. She shook it off and walked over to her aunt, taking her hands. “I know you want to protect me, Aunt Wills. We can talk every day or email, but I have to do this myself. You have to let me do this myself.”

“You’re asking me to go against all of my training, and my instincts, Becca.”

“I know.”

Wills sighed. “All right. On *one* condition. I hear from you daily, at least in the beginning. And, *if* something like this happens again, you tell me immediately. And, I want weekly sessions with you.”

Rebecca raised a blonde brow. “That’s three conditions. Is it ethical to counsel a family member?”

“Screw semantics and ethics. I want to make sure you’re okay. I know you, Becca. You won’t go to another therapist, so you’re stuck with me.”

Rebecca laughed softly. “I agree with calling, texting, or emailing you daily. I won’t allow anything like this to ever happen again.” *I’ve learned my lesson.* “And, I only agree to weekly therapy sessions if I get the family discount.”

Willamena’s lips twitched. “You’re quite the negotiator.” She held her hand out to Rebecca. “Deal.”

Rebecca took her aunt’s hand, shook it once, and pulled her in for a hug. “Thank you.”

Willamena pushed her back enough to frame her face with her hands and look her in the eyes. One iris was still red from the burst blood vessels, and both eyes were underlined by fading bruises. Even with the blemishes, Rebecca was beautiful and captivating.

“Please, don’t shut me out again, Becca.”

“I promise.”

Becoming Mistress - Present

REBECCA SAT IN her newly renovated office. It was here that she dominated over everything she had re-built. The once small, semi-profitable club was now a two-story, high-end lounge where entrance was by application and invitation only. Yes, it still held much of Samantha’s BDSM vision, but gone was the old staff, mediocre vendors, and greedy investors. In their place were professionals that were meticulously vetted by Rebecca before they were even brought in for an interview. She had strict rules, and if they were not adhered to, there were no second chances. None

of them met the real Rebecca Cuinn. Instead, they encountered leather-clad, mask-wearing Mistress. It was a mystery to them who she really was, and that's exactly what Rebecca wanted.

Another major change was Rebecca's demeanor. Being a sub was buried with her past. Mistress—now a Dom—was born out of the necessity to take charge of her life again. She also had the idea to show subs in the BDSM world that what they may have thought of the lifestyle didn't have to be so black and white. It was why she chose the pink room as her personal room. Each person she had in that room—also carefully investigated before Mistress would allow them in—saw a different side of BDSM. A side where the Submissive had just as much power as the Dominant.

The main difference between Mistress and the other Doms in the club was Mistress never had sex with her clients. Sex certainly wasn't something she wanted to be paid for. Not to mention, she didn't feel sexy underneath the leather. Underneath the mask. Scars still branded her back, and though the scars on her face were gone, she felt them nevertheless. Even without the sex, Mistress was the most sought-after Dominant in the club. They all wanted to be whipped, bound, and punished by Mistress. Just having her in the room was enough of a sexual experience for them.

It was enough for Rebecca to get her confidence back. Not just the dominance over others, but the success of the club. Samantha had worn her down so much, told her she was stupid so often, that she wasn't sure she had the same business mind anymore. But with Samantha gone, everything that Rebecca touched seemed to turn to gold. That's not to say she didn't have problems. She most certainly did. At times it took double therapy sessions with her aunt just to pause the nightmares.

As the years wore on, Rebecca became tired of the tedium of her life. Time in the pink room did nothing for her anymore. She merely went through the motions with clients who never lost the novelty of being dominated by the small woman. The effect on her, though, wasn't the same as it was before. With her confidence high, sexless domination over her clients got... boring. Unfortunately, as of yet, no one had intrigued her enough to go down that road again. Or, perhaps, she was lying to herself about being too scared to bring sex into it. What if she found out that she would be just as bad as Samantha if she let herself go?

In order to suppress temptation, Mistress closed the pink room, indefinitely. Clients and staff both were disappointed in the decision, but her staff was astute enough not to argue with Mistress. Clients begged, threatened, and begged some more for Mistress to keep seeing them. However,

per their binding contract, they had no choice but to let her go. They were more than welcome, however, to choose a new Dom if they wanted to continue their patronage at the club.

These days, Mistress stayed in her office, high above the action, watching. She was getting pretty good at determining which room clients would request. There had been only one time she had been surprised by the gender choice of one sub, but fine-tuning her observance was easy enough. Mistress knew every name, every career, every fetish, every family member of every single person that stepped foot in her building. She refused married people, but allowed couples. She wasn't in the business of tearing families apart. Mistress preferred showing them exactly what they had with each other.

Mistress picked up a file and flipped it open. The club was hosting a bachelorette party—she checked the clock—starting about now. She had dossiers on everyone attending that party. Each had to sign non-disclosure contracts, fill out applications, and give two forms of ID. It was an arduous task, but it helped Mistress filter out those who weren't serious about the lifestyle or who wanted to use it as a way to hurt others.

She plucked a sheet from the file. Miranda Loring, bride-to-be—and frequent customer with her fiancé—had submitted a request for time with someone other than her groom and vice-versa. *That won't do*, Mistress concluded. *They just need a push in the right direction*. In lieu of a surrogate, she arranged for the couple to be placed together without them knowing. Blindfolds were wonderful tools if used correctly.

She stood and walked to the window that overlooked the main room and VIP section. One change Mistress loved after her takeover was how diverse the group always was. Yes, they had rules, but in the end, every type of person you could think of could be here at any given time. As long as you followed the guidelines, your race, gender, sexuality, body type, didn't matter.

Her breath caught, and her chest tightened when she saw one particular club-goer. This was someone she had never seen before, and part of her wished she had missed seeing the tall woman now. Her body's response was too intense to be good for her. With a shaking hand, she pressed the intercom button on the wall next to her.

“Yes, Mistress?”

“Bring me the files on the entire Loring party.” At least her voice hadn't betrayed the chaos she felt inside. Less than a minute later, there was a knock at her door. “Enter.”

“The files, Mistress.”

“Thank you, Carlie.” Once she was alone again, she began sifting through the files. “*You shouldn’t be doing this,*” she told herself. It didn’t stop her. Nothing stopped her until she came to the one photo she was looking for. A scan of the attached copy of the driver’s license gave her the information she was looking for. “Cassidy Giles. Oh God, she’s only twenty-five!”

Mistress tossed the file aside, determined to forget about the incredibly hot, tall, androgynous woman. She couldn’t care less how the black jeans made that ass look. Or how the crisp, white button-up shirt was unbuttoned dangerously low. And, she certainly wasn’t thinking about fisting her hands in that short, dark hair. Nope.

“She’s too young, Rebecca,” she said aloud in an attempt to remind herself to get the gorgeously handsome... “Stop!” *Too young. Too young. Too young.* She groaned in frustration when that wasn’t working. She walked away from the window, paced for a moment, before sitting back at her desk. She tapped her pale pink tipped nails on the surface, then let curiosity get the best of her.

Mistress activated the monitors in front of her. She had a view of almost every single inch of the club. Except for the private rooms, of course. Those sessions were recorded on an encrypted server that purged itself every forty-eight hours unless a specific order came from the Mistress herself. As with all the cameras around the place, it was purely a safety measure.

But, what she was looking for right now, had nothing to do with safety and everything to do with her aroused libido. “You’re playing with fire,” she told herself, wondering when she started talking to herself. She scanned the area, stopping at the VIP section. “Ah, there you are, Cassidy Giles.” A couple of clicks from the mouse had the camera zooming in on that exquisite face. “Jesus, you’re gorgeous.”

She sat back in her chair with a huff. “Carlie!”

“Yes, Mistress?”

Good lord, does she stand right outside my door?

“Send a shot of Fireball to table one in the VIP section. From me.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

The sprite of a woman disappeared as fast as she appeared, and Mistress shook her head. “Okay, so you sent her a drink. That’s it. Your room is closed, and you will *not* open it for someone who is young enough to be your...” She stopped talking and banged her head on her desk. “Anyone who makes you talk to yourself should not be messed with,” she muttered.

As if it were on a string, her head lifted in time to see Cassidy Giles look around, raise the glass in salute, then slam back the amber liquid. Consequences be damned, Mistress opened her desk drawer and took out the one thing she never thought she would use again.

Chapter Four

REBECCA



Giving in to desires

MISTRESS BARELY RESISTED making a fool out of herself by touching Cassidy's hair as she passed by. In her defense, she only wanted to know if it was as soft as it looked. She managed to stick to her task of putting her pink card on the table, bringing attention to it with a tap of her fingertip and walking away. She never looked back to see if Cassidy followed her. Truth be told, part of her hoped she didn't. A much bigger, more horny part, was desperate that she did. That she was considering actually having sex with this woman surprised the hell out of Mistress. She *never* wanted to have sex with paying clients. *Technically, Miranda Loring is paying.* It was a thin technicality, but one Mistress held on to.

She entered the room painted in a soft pink hue for the first time in months. Since no one was allowed in here, nothing had changed. It was minimally but tastefully decorated with the finest furniture, carpet, and accessories. Mistress wanted the ambiance to portray safety and peacefulness. Some may say that was ironic, but she thought it made perfect sense.

Once inside the room, you found two high-back, pink chairs that faced each other. A door on the left led you into a full bathroom complete with a shower and soaking tub. Further in the room was the pièce de résistance. A colossal California King four poster bed. It was perfect for bondage. Not far from the bed stood an armoire full of implements of pleasure and pain. Mistress's heart rate spiked when she thought of using those things on Cassidy Giles. *If* she showed up.

Determined not to get her hopes up, Mistress sat in one of the chairs that faced the doorway. Her posture—straight back, feet crossed at the ankles, and hands clasped together in her lap—gave off a relaxed, yet commanding, vibe. Inside, she was anxious and aroused. A feeling she deliberately avoided for years. It left her feeling a bit off-kilter.

She wasn't sure how much time had passed since she laid that card down on Cassidy's table, but it seemed like hours. Just as she was about to give up, there was a knock at the door. For the first time, Mistress was speechless. She opened her mouth to say something and nothing happened. Apparently—luckily—that didn't stop Cassidy from entering.

If Mistress thought Cassidy was hot from afar, being so close nearly caused her to gasp. Lust coursed through every vein in her body, and it took her a moment for her brain to function.

“Come,” Mistress commanded softly. Cassidy merely stood there, staring, so Mistress tried again. “Sit.” Her eyes glanced at the chair in front of her. When Cassidy still remained close to the door, Mistress tilted her head and studied her. Defiant. Strong-willed. Someone who could be difficult, yet oh so fun, to dominate. “You don't like being told what to do.”

This is a waste of time, Mistress thought dejectedly. She had taken a chance by reopening her room for someone too young for her, and got what she perceived as rejection. Having had enough humiliation in her life, Mistress began to rise.

“Wait!” Cassidy moved to the chair quickly and sat.

“Why are you here?” Mistress asked as she resumed her position.

“I'm here in support of my friend.” She rolled her eyes slightly. “Of course, I haven't seen her since.”

Mistress nodded. “Miranda. She and her friends are being well taken care of. You didn't join in the fun.” *Thank you for not joining in with someone else.*

“Not my scene.”

Judging by Cassidy's distasteful look, Mistress wondered if she would leave this room unsatisfied.

“You don’t approve.”

Cassidy shrugged. “Who am I to judge? I’m sure you get a lot of cheaters in here. Part of the reason I could never get into this lifestyle. What if I did something wrong? Forgot to obey? My ‘Dom’ would just find someone who would, right?”

There is definitely something deeper there, Mistress thought. People with that much passion, good or bad, usually had a reason for being that way. Cassidy had a point. There were Doms out there that did exactly what she described. Mistress knew that better than most. But that’s not what it was truly about. Especially here for Mistress.

“You have no idea what this lifestyle is about, do you?” Cassidy shook her head. “Would it make you feel better if I told you that Connor is with Miranda?”

Cassidy frowned in confusion and Mistress explained.

“They don’t know it’s each other. They wanted a different experience, so we’re giving them one. They’ll see that all they really need is each other at the end of the night. The purpose of this place is not to tear people apart, Cassidy. It’s to bring fire to the relationship. To give them something more than what they have right now. It’s not for everyone. But for those who enjoy it, it does not make them bad people.”

“How did you know my name?”

Mistress smiled. *All of that I said, and she focuses on that*. “This is my club. I make it my business to know what goes on in here. Do you feel better about Miranda now?”

Cassidy shrugged again. Mistress could tell she was still uneasy about everything that went on in this establishment. Especially when it came to her friend. She wanted to show Cassidy that what happened here could be incredible.

“Would you like to learn more about what we do here, Cassidy?” Mistress tilted her head again at Cassidy’s hesitation. It almost scared her that Cassidy would say no. It was a very vulnerable way to feel.

“Yes.”

That one small tremble in Cassidy’s voice caused desire to explode inside Mistress. She had never wanted to be with someone as much as she did at this moment. With this woman. It was enough to make her ignore the warning bells.

