

## DEFENSIVE ZONE

The Dartmouth Cobras  
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### Chapter One

*Celebrity Dish*

by Hayley Turner

*Silver Delgado has abandoned the spotlight—to run a hockey team?*

*I can't say I'm surprised. The child model and supporting actress for Take Me Home started her career in Hollywood followed by rumors of sexy rendezvous with several players from her father's team, so it's obvious that she has a taste for stick welding hotties. The question is, why didn't her father, wealthy financier Anthony Delgado, delegate the team to his eldest daughter, Oriana? Rumors of her upcoming nuptials to the Dartmouth Cobras playmaker, Max "The Catalyst" Perron, say Oriana definitely knows how to handle a player, or three, quite well.*

*Daddy dearest may regret his decision when Silver continues her shameless antics with the players who aren't 'attached' to her sister....unless he's hoping she'll provide a little motivation. And who knows, if she gets bored, perhaps she can design a trendy line of heavy coats and boots!*

*Hollywood's loss is Nova Scotia's gain?*

Silver Delgado crumpled the clip from the tabloid in her fist. A whitewash of cold ran over her flesh as she faced Daddy, but her smile never slipped. "Hayley is a jealous bitch—she thinks I fucked her husband."

"Watch your language, young lady." Her father's golden brown eyes narrowed as he leaned forward in his wheelchair. His red velvet smoking jacket, with its thick black silk collar, masked his frailty well, forcing her to focus on the austere expression which reduced her to the naughty little girl that had disappointed him yet again. "Did you?"

"Did I . . . ? No!" Her skin crawled as she pictured Mr. Turner, not ugly exactly, but definitely disgusting. He licked his lips so often whenever he talked to her it looked like he was drooling. "He hit on me a few times—my agent told Hayley that he was making me uncomfortable and she

had to conduct any future interviews herself. Hayley refused to believe her husband would be that 'unprofessional'."

"I see . . ." Shaking his head, her father rolled to the far end of his rooftop patio. He drew in a raspy breath and waved her over. Gazing out at the picturesque scenery, a clear view over the trees to Lake Banook, glowing under the early morning sun, he spoke quietly. "You earned this reputation, Silver. Whatever this woman has against you, everything in that article is the truth."

*Everything?* She bit back a grin. "So you want me to 'motivate' the players?"

He slapped his hand on the railing. "Don't be obtuse. I want *you* to behave professionally. This family doesn't need any more bad press."

"I know. But—"

"No buts. I hate asking this of you. If I had a son . . . if Antoine wasn't . . ." The lines in his face tightened. "You are all I have left. I need to know I can trust you to represent me, to prove that our family, that our *legacy*, is as strong as ever."

Chewing on her bottom lip, Silver rested her forearms on the railing and stared down at the manicured grounds below. "I'm not all you have, Daddy. Oriana—"

"Do not speak *her* name in my presence. What is it, Silver?" His trembling hand latched onto her arm. "Are you afraid of the responsibility? Please don't be. Think of it as playing a part. You're an actress, aren't you? Smile for the cameras, sign whatever my staff brings to you, and be pleasant with the investors. Learn enough about the game to carry on an intelligent conversation. It shouldn't be too difficult, even for you."

*Yeah, thanks for all that trust, Daddy.* "I'm sure I could do a decent job, but . . . Daddy, you can't be *that* mad at Oriana! She knows the game! She would be perfect for the job!"

"What did I say?" His face reddened and the stark blue veins at his temples throbbed. He slumped into his wheelchair and put his hand over his heart. "Do this for me and I will give you whatever you want. Do you like your condo? There's an extra room for an office so you can work from home whenever you want. My staff will accommodate you. If there's anything else you need, just tell me."

Silver blinked and shook her head. Her eyes teared up as she saw the strong man that had always intimidated her reduced to this. After seeing him in the hospital, inches away from death, all she wanted was to make sure he had time to heal. Did it really matter whether it was her or Oriana who took over the stupid team until then?

"Don't get upset, Daddy. I'll do it. Everything is perfect." She knelt by his side and held his hand to her cheek. "I'm just scared that I'll disappoint you. I don't know anything about hockey."

"Of course you don't, my precious little doll." He smiled and bent over to kiss her forehead. "But you can do this. Just be your beautiful self, keep your legs crossed, and everything will be fine."

*Ouch.* She bowed her head so Daddy wouldn't see her wince. "Okay."

"I like what you're wearing." He tipped her chin up and brushed his hand over her tight bun, his gaze raking over her grey and black pinstripe skirt suit. "If you dress like this every time you go out in public, people will forget your tawdry past and give you the respect a daughter of mine deserves. I suggest you burn the rest of your wardrobe. It killed me to see you strutting around in those trashy outfits. I was advised not to watch your movies. I hope you know you don't have to sell your body any more to make a living. You will receive a monthly allowance to cover all your expenses and more."

*Damn it, I never 'sold my body'.* Fine, some of the parts she'd taken hadn't required much of a wardrobe, but everyone in Hollywood had to start somewhere!

Not that Daddy would understand. So she simply nodded and smiled. "Of course."

Sitting back in his wheelchair, Daddy motioned for her to stand. "One last thing. I'm sure you've heard about the mess last season—last season being when the team was playing?"

She nodded. She wasn't completely brain-dead.

"Roy Kingsley was involved, but he is our biggest investor." Her father studied her face as though to make sure she understood what that meant. He continued at her nod. "If he approaches you, in any way, do your best to make him happy. And I don't mean by sleeping with him. But batting your eyelashes and being sweet may be enough to keep the dirty bastard from pulling his support of the team. Can you manage that?"

*Flirt with the old guy, but don't fuck him. Yeah. I think I can manage.* But hopefully she wouldn't have to deal with him at all. "I can do that."

"Lovely." His head jerked up as the patio door slid open. His jaw ticked. "*They* will have to go."

Silver looked up and inclined her head as Asher, her boyfriend, stepped out beside his boyfriend and tapped his watch.

"I'm very sorry to interrupt." Asher didn't look at her father. After Daddy's ranting about her 'gay boyfriends' at the hospital, he knew better. "But we have to go."

"Not sorry enough not to." Daddy frowned at her. "If you don't go, I suppose there will be talk. Bring your sister the gift Anne bought her. We must keep up appearances. For now."

A quick nod and she scrambled to her feet. Anne, her father's—and now her—secretary, came out to roll him inside. For a split second, Silver was tempted to beg her father to come to Oriana's wedding. But after his last reaction to just hearing her name . . .

*Yeah. Bad idea.*

"You good?" Asher asked as soon as Daddy was out of hearing.

"I'm good." She moved away from him and stood by the tall, glass wall fountain in the center of the patio. It was new. Not something Daddy would have added on his own. She had a bad feeling Anne was making herself *very* comfortable here. "Let's go. I hate this place."

"Aww, doesn't it look the same as the fancy place you grew up in? What is it, new curtains? I'm sure it must be dreadful for you."

She should have kept her mouth shut. Asher had grown up poor. He'd gotten where he was today through hard work, his brains, and playing dirty. She respected him for that, but she wasn't stupid enough to think that he'd understand that her life hadn't been something to envy. As far as he was concerned, if you grew up with enough to eat every day, you had no right to complain.

And he was probably right.

"You're never late for anything, Asher." She gave him a sideways glance and smirked. "I wouldn't want to be responsible for ruining your *perfect* image."

"If I gave a shit about my image, I'd stay away from you." Asher grinned. "Come on. You've gotta get all prettied up. The sister of the bride should look her best, right?"

Pulling off the careless act was easy with Asher. She tossed her head and shrugged. "This is me. Would you expect any less?"

"Nope." Asher hooked his arm to hers and brushed his free hand over the front of his dark blue suit jacket. His crisp, light toned cologne tickled her nose as he gazed longingly towards the entrance. "You know, it's too bad your father doesn't like me. He's got this Hugh Hefner thing going for him. I'd so drop you for him as a sugar daddy!"

"I *did* not just hear that!"

Asher smirked. "I've never done vintage."

"TMI, Asher." She tugged him inside, casting a pleading glance to Cedric who stood by the doorway, silent as a shadow. "Will you talk to him?"

"Why?" Cedric hunched his shoulders and followed a step behind as they made their way through the house. "He does who and what he wants. I'm just here to look pretty."

*Uck, why do I bother?* But at least Cedric's remark shut Asher up. He let her go and slung his arm over Cedric's shoulders. Thirty minutes later, Asher parked his towncar in front of the condominium, then went inside with Cedric, straight into their room, and shut the door.

Silver paused in the hall by the door, wondering, like she always did when Cedric got like this, if she should have said something. What exactly, she didn't know. Cedric and her didn't talk much unless it was about legal stuff.

*Asher can handle him. Go get ready.*

Closing down and dealing with routine stuff, like getting all dolled up, cleared her head of all the drama with both her boyfriends and her father. Time to forget how sick Daddy was. And how miserable Cedric seemed sometimes. A mist of sweet perfume, a bit of powder to on her face to illuminate her complexion, one would think she didn't have a care in the world.

The gilded vanity mirror before her reflected an utterly perfect face and body. Her bright green eyes were fake, but everything else was real, despite her agent's frequent hints about getting a boob job. She turned from side to side. Yep, her pert breast in the snug pink mesh tube top would get the guys drooling even though they weren't huge. She smoothed her hands over her loose hair and took a deep breath.

*It's Oriana's day. All eyes should be on her.*

Little wisps rose from her pale gold locks and she scowled. After spraying hairspray on a bristle brush, she brought it up and clenched her teeth when she noticed the brush shaking. She was shaking. She had to get a grip. A *lot* of the members of the BDSM club where her sister was getting married were players on the hockey team she now owned. If she was going to prance around in front of them looking like a whore, she better act comfortable with the image.

*Not a whore. A sub.* She snickered. As if any man could dominate her. She might pretend with Asher and Cedric, but that was just a game. A role she played when she was in the mood. Granted, she'd directed her sister to a Domme book when she'd had problems with her ex, but that was just because Paul seemed like the submissive type. Or a cheater, but she hadn't had the heart to tell her sister that. Men who didn't want sex either weren't interested in the woman they

were with or they needed someone else to take charge. They could also be gay, but she knew enough gay men to rule Paul out. What she didn't get was how Paul had resisted Oriana. She had a natural beauty that might not make it on the runways, but made men think of more than fucking.

The brush clattered on her dresser top. She braced her hands on the ledge and bowed her head. Was she really going to get all worked up about this? Her sister was happy and Silver was happy for her. Oriana needed the ring. And the collar.

Silver Delgado needed none of that. She was a self-made woman and she had two men who . . . cared about her. She was in control of her own life and that was exactly how she wanted it.

Her pink silk clutch caught her eye. She opened it and took out a small vial, sealed with wax and full of white powder. Gritting her teeth she shoved it back inside the purse and grabbed a lollipop from her stash. *I don't need that anymore.*

But she *did* need a drink. The cherry flavor felt cough syrup thick on her tongue. She plucked it from her mouth and shouted. "Cedric, bring me the rum!"

A couple of minutes later, Asher strode in and handed her the bottle. She smiled and fingered the buttons of his black silk blouse, hoping to distract him from a lecture. He had a thing about women drinking too much.

He took her purse and dumped the contents on the dresser. Picking up the vial, he gave her a sideways glance. "You're still hanging on to this? You know if you get hooked again I'm not fronting the dough. It's a disgusting habit."

"I know that." She shoved her makeup and stuff back into her clutch without looking at him. "Don't worry. I just keep it around so I know it's there. If I don't, I start wondering where I can find more. It's complicated."

"Whatever. Are you ready?" He put his hands on his expensive black jean clad hips. "You look good."

"Thank you." She turned to the mirror and ran her hands over her thighs to make sure her pink booty shorts didn't ride up. Archer wasn't looking, but sometimes he did. He might be gay, but for some reason he was still interested in her. Which made him bi as far as most of his friends were concerned, but he joked that he wouldn't go *that* far. She was different. Not just another pussy.

She liked to think she was special. He loved Cedric. And just maybe loved her too.

"I've never played the Dom in front of anyone." Asher tucked his thumbs into his pockets and rocked on the heels of his shiny Italian loafers. "Anything I should know?"

*As if I know?* She slid open the top drawer of her dresser and grabbed the collar that went with her outfit. Pink and black studded leather. She held it out to him. "You do just fine showing the leatherguys that you're the 'top'."

"That's not the same and you know it."

All right, the dick chastity belt that Asher made Cedric wear to their meetings—which she couldn't attend—was a bit more than she wanted, but dominance was dominance, no? She just didn't want to seem available. She stuck the lollipop back in her mouth and wrinkled her nose. *Not to the 'real' Doms.*

"Just pretend you own me. Okay?" She shoveled all her belongings into her purse and sucked harder on the lollypop. "This is about Oriana."

"That's funny." Asher lifted her hair off her back and laid a soft kiss on her shoulder. "Because dressed like that, I'm thinking you'll get most of the attention. Which is exactly what you want."

"No it isn't! This is how subs dress!"

"For their *Master's* pleasure. So he can show off." Asher shook his head. "Why don't you wear that little red number you got from your shopping spree in Italy? It's quality and it's what I'd have you wear if you were really my sub. This outfit costs less than my socks."

"You're such a snob." She held her hair out of the way and let him put on her collar. "And I'm not your sub, so you don't get to tell me what to wear. That dress makes me look like a streetwalker."

"And this doesn't?"

"Fuck you!"

Asher laughed. "Not tonight, angel-face. I've already had my fill. Had to make sure Cedric was sated before I locked his cock." He chuckled at the face she made before leaving the room with a nonchalant. "You know I don't like sharing him."

*Like you'd let me forget.* Cedric wasn't even allowed to play with her much unless Asher was in the mood to watch him take her ass. Her thighs clenched as she recalled the last time. As usual, sex was good with either man, but . . . well parts of her were neglected. Asher stimulated her clit to get her off, acting like it was a chore. Her 'girly bits' did nothing for him. Of course,

she had plenty of toys when she wanted to feel full in the most basic way, but it wasn't the same. For once it would be nice to have a man want her as a woman.

Which could happen tonight if that's what she *really* wanted. Asher wouldn't stop her from going home with another man, he wasn't possessive of *her*. The thing was . . . damn, finding a man at a BDSM club?

Taking a deep breath, she leaned closer to the mirror and tapped her bottom lip with a finger to make sure her lipstick was dry. Then she applied a generous coat of gloss and smacked her lips. *Perfect.*

She uncapped the rum and moved the lollipop to one side of her mouth so she could take a few good swigs from the bottle. Sweet fire burned through her and she closed her eyes to absorb it. Once the sensation faded she felt calm. In control.

Maybe, this time, she could be the one who did all the right things. She'd always been the trouble-maker, the wild one, too irresponsible for anyone to ask for anything from. Maybe if she could prove she'd changed, daddy wouldn't regret putting his faith in her. For once maybe *she* could be the good one.

*You're going to a kinky club to watch your sister essentially marry two—three?—guys. And then there's your gay boyfriends. If you're going to be the good one, shouldn't you dump them and find a 'normal' guy?*

Well, daddy didn't need to know what she did for fun. She took another swig from the bottle and winked at her reflection.

