



Menotte avec toi

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Category: Romance

Description: Despite the breakup of their marriage, Harper and her ex-husband Simon remained friends. As co-owners of the popular lifestyle club, Menotte avec toi, they decided to put out an open call to local artists to fill the colorful walls of their freshly renovated club.

Harper expected bright colors and sensual art. What she didn't expect was to find love.

On a whim, free spirited Sonnet attends the call out having come to a bit of a crossroads in her career. Maybe this was just the spark she needed to fill those empty canvases haunting her studio.

Will Sonnet be the one to soothe Harper's soul and in return can Harper silence the cruel voices inside Sonnets head?

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Chapter One

Harper

The renovation was nearly done, yet it still felt incomplete.

“Something is missing.”

Menotté avec toi was a BDSM club I co-owned with my ex-husband, Simon Moreau. The name, Handcuffed with you, was his brainchild, and when said in his native language of French, it rolled right off the tongue.

“I agree, but what?”

His current plaything ran around, flirting with the staff and the remaining tradesmen.

Mischievous little bastard, this one was, but that was part of what drew him to Simon in the first place.

That and the fact he had zero inhibitions and enjoyed being put on display.

Given that Simon now ignored him for the most part, I knew his time as plaything number...

hell, there were so many I'd lost count.

Either way, his role in Simon's life was coming to an end.

Thank fuck for that. If I had to hear one more, fuck me Daddy , I'd string him up by his balls. That shrill voice of his carried, and if Simon didn't have a ball gag, which I knew he did, I'd shove one in the little shit's mouth myself.

We had an odd relationship, Simon and I, but one that worked for us.

Compatible as a couple we were not, but as friends and business partners it flowed well.

For one, I preferred the company of women, and as of late, my bisexual ex appeared to lean more towards men, and young ones at that.

But all these years later, Simon and I remained the best of friends and trusted each other without question.

In my heart I truly hoped he'd one day find his forever person.

The very same wish I had for myself as of late.

Business had tripled over the last decade since we first opened Menotté, and the need to expand the club had been a no-brainer; only we took it several steps past our initial conception.

We'd added not only a dining area, reservations only for the dozen tables, but also a Plexiglas deck beneath it that sat above a couple of our dungeons, and the walls around two sides of the dining area itself were fetish rooms also visible through Plexiglas, so our diners received a show while they ate.

Fetish rooms with sensory play. When we surveyed our current members and asked what they'd wish to see more of, that and the dining experience were their top two choices.

So, at their request, the new dining venue and entertainment areas were born.

Meals are not part of their membership dues, and given dinner comes with a show, their dining experience would be quite pricey.

Those cubicles were a modern marvel that took quite a bit of additional engineering to bring to life.

One can never be too cautious when dealing with electricity, after all.

Each fetish room was outfitted with a series of interactive play that those on the dining side could not only watch but also engage in without laying a single finger on the subs.

Anything from press this button , which a throng of toys from dildos to clamps were outfitted to, to roll the dice, which randomly gave instructional commands, has been installed to up the experience.

Options ran the gamut from light play all the way down to the other end of the spectrum, with the sub receiving electrified pleasure.

Try me, spank me , there were so many choices.

How was anyone to pick just one? The beauty of it was that they didn't have to.

It was like walking through a holiday display in a big box retailer with all the test me buttons there itching to be pressed.

Imagine being the electrician we had to explain these rooms to. Sometimes the shock and awe factor when I shared my chosen profession as a Domme to those outside of the lifestyle was worth its weight in gold.

I couldn't wait to hear the gasps and claps when the curtains fell, and the shows began.

It was the simple things in life that brought such happiness. And when it came in the form of orgasms, it sweetened them even more.

"Artwork." It finally hit me. "Let's interview local artists and find one to commission one-of-a-kind art for us."

"Hmm," Simon paused, his gaze currently ravishing one of the younger electricians. "That's a wonderful..."

"Idea?" I rolled my eyes. Clearly he was about to say ass, since that's what his eyes were locked on.

"Yes, yes, of course. Idea."

If I rolled my eyes any harder at the ridiculously horny man, gray matter would be all I'd see.

"Don't worry, I'll handle it." Le sigh. If the man wasn't a well-renowned Dom, I'd have found a way to buy him out already. But alas, clients come from far and wide seeking his services. And service them well he does.

I have a handful of clients myself, though over the last few years I'd transitioned into more of an administrative management role.

There were a few favorites I still played with, though that was few and far between.

It wasn't that I didn't enjoy my job, but as with the artwork, something was missing.

Hiding in an office behind a computer instead of facing the issue head-on?

Quite possibly, I was, but such is life.

“Good morning, Patrice.” Our office assistant and receptionist, who’d been with us since the beginning, had just begun her day.

“Morning, Harper. Nearly done with the construction?”

In my opinion, we’d been closed for far too long.

The members were getting antsy, as was I.

“Nearly. They’re working through the punch list items today, but we’ve decided to add artwork.

I’m sure it won’t be ready for the grand re-opening next weekend, but the members are getting restless, so we can’t put it off any longer.

” I feared they’d invade our apartments above the club, demanding we unlock the doors.

“Would you be able to help me put an ad together? I’m thinking of sensual artists, which limits where we can post it, but I know you have a plethora of connections.

Maybe also allow whomever we choose to offer some of their works for sale as well, but on consignment.

” Might as well make a little while we spend a lot. “Those can be displayed in the lobby.”

“That’s a wonderful idea. I’d be happy to assist. I’ll add it to the website and send out a newsletter today. Once you approve the ad, that is.” Patrice was a true find and our Jack, or Jill, in this case, of all trades.

“Excellent, just pop into my office when you’re ready and we’ll go over it.”

Mindless paperwork. The last task any business owner wants to take on, but the best way to kill time. Before long, Patrice knocked on the door, and a quick glance at the clock showed three hours had passed.

“Harper, ready to go over the ad?”

“Let’s hear it.”

“Attention: NSFW artists for exclusive contracted commissioned art portfolio for local lifestyle club. Seeking one-of-a-kind artwork for our members’ viewing pleasure. Only serious artists need apply. Resume, references, and NDA required.”

“Very thorough without giving too much away.” Why I double-checked anything she did was beyond me. It’s been eons since I’d corrected a single error.

“I’ll add my contact information at the end and will fully vet them before they reach your desk.”

“And that, Patrice, is one of a million reasons why you have unending job security.” She laughed, but I was dead serious. “You are an asset, I hope you know that.”

“Thank you. I’m excited for the grand reopening.

Images pale when compared to the real thing.

” Patrice and her husband were equal parts exhibitionist and voyeur, as were most of us here.

I too was intrigued with how the display cases, that’s what I’d lovingly nicknamed the Plexi sub cages, would work out.

I foresaw an onslaught of reservations, booked out for months just to get a glimpse of them.

Doms at the ready, intently watching those on display to ensure they wouldn’t overdo it.

Pain sluts were a full-time job, in my opinion, and didn’t always know what was best or when to stop for their own good.

Every inch of this club, except for our third-floor residences, had been remodeled.

One half of the upper floor was Simon’s, the other mine, both with separate entrances.

We had spared no expenses; it was only the best for us and our members.

Given we’d waited as long as we had to finally bring their suggestions to fruition, we owed them that much.

We lucked out when buying this building.

An opportune time when the market was ripe for picking.

We’d undergone a basic remodel then, a refresh of the existing rooms, whereas this time around we scrapped the first two floors completely and built them anew.

The only floor we did not touch this time around were our third-floor residences.

No part of the club was visible from the lobby, which also held our offices, but as soon as you entered the double doors, you were immersed in a world of sexual wonder.

Hiring a reputable chef and culinary waitstaff willing to work in such an open environment proved to be a bigger challenge than getting the architectural plans through the city.

But it was best to know that ahead of time before extending offers to the wrong personnel.

With no sessions scheduled and the club still closed, there was no reason to hang around the office any longer.

Was I bored?

Had I acted rashly, removing myself from the dungeon schedule this morning? What would Simon say when he saw it posted?

What was wrong with me?

My head was no longer aligned with my heart. That was the biggest issue. The life I'd built for myself no longer held the allure it once had.

So where did that leave me now? What was next?

Where do I go from here?

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The fact that I even questioned my life confused me.

Starting over at my age was not for the weak nor a challenge I'd willingly take on.

I had a great life, and I'd be a fool to throw it away.

I was just in a midlife slump, that was all.

Not a crisis, just a lukewarm mental state.

Besides, what would I even do? Old dog, new tricks, and all of that...

Jesus, if I had to listen to one more whining artist blabber on about why we should hire them while handing me a portfolio of random stick figures swinging a cowboy hat with the caption 'yee haw' on it, I was gonna lose my shit.

That hadn't actually happened, but if they thought showing up with juvenile sketches would get them into the club, they were sorely mistaken.

Imbeciles.

I drew that same crap in the third grade. Well, maybe that was exaggerating, just a bit, but it wasn't what I sought for our club, nor did I accept that as a sign of any real talent.

I wanted faceless bodies engaged so sinfully you couldn't look away. Acts so delicious I wished to be a part of them. I wanted to be turned on, my panties so wet I

was on the verge of orgasm without so much as being touched by myself or by another. I wanted...I wanted...

Her.

There she stood before me, so innocent, so pure.

Well, hopefully not completely innocent, but innocent to the world we were about to guide her through.

Her eyes wide as we toured the club, but alight with curiosity and a hint of mischief.

Had she envisioned herself strapped in that St. Andrews cross or bent over the spanking bench?

Maybe she was drawn to the display cubes, a velvet wand trailed over her naked flesh.

Nipples pebbled so hard, even without clamps they drew a hint of pain on their own.

Her beauty was like no other. Simple in comparison to some but so genuine, unenhanced, alluring. Even Simon did a double take and smirked when a barely audible groan escaped me.

Could it be?

Would she be the one to reignite the nearly doused flame inside me? Awaken my desire, set my soul afire, and lure me from the funk I'd been drowning in.

Jesus, now I was a fucking poet.

Her name rolled off my tongue with ease, Sonnet Celestine . Though for some reason I wished to call her Kitten. No. I wished to call her mine .

And to think I nearly cancelled today's meeting and left this foolish quest for the perfect art behind us.

Accepting the black walls I knew all too well as a fixture for life.

But I was over that, just frustrated with the interviewees thus far.

We poured too much money into Menotté to have it be just another BDSM club. It was so much more than that.

“Harper, Harper.” Simon’s jovial voice broke through the haze. What had he found so funny? “Would you care to introduce yourself to our guest?”

Comedy was the best way to describe the blank blinks my mind rotated through as I regained focus. My visions of her and I engaged, naked bodies entwined, were so clear, yet we hadn’t made it past the lobby.

“My apologies, I’m Harper Moreau.” Her smile faltered. The urge to restore it to its rightful place upon her beautiful face nearly had me reaching out. Consent, Harper. Remember the golden rule.

“Oh, you’re married?” She gestured between Simon and me.

“No!” Simon and I blurted in unison.

Given the way she jumped, our responses came out a bit too harshly.

“Apologies. No, Simon and I have been divorced for years but remain business

partners and friends. But nothing more.” Why had I added that last part? It wasn’t necessary, though her smile did return. Dare I dream and hope she’s as drawn to me as I am to her?

“Nice to meet you both. I-I, I must be honest. I’ve never visited a lifestyle club before.

” The adorable blush tinting her cheeks and neck had me wishing she were naked so I could see how far it ran.

“I have my portfolio,” she tapped the case in hand, “is there a table I could lay it out on for you to view?”

“Yes, please, follow us.” Simon and I led her into the lounge area of the club to utilize one of the tables. Carefully, she slid several pieces from her case and set them out.

“These may not be what you’re looking for, but they at least showcase my gifts.”

Gift. That she truly was and quite possibly dropped into my lap by the Goddess of Love herself.

Simon and I examined each one, the vision in my head nearly identical to what she’d shown us.

“These are very close to what I’d imagined.

Geometric shapes and lines, forming naked, faceless human bodies.

Some solo while others engaged in sensual acts.

” I glanced up at her, the heat in my eyes wouldn’t go unnoticed.

“Why don’t you come back on Saturday night for the grand reopening as my guest?

The rooms will be occupied, but perhaps that may...

influence your vision?” Either that or pique her curiosity, both of which I’d request a front row seat for.

Simon’s eyes met mine, and I knew we were on the same page and in agreement—Harper was the artist we sought.

“I have the contract in my office. Would you like for me to email it to you and your lawyer?”

She blinked those alluring hazel eyes at me. “I-I don’t have a lawyer. Do I need one?”

Oh, my sweet, sweet kitten, you’ll soon learn I’ll never screw you over and would protect you with everything I have.

“It’s always recommended for your own protection, but I can promise you it’s pretty straightforward. Shall we?”

Goddess, I’ve never asked for much and have worked hard for all I’ve achieved. Please, just let me have this one wish... Let this beautiful soul become mine.

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Chapter Two

Sonnet

Was there a dress code?

Oh, shit, I should have asked that question, at the very least, before agreeing to go to a lifestyle club.

What was I thinking in not asking that? Where was my head at?

Gone, that's where. With Harper staring at me with her beautifully intense gaze and sensual lips curled up into the barest hint of a smile. A striking woman, she'd captivated my artist's soul from the moment I laid eyes on her.

Listening to her describe what she was after for the club, shapes entwined, flowing together until their lines blended and blurred into an image of unabashed bliss.

I'd felt my face heat up as she'd spoken about the emotion she longed to see the artwork convey.

My inner artist wanted to give her everything she sought and then some, but the images in my portfolio had been born of wet dreams and hope.

I had little in the way of experiences to draw from and certainly nothing that delved deeply into a lifestyle I'd long admired.

Call me a bit of a scared cat, but seeing for myself had seemed like an impossible mission to tackle alone.

Perhaps if I'd had a friend to cast a guiding light and show me the way, but art had been my dearest friend since childhood, and few people had ever been able to lure me away from it for long enough to get to know me, let alone for friendships to form.

Now here I was, standing barefoot on the carpeted floor of my bedroom, staring into a closet that contained mostly paint-splattered clothes, trying to remember where I'd shoved the few clubbing outfits I did own.

Yet they hardly felt appropriate.

Sundress, sundress, spaghetti strap top, I wasn't sure if I'd ever bought a skirt to go with...

Shit, shit, shit!

What the hell did one wear to a lifestyle club if you were going to observe and not participate?

Oh, shit!

Goddess, please tell me no one would expect me to participate. I'd die of embarrassment and probably lose out on the job I was desperate to land if they saw how awkward and uncertain I got when faced with casual intimacy.

Sometimes I wished I could just be okay with showing off in a room full of strangers, but the reason there was little in the back of the closet where I'd shoved the pretty little outfits I'd picked up was because I'd stopped wasting my money on them when I knew I'd rarely put them on.

The lights, the music, and the drinks that left me a little tipsy and feeling, for just a moment, like I could conquer my fears and just cut loose, were all the things I enjoyed immensely.

From a distance.

I.e., the back of the room, where the wall could hold me up and the shadows could conceal me from those who might try to draw me out onto the dance floor.

Which in some ways was a shame, since I loved dancing. Especially in my studio, where I could shimmy along while singing at the top of my lungs to whatever music I had on.

I was just about to grab a maroon top with spaghetti straps and a pair of black yoga pants when my eyes landed on a purple and black baby doll dress with ribbons for shoulder straps and ribbon laces running up the front and in several places along the back and sides.

Lavender and lilac lace peeked from beneath royal ribbon in little hideaway spots, while tiny black ribbon bows adorned the hem.

Sweet and absolutely adorable, it still had the price tag on it, but that was an easy fix.

Thin lavender lace knee socks with bows that tied to keep them up were draped over the hanger, just as cute as the outfit, yet I'd forgotten about both.

Now to hope I had shoes to go with it, or at least something close enough that they wouldn't throw off the look I was going for.

I could hardly show up barefoot with paint-splattered toes, thanks to some drips of gray and blue acrylic I hadn't been able to scrub all the way off them.

I'd been too worried about getting the paint out of my bangs after the enthusiastic painting session I'd had this afternoon.

Fall of the Pirate Queen, as I had taken to calling my latest creation, had started out as a somber piece, depicting a stormy sky with lightning arcing everywhere and a ship sailing off in the distance, while a figure lay bobbing in the choppy surf, one arm raised, as if desperately pleading with those on board the ship to come back for her.

Only after my visit to Menotté and meeting Harper, my thoughts about the piece begin to change.

No longer did I seek to depict the fall of a once glorious hellion of the high seas, but her choice to leave all that behind her.

For love.

In my head, she wasn't cast adrift. She'd leapt over the railing of her own ship and into the waves to join the mermaid who'd been following them for days, beseeching the queen to join her.

And no, I had not followed the traditional mythology of the cruel and bewitching mermaid luring the queen to her demise, but rather, a passionate lover longing to float with the queen in her embrace forever.

Painting that part had forced me to push past the voice in my head whispering there are no forevers, but I was proud of myself for doing it and bringing to life their watery reunion.

And if their embrace was a bit lewd and a little tawdry, the naked mermaid and the pirate queen's dress slipped from her shoulders to billow around her waist, well too bad.

That was the image I saw, and that was the image I created, even if it might not have hung anywhere but in my living room.

My alarm beeped the first of a trio of warnings, letting me know there were fifteen minutes left before I needed to walk out the door if I was going to get there on time.

With how easy it was to get wrapped up in my art, just thinking about it, alarm bombing myself was the only way I had of keeping myself moving.

Kneeling in my towel, I rummaged around on the shoe rack until I came up with the one pair of black pumps I owned.

They might not have been lacy, but they had sparkly dragonfly straps that might complement the outfit if no one looked too hard.

Dressing quickly so I wouldn't change my mind about what to wear tonight, I was halfway through the living room before it dawned on me that I'd forgotten to comb my hair.

Makeup I wasn't even going to bother with, but I did rush back into the bathroom to combat the snarls.

Most days, I just tied a bandana over my head to keep the paint out of my hair and called it good. Tonight, I don't know, there was a part of me that wanted to put my best foot forward, and not just for the sake of the job.

Back to the door I hurried, nearly getting it unlocked before my trusty mirror reminded me of the other thing I was about to forget.

Shit on a fuckin' shingle, I couldn't go anywhere with the giant tote bag full of sketchpads, ink, paper, and paint pens I carried around.

Dammit.

I was gonna get a workout in just trying to leave my apartment.

At least I knew where my purple backpack was; it was just a mini one, but it was covered in black and lavender dragonflies that would help tie the outfit together.

I hoped. Keys, wallet, phone, the smallest sketchpad I owned, and a handful of drawing pencils were all I had time to gather before my alarm beeped again.

“ I’m going, I’m going!” I muttered as I silenced it, locked up my apartment, and hurried down to my car.

The VW bug was from a bygone era, completely restored, and painted to look like a bumblebee, complete with stripes on the body and antennae on the hood.

The headlights made perfect eye shapes, and I’d done the detailing around them myself to complete the bumblebee effect.

It was as much a work of art as the rest of my creations, even if it had taken me three long years to get her back into pristine condition after I’d found her at an auction.

That no one else had been interested had played in my favor.

As always, starting her was the best feeling in the world.

While I was the only one who knew that it was my hard work and effort that had gone into making her a rolling work of art, there was still a sense of satisfaction every time I sat on one of those soft, black seats and buckled in.

GPS engaged, I returned to Menotté, parked where I was directed, and hurried in

before I gave my brain a chance to second-guess my appearance or my right to apply for the job in the first place.

Three minutes to spare.

Phew.

Thank you, Goddess.

My name was even on a list when I got to the desk, along with a special message for them to alert Harper upon my arrival.

As I waited, I cast curious glances around, taking note of a whole lot of leather.

Skirts, dresses, pants, vests, holy wowy wow, there were even several men and women in leather kilts.

None of them, not a single one, held a candle to Harper when she appeared in a maroon and black leather dress that clung to her curves and accentuated her regal, commanding presence.

Even her boots were leather, the heels on them adding to the height distance between us.

The moment she spotted me, the stern look on her face split into a smile, and I'd have sworn her eyes lit up, though I knew it was just a trick of the light she strode under.

I felt my cheeks go warm as she raked her eyes over me, but when I started to duck my head, she hummed a little sound of approval, her smile morphing into a full-on grin.

“That outfit suits you perfectly,” she declared. “It’s positively adorable and as unique as the drawings you shared with us.”

My heart soared at hearing that, while the nagging worry I’d felt on the drive over melted away completely.

“Let’s get to our seats before the show begins, though for me, it’s already started. I may have a difficult time peeling my eyes off you to pay attention to what’s going on below and around us.”

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Oh, now that really boosted my confidence and made it easier to follow her deeper into the club until we reached the dining area.

Along the way, I noticed a few of the individuals from the entryway, though bits of their attire had changed.

One of the kilted men had exchanged his top for a leather harness, while a tiny woman in six-inch stilettos removed a flowy wrap to reveal nothing but fishnet and leather strips beneath it.

The way they crisscrossed her body, showing off wide strips of tattooed skin and piercings, was one of the coolest things I'd ever seen.

My artist brain wanted to draw her immediately or at least get a quick gesture study penciled out so I wouldn't forget any details, while the little voice in the back of my mind reminded me that it might be rude to dive into my sketchbook the moment we sat down.

Besides, I hadn't asked if sketching, even without including identifying details, was even permitted here.

"Oh wow," I murmured as we took our seats.

The horseshoe-shaped benches meant we weren't seated across from one another, but side by side, leaving me extremely aware of Harper's presence.

Instead of being uncomfortable, it was comforting and made it so much easier to lean

close and ask questions without the risk of someone overhearing.

“I, um, remembered what you said about wanting me to see the show to help with inspiration for the artwork you’d like to have created, so I brought my sketchbook. Would it be okay if I mocked up ideas while we ate? I won’t draw anyone’s faces or anything like that.”

“It’s perfectly okay.”

“Thank you,” I replied. “And please, if something really stands out tonight that you’d like to see depicted in the art, let me know so I can make notes and mockups.”