“Let me bind your hands.”

Cassidy’s eyes, that had been trained on Mistress’s cleavage, snapped up at the demand. “Take

off your mask.”

The request took Mistress by surprise. No one had ever questioned her, countered her, or asked for anything more than what she was willing to give. Until now.

“No. If you can’t comply, Cassidy, we’re wasting our time here.”

“You mean submit.”

Mistress set her desire aside. She became a dominant because it was what she needed in her life. Control. It didn’t do to have someone demanding things from her at this point in her life.

“I admit that I don’t know much about this... stuff,” Cassidy said quickly. “But I’m pretty sure that trust is a big thing, right? Don’t I need to trust whoever is going to be causing me pain?”

Mistress caught the slight shiver that ran through Cassidy and felt compassion. “I don’t want to cause you pain, Cassidy.”

“Cass. Remove the mask. Please?”

“Since this is your first time, I’ll compromise with you.” *You’ll what?* She couldn’t believe she just said that. Mistress did not compromise. *What the hell? I seem to want to do a lot of things with Cassidy that I haven’t before.* With a confidence she didn’t fully feel, Mistress looked Cassidy in the eyes. *Extraordinary eyes.* “Let me bind you, and I will take off the mask.”

“Take the mask off first.”

Ah, yes, you are a defiant one. That will have to be dealt with. With a stern but delicate hand, of course.

“You don’t like authority. If you want to learn, *Cassidy*, you’re going to have to knock that chip off your shoulder. Or I can do it for you.” Mistress made sure to emphasize Cassidy’s full name. It was clear that Cassidy was used to getting her way. She would have to learn that not everything is negotiable.

Cassidy slowly put her arms behind her back and, essentially submitted to Mistress. It was a small victory, but it definitely had the desire coming back ten-fold. Mistress stood and walked behind Cassidy’s chair. She slipped a long piece of silk out of her cleavage and bound Cassidy’s hands together. She made sure the silk would hold, but not hurt. Too much.

Mistress leaned close to Cassidy’s ear. “That wasn’t so hard now, was it?” she whispered. She closed her eyes and silently breathed in the handsome woman’s scent. It was a woody/citrus combination that ramped up Mistress’s arousal even more. Cassidy turned her head and Mistress nearly kissed her. Unnerved, she moved away quickly and sat down.

“Now the mask.”

The husky, low octave of Cassidy’s voice made Mistress want to give into anything she asked. Even take off her mask. She lifted her blonde hair away from her neck and grabbed the ribbon that kept the mask in place. Holding the mask to her face, she pulls the ribbon to untie it. She closed her eyes and thought about what she was about to do. Not even her staff had seen her without a mask firmly in place. What was it about this woman that made her give in to her desires so easily? With both hands, she lowered the mask from her face.

There was a small gasp in the room. When silver eyes met bicolored ones, Mistress could see the hunger in Cassidy’s gaze. It filled her with a confidence she had lacked behind the mask. With the mask, clients had to use their imagination as to what Mistress looked like. She could be anyone they wanted her to be. Most importantly, she didn’t have to be herself. As beautiful as people always told her she was, years with Samantha had chipped away at her self-esteem. She no longer saw the beauty everyone else did. Refuge behind the mask became her salvation.

“Are you ready for your next lesson?”

“What’s your name?”

“You may call me Mistress.”

“You know my name.”

Mistress wasn’t sure whether to laugh or leave. Cassidy was perilously close to whining, and the pout was beyond cute. But this was a lesson. If Mistress was going to keep any semblance of control, she would have to make Cassidy understand who the boss was.

“I’ve given you the mask, Cassidy. That’s all I’m willing to give you. Stand.” Cassidy didn’t hesitate this time, and Mistress smiled. *Progress. God, she’s tall. And, oh so damned sexy,* she thought as she stood as well. “Walk to the edge of the bed.” When Cassidy reached her destination, Mistress spoke again. “Face me, Cassidy.”

The sexual tension in the room was palpable. There was an animalistic magnetism between the two that had them leaning into each other. *No kissing!* It was Mistress’s one unbreakable rule. Kissing meant emotions. Emotions meant the possibility of heartache. *Not to mention, she’s way too young for you! Play and then step away.* She pressed a hand firmly to Cassidy’s chest.

“No touching. Not with your hands, not with your mouth.” Mistress started to unbutton Cassidy’s shirt. “What’s your favorite word, Cassidy?”

Mistress stopped her task when Cassidy didn’t answer. Her lips twitched as she realized

Cassidy was focused on her breasts. She waited until cheeky woman realized she seriously wanted to know the answer.

“Um. Platypus.”

The answer was so out of left field, it caused Mistress to laugh. “Platypus?” Cassidy nodded earnestly. *Cute*. “All right then. That is your safe word. Should be easy for you to remember. If I do anything that you’re not comfortable with, or you want me to stop, all you have to say is your safe word. I will stop without hesitation. Without question. Understand?”

Cassidy nodded again. Mistress found the speechlessness endearing. In a move purely born out of a need to feel Cassidy’s body, Mistress wrapped her arms around her. Of course, she could have used a different tactic to untether Cassidy’s hands, but where was the fun in that? Once her task was done, she stepped back.

“Remove your shirt.” Interest turned into surprise when it was revealed that Cassidy wasn’t wearing a bra. *Nice*. Mistress allowed her eyes to roam further down. The six-pack abs caused her sex to clench almost painfully. *Very nice!* She couldn’t resist feathering her fingers down that hard stomach.

Hell, if she didn’t get Cassidy inside her soon, she may just implode. Such a visceral reaction nearly brought Mistress to her knees.

“Unbutton your jeans, but leave them on.” *If you take them off right now, I may lose control.* Cassidy did as she was told, and Mistress continued. “Now get on the bed. Lay down in the middle, with your hands above your head.”

Cassidy hopped up on the bed—not quite the arduous task as it was for Mistress—and assumed the position. Mistress’s hands itched to touch Cassidy. Everywhere. She forced herself to maintain control. To stretch this experience out for both of them.

“Grab ahold of this bar,” Mistress demanded, pleased when Cassidy obliged. She wrapped the attached ropes around Cassidy’s wrists, again making them tight enough to feel the bite of the rope on the skin. After completing her task on both hands, Mistress allowed herself a moment to take in all that was Cassidy Giles, bound and at her mercy. As marvelous as the view was, she needed to see the rest. Hooking her fingers into the waistband of Cassidy’s jeans and boxer briefs, she tugged.

“Lift.”

Cassidy complied and grinned when Mistress hit a “snag.” She let out a small gasp when she

saw what had impeded her progress. There, in all its wonderful glory, was an impressive dildo. Cassidy Giles packs and that made Mistress *very* happy. She had used them on herself in the past. A very enjoyable experience. One that Samantha never gave her. She was all about using instruments to torture Rebecca, but never that. If Rebecca wanted a dick, she could find a man. It looked as though Cassidy didn't have the same hang-ups.

She lifted a brow at Cassidy's arrogant smirk. It's not often she was surprised by people these days. This surprise had her mouth watering. As did the multitude of tattoos that painted Cassidy's body. Tiny works of art that Mistress would love to trace with her tongue. She licked her lips at the thought.

"Spread your legs."

Mistress was mesmerized by the delicious sight of Cassidy's glistening sex. If she were ever ambivalent about being a lesbian, this sight cured her of that rather quickly. *More!*

"More, Cassidy!" she echoed her needy thought. There was hesitation this time. One that Mistress could understand. It wasn't easy opening yourself up—literally—to someone. Particularly someone you didn't know. She waited semi-patiently—despite the tapping of her nail on the bedpost—to see if Cassidy could do it. Finally, Cassidy chose to trust Mistress and spread her legs. "Good girl."

She tied Cassidy's ankles in the same fashion as her wrists, patted her on the calf and made her way to the armoire. She swung the doors open and pondered her options. This was Cassidy's first experience. Mistress wanted to make it memorable, yet adventurous. She didn't want to go overboard on the pain. But she also knew that the combination of powerful pleasure with the sharp sting of a whip was intoxicating. *Ah, a whip. Perfect.*

Mistress chose a fringed whip for maximum pleasure. She slapped her palm a couple of times. Partly out of the need to feel the leather on her skin. Partly to get a reaction out of her Sub. It worked as each sound of the snap caused Cassidy to jump. Mistress used the fringe to tickle Cassidy's ribcage, knowing the sensation would amplify her next move. With a flick of her wrist, she slapped the whip against Cassidy's side, who immediately hissed through clenched teeth.

"Do you always wear that?" Mistress asked, nodding towards the dildo. When Cassidy failed to respond audibly, Mistress slapped the whip across her nipple. "Answer me!"

"Yes."

Another slap, another hiss. Mistress noticed the small movement away from her, but she had

other things to deal with at the moment.

“Yes, what?”

More hesitation. She knew Cassidy would have a problem with this. Hell, it was something Rebecca herself had issues with. All Cassidy needed to do was say her safe word and this would be over. She almost expected it.

“Yes, Mistress.”

More progress. “And do you use that often?” Cassidy shrugged and received two stinging snaps from Mistress. “Tell me the truth, Cassidy.” *Even if I don’t want to hear how others have enjoyed you.* The unbidden thought shook her.

“I used to, Mistress. Not so much these days.”

Mistress wondered if Cassidy revealed so much because she was scared of getting punished again, or she was just that open. *Let’s see how much she will tell me.*

“Why?”

“I haven’t found anyone that holds my attention lately, Mistress.”

A young, handsome, obviously passionate woman such as Cassidy didn’t seem like she’d have a challenging time finding *anyone* that would fight to hold her attention.

“Do I hold your attention, Cassidy?”

“Yes, Mistress. Very much so.”

The vulnerability and honesty in Cassidy’s gaze took Mistress’s breath away. As a reward for her candor, Mistress fanned the fringe of the whip softly over Cassidy’s breasts. She could practically see the tension flowing out of Cassidy’s body, though her hands still held tightly to the headboard.

“I don’t want to hurt you, Cassidy. That’s not what this is about.” She ran her fingers up her captive’s arm and tapped the firm grip. “Relax. Loosen your grip. Your brain is anticipating the pain, your body bracing for it. So much so that you can’t feel the pleasure that being like this can give you.”

“Easy for you to say. Why don’t you lay here all tied up, and let me hit you. See if you like it.”

Pain of a different kind rushed through Mistress causing her to frown. She forced herself to erase the images of her past before they took over.

“Say your safe word, Cassidy.” The woman’s mouth clamped shut, and Mistress could see the

contrition in that handsome face. “I know what it’s like to be hit. The kind of hitting that *doesn’t* come with pleasure at the end of it.” *Stop talking! You’re getting too personal, Rebecca.*

“I’ll kill them!”

As though surprised by her outburst, Cassidy quickly looked away. Mistress, on the other hand, was touched by the ferocity and protectiveness she heard. With her fingertips, she brought Cassidy’s gaze to hers.

“You’re sweet.” Mistress smiled at the cute little blush that graced Cassidy’s face. It tugged at her heartstrings. *Time to get back to business*, she thought with conviction. *She’s not your lover or your girlfriend. She’s a client. A Sub.* Not thoroughly convinced, Mistress called on all of the disciplines she had built up over the years.

“You’re associating the feel of this,” she whipped Cassidy on the side, “with pain and humility. It doesn’t have to be like that.” Mistress took Cassidy’s “cock” in her hand. She realized then that it was double-sided, and one side was snugly inside her Sub. *Perfect.* “I want you to associate this, with this.” With deliberate movements, Mistress jerked Cassidy’s cock while flicking her nipples smartly with the whip.

“Fuck!”

Mistress leaned in close. “Did your pussy contract when I did that?”

“Yes, Mistress,” Cassidy panted.

She’s beginning to understand. Mistress continued to stroke in slow, torturous strokes as she kept the whip moving sensually across Cassidy’s nipples. Cassidy’s hip began to move in rhythm sending electric currents to already aching parts of Mistress’s body. As Cassidy’s breathing became erratic, Mistress knew she was close. She increased the speed of her strokes, and at just the right moment, she snapped the whip, hard, across Cassidy’s breasts.

Cassidy yelled and thrashed. Legs tried to close but were held open by ropes. The vision proved to be Mistress’s breaking point. She *needed* to be fucked by Cassidy or she would explode. And, not in the good way. Her eyes were trained on that cock that she could practically feel inside of her right now and she licked her lips in anticipation.

“In my opinion,” Mistress began, warring with herself to give in to everything she wanted. “People have it all wrong. Even those who are deeply *into* this stuff.” Cassidy had a charmingly confused look on her face, so Mistress explained. “This Dom/Sub lifestyle. Everyone assumes that the Sub is weak and that it is the Dom that is in control.”

She chuckled lightly when Cassidy looked pointedly at her wrists and ankles and raised a brow. She gave her a playful flick of the whip but located it very precisely. Cassidy moaned with pleasure as the fringe caught her clit.