*Never said I'd be that good!*

\* \* \* \*

Leather, sex, and . . . carnations? Dean Richter rubbed his eyes with his thumb and forefinger, then undid the top button of his black dress shirt. Blades & Ice, the notorious hard core BDSM club—*his* hard core BDSM club—looked like it had been attacked by Martha-fucking-Stewart. White ribbons, flame colored bouquets, and a woven wood arch. Tim had opened the place at 5am so Max Perron, the groom, and, more importantly, the Dartmouth Cobra's best assist man, could set things up for his wedding. Max had been perfectly willing to rent a hall, but Tim had insisted the club was the perfect place for the ceremony.



*Thanks, Tim.* Dean leaned over the bar across from the insanity and glared at his half-brother, who'd dragged the entire staff into decorating. *I'm going to make your wife twist your ball sack with rubber elastics, bro.*

A whimper drew his gaze to the doorway of a playroom just off the bar area.

Sloan Callahan, the Cobra's captain, forced Oriana Delgado, bride-to-be, to her knees. "You're spoiling the surprise. Max won't be happy."

"Please don't tell him."

"Give me one reason I shouldn't."

Oriana licked her bottom lip and her tone turned husky. "You're hurting me, Sloan."

Letting out a strangled laugh, Callahan released her. "Tease. We'll have our fun after the ceremony, not before."

"So we can't do *anything*?" Oriana undid the top button of Callahan's leathers. "At all?"

"Not unless you want to be upgraded from the flogger to the whip, love." Callahan smoothed his hand over Oriana's loose, shimmering bronze hair. "Dominik decided that was a fitting penalty."

"Oh no!" Oriana giggled and pulled the zipper down with her teeth. Her tongue darted out over the head of his cock. "To tell you the truth, I think he said that because he knows I'm ready."

Callahan's bare chest and stomach muscle tensed as he wound her hair around his fist. "Are you?"

Rather than answer, Oriana licked Callahan's dick with her lips and tongue, taking him so deep Dean couldn't help but stare.

*Damn. Out of Delgado's daughters, she's the last one I would have thought could . . .* He tore his gaze from the pair and tapped the bar for another beer. No matter how often Oriana came to the club with her men, he still couldn't quite fit the image of the 'sexually retarded' woman—as her ex-boyfriend and his ex-coach, Paul Stanton, had called her—and the beautifully submissive woman he'd come to know, in his head. Paul Stanton was the retard.

Then again, she wasn't submissive enough for his tastes. As long as she didn't break the club rules, it didn't really matter, but sometimes he found himself scratching his head when he saw what Dominik Mason, the Cobra's best blueliner and the man who'd collar her after Perron married her, put up with. Mason was a damn good Master—how could he let Perron and

Callahan be so lax with discipline? The diminutive sub liked to top from the bottom, and even though she was usually reprimanded, Dean knew with Dominik alone she'd have been broken of the habit.

*That's what you get for sharing a woman.* He inclined his head to the scrawny bartender, who wore nothing but a leather cup and straps, and took his beer. Leaning one elbow on the bar, he surveyed the room with mounting disgust. The whole thing stank of a spoiled sub getting her own way. Only, Oriana *wasn't* spoiled and her Doms had tormented her excessively to get her to spill the details of her dream wedding. Which had been fun to watch. But the results had him on sugar overload.

"Bad time?" A young man in a stylish, yet understated black suit—likely tailored to fit over those massive shoulders and long frame—took a seat across from him and gestured to the bartender for some of what Dean was having. His crew cut and the hard edge that stole some youth from his face gave him the appearance of a soldier on leave. A faint French accent and an easy smile lightened his stalk demeanor. "I have to admit, this isn't what I expected."

It took Dean less than a second to figure out who the man was. Landon Bower, the Cobra's new goaltender. Twenty-five and at the top of his game, Bower had been stuck on Montreal's farm team in Hamilton his whole career. The Cobras were desperate for a starting goaltender and Bower was everything they needed. Talented and kinky. The kink wasn't a requirement, but it made things easier. A good third of the team was in the lifestyle in one way or another. It wasn't exactly conventional for a team's general manager to seek out players with certain sexual . . . *leanings*, but it tightened the ranks, which was exactly what Dean wanted.

"This is not what my club usually looks like." Dean motioned towards the set up with his bottle. "Delgado's daughter is getting married to one of the players, and getting collared by another. My brother, your coach, thought it would be good for the team to do it here."

"And you don't agree?" Bower took his beer from the bartender and frowned when the man gave him a swift once over. Straight then. He held the bartender's eye until the sub ducked his head and scuttled away. Then he swiveled in his chair to face Dean. "You have a problem with polyamory?"

"Not at all." Dean frowned. "You?"

"No. I've shared. I see the appeal." Bower paused and took a sip of his beer. "But I've never found a sub that would make the complications worth the headache. Takes a bit more work, in my opinion. One on one is hard enough."

"Very true." Dean tipped his beer bottle to clink it to Bower's. He liked the man already. "So you leave someone special in Gaspé or Hamilton?"

"Would that be a problem?"

"Only if it distracts you from the game."

Bower grinned. "Nothing distracts me." He angled his bottle towards the club's packed entry. "Mon Dieu, I might find someone to help pass the time, though."

At the front desk, probably filling out the club's required waver, a petite blond with an ass-to-die-for covered in snug pink booty shorts bent over.

Dean admired the view and thumped his fist on the bar. "Well now. Perhaps the night isn't a complete loss after all. I'll admit, Bower, this whole wedding thing doesn't do it for me. But if it brings in some fresh meat like that—"

"I wouldn't want to alienate myself by competing with my GM for a woman." Bower cocked his head. "Not that either of us have a shot. Looks like she's taken."

Two slender men came up to fill in the forms beside the woman. The one in snug black jeans and a black silk shirt put a possessive hand on her waist, then laughed out loud and pushed her away. Then he moved in behind the man in leather chaps and a chastity belt, carrying a large white gift box topped with a huge white bow, and whispered something in his ear.

"Look at little closer, Bower." Dean's lips curved into a sardonic smile. "She's not taken. She's here with her gay friends. Probably a safety thing. Which makes her hot *and* smart."

Bower didn't say a word. Face impassive, he seemed to study the men like they were opponents in possession of the puck.

With her back still to them, the woman adjusted the collar of the apparent dominant's shirt and then rubbed her face against his arm like a kitten demanding attention. The dominant raked his fingers into her hair and pulled her in for a rough kiss.

"I'd say the dynamic of their relationship is a tad off balance, but she's with them." Bower shrugged. "You've got unattached subs here, right?"

Dean kept his gaze locked on the woman and found he couldn't look away. His gaze trailed her as she made her way through the crowd filtering into the main room and settling on the long

wood benches that had temporarily replaced all the crossed and stocks and spanking benches. Something about her had every protective instinct within clawing past reason and demanding he see more. He considered himself an observant man. First impressions spoke volumes. Even from across the room, he could sense the connection between the men. The woman seemed like an afterthought, despite the passionate kiss.

*You're reaching, Richter.* Letting out a grunt, he nodded. "I've got plenty. I'll introduce you to a couple after the ceremony."

"I'm good with one," Bower said.

One brow arched, Dean regarded Bower, his tone dead serious. "You wanna make good with your GM? Do me a favor and take at least two off my hands. My most popular Dom and two of his trainees just took themselves off the market. There will be a number of needy subs and I won't have them leaving here all depressed because they didn't get the coveted ring-collar-picket fence combo."

"Well since you put it that way." Bower grinned. "I suppose I can take one—or two—for the team."

"For the team." *Time to get down to business.* "I spoke to Noah—thank you for providing the reference, by the way, your agent was smart to include a man I know personally on that very long list to vouch for you, it makes getting you settled in much easier. Anyway, he told me you're pretty good with eletroplay. I've gone to few workshops, but haven't gotten comfortable enough to start fooling around with the TENS or the wand. Think you could teach me?"

"Be glad to." Bower reached down, then lifted a metal case onto the bar. "I've got all the stuff for some demos, and I know a man who can supply you with more whenever you're ready."

"Perfect."

"Under one condition."

Dean's brow furrowed. "What?"

Bower took a deep breath. "Teach me how to use a whip. I . . . well fuck, I tried to convince myself I wasn't into giving pain. But I'm done pretending. I came out here because you guys offered the chance to accept who I am. I'm tired of playing with the light stuff."

"Electroplay isn't considered light."

"Yeah, well I've always had a thing for the charge—I've been messing around with it since I was a kid. I learned a bit about the ropes and discipline, but I want more." Bower frowned at his

bottle. "I want to be able to offer a sub whatever she needs. I've had a few who like playing hard and fast, and I hate sending them to someone else because I lack the skills. Sharing is one thing, but when you're doing it because you're not good enough—"

"I got it." Hell, why not? He liked training and this would work out well for them both. He'd learn a new skill and he'd teach one of the most important men on his team not only how to wield a whip, but to accept the darker parts of himself. "Actually, unless I'm mistaken, the ceremony will end with one of my pupils using the whip on the new bride. Should be quite a show."

Bower's expression shifted, turning eager and almost feral. "I can't wait."

"You're gonna fit right in, Bower." Dean lifted his beer. "To the game, on and off the ice."

"To the game."

The faint music playing in the background changed. Romantic instrumentals to tell one and all things were about to get started.

And for the first time that day, Dean was looking forward to what laid ahead.

But as he made his way to the benches, the neglected sub in pink plagued his thoughts. Maybe he didn't understand her relationship with the men she'd come with. Maybe he was wasting his time.

Still, before the night was over, he'd meet her. Find out if he could give her what she needed.

Because the Dom in him knew, without a doubt, she wasn't getting it.

Yet.

## Chapter Two

"Oh my God, Oriana! You look amazing!" Silver burst into the small office turned changing room, the words leaving her mouth before she even saw her sister. Oriana had always been self-conscious about her appearance, and had no sense of style, so Silver wasn't expecting much. Off the rack at best, hopefully form-fitting?

*She'd have something beautiful if she'd have let me help her.*

Oriana hadn't wanted any help. She'd said Silver had enough to do with the move and the business. She'd insisted her and the men could handle it. As if men had any clue about wedding dresses!

*They did a pretty damn good job setting up the club without your input. Fine, most of the people look like they're going to a kinky funeral . . .* Almost everyone had either gone with black leather, suits, or outfits much like Cedric's. More than one sub, male and female, wore some kind of chastity belt and little else. She'd have stood out less if she'd stripped at the door. But the set up itself was pretty classy. *Some men have good tastes. Look at Asher.*

Still, she would have liked to be involved. She'd hinted at Oriana needing a bridesmaid—all her sister's friends were in Montreal, and none had been able to take time off school to attend—but Oriana insisted she didn't need one. Fine, so Silver wouldn't 'officially' have a place in the wedding, but she'd looked up some local caterers and florists anyway, emailing the information to Oriana just in case she needed them. She even gotten a bunch of wedding magazines and swung by Max's place to drop them off—with Dominik, after he told her Oriana was a little under the weather.

Oriana had called to thank her that evening. The phone call had been short and tense, but she'd pretended not to notice. Oriana was probably stressed because the press had latched onto the unconventional event, drawing the kind of attention her sister had always been uncomfortable with. Which she wouldn't want to talk to Silver about since she thrived on the spotlight.

*Well, the press isn't here and Oriana deserves to be in the spotlight. Maybe she'll let me do her makeup . . .* She fixed a cheerful smile on her lips and looked around. Oriana stood by the window, holding the thick black curtains together, head bowed. Then she squared her shoulders and turned.

The vision of her sister took her breath away.

In a long white, one-shoulder gown, cutaway to reveal the bottom halves of her breasts, Oriana looked like a bride more prepared for the wedding night than a walk down the aisle. A short zipper was the only thing holding the dress together from the cutout to the where the skirt was slit a one hip. Her natural olive toned skin, which she'd inherited from their father, made her look exotic, like the woman in Silver's favorite painting, the *Gitana* by Fabien Perez, which one of her friends in LA bragged that she'd gotten from the artist himself. While some might envy Silver's fair, flawless complexion, she'd always longed for that honey-gold glow.

Her lips moved, but no sound came at first. Whoever thought Silver was the better-looking Delgado sister had never seen Oriana like this. She shook her head and whispered, "Wow."

"Thank you." Oriana gave her a tight smile and touched her partial updo, lightly fingering the wreath of baby's breath. "I take it you approve?"

"Oh, Oriana . . ." Silver held her hands out, palms up as she approached her sister. "I always knew you'd make a beautiful bride. Max is a lucky man."

Oriana hesitated, then took her hands and squeezed. "What about Dominik? And Sloan?"

"Them too," Silver said, quickly. She didn't like Sloan, but now wasn't the time to let her personal bias show. And really, he'd chosen the better sister. "Is that what you've been so worried about? Did you think I'd judge you for being with the three of them?"

Shrugging, Oriana pulled away. "We were going to have a normal ceremony at first—for me and Max. Just so our father could . . . but he refused to come."

Silver bit her bottom lip. "Daddy's just old-fashioned. I tried to talk to him—"

"I *don't* need you talking to him for me." Oriana's eyes, only a shade lighter than their father's, turned hard and distant. "Stay out of it."

Silver swallowed and nodded. "All right." She fiddled with her clutch. "I was going to offer to do your makeup, but it's perfect."

"Yep." Oriana folded her arms over her chest. "I'm pretty much done here."

"That's . . . good. Do you want me to stay until things get started?"

"No. The ceremony will start in a couple of minutes." Letting out a sigh, Oriana moved towards the large desk and picked up her flowers. "Unless there was something you wanted to talk about? Have you settled in okay?"

"Yes." Silver moved away from the door and rested her hip on the edge of the desk. "Not that there was much setting up to do. The new condo Daddy bought was fully furnished. Once my

stuff was shipped in from Hollywood it felt just like home. I even managed to fix up the office in the forum. I haven't gotten a chance to go over all the paperwork, but with Anne's help it won't take me long to—"

"I'm sorry, I just realized I need a few moments alone." Oriana's clipped tone froze Silver's words like jagged lumps of ice in her throat. "If you could go take a seat with the rest of the guests?"

Silver blinked, nodded, and backed out of the room. Her shoulder hit the door jamb and her lips formed another 'I'm sorry', but Oriana had returned to the window.

*Damn me and my big mouth.*

She knew Oriana wasn't okay with her taking over ownership of the team for their father.

*You just don't think.*

Then again, that wouldn't surprise Oriana. Everyone knew Silver was spoiled and selfish. And she knew Oriana would forgive her, just like she always did. She stared at her sister's stiff back for a while, then retreated.

Making her way to the main room, Silver spotted Asher and Cedric seated near the end of the aisle. The Dartmouth Cobra players took up most of the front seats. By right, the sister of the bride should be up there.

But Oriana didn't need her family anymore. She had a new one.

Loving and loyal. Exactly what she deserved.

*So where do you fit in?*

She didn't—not yet anyway. Reality hit her and she forced the tension from her body and leaned against Asher. Honestly, she shouldn't have expected everything to be all right with her sister—they'd hardly spoken since her return. Being like real sisters again would take some work.