“That sounds like a wonderful idea. I’ll be sure to let you know.”

When the lights came on beneath the clear table and to the front of us, I didn’t expect the Plexiglas to glow the way it did, creating a whole ambiance for us that went beyond the two women in the room below us.

One wore sparkly pink and black pasties over her nipples, in the shape of a kiss, and a matching thong that showed off every ripple of her abs as she danced seductively around her partner, a woman in a mini-skirt and leather bustier that showed off her tattooed midsection.

Miss Pasties moved to the beat like the room was filled with music, a pink and black boa and matching fedora rounding out her outfit.

I couldn’t help it; I had to dig my sketchbook out just to capture the uniqueness of her outfit and the way she moved so seductively around her partner, who caught her boa and booped her on the nose when she attempted to lasso her with it.

Pasty girl pouted for a moment and crossed her arms, until her partner plucked the

fedora off her head, waved it at her, and plopped it on her own head, the jaunty feather matching one of the ones hanging from her ears.

“You see the way they are moving with one another, like they’re playing cat and mouse?”

Harper’s voice near my ear sent a shiver down my spine, and when I turned to look at her, she was so close I could see the flecks of colors in the pattern of her iris, so light they were almost gold in all that green.

“Uh-huh,” I murmured, unable to look away.

“Seduction is a dance that starts long before you ever put your hands on someone,” she said. “The artwork I long for should show more than just lovers entwined. I want you to capture the moments it took to get there, as well as the moment when they move from teasing to more.”

I shivered again, not just because she was giving me a different way of looking at what was taking place below us, as pasty girl reached to adjust the fedora, just a little, on the tattooed woman’s head, only to have her hand captured.

The tattooed woman spun her and pressed against her shoulder, bending her over a chest at the foot of a bench.

Pinning her there, the tattooed woman traced patterns up pasty girl's back with fingertips and kisses, slowly, gently, until she reached the nape of her neck, and pasty girl shivered.

Her hair was a riot of blond curls that the tattooed woman gripped before tugging her hair back, her other hand on pasty girl’s hips, keeping them in place as her back bowed, allowing the tattooed woman to whisper in her ear, and lick the shell of it.

My pencil flew over the page as my mind raced, Harper's words and the images playing out below us beginning to flow together like wisps of smoke.

Watching incense curl and trail around a room had always been something I loved to do when I was daydreaming; now I thought about the way that smoke came together and drifted apart, some trails dancing for long distances, others curling and fading from view.

On the page, lines started taking shape as I drew the smoke, one twisting spiral becoming an arm wrapped in that fluffy feather boa, as the tattooed woman began trapping pasty girl in her own prop.

"Every movement has meaning," Harper whispered, drawing a low moan from me that I hope she didn't hear. "Every action builds to a new possibility. That's what we pride ourselves on here. That's what I want you to capture."

Sweet, sweet goddess in the sky, my panties were damp already, and they were just getting started.

While my artist brain focused on capturing as much inspiration as possible, the little voice in the back of my head giggled and whispered that we were going to need a change of underwear long before the main event.

Chapter Three

Harper

Was it my presence that elicited those salacious shivers and moans from Sonnet, or the erotic show?

Possibly both. We'd chosen wisely when hiring tonight's entertainment for the grand reopening and witnessing her reaction to it firsthand set my inner Domme into a whirlwind of potential scenes. All tailored to meet Sonnet's needs.

I'd always been drawn to redheads. I loved their feisty behavior and no-nonsense attitude. Heightened sensitivity and their overall reaction, absolutely delicious. But when it came with a side of uncertainty and wonder, as Sonnet presented, well then, that was the ultimate foreplay to me.

Beneath Sonnet's gloriously ribboned exterior was a woman begging to be held, tied down, and repeatedly brought to climax. I'd bet my salary on it. The way she sketched, so lost in the moment. There was no way visions such as the ones she laid out before us were born of a completely vanilla mind.

And that dress...

Did each bow untie? I'd love to find out. Undo them one by one, press my lips to each piece of naked flesh that peeked out beneath it. Jesus, if this evening didn't end with her in my bed, my vibrator was getting one hell of a workout.

Don't mix business and pleasure, Harper.

I swear, at times my mind forgot what I did for a living. Seduction. Compassion. Aftercare. The ability to read a sub's needs and bring them to fruition was a gift and one I proudly possessed.

Though Sonnet wasn't a job. Her trust I'd have to earn right along with her heart.

Fuck, how I thrived when challenged and always did my best work then.

I hadn't dated in years. The thought never even crossed my mind when my needs were met within the club. For a while I'd been content, and it wasn't until we had closed for the renovations that I had time to truly reflect, and the loneliness hit.

And it wasn't until Sonnet walked through those doors that my life came full circle.

It was a partner I desired. Not a playmate, nor a sub, well, not necessarily, though I knew on some level Sonnet was a sub.

To what extent was yet to be determined, but I looked forward to peeling back her layers and learning what made Sonnet tick.

I can't remember the last time I felt this alive, this energized.

"Good evening, Mistress Harper," Lana, a member of the new waitstaff, greeted us. "Would you two like to order anything off the menu or from the bar?" The bar was only available to those not partaking in the dungeons.

"Kitten," slipped past my lips. Surprised, she glanced up from her drawing, and her eyes met mine. I didn't dare flinch and apologize and instead stayed the course. "Are you ready to order?"

A slow nod of her head as she found her words. “Yes, please. Why-why don’t you order for us? I-I have no allergies or dislikes save for Brussel sprouts.”

Stuttered words filled with uncertainty, but what about? My choice of a pet name or for shocking herself in requesting I order for us. “I too am not a fan. Lana, tell Chef we’ll take two specials. Would you like wine or anything besides water to drink?”

“I’ll have whatever you’re having.” Sonnet returned to her sketch without another word. I’m sure my slip of the tongue would be addressed once the extra set of ears was out of hearing range.

“Ask Chef to pair our dinners with the perfect wine.”

“Very good, Mistress Harper. I’ll be back with your drinks momentarily.”

“Your brain is about to work overtime.” On-the-fly icebreakers weren’t a gift, but I did my best. “The main show is about to begin.” The lights dimmed and the curtains around us opened, revealing the various subs on display.

“Oh my.”

Sonnet’s eyes widened as she stood, then paused and turned to me. “Can we?”

“Get a closer look?” She nodded. “Of course.” I rose and took her hand in mine. She glanced down at them, seemingly fine with it as I led her over to the human displays.

“Do they, do they want this? Or are they being punished?”

“I can assure you, Kitten, all are here of their own free will and have signed contracts stating such. There are many within the BDSM community who enjoy this kind of painful pleasure.” There it went again, the pet name, slipping past my lips.

She didn't question, nor did I, given I'd never blessed another a special nickname of their own.

"Pain sluts?" She blurted the word out and nearly slapped her mouth. "Sorry, was that rude?"

"Only if it's said to someone who isn't. Most of the time those who say it are their masters or Doms for a scene."

"A scene?"

Oh, my sweet Kitten, I have so much to teach you.

"Some that come to the club are solo members, while others are couples. All of which are either looking to just do a scene—a one-and-done or an occasional meet-up. Anything from being put on display as these subs have chosen." I gestured around the room to the half dozen display boxes we now had.

"To a more masochistic play down in the dungeons. Each encounter is called a scene."

"Wow, that's interesting. Would you like some of the more explicit scenes," she tried the word on. "Depicted in my art?"

"Kitten," I'd grown attached to the pet name, though her given one was equally as beautiful.

"I want to see what you feel. What's drawn you into our lifestyle?"

Maybe even choose scenes you perhaps wish to be a part of.

” Her eyes lit up, and I knew I’d struck gold.

“I’d happily be your Domme for any aspect you wished to try. ”

“R-really?”

I leaned in, there wasn’t a millimeter between my lips and her ear.

“Really. After dinner, I’ll show you more.

” That would be the real test of how well she’d handle watching others engaged in sexual acts or otherwise.

Would it turn her on or turn her off? One thing was for certain: something about me reached her inner core if her shivers were the telltale indication of the effect I had on her, tonight would end on a very happy note.

“Shall we?” My hand never left her lower back as we walked, and since she hadn’t complained, I left it there.

But a conversation about consent would be our dinner discussion.

Lana waited around the corner to bring our meals. As soon as we sat, she delivered them. “Ah, surf and turf. One of my favorites. Thank Chef for us, please.”

“Will do, Mistress Harper. May I bring you two anything else?”

A quick glance at Sonnet and a head nod confirmed we were good. “No thank you.”

“Is Mistress a moniker reserved for those you...”

Hmm, where was this headed? “Those I?” Brow raised in question.

Her face flushed, and she stared down at her food. “You sleep with or dom over? I’m not sure what the proper terminology is.”

I nearly laughed and barely refrained. Offending her was the furthest thing from my mind.

“I can assure you, Kitten, I’ve never slept with that girl, nor will I.

Mistress for me is a term of respect. While I am a Domme and have actively sexually pleased some of my subs, not all, it’s not as frequent as you’re assuming.

” Interested? Jealous? Further clarity was required.

“May I ask what’s going on inside that beautiful head of yours? ”

“You think I’m beautiful?”

Gently raising her hand, I pressed my lips to the top of it. “I think you’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen.” Sappy? Most likely, but in my mind the words were true. She’d captured me from the first moment we met. “Now, back to my question.”

Sonnett stumbled, took a bite of her food, and then a sip of wine. “I-I, I like you.”

Now we were getting somewhere. “I like you too, Kitten. But what does that have to do with my status as a mistress?”

She shrugged. “I don’t think I could date someone whose job was to, um, please others. Orgasm wise.”

Ah. Hard to hide the realization in my facial expression, though I did my best. “There are ways to work around that. And not every scene is about bringing a sub to climax, nor myself. Now, if I had a sub of my own, that would change everything.”

“How so?”

“My focus would shift to them and their needs, whatever they may be.” Was that clear enough?

To those outside the lifestyle, comprehension wasn’t always easy.

“Which brings me to another question, one of consent. Earlier, when I placed my hand on your back I should’ve asked first, and for that I apologize.”

Her grin had my rarely used one appearing. “I liked it, and I, um, I like it when you call me Kitten too.”

Goddess, have mercy. Sonnet was about to wrap this I’ll never love again Domme around her paint splattered finger. Yes, the deep pink hue that was missed during a scrubbing wasn’t missed by me. Another thing I already adored about this woman. Innocence and curiosity, a highly dangerous combination.

Flirty stolen glances as we ate, all the while wondering to myself where her thoughts were made for an interesting meal.

Most subs were easily read between their responses to the limit’s questionnaire and one-on-one initial meetings we had, I hit it dead on most times.

Did they like the subspace received from pain, or were they a little?

Maybe a pet with an abundance of energy to run off.

Or maybe they preferred the ability to be rendered motionless with the beautiful art of Shibari.

Once upon a time that was a highlight for me when accepting a new sub, depicting their needs.

Now, my focus was on one sub whose needs I'd soon uncover.

Sonnet would take time and patience. Thankfully, I had an abundance of both.

With our plates cleared away, the time had come to see if current scenes taking place inside the club grabbed her... attention .

“Are you ready to experience a whole new world?”

“With the head mistress as my guide.” Was it the great food, I must remember to thank our Chef, or the wine that brought out her sassy side? “I'd be honored.”

“Elevator or stairs?”

“You have an elevator?”

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“We do. Some of our members have physical challenges, and our club is all-inclusive. Discrimination of any sort is not allowed.”

Our club theme was the perfect mixture of industrial and chic.

Black iron staircases with matching walls, where Plexi hadn't been installed, and the overhead trusses had been painted black as well as the structural beams. We took the stairs down, Sonnet's head bounced from side to side, taking everything in.

“The basement rooms are mixed-use dungeons.” We paused in front of the one that was visible from our table above.

“The others with the closed doors that you can't see into are for private sessions, so we won't be able to peek inside.

” Though as the club owner I was technically allowed in at any time, I preferred not to take that modicum of privacy away from those utilizing the rooms unless I'd been alerted of a potential issue or asked to assist with a scene.

Our security team manned the cameras and listed for the use of any safewords.

If the Dom/Domme didn't immediately stop, security would engage.

“This room is the one our table sat above though the players and scene have changed.” Her eyes widened as she watched the Dom spread the restrained sub's legs wide. Their back freshly reddened by the flogger he'd used.

The Dom thrust a large, ribbed dildo inside them, fucking them in earnest before giving the command to come.

The sub moaned and cried out, going limp before the Dom removed the toy, loosed the restraints, and then carried the sub over to the couch.

“Aftercare is of the utmost importance when a scene comes to an end. Water and a sugary treat to refresh them while the Dom cradles them. Many a sub has shared that aftercare was what they most desired.” The feeling of being cared for while in another’s arms was a heady emotion.

“I can see that.”

“Is flogging or being restrained an element you wish to explore?”

Sonnet paused, still watching the Dom and sub inside. “I-I’m not sure.”

I’d chalk that up to a conversation to be had at a later time. “Over here are the wet rooms.”

“Wet rooms?”

“While our club doesn’t allow scat or blood play,” don’t even get me started on the rules and regulated requirements around those fetishes. “We do allow watersports, or urophilia, if you will.” Her face remained blank, so I chose a less appealing term to explain. “Urine play.”

“Oh my.”

Based upon her reaction, I’d say that one was crossed off the list. A non-issue for me as well.

“Members also like to act out bathroom or locker room scenes. The rooms are frequently utilized for such play.” I nodded to the security guard as we passed him by.

The safety within our club was another non-negotiable that we spared no expense on. “In this area is our pet playroom.”

“Pet play? Like, dogs and cats?”

I smiled. “Not in the traditional sense.” We stepped inside to the sounds of barks, mewls, and every attempted animal sound bouncing off the concrete walls.

“Pet Play is another aspect of BDSM. One where they dress as their preferred animal and let go, leave their worries at the door, and play until they’ve worn themselves out.

Those over there are their handlers, or in some cases, Mommies and Daddies.

” I waved to the group off to the side in the new area we’d added that gave them the perfect view of their pets while they played on the vast state-of-the-art equipment we’d installed for them.

Tunnels, climbing walls and cat trees. There was even an obstacle course that ran the gamut of the vast space.

“That’s really interesting. Is that why you call me Kitten? Do you see me as a pet?” Was she analyzing my analyzing?

“Great question. To be honest, I hadn’t thought of it at the time though I can’t deny the thought of you in a leather cat suit doesn’t arouse me.” Too much too fast? The heat reflected in her eyes said no.

“Hmm, add that one to the list.”

Touché, my feisty feline, touch?.

“Let’s head up to the second floor which was where we entered from.

There’s much to see there.” Walking past these rooms rarely did anything for me other than appease my inner voyeur, but with Sonnet by my side, imagining us in some of the positions we were about to witness while inside the privacy of my bedroom upstairs made it nearly impossible to move.

“I had no idea.”

I stood behind her, my hands itching to touch every inch of her flesh. “May I?”

No questions asked, she simply replied, “Please.”

I trailed my fingers along her sides, over her dress.

Goddess, no lingerie just merely a very thin G-string...

Sonnet leaned back into me, I swept her hair aside and pressed my lips to her neck.

“How do you feel about being watched?” My hands skated across her abdomen, drawing more of those delicious shivers as I reached her bikini line.

“I-I, I don’t know.”

“But you like watching?”

“Yes.” The weight of her whispered word hit me right between the thighs. If we

didn't move away from these rooms and fast, I'd take her against the wall for all to see, bring her to the first of many orgasms I longed to give her tonight.

"We're almost done. Let me show you the littles room." That would definitely cool me off. I loved littles though it wasn't my desired kink.

"Littles?" Hmm, another new kink for her to research. This was a night full of firsts for my sweet Kitten.

We entered to giggles and cheers and a silly song they sang along with while the video played on the TV.

The energy was hard to miss, as was the happiness upon their faces.

"Littles are much like pet play. Another way to let go and know that your Mommy or Daddy will be there to take care of everything." Coloring, blocks, dolls, arts and crafts—you name it, and we likely had it for them.

"This is interesting. Like reliving your childhood."

"Or for some, reliving all they missed. Either way, it's very therapeutic, and when inside their little or middle headspace, they're able to let go and relax.

" The positive aspects the BDSM lifestyle brought were missed by many.

It wasn't as they perceived it, yet they were too fool headed to learn something new.

We weren't asking them to join us, only asking they not shame us.

Sonnet's questions were few and far between as we toured, much to my surprise. Was the experience fodder she stored away only to be presented in the form of her art?

Possibly, though I'd love to know what she was thinking.

"What's on the third floor?" She asked as we returned to our table.

"Our private residences. Would you like to see?"

"Yes, please."

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Chapter Four

Sonnet

The things I'd seen this evening went beyond anything I'd ever pictured or dreamed.

While my imagination was wild and vivid, it didn't hold a candle to the reality I'd glimpsed in those rooms. What was odd, at least for me, was the way my fingers no longer ached to take up one of my drawing pencils so I could pour all my focus into capturing the things I'd seen.

Maybe it was because I didn't fear forgetting them; how could I when several had left me damp and aching to experience them for myself? I'd never been as turned on as during that tour, though I knew a good deal of those feelings had to do with Harper being my guide through the different spaces.

When had I ever been attracted to someone so much that they were able to steal my focus from my artwork in such a short time together? The answer was simple.

Never.

If my actions matched my thoughts, I'd have been considered wanton or even brazen with some of the urges that had taken root in my head.

But I'd never been tempted enough to act on any of my many, many erotic fantasies, but I dreamed of wicked things all the time and had never felt the slightest shred of shame over it either.

Then again, I'd never found someone who enthralled me so much that I wanted to act out some of the naughtier ones with them.

And yet Mistress Harper had just introduced me to a space where it was safe to do so.

And goddess help me, I wanted to know more.

"Here it is," Mistress Harper said as she opened the door and ushered me inside a space that was filled with warm, deep wood and high windows. Every bit of it gleamed where the soft light hit it, creating the sort of ambiance I loved.

"Wow," I murmured, turning slowly to take in the personal space she'd created. "The lightning alone is magnificent."

A fainting couch with rich, mahogany tones jutted out from an alcove; only when I looked closer did I notice that there were soft-looking straps wound around each leg.

"What are those for?" I asked, pointing to them even as I stopped closer to get a better look.

Kneeling, I noticed that there was a gleaming wooden box beneath it, intricate carvings running along the sides.

Polished to a shimmery sheen and positively beautiful, it was definitely a work of art in and of itself.

No pressboard or cheap fabrication, that was for certain.

Someone had taken the time to lovingly create it. A gift, perhaps?

"Those are restraints," she explained. "Each one is long enough to not only wrap

around a sub's ankles and wrists to secure them to the couch but to allow me the freedom to arrange them into enticing positions, especially the extremely flexible ones."

"I'm flexible," I blurted and immediately felt my cheeks heat up.

"I-I mean, I do yoga each morning; it helps me clear whatever thoughts I woke up with so I can focus on my muse without stray bits interfering. I was never very athletic. Okay, so that's an understatement; I was never athletic at all.

I was the klutzy art geek who could trip on air, especially if there was a ball involved.

I'd have been picked last for every team if it hadn't been for Patrick McGee being in the same class since we were ten.

He was a bigger klutz than I was, which was saying something.

He sent more people to the nurse than the stomach flu. "

Downstairs, she smiled at me several times. Now she threw her head back and let out a throaty laugh.

"Oh, oh, that's bad," she muttered, shaking her head, that grin feeling very permanent now as she studied me.

"Right? I felt so bad for him. For both of us, really. I get the importance of making sure children are getting exercise, but there has to be a better way than gym class. There were times when it felt like the gym teacher's sole purpose in life was to torment the slower, weaker students and the ones who didn't catch on to whatever game or sport we were supposed to be focusing on. "

“Did you not enjoy playing?” she asked as she knelt and slowly unwound one of the straps from the leg of the fainting couch to show me how long and soft it was.

Like crushed velvet beneath my fingertips, it felt as wonderfully luxurious as the sofa itself.

No way it came off an assembly line.

“Sometimes,” I replied, having to remind myself to answer the question and not get lost in the gesture beneath my fingertips.

I loved soft things, all soft things, whether they were firm or squishy.

Like with yoga, stroking over something and using it as a touchstone was a means of grounding myself and lulling me into the right headspace for my art, only here, looking at this sofa, it wasn't a drawing I was thinking about.

It was her.

“Would you like to experience it for yourself?” she asked, while I continued to run my fingers over that strip of cloth.

“I'm so curious it's hard not to squeal with excitement at you giving me the chance,” I admitted. “Will you show me what to do?”

“It's simple enough,” she explained. “Just get comfortable on your side or back, relax, and let me position you. If something feels uncomfortable, or if you change your mind and decide you don't want to be bound to the chair, just tell me and I'll immediately unwrap you.”

“I can do that,” I said, sitting first before carefully removing my shoes and tucking

them off to the side.

Not only did the cushions feel soft, but they were super comfortable too. As I stretched out on my side and smoothed my dress over my hip, the fabric draped right along the edge of my knee-high socks, showing off the bit of ribbon that was holding them up.

“You’re striking this way,” Mistress Harper declared as I got comfortable, my head resting on the pillow as she started wrapping fabric around the leg that rested against the cushions.

Giggles welled up when she reached my calf, spilling over when she wound it higher, until she found the spot on my inner thigh that always made me squirm.

“I see someone is extremely ticklish, right there,” she murmured, dangling the edge of the fabric over the spot, teasing, until our eyes met.

That first, teasing brush against my skin drew a gasp from deep inside my chest, my body tightened, and I flung my free leg wide when she did it again. When she licked her lips, one eyebrow arching at my inadvertently flashing her, it was the hottest thing in the world.

Like a cat fascinated by dangly bits of fluff hanging from a string, she waved it about, catching the curve of my knee with a light enough graze that I giggled again. When my squirming revealed another patch of skin, she tickled that too, but never for long enough for me to beg her to stop.