“One word, Cassidy. That’s all it takes from you that could stop all of this. *You* have the power to leave me wanting. And, oh god, do I want you. If you could only feel how wet I am for you.” Another groan from Cassidy nearly had Mistress fidgeting. “If you break the rules, you get punished, but there’s always a reward for you at the end. If *I* do something you don’t like, one word and it’s over for me. No rewards. So, you see? *You* have the power here. *You* are allowing me to do these things to you. I wouldn’t be able to do them without your permission.”

Mistress started unfastening her corset. There was no denying what she wanted from Cassidy. She made the rules. If she wanted to fuck someone, that was her right. She didn’t think Cassidy would object. The corset comes off and her full breasts spill out, captivating Cassidy. Of course, Mistress didn’t mind having her rosy-tipped nipples stared at by this woman. It made her feel wanted. Yet, even though *she* made the rules, there were still rules. She paused in taking off her leather pants until Cassidy finally looked up at her.

“Paying attention?” she smirked.

“Yes, Mistress.”

“You’re not to move. If you move your hips, I will stop. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Mistress,” Cassidy responded after a second’s hesitation.

That was as convincing as my understanding of what’s happening here, Mistress thought sardonically. Nevertheless, she continued to undress until she stood in front of Cassidy completely naked. It was the first time since Samantha since anyone had seen her like this. That would have been more daunting if Cassidy didn’t look as though she could start drooling at any moment. Mistress never stopped taking care of her body and was proud of her femininity. As long as Cassidy didn’t focus on Mistress’s back, things would be okay. She was quite confident she could keep Cassidy’s attention elsewhere.

Mistress crawled up on the bed until she was straddling Cassidy. She knew the woman beneath her could feel the heat radiating from her center, and praised her silently for her control.

A soft touch started on Cassidy’s cheek and moved down her neck. She tweaked Cassidy’s nipples hard, before moving her hand down between them. Taking the ‘cock’ in her hand, she guided it to her opening.

“Don’t move,” she reminded Cassidy before sinking down onto her. She’s so wet the dildo slid in easily, and she moaned in ecstasy. Cassidy moaned in response but still managed not to move. *Impressive.*

Unable to keep her own body from moving, Mistress lifted her hips and impaled herself on Cassidy once again. Being watched with such intensity only heightened her passion as she moved her hips back and forth, her clit rubbing against Cassidy’s chiseled stomach with each stroke. Her breasts bounced in rhythm with the thrusts, effectively holding Cassidy’s enraptured attention.

“Don’t come until I tell you,” Mistress rasped, hearing the change in Cassidy’s breathing. It was a lot to ask for, she knew, if Cassidy was feeling even a fraction of what Mistress felt. Her hand clutched at Cassidy, and she dug her fingernails digging into her stomach as her breath hitched. *So close.*

She fell forward, enticing Cassidy with her swaying tits. When she felt Cassidy’s hot mouth suck in one of her nipples, she gasped loudly. Using her left hand to hold herself up, she tangled her right hand in Cassidy’s hair and pulled her closer. She needed more, and Cassidy responded by biting her nipple hard. That sensation of that pain with the pleasure that she was feeling having Cassidy inside her had a strikingly fierce orgasm racing to be released. She bucked wildly and slammed her body down on Cassidy’s hard and fast.

“Move!” she cried out. “Fuck me!”

There was absolutely no hesitation in Cassidy as she brought her hips up with strong thrusts, giving Mistress everything she needed. Flesh slapped against flesh, rough and fast, and the sound was intoxicating.

“Now! Come with me!”

Cassidy let go with a roar that reverberated through Mistress, causing her to come hard. She squeezed Cassidy’s breasts as she rode out the last waves of an orgasm that was unlike anything she had ever felt before. Something else happened that she had never felt before. A warmth flowed from her and washed over Cassidy. Mistress had a moment of embarrassment until she realized Cassidy climaxed again.

Depleted—literally—by the power of what just happened, Mistress collapsed on top of an awfully triumphant Sub. She let out a small sigh and weakly reached up to release Cassidy’s hands. She tensed almost involuntarily when Cassidy immediately wrapped her arms around her. She would have loved to lay there and be held by her incredible lover... she sighed silently. *She’s not*

your lover. This is your job. It was an ugly thought, especially since what just happened between them felt *nothing* like a job. It felt... real.

Gingerly she dislodged herself from the woman beneath her, and rolled off the bed and shuffled to the bathroom. The least she could do was clean up the mess she left behind. Armed with a warm, wet washcloth, she came back into the room. She was surprised to see Cassidy's ankles still shackled to the bed. *Maybe she was afraid to untie herself.* Mistress didn't like the idea that Cassidy could be afraid of her. She placed the washcloth on Cassidy's tummy and proceeded to untie her, gently rubbing the redness that was left behind on her skin.

Once that was finished, she began wiping Cassidy clean. "I got you all messy," she said quietly. It still surprised and embarrassed her that she had that reaction. She hadn't known her body was even capable of that.

"That's quite all right. I enjoyed it immensely." Cassidy grinned sincerely.

"So did I," Mistress answered just as honestly. She brushed the washcloth over the small, red welts left behind by the whip. Had she been too harsh? The thought of hurting Cassidy made her unbelievably sad.

"Kiss me," Cassidy whispered.

Her hand stilled. She wanted to. Oh, God, she wanted to so badly. But she couldn't let herself get emotionally involved.

"I can't."

"Against the rules?"

The disappointment in Cassidy's voice was enough for Mistress to bring the emotional shutters down.

"Something like that," she responded evenly and turned away.

"So, no name and no kissing. What else should I know?"

"Perhaps this lifestyle isn't for you, Cassidy." Mistress knelt to pick up Cassidy's clothes and tossed them at her. "Get dressed."

She started to get dressed, disappointed that such an awe-inspiring time was ending this way.

"I'm sorry."

Mistress paused but said nothing.

"Please, Mistress. I didn't mean to upset you."

She noticed from the corner of her eye that Cassidy was not getting dressed. That immaculate

body made her want to start all over again. But, she couldn't.

"It's okay, Cassidy. Not all of us are made for this."

"I am! With you. May I see you again?"

Mistress contemplated the ramifications of seeing Cassidy again. She had already stepped out of bounds.

"I don't think..."

"Please! I have more to learn. I *want* to learn. With you."

Mistress finished dressing and reached for her mask. "Okay."

"When?"

"You have an open invitation, Cassidy. Come whenever you desire." They both smile at Mistress's play on words.

"How will I know you're here?"

"You'll know."

"It'll be you, right? I don't want anyone else, Mistress."

Mistress nodded. "It'll be me. Now, you should get dressed and join your friends."

"I'd rather stay with you."

I'd rather stay with you, too. Mistress secured the mask, hopefully hiding what she was feeling inside, and stepped to Cassidy. "You've learned enough for tonight, Cassidy. I'm sure by now Rand is finished with her 'conquest.' Celebrate with her."

"Promise you'll be here again?"

Mistress, unfortunately, felt the neediness she heard coming from Cassidy. *Not good. Do not promise!* "Yes." She relaxed minimally when Cassidy seemed to accept that answer and slipped on her shirt. "You're welcome to stay here as long as you need to. There's a full bathroom through that door," she informed her guest.

"Won't someone else need the room?"

There was no mistaking the real question, and Mistress answered honestly. "This is my personal room. No one is allowed in here without me. I won't be needing it anymore tonight."

Cassidy caught Mistress's hand as she walked by and brought it to her lips, kissing it lightly.

"Thank you," she whispered.

The gesture touched Mistress deeply. *This was a mistake. You should have left her alone.* She caressed Cassidy's cheek and smiled softly before walking away.

Chapter Five

REBECCA



Trouble

SHE WAS A coward. She freely admitted that. Being with Cassidy that night brought up hopes she didn't want to feel. Because of her cowardice, Rebecca didn't hesitate when a friend called her for help with a business venture. She could have refused, but she hoped by going away for a bit, she could get Cassidy out of her system. Or at least put her feelings in perspective. It didn't work.

When she arrived at the club that night, she was informed that Cassidy had been there every night. She was also informed that she had been propositioned many times. And refused. As much as Mistress didn't deserve to feel relieved, she did. She wasn't sure how she would have handled Cassidy being in someone else's room in *her* club.

Mistress's step faltered when she saw Cassidy toying with the black card that had been left on her table. She seriously considered firing every single Dom that worked here if Cassidy accepted. The relief when Cassidy pushed the card away was remarkable. *I'm in so much trouble*. Of course, that relief was short-lived when she saw how sad Cassidy looked. The passionate woman she

remembered was now laying her head back on the couch with those peculiar eyes closed.

She wanted to comfort her. To hold her in her arms and apologize for not being here. *Rules!* With a sigh, Mistress carefully placed her card on Cassidy's table, caressing her cheek briefly before walking away. Just as she was closing the door, she heard Cassidy call out to her.

"Where the hell have you been?"

Oh, hell no. No one talked like that to her now. *She* was the boss. *She* was in control. She closed the door with a distinct click.

"Go to the foot of the bed and strip."

Cassidy didn't move. "Where have you been?" She repeated with irritation. "You said you'd be here. You lied!"

Anger filled Mistress. "I'm here now. And, I will not tolerate you speaking to me in this way. Say your safe word, Cassidy, and leave. Otherwise, do as you are told, and go to the foot of the bed and strip."

It was like a switch had been thrown. Cassidy, who had just been fired up with resentment, now hung her head in defeat. Perhaps it was fitting that they were both dressed in black tonight with the way this was starting.

"Face me," Mistress ordered. She watched as Cassidy disrobed, never once lifting her head. "Look at me."

Her heart broke as a single tear rolled down Cassidy's cheek and her eyes fluttered closed to block out the image. Or, maybe it was to remember this feeling of regret so she wouldn't do it again. She reached up and removed her mask, tossing it aside. Whether it was Mistress or Rebecca that gently wiped the tear from Cassidy's cheek, she didn't know.

"Turn towards the bed." Mistress stood close enough that her corset scraped against her tanned back. Placing a hand on Cassidy's left shoulder blade, she hoped she could convey her remorse. "I was called out of town on business," she explained quietly. "It was sudden, and I didn't have time to get word to you. I'm sorry."

She never saw the second tear.

Emotions weren't her forte. The best way she could make it up to Cassidy is by rocking her world. And that's exactly what she intended to do. If she got lucky, she would get the same results as the last time they were together. "Kneel on the edge of the bed. Hold on to the bedposts."

The muscles in Cassidy's back stretched as she obeyed. She had so much strength, and yet,

someone as small as Mistress could bring her to tears. It nearly felt like too much control for Mistress, until she had to bring out the step-stool in order to reach up and tie Cassidy's hands. She tied them a little tighter than usual, then dipped her head close to Cassidy's ear.

"Don't fall in love with me," Mistress whispered. It was a desperate plea to Cassidy and to herself. Either way, it tore her apart to say them. In order to give her some time to gather herself, she stepped down and went to her armoire. Tonight deserved something more advanced. A riding crop would do. For now.

She took that crop and traced those spectacular muscles and colorful tattoos before moving lower. The slap of the crop against Cassidy's ass rang out in the silence of the room.

"That's for speaking to me the way you did."

It didn't surprise her that Cassidy pushed her ass towards her, silently asking for more. Emotions could do that. They could make you crave the physical pain over the emotional.

"Did you get other cards while I was away, Cassidy?" Mistress asked, knowing full well the answer.

"No, Mistress."

She wants the pain. Mistress made sure to hit the same place for an extra sting. "Don't lie to me! Did you receive invitations?"

"Yes, Mistress," Cassidy panted.

"Did you follow through with them?" Mistress slipped the crop between Cassidy's legs and caressed her soaked pussy lips with it.

"No, Mistress."

Mistress moved the crop when Cassidy began moving her hips, effectively depriving her of finding more pleasure.

"Did you want to?" She asked. She dipped the crop into the crack of Cassidy's ass, eliciting a gasp from the bound woman.

"No, Mistress."

The vision of Cassidy toying with that black card flashed through Mistress's mind and she spanked Cassidy harder than she had dared to before.

"Don't lie to me, Cassidy. One more lie and this is over." It wasn't the rules, but she wouldn't condone being lied to.

"Tonight was the first time I considered it," Cassidy confessed in a hurry. "I thought you lied

to me. I thought you never wanted to see me again. I thought I had done something wrong to drive you away. I waited for you every day. When you didn't show up it..." The pause spoke volumes. "I considered it, but I couldn't do it. I don't want to do this without you. I don't care about the lifestyle if it's not with you, Mistress."

Speechless and sorrowful at what could never be, it was Mistress who shed a tear this time. "Don't turn around," she commanded, her voice rough with emotion. Her need for this woman was dangerous and thrilling. And, she was coming to find, addictive. Her pussy ached to be filled by Cassidy. To feel her pounding deep inside her, making her forget how bad it used to be. Suddenly, her clothes were too restricting, and she peeled them off as quickly as she could. "Stay facing forward. Understand?"