Starting tonight she would show Oriana she wanted that again. After all, she was the one who'd left, who'd decided she needed her freedom more than she needed anyone. She'd abandoned the sister who'd practically raised her, leaving her to deal with Daddy and all his issues alone.

*But I'm back. And I'm not going anywhere.*

\* \* \* \*



Dean rubbed his hands on his knees and sat up straight. Aside from the bride walking down the aisle in a dress that had several of the players adjusting themselves in their seats the ceremony was as long and dull as he'd expected. It reminded him of an ex-girlfriend who'd been into soaps. She'd be sitting there, all teary eyed, mumbling about how *finally* the current super-couple was getting their dream wedding. And he'd be forced to sit there, feigning interest while the priest went on and on for three episodes. Sappy personal vows would be exchanged and the couple would rush out while the cast cheered and blew bubbles at them because rice was bad for the stupid birds.

Unless something interesting happened. Like the bride getting shot or someone in the crowd stood up and claimed to be having the groom's baby.

No such luck. Not that he wanted Oriana to get shot, but the minister . . .

*Hell, is he reading the extended version?*

The wedding ended. The collaring began. A bit more to the point, but Dominik seemed determined to cover everything. He included Max and Sloan in the ceremony, having Sloan cuff Oriana while Max braided her hair up and out of the way. She knelt and Dominik placed the collar around her throat. The small lock clicked and Dominik hung the key around his neck on a black ribbon.

"You belong to us, love," Sloan said, loud enough for everyone to hear. "Tonight you submit to our pleasure—whatever it may be. Do you give your consent?"

Oriana's cheeks glistened with tears as she tipped her head back. "Yes. But—"

Dominik frowned. "But?"

*Well, this just got interesting.* Dean leaned forward.

"I don't want to wait for your mark, Sloan." Oriana took a deep breath. "I want something tonight. Something that won't fade in a day or two."

"Are you sure?" Sloan laid his hands over her cheeks, using his thumb to wipe away her tears. "I'm happy to oblige, bunny, but I don't want you to regret it tomorrow when you're not all emotional. People could see it, it's still pretty warm out."

"I don't care—let them see." Oriana closed her eyes and touched her collar. "I need you to be part of this."

"I am." Sloan straightened. "And I will be. Dominik and Max will chain you for me, babe. Is that okay?"

Oriana shuddered. "That's perfect."

The foursome moved to a playroom and the crowd followed as one without being invited. Dean stood in the doorway and glanced over at his brother as he and his wife approached.

"Was my wedding this long?"

Tim made a face. "Your divorce was longer. I think the four of them will make it work, don't you?"

Despite being bored out of his mind, Dean had to admit he could see the men really loved Oriana. And she loved them back without restraint. His wife had never been like that. She'd taken his ring and his collar, but she'd always held part of herself back. As soon as their daughter had grown up enough for her to gain some independence, his wife had decided she wanted the same. For years he'd told her to find her own interests, to be more than a stay-at-home mother—which she obviously hated being—and his sub. She'd insisted she had everything she wanted, then suddenly decided she wanted none of it. She walked out on him in search of a carefree life and ditched her daughter because, as she'd said, she'd never really wanted to be a mother. In front of their sixteen year old daughter.

Seeing the utterly crushed look on his daughter's face had hardened Dean's heart. He'd signed the divorce papers. But that hadn't been enough. His wife needed his money to have her fun. He'd resisted at first, but the long court battle had taken their toll on his daughter and he'd finally given in. Let the bitch have the money. His daughter needed to know someone still wanted *her*.

He'd been blind when it came to his wife, but he didn't think Oriana's men had that problem with her. She was as open and honest as they came.

"They'll work." Dean jabbed his thumbs into the pockets of his leathers and wrenched his thoughts away from the past. "Not what I'd want, but I've never met a woman like Oriana. It's hard to believe she's Delgado's kid."

"Can't argue that." Tim pressed a light kiss on his wife's brow. "But some of us are lucky and get the pick of the litter. My baby has a messed up family too, but she rose above it. You wouldn't want to know her siblings, or her parents. But coming from them made her a strong woman you can't help but admire."

This was true. Tim didn't tell him much, but he'd done enough scenes with Tim's wife, enough after care before Tim took her away for the sexual stuff, to have learned a bit.

For the past two years, he'd kept scenes nice and impersonal. Platonic with Tim's wife, exploring a bit of pain, and purely sexual with the subs that came to the club not wanting a commitment. Maybe one day he'd meet a woman who would fit into his life in the way his wife never could, but he was perfectly happy without that now. He didn't need more.

Not yet.

Then again, he was open to the possibility. The woman in pink, for example. He hadn't seen her since he and Landon had watched her filling in the forms, but if she proved to be available as he thought she was . . .

Well, he might make an exception for her. He pictured her kneeling at his feet, naked, ready for more than just the vanilla with a bit of kink he'd settle for of late. A brief glimpse of what she had convinced him he had something to offer her. Even if only tonight.

\* \* \* \*

Silver swallowed convulsively, fighting not to jump every time Sloan's whip hit her sister's bare flesh. Her cheeks had heated slightly when Oriana had been stripped, and she hadn't wanted to look at first, but as each sharp *Crack!* got louder she couldn't stop herself from staring at the long, red welts on her sister's back, butt, and thighs.

So far, so good. After all, Silver had been to plenty of BDSM and fetish clubs, she'd seen people whipped before. Of course, all the places she'd gone to had been more glamorous than Blades & Ice. The few men that had used a flogger or a paddle on her ass before fucking her knew better than to leave marks. She always had a list of limits a mile long when she played.

*Looks like Oriana has a shorter list.* A mocking voice said as she watched Sloan pause and kneel to kiss an unmarked spot on Oriana's hip. He stroke up her thigh and tipped his head back to say something only Oriana could hear.

Oriana nodded.

As Sloan straightened, a sick feeling of dread pooled in Silver's gut. She dug her nails into her palm and glanced over at Asher—who was kissing Cedric and completely oblivious to everyone else in the room. Other people were making out or . . . more. Apparently watching the scene had gotten a few people hot.

But these people didn't know Oriana. Oriana always put other's needs before her own. She would let Sloan push her further and further, never asking him to stop, if she thought it was what he wanted. And Sloan was just the type of asshole to take advantage of her passive nature.

*Oriana's not stupid. Maybe this is what she wants.*

Silver fumbled with her purse and took out a lollipop.

The whip snaked out over Sloan's head, came down in a black blur, and curled around Oriana's hip. Oriana gasped. A thin line of blood trickled.

Silver dropped the lollipop and rushed forward. "You son-of-a-bitch!"

Sloan froze and stared at Silver. "What—"

*Smack!* Her palm went numb and she watched her handprint on his face darken to a bright red, shocked, but not satisfied. If only she was big enough, strong enough, to do some real damage. To make *him* bleed.

The crowd had gone silent. And not one member of the team Oriana cared about so much moved to help her. *Fucking cowards! Afraid to stand up to your Captain?*

Well she wasn't.

"Get away from her!" When Sloan didn't budge, Silver snatched the whip from his hand and threw it across the room. "She trusts you! How could you do that to her?"

His dark eyes narrowed. "Silver—"

"Don't 'Silver' me! You don't fucking scare me, Sloan." She poked him in the center of his bare chest. "The worst thing is, I was willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. But you're the same arrogant bastard you've always been. I think we both know exactly why you enjoy beating on women, don't we? Does Oriana know you're an impotent freak? Is that why she needs Max and Dominik?"

The area around the handprint on Sloan's face turned a darker shade of red. When he didn't say anything she looked over at Max, who was standing in front of Oriana, speaking softly, and Dominik who was watching the crowd expectantly.

"Dominik, are you seriously going to put up with him treating her like this?"

The big black man ignored her.

Rage bubbled up inside and she moved to get his attention.

Suddenly, Sloan's hand shot out. He hooked a finger to her collar. "Who are you here with?"

"Excuse me?" She pried at his fingers in an effort to get free, but his hand seemed like one solid piece of iron. "Why does it matter?"

"Subs in this club don't disrespect Doms and get away with it." He jerked her collar. "Don't. Move."

All the blood left her face. She went still.

"Where's your Master?"

"He's there." She pointed at Asher, pleading with her eyes for him to come get her away from Sloan. *Fuck not being scared. This guy's crazy!*

Asher's eyes went big and round. He shook his head. "Look, man. We're not . . . I can't . . . Damn, she was just worried about her sister. Give her a break."

"Are you refusing to punish her?" Sloan threw his head back and laughed at Asher's nod. "Why am I not surprised? You treat BDSM like you do everything else, Silver? Like it's one big fucking game? Was coming here as a sub just your idea of playing dress up?"

"You better watch it Sloan," Silver said, doing her best to sound brave even though, for the first time in her life, she was the center of attention and really just wanted to disappear. Everyone was staring at her like *she'd* done something wrong. "I'm your boss."

"And I give a shit?" Sloan caught someone's eye and Silver tried to twist around to see who. "You dealing with this or are we just kicking her out?"

"That's entirely up to her." The man's voice was deep, just gruff enough to be sexy, but it was the edge, the way he spoke as though obedience was a given, that made goose bumps rise all over her flesh. "I'll give you a choice, Silver. Sloan, you can let her go."

As soon as she was released, Silver shuffled away from Sloan, careful not to get too close to—*shitshitshit*—Dean Richter. Even over the phone, the man intimidated her, but it had been easy to come off as unimpressed without his sharp, hazel eyes locked on her, seeing everything she tried to hide.

"Are you listening to me?"

Silver evaded his steady gaze and tried to see around him. "Oriana?"

Dean glanced over his shoulder. "She's fine. Perron, Mason, would you please take Oriana to another room to come down?" He smiled. "It looks like she managed to stay in a good place."

Neither Max nor Dominik said anything, but moments later a door at the other side of the room opened and closed.

Sloan stared in the direction of the door, then looked at Dean. "I'll leave this to you. I need to be there when Oriana's head clears."

"Go ahead," Dean said.

Once Sloan disappeared, Silver managed to hike her chin up and look Dean in the eye. "I want to go with them." Her pulse quickened. "Please. Just let me see if she's all right."

"So polite now." Dean circled her slowly, close enough that his leather pants brushed her thighs and his breath stirred her hair. "You're used to getting your own way, aren't you, Silver?"

*As if that's a bad thing?* "You said you were giving me a choice."

"I am." Dean stopped at her side. The fine lines on his cheeks smoothed away as his expression went blank. "Your choices are leave my club and don't ever come back, or accept whatever punishment I choose to give you."

"Punishment for what?"

"You're dating two lawyers and you don't know better than to sign something without reading it?" One brow arched, tone light, he seemed to be laughing at her.

A few people in the crowd did.

Deep, deep breaths and an eye roll kept the tears back. "I wasn't planning to do a scene tonight. I didn't think it was all that important."

"What you signed applies to every time you come here."

"Then I won't come back."

"Very well." He stepped aside. "You may leave."

For some reason, everything inside her rebelled against the very idea of walking out. And she couldn't quite figure out why.

*Oriana. You're just worried about Oriana.*

"I'm not going anywhere until I see my sister." She put her hands on her hips. "Things will be very unpleasant at work if you won't be reasonable."

"Don't threaten me, Silver."

"You should call me Miss Delgado."

Dean let out a gruff laugh. "I don't think so, pet. But while you're still here, I suggest you refer to me as either Master or Sir."

"Why should I?" She sniffed and gave him a swift, detached once over. "Like Sloan said, I not a real sub."

"Aren't you?" He took a step forward and she took two quick steps back. He closed the distance between them and put his finger under her chin before she could move again. "Stop."

Her knees locked and she made a small sound in her throat as tiny fluttery things danced inside her belly at his command. She struggled against the clenching down low, but she couldn't stop herself from leaning, just slightly, towards him.

"There are things you could learn about yourself here, Silver. Things I and other Masters with experience could teach you. Have you ever been restrained?"

"Yes."

His eyes narrowed. "Respectfully, Silver."

She sighed. "Yes, Sir."

"Ropes or cuffs?"

"I hardly see why I would tell you—"

"You will tell me." His hand framed her jaw in a firm, but not painful hold. "And you will *not* question me again."

Her mouth went dry. Her eyes wide. She was almost panting. "Cuffs. Handcuffs."

"What else have you done?"

Mind racing, she went over her considerable experience and tried to figure out a way to answer that wouldn't make her sound like a slut. His dark look didn't give her the impression she could make something up so she went with vague. "Everything. I've tried a bit of everything."

"Everything?" His brow shot up. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

People were laughing at her again. She wanted to scream, to throw something—but she had a feeling that would only get her in more trouble. Tears of frustration blinded her. One spilled down her cheek.

"Stay with me, pet. I'm the one you need to impress, not them." Dean used his thumb to wipe the tear away. "I've been in this lifestyle for about fifteen years and *I* haven't done everything. You've barely had a taste."

"Fine." She wet her lips with her tongue. "But that doesn't mean I *want* to do more."

Dean let his hand fall to his side. "Then the choice is clear, isn't it?"

*Yeah. Clear as fucking mud.* Seriously, why even discuss all this with him? If she stayed, he would punish her. And it wouldn't be all fun and games. She could walk out with her pride barely bruised—impressing him didn't matter.

Shouldn't matter.

But it did.

"If I stay—"

"Silver." Asher called, warily eyeing Dean who still hadn't moved. "Let's just get out of here. There are other clubs."

Several murmurs of accord came from the dwindling crowd. They were getting bored of her. No one wanted her here and the entertainment value had passed.

"If you stay?" Dean prompted, as though he hadn't heard anything but her words. The flesh around his eyes crinkled slightly and a dark strand escaped his neatly parted hair to rest on his forehead. The touch of grey over his ears gave him a distinguished look, but that unruly strand made him seem a little more approachable. And his tone wasn't mocking at all. Actually, it was warm, kinda nice.

Still, she shook her head. She couldn't finish that sentence.

He put his hands on her shoulders and suddenly it seemed like they were the only two people in the room. Like his opinion *was* all that mattered. "Hear me now, Silver. I will be very disappointed if you take the easy way out. I think you're stronger than that. But I won't force you. You can go home with your boyfriends and have a pleasant evening."

She winced. Sure, going home with Asher and Cedric would be . . . pleasant. All she had to do was make sure they didn't forget she was there. Getting punished would be better.

She gulped as she resolved herself to her decision. *Maybe*.

"All right." She took a deep breath and rushed through the rest. "So long as it doesn't get too . . . personal." She forced a smile. "I'm not available."

"That remains to be seen." Dean muttered before he squared his shoulder and glanced over at Asher. "You may stay if you'd like. But I warn you, don't come here again playing the Dom if you won't follow through."

Asher nodded slowly. "Well, you see, things aren't really that way between Silver and I. If I decide to get involved in things with Cedric here, it will be different."

*Wow. Thanks for completely abandoning me.* Silver let out a strained, but light, laugh. "Glad you made that clear, Asher."

"Silver—"

"You can go. I'll be fine."



Apparently, that was exactly what he'd wanted to hear. Because he left without looking back, Cedric following demurely on his heel. Which should have bothered her, but it didn't. Not at all. She didn't need anyone holding her hand.

"Give me your wrists." Dean slid his hands down her arms and forced her to focus on him as he undid a pair of cuffs from his belt. "I don't give safewords for punishments, but I won't push you any further than what you can take."

*Oh, that's reassuring.* She ground her teeth and let him secure the cuffs. "You sure asshole doesn't want to watch?"

"You will refer to him as Master Sloan in the club, pet. Preferably when he returns for his apology."

"Like hell I will!"

"If you don't, your punishment will be even more severe." Dean's tone softened. "And you don't want that."

*I really don't.* But then she caught sight of the whip, lying like a dead black snake at the feet of the men in the front row, and her pride snapped back into place. Sloan, the fucktard, had used that whip hurt her sister. Dean couldn't beat an apology out of her no matter how hard he tried.

She folded her arms over her chest and sneered. "What will it be, ten lashes? Twenty? Bring it on. I'm not apologizing to that sorry excuse for a man."

"You're going to wish you didn't say that, pet." Dean sighed and took hold of her upper arm, towing her with him out to the main room. "Ten is a good number."

"I'm glad you agree."

He drew her in front of a large, throne like chair and folded his arms over his chest. "Now strip."

"Strip?" She rubbed her arms and nodded. Fine, there was a crowd, but she had nothing to hide. All those women giggling and pointing could eat their fucking hearts out. She peeled off her top and shorts and faced Dean before letting out a flippant. "So what are you going to use?"

"My hand."

*Aw fuck.*

\* \* \* \*

Dean struggled to keep his eyes on the mouthy little sub's face. Not that the pink number had left much to the imagination, but somehow she hid more in the swatch of cloth than most women

could in a muumuu. Even naked, her posture and icy smile disguised the vulnerable woman he'd gotten a glimpse of earlier.

*Why did the woman in pink have to be Silver Delgado? Why couldn't she have been someone a little easier to handle? Like . . . that Paris Hilton chick.*

Not that high maintenance women ever appealed to him, but hell, maybe Silver wasn't what she pretended to be.

He pulled off his suit jacket, draped it over the high back of the large, oak throne. Then he pushed the padded, velvet arms out of the way. The piece was custom made, used most often for spankings because it was damn comfortable, but the seat split down the middle to spread a bound subs thighs wide for a good fucking. He glanced down at the seat and shook his head.

*Not this time, Richter. She needs something else from you tonight.*

Settling himself into the chair, Dean patted his thigh. "Come on, Silver. Let's get this over with."

She looked over her shoulder at the small gathering and inched closer. "Can't we do this somewhere a little more private?"

"No." He reached out and caught the short chain between her cuffs to pull her to him. "You had no problem disrespecting Master Sloan in front of an audience."

"He fucking deserved it."

Tired of arguing with her, he hooked an arm around her waist and dropped her over his left knee. As expected, she immediately kicked and tried to roll off his lap. So he pushed her knees down and held them in place with his right leg, all the while firmly gripping the nape of her neck to restrain her. "No. But *you* deserve this."

Without a breath of warning, he hauled back and laid a solid smack on her tight little ass. His hand was big enough to cover both cheeks and a bright red mark blossomed over her pale flesh. She let out a screech which he cut off with two quick slaps.

"Damn you!" She bucked her hips and screamed when he responded with a resounding smack on her upper thigh. "You're hurting me!"

"That's the point, my dear." One more *crack!* and he decided to give her a little break. He petted her colorful bottom, speaking in a low, soothing tone. "There are rules here. You will learn to obey them."

"You think this will turn me into a good little sub?" She tossed her hair away from her face and glared at him. "Are you really that stupid, shithead?"

He had to clench his jaw to keep from laughing. *Shithead? I think you're ready for more.*

"You." *Smack!* "Will not." *Crack!* "Swear." *Slap!* "At me or any other member of this club."

"Fuck you!" She choked on a sob as his hand connected with the soft undercurve of her ass. "Stop! Stop!."

"One more if you promise to behave," he said.

"I promise!"

*Finally.* For a minute there, he'd wondered if she'd ever back down. He really didn't want to have to prolong her punishment, being that this was obviously the first time she'd ever been disciplined. Much as he enjoyed having her laid out, naked and available, she needed to know that accepting that she'd been in the wrong came with its own reward. He had a feeling a 'good girl' would go a long way with her.

"Brace yourself, pet." He felt her tense up and waited. A bit of a head-game, but he couldn't help pushing her, just a little, to see how she'd react.

A few shaky inhales and she let her body go slack.

He gave her a solid *whack!* and set his hand on the small of her back as she absorbed the impact with a quiet dignity he admired. Gently stroking her tender bottom, he let his approval deepen his tone. "You did very well, Silver. I'm proud of you."

She went perfectly still. Abruptly her whole body stiffened up and he had to tighten his grip to keep her from tossing herself to the floor. "As if I care? That's some ego you've got, Richter."

*Well . . .* he had to admit, that wasn't at all what he'd expected from her. He gave a curt nod and patted her butt. "In any case, your punishment is served. After you apologize to Sloan—"

Her laugh cut through his dwindling sympathy. "You've got to be kidding me. Did you miss the 'I'd rather take twenty lashes?'"

Stubborn didn't cover it. She had to be hurting! What was up with the continued defiance? "Silver—"

"Let me up." She hissed, squirming. "You got your kink on. I'm done."

"You're done when I say so."

"As if! You know, I could use you as a blueprint to build an idiot."

"Is that so?" He fisted his hand in her hair. "You've just earned yourself ten more. Sad thing is, I'd originally intended five because of your lack of experience."

"Oh yeah?" She wrenched her hair free and turned her head to curl her lips at him. "Well experience this, asshole."

Bending down, she sank her teeth into his thigh.

The leather was thin enough for her to latch onto a nice chunk of skin. But the pain didn't reach the part of his mind that had locked on to the task at hand. He couldn't be angry at her, not when she was practically begging for more.

"Twenty it is."

\* \* \* \*

Landon took another sip of his beer and shook his head. Unlike most of the club's patrons, he didn't feel the need to get a front row seat for the woman's punishment, but still, he couldn't take his eyes off her. Despite her outrageous behavior, there was no denying she was submissive. Most women would have told Richter to take his club and shove it by now. Granted, she didn't have a safeword, but she didn't have to stay. No one would force her to go on with this so somewhere, deep inside her, she wasn't ready for it to end.

*But how long will she let this go on before she gives in?*

He pushed away from the bar and moved closer to get a better look at her poor, abused bottom. Bruises had already formed, some purple around the edges, and Richter wasn't holding back. After another five he spoke softly to her, and some of the fight seemed to leave her as she hung her head and nodded.

The crowd had thinned. Whatever perverse pleasure they'd hoped to gain by watching Silver break had been denied. This could go on all night without her giving in completely. Most Doms would have shown her the door, figuring there was no way to get through that thick shell, but Richter was in another class and Landon had to give him props for not giving up on her.

*I wouldn't either.*

He finished his beer and sighed. Those kinds of thoughts would get him nowhere. He was positioned perfectly to see the effect the punishment had on Silver. The dim light caught the slick juices coating her thighs. Whether or not she was ready to admit it, Richter was getting to her. And he obviously thought she was worth the time and effort . . .

*The play isn't over, Bower.*

But with one last *Crack!* the spanking was. He figured Richter would need a moment to bring her down from the twisted place between pain and pleasure, but circling around to where he could see clarity slash through the glaze of her eyes told him otherwise. He strode back to the bar and asked for a bottle of water. Then he asked a Domme by the bar where the sub blankets were.

