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BRIAR'S CHAMPION

Mahalia Levey

Erotic Romance

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Erotic Romance

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Dedication

To the readers who make writing an immense pleasure. To the editors for their continual support and education, and to my family for sacrificing family time now and then so that I may write.

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Chapter One

Disbelief tore through Briar Thompson as she read the fine print in front of her. She drank in the text, line by heart crushing line. The picture of the couple put a ball of emotions in her throat so tight she couldn't swallow.

Frantic, she whipped out her cell phone to call the lying, cheating ass. Damn it all, she got voice mail. Briar opened her mouth to speak when the beep for her to leave a message sounded, but no words came out. What could she say on a voice message? How could she possibly respond impersonally to such betrayal? Pain constricted her chest, leaving her winded. The newspaper she'd been holding was strewn about. A breeze was taking various pieces of it across the pavement. Her life in that moment was much like that paper, scattered and floating apart. The muffled ringtone of her cell gradually penetrated the numbing fog in her mind. It wasn't until it started to vibrate did it snap her out of her trance. Briar pressed redial after taking a moment to clear her thoughts with a deep breath.

"Westly." She said his name in cracked syllables, unable to maintain composure.

"Briar, what can I do for you?" She'd never heard him sound so distant, cold.

"How could you?" she cried.

“How could I what?”

“Did you think the news wouldn't cover your marriage? I...saw the local paper.” The second she uttered the words, she died a little more inside. She swallowed hard. “You're married. I d-don't understand.”

“Damn press. Fuck. We gave orders for a private ceremony.” Her heart shattered as his words echoed what was in the newspaper. He left her, without a word, without a thought, for another woman.

“How could you hurt me? We have a life, a condo, our friends, our families. This doesn't make sense,” she said between sobs.

“Quit crying, Briar. You know tears don't work on me. I'm sorry, I guess I should've come clean, told you I wanted out.

“You wanted out? Six years later? We've been together since high school. We were planning to have children. Their names picked, the best preschools lined up. How can you, out of nowhere, do this to us? *To me?*” Briar shrieked, through her cell phone at him causing people to gawk as they passed by on the sidewalk.

“Sometimes couples outgrow each other Briar. There's no way around the truth. I outgrew you.”

“That's a load of bullshit. Just two days ago, you said you loved me. You were lying then? Just when did you fall out of love with me?” She sobbed into the phone, her hand gripping the tiny plastic piece like a lifeline.

His long drawn-out sigh met her ears, followed by dead air. “I haven't been in love with you for a while. You let your need to please destroy our relationship, always settling instead of following your own dreams. I need a woman not afraid to take a chance, one who uses her own mind. You tiptoe around doing what you want to do instead of going all out. Briar you aren't the woman I fell in love with. You have not been for a long time. The attraction is gone.”

“Sweet Jesus.” His venomous words made acid churn in her stomach. She stumbled backwards, until the back of her knees hit the edge of the bus bench behind her. She sat hard, staring blankly at her phone. “I thought we were building a life together.”

How could he have no compassion, no heart for what he’d put into action. Where did the man she fell in love with go? More importantly, why didn’t she see the change in him?

“Look, my wife is back. I have to go.”

She heard the rustle of the phone accompanied by static. In the distance, Westly gave his new wife the rundown on the conversation. Moans and laughing followed, then a dial tone.

“Miss, are you okay? Do you need help?”

A horn blared, jerked her back to reality. Headlights blinded her. She froze in horror. When had she moved off the bench into the path of oncoming traffic? The car, driven by an angry older woman, honked again, waving a fist as she zoomed away. Briar put her hand to her head while making her way through the parking lot. She tearfully found her car, and locked herself inside, before taking a steady breath. Home was the last place she wanted to go. The thought of sleeping in the bed she once shared with Westly turned her stomach. So did the thought of having his scent around her, or looking at the pictures of them on the walls.