"Yes, Mistress."

Cassidy's voice cracked as Mistress pressed her breasts into Cassidy's back. Nipples hardened achingly as she reached around Cassidy to stroke her cock. Mistress had been more than pleased to see her Sub had come prepared again tonight. She jerked Cassidy off as the trussed woman watched. Wanting to watch herself, Mistress pressed a hidden button, revealing a mirror directly in front of them.

"Watch me jerk you off," she commanded, barely recognizing the hunger in her voice. She teased Cassidy by nearly pulling it out completely until Cassidy was stretched by the thick knob of the double-sided dildo. She would then thrust it back in harshly, causing Cassidy to lose her breath. With her free hand, she caressed her Sub's rock-hard nipples with the crop. She knew the simultaneous friction was creating havoc with Cassidy's body, and she wanted to hear the words. She wanted to know for sure the pain was going to be welcomed.

"Tell me, Cassidy. Tell me you want it."

"I want it, Mistress. Please."

Mistress's nostrils flared with desire, and she slammed the dildo inside Cassidy, grinding her clit with the base. She waited until the precise moment, the intense beginning of the orgasm, to whip the crop across Cassidy's nipple. A guttural response came from the bound woman before she slumped forward as much as her tied limbs would allow.

"Are you okay?" Mistress could have sworn that Cassidy lost consciousness there for a second.

"Yes, Mistress."

Mistress smiled at how easy those words seem to come from Cassidy now. She patted her on the ass and moved to the armoire for something a little more aggressive. After picking out her carefully selected choice, she used the stepstool to climb up onto the bed. She shook her head with mirth when Cassidy's eyes never left her tits. Using a fingertip, she raised Cassidy's chin until their eyes locked.

"Can you handle more, Cassidy?" she asked, genuinely concerned about giving the newbie too much to handle.

"Yes, Mistress."

With a nod, Mistress eased the dildo out of Cassidy. What she had in mind had the smaller woman sliding off the bed to stand behind her Sub. She scraped a fingernail across the tattooed back, loving the feeling of rippling muscles as she went. *I hope you're ready for this, Cassidy.* She pushed the taller woman lightly until she was bent forward as much as her binds would allow. The same finger that journeyed down Cassidy's back tracked lower, finding its destination.

"Have you done this before, Cassidy?" Mistress asked when Cassidy gasped. She carefully watched the reaction in the mirror.

Cassidy shook her head. The trepidation was evident, and Mistress wondered if she would say her safe word.

"I've never trusted anyone that much," the young woman answered with a trembling voice.

Stirred by Cassidy's faith in her, Mistress vowed silently to be as gentle as she could. She reached over and picked up the anal beads she had a sneaky suspicion Cassidy hadn't noticed yet and began coating them with Cassidy's wetness.

"Do you trust me?" Mistress asked, holding Cassidy's gaze in the mirror.

"Yes, Mistress," Cassidy whispered.

"You can tell me to stop, Cassidy. I will go slow, one bead at a time. If it hurts or makes you uncomfortable, please let me know." Cassidy merely nodded as Mistress slipped the first small bead into uncharted territory. "Relax," she coaxed.

Cassidy took a deep breath, and Mistress could feel a slight loosening. In an effort to help calm Cassidy, Mistress started rubbing small circles on her smooth ass cheek. Once the first bead was securely in place with no complaint, Mistress proceeded to slip the slightly larger second bead in. Cassidy pressed her ass back, offering herself even more. Mistress approved, and slipped the third, even larger, bead in.

“Enough,” Cassidy groaned huskily, and Mistress immediately stopped the pressure.

“Do you want me to pull out, Cassidy?”

“No, Mistress. Just give me a minute, please.”

“Of course.” She increased the breadth of her strokes, rubbing hypnotic circles on Cassidy’s ass and back. She waited patiently for Cassidy to get used to the sensation.

“I’m okay,” the younger woman finally pronounced.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure, Mistress.”

Perfect. Mistress smiled and climbed back up onto the bed in front of Cassidy. “Do you remember your safe word?”

“Yes, Mistress, but I don’t need it.”

“Just in case, Cassidy.”

Now for the big guns. This is going to be fun. Mistress picked up a large, triple-pronged dildo. She laughed lightly at the expression of fear mixed with excitement on Cassidy’s face.

“This fits inside you, like yours,” she explained. “The other parts are for me. Okay?”

Cassidy nodded with enthusiasm. *She likes the idea of doing to me what I’m doing to her.* Mistress had been told multiple times that her ass was fuckable. When Samantha forced her to do things like this, it had been painful. So, when she chose to do this with Cassidy without much thought, it had surprised her. Not only was she doing something she hadn’t necessarily enjoyed with Samantha, it meant exposing her back. But it seemed as though her body had cravings that only Cassidy could feed. She could only hope that her scars would be the last thing Cassidy was looking at.

“Ready?” Mistress asked, amused by Cassidy’s enthrallment with the dildo.

“Ready.”

It was relatively easy to slip Cassidy’s part inside of her due to her abundance of wetness. Mistress was pretty sure the same would be true for her. Not yet finished, Mistress leaned over to get one more gadget. She let the delicate chain drape through her fingers. *Can you handle this, Cassidy? Let’s test it.* She cupped Cassidy’s modest breasts and pinched her nipples. That beautiful, powerful body jerked beneath her touch.

Mistress squeezed the small clamp open, hearing an audible gulp from Cassidy. The temptation was too great, and instead of immediately using the implement, she bent her head to

suck Cassidy's nipple into her mouth. She had no doubt that what she was doing affected Cassidy by the way her hips bucked wildly.

Cassidy moaned from somewhere deep inside her, causing Mistress to moan in return. She brought her gaze up, making sure Cassidy was paying attention. Those magnificent eyes were vibrant with excitement. Cassidy was close, and Mistress knew just what to do to push her over that threshold. Her pink tongue came out to circle the tip before taking it between her teeth and biting. Hard.

“Fuck!”

As soon as Cassidy threw her head back in total euphoria, Mistress fastened the nipple clamps to nipples she knew had to be incredibly sensitive. The taut body spasmed again with another orgasm much to Mistress's delight.

“Don't move!” Mistress whispered harshly. She couldn't hold back any longer. She *needed* Cassidy inside her, now! She got on her hands and knees in front of Cassidy, backing up until she was positioned just right. She reached back to arrange the dildo, then filled herself by pushing back with force. As wet and turned on as she was, the pain never came. Only unimaginable pleasure.

Cassidy is a quick learner. The tall woman merely braced herself as Mistress increased her speed. She brought a hand between her own legs and stroked her throbbing clit. It wasn't going to take much after seeing Cassidy come twice already.

“Oh, Cassidy!”

“Please!” Cassidy begged.

“Fuck me, Cassidy! Hard!” Mistress commanded.

There wasn't even a second's hesitation from Cassidy. With hard, fast thrusts, Cassidy quickly drove Mistress to the edge of a violent orgasm.

“I'm coming, Cassidy!”

“Me, too!”

Both women cried out simultaneously. They were loud, and at the moment, Mistress couldn't care less if anyone heard them. In fact, the possibility that someone could hear them spurred Mistress on. She wasn't even close to being done. She slid Cassidy out of her, then relieved the slightly exhausted woman of the dildo as well, and tossed it aside. She then released Cassidy's nipples from the clamps, causing her to hiss, and untied her wrists.

“Keep your hands there until I tell you to move them. Understand?” she panted, yet her

authority was still loud and clear.

“Yes, Mistress.”

Satisfied that Cassidy would do as told, she picked up the dildo Cassidy wore to the club and spread herself out in front of Cassidy. It was the first time she had ever willingly exposed this much of herself to someone. The first time she ever wanted to do what she was about to do. She watched Cassidy’s reaction as she began fucking herself with the dildo.

“Mmm. Fuck yourself for me.”

Mistress hadn’t expected Cassidy to say anything. When those words came out of her mouth, her pussy clenched, and a thrill ran through her body. She watched as Cassidy’s body bucked in time with her as though she was the one fucking Mistress. Watched as Cassidy licked her lips as the dildo was thrust in and out of Mistress’s wet pussy. She wanted that tongue inside her. With only slight reluctance, she pulled the dildo out.

“Eat me, Cassidy!” It was like Cassidy had been waiting for Mistress to free her. She dove at Mistress as though she had been parched for weeks. The way Cassidy sucked in her clit, then batted it with her tongue, drove Mistress crazy. *More.* “Use your fingers, Cassidy!”

Cassidy buried three fingers inside her, and Mistress lifted her hips, helping her go deeper. Teeth got in on the act, and when Cassidy curled her fingers, hitting that elusive spot, Mistress knew she was about to explode.

“Cassidy!”

“Come for me like I know you can. Let me drink you.”

Oh, God! It was Rebecca—not Mistress—who screamed, arched her back off the bed, and gave Cassidy exactly what she commanded from her.

Doing what's best.

AM I ALIVE? If she wasn’t, Mistress couldn’t think of a better way to die. That orgasm was so unreal, she still hadn’t caught her breath. Cassidy had yet to move, though that could have been because Mistress had a firm hold of her hair. She couldn’t say she didn’t enjoy feeling Cassidy’s hot breath

on her *extremely* sensitive sex. She would love to stay this way forever.

That thought, coupled with the small kiss she felt Cassidy place on her mound, scared the hell out of Mistress. She extracted her fist from Cassidy's hair, but even fear didn't stop her from giving the woman a light, affectionate scratch on her head.

"Go into the bathroom and start the shower for us," she ordered softly. She had given up trying to figure out why she was treating Cassidy so different than any other client. *Not client*. No money had been exchanged between the two of them. That, at least, was something Mistress could be happy about.

"Um, Mistress?"

Mistress was brought out of her thoughts by Cassidy timidly calling out for her attention. *Does she not want to shower with me? Is that too personal? And, why the hell am I disappointed by that when getting too personal is something I really don't need?*

Cassidy sheepishly looked behind her. Not understanding, Mistress frowned. That is until she remembered what was causing Cassidy to hesitate.

"Oh!" Her lips twitched, but she somehow managed not to laugh. She scooted out from under the younger woman. "Sorry, Cassidy." *Do not laugh. Do not laugh. Do not laugh.* This had to be uncomfortable for Cassidy, so Mistress patted her butt cheek and told her to relax. Which, apparently, was not working.

"Cassidy, this is going to hurt if you don't... let go." *Well, this is awkward.* Yet, Mistress felt a certain intimacy had been formed. She didn't have time to explore that feeling as Cassidy took a deep breath and finally let go. As delicately as she could, Mistress relieved Cassidy of the anal beads.

She frowned when Cassidy didn't get up right away. Fear that she had hurt her made Mistress's heart hurt. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, Mistress." The reply was muffled because of the pillow Cassidy had her face buried in.

"Come here, Cassidy." There was only a small hesitation before she obeyed. "Are you sure you're okay? I'm sorry about that."

Cassidy didn't answer. Instead, she leaned down, coming close to kissing her. Mistress couldn't allow that. As much as she wanted it—God, how she wanted it—she couldn't allow that kind of closeness. She braced a hand on Cassidy's chest, keeping the distance between them.

"*Cassidy,*" she breathed. The taller woman lowered her head and sighed, not bothering to hide

her disappointment. *This hurt—hers and yours—is exactly why you shouldn't be involved with anyone.* “Start the shower. I’ll be right in.” She hoped Cassidy didn’t notice the hitch in her voice.

“Yes, Mistress.”

When Cassidy disappeared into the bathroom, Rebecca gripped the bedpost and pressed her forehead to the cool wood. *You shouldn't want what you can't have. You should have left her alone. You know a relationship is impossible.* She sniffled quietly, telling herself to get over it. The sex was incredible, but that’s all it could be.

“It’s ready, Mistress!” Cassidy called out from the bathroom.

Mistress wiped away any errant tears and squared her shoulders. *Just sex, nothing more.*

“Thank you,” she said as she walked in, curiously startling Cassidy.

“Yes, Mistress.”

Mistress swept her hair up into a messy bun and grabbed Cassidy’s hand as she walked by her. She let the water wash over her, wash away the depression that wanted to take over. She picked up a loofah, dolloped it with her favorite lavender and chamomile body wash, and handed it to Cassidy.

“Wash me,” she commanded, hoping that having Cassidy’s hands on her would help. Cassidy complied, her eyes never leaving Mistress’s, as she bathed her tenderly. It was all Rebecca had ever wanted. What she had craved all those years ago with Samantha. Something she had never received. Her heart rate and breathing became erratic when Cassidy moved closer.

Mistress moaned softly but didn’t move, when Cassidy progressed lower and cupped Mistress’s sex. She wanted to see how far Cassidy would go in a situation such as this. Her palm rubbed against Mistress’s clit and she closed her eyes to the sensation. The next thing she felt was Cassidy’s lips on her neck. *God, that feels incredible.* She moaned louder, pressing herself even closer to Cassidy. But, when Cassidy’s lips started to make a path to her lips...