Things were about to get nasty.

"I won't say it!"

Landon approached the throne, careful to avoid notice. Richter had Silver on her feet, his arm around her waist all that was keeping her at his side. Sloan Callahan had returned and was staring at her in a cold, detached way that seemed to steel her resolve.

"Pet, all this will be for nothing if you won't say you're sorry." Richter rubbed his forehead, as though trying to massage patience into his skull. "Whether you like it or not, Master Sloan is one of the men your sister has chosen. Your personal history with him is irrelevant. Can't you move beyond that? For her?"

Silver dropped to her knees with a hard thunk. She stared at the floor as she spoke. "I'm sorry if anything I did ruined tonight for Oriana."

Richter dropped his head back and muttered something to the ceiling before looking at Callahan. "Are you satisfied?"

"Yeah." Callahan shook his head. "I didn't come back for an apology anyway. Oriana asked me to tell Silver she was fine. And I needed to—damn it, Silver, I would never hurt her. I love your sister and—"

Head bowed, slender shoulder's stiff, Silver muttered. "You *did* hurt her. And I'm sure you will again."

"I'm sorry you feel that way." Callahan scowled. "I've wasted more than enough time on this. She's your problem now, Richter. I'm going to take off and enjoy Max's honeymoon."

Every word out of Callahan's mouth seemed to have more impact than anything Richter had done. Landon saw the glisten of tears on her cheeks and had to fight the urge to go after Callahan. Not that the man was in the wrong, but damn it, she had her pride! What more did he want from her?

"Up we go, pet," Richter said.

Silver's eyes flashed as she shot to her feet. "Don't touch me!"

"It's over, sweetheart." Richter stroked her side, his jaw working when she jerked away from him and braced her hands on the throne. "Come sit with me for a bit. I know it was hard, but you did very well."

"I didn't have a choice, did I?"

"You didn't have to stay." Richter reached for her again, his hands hovering over her as she evaded him yet again. "You're a very strong woman, Silver. Come on, there's a good girl."

She let him touch her, let him pull her into his arms, surrendering for less than a heartbeat before she twisted away and lashed out. "No! I mean it, Dean! You've had your fun now leave me alone!"

Her lunge forward came as a surprise, but Landon still caught her before she fell. Tucking her against his side, he wrapped the blanket around her shoulders and whispered "Whoa there. Give yourself a second to get your bearings, mignonne. We get it. You're tough. That was still a rough scene and your body needs some time to recover."

Richter's hard gaze locked with Landon's as Silver sobbed and pressed against him. He obviously didn't want to let her go, but the Dom in Richter understood he couldn't help her, not now when she still blamed him for whatever chaotic emotions tore through her.

Her bottom lip trembled. "I don't know you."

"Sure you do. You just signed off on a pretty decent contract for me to play for the Dartmouth Cobras as a starting goaltender." He drew her to a dark corner of the club, away from the lingering crowd, to a little nook behind a wood partition with a comfy sofa that offered some privacy. "Let's say I owe you."

"Sure." She sat up straight and eyed him as she took the uncapped bottle he offered. "But I don't get it. Are you a Dom?"

"Yes." He smoothed her sweat-slicked hair away from her face. "Why? Is that a bad thing?"

She frowned. "No. It's just . . . I was *bad*. Don't you guys look for the girls that want to lick your feet?"

"Right now—no offense—I'm not looking for submission from you." He grinned and leaned close as though they were sharing a secret. "Aftercare is part of my job. I've helped plenty of clueless husbands with it after a scene. He says or does the wrong thing and the wife is ready to walk out, but if I play with a woman, even if it's not sexual, I won't risk her dropping after and feeling bad about whatever happened."

"You had nothing to do with this . . . scene."

"Yes, but you plan to come back here, right?" He waited for her nod and pressed a soft kiss on her forehead. "Good. So do I. And I'd hate to think that what happened tonight scared you away."

"I don't scare that easy." She shifted, wincing as her hip pressed against his. But she relaxed against him, not resisting as he wrapped his arm around her shoulders. Such a tiny thing, quivering, smelling sweet as the little flowers decorating the place, with the voice of an angel spitting venom. "So what is it? You figure if you're nice I'll let you fuck me?"

*Christ.* Just holding her had him hard as fucking stone, but those words caused all the blood to retreat from his dick and rise up to pound in his skull. She really didn't see anyone wanting her for anything else, did she?

Much as he hated lying, he couldn't stop himself from reassuring her. It wasn't really a lie if it was partially true, right? "I try to do a good deed a day. Would it hurt your feelings if I tell you I have no intention of sleeping with you?"

Her muscles hardened under his arm. Then went slack. She laid her head on his shoulder and let out a heavy sigh before taking a sip of water. "Oddly enough, no. It's not insulting. You really do this with women you don't have sex with?"

"Yes." He pressed his eyes shut and rested his cheek on her soft, tussled hair. "You ever snuggled with a straight man that didn't want to fuck you?"

"Honestly? No." She snuggled a little closer. "So you're saying you don't want to fuck me?"

This time he could answer with the truth. "I don't want to fuck you."

"Good." And with that she let herself go. "That's a nice change."

Those words wouldn't have left her mouth if she wasn't feeling so raw, so exposed, but he'd take it. He made sure she drank the full bottle and held her arms when she tried to stand. Her legs shook and she let out a weary laugh.

"It still hurts."

"It will—for awhile." He licked his bottom lip and forced an easy smile. "The question is, what do you want now? Should I call you a cab?"

"You probably should. But . . . ."

"But?"

She kept herself pressed against his side, thankfully nowhere near the stiff erection that saluted her between his thighs. Her focus was on Richter, at the bar tipping back a shot. His eyes

hadn't left them once. The man hadn't liked Landon taking over aftercare, but, as a Dom should, he put the sub's needs before his own.

"As a . . . friend—not that I should be telling you this at all—"

"Tell me." He watched Richter stand and approach the bartender before heading to a small corridor that led to the private rooms upstairs. The ones he'd been told right away were for Richter alone. "That way I'll know I haven't lost my touch."

"I don't want it to be over. Not now." She burrowed her face under his arm. "Not like this."

"You want him."

*Lie to me, babe. I don't usually allow it, but I will now.*

But he'd gained her confidence, so she replied with complete honesty as she stood. "I do. And I take what I want."

"As you should. They say life is short." He kept his eyes on her. Legs steady. Fully aware of her surroundings. She knew what she was doing. "Go for it."

"I think I will." She spared him a carefree smile. "Thank you for this. I was feeling . . . a little weak. You made the ground solid again. I don't have the words to say it better."

"You've said it just fine, pet." He wanted to use a more personal endearment, but he had a feeling she needed nothing more. From him anyway. "I'm glad I could help."

"You did." Her brow furrowed as she looked around. "Damn, where's my purse? I want to leave you my number. I don't usually, but I want to hang out some time. For coffee or something."

"You left your purse with your clothes." He pretended not to notice her blush. She'd forgotten that she was wearing nothing but a blanket. "Tell me your number. I won't forget."

She told him, then laughed. "This is stupid. After the way I acted, he'll tell me where to go."

"I doubt that." *I wouldn't* "You'll never know if you don't put yourself out there."

"True" She squared her shoulders "Maybe if I show him how good I can be—"

"Be you." Landon pushed his own feelings aside and gave her the best advice her could, all the while wishing he was in Richter's place. "He won't say no."

"I hope you're right."

"I am."

"Okay." She took a step, then paused. "See you . . . soon?"

"Of course." He forced a smile. "I'll give you a shout tomorrow."



"That would be great. I need a friend here."

He watched her slide up the shadowy stairwell and nodded to himself. *You've got one, sweetheart.*

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