It was only when she stopped tormenting me and finished wrapping the strap that I realized there was nothing to hold it in place. No Velcro, no buttons, zips, or snaps, just the end looped over another strip and tucked beneath it.

I didn't need to be freed, but I did give an experimental tug of my leg to see how it all worked and quickly discovered that the cloth had very little give. In fact, tugging seemed to tighten it.

Okay, that was good to know and to think about once I was ready to incorporate those strips into a drawing, because holy shit, they were both soft and snug.

Like a hug.

"Does that feel okay to you?" she asked, her fingers light as she caressed my cheek and brushed a wavy lock of hair back behind my ear.

"I like it," I admitted, my words followed by a contented sigh in response to her touch. "It isn't tight at all."

"Good," she replied. "This type of restraint isn't about being tight, just secure enough to let someone get lost in sensation and enjoy what's being done to them."

Sometimes, it's hard to sink down and get lost in the moment when inside of your head you've got a whirlwind of suggestions playing on an endless loop, telling you what you should be doing in response to what's being done to you.

This type of bondage removes the urge to focus on things like that. "

"How?"

"By making them impossible," she explains. "Once the mind accepts that the body can't do something, it quits trying to suggest it."

"I never thought of it like that," I murmured as she began securing my wrist and arm next, so it remained at my side but secured in a way that made it impossible to lift it.

This time, I didn't feel the need to test how well it held, since I knew what pulling would do, and I liked it. She was right; not having to think about doing anything at all made it easy to just be there in the moment, especially when she playfully drew the end of that strap down my arm.

I wasn't ticklish there, but it did raise a crop of goosebumps along my arm that she noticed and blew on, raising more. So many more that I shivered and watched as my nipples pebbled enough that they were visible through my thin, lacy dress.

She noticed, of course she did, and flashed me a wicked grin as she moved around the end of the couch to reach the other side.

There, she started with my wrist and arm this time, bringing it to the top of the couch, but with no way to cover myself up if I started feeling shy or modest. I felt neither and doubted I would, not when I had her expression to study.

Concentration and desire. Her focus reminded me of my own when I was deep within a piece of artwork.

I'd recorded enough videos of my process to know how lost I got when I was deep in a moment of creation. Was that what I was for her right now? A living, breathing piece of art for her to mold into the picture she envisioned?

Was that what a mistress got out of a scene? Was that part of where they derived their pleasure?

I didn't want to break the mood by asking, nor did I think I could muster up the effort, or words, when she trailed the end of that strap along my bustline, then back again, over my nipples, so taut that they reacted to the barest whisper of fabric ghosting across them.

When she did it again, I raised my hips, just a little, such a small, inviting motion that hiked my dress up further than I expected it to go.

Damp, my panties grew wetter as she used that strap to tease my nipples over and over again until I couldn't swallow down my gasps any longer and let one out.

“You don't have to hide your sounds of pleasure from me,” she whispered, leaning over me to speak right against my ear.

Like in the dining room, her breath and the rumbling murmur vibrating against the shell of my ear made me shiver more and a moan escaped.

She'd barely touched me and already my body felt like pinpricks of electricity that danced along my skin. I wanted, no, I needed to see what would happen once she had me completely entangled in those straps.

One limb to go.

My dress was high enough that it barely hid my lavender lace panties from her.

Yet she took her time, finding my ticklish spots again and chasing them higher.

Each slow discovery made me giggle more.

In between gasps and moans, she found a spot near my hip, the flesh that the dress revealed once she'd positioned my leg the way she wanted it.

Open.

It was as if I were on display the way the subs in the displays had been. When she asked if I liked to be watched, I didn't know how to answer, because I'd never been

put into a position where I had to consider it.

Now, as her eyes peered down at me, as they gleamed like the wood in that soft light, I knew that yes, yes I did.

As long as she was the one watching me.

Each time she met my eyes, it felt like she wove a connection between us. Eyes were one of the first features I'd mastered when I was learning to draw. The window into the soul, many had called them.

I'd done a whole collection of them, with images inside the iris depicting what the soul might desire.

I'd do one for her, even if it didn't mesh with what she wanted for the club's walls. I'd do one to reflect on some of the naughty, wicked, lascivious things I'd only fantasized about. Things she'd proven to me were possible all evening long.

The edge of the strap brushed the high curve of my thigh, inches away from the damp place between my legs that grew wetter as I shivered and sucked in air.

This was sweet, sweet torture, and I couldn't have moved if I wanted to.

Goddess knows I didn't.

My hips couldn't even rock anymore or squirm with the way she'd placed me. Words were the only things that would free me, words I felt no desire to say.

Instead, I gazed up into her eyes, smiled, and whispered, "Please, please touch me more."

Chapter Five

Harper

“As you wish, Kitten. But first, it’s imperative we establish safe words.” Having signed a contract should’ve come first, but I’d not take us into any truly painful play, should Sonnet desire, this evening. Tonight, it will be all about gentle pleasures, Sonnet’s pleasure.

“Safewords?”

“Yes, Kitten. If you enjoy what I’m doing, you say green when I ask what color you are. If you’re unsure, say yellow, and we’ll slow down. If you wish for me to stop, saying red will do that.”

“Stoplights.”

“Exactly, and easy to remember. If later you wish to explore more, we’ll prepare a contract between us, and you can pick your own safeword if you so desire.”

“Is, is that what I’ll be, a sub? One of your subs?”

“My only sub, Kitten. After tonight, no other will do.” I withdrew the box from under the bench.

A handmade gift from a sub I had some years ago.

He was a gifted woodworker and a longtime client until he found his forever.

I was thrilled for him and his partner, having watched him grow during our sessions and learn to let go.

Inside this ornately decorated chest were some of my favorite implements, though we'd not delve too far into those.

There was only one I sought for tonight.

"What's that?" Sonnet's eyes widened, full of curiosity this girl was.

"This is a cat-o'-nine-tails. It has many uses, though mostly as a whip. But for tonight, you see these feathery wisps on the end?" I brushed them along her thighs.

She nodded, shivering as they trailed along the inside and then back down toward her feet.

"Tonight, will be all about painless sensation." Every time her hips moved, her dress rode up.

Revealing more of the skin I yearned to run my tongue along. "How does it feel?"

"Ticklish, but in a sexy tickly way."

I smiled, loving how she worded it. "Good. Most subs aren't allowed to come until their mistress tells them, but tonight I want to hear every moan, every whimper, every sound from you as I bring you to climax." I trailed it between her thighs and over her panties.

My fingers replaced the tails, slipping beneath the lace, gliding along the edge of the

sheer material to the thin straps that outlined her waist. Sonnet hadn't a clue how absolutely breathtaking she was, spread out before me.

Her trust alone was a beautiful thing, and her body, its own work of art.

If only I could draw. The vision before me would hang above my bed, a constant reminder of this moment. A snapshot in time. One I'd surely replay throughout the coming years.

Before Sonnet, I struggled with the belief that true love, let alone love at first sight, even existed. Now, I second-guessed both potential ideals as I envisioned myself building a future with this woman. What was the draw? What separated her from the others I'd been with?

No clue, but I am looking forward to finding out.

"Close your eyes, Kitten." No second-guessing, questions, or doubt in her mind as she immediately followed directions. Earning a sub's trust was a heady feeling. Any Dom that didn't take that seriously better find a new profession.

Hovering the tails above the top of her dress, I swept the feathers across her flesh.

Down one arm and up, then back across her chest to repeat the same on the other.

Her skin prickled with goosebumps. The material of her dress was thin enough that her arousal was evident given the state of her pebbled buds.

My treasure box housed a variety of nipple clamps I'd love to one day utilize on Sonnet's breasts.

Tracing around the areolas I gave a light flick of the tails to the tips. Sonnet

whimpered, and her hips thrust as much as the restraints would allow. “Did you enjoy that, Kitten?”

“Yes, Mistress Harper,” she hissed. “Yes.”

I did it again to the other breast, eliciting a delightful gasp that time. “Maybe my new pet does enjoy a hint of pain.” I’d not flicked it hard enough to leave a mark. But maybe someday...

Down her torso it weaved, revealing many ticklish spots along its path, all of which I committed to memory.

“What color are you, Kitten?”

“Green. A wonderful shade as deep as your eyes.”

In an artist’s mind, no detail goes unnoticed. “Flattery will get you,” I snapped it right between her thighs, pleased with myself when she squealed and writhed against the restraints. “Everywhere.”

While she caught her breath, I trailed the feathers down the inside of her stocking-clad legs and back up. Across the top of the bikini line along the exposed skin, over her mound, and around again. The way she moaned, teetering right on the edge, I knew a couple more times was all she’d endure.

“What color, Kitten?”

“Green. Green. Green,” she chanted. Right as she canted her hips, I flicked the tails, landing directly on the dampened area.

“Fuck!” She shouted. I pushed the panties to the side and slid two fingers in.

Awestruck as I watched her body undulate.

Her facial expression while in the throes of ecstasy as she rode my fingers through her orgasm was nothing short of erotic.

“Beautiful.” Sonnet blushed at my compliment as she slowly opened her eyes.

Massaging her ankles and wrists as I undid each restraint, my own needs heightening the more I touched her.

“Stay here, Kitten. I’ll be right back.” I went to the kitchen and returned with a bottle of water. “Please, drink.”

I wanted to curl up beside her and take her in my arms, but the chaise wasn’t suited for two bodies.

Sonnet finished the bottle, then sat up. “I should leave. Right? Our scene is over. Isn’t that how this works?” She straightened her dress and slid into her shoes, but I wasn’t ready to let her go.

“Spend the night with me.” She paused, uncertainty marring her face. I hated that I put that there when I should’ve made clear this wasn’t a typical scene. “This wasn’t a scene with a sub. I’m sorry I wasn’t clear earlier. Spend the night with me, please?”

She drew in the corner of her bottom lip and gave a lopsided grin. “Okay.”

I held my hand out, and as she slid her fingers through mine, I knew one and done wouldn’t be enough for me. Not that I hadn’t already had similar thoughts, but the way she looked at me now hit me deep. “May I kiss you?”

“Please.”

Hair as soft as I'd envisioned, my fingers easily ran through it. Sonnet leaned into my hand, and I gently tilted her face up and pressed my mouth to hers. We'd barely drawn apart before I took her lips again, my tongue slid between her parted lips, mingling with hers in a sensual game of chase.

Her taste, her scent, her body pressed to mine.

I couldn't get enough, and yet we'd only just begun.

Everything about this woman was an aphrodisiac.

I desired her with everything I had, and it still didn't feel like enough.

My head was in a fog, my heart rate elevated.

How much wine did I drink? Only a glass, yet this woman had my brain in an alcohol-induced haze.

Get a grip, Harper.

"Shall we move this to the bedroom, Kitten?"

"Yes, please, Mistress."

Mistress. If only she knew how weak she rendered me, I'd lose the title I'd worked so hard to earn. But Sonnet would be worth it.

"While I appreciate the use of the proper moniker, I'm hoping to be more to you." Okay, now we were getting somewhere given her smile returned. You must remember to use your words, Harper. "I haven't dated since, well, before Simon and I married." Take me outside of a scene, and I'm useless.

Sonnet giggled and kissed me. “Has my Mistress, lost her words?”

Words, yes, but her emphasis on the word my wasn’t missed by me.

“You,” I tugged her close and pressed my lips to hers again.

“Are going to be a handful, my pet.” Goddess knows I was more than capable of taming a wayward sub, but with Sonnet I’d bask in whatever she gave me.

May be fun to think up new ways of punishing...

naughty behavior. “But yes, your Mistress. Now will you be my pet?”

Maybe this whole dating a sub deal had merit to it.

“Thought I already was? Are you asking me to court you?” She batted her lashes. I had no idea of her age but was fairly certain she was nowhere near the age the word courting had been popular during.

“I’m not sure about the whole courting,” I tugged her hair and pulled her head back. “But,” I nipped her neck, and she nearly purred. Hmm, another favorite recorded in memory. “I want you to be my girl and my girl only.” Possessive? Abso-freaking-lutely.

“Mmm, I like it when you get all growly.”

Who knew I had it in me? I’d shared subs and lovers over the years, never thought anything of it. Evidently, Sonnet had awoken an untapped emotion. I wonder what else I’d discover about myself in the coming days. Seems we both had stepped inside a whole new world.

“Do these bows untie?”

“No,” she snickered and turned, tugging her hair to the side. “But the zipper works.”

Jesus, Mary... awe hell. Whoever is listening. I’d tell you I’d be a good girl, but it would be a lie. Either way, thank you for this gift. Hell, I owe Patrice a huge bonus for this gift.

The zipper was the only sound in the room.

I swear, I held my breath as I unwrapped my glorious present.

Skin smooth as silk, my fingers ran along the opening and under the shoulder straps.

Sonnet's dress fell to the floor, pooling around her ankles. She turned and stepped out of it, and there she stood wearing nothing but a G-string and stockings. Jesus, Michelangelo himself couldn’t have sculpted a more beautiful piece of work.

“You’re stunning.” Breasts so pert, a waist that tapered into the perfect hourglass shape. I’ve seen plenty of beautiful women over the years, but none that took my breath away as Sonnet just had.

She blushed. “Thank you. May I, Mistress?” The way Sonnet’s eyes raked over me had a line about the hunter becoming the prey running through my head.

“Please.”

Sonnet unbuttoned my blouse and slid her hands beneath it and around my torso. “Has anyone ever properly taken care of my Mistress?”

Had they? Great question, and one I unfortunately, or possibly it was fortunate, that I

didn't have an answer to.

"Tsk, tsk." The blouse slid off my arms, joining her dress on the floor. "Perhaps it's a good thing I came along when I did." Sonnet kissed my collarbone as her fingers worked their magic unhooking my bra. "Mistress is just as beautiful as her Kitten."

For my age, I'd managed to keep in shape, though I did have a decade or two on Sonnet.

Youth was wasted on the young. It isn't until you reach a certain stage in life that it hits you.

All the wasted time and wasted years and miles of abuse you put your bodies through came to bite you in the ass.

Once you hit forty, it takes twice as much effort to keep your body taut.

She released the button on my pants, and they fell to the floor.

I slid out of my shoes and stepped out of the pants, and there we stood, taking each other in.

For the first time with a sexual partner, the Domme in me wasn't present.

Good or bad, I wasn't sure, but it was time to heed my own words and feel instead of think.

We tumbled into a heap of limbs and lips atop the mattress, kissing between shared laughter.

Thankfully we were near the bed, or this could've gone horribly wrong.

There was no rush to the end, no game plan in mind, just two people learning what the other enjoys.

Taking our time to map likes and dislikes, though as of right now, the latter had yet to be found.

Hopefully, it stayed that way.

There was no rush to reach the finish line, no car waiting outside to take the lover du jour home. Talking, kissing, slow explorations. There was something to be said for mapping a new lover. Sensual touches and flirtatious glances heightened our arousals. I hadn't felt this alive since...forever.

The delightful sounds she made as I licked a trail to her breasts, drawing a nipple into my mouth and nibbling it while pinching the other. "I could do this all night."

"As much as I love this, I'd like a turn too, please."

Who was I to deny this beautiful soul access to my body? There was still plenty of time to finish my quest and elicit another orgasm or two from her.

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Chapter Six

Sonnet

Having a chance to explore my fantasies was fun!

No, it was more than fun. It was freeing and exciting in a way that even my art had never been.

Watching her wiggle up the bed until she was reclined against a pillow like a queen sent sparkling ideas spiraling through my brain until I started giggling as I crawled after her.

When I caught her ankle, her lips pursed while her eyes widened a fraction, the look one of sexy surprise that only grew when I pressed my lips to her skin.

Grinning, I licked my lips, then started kissing up her ankle to the bend of her knee.

I wasn't the only one with ticklish spots.

I uncovered one behind her knee that made her squirm, so I kissed it again, trailed over it with my tongue, and listened to her gasp and moan.

The middle of her calf was ticklish too, the spot no bigger than a quarter, but I was proud of myself for finding it and earning another soft laugh from her.

Her heel slid over my thigh as I squirmed between her legs, working my way higher

with kisses as soft as the feathers she'd used on me.

Her black lace underwear was right there, a pretty little barrier between me and the hidden parts of her. I wanted it out of the way, and she had said to ask if there was something I wanted, so I tilted my head back to see the soft, blissful look on her face.

"Can I take these off you, Mistress?" I asked, earning another smile from her. "They're a little bit in the way."

"Only a little?" she asked, winking when I tried to pout and burst into laughter instead.

"It's all the way in the way, and I'd really like it gone, please," I requested, unable to keep the whine out of my voice.

She must have liked it though, because she laughed and shook her head at me, then stroked my hair. I could feel her nails graze the back of my head, and I preened and pressed against the pinpricks of pressure, sighing as the sting deepened.

"I'd love for you to remove them," Mistress said, shifting her hand just enough so the nails scraped before she let go.

This floaty feeling I'd never experienced before settled over my mind, like a light haze that left everything soft around the edges.

I'd never felt so graceful as when I glided my hands along her hips, found the edge of her panties, and peeled them off her, one slow, teasing inch at a time.

I spun them around my finger like a prize, then flung them across the room before I dove in.

No teasing, no wait, I kissed her glistening pussy, up and down, working my way to the juncture of her thighs and back in, lingering longer and licking when I reached her core.

I wanted to pleasure her as long as she'd let me, exploring with light, little kitten licks, until she started quivering.

"Mmmmm." I purred against her opening. "Is my Mistress happy?"

"Your mistress very happy," she moaned, the sound deepening when I glided my finger over her.

She arched into my touch until I replaced my finger with my lips and chased the taste of her as she climaxed.

Her cries made me shiver and flush with pride at being the cause of those delicious sounds.

I licked away the traces of her release before kissing my way up her belly, across her chest, and beneath her chin until I was snuggled in her arms. I'd never snuggled before, so I took full advantage of her blissed-out condition to cuddle against her.

I loved that her ragged breathing was the only sound in the room.

I'd done that; her sound was a symphony I could have listened to for the rest of the night.

"Thank you for inviting me to spend the night, Mistress," I murmured. "It's already off to a magnificent start."

"You're the magnificent one," she replied, and tapped me on my nose the way you'd

boop a kitten. “And naughty too, when you let yourself be. I’ve found a playful kitten, haven’t I?”

For a moment I stilled, uncertain and hoping I hadn’t gone too far already.

“Kitten?”

“I hope I’m not too playful for, um, for you,” I blurted, pressing my face to her shoulder as I felt myself flush.

I hadn’t wrecked the fantasy already, had I?

When her fingers glided over my hair, I sighed and felt myself settle down enough to listen to her words and not the ones inside my head.

“I want you to be as playful as you want to be, Kitten,” she said.

“There are lines you’ll learn not to cross, ones I’ll gently remind you about if you ever get close to breaching them, but I don’t want you to hold back how you express yourself.

I’ll get to learn about you that way and teach you about me so we can grow together.
”

Sighing, I snuggled closer while she held me and stroked my hair. Words weren’t needed in the moment. Touch and comfort were the only things I desired. She hadn’t sent me home after our scene on the couch. She didn’t want me to be one sub out of many. She wanted me to be hers. Her only sub.

A declaration like that meant everything to me.

“Would we see each other outside of here?” I asked the question once it popped into my head, one I wasn’t able to contain. “Go on real dates and outings?”

“Of course we’ll go on outings,” she replied.

“I want us to have all kinds of adventures, go on dates, and explore all kinds of places. I’m coming to see that I’ve spent too much time indoors for far too many years.

It’s time for me to get back out into the world outside of Menotté .

I’m sure there are plenty of things I’ve missed. ”

“I’d be happy to show you.”

“Really?”

“Of course.”

“And what’s the first thing you’d show me?” She asked as she stroked my cheek.

Thinking about how little I knew about her left me with plenty of inspiration. I couldn’t think of a better way to start to know one another outside of the bedroom than to introduce her to some of the places I loved. Curiosity flooded me. I knew the perfect place to take her to.

“Have you ever been to the Starlight Café?” I asked.

“I’ve never even heard of it,” she replied.

“Then we’ll start there, with cold dumpling soup and some of the best crab Rangoon

I've ever tasted.

You'll see why it's called the Starlight Café, and then we'll go to the planetarium; it's open until ten.

The displays are magnificent, especially inside the dome.

They've got all kinds of programs that take you right into space, like you're floating with the stars. ”

“I don't think I've ever been to a planetarium.”

“Awe, we have to fix that,” I said. “They're magical.

Sometimes I go there when I'm stuck in the middle of a painting and my muse stops speaking to me.

Watching all the cosmic displays helps me stop thinking so hard about what I want the painting to be because most times, that's the biggest problem. ”

“In what way?”

“Just that sometimes I start to think about something so much that my thoughts drown out my muse,” I explained. “It's never really gone. I used to worry about that part. That one day it would just vanish, and then what?”

“What taught you that your muse would always be a part of you?” she asked. “I've known artists far older than you who haven't learned that lesson yet.”

“Trial and error,” I admitted. “The first time I truly felt uninspired, I signed up for a bunch of workshops and art classes that focused on different techniques and styles. I

don't remember how many I took, but it was a lot.

I was still bartending then too. So, I split my time between my job and practicing techniques until one day I looked at a painting I'd been working on and couldn't see any of myself in it. ”

“How did you find your own voice again?” she asked.

“The first step was to stop taking classes,” I explained.

“I finished the ones I was in, then I went back to working on my own projects. Seeing them with fresh eyes helped and so did revisiting the original notes I'd taken.

It wasn't long before my muse jumped in and reminded me of the plans we'd had. Not trusting it taught me to trust it.”

“It shows a willingness to grow when you can let go of one path to try another,” she said. “There are so many ways people get in the way of their own potential. I think we've all been guilty of it at least once.”

“Some of us more than once,” I said, though it was partially an admission too.

I rocked against her as she chuckled, giggling when her fingers brushed a spot along my neck.

“You're not the only one who can claim that distinction,” she said. “I've been called stubborn a time or two.”

Gasping, I pressed my fingertips to my lips. “I never would have guessed.”

“Oh, you!” she snapped, tickling me deliberately this time.

My snuggling had left me trapped and unable to roll away as she tickled me mercilessly.

“I yield, oh my, no fair Mistress! Not fair!”

Of course she tickled me more, until all I could do was gasp, squirm, and start feeling super horny again.

“Who decides what’s fair?” she asked, a hint of a growl in her voice.

It cut through the giggles and helped me focus on her.

Ohhh. She expected an answer.

“Who decides what’s fair!”

Having to repeat herself turned the question into a demand. She wanted an answer. I’d better give it now.

“You do, Mistress,” I said, lowering my gaze so I wasn’t staring directly into her eyes.

“That’s right, I do,” she said, her lips descending upon mine.

Fierce. Unlike the sweetly tormenting ones we’d shared earlier, this was possessive.

New. Different. The kind of kiss I’d never experienced before.

She tugged my hair until she could kiss beneath my chin, down my throat, nipping in between kisses.

Those tiny pricks of pain left me wet and unable to squirm, arched the way she held me.

I gasped when her fingers brushed over me and whined when she moved them away, her teasing chuckle sending vibrations along my skin as she kissed her way over my shoulder.

“I believe it’s my turn now,” she said.

Yup.

Absolutely.

She could have all the turns she wanted.

“I’d love to see the Starlight Café with you,” she murmured as she kissed my neck. “And the planetarium too. I think I know the perfect dessert to top the night off with, too.”

“I love dessert,” I moaned, shivering when she nipped me again. “S-sometimes I even have it for breakfast.”

Her chuckles were better than a massage as they washed over me. My body had never felt so relaxed and heavy, but in the best kind of way. I could draw it, but trying to put the feeling into words took too much thought. Thought was hard right now.

Everything felt too amazing.

“Such a naughty girl,” she whispered, her lips never leaving my skin. “Dessert for breakfast will leave you with a stomachache.”

“N-no different than waffles with whipped cream and chocolate syrup, especially if they have chocolate chips in them.”

“Uh...”

Mistress was speechless. There was no holding back my giggles, even when she pinched my bottom.

“Valid point,” she said, chuckling a little.

“Does that mean I win?” I asked, flicking my tongue out to tease my upper lip.

“And what do you hope to gain from a victory?”

“Anything you want to give me?”

“Right answer,” she said and started tickling me again.

Okay, this time I’d earned it but oh my goddess, holy shit, it was like she’d memorized every ticklish spot.

There was no escaping her fingers. Not a bit of squirming did any good.

I laughed until I was too exhausted to move and lay limp and sprawled on the comforter.

Her hand splayed against my hip, pinning me to the bed, not that I could muster up the energy to do more than moan when she pinned my other hand to the pillow and wrapped her lips around my nipple.

Her tongue swirled around the tip, and her breath made it even harder.

Intense couldn't begin to describe the sensation as I shuddered.

Achingly slow, she used her lips and tongue to tease and torment me, adding just a hint of teeth every now and then, always unexpected and keeping me right on edge.

Her fingers tugged my other nipple, sometimes twisting, but each time I tried to raise my hips, her fingers tightened on my hip, forcing me to endure the pleasure.

Gasping, I tried again to squirm, feeling slick and wet, desperate for her to touch me so I could climax.

Her teeth pinched my nipple, and I squealed, growing wetter as they tightened, then let go.

Her tongue chased away the sting. It was almost too soft, the contrast its own sweet pain as she tormented me.

She pinched, she licked, she twisted, and she sucked while I shivered and whined.

When she finally took pity on me and stroked between my legs, I bucked and rode her fingers until the sweet, sweet friction swept me over the edge.

She drew it out until I was quaking, then stole the last of my breath with a kiss.

There was no way I was moving again. Ever. They'd just have to bury me here. Preferably with the supersoft mattress I was sprawled across. Mistress' fingers stroked my hair back and I melted more as her fingertip brushed my cheek. Everything was soft. Perfectly soft.

Beautifully.

Wonderfully.

Soft.

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Chapter Seven

Harper

My Kitten was properly sated, nearly purring as she began to doze off.

I swear, I could watch her sleep for hours.

Creepy? Maybe to some, but it was more an appreciation for the beautiful woman who held my gaze.

Like a summer storm, Sonnet came into my life and turned it upside down—in the best of ways.

From her silly giggles to the softness of her skin, and goddess, how she moans, her back gracefully arching as she comes.

Images I'll draw from for days on end when we're apart, but everything about Sonnet called to me.

I wonder if I took a picture of her in the throes of passion if she'd paint it for me.

Hmm, food for thought. To capture an all-encompassing image of her natural beauty would be amazing.

Flesh so smooth, supple breasts, and pinkened nipples—freshly plucked by yours truly.

The curve of her spine, the dip of her tailbone as it opened into the mounds of her perfect derriere .

It would be challenging to stop in the middle of making love to take it, but it'd be worth it. In the end I'd always ensure my Kitten was well taken care of, as I had tonight, so the pause would only be momentary. Nothing more than foreplay, denial in a game of chase the ultimate orgasm.

Curled up around Sonnet, my dreams filled with the wonderful memories from tonight, sleep easily came. Though what I didn't expect to find the next morning was to be cuddled up with a pillow with a note atop it, in lieu of her body.

Note: Harper, Last night was wonderful, but my muse wouldn't shut up. I'm off to create. Until next time. XOXO Sonnet

Even whispering her name set my soul on fire. Had I ever inspired another to create? What a great way to start the day, especially when your lover was inspired as opposed to being filled with regret after one of the best nights of my life.

One night and I've got it bad...

"Good morning, Soleil ." Running into an overly happy Simon in my kitchen was not on my bingo card for today. His heavy accent, one of the things that first drew me to him, only served to irritate my uncaffeinated brain.

"What are you doing in here?" All I wanted was to have the morning to myself, a cup of coffee in hand while basking in the afterglow.

Simon handed me a cup, fixed just the way I liked it. It somewhat helped my cross and, honestly, misguided anger. "You're so much nicer after caffeine, though sex used to have the same effect on you."

“Cute.” But he wasn’t far off. “I had an amazing night. Now wipe that sneer off your face.” Catty bastard. “Where’s your latest toy?”

“Meh,” Simon waved his hand through the air. “Sent him on his way. He’d run his course, and I’d grown tired of him fucking everything that moved.”

Sounded about right.

“I don’t know whether to say I’m sorry or to thank you.”

“Seems to be the general consensus amongst the staff. Security was done with finding him in compromising positions. C’est la vie .” His hand fluttered through the air.

Simon was right, that’s life. At least in his world.

“Where’s your new flavor?” There were times when his snide remarks did nothing and others, such as this, where they got a rise out of me.

“New flavor is the only flavor by choice. No sharing, no open relationship, no booty calls. Sonnet went home to start the new art for us. We decided to date, exclusively.” As if my statement hadn’t already clarified that it was worth reiterating.

Many times, over the years Simon and I shared lovers, both solo and in group settings, but this time that wasn’t happening.

His raised brow said more than the words I hoped he’d carefully choose. “Mistress Harper dating? Hath hell frozen over?”

“It might. Keep pushing, and you’ll be the first one on the bus to find out.”

His hearty laughter filled my home. “ Mon Amor , I’m happy if you’re happy. We

may no longer be lovers, but you will always be my best friend, and I wish you all the happiness in the world.” Simon kissed my cheek and put his cup in the dishwasher.

“Thank you, Simon. I wish the same for you, though I guarantee you won’t find it lurking in the dark corners of the club.”

“Maybe, maybe not, but yours came from within these hallowed walls.”

“Hallowed?” I chuckled. “You always did have a way with words.”

He bowed, accepting it as a compliment. “It’s a gift. I’m off to prepare for my eleven a.m. session. Give my best to Sonnet.” Simon winked and disappeared down the hall.

A day to myself, a rare occurrence, and yet my fingers itched to reach out to Sonnet instead of allowing my body and mind to relax.

While I didn’t necessarily have a creative muse, I did understand being in the zone and lost to whatever task I was engrossed with.

Breaking the momentum wasn’t wise and was oftentimes hard to regain.

Someone needs to write a book about how to learn to unwind after a lifetime of running non-stop.

Hmm, I wonder...

Coffee refilled, I grabbed my laptop and perched myself in the window seat.

The views from our top-floor apartments were breathtaking.

Simon and I both designed our homes with fantastic views in mind.

Locked and loaded, well, with my computer turned on at least, the challenge now was what to do given an empty to-do list. What was I hoping to find?

Being a list maker, I did just that—created a new one.

Or at least attempted to. Maybe one for places to take Sonnet. How does someone that doesn't date plan dates for someone they know very little about?

An hour later, it hit me—they didn't. They get dressed and do the only thing they know how to do—work.

“Harper, what are you doing in today?”

“One could ask the same of you, Patrice. It is Sunday, right?”

“True, but given our email blew up after last night's party, I thought I'd come in and organize the feedback I knew you'd ask for.”

“Cheeky woman, nothing gets past you.” Dammit, I'd been had. “So, run me through the highlights. Any negatives?”

“Not a single one. Chef's culinary creations were a big hit, as were the interactive displays.”

“Bunch of kinky fuckers, I love it.” Yes, those kinky fuckers, aka my people, were the reason our club was ridiculously successful. As with every day of my life, I logged in and was lost to the wide world of business ownership and our raving reviews.

But by Wednesday, when I hadn't heard from Sonnet, I figured she'd moved on, forgotten about me and the magical night we shared. I thought she'd felt the

connection too, but I guess I'd been mistaken.

I tossed the pen on the desk, disgusted with myself. "You're a fool, Harper. Give it up."

"Yes, you are," Patrice hollered from her desk outside my office. "Now pick up line two and find out why."

Huh? "This is Harper."

"Hi, it's Sonnet. I'm sorry to call your office, but I forgot to give you my number." Her giggle was a welcome sound, righting my upside-down world. I could've smacked myself and asked Patrice for Sonnet's contact info.

"I am such an idiot."

"We both were, so let's remedy that now. Otherwise, you'll have to write down my address, which you're fully capable of, but where's the fun in that?"

Sonnet rattled off her number, and I shot off a text to her, so she'd have mine.

I heard her phone chime on the other end of the call.

"Perfect. Now, I've been working around the clock.

The images are coming to life, but before I go any further, I'd like for you to see them and make sure we're of the same mind. "

"I'm sure we are, but if you wanted to ask me out, you didn't have to bribe me with artwork." Just hearing her voice breathed new life into me. Sulking. That's what the last three days have been. No one has ever ruffled me the way this woman has and

likely wouldn't again.

More of her sweet laughter came through. "True, but this way it's dinner and a show. Wait, that was our first date. Hmm, not creative, but I promise something different for date three."

"Date three, I like the way that sounds. Okay, send me the address and time you want me there, and let me know what I can bring."

"Deal. And Harper?"

"Yes?"

"I can't wait to see you."

"Me too, Kitten. Me too."

Now, to make it two more days without Patrice strangling me.

Flowers ?

Wine ?

Sitting in my car too long outside of her building. Check and double-check.

Who knew finding your heart left you filled with a constant sense of insecurity.

"This is juvenile." I grabbed the roses and wine off the passenger seat and headed inside.

A quick pep talk to myself in the elevator, thank fuck it was a solo ride, only helped

momentarily, but when it stopped at her floor, so did my breath.

There she stood, and as soon as I saw her smiling face, the turmoil churning inside from the past week settled.

“Harper, it’s wonderful to see you.” Sonnet greeted me with a hug and a kiss. “Are those for me?”

“Yes, they are, though they pale in comparison to your beauty.” Wow, I’m not sure where that cheesy line came from, but it was going back inside the box marked ‘do not use again’.

“Corny and I love it. How did you know pink was my favorite color?” She drew in a deep breath, drawing the rosy scent from the petals. “What a gorgeous bouquet.”

“They reminded me of the beautiful blush that tinted your flesh. Your loft is amazing and, oddly enough, exactly as I’d envisioned it.” An artist’s loft for sure complete with paint splatters and drop cloths.

“Let me put these in water, and then I’ll give you the thirty-second tour.”

She pulled an ornate stained-glass vase from the cupboard, trimmed the stems, and strategically placed each rose, leaf bunches and baby’s breath included, into it until she had it just right. “There,” she smelled them again. “I don’t think I’ve ever had flowers this fragrant.”

Helps when a local florist was a client. “I’m glad you like them, Kitten.” Stored away for later surprises. I can’t play the same cards all the time gift-wise, but flowers were a definite repeat.

Sonnet came around the island, wrapped her arms around my waist, and snuggled

into me. This girl had no idea of the calming effect she had on me. “I’m so happy you’re here.”

“Me too, sweetheart. Me too.” Did I have to let her go so we could walk around? I wasn’t ready to. It’d been one long ass week without seeing her.

“Come on.” With my hand in hers and a smile on her face, Sonnet played tour guide. “This is obviously the main area. Living room, kitchen. Behind this divider is my bedroom.”

“Are these individual canvases?” The makeshift divider was a vast piece of art.

“It is. I painted each of them. Most of the dividers I found were thin, and the sun came right through. I work long, odd hours and more often than not crashing during daylight hours, which means I don’t want the sun in my face.

So, I took a bunch of canvases, laid them out on the floor, and created one giant mural.

Each four-foot section is framed as one and are hinged so I can position them however I want. ”

“Absolutely brilliant and gorgeous.” Though the paintings were abstract, the flow between them was clear. The bohemian bedroom scape had Sonnet’s free soul written all over it. “This space is very you.”

“It’s my Zen, my sense of peace. The place where I go to shut my mind down.”

I could see that about Sonnet. Her mind running on an endless loop. Everyone and everything she saw was translated into art by that gifted brain of hers. What little I knew of Sonnet gave away the free spirit she was.

“And this is where the magic happens.”

I glanced back toward her sleeping area. “Isn’t that the room we just came from?”

“Nope. My magic comes in the form of paint and canvas.” She gestured around the open space. Daylight streamed through the windows, illuminating her work. And then, I spotted them.

“Sonnet, are these?” My breath caught, and my heart raced.

“These are perfect.” Sensual and alluringly non-binary.

“I love the gender-neutral ones as much as the defined drawings.” Tears welled in my eyes, and I now had a glimpse inside of what it felt like to be an artist. I may only be a dreamer, but she put my dreams to canvas.

“Sonnet.” I cursed myself for not having come up with that idea.

Our club was all-inclusive, and that should’ve been at the forefront of my mind.

“Are you sure? You don’t want them more specific or realistic?” She nervously chewed on her lip much as she had the other night.

“Absolutely not. These couldn’t be more on-point if you’d been inside my head. We’ll take them all. Name your price.”

“Mistress, we already agreed to a price, but I’d like for you to pick one just for yourself to place above your bed.”

“I’d love one of you for that, my Kitten.”

And there was that beautiful blush the shade of the roses I'd given her.

"Did you bring your camera?"

Goddess, if I wasn't falling in love before, I sure as hell was now.

Chapter Eight

Sonnet

“Will the camera on my phone be sufficient?” she asked.

“Absolutely,” I replied, elated that she was pleased with the paintings I’d worked so hard to create for her.

I’d left her apartment with bright images in my head that burned hotter than the sun.

They’d drowned out the need for caffeine, leading to several mugs getting cold before I drank them.

Not that it bothered me, I loved iced coffee, especially when it was all creamy and sweetened up like liquid candy.

Meals were another thing I’d eaten cold, when I’d bothered to remember them at all.

My refrigerator and freezer were packed with premade ones because I was shitty about pulling things out to thaw.

When I did cook, I forgot that I was just one person who didn’t eat a lot, which always resulted in leftovers.

Freezing them made it so I didn’t have to eat the same thing every day.

Shopping for specific dishes and making them all at once meant I didn't have to cook again until I got bored with the rotation I had or ran out of things completely.

There was rarely any middle ground with me.

I was such a slave to my muse that I'd picked up silicone trays so I could fill them with fruit and juice for premade smoothie blends.

It was great for mixing and matching too.

Two fit beautifully in my bullet blender with enough room for a splash of added juice or yogurt.

Most days that was breakfast and a boost at lunch if I remembered to pause for a sandwich.

Those I made two at a time, eating one and wrapping the other for mid-afternoon, when my tummy finally decided to go to war with my muse and devise something more substantial.

"Let me put the wine in the fridge to chill," I said, carefully taking it from the counter. "Ohh, I love a beautifully sweet Riesling, and this one says it has notes of mandarin and lime that will go perfect with dinner."

"It's called an Erotic Riesling," she explained. "And I happen to be very fond of them myself."

"I bet you're fond of anything with erotic in the name," I sassed as I tucked it in the fridge.

"Not everything," she said as she leaned against the counter and watched as I

rearranged a few things.

I'd been a whirlwind of chaos in the grocery store this afternoon, mentally plotting out the meal I wished to share with her as I wandered the aisles, which meant doubling back several times as the ideas built on themselves, much as they did when I was creating.

"Really?" I said as I closed the refrigerator door. "Tell me something labeled erotic that didn't appeal to you."

"Besides a dancer who came out so drunk one night that he fell off the stage and landed in the crowd," she remarked with a teasing shrug, her lips pursing a bit as she leaned there looking thoughtful.

"Well, there was a cream I tried once. According to the vendor, it was created to enhance pleasure. Unfortunately, I had an allergic reaction to it that led to hives in very sensitive areas."

"Oh my," I said, eyes drawn to her chest and the beautiful bounty that lay beyond the top she was wearing. "I think you made your point. I stand corrected and promise that there is nothing in the meal I made for us tonight that will leave you itchy and uncomfortable."

"Really? And what have you made?"

"Something for us to share," I replied, not wanting to give away that secret until I set the dishes in front of her.

I'd gone off the meal we'd had at the club when choosing what to create, though I'd opted to pass on the steak for a more seafood-based menu.

“Really? Now you have me keenly interested in seeing it revealed.”

“Soon,” I replied. “The wine should chill a little more first, and I still haven’t shown you the last piece yet.”

“There’s more than the art you showed me?”

“One more piece, for the entryway. I was inspired after seeing the array of beautiful kilts and schoolgirl skirts at the club the other night and how transformative the outfits were, especially once they passed from outside the club to the inner spaces. I loved the fierceness of your security team too, so protective. Watching them, I never saw a hint of judgment in their eyes as they looked at the people coming in. It was like they were saying, without words, that they’d stand between them and anyone who tried to ruin their evening or keep them from being their authentic selves. So, I painted this.”

I tugged the cloth draping off with a flourish, the rustle of it as it slipped free of the painting reminding me of a cape blowing in the wind. My breath caught in my throat while my gaze dropped to the ground, uncertainty making my shyness burst to the surface as I waited for her reaction.

It was hard to infer anything from the gasp that escaped her and the silence that followed.

Had it been a mistake to paint the guards as lions posed looking boredly fierce beside the registration desk?

Between them was a regal, leather-clad noble adorned with silken chains as golden as the lions beside them.

Like the other people I’d painted for the club, I’d made certain they were

androgynous, with their features blurred hues composed to give the illusion of stern efficiency.

Behind them was a huge, open doorway with shadowy figures on the other side.

I'd focused more on their attire than their features, so they appeared as a walking collection of clothing with hazy features.

Onesies, harnesses, pup gear, crisscrossing strips of leather, and form-fitting lace bodysuits, each shadow figure resembled the attire I'd seen at the club.

While I hadn't written a title on the back, in my head I'd referred to it as the doorway to freedom, and it had been the very first thing I'd painted when I'd returned from my Mistress' home.

The paintings I'd previously shown her had been born of this one.

"You...this is..." she stammered.

Swallowing hard, I lifted my head to see her staring with her mouth half hanging open.

While I watched, she cocked her head to the side, squinted, and let out another little gasp.

When she finally moved, I stepped back so we wouldn't collide, as she returned to the other art pieces and moved back and forth between them while my inner muse did a happy dance that ended in a handstand.

She'd noticed.

“Each of the shadows has its own painting,” she murmured as she moved between them a little slower this time.

“Yes,” I replied. “I thought this one could serve as a sort of teaser for what lay beyond the door.”

“It’s magnificent!”

Warmth flooded me and allowed me to finally take a full breath.

“I can’t wait to see it hanging in the club,” she explained. “The way you portrayed the guards should serve as a brilliant reminder to everyone who sees it. While it’s rare that they have to step in, when it happens, it’s swift and vicious.”

I giggled at that and eyed the lions I was so very proud of having brought to life on canvas. “With that description, maybe I should have drawn them as cheetahs instead.”

I loved listening to our laughter mingle. Something told me she hadn’t had much of it in her life, at least not recently.

“No,” she said. “The lions are perfect. I love that they are the only figures with clearly defined features, right down to the scowl on this one.”

“He did have a fierce scowl as he stood watching everyone come in,” I explained. “It was his hair that made me think of a lion, though. The other guards all wore theirs short or shaved almost completely, but his was long and flowed over his shoulders like, well, a lion’s mane.”

She chuckled at that. “Casey is a bit vain about his hair, until it’s time to wade in and deal with someone. Then he doesn’t give a damn about the condition it ends up in, as

long as he gets his hands on the problem. I think he'll appreciate you painting him this way."

"I hope so. I wouldn't want to get on his bad side."

"Everyone should aspire to stay on his good side," she said. "He's hard to settle down when he gets pissed."

"I bet he is. Is it the same way for you?"

"When someone truly does something utterly asinine, it can be," she admitted, "though I'm more like a simmering pot steaming before it boils over."

"I'll remember that," I said. "Wouldn't want to get burned."

"No, you wouldn't. It can be hard to sit when that happens."

"Eeep."

The sound slipped out before I could press my fingers to my lips to hold it in.

The thought of trying to sit on a stinging bottom was not one I wanted to think about.

Her chuckle sounded almost wicked as she dragged her fingers through my hair, carding it away from my neck so she could lean in and kiss me.

Sighing, I tilted my head to the side to give her more access, a gasp and soft moan escaping when she nipped.

One arm snaked around me, her fingers splaying across my belly as she held me in place.

“I-I should cover the paintings back up until I can crate them for transport,” I whispered, shivering as she ran her thumb along the curve of my breast.

Her touch was sensual, teasing, and on the verge of turning me into a smoldering mess.

“Yes, you should,” she murmured, the pink tip of her tongue flicking up to lick her upper lip as she stepped away from me.

I needed a moment to remember which way was up and where I’d laid the cloths, so rattled that I was disoriented in my own creative space.

She winked, and I melted a little more, because damn it all, she was deliberately teasing me, making it impossible for me to get my shit together.

“I believe you dropped one on the back of that chair,” she said, when I still didn’t spot one after several moments of standing there.

“Thanks,” I replied, retrieving it and carefully covering the painting.

Fortunately, I’d dumped them all in the same place, in and on the chair, and was quickly able to recover the paintings.

“If you’d like to make yourself comfortable on the couch, I’m going to find something that will serve as an ice bucket and start bringing everything out,” I said, gesturing towards the curved purple sofa I’d fallen in love with the moment I’d laid eyes on it.

The two-seater offered an intimate setting for the meal I had planned, while its curves kept us from having to turn to see one another.

The bend of it always made me feel like it was hugging me when I stretched out on it, while its wide cushions left enough room for two people to snuggle in its embrace.

In no time at all, I'd repurposed a reusable popcorn tub from the theater and filled it with ice and the wine, open and breathing.

I remembered the lighter I kept in the kitchen drawer so I could light the trio of candles on the coffee table.

Soon they were flickering, letting off the scent of the ocean I loved so much.

Returning to the kitchen, I loaded the bamboo tray I'd set out on the counter with the pan-fried crab dumplings I'd made with a homemade dipping sauce that was loaded with flavor and a hint of spice.

Shrimp with mango cocktail sauce rested in the center of the tray, bracketed in by plates containing three different sushi rolls and a small one holding chilled mango slices drizzled with coconut milk.

It wasn't dessert. I had that tucked away for later.

This was more of a fun palate cleanser and to see if she shared my love of mangos.

While two sets of silver chopsticks rested on the tray, I'd tucked a fork just under the edge of one of the plates in case she needed it.

I remembered wine glasses too and carefully carried everything to the coffee table.

When her eyes went wide again, I could tell this was the last thing she'd expected.

"I brought a fork if you aren't comfortable with chopsticks," I said as I positioned the

tray and filled our wine glasses.

“I am rather proficient with chopsticks,” she replied, smiling over at me as I used the remote on the coffee table to dial down the overhead light and turn the flatscreen on. “But thank you for your consideration. This looks delightful.”

“I thought it would be fun to feed one another,” I explained as I plucked up the chopsticks, captured a dumpling, dunked it and held a small saucer beneath it to catch any droplets as I brought it to her lips.

Watching her eyelids flutter as I fed her the first bite was as confidence-building as the mmm she let out after she’d tasted it.

Pampering my Mistress was going to be so much fun.

I had no idea if this was the way it was done or if I was doing everything backwards.

I was just going on instinct, and my instincts screamed to show her how much I was already coming to cherish her.

“The flavors are wonderfully blended,” she said. “Where did you learn to make all of this?”

Giggling, I just grinned as she picked up a shrimp by the tail, dunked it in the sauce, and held it out to me.

“YouTube,” I said before opening my mouth to take the shrimp from her.

Her laughter was praise to my ears. I’d deliberately removed the whole shell, even if not technically proper.

It made it so much easier to lightly suck her fingers as I accepted the shrimp.

As I'd hoped, the flavors of the sauce were truly bursting after several hours in the fridge.

I'd cued up a movie I hoped she'd like. My tastes tended to run towards musicals and visually stunning movies with a great deal of ambiance.

For that reason alone, I'd chosen the original Broadway musical version of Cats for us to watch.

While I enjoyed the remake, there was just something about the original that always called to me.

Tonight was about seeing the way our tastes lined up, including the chocolate fondue pot and array of fruit and cubed pound cake I'd tucked away for later.

As we continued to feed one another while the opening credits appeared, all I could think about was her and how pleased I was that our second date together was already off to a wonderful start.

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Chapter Nine

Harper

Sonnet couldn't have nailed those paintings any better than if she'd been inside my head. And at this point, I wouldn't be surprised to find she had been. They were everything I'd wanted and more. So much more.

Her shy, timid reaction as she unveiled the canvases spoke volumes.

Someone from her past filled that beautifully brilliant mind of hers with bullshit.

Mentally beaten down, yet she still overcame and found her voice.

I can't imagine the internal struggle she battled, and I had the overwhelming urge to smack the shit out of whoever did this to her.

How had they missed how utterly perfect she was?

Well, their loss was my win.

"Sonnet, you've absolutely blown me away with the paintings. I don't know if you remember, but we offered the artist we contracted with space in the lobby to sell their works. We've cleared the main wall already in preparation." Her eyes lit up, and I knew that brain of hers was working overtime.

"Are you sure? I mean, I remember reading it, but I don't feel the consignment

percentage was fair.”

Interesting. “How so?” Was twenty-five too much for the club to take?

“Usually the house gets more.”

“This isn’t a game of blackjack, sweetheart. This is your career, and with us dating, I wish to reduce it to ten percent. I’d prefer you pay Menotté nothing, but Patrice will be handling the transactions for both parties and should be properly compensated for her time.”

“You’re too kind, and I don’t want our relationship to overshadow business for either of us. I more than agree Patrice should be paid.”

“Then it’s done. I’ll ask the lawyer to amend it to ten percent payable directly to Patrice.

Now, about those photos for my special painting.

” Goddess, I’d wanted to undress her the moment I laid eyes on her in the hallway.

It’d take some time to retrain this old brain from undress, take care of their needs, then move on to the next client.

Sonnet was mine, all for me and not a job.

Dating was a foreign concept but one I’d learn to grasp, and this date had gone well, and now it was time for dessert and to show my girl how special she was.

“Let me help you clean up.” Together we had the leftovers stored and dishes in the dishwasher in a matter of minutes.

All but save for one. I dipped a remaining piece of sponge cake into the fondue pot and gently ran it across her lips, my tongue quick to remove the remnants.

The sundress she wore, a pattern of sunflowers and sun rays, while adorable, had to go.

I hooked a finger under a slender strap.

“May I?” An adorable nod as she nibbled her bottom lip was consent enough.

I pressed my lips to the light coating of freckles across her shoulders, and the material slipped free of them. I wondered how long it would take me to lick each and every one of them across her naked flesh.

Sonnet was my Achilles heel. I could never get enough of her.

Every waking moment I thought of this ginger beauty.

Touching her, tasting her. Listening to her moans while I made her come.

Knowing I did that, brought those sensual moments, and set her free was an aphrodisiac to my ears and libido.

Her climaxes only served to enhance mine.

Or maybe there was something more at work here.

Her cheeks pinked as her flesh was revealed, her shyness surfacing as her body was bared.

She stepped free of the clothing that lay at her feet and slid out of her summery

sandals as I took her hand and led her over to the full length mirror I'd spotted in her room.

I stood behind her, my fingertips danced along her sides, and slid her long, ginger locks to one side.

My lips touched the exposed skin on her neck in barely there kisses as I whispered, "Keep your eyes open, Kitten. I want you to watch us. Want you to see how beautiful you are when I make you come."

Nervously, her head bounced, easily agreeing with me.

"Good girl." My fingertips continued mapping her flesh, along her torso, around her breasts and erect nipples.

"You're gorgeous beyond words." She began to shy away, that uncertainty from earlier returning.

"No, my pet, keep your eyes on the mirror. I want you to see the same beautiful, brilliant woman that I do."

With every touch, every caress, the familiar goosebumps surfaced.

Goddess, how I ate up the reaction she had to me.

"Spread your legs for me, Kitten." Our reflection in the mirror, another I wished to have a camera at the ready for.

My naked princess against my fully dressed body.

A sign of trust. Sonnet trusted me and that was a heady feeling.

“Remember this and paint this for me one day. Can you do that for me, baby?”

“Yes, my Mistress,” Sonnet purred as my finger slid over her clit and between her legs.

“I’ve never seen anything as lovely as you, my Kitten.”

“Mmm,” was all I received in return.

My perfect pet was so wet, my finger easily slid between her folds and inside. One hand pinched and tweaked a nipple while the other fingered her. As Sonnet reached the apex, a single thought consumed me.

I had to taste her again.

She pouted as my fingers withdrew until I pressed them to her lips. “Taste yourself.” Her reflection made eye contact with mine as she sucked my fingers clean. “Fuck, that’s hot. I’ve got to taste you.” Her pupils dilated as I knelt before her.

“Watch us, Kitten. Commit your every reaction to memory.” One day I may request a portfolio of my own to draw from and reflect upon whenever we’re apart. A sensual collection of our expressions while passion built and toppled over the edge.

I tasted every inch of my ginger kitten's flesh. From her ankles to her thighs before my tongue slid inside. The titillation of her essence, the sweetest taste on my tongue, nibbling her clit between her riding my tongue. “That’s it, Kitten. Take what you need from your mistress but keep your eyes open and glued to the mirror.”

“Yes, yes, M-m-mistress.”

“That’s my good girl. Now I’m going to eat that pussy that’s so wet and wanton for

me.

Don't hold back, I want to hear every sound that comes from you while I enjoy what's mine.

" My tongue circled her clit, drawing the swollen nub inside.

Nibbling elicited the sexiest fucking moans from her.

Sonnet's knees wobbled. I gripped one of her thighs to steady her as two fingers of my free hand slid inside.

The dual sensations had her chasing a high just out of reach.

Does she ride my fingers or focus on my mouth?

It only served to intensify and draw out the ultimate orgasms when stimulating a partner in multiple ways.

Every inch of their body felt it and they soundly slept afterwards.

I saw it reflected in my girl's hazel eyes, she hadn't slept a wink since she'd left my bed.

Her creative intuition ran her life, but now her mistress was here to give her brain and her body the calm it sought.

Ride me, sweet girl, I thought to myself and immediately pictured her tied to the bed while I filled her with the large silicone strap-on I had.

A dual sensation unit, the phallus buried deep inside a lover while the wearer had an

orgasm-stimulating portion inside them.

The brilliantly devious minds of those who created adult toys never ceased to amaze me.

“Mistress.” Harper firmly gripped my hair and rode my fingers as she moaned the moniker and came, hard, nearly collapsing as she rode out the waves of her orgasm.

I guided her over to the bed and quickly retrieved my phone, snapping endless pictures of my sated Kitten.

She rolled on her side, eyes barely open, and shyly grinned.

Muse. Sonnet may’ve said I inspired hers, but she was now mine. My reason to exist and the entire reason why there was only one I sought to please.

And based upon her smile, pleased is exactly what I’d just accomplished.

I mussed the sheets, draping one across her chest with barely a sliver of nipple peeking out.

“So beautiful,” and took more shots. The curve of her hip, leg drawn forward covering her pelvis.

I moved her leg back, presenting that special place I’ve had the pleasuring of becoming intimately familiar with.

What a picture that was, from her belly button to her thighs.

“There isn’t a spot on your body I don’t love.

” Even her feet, even though I’d not mention that.

Foot fetish wasn’t my scene, but every inch of this woman was perfect.

“Roll on your stomach, please, and arch your back. I ran my hand along her spine as she settled in, down over her cheeks, and took a picture with it rested there. Pride of ownership , I mentally labeled this one. I yearned to collar my girl, though we weren’t in that type of relationship.

Was it possible to fall in love this fast?

“Mistress,” Sonnet reached for me. “I need to take care of you.”

“Sweet Kitten, you’ve done more for me than you know.”

“Please?” She shot me the most adorable pouty face. “Undress and lay with me.”

Who was I to deny that request? Wrapped up, flesh on flesh with my Kitten. I’d be a fool to deny her anything.

“This is nice.” Sonnet cuddled up in my arms as soon as I lay down.

I pressed my lips to her head, drawing in the honey and lavender scent of her shampoo. “I agree. It’s been lonely in bed alone this week.” One night, on the verge of two and I spoke as though we’d lived together for years, and she’d merely been away on business.

How quickly the human brain fixates on desire, and not necessarily one of sexual desires but more of need.

If need could be considered a desire. Had I harbored a hidden desire to find a partner

and ignored my inner monologue?

Hell, had I even allowed myself such thoughts since Simon and I divorced? Likely not.

It's like I completely shut down. No emotions.

Every erotic interlude was merely a series of motions, an end to satisfy a need and nothing more.

Jesus, when did I forget how to feel? I sincerely hoped past partners didn't see me as the cold woman I had become because that truly wasn't who I sought to be.

"You're thinking awfully hard over there." Harper gazed up at me and I pressed my lips to hers.

"Reflection. Self-flagellation." Was there a better way to say you're beating yourself up?

"How so?"

How much was too much to share? Scaring Sonnet away was the last thing I wanted, but lying wasn't an option either. "Well, not to be too forward but feeling the way I do about you."

Sonnet perked up. "And how is that?"

Was Sonnet feeling the same as I was?

"Tried to remember when the last time was that I felt this way about another and came up empty. Don't get me wrong, I love Simon, and a part of me always will, but

I question whether we were truly in love or if it was more infatuation.

My feelings for him pale in comparison to the way I feel for you. ”

“And how is that?”

“Well, my little parrot, you’re quickly stealing my cold heart.”

Sonnet hopped up and kissed me then slid back into place. “I don’t think it’s cold, just maybe a little reserved.”

“Reserved for you, it would seem.” I swear, her happy feet danced beneath the sheets.

“Sorry, had an itch,” the giggling nut fibbed.

“As long as my Kitten is happy, so is her mistress.” No truer words had come from my mouth.

We lay there, basking in the feelings our conversation drew.

Completely content. Guess Sonnet wasn’t the only one of us who was tired because I dozed right off.

Though when I woke, she was no longer in my arms. I crawled from beneath the warm sheets in search of the soft body I craved to curl back up with.

When I found her, the vision of Sonnet hard at work that I walked into was one I’d soon not forget.

Her silhouette through the sheer robe she wore allowed the sunlight to capture her figure beautifully.

The glow highlighted her pert breasts. Nipples erect without receiving a single touch.

What was it she worked on that had her body in a state of arousal?

Silently, I crept back to the bedroom where I'd left my phone and returned to take more pictures.

"You're a living, breathing Angel." Sonnet stole my breath away. Had I not immediately snapped a picture, I'd have lost the moment because the instant she heard my voice, she turned, blocking the sun.

"You're biased." But her pleased smile said she appreciated the compliment.

"Maybe so but I feel like I've been given the greatest gift of my life." All she was missing was the red bow that usually decorated such a perfect gift. "What are you working on?"

She blushed. "Come see."

Chapter Ten

Sonnet

Showing her this morning's artwork was far less nerve-wracking than the reveals I'd done for her last night.

Not only was this personal, but this was all for her and a direct reflection of the night we'd shared in my bedroom.

The mirror was the first thing I'd painted, wide, oval, and tall in its metal stand.

I'd found it at a thrift store and painted the frame a deep, royal purple so that it stood out among the lighter hues of purple in the rest of my room.

Her hair was the second thing I'd painted, wanting to capture the luster of it with the soft overhead light glinting off the deeper hues in those beautiful strands.

My hips, with one of her hands holding me steady, had been next, remembering my lessons in perspective to create enough distance between our bodies that the most intimate part of me was visible in the mirror as she'd stared up, admiring it as she stroked over my clit.

I'd sought to capture the softness as well as the beads of moisture she'd been coaxing from my folds with each slow, shudder-producing touch.

"Damn," she murmured as she stared, drinking in the moment I'd begun to capture,

though I was far from finished yet. “So stunning.”

I flushed a little at that. “Not nearly as stunning as watching it happen last night.”

“You have a wonderful eye for detail, and memory too.”

“I have to when moments happen so fast that sometimes there’s no time to take a photograph.”

“Yes, I can see where a sharp memory would be important in those situations.”

“The only drawback is that other things start muddying up the image in my head if I don’t start painting or at least sketching it out right away.”

“How long have you been up?”

“Just a few hours.”

Her eyes narrowed a little. “How much is a few?”

“Three.”

“Sonnet no. Honey, you are going to start getting more rest, even if it means naps while the paint dries.”

“I try.”

“Trying isn’t enough,” she replied as she reached out to brush her fingertip beneath my eye. “Your eyes are too beautiful to have circles as dark as the ones you’re sporting beneath them. I can see that you’re not getting enough rest.”

“I just wanted to give you what you asked for,” I replied, shuffling a half step away as I ducked my head.

She didn’t like that and cupped me beneath the chin, raising my face until our eyes met again.

“I love it, but nothing in the world is worth you exhausting yourself the way you’ve been doing,” she said.

“I may not be an artist, but I know that to do any task to the best of your ability, you have to be well rested with a full belly and plenty of downtime to let you recharge between each endeavor. We will be heading back to bed just as soon as we’ve had breakfast. Don’t even think about making coffee, either; we can have some after our nap. ”

“Yes, Mistress,” I replied, her tone serious and stern enough that I washed the brush I’d been using and turned my focus from the painting to brainstorming what to have for breakfast, which I tended to skip more often than not.

“I’ve got a few plums and peaches; we can make a fruit salad with eggs and toast to go with them,” I offered once I’d peeked in the fridge.

“Perfect,” she replied. “Light but filling at the same time. What can I do to help?”

“Can you chop the fruit?” I asked, pulling out two peaches and two plump plums and setting them on the counter for her so I could retrieve the cutting board from its hook on the wall.

“I’d be happy to,” she replied as she washed her hands in the sink.

“How do you like your eggs?”

“Scrambled with a hint of hot sauce.”

I giggled at that because spicy was how she seemed to like a lot of things, including me.

“And what’s so amusing?” she asked.

“Scrambled is my favorite too. I melt a little cheese in while they cook, but I can make yours without it if you’d like.”

“No, I like cheese in mine too, though I doubt that’s why you were laughing.”

“The hot sauce,” I finally admitted. “Spicy things seem to be a favorite of yours.”

“Especially when I’m around you,” she said, dancing her fingertips up the back of my neck to make me shiver. “But most particularly when I’m watching you let go of all your inhibitions.”

“That’s easy to do when I’m around you.”

“And why is that?” she asked as I sighed and finally moved away so I could get the eggs out.

“Because you don’t want me to hold back,” I replied. “And you don’t make me feel ashamed of my fantasies and desires. I know we’re just getting to know one another, but I already feel like I can just be myself around you and not have to worry about being chastised or ridiculed.”

“Which tells me that someone else made you feel that way and trampled all over your self-confidence in the process.”

“I doubt he meant for things to turn out that way,” I said. “He was just doing his best in a bad situation.”

“What situation and who do I need to have words with for treating you that way?”

Sighing, I debated how much to say and how much was too much to reveal about my past and the person who finished raising me.

“Sonnet?” she said, a note of warning in her voice when I remained quiet for too long.

“My uncle was a confirmed bachelor when I wound up on his doorstep and considerably older than my parents. He didn’t know anything about raising teenagers, let alone a girl who was constantly dabbling in something.

He was afraid that me being as free-spirited as I was, I’d get into trouble or attract the wrong kind of attention and get hurt,” I explained.

“I know he loves me in his own way; there was just a huge learning curve to conquer, and we both messed up a lot along the way. I was kind of angry and rebellious when I went to live with him, and he was at a bit of a loss for what to do when I kept defying him.”

“Did he ever lay a hand on you?”

“Never, not once,” I said as I cracked the eggs.

“But the language he used wasn’t exactly kid-friendly, even for an older kid like me, so there were times when he was just harsh and sharp when he spoke and times when he cited news articles about other girls who’d snuck out or done this and that and gotten themselves hurt or killed in the process. ”

“Was sneaking out something you did often?”

“In the beginning, yes,” I admitted. “I was used to doing whatever I wanted, since my folks were rarely at home or paying attention. It was hard to learn to live by his rules, and he said more than once that he hated being in a position to make them since he wasn’t a fan of rules himself.”

She shot me a side eye, knife still and poised over the chopping block, one fruit finished while the others waited for her attention.

“Did something happen to make you start listening to him?”

“I snuck out,” I admitted, squirming beneath her scrutiny.

“And?”

“Went to a party?”

“And?” she prodded again, never taking her eyes off me.

“Got jumped by a bunch of girls who thought I was being a showoff and trying to steal their boyfriends,” I explained.

“Only it wasn’t their boyfriends whose attention I was after; it was another girl who was there who’d kind of been flirting with me at school.

Only when everything popped off, she sort of ran away and hid so she wouldn’t get jumped too. ”

“I hope that ended your infatuation with her.”

“Yeah, it did,” I admitted. “I found out later that she thought they were jumping me for being a lesbian.”

“Doesn’t matter what she thought was happening; if she cared about you, she’d have done something to help, even if it was just to scream, holler, and make a ton of noise until someone called the cops or came to help you.”

“I know.”

“Good,” she growled, hacking the second plum with far more fierceness than she’d chopped the first. “I hate that you had to endure that. Growing up is hard enough without people making it harder with their bullshit. I hope you reported what happened.”

“My uncle made sure of it once he found out what happened,” I explained.

“He nearly got himself arrested after he paid a visit to their houses to have words with their parents; it was such a mess. I’ve never been so scared.

Not just because of what happened, but because it almost cost me the first stable, available person I’d ever had in my life. ”

I hoped that eased some of her growliness towards my uncle, who was still a part of my life.

While we didn’t get together often, he always popped up around the holidays and my birthday to both spoil me and thrill me with whatever adventures he’d gotten up to since we’d seen one another last. Introducing them would be inevitable if we were going to make this new relationship a long-term thing, and I’d hate for it to get off on the wrong foot.

It wasn't long before the eggs and toast were ready and the fruit salad was in bowls, drizzled with a bit of lemon juice and a squeeze of lime.

I cut up the rest of the lime and put it in the water pitcher for later.

It would be a refreshing addition to whatever was on the menu for lunch.

While she added hot sauce to her eggs, I topped mine with a dollop of ketchup and giggled as she raised an eyebrow at me.

"Another gift from my uncle," I explained as I put the ketchup back. "We always ate our scrambled eggs this way. This one time, we ran out of ketchup and tried grape jelly, which wasn't bad, especially with a sprinkle of red pepper flakes to cut the sweetness a little."

It was a good thing she wasn't drinking anything when I said it because she snorted and scrubbed a hand over her face, fork landing on her plate with a rattling clank.

"And you stood there giggling at my hot sauce."

"Only because you and spicy have become synonymous in my head," I explained.

"Would you think it strange if I said I was curious to try scrambled eggs with grape jelly and red pepper flakes the next time you make them?"

"Nope. It will be fun to try them that way again."

Yawning, I took the seat across from her with a sudden realization that I was actually tired and more than ready to lay back down, especially if that meant more time getting to snuggle up beside her and be cuddled in her embrace.

“Eat up, Kitten. I think the sandman is calling your name.”

“Yup, and loudly too,” I replied before digging in.

While last night had been fun and romantic as we’d fed one another, this morning just felt domestic and blissfully tranquil.

Eating breakfast with her felt like the most natural thing in the world, and the best part about it was the way my thoughts stayed firmly fixed in the moment and never once strayed to the project in the other room or the rambling list of other artistic ideas that usually tumbled through it when I took a break.

Instead of scarfing so I could hurry back to my work, I took my time savoring each bite and sipped the apple juice I’d poured us to go with our meal instead of guzzling it down at the end, right before I rushed to rinse everything and put it in the dishwasher.

It was just so easy to take my time when I was with her.

Maybe it was because she took her time too, or maybe it was how much I enjoyed being in the moment with her without feeling like I needed to do something extra to hold her attention.

The way she watched me in between bites and smiled when I caught her watching me settled me in the same way having her hands on my body did. In those moments I could just relax, breathe, and know that I was cherished for just being me.

It really was the most amazing feeling in the world.

Chapter Eleven

Harper

I wasn't a mommy by any means and hats off to those in the lifestyle.

But taking care of Sonnet has become a high priority for me.

I'm getting a grasp on an artist's mind, and I don't wish to hush her muse in any way, just maybe get it on a better schedule if at all possible.

And if that meant showing up three times a day for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, then I'd do it.

Though feeding each other as we had last night led to one of the best desserts I'd ever had.

Maybe the answer lies in spending more time together while monitoring her schedule. Bring my laptop over, and make sure she has solid meals and plenty of sleep. While in theory it appeared to be the answer, in the end, would taking that control away push Sonnet to later resent me?

It was a fine line for sure.

"Nap time, Kitten."

Back into her comfy bed we went. Sonnet's rapid-fire yawns and half-lidded eyes as

we settled in assured me I'd made the correct decision. Conversations needed to be had, above and beyond those I was used to negotiating but defining all the questions in my head was a high priority.

Wide awake, my mind wandered while she slept. Should I set up a studio space for her at my place? Maybe if she did some work here and some there, splitting her time a little more, that would help? Or make it worse because she'd likely never take a break then.

So many questions, so few answers, though one thing was for certain—I wasn't going back to sleep.

As I slid out of bed, I moved the pillow into place and watched as Sonnet curled into it as I tiptoed away.

I wanted to do something nice for her, but what could that be?

Cup of coffee in hand, I formulated a plan and got to work.

As soon as I opened the fridge, it came to me.

One very large rushed grocery delivery order later, I had made a list of meals to prep and freeze as soon as it arrived.

Lack of sleep combined with lack of eating was a recipe for disaster.

It was the least I could do until we figured out the boundaries.

While I waited for the delivery, I took inventory of her supplies—paint and material brands and sizes, canvas sizes, easel, and drop cloths, and made a list in my phone to research when I got home.

Fuck, it just dawned on me...I'm new relationship nesting. I'm moving a brand-new relationship into the living-together phase without actually...living together.

A studio in both our homes.

Remote work for myself.

Buying groceries.

Meal prep.

For the love of all things holy, my brain was wayyyy ahead of us.

How do I rein it in when suddenly these were all the things I wanted?

But what if Sonnet didn't?

With Sarah McLachlan playing in the background from the playlist on my phone, I got to work sorting the groceries, leaving out what I'd cook first. Chicken and rice were easy, and since a couple of the recipes called for chicken, I got it sorted and baking in the oven while I prepped the vegetables.

Frozen meals heated in minutes, salads for grab and go, and assorted fruits diced and bowled.

A summery pasta salad was in the mix too.

I'd forgotten how much I enjoyed cooking, given how rarely I did it anymore for just me.

Funny how quickly the months of wondering what I'd do next were answered when

Sonnet stepped into my life.

Who knew what I'd been missing all along was the right person?

Not a change in jobs but a change in life as a whole.

The reality of that left me feeling lighter, happier even as I danced around the kitchen.

Mentally planning a life so far into the future, it shouldn't have been as clear as it was to me.

Envisioning Sonnet in her studio in our shared home, romantic meals, making love.

The firelight of the burning logs in the fireplace adding to the ethereal glow my beautiful angel had.

Goddess, I was in love with Sonnet.

Once upon a time, I enjoyed traveling, taking cooking classes while visiting Italy.

Would Sonnet love to travel? Indulge in local cuisine and learn about their cultures.

I wanted to show her the world and share everything I loved with her.

Vibrating with excitement, I did a silly dance as I pulled the chicken from the oven to add to our salads for lunch before I woke her.

Only when I turned toward the island there she was, hand to mouth masking her giggles, sketchpad on the countertop.

“Naughty girl, are you laughing at your mistress?”

“Mmm,” she cocked her head. “Right now, I’d say I’m enjoying watching my girlfriend.”

“ Touché, Kitten,” I kissed her, then bopped her nose. “Good nap?”

“Yes, though I’ve been up long enough to draw this.” She turned the pad toward me and there I was in all my glory. Likely gave the delivery guy a heart attack given my scantily clad attire. Good thing I wasn’t shy about nudity.

“That is fabulous, though I fear I may’ve scared the poor grocery guy.

” Her laughter was no longer contained. The naughty kitten lost it.

I’m sure imagining the poor guy’s face. “Laugh it up, girly.” I couldn’t imagine ever truly being angry with her.

I’m sure heated arguments were in our future, I wasn’t foolish enough to believe otherwise. But damnit, I had it bad.

“I don’t think my house ever smelled this wonderful. What’re you up to?”

“It’s part of my desire to take care of you.

When I’m not here to cook, or for us to cook together,” I smiled at the wonderful thought.

Sharing a kitchen and cooking together would be amazing.

“I’ve made meals for you. Chicken and rice in the freezer, salads, and pasta dishes. I

may've gone a bit overboard."

"I-I can't believe you did all this for me." She came around the island and wrapped her arms around me. "I love you, Harper. I know it's soon, and it's okay if you don't feel the same, but maybe someday you will. Or not, but that's..."

I cut her rambling off with my lips. "I do feel the same. I love you too, Sonnet. So very much." It felt so fucking good to say those words to her.

Like a weight had been lifted. "I was afraid of scaring you off, saying it so soon. But I love you, Sonnet, I really do. When we're apart, I want us to be together.

I want to share everything with you. Take you places I've been and loved, share my life with you. "

More adorable giggles. The more I learned about Sonnet, the deeper I fell.

"I've been on my own for so long, even when I lived with my uncle. He tried his best, but," she shrugged. "I dunno."

"Well, my love, I do. If you allow me to I'll take care of you, but if it gets to be too much, you must promise to tell me. I don't want us to fight and talking about everything is the best way to avoid that. We'll be learning together." And I was excited beyond words at what lay ahead for us.

"Kay, but I don't want to shut my muse out. I get super depressed when she doesn't talk. Art is my life, my way of expressing emotions and thoughts. My therapy, to be honest."

"And I love that about you, but maybe the Muse could work on more of a schedule?" Pot, meet kettle. Though I'd already been stepping back from the Domme side of

Menotté . It was like my mind was ahead of me, but it would've been nice if it shared why we'd been backing off these last few months.

“We can try. She's definitely working overtime right now. I'll be done soon with the art for the club. Maybe we can take a vacation or something then.”

“That's a wonderful idea. Anywhere in particular you'd like to go first? A number one bucket list destination we could cross off?” We had a club member who was a travel agent both Simon and I had used for trips before. I bet she'd find the best excursions for us.

“Hmm, let me think about it.”

“Good enough. Now, let me fill that grumbling belly of yours.” I whipped up a lemon vinaigrette, chopped up the chicken breasts, and then mixed it all with the greens and plated it. “ Voilà , lunch is served.”

“Yum, I could get used to this.”

“Music to my ears because taking care of you is number one on my bucket list.” When we were done, I grabbed our plates and started cleaning up. “What's left to do on the art for the club?”

“I just need to sign them, order the crating materials, then package and ship them to you.”

“Do you have any canvases to hang in the lobby to sell?” I was ready to contact our handyman to start hanging everything.

These were perfect for the club, ideal representations for the live art that took place amongst our clients.

Life was sensual and sex was art. Love was art.

The more I thought about it the more excited I got.

“I do. Let me see how quickly we can get the crating materials. They usually take a couple of weeks to get here.”

“Do we need to crate them? I mean, can’t they be delivered as is or even wrapped in the sheets? I can call our handyman and have him pick them up and transport them if that helps?”

“Mistress, you paid me for a job, and that bid included proper crating and shipping.”

Glad to hear she honors her contracts, but in this case, that just won’t do. “Not gonna lie, I’m beyond excited to see this exquisite work on display. Can we possibly forgo the crating and just carefully wrap them so he can get them hung?”

“Let me sign them.” Sonnet took off down the hall, seemingly as excited as I now was while I fired off a text to him. Sonnet’s presence would be required when he hung them. Her eye for detail with her work I won’t allow to be silenced. She will pick the placement for each piece.

I finished cleaning up and met her in the studio space. “Almost done. What did he say?”

“He said he can pick them up in the morning and go right to the club. We’ll need you there to handle placement.”

“You want me to choose?”

“I’d not have it any other way. Now, show me the pieces you wish to sell.” Sonnet

walked across the space to a door I hadn't noticed before, took a deep breath, and opened it. "Wow, there has to be fifty canvases in there."

"Fifty-seven, to be exact. Once upon a time I sold my work, then switched to commission-based pieces only. Hence why I still live where I do. I dunno," she shrugged. "Wasn't sure if these pieces were good enough to sell, so I stored them away."

My breath caught as soon as I flicked the light on. "Kitten, how could you ever second-guess these? They're wonderful." Some were a bit more abstract than others, but each was a thought, a moment in time, a memory. Things Sonnet had seen or engaged in or with. "That's the harbor at sunset."

"It is. My muse had been silent, so I took a walk. There was an older couple," she pointed to the park bench where two faceless bodies sat.

"They held hands the entire time, watching the sunset. Then they turned, kissed each other, and left. They captured my heart in that moment, and I had to recreate it."

"Your talent blows me away. Why is none of this hung in your place?"

Another shrug. "Never felt right. Never felt good enough. I mean, look around. Outside of my bedroom, I never really made this place my own. Always thought of it as my studio and never my home. My muse was settled, but I never was."

My sweet, sweet Sonnet strived for stability and a place to call home. One where she was nurtured and loved. Maybe I had no boundaries to worry about. Maybe I too was the one she'd been waiting for all along.

"Sonnet, we'd be honored to have you display any of these in the lobby. There isn't a single one not worthy. My love, I will spend every day we have together proving to

you how much you're worth.” Never again would my Kitten go a day without being told I loved her and how truly wonderful she was.

“If you think so,” she nervous chewed her bottom lip again, Poor thing was getting abused beyond repair.

I plucked it free and kissed her. “I do. Let’s pick a dozen out to start with.”

Chapter Twelve

Sonnet

It was a little scary and a lot thrilling to watch and give direction as my artwork was hung up in the club, especially when my Mistress had instructed me to choose the spots where they would hang.

For the first few minutes, I'd simply stood, taking in the size and shape of the space while considering how to tie them in with the erotic displays they'd experience beneath their tables.

Hanging art on the walls behind the booths across from the interactive displays would mean the patrons would have to turn their heads to look at them, so that wouldn't work.

I turned my attention away from that area and focused on the rest of the space.

The far wall, with its horseshoe shape, would be the best place to hang pieces so patrons could enjoy them as a part of the already erotic dining experience.

Placing the ones for sale in the lobby proved to be a little harder, as pricing my pieces has always been something that made me squirmy and uncomfortable.

With my Mistress providing input in the form of a raised eyebrow when she thought I was undervaluing something to a warm smile and a nod when she felt I'd gotten it right, we soon had that task completed as well.

Returning to her side after the final painting had been hung, I slid my arm around her and sighed as I cuddled into her embrace.

“Do you have to work tonight?” I asked.

“No Kitten, all my duties for the day have already been attended to and the last of my subs has been assigned to someone else to see to. My night is free if you have something in mind.”

“I do, actually,” I said, taking her hand. “Let’s go for a walk.”

“A walk, huh? It’s been a while since I’ve gone on one of those.”

“That makes it even more perfect,” I murmured as I went up on tiptoes to kiss her.

What was meant to be sweet and soft soon turned feverish and hungry as she took control of it and I mewed and pressed against her front, fingers tangling in her hair as I sought to show her just how hot and needy she made me every time we touched one another.

My cheeks felt flushed when we finally broke apart, but I was smiling too and more than excited to show her one of my favorite spots.

It wasn’t a long walk from here, and the city was alive tonight. With her hand in mine, we wandered past a wonderful mix of dark buildings and bright ones teeming with laughing people enjoying an evening together.

“This was the first gallery to ever display my pieces,” I said as we reached the big brick building on the corner of the street we needed to turn down.

“The owner, Arthur, was so amazingly kind to me. He taught me how to select the

best pieces for a show because my thoughts were scattered, and my selections were all over the place in terms of tones and style. You want to give them a taste, never the full buffet. That's what he told me as we sat down with the pictures I'd taken on my phone of each of the paintings.

One by one we went through them all, with a notebook between us where we wrote notes on how to group them.

I had no idea then that he was going through all that effort because he already had a follow-up show in mind. ”

“Really, how many times have you been featured there?”

“Four so far,” I explained. “Each time more than half of the paintings sold. I haven't done a showing in a while, though. The commission-based pieces I've been contracted for have kept me busy for the last year.”

“Do you enjoy doing those more than having the opportunity to paint whatever you'd like?”

“No, but painting whatever I'd like doesn't always pay the bills,” I explained.

“Not once art supplies are factored in. I'm picky about my paints and the quality of my brushes, and I'm super picky about color tones and the consistency of the paint.

One brand is not the same as another, no matter what the websites and ads might claim. ”

“Now that I understand completely,” she said.

“Just because something serves the same function doesn't mean the results will be the

same.

I've been burned a few times myself, grabbing a different brand when what I'd come for was sold out.

I finally learned to stick to what I liked and what gave the result I wanted, even if it meant visiting other stores or biting the bullet and ordering in. ”

“Exactly. I'd rather order in and get exactly what I'm after, especially if that meant that I don't have to wade through crowded stores or deal with people clogging the aisles with their carts and conversations they could have had over the phone or through text messages.”

“Now that level of rudeness just pisses me off,” she admitted.

“I should not have to say excuse me several times and even resort to nudging someone's cart to get them to scoot it out of the way so I can pass.

I don't know what it is about people, but some of them get out in public and act like they've never been taught any manners at all.

I've even seen people open a box to look at the contents, then put the open box back on the shelf after putting a different box in their carts.

It's ridiculous and utterly unnecessary. ”

“That's the other reason I order most things in from online shops,” I explained.

“There's a whole ick factor in stores, seeing people sneeze, wipe their noses, and then handle produce like they didn't just contaminate everything they came in contact with.

No one wants to buy snot-covered plums. That's just eww. ”

“You do realize that the plums being delivered just might be covered in snot and germs too,” she pointed out.

“Oh, I know, and I always wash them regardless. But there is something about seeing gross things take place that wrecks my appetite completely.”

“It would wreck mine too.”

As we rounded the corner by the gallery, the first notes of a saxophone reached my ears, and my heart felt giddy as we approached my favorite place in the city.

Lit up with fairy lights, with a gazebo placed several feet away from a small amphitheater, it was the site of more impromptu concerts than I could count, seeing as how I came here often.

How weird was it that I'd been so close to the club on so many nights and never even known that it was there?

To be fair, I was usually so focused on my muse or looking for the perfect bit of inspiration to enhance something already tumbling around in my head that there were times when I walked blocks past my destination before realizing that I'd forgotten to turn.

By happy accident, I discovered the teahouse several blocks from where we stood.

I'd have to take her some time. The soft atmosphere was warm and inviting, with greenery everywhere and gleaming wood that created little alcoves of privacy, even when all the tables were full.

The inside smelled amazing too, and with all the tea blends they carried, I never ran out of the variety I loved.

The best part was when they announced new flavors.

I was always all over those, eager to try something new, even if the taste turned out to be one I had no interest in drinking again.

“How long has this been here?” My Mistress asked as we drew closer and the low concrete benches on both sides of the gazebo were revealed.

“Years,” I replied. “It was one of my favorite places to sneak out to when I was a teenager. I’d sit on the railing of the gazebo, sketch and listen to music, or sprawl out on one of the benches and draw while different musicians played.

That’s Gus on the saxophone, he’s here often.

He’s one of my favorites. I can listen to him for hours and sketch the night away.

There’s a girl who comes here sometimes with her cello.

She’s fabulous too, and oh goddess, the sounds she wrings from that instrument are just divine. ”

“Don’t cello pieces tend to be a bit darker than saxophone ones?”

“Not necessarily,” I explained. “It just depends on the player and the mood. Sometimes whole bands show up to play acoustic sets, and that’s awesome too.

There’s just something about music at night that has a different feel from the way it hits in daylight.

I think maybe it's because there aren't many competing sounds.

It's far enough back from the busy storefronts and bars that even traffic sounds are muted, unless someone really lays on their horn. ”

I led her to the gazebo, our fingers laced together, swinging between our bodies. A part of me longed to skip a little as the music washed over us, but I curtailed the impulse to give her time to drink it all in, especially since the gazebo was empty.

A few people sat on scattered benches. Some were watching Gus, while others fiddled with their phones or whatever they held in their hands.

One was a fellow artist I'd spoken to from time to time.

Tonight, he lay sprawled on a bench, hair spilling over the side as he sketched.

I couldn't place the song Gus started playing as we climbed the gazebo steps, but in my soul I felt like he was playing it just for us.

Soft and romantic.

With the perfect beat for what I longed to do.

“Talk about a hidden gem,” she whispered as I led her to the center, then turned so we were face-to-face. “You and this place are magical.”

“Would you care to add a bit more magic to the moment and dance with me?” I asked, opening my arms as I stepped closer to her.

“It would be my pleasure.”

No other words were needed. Her arms closed around my waist as I stretched my hands up to slide them over her shoulders.

Giggling, I recalled the way the chaperones at the few school dances I'd attended had wandered the room tapping couples on the shoulder while suggesting they put space between themselves as they danced.

No one was here to do that tonight.

We melted against each other and swayed, easily getting lost in the song. All the times I'd come here alone to feed my muse has been amazing and was why I kept coming back. But this was the first time I'd brought anyone here, and I was thrilled that it was her.

My Mistress.

The void she'd already begun to fill was one I hadn't realized was vast, deep, and a little cold.

I'd always known it was there. But for most of my life I'd counted on my muse to keep it from drowning me.

Slowly, she was beginning to teach me that I didn't have to fill every moment of my life with my heart.

Melting against her chest, it was easy to drift in the moment, inhale the scent of my lavender body wash clinging to her skin from the shower we'd shared that morning, her hair occasionally tickling my nose as the night's gentle winds made it flutter.

As Gus moved from one song to the next, I got lost in her and another perfect moment of absolute bliss.

Funny how in the short time I'd known her, she'd already been able to give me several of those and a wealth of beautiful new memories to draw from whenever I felt sad.

Even after Gus tucked his saxophone back in the case, we continued to sway, simply enjoying the opportunity to be in each other's arms.

"Thank you for this," she said as we finally drew apart. "I can't remember the last time I danced with anyone, and never like this."

"If you don't mind walking another few blocks, there's a little bakery and sweet shop that's open late. Their strawberry shortcakes and fruit tarts are amazing. I'd love to share a little late-night dessert with you."

"How do you find these places?" she asked. "I have a hard time finding good takeout, let alone a bakery at this hour."

"Wandering," I explained. "Back when I was in art school, I'd drop in a few times a week and get a box of pastries to nibble while I was working on my projects."

Two doors down from it is a little bookstore that's open until ten on Saturdays.

They hold wine tastings there and open mic nights.

Listening to them was always as much of an inspiration as drinking in the sights, so I drop in there a few times a month and usually wind up filling several pages in my sketchbook. "

"Fruit tarts and strawberry shortcake sound like a wonderful way to wrap up the evening," she replied, my hand firmly held in hers. "Lead the way. Dare I say you are starting to become my muse?"

“How so?”

“By inspiring me to step outside of the club and the duties I’ve been focused on for years to finally start living life again,” she explained.

“And by reminding me that there are so many little things I’ve overlooked these past few years.

I’m starting to see that I might have been growing a bit jaded after narrowing my focus on business for so long. ”

“You’re not the only one.”

“You, jaded? Kitten I just don’t see it.”

“Not with the world around me,” I explained as we walked the short distance to the bakery. “But when it came to love and relationships and putting myself out there to meet people, well, let’s just say that it had grown easy for me to come up with excuses not to bother.”

“Then it’s a good thing you changed your mind, or we’d both be missing out.”

Our faces in the bakery window reflected the joy I felt inside.

I rarely walked around smiling, but as we stepped through the doors and up to the display case, I was beaming ear to ear, so much so that my cheeks hurt.

There were still a few open tables and plenty of time to enjoy our treats right there when they were at their freshest.

As we sat across from one another with a mixed berry torte and a four-layer hunk of

strawberry shortcake between us, it was hard to pay attention to the dessert when I got to stare into her beautiful eyes.

The taste of that first bite, after she'd lifted it to my lips, was pure and utter heaven.

Creamy with plump, bursting pieces of fruit.

Her eyes promised wicked, wonderful things when she leaned over to kiss a bit of custard from the corner of my lips, and in that moment I couldn't wait to experience each and every one.

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Chapter Thirteen

Harper

It was the simplest of pleasures with Sonnet that meant so much, such as our walk last night.

Every date with her had been nothing short of amazing, and the stroll through the park and dancing under the moonlight was...

heavenly. It wasn't about money with her, it was time together, enjoying one another's company.

She didn't want flashy jewels and expensive meals, she just wanted someone to love her for who she was, and I was thrilled to be that and so much more to her.

With her artwork installed, the last of the remodeling was officially complete, and I couldn't wait for our members to see it.

Their kind words would surely boost Sonnet's self-esteem, and I insisted she be here for the unveiling Saturday night.

Purposely I chose that day, as it was our busiest. For now, the artwork inside the club was covered in black linens the only paintings visible were the ones for sale in the lobby.

While I understood why Sonnet defended her uncle's unconventional methods of

raising her, the challenges it brought forth in the form of her lack of self-confidence angered me. But was my anger misplaced? Was Sonnet just too kind and possibly naive?

The jury, AKA myself, would decide once I met the man.

“The artwork is incredible,” Simon said as he stepped inside my office and took a seat. “Your girl is talented.”

“That she is. Did you see the pieces in the lobby she has for sale?” I shook my head, recalling the finished canvases in her storage closet. “That’s only a fraction of what she has done and gathering dust.”

“I’ve got my eye on a couple for my place. I swear, Sonnet could make a dilapidated farmhouse appear sensual.”

The laughter flowed so freely I surprised not only Simon, but myself. “You have no idea. I wonder what she’d turn a bowl of fruit into.”

“Harper, it’s been so long since I’ve seen you this happy. You deserve love, so don’t let your stubborn pride get in the way and ruin it for you.”

“Here! Here!” Patrice shouted from her desk.

“Hey, this is a no-heckling zone!” I shouted back though my words held no malice. Clear as day, even with the wall between us, I knew Patrice’s middle finger waved wildly at me. “Don’t make me cut that finger off, woman!” Her evil cackle filled the air, solidifying my assumption.

“The young, full of life, ready to take on the world Harper that I met in college is back. I couldn’t be happier for you, my friend. Being in love is a wonderful look on

you.” Simon sighed. “I wonder if my true love is waiting somewhere out there for me.”

“They are, Simon, I can feel it. When you find them, don’t let go. Give it all you’ve got and live it up. Oh, speaking of which, I’d like to plan a vacation with my Kitten.”

“Vacation sounds wonderful. Where are you off to?”

“Not a clue, waiting for Sonnet to give me some ideas. Simon,” I sat back and waited for his eyes to meet mine.

“We’ve worked ourselves into a lonely existence, and now it’s our turn to live and love and enjoy the fruits, or in our cases, wealth of our labors.

We sacrificed much to build Menotté, and now it’s time to entrust those we’ve endlessly trained to run it in our absence.

Life is far too short to be filled with what-ifs or regrets. ”

“Too true, and it’s been forever since I’ve visited my family in France.” He got that faraway look in his eyes. “Maybe when you get back I’ll plan a trip.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea. Your parents would be thrilled to see you. Now, I have made a change in the consignment portion of the contract with Harper. I forewent our cut of the deal in exchange for ten percent being paid directly to Patrice.”

“You did what?” Patrice’s shrill voice came through loud and clear before her body appeared in the doorway. “Why in the world would you do that?”

“Because you’re handling the transactions, and you’ll be properly compensated for

it.” That I’d not budge on. “End of discussion.” This time the finger was visible, as was her smile which accompanied it.

“That could equate to thousands, Harper. My time isn’t worth that much.”

“Your time is worth far more than that,” Simon corrected her. “Use it to take your family on vacation, splurge on the kids. The long hours you work taking care of us can never be fully compensated.”

Patrice hugged Simon as best she could with him currently sitting. “Wait, he gets a hug, and I get the finger. What gives?”

Around the desk she came and plopped down in my lap, peppering my face with kisses.

“Did I miss something?” Sonnet’s voice brightened my smile, as though it could widen any further without breaking my face.

“We just gave Patrice the good news about the commission, and aside from an errant finger, this was the round of thanks. Come in, my love.” I hoped she wasn’t upset by Patrice’s display, but given Patrice pulled her into a tight hug on her way out, I believed all was properly settled.

“Come, sit on your Mistresses’ lap, it is yours, after all.” There, a potential crisis averted as my Kitten blushed and took what was rightfully hers.

“Sonnet, darling, your artwork is exquisite,” Simon praised her.

“Harper mentioned you have more than what’s on display available, and I wondered if I might see it.

Quite a few pieces already caught my eye.

” Simon caught my glare and quickly backtracked.

“With your Mistress there, of course.” Good save, Simon.

I loved the man dearly, but he had a penchant for all things beautiful.

While I didn’t believe he’d make a move on Sonnet, I wouldn’t dare chance it either.

“My beautiful Kitten has many and each are a brilliant display of her talent.” And many others that were reserved just for me.

“I’ll just leave you two be. Check with Patrice, she has my schedule.” Simon left us.

Sonnet’s fingers trailed along the cleavage of my shirt. “My bed is lonely without you in it, Mistress.”

“Mmm, is it now?” I tucked her hair over her shoulder and nibbled down her neck.

“Don’t you miss me when I’m gone?” The pouty lilt in her voice brought out my protective side.

“I do, and so does that lovely new set of handcuffs I bought just for my Kitten.”

Sonnet gasped as I hit a sensitive spot. “Handcuffed with you. No place I’d rather be than with my Mistress doing naughty things to me.”

“All the naughty things, my love. I’m so glad you came by the office.”

“Shoot,” she popped up. “Which reminds me why I came by.”

“It wasn’t to see me?”

“Well, that too, but my uncle wants to meet you.”

That’ll kill an erotic interlude, just as I’d imagined taking Sonnet atop my desk. Her words threw ice over that party. “Might want to start from the beginning and fill me in on what exactly was said.”

Her little fingers nervously worked, dipping in and out of my cleavage. “He called to check on me and asked how I was doing. I told him I was seeing someone, and it's serious, and I love you's were exchanged, and he said he wanted to meet you.”

Somehow I doubt that was everything, but I’d let it slide. For now. “And when is this meet and greet taking place?”

“I know we have the unveiling Saturday night which I’m super nervous about.”

“No need to be, my love. You’ve already heard Simon’s opinion, and he’s a picky fucker.” For all but sexual partners, it would appear.

And that adorable sigh came out. “I’m like this before every event, just ignore me.”

“I’ll do no such thing. What kind of partner would I be if I wasn’t there to support and calm my Kitten? Now, our gathering?” That busy bee mind of hers was easily derailed.

“Oh, sorry. Would Sunday night work? He offered to cook, but I declined on our behalf, you can thank me later for that.”

“Let’s meet for dinner at Pier Twenty-Seven at eight p.m. My treat. Does he like seafood?” I hadn’t heard of many who lived this close to the ocean who didn’t, but to

each their own.

“Let me check.” She slid her phone from her pocket and fired off a text. “Now, where were we?”

“As much as I’d love to continue this, I have to meet a new client.”

“You’re not taking on too much, are you, Kitten?” I’d do my best to be lenient, though we’d finally gotten those pesky dark circles under control and there was no going back on that. I’d put my foot down already.

“I promise,” she gave me a quick kiss and hopped off my lap. “But he’s not too far from here, so I decided to pop in and ask in person about my uncle.”

“Mmm, hmm,” she caught my eye roll and giggled.

“Let me know how it goes and if you’ll be back this way tonight.

I’ve got that huge, empty bed calling your name.

” Was it too soon to make her a key and alarm code?

I’d get Patrice to arrange it all. She was far better with the damn electronic gadgets than I was.

As soon as I heard Sonnet bid farewell to Patrice, I logged on and started shopping for the surprise studio I decided to turn my solarium into for her.

It had the best views and natural light.

Already I pictured her there, muse hard at work as she painted and sketched to her

heart's content. Well, within reason deemed by me.

“What are you working on?” Patrice popped in a few hours later.

“A surprise for Sonnet. Speaking of which, could you get a key made for her and an alarm code?”

“Wow, you’re really serious about this girl.”

Where was this going? Anger flittered inside, fearing my dear friend would say the wrong thing. I managed to tamp it down, but only just. “I am.”

“I’m so happy for you. Now it all makes sense. I couldn’t figure out why you didn’t want to take on subs anymore. Sonnet is the sweetest thing. You’re perfect for each other.”

Whew... “Thank you, I feel the same. I fell hard and fast, but without a shred of doubt, I know she’s the one for me.

” I should’ve known better than to doubt what Patrice would say.

Had she had an issue, it would’ve been brought to my attention in the beginning and not weeks later. She was loyal to the bone, that one.

“You finished work before Sonnet showed up, what are you so engrossed in now?”
Nothing got past Patrice.

“Well, if you must know...”

“I must.”

“Of course you do, sassy woman. I’m turning the solarium in my place into a studio for Sonnet.

” Wouldn’t require more than supplies. The comfy furniture could stay for her to relax in while she sketched and what not.

“Which reminds me, there will be far too many deliveries coming. Could you just have security take them up to my place?”

The smart ass curtsied. “Yes, Mistress, I’m at your beck and call.

” I launched a notebook at her. “You missed!” She sing-songed as she skipped out of my office.

I’d see to it that man of hers paddled her ass good and red.

The only problem was, she’d enjoy it, but I’d enjoy tormenting her each time she hissed as she sat.

Oh, my evil side was so delightfully naughty.

As I finished the order for the easels, my phone chimed.

Sonnet: Sunday night works for everyone.

Me: Excellent. I’ll make the reservations. How was the client meeting?

Sonnet: Weird. I’m headed back your way. Dinner?

Me: Order in?

Sonnet: Sounds perfect. See you in a few.

I waited to head upstairs until Sonnet arrived. My mind locked on those new handcuffs and a few other delightful finds during my online shopping spree. Sensory play was one of my favorites, and I hoped to make it one of Sonnet's as well. I wonder how she feels about candle wax...

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Chapter Fourteen

Sonnet

Candles burned on the table in the dining area, giving off the sweet scent of honeysuckle and vanilla as we sat down to eat.

My Mistress had ordered breadsticks, Caesar salad, shrimp and pesto bruschetta, buttery calamari, and baked manicotti in a creamy white sauce for our meal tonight and opened a fruity-smelling white wine to go with it.

Everything looked and smelled so delicious that my stomach started growling the moment I caught a whiff of it coming through the door.

Food was rapidly becoming part of our love language, something I deeply appreciated being a closet foodie.

Ever since she'd discovered that eating together meant I took the time to slow down and savor every bite, my Mistress had gone out of her way to see to it that we shared as many meals as our schedules would allow.

In fact, I'd come to suspect that she rearranged her own schedule just to be free to have meals with me, something that left me feeling cherished and appreciated.

She had no way of knowing that my uncle used to do the same thing, even if that meant later nights for him.

Through him, I'd learned that family meals had been a big part of his upbringing, though he'd admitted to falling out of practice in the kitchen the deeper he'd gotten into his bachelor years.

Still, he'd tried. With little patience for the sometimes long, drawn-out steps in cookbooks and a disdain for technology that left YouTube videos off the table, he developed a style of cooking that I came to call Dash and Hack.

No measurements, no real concept of what he was attempting to make, he just hacked up whatever vegetables happened to be lying around, chunked them in a pot with whatever meat was languishing in the freezer, threw in a couple dashes of his favorite seasonings, and plopped it on the plate with a grin and a flourish that never failed to make me giggle.

His concoctions were always hit and miss, with items like junk in a pot, chipped beef on toast that I came to learn was often called shit on a shingle, and everything pot pie among some of my favorites. Still, I hadn't wanted to expose my Mistress to that brand of insanity just yet.

As I dished us up portions from each of the pans on the table, I couldn't help but be reminded of the first meal my uncle had attempted to make when I'd gone to live with him.

A giggle slipped out, and as my Mistress stared quizzically at me, I just shook my head and finished plating things with a grin on my face, knowing he'd have a few colorful doozies to share with her when she asked about my exploits as a teen, and decided I'd get the jump on him, for once, and share one of my fondest memories of him.

"This meal reminds me of the first one I had at my uncle's house," I explained as my Mistress continued staring across the table at me as I snickered a little. "Only it looks

way more appetizing and lacks the burnt bits clinging to the garlic bread.”

“Exactly how did the garlic bread get burnt?” she asked. “Did he have the oven up too high?”

“No, I think that was one of the few times he decided to put his glasses on so he could read the label. It said to open one end of the bag, place it on a baking sheet, and stick it in a preheated oven. He did all the things it said, and the bag caught on fire.”

She’d just taken a sip of her wine when she snorted and fumbled for a napkin to press to her lips.

“Oh, oh goodness,” she muttered, shaking her head, her eyes shimmering from how hard she was laughing behind the napkin.

“He yanked it out of there so fast the garlic bread flew off the pan and landed on the counter with flames shooting off the bag, but after he smothered them with a pot top and peeled the wrapper off, the bottom of the loaf was still edible. It was a good thing too, because his attempt to make spaghetti noodles went just as badly.”

“How!” She squeaked. “Just answer me that, please. It’s just noodles and water. Who can screw that up?”

“My uncle,” I explained. “He tried to cook a whole lot of noodles in a medium-sized pot, didn’t use nearly enough water, and wound up with a congealed mass of semi-cooked pasta.”

She sputtered, opening and then closing her mouth, but no words came out. “There are no words, none. I can’t even imagine what that looked like.”

“Stringy Play-Doh,” I explained, nibbling on the calamari, which practically melted

in my mouth. “Ohh, that’s good.”

“As much as I enjoy a good, crispy calamari dunked in sriracha-lime sauce, buttered calamari offer such a beautifully simplistic flavor that elevates the taste for me.”

“It’s so soft. I’ve never had it this way before,” I admitted. “I love fried calamari too, but you’re right, having it this way lets the sweetness of the meat shine through.”

“Exactly,” she replied. “So, tell me, Kitten, what did you guys’ wind up eating for supper that night?”

“Well, my uncle had purchased a container of meatballs in sauce from the deli that he heated in a pot with a dash of garlic powder and Italian seasonings, and those turned out beautifully, so he cut the garlic bread he’d salvaged and layered the meatballs and some parmesan cheese on top.

It was really good and gave us something to laugh about, not like that was the only culinary disaster that resulted from his attempts to follow the directions on the package.

He grabbed a box of frozen fried chicken one night and potato salad from the same deli as the meatballs.

Needless to say, we wound up just having potato salad for supper after the chicken caught fire in the oven and charred.

When he tried to scrape the burnt bits off, he discovered that it was still frozen on the inside and pitched the mess in the trash. ”

“Dare I even ask?”

“Probably not, since I wouldn’t be able to tell you how he managed that, but smoke started rolling out of the oven and the chicken was in flames when he opened the door.”

“I see why you opted for us to go out.”

“Right.”

“He got better when he stopped trying to follow directions and just did things his own way, but those first few weeks were an adventure, let me tell you,” I said.

“But he was hell-bent on being the one to cook for us. He said it didn’t feel right to have me do the cooking when I’d already had a long day at school and the after-school art workshops he helped me sign up for. ”

“I bet those were fun,” she remarked, the food on our plates slowly diminishing.

“They really were. Having somewhere constructive to go after school where I could explore the things I loved helped me settle in a little better, and it meant that I wasn’t sitting around the apartment waiting for him to come home from work.”

“You don’t do well when you don’t have something to occupy your time, do you?” she asked.

“Not in the slightest. I get fidgety, and then I start looking for things to get into,” I explained.

“This one day I decided to try my hand at paper maché, only I used too much water and couldn’t get my newspaper strips to adhere to the balloon I was attempting to wrap them around.

It was a hot mess. Eventually, I figured out the right flour-to-water ratio to create paste, but he never fussed at me for artistic disasters.

He'd just step into the room, groan, and help me clean the place up so he could wreck it again cooking. ”

I loved when she laughed. Deep and throaty, her upper body shaking as she pressed a hand to her face, snickering at my stories.

I was beginning to understand why my uncle had clung so tightly to his memories of family mealtimes.

Sharing moments like this with her rapidly became the highlight of my day.

“I’m curious about something,” she said as she set her wine glass down, her expression having turned serious so suddenly that I found myself squirming beneath her gaze.

“What’s that, Mistress?” I said.

“When you texted to tell me you were headed back and that Sunday night would work for your uncle, you mentioned that your meeting with your client had been weird ,” she said. “I’d like you to elaborate on that. Weird how? Was he inappropriate?”

Trust my Mistress not to miss anything, even something I was still conflicted about.

“Not exactly,” I hedged. “There was just something about him and his request that made me uncomfortable. I told him I’d have to think about it before accepting the commission, and he seemed a bit put off by that for a moment before nodding and telling me to take all the time I needed.”

“When you say that he seemed put off by your response, what do you mean?”

“Just that his face got all pinched up and his eyes narrowed into this sneer that was, well, not exactly creepy but definitely uncomfortable to look at,” I explained.

“Then he smiled, though I could tell it was forced. I don’t know if I really want to work for him even if he does own one of the biggest art galleries in the city.

I know it would mean a big boost for my career, but my uncle always told me to go with what my gut told me and not to waste time questioning it, because our first reactions to someone or something were rarely wrong. ”

“I have to agree with your uncle there,” my Mistress replied. “If something about him bothered you, then tell him no. If he’s got a problem with you refusing him, you tell him he can just come have a conversation with me and I’ll set him straight.”

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I giggled at that, because I could almost picture how that conversation would go.

I doubted the man would appreciate the words my Mistress would have for him, though I hoped it wouldn't come to that.

I'd seen, all too well, how a person in a position of power could derail someone's career.

One of the few friends I'd made in art school had left the city after an encounter with a potential patron that had left his reputation in tatters.

Between the vicious lies the man had spread and the way so many others had jumped on the bandwagon when he'd called for my friend's work to be shunned and him to essentially be 'canceled' from the art community, had been a horrible lesson to learn, even while watching it from outside of the situation.

"Exactly what do you find funny about that?" My Mistress asked.

"That my uncle would have said the same thing," I hastily explained.

"I really have no desire to work for him. I have no problem painting nudes, as you've clearly seen, but he wanted me to paint him tying up his partners while they wore blood-splattered wings and held different religious symbols and relics.

It just felt weird and a bit like I'd be mocking someone's faith, which I would never want to do. "

“Then there is nothing more for you to think about,” my Mistress declared. “You can call him tomorrow and politely decline. It doesn’t sound like the project is for you, which tells me your heart wouldn’t be into it.”

“You’re right,” I replied. “The easiest commissions to accept are the ones where I’m immediately hit with a jolt of creativity after having the project described to me.

When I’m passionate about something, the ideas flow easily, making it hard to put my sketchpad down while I’m working them out.

Like your project, oh goddess, that one kept me up at night with the ideas that kept flashing through my head every time I closed my eyes.

It’s a good thing I keep a sketchbook and pencils in the nightstand by my bed where they are easily accessible, because I could not fall asleep until I’d captured the gist of every tantalizing image my imagination conjured up. ”

“Then those are the things you should stick with,” my Mistress explained, “the things that bring you joy, challenge your skills, and leave you filled with excitement to work on. I know this is your career and you’ve worked hard to build it and hone your craft, but it’s for that very reason that you should allow yourself to continue to enjoy it along the way.

I’ve heard it said that work isn’t truly work when you are having fun.

That’s the way I’ve always felt about the club. ”

“And it shows,” I replied. “Though I think you were right when you suggested that we could both use a vacation to recharge and allow ourselves some new experiences. I was wondering what you thought about us renting an RV and going on a meandering road trip to nowhere. We could just follow the signs pointing to places

that caught our attention and spend our nights eating under the stars or dining at some unique, off-the-wall little hidden gems that only the locals know about. Bet we ran into some vineyards along the way. What a perfect opportunity to sample new wines and explore all the different ways we can pair them with sumptuous meals and decadent desserts. Maybe we'll even happen upon a music festival along the way or one of those sprawling outdoor flea markets and craft shows.

I've always wanted to see the Grand Canyon and travel up into the mountains just to be closer to the stars.

The best part is that we'll have plenty of time to just be together without being surrounded by hundreds of other people flocking to see tourist attractions and cluttering it up with their noise and camera phone flashes. ”

I reached the end of my ramble, hoping I hadn't overwhelmed her with all my thoughts, but my idea of the perfect vacation wasn't one that placed us in overly populated places where we couldn't relax and be ourselves.

I wanted to do something with her that would let us get to know one another better while making memories together that we'd never forget.

I wanted the only photobombs to be from random, curious animals and nights spent lying in her arms, reminiscing about the day and the regionally specific treats we'd tried, like lime-pickle slushies, which I'd only heard about but would love to try someday.

“That sounds like a wonderful idea,” she said as she swirled the end of a breadstick through the sauce that remained on her plate.

“I'll start looking into RVs and leave you to plan out which direction to head in to start our little adventure.

Something tells me that a trip like that will give us both plenty of opportunities to experience new and interesting things with little chance of getting bored along the way. ”

“I doubt I could ever be bored when I was with you,” I said.

I’d already sopped up the last of my sauce and was busy finishing off what remained of my pesto shrimp bruschetta, the combination so delicious I planned to make a batch the first chance I got.

“I feel the same about you, Kitten,” she replied. “Each day with you is a beautiful awakening, especially when the first sight I see in the morning is your stunning face.”

Her words left me blushing and at a loss for my own, not that there were any eloquent enough to follow up on her statement. Instead, I just smiled and finished the last bite on my plate as the image of holding her while basking in a mountain sunset flittered through my head.

A woman who loved me and an opportunity to tick something off my bucket list—what more did any girl need?

The answer was simple—nothing.

Absolutely nothing.

Chapter Fifteen

Harper

“Patrice?” I shouted from my office. “What do you know about driving an RV?” I’d never driven a recreational vehicle of any kind.

Wide eyes peeked around the doorframe as though I were a wild animal about to attack.

“Did you just ask what I think you did?”

“Ugh,” I tossed the pen down and slunk back into my desk chair. “I may have overpromised on a whim and a beautiful dream.”

“I’m gonna need more than that to figure out what you’ve gotten yourself into.”

“Well, let’s just preface this with the fact I have a hard time saying no to Sonnet.

” Patrice rolled her eyes. “We were discussing our potential vacation, and she came up with a wonderful idea to rent an RV and just go where the roads take us. I got swept up in the amazing story she told and said yes before I realized I’ve never driven anything of that magnitude before. Are there classes I should take first?”

She laughed so fucking hard Simon came running in. “What did I miss?”

“She, her.” All Patrice could do was laugh and point at me.

“I’ve known Harper for twenty years and never found her to be that funny. What are you two baking up in here?”

“I’ve got game.” Though my pout said otherwise.

“Just the fact you said I’ve got game proves you don’t.

Now, what did you do that has Patrice in need of adult diapers, and not the fun kind?

” Great, now Simon thinks he’s got game.

But as soon as I recounted the story, he joined Patrice in their merry band of merriment.

That was a lot of merry in one sentence...

“Jackass One and Jackass Two, can you please control yourselves? I have a real problem here that requires your assistance to remedy.” What was so fucking funny about this? “Never mind, forget I asked. Is everything ready for tonight?”

“No, no,” Patrice tried and failed to catch her breath. “Just give me a sec.” Tears streamed down her face. I grabbed the box of tissues off my desk and launched it in their direction. It hit Simon in the head, for which I felt no remorse.

“Alright,” he rubbed the spot, “I can take a hint. Good luck with your endeavor.” With a final chuckle, he headed back across the hall to his office. Meanwhile, Patrice was still curled in the fetal position, laughing far too hard.

“How are you still finding humor in this?” I saw the error in my question, more of whom I asked the question of, and had switched to internet searches. Those two were useless in this situation, as was this search.

Apparently a Class C vehicle, which was what Sonnet mentioned, doesn't require any special endorsements or training to drive.

Not sure that's wise, but they're the so-called experts.

On the bright side, many of the consignment and RV sellers offered a pay for training course, which, if this was truly what Sonnet wanted, I'd have to sign up for.

But her vision for the ideal vacation really hit me.

It wasn't about tiki torches and fancy drinks for Sonnet.

It was so much more and something no amount of money could buy.

Her desire was for the two of us to bond and enjoy every moment together.

Not sure what I did to appease Aphrodite, but I'd do my best not to fuck it up.

And that included avoiding taking out a forest of trees with my inability to park the big-ass truck.

I joined RV lifestyle chats, downloaded cost analyses to compare, and ordered an RV-ing in America manual, which included all the national parks.

Okay, so maybe this idea had grown on me.

Having been raised in a rural, small town, I'd been labeled an outcast from birth and a weirdo for not fitting into the societal mold.

Men with women, nothing more. Gender labels meant nothing to me, it was the human inside that I was drawn to.

Once word of mine and Simon's lifestyle got back to my parents, they disowned me.

Said I was living the devil's life, going against God's will.

Their words hurt like a son of a bitch, but in hindsight they'd done me a favor by revealing their true colors.

For far too long I'd tried to conform, keeping who I was to myself.

One too many ass beatings will do that to a soul, until I met Simon and was introduced to a whole new world, thus finding myself.

Acceptance makes the heart warm.

As does an adorable redhead with road adventures in her near future.

Speaking of the devil. "Were your ears burning, my love?"

"Should they be, Mistress?" My beautiful girl took her place upon my lap and pressed those shiny pink lips of hers to mine.

"Mmm, hmm. I've been researching the trip you requested." Patrice's evil cackle drifted into my space. "Ignore her, darling, she's a menace."

"Takes one to know one!"

"And evidently twelve again."

"What did I miss? Was this vacation idea dumb? You can tell me."

"My sweet, sweet girl, it is not dumb. My soon-to-be unemployed assistant found

humor in the idea of me driving the vehicle you requested for our trip.” And more laughter from the peanut gallery. “Ignore her. Now, when would you like to hit the road? Do you have any more commissions?”

“Nope, I turned down the bad feeling one and now my gut feels better.”

“As does your Mistress.” I could make a few inquiries and find out who that was, but Sonnet hadn’t asked me to step in, and business was separate from our relationship until it had a detrimental effect on her health. For now, I’d let it go. “Your safety is first priority with me, Kitten.”

“And my orgasms,” the sexy minx giggled.

“My love, that is a given. With or without a contract.” Unfortunately, now wasn’t the time for that, though I did have an idea for later. “Shall we get ready to meet your new fans?”

Sonnet paused and drew her finger along my cleavage. The move I’d learned was one of nerves as opposed to a hint at playtime. And least’s she’d graduated past chewing her lip raw.

“What if they don’t like any of it?” she whispered.

I nudged her chin until she faced me. “Kitten, that isn’t possible. I bet after tonight you get so many commissions you’ll be working on them during our trip.”

“Do you really think so? Will I be able to take my supplies with us? Would that ruin the trip if I did?”

I slowed her brain with a gentle kiss. “Yes to anything and everything, my love. Now, as much as I adore having you perched upon my lap, we must ready ourselves to

greet our guests.” Sonnet hopped up and tugged my hand, suddenly full of excitement.

We took our place near the lobby artwork and Sonnet nervously fidgeted.

“My beauty, you’ve got this.” As the doors opened, gasps filled the air.

“Showtime, my love.” I kissed her cheek and stepped aside as the members meandered toward her paintings.

My presence shouldn’t sway potential purchases, and while most knew we were dating, these conversations were to be had with Sonnet and not with their former mistress.

Occasionally as I mingled with the club members, my gaze wandered toward Sonnet.

I was so ridiculously proud of her for allowing us to display her works.

In the past she said she’d done art shows, but I didn’t get the impression those were events she necessarily enjoyed.

Tonight, she’d stepped way outside of her comfort zone, and that was huge.

This was a big deal for her, and I was elated with the turnout and the solid funnel of guests engaging with her.

Community.

Our lifestyle was rich in support, and now Sonnet was a part of that.

Without a doubt, I knew this would go well for her, and maybe Menotté would

become her own gallery.

As it was, anyone could enter the lobby, but without membership they couldn't cross the threshold of the large, weighted doors that led to our own private oasis.

"Harper," Patrice whispered beside me. "I don't think Sonnet's aware of this, but we've already sold half her pieces."

"That's wonderful, Patrice. She'll be so excited." As was I, filled with overflowing excitement and pride. My precious Kitten will be so happy. "I'll let you be the one to tell her at the end of the night."

"As you wish, Mistress," She curtsied. Such a smartass but a true asset, and I wouldn't have it any other way. Even if she doubted my ability to learn to drive an RV.

"You know," Simon appeared as if out of thin air and handed me a glass of wine. "I was serious about seeing the rest of her pieces."

"They're as amazing as these are. I'm sure you'll find one you like, and if not, commission is always available.

" Visions of Sonnet working in the new studio upstairs warmed me.

Maybe then she'd spend more time here, not that we weren't together several nights a week as it was, but it was split between both homes.

Was I envisioning cohabitating?

Could I live with another after decades alone?

That answer was easy—yes, as long as Sonnet was the one by my side. Filled with warm thoughts of what our future will hold, I decided it was time to rescue and feed my precious Kitten.

“My love, I hate to steal you away, but we have reservations in the club for dinner.” Her eyes lit up, a break was definitely in order.

The resounding round of applause as we entered the club side was overwhelming for Sonnet.

She froze in place as they rose and clapped.

“Sweet girl, this is all for you. Still questioning your abilities?”

“I’ll always be my worst enemy.”

“Without reason,” gently, I wiped away the tears. “Are these happy tears?”

“Yes, very happy, my Mistress.”

I couldn’t help myself, nor would I have if I could, as I took Sonnet in my arms and kissed her in front of everyone. A claiming, if you will, without a collar, but the whistles and cheers intensified the moment I did.

While we dined, I’d enlisted a couple of the staff members to set up the plethora of art supplies and easels I’d rush-ordered in the solarium.

A gift to my Kitten after a hard night of peopling.

Humans weren’t always easy, but art was her Zen and a way for her to unwind after a crazy, busy night.

The moonlight reflecting through the windows will be the perfect backdrop for the reveal. A true night of wonders for my girl.

After dinner, we walked through the club. I lost count of how many times the patrons stopped to chat with Sonnet, each asking if our commissioned pieces were for sale.

“Her business cards are at reception, feel free to take one and schedule a meeting with her to commission pieces if you wish. These inside the club were created just for Menotté.” Anxious to get Sonnet upstairs, I too had had my fill of people.

There was only one person on my agenda for the rest of the evening, the beautiful woman by my side.

Tonight, Sonnet was a bit adventurous and wandered over to the displays. “What will happen if I press this button?”

“You’ll make that boy inside hooked up to the prostate massager very happy.”

She giggled and pressed the button. The sub squealed as his master worked the fleshlight over his erect cock. “Do it again and see what happens.” He was on edge, sweaty and panting, and as soon as she pressed it again, he moaned, thrust forward, and came.

“Oh my, that was, that was something.” Eyes wide as saucers, Sonnet watched as his master unhooked him, took him in his arms, and cradled him as he drank from a bottle of water and settled down from the euphoric high.

I’d witnessed many patrons push the button, and the boy hung on far longer than I thought he would.

“Did you wish to visit the next case?” Behind the next display was a female sub. Her

nipples and clit were hooked up to an electrical stimulation unit. Her Dom winked at me and slid a vibrator inside her vagina.

“Is that completely safe?”

“It is, Kitten, or we wouldn’t allow it. The human body is amazing, and everyone’s level of tolerance for that level of play is different, but I assure you it is very safe.” And every Dom better damn well pay attention to their subs bodies while using it.

Reluctantly, Sonnet pressed the button. The sub’s back arched, and she moaned, “Again.” So Sonnet did. The sub moaned and writhed on the platform.

“Can she come like that? Untouched?”

“You’re about to find out. Press it one last time and see what happens.

” Sonnet missed the slight nod from her Dom, but I hadn’t.

The sub was on edge, and this would likely tip her over.

Sure enough, as soon as Sonnet gave her that final jolt, her hips thrust up and down, riding the vibrator her master controlled as she shivered and moaned while the orgasm coursed through her.

“Take me upstairs, Mistress. Please.”

The big reveal may be delayed until morning.

Chapter Sixteen

Sonnet

I was still riding the high from the night before as we sat down across from where my uncle stood, waiting for us to be seated before he pulled the chair out.

While he'd never been one for socializing, I'd been surprised over the years of living with him to learn that he possessed deeply ingrained, though somewhat old-school, manners.

“Uncle Bruce, I'd like you to meet my girlfriend, Mistress Harper.”

Would he think it weird that I introduced her that way?

It took me a moment to realize that I didn't care.

I was proud of the relationship we were forging, every aspect of it.

The thought of referring to her as just Harper had made my brain trip over itself trying to think of some other way of acknowledging the bond we shared.

It was easier to just be honest, despite not knowing if he was aware of the lifestyle I was now a part of.

He shocked me, as he'd often done when I was a teen, when he inclined his head and reached across the table to shake her hand.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” he said. “And to learn that Sonnet has found someone who will be both protective and encouraging of her.”

“You know what a Mistress is?” I blurted.

“I do,” he acknowledged.

“Wow.”

“Don’t look so surprised, Honey Bun. Your old uncle has been around, even if I have made a practice of keeping you from discovering just how much.”

Stunned, I didn’t know what to say now that he’d made that little revelation.

He smiled one of those rare, charming smiles of his that he’d always reserved for the teachers who’d called him up to the school to complain about me drawing on the backs of my test sheets instead of taking the time to check my answers.

Somehow, he’d always wound up getting me out of whatever trouble I’d got myself into, something I’d always be eternally grateful for.

When I shot a look at my Mistress, seated to my right, I was a little thrown by the fact that it hadn’t disarmed her in any way.

She sat studious and stern as she peered across the table at him, no doubt remembering the conversation we’d had in my apartment, when I’d told her about my early days of living with him.

He didn’t seem thrown by it in the slightest, though, and contentedly sipped his water as he skimmed the menu.

“So, tell me,” he asked as he glanced up. “How did your art show go?”

“Oh my gosh, it was wonderful,” I explained.

“By the end of the night, all but two of the paintings had sold. We’re going to pick new ones out to hang tomorrow, and I have a second studio to work out of in her home.

Mistress Harper surprised me this morning with an amazing space full of light and windows I can stand at to people-watch when I’m in need of inspiration. ”

“Good for you!” he declared, smile growing even brighter. “I always hoped you’d be able to follow your dreams and make a career out of your art the way you wanted to.”

Now that left me with my mouth hanging open as the menu blurred, tears welling up, not only because of his approval but because he’d never said that to me before.

“If that’s the case, then why are you only telling her now how amazing her work is?”

Trust my Mistress to state the very question that had been tumbling through my mind.

His smile slipped then, and his shoulders slumped a little as he shook his head.

“I’m sorry,” he said, his attention solely on me.

“I should have. I should never have listened to some of the idiotic advice I was given not to encourage you to make a career out of being an artist. Even the folks at those damned parenting classes I attempted to take said that while it was good to encourage a child’s creativity, I’d be setting you up for failure if I let you think you’d be able to support yourself in that field. ”

“The whole starving artist assumption,” my Mistress murmured. “I wish people would give up that belief and start to realize that those who are truly skilled will always find a way to attract people to their work.”

“Wish there was someone like you to offer that counterpoint when she was a teen,” my uncle admitted.

“It’s taken me a long time to learn that grinding away in the workforce doesn’t have to be everyone’s fate just because societal norms say that’s what’s expected of us.

The older I get, the more I’ve started to realize that there are plenty of things I’d like to try my hand at and experiences I’ve been putting off that might not be possible if I keep on waiting for the right time or the perfect opportunity.

Gotta say, you’ve inspired my Honey Bun, and if you’ll take a look out the window right there, you’ll see the first of several new changes I’ve made in my life. ”

“What am I looking for?” I asked as I peered through the glass, but all I saw was vehicles in the parking lot, among them a gleaming cherry-red motorcycle.

“See the bike out there, the red one?” he said.

“Holy crap, is that yours?” I gasped.

I couldn’t make out any of the details besides the color, and even then it was only because he’d parked it beneath one of the lights in the middle of the parking lot, but what I could see was shiny and absolutely beautiful.

“Yup,” he replied. “I couldn’t think of a better way to tour the country, meet new people, and see some of the bands I’ve always hoped to catch before they retire or start dying off.”

I stared from him to the bike and back at him, waiting for the punchline, even if I'd never known him to pull pranks like this.

The occasional message written on a useless bit of toilet paper clinging to a near-empty roll giving me shit about never changing it and sad-faced stickers in the bottom of the cereal box after I'd put back less than two inches of cereal, but never anything this elaborate.

"You're serious?" My Mistress said as I sat there silently confused and secretly pleased that he was planning to do something besides ramble around in his old apartment tinkering with little things he rarely finished.

"I am. My lease is up at the end of the month, and I've already sold the shit I don't intend to carry with me," he explained. "It's time to just live life and be thankful for the opportunity, considering there aren't many left in our family beside me and Sonnet."

My Mistress glanced over at me, lips curling up into a smile. "Sounds like road trips run in the family."

"I don't know, I've never been on one," I admitted, "that's why I'm dying to load up in the RV with you."

"Never been on one either," her uncle seconded.

"Never thought I'd want to go on one, either, but the urge started to hit a few years ago, and it's only gotten worse with every birthday that ticks past. Figured that if I put it off any longer, it was never going to happen, so I decided to just go for it."

"Alone?"

“You know me, Honey Bun, I’ve never been a fan of people.”

I sighed at that and smiled across the table at him.

“Yeah, I know, though I kind of always expected you to get a girlfriend once I moved out. I get why you never brought anyone around while I was living there, and I appreciate it. I don’t know how I would have handled someone poking their noses into our lives or trying to tell me what to do, but I will never understand why you stayed single all these years. ”

“I think you will,” he explained. “In time. Think about the way you feel right now, sitting beside Harper. Someone would have to be a fool not to notice how much you already care from her, just from the looks you shoot her when you think she’s not looking.”

“I love her.”

“Exactly.”

“Don’t you want that too?” I asked, confused and a bit sad for him.

“Oh, Honey Bun, I had that a long time ago,” he replied. “After he passed away, I never wanted to open myself up to that kind of heartbreak again.”

“H-he?”

“Was long before you were born,” he explained.

“Is that why you didn’t blink an eye when I told you I liked women?”

“One reason, yes, but your grandparents never blinked when I came out either,” he

explained.

“My mom just warned me to always treat my partner right, and all my old man had to say about it was that he hoped I’d find someone who could put up with my bullshit ‘cause the bulk of his gray hairs had come from me.”

Snorting, I pressed my fingers to my lips and wrestled my laughter back under control while beside me, my Mistress snickered as a very perplexed-looking waitress stepped up to the table and eyed us like we’d lost our minds.

After she’d taken our orders and walked away, I turned my attention back to my uncle.

“Did he?” I asked, suddenly very curious about this secret part of his life my uncle had kept from me. “The man you loved. Did he put up with your, um...”

“My bullshit?” he asked when I didn’t dare finish the sentence while seated at the table beside my Mistress.

“Oh yeah and hit me with a healthy dose of his own, which just made life more interesting.”

“May I ask what happened to him?” My Mistress asked.

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My uncle heaved a heavy sigh at that and nodded.

“Drowned helping to save a couple kids whose idiot friends had either pushed or dared them to jump off the pier into the harbor. We were down there taking a stroll, walking off a decadent meal we’d just indulged in, when we heard them hollering.

He could swim, I couldn’t, so he went in after them while I raced to the nearest phone booth to dial 9-1-1.

Thinking back, that’s the only time in my life when I’d have been grateful to have a cell phone.

Someone else ran to a nearby hardware store, grabbed some rope, and lowered it down to them.

He managed to get the first kid tied on but lost hold of the second when the current swept him out again.

Dustin went back after him and managed to drag him back over by the pier, but by the time he got him secured to the rope, he was too exhausted to hang on to the pylons, and the current took him.

I got there just in time to see him swept away.

Probably would have died that day myself if the guys who’d been helping haul up the kids hadn’t piled on me to keep me from jumping in afterwards.

For a long time, I hated those bastards. ”

“I’m sorry,” I said, feeling nothing but deep, profound sadness for him and terror at the thought of anything ever happening to my beloved Mistress.

“When fate gives you the one , you know it. I’ve always known he was the only one for me,” my uncle explained.

“Made it easy to keep my life simple and uncomplicated. Then you came along, Honey Bun, and I was thankful that the fates had given me someone else to love. I’m so proud of the woman you’ve become.

And now to hear that you and your Mistress are going to head out on the open road and go exploring, well that just makes me prouder.

I’m glad you’re not waiting until you’re old as dust like me to go out and have adventures.

You deserve to have some joy in your life.

I look forward to seeing the pictures of what you two get up to. ”

“I’ll share them on one condition.”

He chuckled at that, cocked his head, and studied me. “Oh yeah, what’s that?”

“You send us pictures of where you wind up and all the bands you see,” she said.

“I want to hear about what the vibe in the crowd was like and if they sounded as good as they do on the radio, and I’ll expect those photos to keep on coming after we get back.

I'm sure I can find plenty of places in the city to share with you, since my Mistress has rarely gone out exploring and I still haven't had a chance to take her to the planetarium yet. ”

“Shocking,” he declared. “And a fair request. I have no intention of losing track of my favorite Honey Bun.”

I giggled at that while my Mistress raised an eyebrow at me. “Okay,” she said, looking between us. “I’ve been dying to ask how she got the nickname Honey Bun.”

“Easy,” he replied. “She could eat a box of them in one sitting and always managed to find them no matter where I hid them, and let me tell you, I got damned creative too. Was worried about giving her too much sugar since those teachers up at the school kept complaining about how she’d get bored in class and couldn’t sit still.

She loved them so much that I didn’t have the heart to stop buying them, ‘cause sometimes a honey bun, a bowl of fruit, and a glass of milk was all we had time for in the morning. Neither of us were morning people, and I worked the second shift, which meant we both slept through our alarms in the morning and wound up rushing around to get her to school on time. I wasn’t gonna send her on an empty stomach, either, and honey buns were easy to eat in the car, so I stocked up. ”

“And I knew it too,” I admitted. “He’d get really cagey about the hiding spots too and never put more than one box in the same place. This one time he stuck them up in the ceiling. We had one in the kitchen with sections. Oh, I forget what they’re called.”

“Drop ceilings,” he explained.

“Yes, those,” I said. “He tried hiding them up there. How unfair was that?”

“And I’m still waiting to hear how you got them down.”

“Probably the same way you got them up there. I stood on a chair to get on the counter and used the back of a spatula to poke at the tiles until the honey buns fell out.”

They both laughed at that, my uncle smacking a hand to his face while my Mistress shook her head.

“How did you figure out that they were up there in the first place?” My Mistress asked.

“Yeah, I’m still wondering about that myself,” my uncle added.

“Easy, Uncle Bruce,” I replied, grinning at him. “You left a footprint on the counter. I couldn’t see any other reason for you to be up there unless you were trying to hide something, so I stood where you stood, and voila .”

Another round of laughter ensued. That poor waitress, the timing always seemed to be just as she was reaching our table.

Like before, she just schooled her features, set our drinks on the table, and left without another word, leaving us to settle in and just enjoy our evening together catching up and sharing plans for the adventures to come.

Wanna hear more about Harper and Sonnet’s vacation? Maybe they even run into Uncle Bruce while on the road?

Coming soon – Harper and Sonnet do America!

Um, err, tour America? ??