“Cassidy, no.” She pushed Cassidy away and turned around to rinse her body.

“Why?”

Mistress stiffened when Cassidy put her hands on her shoulders.

“Mistress?”

Mistress knelt to pick up the loofah that Cassidy dropped earlier. “Finish in here, and then join me in the room.”

Why? Why did she have to make this so difficult? Why couldn't she just want sex like everyone

else? Mistress snapped a towel off the rod, pissed that she didn't know which one of them she was questioning. *This has to end. It's what's best for both of us.* She kept telling herself that, hoping she would believe it, as she dressed. Once she was fully dressed, she picked up her mask. *This is who you are. Cassidy could never love who you were. You're broken. You're too old.* She shook her head sadly before putting the mask on.

She sat in the chair, in the same position she had been in when Cassidy first came into this room. And she waited.

"Mistress?"

The waver in Cassidy's voice shook Mistress's resolve. *Do it. For her.* She couldn't bring herself to look at Cassidy. If she did, she may not be able to go through with this.

"Get dressed and sit, Cassidy." Cassidy dressed but didn't sit. "Please."

"What's with the mask?"

"This will be our last session, Cassidy." Though it hurt her to say those words, Mistress kept her tone even as to not give up any emotion.

"What? Why? What did I do? If this is because I kissed your..."

"It's not that," Mistress interrupted. The pain, fear, and anger in Cassidy's voice were like torture. So, she did the only thing she could think of to make this marginally easier on both of them. She lied. "The business that I was called away for? I'm opening a new club. I'll be going there to get it up and running."

"No. We—we just started. You told me you would teach me."

It was unfortunate that Mistress, no that Rebecca, felt the same desperation she could see in Cassidy. Yet, she continued.

"This is for the best, Cassidy."

"For who? You? Am I that bad? You can't tell me you didn't get off on all of this!" Cassidy gestured angrily towards the bed.

It took everything in her not to flinch at Cassidy's anger. She didn't believe Cassidy would do anything to hurt her, but anger never bodes well for her.

"It's normal for a Sub to get attached..."

"Don't! Don't fucking do that!" Cassidy stood abruptly. "I didn't get attached to my *Dom!* It's more than that. You *know* it!"

A small trickle of fear made it past Mistress's defenses as Cassidy towered over her. She

looked up at her, genuinely apologetic for causing this animosity between them. “I’m sorry.”

“Where?”

“What?”

“Where are you going? My job is flexible.”

Though she knew that to be true, Mistress had nothing to offer her. Besides, there was no ‘other club.’ “Cassidy, you can’t leave your home here.”

“I’m pretty sure I can do whatever I want. Except in this fucking room.” Unable to hold her gaze, Mistress lowered her eyes. Apparently, that only managed to piss Cassidy off more. “Ah, I get it. It’s time for you to move on, right? What’s the matter, *Mistress*? Run out of conquests here? You successfully recruited me, and now you have to find more?”

Those words hurt as much as any blow to her. But, Mistress couldn’t—*wouldn’t*—allow anyone to hurt her like that ever again. Her shutters came down with force.

“You are welcome here at the club anytime you want,” Mistress said evenly, hoping that Cassidy would never show up here again. She just couldn’t fathom thinking of her with someone else here. “But this room will be closed. Indefinitely.”

“Please, Mistress. Please don’t go. Please don’t leave me.”

Mistress stood immediately as this beautiful, strong, proud woman fell to her knees and begged. It was something Mistress never expected. And something she never wanted to see. She wasn’t worth it. No one was.

“Get up, Cassidy.” She grabbed Cassidy’s shoulders when she didn’t move. “Please get up. You don’t deserve this. Get off your knees.” She pulled Cassidy desperately. “This world isn’t for you.”

“Have I not done everything you’ve asked of me? I may have had some issues, but I got over them. All I want is to be... is to be a good Sub for you.”

Cassidy’s tears brought Mistress to her knees. Kneeling in front of her, she took Cassidy’s face in her hands “God, Cassidy, you are so much more than this. I’m leaving because it’s what’s healthiest. For both of us.” She wiped Cassidy’s tears with her thumbs, fighting to keep her own tears from falling. “*I should have left you alone,*” she whispered, then leaned in to feather a kiss on Cassidy’s cheek. “*I was selfish, and I’m sorry. I’ll never forget you, Cassidy.*”

She rose quickly and left before she didn’t have the strength to. It was one of the hardest things she had ever had to do. With all that she had been through, she found it curious that a woman she

had just met could affect her so profoundly. And wondered if she had the power to move on this time.

Chapter Six

REBECCA



Mistakes

“HOW LONG AM I going to have to apologize for this, Hunter?” Rebecca tapped her fingernails on the table as she talked to her old friend on the phone.

“Until I decide to forgive you for disappearing,” Hunter replied with mirth.

“I didn’t just disappear. I had business to take care of,” Rebecca explained once again. It was the truth.

“You didn’t say goodbye, Becca. And, you’ve been gone for quite a while. Do you expect me to believe that something else wasn’t involved?”

Rebecca sighed because that was the truth, too. “You’re right. There are things I need to work out.”

“Things that you couldn’t have talked to me about?”

“It’s... complicated. I think I just needed to be near my aunt for a bit.”

“Yeah, okay. How much longer do you think you will be?”

It seemed the only time she genuinely smiled these days is when she talked to Hunter. The doctor who saved her that night so long ago continued to save her as her best friend. Though she found the doctor charming and beautiful, the two never became intimate. A fact that Rebecca was truly thankful for. Hunter's friendship meant the world to her, and she wouldn't dream of ruining that with sex. Besides, as Rebecca found out during one of their late-night conversations, Hunter was dealing with her own complicated situation.

"I don't know, babe." The reality was, Rebecca was getting restless. She didn't know how long she could keep running away from what she was feeling. "I promise to let you know the minute I'm on my way back."

"Do that. I'll be visiting my folks this weekend, but I'm always available. You know that."

Rebecca always had a bit of anxiety when Hunter went to visit her parents. Her "complicated situation" came in the form of a woman there that was no good for Hunter. She had no idea how deep those complications were. But seeing how much it hurt Hunter, Rebecca wished she could convince her friend to get rid of the problem permanently. But who was she to give relationship advice when she couldn't handle her own shit? Even so, she kept trying. "I do. And, Hunter? Please try to stay away from Susan."

There was a slight hesitation on the other end. "It's been three months, Becca. I'm doing my best, I swear."

That was all Rebecca could ask for. They said their goodbyes and Rebecca put her phone away just as a cup of tea was set in front of her.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome. Problems?" Rebecca's companion took a seat next to her and sipped from her own tea.

"My weekly guilt-trip from a friend back in LA. She wonders why I'm here and when I'm coming home."

"Hmm. Not that I don't enjoy your company, but why are you here?"

Rebecca cautiously took a drink of her tea. "If I recall, Eve, you asked for my help."

Eve Sumptor-Riley was one of those women you either love or hate. Rebecca found herself on the side of the former when, after a consulting job a few years ago, they formed a working relationship. Over time, that turned into a lasting friendship. Yes, their analytical minds caused occasional head-butting, but all-in-all, the two women got along beautifully. So, when Eve called

her to help out with a new art gallery she was opening in LA, Rebecca didn't hesitate to say yes.

It was the reason she had left Cassidy the first time. Rebecca flew to New York to meet with Eve and ultimately agreed to assist her with a business plan and vet new employees. With Eve being a savvy businesswoman herself, Rebecca reveled in the challenge. While she did most of the heavy lifting on the business end, Eve and her associate Lainey were able to focus on the talent that would fill the gallery.

"I did," Eve acknowledged with a smile. "However, when you came here that first time weeks ago, we had determined that you being in LA near the gallery would be more beneficial."

"I can do the job from anywhere." Rebecca pushed a file towards Eve as evidence. "I found your curator, didn't I?"

Eve chuckled. "Lauren sounds perfect and I can't wait to meet her. But, that doesn't answer my question. I know you, Rebecca. You haven't been yourself since you've been here."

Rebecca breathed in the crisp New York air. They sat at a small café near Sumptor Gallery, NY, in a rare quiet moment. Though Eve was inundated with opening a new gallery, running multiple businesses, and even her own personal turmoil, she remained perceptive of everything going on around her. If Rebecca thought she could get anything past the astute woman, she was severely mistaken.

"I made a mistake, Eve."

Eve leaned forward, giving Rebecca her full attention. The absolute beauty and power that radiated from the woman never ceased to amaze Rebecca. Or catch her off-guard at the oddest of moments. The one thing that kept Rebecca from ever being attracted to Eve was the fact that everyone thought they were sisters. Well, that and Eve was completely in love with someone else.

"I'm listening."

Rebecca took a breath, letting it out slowly. It was a pathetic stall for time, but it allowed her to find the words.

"I met someone. She walked into my club, and no matter how hard I tried to resist her," she paused, thinking of how her body seemed to act of its own accord when it came to Cassidy. "I gave her a card. An invitation to my room."

Eve's eyebrows raised slightly. "I thought you had given that up."

"I had. *Have*. But, I needed to be near her."

"I can understand that feeling," Eve said with a touch of melancholy.

“I know you can. I wish that...”

“No, Rebecca. Don’t try to distract me with my own problems. I do that enough these days. Go on. This woman accepted your invitation, I presume.”

Damn it, Rebecca sighed. “Yes, unfortunately. Or, fortunately depending on how you look at it.”

“And, how do *you* look at it?”

“I don’t know,” Rebecca answered honestly. “On the one hand, it was the most incredible sex I’ve ever had.”

“Sex?” Eve interrupted with surprise. “I was under the impression that sex was never an option in that room.”

“Your impression is right. It isn’t.”

“But with this woman everything is different,” Eve guessed.

“Yes.”

“And, on the other hand?” Eve prompted when Rebecca remained quiet.

“Hmm? Oh, right. The unfortunate part.” Rebecca absent-mindedly turned her teacup in circles on the table. “She’s young. *Very* young. I should have left her alone.” The last part was said quietly, almost to herself.

“How young are we talking?” Eve asked.

“Twenty-five.”

Eve hummed and sat back in her chair. “That is young. However, she’s old enough to know what she’s doing.”

“I could be her mother, Eve.”

Eve chuckled. “Perhaps. If you started early enough. But is age really the biggest factor here? I can’t see you being this troubled by someone who is immature.”

“She’s not. It’s not that.” She groaned in frustration. “It’s the combination of that, the sex, the emotions. It’s too much.”

“So, you ran.”

Rebecca couldn’t be upset with the truth, and the fact that Eve’s eyes held compassion told her that Eve wasn’t judging her.

“I ran.”

“May I ask, which one of those things was the mistake? The invitation, the sex, the emotions,

or the running?”

Rebecca let out a mirthless laugh. “All of the above?”

“Are you asking or telling?”

“I should have left her alone.”

“So you’ve said. What I would like to know is why you feel that way.”

Rebecca closed her eyes. This was what she was trying to figure out in her head. In her heart. Why it hurt so much to be with Cassidy. And why it hurt, even more, to be away. She had been with the woman twice. It shouldn’t be like this. Walking away should have been easy and painless. Yet, here she was.

“She wasn’t a fan of the lifestyle,” Rebecca began. “She doesn’t like being told what to do.”

“I’m guessing you changed her mind.”

Distraught eyes looked up at Eve. “She’s young. Impressionable. Just like I was.”

Comprehension lit in Eve’s eyes. “With Samantha.”

Rebecca nodded. “Cassidy is not immature, but there’s a naiveté to her. She deserves more.”

“More than what? You?”

“Yes. What if I turn out to be like her, Eve?”

“Like Samantha?” Rebecca nodded again, and Eve reached out to take her hands in hers. “Oh, honey, *that’s* what this is about? You are *nothing* like that monster. You must know that.”

“I convinced Cassidy to do things, Eve. Things even I have never done before.”

“Convinced her or offered and she said yes? You are projecting your fears from your past onto your present.”

“You sound like my aunt,” Rebecca muttered.

“Well, she is a good therapist. Perhaps you should think about having some sessions with her.”

“I do. Once, sometimes twice a week,” she smirked.

“Show-off,” Eve laughed.

“To be honest, I haven’t told her that, yet. I’ve been trying to work things out in my head before I get her involved. She knows about Cassidy and how old she is, but that’s about it.” She eyed Eve with a smirk. “She says hi, by the way. And that she misses you.”

Eve rolled her eyes playfully. “I don’t know if it’s a blessing or a curse having a friend whose aunt is my therapist.”

“A blessing, of course,” Rebecca winked.

“Mmhmm. It has only been a couple of weeks, but I will go see her. Soon.” Eve studied Rebecca silently for a moment. “May I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

“Have you thought of this Cassidy since you’ve been here?”

“Only every day,” Rebecca answered honestly.

“Do you miss her?”

“*Only every day*,” she whispered.

“Then go home, Rebecca.”

“What’s the point, Eve? We spent two days together. No, mere hours. It’s ridiculous that I even feel this way. We don’t even know each other. Besides, she’s probably forgotten about me and moved on. As she should.”

“First, I know *you*, Rebecca. No one steps into your club without you learning everything there is to learn about them. And, second, knowing you as I do, it’s safe to say you affected her as much as she affected you.”

Rebecca shook her head even as she hoped that what Eve said was true. Believing that Cassidy still thought about her gave her hope. And anxiety. *Wow. I could do with a session right now.* “I don’t know about that. And Cassidy was a guest of another member. I didn’t do a full workup on her. Her age, her finances, her friends. Basic information that doesn’t tell me what she likes or dislikes. It doesn’t tell me if we’re compatible anywhere other than in bed. Don’t you think that’s important?”

“What I think is important is that you found someone who made you feel something pretty remarkable after everything you’ve been through,” Eve answered gently. “It doesn’t have to take weeks, months, or years to recognize that.” She looked away, a wistfulness in her eyes. “Regret is a bitter pill to swallow, Rebecca. Fear causes you to make extremely regrettable decisions. Even if you think you’re doing the right thing.”

This time it was Rebecca who reached for Eve’s hand in compassion. She knew of Eve’s past. The horrors that she had been through. She also knew that Eve gave up the one person she was in love with in order to “do the right thing.” If Rebecca felt this despondent about a woman she barely knew, she could only imagine what Eve was feeling.

“You can change things, Eve.”

Eve brought her gaze back to Rebecca. “You have no idea how much I wish that were true.

There are too many obstacles. Too many lives that can be destroyed.”

“So, you sacrifice your own happiness?”

Eve shrugged. “It was the choice I made. One I have to live with until...” She cleared her throat, obviously not comfortable with where the conversation was going. “This thing you feel for Cassidy? Go home and explore it while you have a chance. While there are no other obstacles standing in your path. I understand your fears, Rebecca, more than anyone. But the ‘what-ifs’ will be even worse. I promise you that.”

From her peripheral, Rebecca saw the object of Eve’s happiness and sorrow. Judging by the not-so-happy look that was being directed at her, the fact that Rebecca was holding Eve’s hand was not appreciated. Rebecca squeezed the hand in hers before letting it go and standing up.

“Lainey,” Rebecca smiled, going in for a hug that was readily returned. She and Lainey had gotten to know each other much better over the past couple of years. The quiet woman was kind, intelligent, beautiful, talented... and married with children. She was also just as in love with Eve as Eve was with her. It made her situation feel tame in comparison.

“Hello, Rebecca.”

Lainey smiled warmly, though Rebecca could see the tension behind those green eyes.

“Please, take my seat. I was just leaving.”

“Not on my account, I hope.”

“Of course not,” Rebecca smiled at both of her friends. “I need to make arrangements to go back home. Of course, that means breaking the news to my aunt. She’s gotten pretty used to me being here.”

Lainey laughed as she took the seat Rebecca vacated. “You have your work cut out for you.” She absently picked up Eve’s tea and lifted it a salute. “Here’s hoping she doesn’t bring out her notebook.”

Rebecca watched as Lainey sipped from Eve’s cup. She was sure it was as second nature to her as breathing. But Rebecca found something acutely intimate about the gesture.

“Take the jet,” Eve offered as she smiled at Lainey.

“It really is nice having a friend with a private plane,” Rebecca chuckled. Actually, it was an offer Rebecca rarely refused. Anytime she could fly in style was an enjoyable time. *And, now I’m thinking about Cassidy being in that jet with me. Great.*

“Yes, it is.”

Rebecca was sure Lainey's thoughts of being in a private jet with Eve were along the lines of hers with Cassidy. She wished she could do something to help her friends. Unfortunately, she didn't even know what to do to help herself.

"Thank you for the kick in the ass," she said to Eve. Noticing Lainey's confused look, she added, "I'm sure Eve will fill you in when I leave."

"Only with your permission," Eve assured.

"You have it."

"Are you going to take my advice?"

Rebecca thought for a moment. "I don't know. But, at least I'm taking the first step."

Eve nodded her approval. "If you need anything, you know where to find me." She laid her hand on the folder Rebecca had given her earlier. "Thank you for this and everything else you've done for Sumptor Galleries."

"It's been a welcome distraction. I'll see you both in LA before the opening, I'm sure."

"Absolutely. Good luck, Rebecca."

Confessions of a Mistress

REBECCA WALKED ALONG the sidewalk, occasionally stopping to look at the cute merchandise the outdoor marketers were hawking. It was the first time she had actually been out since moving back home two weeks ago. Yes, she knew full well that she was being a coward—again—but she couldn't bring herself to go to the club just yet. Fear of not seeing Cassidy there was just as bad as the fear she would.

What would she say? How would she act? Would Cassidy even want anything to do with her anymore? Then there was the fact that Rebecca still didn't feel worthy without the mask. As intelligent and successful as Rebecca was, she felt incredibly inept when it came to matters of the heart. *Why do I feel this way about someone I barely know? What is it about Cassidy Giles that makes me want more?*

Rebecca was completely preoccupied with her thoughts that she didn't see the other person

coming right towards her. When they collided, Rebecca immediately began to apologize for being distracted.

“I’m so sorry, I wasn’t…”

“I’m sorry…” Rebecca gasped when she looked up into the bicolored eyes she had thought about so often. “*Cassidy.*” *No! I’m not ready! Not like this! Not as Rebecca!*

“M—um. You’re back.”

Cassidy looked as shocked as Rebecca felt. *She probably hates me.* “Y-yes.”

“How long?”

Two weeks, but I’ve been too much of a coward to seek you out. Rebecca shrugged apprehensively. *I wish I had dressed more appropriately.* She almost laughed out loud at the thought. How could she have known that she’d run into the one person that could bring her to her knees? What was she supposed to do? Wear a bustier and mask everywhere?

“I’ve been back to the club a few times.”

Jealousy coursed through Rebecca. She forced herself not to ask about… clients while she had been away. There were just some things she didn’t want to know. Now, as Cassidy stood in front of her looking amazingly sexy in dark, ripped blue jeans and a low-cut V-neck tee, Rebecca *needed* to know. She lifted a brow.

“Find someone that will give you what you need?” Okay, that came out a little more resentful than Rebecca meant.

“No. You weren’t there. I looked for you. Hoped you would come back.”

Rebecca’s heart ached at Cassidy’s honesty. “I should go.”

“What is your name?” Cassidy asked quickly. Sounding almost desperate.

Rebecca looked away. Giving her name meant she would have to step out from behind the mask completely. Insecurities embedded so deep in her psyche bubbled up, making it impossible to answer.

“Did I mean anything to you at all?”

So much more than you know. More than should be possible.

“You know,” Cassidy continued angrily, “when you told me not to fall in love with you? There was only one problem with that, *Mistress.* You said it a little too late.”

Rebecca was stunned. She knew Cassidy was attracted to her. She *knew* that there was more going on than just sex in the Pink room. But, falling in love? So quickly? *Don’t pretend you don’t*

know what she's talking about, Rebecca scolded herself silently. You know what you feel is more than just physical attraction. You don't have to understand it, but you damn well need to own it.

"Rebecca," she called out timidly as Cassidy marched away. The younger woman stopped but didn't turn to face Rebecca.

"What?"

"My name is Rebecca."

Slowly, Cassidy finally turned to face her, speechless.

"Not what you were expecting, is it?" Rebecca asked sardonically. It wasn't exotic. It wasn't a name that fit Mistress's persona. However, right here and now? It's who she was.

"It's beautiful," Cassidy says sincerely as she took a step towards Rebecca.

"It's normal."

Cassidy frowned. "It suits you."

"Not when I'm behind the mask. People assume I have some erotic name that goes with that persona. I don't."

"I'm glad you don't."

For some reason, Rebecca believed Cassidy.

"Why?"

Rebecca frowned this time, tilting her head in question.

"Why the club? The mask?"

"That's a long story, Cassidy." *And one that will surely scare you away.*

"I have all the time in the world. Rebecca."

Rebecca's breath hitched hearing her name come from Cassidy's lips. There was no demand, no plea. Just a quiet offering to listen.

Cassidy gestured to a bench across the way. "Sit with me?"

If you sit with her, you have to tell her the truth, Rebecca. All of it. Are you ready for that? Perhaps this was her out. Cassidy could never love someone who did what Rebecca had done. With a heavy sigh full of dread, Rebecca nodded. She followed Cassidy, and settled in on the bench, tucking one leg under her.

"What do you want to know?" she asked warily.

Cassidy faced her. "Everything."

Rebecca shook her head. *Everything. Be careful what you wish for, Cassidy Giles. You may*

regret this. So could I.

“I used to be a Sub,” she began quietly. Rebecca then did something she wished she didn’t have to do. If she had any hope at all of getting to know Cassidy better—as Rebecca—she would have to tell Cassidy about her past. About Samantha, about the club, about how she stayed despite the pain, about the drug use. But could Rebecca have the courage to tell Cassidy *everything*?

Cassidy listened intently, only leaving once to get them both something to drink. *Well, at least she came back.* Cassidy asked questions, made comments, but never once judged. It was better than Rebecca could have hoped for.

“Where is she now?”

“Dead.” Rebecca’s tone was emotionless, and she noticed the shock on Cassidy’s face. “You’re wondering if I killed her. I can see the question written all over your face, Cassidy. Do you think I’m capable of that?”

“I think everyone is capable if pushed to their limit, Rebecca. But I didn’t think... I mean, I just...”

Rebecca smiled at a flustered Cassidy. *She’s cute when she’s flustered.* “I know. The thing is, I’m not sure if I can say I didn’t kill her.”

Cassidy frowned. “I don’t understand.”

“The official cause of death was an overdose. Samantha liked to party. Hard. Everything she did was over the top. Drinking, drugs... me.” She fidgeted, hating that she had to think about all of this.

“Did she make you?”

Cassidy didn’t finish her question, but Rebecca understood what she was asking. “I never did drugs, Cassidy. That’s one thing I could be grateful for. Samantha was a very selfish person, especially with things that gave her pleasure. That night was no different than any other. She came home already high and wanting more. She liked having me watch her shoot up. It made her feel powerful to let me know that I was not ‘worthy enough’ to participate.”

“Do you think that by watching, you killed her?”

Rebecca was impressed with Cassidy’s intuition. “I felt nothing when she died. There was no remorse.” She swirled the water in her bottle and was mesmerized by the tiny twister that formed. *You’ve been honest so far, may as well keep going.* “Actually, that’s not true. I did feel one thing. Relief.”

It didn't quite answer Cassidy's question, but at least it was the truth.

"With everything she put you through, I think that's normal."

"Is it normal to sit there and watch her take her last breath?" Rebecca asked quietly. She took a chance and looked up at Cassidy. "After she took that last hit, she became more and more agitated, which she took out on me. She kept screaming at me that I was cheating on her, that there was someone hiding in our bedroom. If she wasn't searching, she was hitting me. Then it all just stopped. Samantha raised her hand to hit me again and just froze. Convulsions started, she began to get sick."

Rebecca shuddered at the memory. Then she felt the warmth of Cassidy's touch on her arm. That simple touch felt like a balm on her soul and gave her the bravery to continue.

"I could have called the ambulance, Cassidy. I could have called 911, and maybe she would still be alive. But, I stood there, bloodied, watching her suffer, and I couldn't."

"I don't blame you, Rebecca. She did this to herself. She doesn't deserve your guilt."

It wasn't just blithe comments. They were an absolution to Rebecca. Perhaps one that she didn't deserve.

"Those are easy words to say, Cassidy."

"I know, but it's true."

Rebecca gave Cassidy a small shrug. "Fortunately for me, you weren't the only one that feels that way."

"You found someone you were able to trust?"

As steady as Cassidy's voice was, Rebecca thought she detected a note of jealousy. Or, perhaps she was just hoping that Cassidy would care enough to have wanted to be the one to save her. It was a silly notion, of course.

"I don't know about trust, but he's a cop. And he knew Samantha did drugs. He always looked the other way because she gave him free access to the club." She didn't know why she didn't tell the exact truth then. Maybe she didn't want Cassidy to know that it was Rebecca that gave him a free pass. That would be admitting that she let Samantha get away with so much more.

"Wait, he's a cop and he didn't protect you?" Cassidy asked angrily.

"He didn't know about that, Cassidy. I never said anything. Not until that night, and then it was only because there was no way for me to hide it from him. Not after what she did to me. It's why he agreed to help me and wrote in the report that I had called him, but he was unable to

resuscitate Samantha when he arrived.”

Cassidy shook her head. “But that’s all true from what you’re telling me. She overdosed, you called him, she was already gone. Clear case.”

Rebecca tilted her head, eyeing Cassidy. “Are you a lawyer?”

Cassidy’s chuckle was a much-needed sound after the conversation they were having. “No, but my dad is. I’ve listened to him discuss cases enough to know the basics.”

“I see. And, what do you do?” Rebecca asked, hoping to veer the conversation in a different direction.

Cassidy’s eyebrow flinched, and Rebecca suspected Cassidy saw right through her little ruse.

“We can discuss that later. We were talking about you.”

Though the thought of spending more time Cassidy was tempting, Rebecca became weary of discussing more of her problems. Surely, they would be too much at some point. “Aren’t you tired of hearing my problems?”

“I could never be tired of you.”

Cassidy continued to surprise Rebecca. “I don’t know about that, Cassidy. I’m pretty boring behind the mask.”

Cassidy leaned closer. “You took the mask off for me. There was *nothing* boring about you, Rebecca. Or do you not remember our time together?”

Rebecca closed her eyes and breathed in deeply. Every single second of their time together was burned into her brain. Her body could never forget the things Cassidy did. The memory of *that* brought tears to her eyes.

“I remember.”

Chapter Seven

REBECCA



Taking Chances

THE CONVERSATION SHIFTED back to the club, and Rebecca explained to Cassidy how she came to own it. It was almost funny how, looking back, she could see all of the mistakes she made. And, how she fought to correct those mistakes in the years that followed. Perhaps it was a bit extreme to hide her true identity from those who worked for her. Or to vet the patrons of her club so diligently. However, when you come close to losing your life to someone you thought you could trust, trust becomes a rare commodity.

“Why, Rebecca? Why did you stay?” Cassidy asked after Rebecca alluded to being beaten after Samantha found out she had bought the club. “I’m sorry...”

“Don’t be,” Rebecca interrupted. “It’s a legitimate question. I obviously had the means,” she shrugged. It was a question she knew would come eventually. One she had asked herself many times. One she didn’t know if she actually had an answer to.

“You loved her.”

Rebecca laughed joylessly. “No. I hated her. At least I did at the end. If anything, I was infatuated with her at the most. Her strength and control intrigued me. She introduced me to this lifestyle and I became addicted. It wasn’t bad in the beginning, Cassidy.”

“And when it turned bad?”

“By that point, she had it ingrained in my head that it was my duty as her Sub to do as she commands. Like I said before, I was so naïve and impressionable that she convinced me what she did to me was normal for those who practice this type of relationship. I hate to use that as an excuse, but I really didn’t know that her version of this way of life was extreme. I know that’s probably hard for you to understand.”

“Not really. I did things with you I never thought I would do without questioning it.”

Rebecca frowned. “That’s exactly what I wanted to avoid when I took over the club.”

“I didn’t mean that in a bad way, Rebecca,” Cassidy said quickly. “You’re nothing like her.”

I hope that’s true. “I never want to be,” she said softly. “The moment she took her last breath I stopped being a Sub. Unfortunately, that also meant I was lost. It took the staff fighting over who should take control of the club that snapped me out of it. I took over the club, fired *everyone*, exhaustively vetted a new staff, and donned the mask.”

“And became Mistress?”

“Yes. Even my staff knows me only as Mistress. They don’t know Rebecca. I needed my control back, and that was the start. Becoming a true Dom was the next.” Rebecca glanced at Cassidy, debating her next words. “Every person I brought into that room was carefully selected in order to build myself up. I know that sounds callous, but I made sure that they all left feeling that everything they did in that room was their decision.”

“Is it normal for a Sub to become a Dom?” Cassidy asked, sounding a bit dejected.

“For some. Some are very set in their roles. Others use the experience as a stepping stone.” She tilted her head again, and her eyebrows furrowed. *Why are you so sad, Cassidy? Do you really want to be a Dom? How could I ever go back to being a Sub?*

“Why me?”

She let out a sharp laugh. “Believe me, Cassidy, I tried to stay away from you.” The defeat she heard in Cassidy’s voice now showed on her face. Without much thought, she softly touched the back of Cassidy’s hand. “I didn’t mean that the way it sounded. Before you walked into my club, I had decided I was done. I was getting nothing from it anymore. In fact, there hadn’t been

anyone in my room for months.”

“A myth.”

“Excuse me?”

Cassidy looked up from tracing little patterns on the bench. “My waitress that night. When I asked her about the card, she said she thought that it was a myth.”

Rebecca nodded with a little smile. “It had been a long time. But when I saw you walk in with Miranda, I wanted you.”

Cassidy shivered at Rebecca’s words causing Rebecca to feel that familiar hint of desire she now associated with only Cassidy.

“I fought with myself, telling myself to leave you alone,” she continued before Cassidy could say anything. “Next thing I knew, I was buying you a drink. No matter how hard I tried to stay clear of you, my body had other ideas.”

“What was so wrong with me that you tried to avoid me?”

Oh, Cassidy. You have it all wrong. “*Nothing* is wrong with you. I tried to stay for many reasons. The biggest one being that I *knew* things would be different with you in that room.” Rebecca pinched the bridge of her nose. It was as though her mouth had a mind of its own. It was bound and determined to tell Cassidy *anything* and *everything*. “I know what you think happened with the others, but you’re wrong. None of them ever saw me without my mask. None of them ever saw me naked. *You* did.”

Cassidy frowned in confusion.

“I never had sex with any of them, Cassidy.”

“But,” Cassidy shook her head as though she were trying to find the right words. Or any words for that matter. “I... we...”

Yep. So very cute when she’s flustered. “It was never about sex. It was about control. For both parties. That’s what I meant when I said I chose them carefully. They were more interested in just giving their bodies over to the pleasure of the pain. *That’s* what they got off on. I never touched them without some sort of instrument of torture. Touching me was off limits. No exceptions. Until you. I broke all of my rules with you.”

“Not all of them,” Cassidy muttered. “Did you feel *anything* for me, Rebecca?”

“Oh, Cassidy.” Rebecca scooted closer to her companion and touched her face gently. “I felt *too* much. It’s why I had to leave. It’s why I should leave now.” She dropped her hand and stood.

“Oh no!” Cassidy grabbed both of Rebecca’s hands and turned her until they were facing each other. Her grip was tight, but not painful. As though she were afraid Rebecca would run if her grip loosened. “I’m not letting you walk away again, Rebecca. You said it was for the best, but didn’t say why. You said it was what was healthiest, but still no reason. I *need* a reason. A *legitimate*, concrete reason.”

Rebecca didn’t know whether to be irritated or terrified. Irritated that Cassidy was demanding something of her, and she was considering giving her the reasons. Terrified because... she was considering giving her *all* the reasons.

“I don’t know how to have a real relationship, Cassidy.”

“I’ve never been in a serious relationship, either. So we’ll learn. Together.”

Rebecca shook her head a little. “I’m damaged. Why would you want to get involved with that?”

“We all have our demons, Rebecca. Yours may be a bit more complicated, but I don’t care. I want to be there for you.”

“You don’t even know me.”

“I’m *trying* to! And, so far, your excuses are feeble. Give me a *real* reason!”

Rebecca let out an exasperated breath. *She’s really going to make me say it.* “Fine. You want a real reason? I am technically old enough to be your mother, Cassidy!”

“Bullshit! You know I’m twenty-five, right? You can’t be more than five years older than me.”

“It’s not nice to lie to your Mistress, Cassidy.” *Shit! I just called myself her Mistress!* Any hope that Cassidy missed that little slip was dashed when her nose flared with a desire that most likely mirrored Rebecca’s.

“I have no reason to lie to you. The *most* you can be is ten years older than me. And that’s pushing it. Besides my mom is like that much older than my dad.”

Rebecca threw her head back and groaned. Determined to make Cassidy understand that they were probably doomed from the start, she locked gazes with her.

“Cassidy, I’m sixteen years older than you.”

“Bullshit!” Cassidy snickered at herself as Rebecca rolled her eyes a little at the unimaginative outburst. “Damn!”

“Exactly.” *Now she gets it.* Yeah, it hurt, but what else did she expect? That Cassidy would say ‘fuck our ages’ and whisk her away?

“Uh-uh, nope. You’re not going anywhere.” She spread their linked hands and leered at her Rebecca in a way that made her feel much younger. And aroused. “Well, shit. I just figured out what my problem has been all along. I’ve been dating down when I should be dating up! If this is what forty-one looks like, sign me up!”

Rebecca couldn’t stop the smile if she tried, but it faded as quickly as it appeared. “And when we have nothing in common?” she asked.

“More to talk about.”

Another smile tugged at Rebecca’s lips. “Mmhmm. And when your parents and friends disapprove?”

Cassidy shrugged a shoulder. “I’m an adult, Rebecca. I’ve been making my own decisions for a while now. Besides, like I said, mom is older than dad.”

“Cassidy! I’m probably closer to *their* age than I am yours.” *Ugh! I hate saying that!* Her nose wrinkled in distaste.

“I don’t care. It’s my life, and I want you in it, Rebecca.”

She’s relentless! “Okay. How about when you’re thirty-five and I’m fifty-one?” Again, her nose crinkled. Must be a side-effect of their age gap. Or perhaps just her age. She was not a young, naïve woman anymore.

“Then I hope I can keep up with you.”

“You have an answer for everything, don’t you?”

“When something is important to me, yes,” Cassidy answered, squeezing Rebecca’s hands lightly. “Rebecca, you’re afraid you don’t know how to have a real relationship because you’ve never had one. But even if you had, all relationships are different. There’s no magic recipe. We work at it, and we find our own way. Nothing is a guarantee. Hell, you could wake up next week, and figure out I’m some immature idiot. It would devastate me, but at least I’ll know that I was courageous enough to give it a try. I’ve learned enough in the times I’ve been with you to know that I’m willing to take a risk. I know you’re scared, Rebecca. I’m scared, too. But, please, let me be the risk you take.”

They were all the right words. Everything she had wished she could have heard years ago. Yet, if she had, they wouldn’t mean as much as they did today. Rebecca searched for any signs of malice or dishonesty. She didn’t think Cassidy had it in her to be that cruel. Trust didn’t come easy for Rebecca, but for some reason, she trusted this woman. A woman she barely knew. A woman

she had the overwhelming desire to...

“God, why can’t I stay away from you?” She pulled her hands from Cassidy’s and wrapped them around her neck. Taking a chance, she lowered her lips to Cassidy’s and kissed her.



REBECCA SAT IN her Mercedes trying not to hyperventilate. After kissing Cassidy, she agreed to come back to Cassidy’s place. Now, as she sat in front of the cute house, she wondered if she could go through with what Cassidy proposed.

“Go somewhere with me,” Cassidy murmured against Rebecca’s lips.

“Where?” God, it felt wonderful when Cassidy continued to feather kisses across her lips and cheeks.

“My place. Yours. Anywhere but the Pink Room.” She cupped Rebecca’s cheek. “I want to know what it’s like with you outside of that room, Rebecca. I want to make love with you.”

“I don’t know how,” Rebecca whispered with trepidation.

“Would you like to learn?” Cassidy asked, reminding Rebecca of their first time together. “We could teach each other.”

“Yes.”

Make love. How in the hell was she supposed to know how to do that? She was a virgin when she met Samantha. Lord knows the two of them never did anything that was anywhere close to loving. Making love to Rebecca meant shedding every defense she had. There was no mask, no control, no lifestyle to hide behind. Just her and Cassidy. *Shit.* Rebecca closed her eyes and took a deep breath. *She trusted you, now it’s your turn to trust her.*

She stepped out of the car, grateful that Cassidy hadn’t hovered or pressured her. The younger woman simply waited, then held her hand out to Rebecca when she was ready. Rebecca took Cassidy’s hand and squeezed it lightly. A silent thank you. The fact that Cassidy was trembling just as much as she was, made Rebecca feel a little better.

“This is a beautiful home.” She said it to get their minds off of why they were there. But, it

was true. The modern design seemed to suit Cassidy, though it was much bigger than Rebecca expected from someone so young. *No biased ideas, Rebecca. Go into this with an open mind. And heart.*

Cassidy shrugged, still trying to get the door open. "It's not much..."

"Cassidy, it's beautiful," Rebecca repeated forcefully. She never wanted Cassidy to be anything but proud of what she had and who she was.

"Thank you." Cassidy finally got the door open and ushered Rebecca inside. "Would you, um, like something to drink?"

"Water is good," Rebecca answered, taking in her surroundings. The main living area was open and airy. Filled with natural light from the oversized sliding glass doors that led to a private patio. *Nice. And clean.* She didn't know why that surprised her.

"I have something stronger if you like."

Oh, yeah. She's definitely nervous, too. Time to be an adult. Rebecca smiled and traced a finger down Cassidy's jaw. "I want to be completely sober for this, Cassidy." She kissed Cassidy softly and stepped back.

"Be right back." Cassidy gestured around them. "Make yourself at home."

Rebecca took that as an invitation to snoop a bit but was completely distracted by the mural on the far wall. It was mesmerizing and impeccably done. The beach scene featured a mermaid in the crest of a wave. She walked up to the wall, feeling compelled to touch the creation. As she drew closer, she realized that the mermaid was faceless.

"It's not quite done. I—I just couldn't find my muse for the mermaid."

"You did this?" Rebecca asked in awe.

"Yeah." Cassidy smiled proudly and handed a bottle of water to her guest. "I do murals all around the city. You know, hospitals and stuff. And, my friend's an interior decorator. If her clients want something a little special, she calls me." Another shrug. "Drives my parents insane, but it pays the bills and I love it."

"You're an artist." When her preliminary report came back on Cassidy, it said she was a painter. Rebecca hadn't known that meant an artist. "This is amazing, Cassidy." She followed each brush stroke with her eyes and almost felt as though she were in that wave. "Freehand?"

"Yeah. I see a picture in my mind, and just paint."

"Are you in galleries?" Eve needed to see this woman's work, Rebecca decided. Cassidy

laughed but stopped when Rebecca didn't join in. She wasn't kidding.

"I have a few canvases, but I don't think I'm gallery caliber. It's okay. I like doing murals."

"This is definitely worthy of being displayed or sold as prints, Cassidy. I have a friend who's opening a gallery here soon." She downplayed the significance of the gallery and owner for Cassidy's sake. If Cassidy knew anything about the art world, she would know who Eve Sumptor was. Rebecca wanted to be sure Cassidy was willing, first. "Would you like for me to talk to her?"

"Um, what kind of friend?"

Ouch. Rebecca smiled sadly. "You should know I don't become friends with people who have been in my room. Just one more rule I broke with you. Besides, I don't think there's a human being alive who could dominate Eve." *Except maybe one.*

"You don't have to do that."

"I know. I want to."

Cassidy looked a tad uncomfortable. "Okay." She cleared her throat. "Would you, um, like a tour?"

Okay, we're going to have to do something to get her over this nervousness. And hopefully, it'll help me, too. Rebecca took the water bottle from Cassidy and set them aside. "Maybe later," she said, pulling Cassidy to her. "Right now, I just want you."

The kiss they shared was the most passionate kiss Rebecca had ever experienced. Cassidy began unbuttoning Rebecca's shirt and slipped it off her shoulders. Her hard nipples strained against her satin bra, needing to be touched.

"You're so beautiful," Cassidy murmured as Rebecca's bra joined her shirt on the floor.

Rebecca's eyes teared up with emotion. All of her life, people have told her she was beautiful. But no one had ever sounded so sincere, so tender. Cassidy sunk to her knees in front of her and began unbuttoning her jeans. She whimpered when Cassidy took her bellybutton piercing between her teeth and tugged gently.

Cassidy hooked her fingertips into the waistband of Rebecca's jeans and panties. Before she knew it, she was naked in front of a very attentive Cassidy. Her tummy muscles contracted when Cassidy traced her tattoo with a blunt nail.

"I got it after," Rebecca hesitated. The bird in flight on her hip had significant meaning to her. It took Rebecca a long time before she felt she was worthy of it. "When I became free."

Cassidy kissed the tattoo tenderly. An act that spoke louder than any words that could ever be

said. Rebecca ran her hands through Cassidy's hair, lost in the way she peered up at her. She didn't understand how or why this connection with Cassidy happened. But, at the moment, all she wanted to do was bask in the way Cassidy made her feel.

Rebecca's knees buckled, and she grasped Cassidy's shoulders when Cassidy's nose grazed her clit as she breathed Rebecca in. She gasped, digging her fingers into those shoulders when she felt Cassidy's tongue tasting her. Teasing her.

"I'm going to fall, Cassidy."

Cassidy responded by gripping Rebecca's ass. "I won't let you," she purred against Rebecca's extremely wet pussy. Her tongue dipped further inside and dual guttural moans filled the air.

"Baby, please." *Whoa. I've never called anyone that, before. I like it. I like her.* Cassidy stood, grasping the back of Rebecca's thighs. When she found herself in Cassidy's arms, her legs wrapped around Cassidy's waist, Rebecca's arousal tripled. Hell, it went through the fucking roof.

She supposed she could have made it easier for Cassidy to carry her up the stairs by not having her mouth glued to Cassidy's. But, she couldn't help herself. She was being carried by a very muscular, very androgynous, very gorgeous woman. Rebecca was a woman who knew her weaknesses.

"I'm, uh, sorry about the mess. Maid's day off," Cassidy said as she gently let Rebecca down. "But, um, the sheets are clean. I just changed them."

Rebecca frowned. She had no right to feel jealous, yet color her green. "Not sure I want to think about why at this point."

Cassidy's eyes widened. "No! I just meant it was time. Rebecca, I haven't been with anyone since... well, since I met you."

As surprising as that was, it made Rebecca feel special. And much better than she did just moments before. "Neither have I. Even before, Cassidy."

"No one wherever you went? You know, breaking in the new club?"

Rebecca sighed. "No." She could feel Cassidy's apology in the warmth of her arms as she embraced her. *Tell her the truth, Rebecca. Put her out of her misery.* "I didn't lie to you when I said I was leaving for business. But it wasn't for another club like the one here. I was consulting on a business venture. I just wasn't able to concentrate."

"Why?"

"I couldn't stop thinking about you." *Great. Geez, what is it about her that makes you spill*

your guts.

“Is that why you came back?”

Cassidy looked so hopeful, it almost made Rebecca smile. Then she remembered she was completely naked and just moments before they were locked in a heated kiss ready to let their bodies talk for them.

“Cassidy, I’m feeling very vulnerable here.”

It literally took Cassidy two seconds to get as naked as Rebecca was, causing Rebecca to chuckle. Of course, that turned into a gasp when Cassidy pulled her close and their bodies touched. Cassidy’s warm skin on hers was thrilling, but there was something missing. “You’re not wearing it.”

She shrugged sheepishly. “I haven’t had the urge to wear it lately. Since you left, actually. With the way I was feeling, I didn’t need it. I spent most of my time in here, but alone. I missed you. I didn’t want to do anything but sleep. At least then I could dream about you. I had no idea where to find you, or if you were even still in the country. I didn’t even know your name. But I missed you so much that I was dying inside.”

Cassidy didn’t just shed her clothes for Rebecca. She stood before Rebecca, tears running unchecked down her cheeks, and exposed her soul. Rebecca, who fought her own tears, reached up captured Cassidy’s tears with the pads of her thumbs.

“I missed you, too. It felt so wrong in my head to want you, but my heart ached. I couldn’t stand being so far away from you anymore. I didn’t think I’d ever see you again, but I needed to be closer to you. You were here, I needed to be here, too.”

“Rebecca.” Cassidy rested her forehead against Rebecca’s.

The two women just let the emotions envelop them. There are just some things in life that can’t be explained. Rebecca, in this moment, has given up trying to explain why this felt so incredibly right.

“Make love to me, Cassidy,” she breathed.

“Do you want me to get...”

Rebecca placed her fingertips on Cassidy’s lips. “No. I want to feel you.”

This is what she wanted. What she had always wanted. Someone who treated her as though she were a gift. Someone who would touch her as though she meant the world to them. So, the fear that crept up when Cassidy nudged her back on the bed and began lowering herself on top of her

surprised her. She couldn't stop herself from pushing Cassidy away even though that was the *last* thing she wanted to do.

“What’s wrong?”

How do I explain that this position has always been one of pain and submission for me? “I’m sorry. I...”

“Does this scare you?” Cassidy asked gently.

Rebecca looked away, full of shame, and nodded. *She doesn't need this burden.*

“Oh, baby, you have nothing to be ashamed of. We can try this another way, it’s okay. I just need you to know I would never hurt you. Never, Rebecca.”

The passion in Cassidy’s voice calmed Rebecca. *This is not like it was with Samantha.* “Wait, please,” Rebecca pleaded when Cassidy began to move off of her. “I want to feel you on top of me.”

“I never want to do anything that makes you uncomfortable. We can try this another time.”

“I’m okay. I want this, baby. I just panicked for a minute.” She wrapped her arms around Cassidy’s neck, holding her in place. “I’ll tell you if it’s too much. I promise.”

Cassidy hesitated, so Rebecca made the decision for her by pulling her down on top of her. They both moaned at the contact of their bodies. Accelerated breathing and soft whimpers filled the air as Cassidy kissed Rebecca’s neck. The sounds of ecstasy got louder when Cassidy took Rebecca’s nipple in her mouth, and her body moved sensually on hers. All of the earlier fear disappeared without another single thought.

Rebecca’s body writhed under Cassidy. Her hips lifted, pushing her wet, hot center against Cassidy’s thigh. Then she lifted her knee, and her smooth, strong thigh came in contact with Cassidy’s clit. They’re both soaked and the sound of them together filled the room with an undeniable erotic charge.

“Touch me, Cassidy,” Rebecca breathed close to Cassidy’s ear. She felt the tremors throughout Cassidy’s body and felt a surge of power in her own body. Even in this position, she could have control. Even when giving it up, she could feel safe.

Cassidy slipped a hand between them, and for the first time in two months, Rebecca felt... whole.

“Mmm, you feel so good,” Cassidy moaned.

Rebecca’s fingers clamped onto Cassidy’s ass, squeezing and pulling at the same time. She

almost came immediately when Cassidy slipped two fingers inside her and curled them, hitting a particularly sensitive spot.

“I need to touch you.” Truth was, Rebecca had been dreaming of touching Cassidy since that first night they shared together. She couldn’t allow herself before. Touching was as intimate as kissing. Now? Oh, now all bets were off.

Cassidy didn’t hesitate to oblige. She shifted slightly, staying inside Rebecca while she got to her knees. Rebecca scraped her fingernails down Cassidy’s ribs, then dipped her fingers between the lips of her lover’s sex. The moan that came from her was hoarse and needy when she felt how wet Cassidy was for her.

“I’ve wanted to do this since I saw you walk into my club,” Rebecca confessed her earlier thoughts before slipping two fingers inside Cassidy.

“Oh god!” Cassidy’s hips bucked, drawing Rebecca deeper inside.

Cassidy pumped her hand faster and Rebecca matched each stroke with a stroke of her own. As if by some unspoken agreement, they each slipped another finger inside and the cries of ecstasy continued to get louder as they drew closer to that peak. Rebecca gripped Cassidy’s hair with her free hand, their hips pumped passionately in unison. She felt Cassidy tighten around her fingers and there was no holding back any longer.

“Cassidy!”

“Rebecca!”

The rough sound that came from deep within Rebecca came from years of pent-up need. A need for passion. For something other than pain. For something incredible with someone who she felt cared about her. A need for someone like Cassidy. As the climax took a hold of her, Rebecca pulled Cassidy’s hair as she came. She felt Cassidy’s sex clamp around her fingers, tight and hot. And, oh so wet. It was fucking mind-blowing.

“It was you,” Cassidy breathed with amazement.

Panting, Rebecca looked up at her. “What?”

“It wasn’t what we did in that room. It’s *you* who makes me feel this way, Rebecca.”

It was as if the words turned on a faucet inside Rebecca. Emotions flowed out of her—literally—as she came again. Hard. She may have felt a little self-conscious about that if Cassidy hadn’t followed with another orgasm right along with her. At this point, they were going to need to replenish their fluids if they were going to continue this way.

“You’re the only one that’s ever made me do that,” Rebecca revealed almost bashfully. Of course, that bashfulness turned into a soft laugh when Cassidy gives her a cocky, prideful grin.

Let’s see how long you keep that cocky grin, Rebecca thought, relying solely on her instincts when it came to what to do next. Though she had never had a normal sex life, her imagination never suffered. In fact, it flourished in those times when she had to endure the pain or humiliation. There were so many things she had wanted to try. It should have amazed her that she felt safe enough with Cassidy to do exactly what she’d always wanted.

Cassidy’s cocky grin turned into a whimper as Rebecca pulled her fingers out. Disappointment flashed in Cassidy’s eyes as she pulled out of Rebecca, but that would soon disappear, too. Once she was sure she had Cassidy’s full attention, she plunged her fingers – still soaked from Cassidy – inside herself. Making sure her fingers were nicely coated with both of their juices, Rebecca promptly thrust them back into Cassidy’s greedy pussy.

Cassidy groaned and rotated her hips, but Rebecca didn’t linger for long. She had more in mind. She needed more. She pulled her dripping fingers out, brought them to her mouth, and licked, tasting *both* of them. She hummed her approval. *So good.*

Obviously feeling a bit left out, Cassidy dipped her head and sucked Rebecca’s fingers into her mouth, and licked those fingers clean.

When she was done, Cassidy collapsed beside Rebecca with a big, happy smile. “That was incredible,” she gasped.

Rebecca rolled on top of Cassidy and smiled. “Yes, it was.” She gave her a quick peck. “How’s your stamina? Because I’m not even close to being done.”

“Oh, I can do this *all* night long, baby.”

Oh, this is going to be so much fun! “Good to hear. Why don’t you get your little friend?”