Good thing rush hour in Downtown Kansas City kept her from venturing on side streets that would get her there faster. She caught her reflection in the rearview mirror and saw blood-red puffy eyes staring back at her. *This can’t be happening to me.*

Her confusion mounted when she finally arrived home to discover a moving truck taking possessions down a temporary ramp. Briar watched for a few minutes, until clarity dawned on her. The possessions the movers were carting from the condo were hers. “Hey!” She fumbled with the car door but managed to get out to rush over to the workers.

Her tears now dried, left a burning rage in their wake. Her stomach pitched and rolled, when another item of hers was put into the large moving truck.

“Just moving the items on our list, Ma’am.” The mover clicked his clipboard with his pen.

“I don’t understand. When could Westly have made plans to do this?”

“Mr. Jonston contacted us weeks ago to arrange for his personal belongings to be moved today,” he patiently explained.

“You’re not taking out his things. These are all of my belongings.”

“I have a list of items right here Ma’am.” He waved the clipboard at her. “Again, I’m sorry but we’re on limited time to get the job done.”

Briar saw pity in his face. Did everyone know but her? Exasperation built to high levels within her, threatening to consume her. “Why is he doing this? God, he must hate me.” *I don’t deserve this.* She snatched the list and pen from the man. “What’s crossed out you can take. The items that are circled need to take a trip back to the condo please.” She handed the amended form back to the stunned mover. “Please don’t scratch anything.” Turning on her heel, she was glad she mustered up enough strength to speak without bursting into tears in front of strangers.

“I am sorry Ma’am, truly, but I have a job to do. We’ll, uh, be out of your hair in a bit. Is there anywhere you can go till we’re done?”

Briar didn’t want his pity. “My name is Briar, and no I don’t have somewhere else to go—not yet anyway.” She watched as he moved forward and waited while he instructed the men of the changes. Depression threatened to drown her. She slowly walked around them, trying not to be a hindrance. The sooner they left the better. She made her way into her condo, and sat on the couch. Boxes littered the floor. *Damn bastard didn’t waste any time.*

On the table next to her lay the monthly bills. One by one, she opened them to find he’d only paid half the balance on each one. She wasn’t surprised. For someone rich with

financial security, Westly was a cheap man. Shoulders slumped, she sighed in despair, wondering if he'd left her a dime. Taking out her cell phone, she hit speed dial four for a direct connection to her bank and typed in the account number she shared with him on her keypad. Zero balance rang in her ears. He left her with nothing. The blood drained from her face. How did he expect her to live? What gave him the right to be entitled to everything? She keyed in the numbers for her personal account. The automation verified the amount left in her account matched the amount she'd deposited earlier. A breath of relief seized her. *At least I'm not destitute. There lay the silver lining.*

A wave of exhaustion washed over her, numbness settling in her mind. Hopelessness wasn't far behind. The day's events replayed continuously through her head as she tried to make sense of how her life had gone from great to total shit. *Get it together, girl.* She had the funds to secure herself a small apartment, and said a *bless you* to her late mother who'd taught her to make sure she had a backup plan for her own security. With a heavy heart, she promised she'd make him pay for abandoning her without a care.

* * * *

Six Months Later...

"Briar, wait up." The sound of her friend Suzanne's wheezing plea had Briar slowing her daily jog to a brisk walk.

"What's up?"

She suppressed a smile when the other woman gave her annoyed look for not stopping altogether.

"A group of us are going out tonight." Suzanne flashed a smile between pants. "We want you to join us at the bar and grill. We're doing it up, having a total girl's night out. Food, dancing and liquor. New options..."

"I don't think so, but thanks," Briar declined politely.

“Come one Bri, you haven’t been out since that asshole left you. You’re in the prime of your life, not to mention how spectacular you look. We love you but hiding from life means he wins. He already took enough from you. We’re not asking for all night, just come on out for a few hours. If you can’t do it, we understand, but you know you want to.”

“I just opened the gallery. Give me a break. I’m tired.” Of course, the temptation to go urged her to just say yes, however to utter those words took courage. In truth she lacked the nerve to say okay and follow through. Her heart ached all over again each time she passed couples showing affection. There was nothing she wanted more than to be okay, to have a full life. The few baby steps forward never failed to revert a step backward. Westly better never step to her for clemency, she had none in her to give him.

“Just this once...I won’t bother you again. I promise, pinky promise, spit on the hand promise, and blood sister promise.” Suzanne’s eyes pleaded as she held out her pinky.

“Suuuz, you’re not going to leave me alone, are you?” Briar asked a futile question. This was Suz the group go ‘get her’ girl. The last resort when any one of them needed to be drawn out of misery.

“Nope, you’ve been avoiding the public since, well, you know. We hate how you’re letting that jerk-off win. Mr. Perfect could be out there, but you’ll never know if you don’t get your hinny out there. Live a little. Come on, it’s alright not to be okay but...you can’t let him turn you into an emotional cripple.”

Briar braced herself for the worst when Suzanne took a moment to draw in a breath. *Lord what was she gonna say next?* Her dearest friend was just warming up.

“Don’t make me break out into a spirit cheer like during our school days. You know I have no shame in my game. I will do it at the top of my lungs.” The visualization was enough to make Briar give in, this one time.

“Where are you meeting at?” she asked, thinking Suzanne might be right. The vibrator she received as a gag gift took care of her need for a few months, but lost its

appeal. Slowly her body was starting to show signs of mutiny. She needed to at least find a friend with benefits.

“Whooot!”

The foreign sound of her mirth did her in. Briar laughed, something she hadn’t felt like doing these past few months.

“We’re meeting at O’Kelley’s Pub down on Fourteenth and Vine.”

“I’ll meet you there.”

“Go get ’em killer, and look striking. No lounge pants and hoody. We all love Vicky Secret’s but still how much of their pink line do you have. Let me answer that, the entire catalogue from the last two years to current. Dress alluring. Your face is gorgeous so minimal make up. Wear the new perfume you bought last week. Must have pheromones mixed with the fragrance or something. It is def your scent.”

Briar embraced her friend in a tight hug. “Thanks. I think this type of medicine is what I need.” In that instant, she found herself jazzed at the prospect of hanging out with her friends once more.

Time moved on fast forward since her morning run. With each tick of the clock, Briar panicked. The hardest decision she had way too many hours to make, was finding something to wear. A glass of merlot finally helped soothe her frazzled nerves enough to let her choose.

Silk caressed her arms and back as she pulled the hot pink blouse over her shoulders and fastened the tiny pearl buttons. She wriggled into her high-waisted pin-striped slacks as fast as she could. Eight-thirty glared back at her in big bold numbers from the alarm clock on her nightstand. “Damn,” she muttered while arranging black suspenders to rest on the sides of her breasts. In the full-length mirror, she took in her sophisticated, outright sultry ensemble. If she had a gun she’d resemble a hired hand for the mob. What was a Halloween costume one year turned into one of her favorite outfits...dressed to kill. With minimal time left, she stepped into her stilettos, taking a few seconds to buckle

the strap. Grabbing the hat box out of her closet, she put on the final piece and swiped her finger over the brim.

Handbag in hand, she practiced her saunter toward her door with a gentle sway of her hips. The ring of the bell startled her. She peered out the small peephole and smiled when Suzanne came into view. Unlocking the triple deadbolts, she swung the door open and walked out the door.

"Hey, thought I was going to meet you there," she greeted before stepping out and locking up.

Suzanne beamed a smile at her. "The girls thought you might back out, so I came for moral support."

"I guess this means you're driving." Briar slid her handbag onto her shoulder, trailing behind Suzanne to her SUV.

"How else are we gonna get you set up with the perfect man?" Suzanne teased.

Briar liked the glimmer of amusement in her best friend's eyes. Suzanne's energy had a knack of rubbing off on others. While it exhausted her most of the time, she loved the woman's personality. She wished she could feed off it like one of those emotional vampires she read about in novels. Stories like those gave her a way to escape real life stressors. The happy endings were nice to believe in for a little while, even though current circumstances have tainted her view of them.

"There is no such thing as a perfect man." She clasped her seatbelt and flipped the radio onto her favorite station. "The very idea is a trick of the mind."

"Well, having someone is better than remaining alone," Suzanne quipped pulling into traffic.

"Suz, starting a new business monopolized my time." Briar hoped the weak excuse would quiet her friend. Warmth filled the vehicle as she flipped on its heater. Scrolling the vent knobs down to warm her feet, she released a sigh. The heat felt good on her cold toes, so good she wiggled them.

“You should never be too weighed down to take time for yourself. We’ve been worried, Bri. Being a recluse doesn’t work well with you. We want to see the spark of fire back in your eyes. We want our girl back, and we’re determined to help get her—”

“I don’t know if she exists anymore. I invested so much emotionally, physically, financially...” Briar shrugged. “How can I go back to being naïvely trusting? Would you?”

“I don’t have to walk a mile in your shoes to know what you’re going through. We’ve been friends for so long, you’re like an extension of my arm. Look at the situation a different way. Go in at this looking for a new start, not a promise of a beautiful ending. There’s plenty of road left for that. Along the way you can decide on how much you want to give of yourself. How soon is too soon. Promise to let loose for tonight,” Suzanne said as she turned the corner of Vine Street and pulled into a parking lot.

“Okay. I’ll have some drinks and loosen up, but I’m not leaving with anyone you drag over to end my misery. If by some chance someone is interested in me we’ll see what happens. Deal?”

“Deal. I have to warn you that Carissa and Darcy are already inside.”

“Still, not leaving with anyone...” Briar reaffirmed to most likely deaf ears.

“No, of course not, but we can hope you change your mind.”

Suzanne’s intense expression made her laugh as she unclasped her seatbelt before getting out of the SUV. “Calm down. Let’s go have some margaritas and relax.” She rounded the vehicle and walked up the icy drive, careful not to slip. Suzanne locked arms with her keeping pace. Half melted rock salt littered the ground. Small fragments crunched under foot with each step to the front door of O’Kelley’s. Suzanne’s wink of encouragement helped as she tugged the handle.

Chapter Two

The familiar scent of beer, food and peanuts enveloped Briar as she and Suzanne made their way inside. Music played through large speakers on stands eclipsed the sound of pool balls being hit into pockets but not the low murmur of people chatting or the upbeat ambience. Briar took her ID out for the doorman to scan through a machine before standing aside so that Suzanne could do the same. Once they got their cards back, the two moved past the foyer.

"They're in the back sitting at a table near the bar," Suzanne said.

"How do you know that?" Briar asked as she navigated them through the occupants of the pub and grill. "Something smells good," she commented on the aromas coming from the kitchen. A waitress maneuvered around them carrying a sizzling platter.

"Darcy sent me a text message." Suzanne pointed to where the others were sitting. "All right, all right, they have a pitcher, for us. Time for the real fun to begin." Inside her friend's bubbly interior a lush lay waiting to come out to play.

"Enthused much?" Briar laughed. She was surprised to realize how good laughing felt again. "Come on." She dragged Suzanne after her, weaving through the packed crowd.

"Bout time." Darcy smiled, pulling out a chair for Briar.

"Intervention time." Carissa's gaze inspected the crowd around them. Briar knew she was looking for possible victims or guinea pigs for her.

"Damn it, I don't need intervention." Briar poured Suzanne a margarita from the pitcher before pouring herself one. She scooped a shot of ta-kill-ya off the table, tossing it down the hatch. As the burn made her stomach turn, she lifted the drink to her mouth, flicked her tongue across the gritty sour salt and sipped her favorite drink. Strawberry

margaritas tasted indescribable, especially since she hadn't had a drop of liquor in months.

Strains of soft rock played from the house band, sectioned away from the big screen televisions with various football games stretched across the best entertainment systems money could buy. Briar scanned the crowd while toying with her drink, a ploy to make sure she paced herself. A few good-looking males without females on their arm sat at the bar and a few tables. No doubt her three best friends would pander her to the first hottie they set eyes on. When Suzanne's jaw opened wide with her hummina expression, she whipped her head around to see what provoked the instant lust.

"Aye papi." Briar had never seen anybody so attractive. He had to know his utter affect on anyone with a pulse. God help the person he landed, because they would need nerves of steel to deal with the onslaught of attention sent his way.

Why am I thinking this?

Suzanne nudged her under the table with a boot. "Briar, stop staring," she hissed under her breath.

"I...ah-oh..." Tearing her gaze away, Briar felt her cheeks heat, looking at her friends. "Sorry, guess that happens when you all go speechless." She shrugged, taking a big gulp of her margarita. A choking pain seized her before a coughing fit ensued as she tried to clear the alcohol from her wind pipe. "Ohh the burn," she whimpered.

"Right there is one piece of sin I'd go to Hell for," Carissa crooned.

"Amen," both Suzanne and Darcy chimed. She wouldn't agree and give them the opportunity to set her up with him.

"He's okay." Briar snuck one more peek. Her interest leaned against the bar with a beer bottle against his lips. Lucky for her, he couldn't see her raking her gaze over him, taking in the tattoo running the length of his left arm. Nor could he see her body tremble, or smell the faint scent of her sex dampening her panties from just sizing up his entire

package. She drained her margarita and turned back to her table. Her three friends gave her knowing stares.

“He is the one,” Darcy said with a smug grin.

“Definitely. She can't take her eyes off him. And wait. Check out the way he keeps glancing our way,” Suzanne exclaimed.

“Stop. I don't want him.” Okay, that lie didn't count. She did want him—so bad she could taste how his skin felt on her tongue. She wanted to lick him from top to bottom like no one's business. However, her friends did not, in no way, form or fashion, need to know that. “We just got here. Can ya'll tone your craze to get me laid down a tad, please? I repeat I do not want him.”

“Think her nose'll grow?” Carissa grinned.

“Wonder where he came from? He's not homegrown here in Kansas City. He could be just passing through which is too good an opportunity to pass up girlfriend.” Suzanne's words rang true. She'd have a chance for a one night stand without the hassle of awkward phone calls or second dates. A sexy man passing through could be the one thing to get her moving forward again.

“What color do you think his eyes are?” Darcy asked as she refilled glasses.

“Chocolate brown,” Briar answered, licking salt off the rim of her drink.

“I say black as sin,” Suzanne countered.

“Dark blue, so dark they border on black,” Carissa supplanted.

Hmmm, was there such a thing as blue-black?

If they kept staring his way, he wouldn't need their loud whispering to know they were talking about him.

“We're out of margaritas. Here Bri, you go get the refill and report back to us the color of his eyes.” Darcy thrust the empty pitcher to her, sporting a mischievous glint in her eyes.

She took possession of the sticky container and wiped her hand on the side of her pants, hoping she didn't leave a streak of margarita salt on them, wishing for hand sanitizer.

"You three waste no time. I love you all, but seriously? One of you could easily go see for yourselves." Huffing a breath while glaring daggers at them, Briar tossed her hat off her head, making sure it land on her chair. She sauntered up to the bar, beaming a smile at the bartender before setting the empty container in front of him. "A refill please," she requested as she opened her purse to withdraw her credit card. A hand snaked out to stop her and grazed over the top of her knuckles. Jolts of energy spiked across her skin, traveling with a rush to her core. She swallowed hard in an attempt to formulate a coherent sentence. Tingling deliciously from the tiny touch, the stranger's presence overwhelmed her.

"Let me treat you." The voice who owned the hand produced his own card and handed it directly to the bartender.

"I—we, can pay for our own," she stammered. She waited for the deep lazy drawl in his out-of-the-blue-offer to leave his lips and caress her ears again, setting off a keg of powder to ignite within her.

"It's my pleasure to buy four beautiful ladies a drink." He held out his hand to her. "By the way, my name is Sloan."

"Briar." She returned his greeting seconds later at his prodding expression. The calloused grooves of his hand scraped her palm eliciting a silent groan of pleasure. "Nice to meet you." She lifted her gaze level with his losing herself in the darkest brown orbs she'd ever seen—ones she'd drown in. Sloan belonged in a magazine. He did look a bit familiar but she couldn't place his face. Possibly she'd seen him in a commercial or something.

"Thank you." She took in the slight curve to his nose, suppressing the urge to trail her finger over it. One would think a crooked nose would make him less handsome, but the opposite gained her apt attention.

"Want to check my teeth?" he joked, his accent thick.

"No," she responded, suddenly apprehensive. "Thanks for the margaritas. Carissa, Darcy, and Suz are sure to be thankful for the nice words and free drink." She stepped out of arms reach.

"How about you?"

"Yes, I appreciate the gesture." She thanked God for her mocha skin color or he'd see a definite blush tinting her face. With her hand on the pitcher, she forced herself to move back to the table. Three sets of eyes eagerly waited for her to dish the digs.

"So?" Carissa prodded.

"Dark brown, so dark they melt into black. His voice seduced me. So yes, that's one tall drink of sin right there." She dazed off remembering how his mouth moved as he spoke, the cleft in his chin, dimples she itched to stroke. "He bought our pitcher and when he shook my hand, it felt like a caress more than a handshake." Smiling, she continued her description. "His name is Sloan. He works hard at whatever he does." Realizing she was giving her friends more encouragement to set her up, she topped everyone's drinks. "We should toast to him in thanks." She lifted her glass up, turning her body sideways. When she secured his attention, Briar kicked the others under the table to do the same. Hell, even his half nod of acknowledgment sent a jolt of lust down her spine.

"He is into you." Suzanne tipped her drink into her mouth. "The question remains, what do you plan on doing to keep his interest?"

"Nothing." Briar tucked a strand of her ebony hair behind her ear, sipped her drink and tried not to stalk the man with her traitorous stare. The alcohol finally took hold, working its magic, soothing her nerves, giving aid in relaxing her.

“Bullshit. He has the appearance of a sexual god. Notice his hair, his eyes, and I don’t need to remind you of his voice. We’re all melting over here, and he’s not even for one of us. Though, I might attempt to woo him my way, but it is apparent that he only has eyes for you. Imagine all the alcohol induced fornication you could embark on with him.” Suzanne sighed.

“Suz!” At the best of times, the words that came out of her mouth took the cake, this one no different painting a picture of naughty possibilities.

“Don’t blame a girl for wondering. Now pay attention. He’s boring holes in the back of your head staring at you with his beer in hand. Why don’t you go over and make conversation with him? You do remember how to flirt right?” Suzanne picked up her drink and took a long swig of the red icy mixture before looking her dead in the eye. “Girls, let’s leave Bri to herself. Maybe if she doesn’t get the balls to go talk to him, he’ll take the hint and come over and talk to her.” Suzanne stood, so did Darcy and Carissa.

“Seriously?” Briar replied with sarcasm. They were ding dong ditching her without the doorbell, leaving her to fend on her own. This wasn’t easing into the dating scene again. It was throwing a girl in the deep end, letting her sink or swim.

“Yeah Bri, you need to move on. God, how much better can you get than him?” Carissa jerked a thumb at Sloan.

Bri watched her friends depart and sighed into her drink. She debated on going up to him. *What would I say? I want you to take me home and fuck me?* No, she couldn’t—wouldn’t—do that. A quick turn of her head ensured he indeed showed every sign of being interested in her. Forgoing her drink, she grasped the half empty pitcher, tilted the edge to her lips and drank. Not one sip spilled on her outfit. Briar licked her lips, deciding to make her move. Her heart hammered so loud in her ears she looked around to make sure others didn’t notice. Her palms dampened with each step closer in his direction. Clasp her palms behind her back and adding a smile to her face, she continued on her one way destination. She kept her gaze on him until she was close enough to touch him.

“Hello again.” She lifted her hands to his chest with brazen intent, giving in to the need to run them along his upper body. His gaze locked with hers and she thought she saw a glimmer of desire race through them.

“Hello there. Having fun?” Sloan placed his hands over Briar's.

“A little, but I could be having a better time.” *Get out, where did that husky breathless sound departing my lips come from?* His hands prevented her from continuing to trace the contours of his broad shoulders.

“Why don't we get out of here?” She let the implication drop, wishing her friends were around to see their plan begin to come to fruition.

Sloan released her hands, sliding an arm around her shoulders, drawing her into his body. She breathed in his scent, amazed he'd accepted with so little effort on her part. Stunned stupid, she leaned into his embrace and walked out of the bar with him. Of course, her friends spied her, giving her a thumbs up signal. Their eagerness made her wonder if she'd been set up beforehand with a male escort.

Chapter Three

Sloan groaned. The hot little number attached to his side, housed more sexuality than she probably knew. He directed her toward his sports car, and unlocked the passenger side. After she settled in, he shut the door tight, jogged to the driver's side and slid in, folding his long legs into the small cabin. "Belt up."

"Yes, papi." Briar laughed. He watched as she stretched the belt across her lap into the buckle. "What is it you do?"

"I just transferred here." He shrugged, keeping his response deliberately vague. As soon as chicks learned what he did, the questions never stopped, and dollar signs twinkled in their eyes. He found both insulting and offensive.

"Must be a nice job. But let me give you a tip. If privacy is your game, you'd better get a city car and hide this baby at home or every gold digging girl is going to be lusting after you...and not just because of your fantastic ass." Briar smoothed her hair down. In that instant he realized she left her hat at the pub. He'd have it returned to her in the morning. Right now, the way she flicked her tongue over her bottom lip made him hard as ice as well as too tempting to leave alone.

He leaned over to kiss her lips. "Sass is sexy." Rejoicing in her inability to move thanks to the seatbelt, he took his time ruthlessly sweeping in and out of her mouth, tasting her sweetness. Her strawberry flavored lip balm lingered on his bottom lip. Just when he thought she'd pull away, she clutched him and thrust her own tongue into his mouth. His dick throbbed, hot and heavy ready to be buried in her pussy. If he didn't get her to his place soon, he'd risk breaking the law by fucking her in his car. No woman made him forget being responsible.

"Damn they were right." Briar sighed into his mouth, drawing back from him.

"Who?" Starting his car, Sloan reached over and started the GPS designed to only take him to his parking garage.

"The girls." Briar watched his screen bleep. "Taking me to a secret location?"

Sloan laughed. "Something like that."

"What we're doing is legal right?"

"Very as long as you're not under age." He put her odd question to the back of his mind. His place housed nothing but unopened boxes. The only thing he had out was his king size sleigh bed. "What do you do for a living?"

"I own an art gallery. Local talents show their pieces, I sell them or auction them." Briar folded her hands in her lap and closed her eyes.

"I don't know much about art but sounds like you have your dream job. Nothing can beat loving what you do for a living." His attraction to her rose to staggering proportion in such a short time span.

For years his preference for mocha skin, beat out all other shades, he loved the way African American women tasted, smelled, looked. From hazel to dark brown eyes and flared hips, he couldn't get enough. Big breasts or small enough to fit in his hands, made no difference, but he bet this beauty would fit him well. Nice rounded hips, natural hair or extensions didn't matter, he enjoyed the total package. He felt like a school boy virgin waiting for his first good fuck.

He appreciated the silence, and her closed eyes gave him the opportunity to sneak glances while she relaxed. He paid particular attention to her full lush lips, parted in slumber, how she tasted of ripe berries. Sloan held the wheel with one hand and adjusted himself to ease the constricting fabric cutting off his circulation. Picturing how her hips swayed when she walked away from him in the pub didn't help his situation.

The parking garage came into view. He checked for other traffic, then swung his car into the entrance, heading up the ramp. Once he found his spot, he turned off the ignition

and unbuckled his seatbelt. Briar was still sleeping. Smiling, he leaned over pressing a soft kiss to her parted lips. “Wake up, sleeping beauty,” he spoke into her ear.

“Hmm?” Her eyelids fluttered open.

He watched her focus on him. A look of vulnerability passed through so fleeting, he would’ve missed it had he not been so close. Had he misread skittish for a deeper emotion? