

Deadly Captive

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Excerpt:

At the harsh sound of ripping fabric near my head, I frowned and glanced over my shoulder. Joe covered my eyes with a length of shredded sheet and trapped my face with his forearms so he could tie it.

"Stop it." He held my arms at my sides when I tried to remove the blindfold. "I won't make love to you in this dirty cell. Just relax and listen."

I grumbled and strained against his iron grip, then sighed and did as he asked – relaxed and listened.

The darkness brought back the first of my memories, the time he'd taken me wrapped in chains for the amusement of an unseen crowd. His hands on my body, positioning me at an incline with one leg extended and one knee bent, conveyed me to the present. I'd said I trusted him. I meant it.

Finding my arms slack, he placed one across my ribs and the other stretched over my head.

Then, he began to speak.

"There's a place I go when I want some peace, deep in the Sahara. I want to take you there." The deep timbre of his voice took on the soft, lulling quality of a hypnotist, matching his cadences to the sway of an invisible pendant. "The heat of the desert is deadly, rife with centuries' worth of unmarked graves where the victims of the sun and sandstorms lie. There's incredible beauty to be found, but the desert guards it jealously. We brave the journey together, and I leave you for a time to travel just a little further to a small village for supplies. You're too proud to admit it, but you're happy to stay. You know I won't be long."

I could hear him settling down nearby, but my mind fixed on the imagined setting. He continued to paint the scene with words. "The oasis, surrounded by

monstrous golden dunes, is impossible to happen upon by chance. You find shade by the lagoon, under an outcropping of stones smoothed by centuries of sand storms. The rock you lay on is warm and soft as your own flesh. To cool your body, you stretch your legs and dip your toes into water that feels like liquid velvet."

My legs moved of their own accord, and I could almost feel the water on my wiggling toes.

"When I return, laden with huge canvas sacks full of treats I know you'll enjoy, I have to stop for a moment and stare. You look like a desert goddess, wrapped up in a sarong that a native taught you how to tie at one shoulder like a dress. The rich, white fabric covers you like a cloud, and my palms are itching to undo the knots." The heat of his fingers drifted over my shoulder and then receded. "But I don't, because what I want doesn't matter. This is for you." He touched my lips, anticipating my objections. "So I set down my load and fish out all the ingredients I need for a fruity cocktail."

Quiet footsteps padded across the room. Cloth rustled. Liquid sloshed. He came back, lifted my hand, and helped me curl my fingers around a glass. He propped me up and scooted close. The bare flesh of his chest warmed my back. The rim of a glass tipped to my lips. Peach-flavored liquor filled my mouth. Then he took the glass, and it clinked on the floor.

"You savor the drink and smile at me. Tell me you've missed me. There's a sweetness in your smile that cuts through the steel of my heart like a diamond blade."

Tears gathered in my eyes and soaked into the blindfold. I was grateful that he couldn't see them. They didn't belong in his fantasy.

Joe cleared his throat. "A hot breeze rises from the water and your hair, turned red and gold in the sun, spills over my hands, and I'm tempted to cover myself in it. I can't help touching it."

With a little tug, he freed all my hair. His fingers combed through the mass, and loose strands fluttered over my shoulders. I shivered.

"The sun sets, and the air cools. The abrupt change in temperature is a shock to your sun-soaked body. I ask if you want a wrap. You say I am all you need."

I had to tell him. "You are."

"And I know your words come from the depths of your soul. For the first time in my life, I am humbled. I kneel at your feet." His hands wrapped around my feet. His thumbs massaged the soles. "I can tell by the way you're squirming that you want me to cover you with my body." And I was squirming. I could feel the cold. "But I want to take it slow, worship each and every inch of you."

"Damn it, Joe." I tugged at my feet as he locked his hands around my ankles.

His lips closed over my big toe. He sucked and blew at the moisture to send a shiver of sensation up my thighs. "You whisper my name."

"Joe!" I laughed when he lapped a long, wet line up the sole of my foot and groaned when his teeth grazed up one calf. Nerves twitched, absorbing the sweet, placid contact. Taut muscles jumped when he kissed his way down the other calf and went back to lavishing my toes with his tongue. "You're taking this too far."

"You beg for satisfaction, but I hold back." With his hands still shackled to my ankles, Joe rose up on his knees and towered over me, even as he pried my legs apart. "A little."

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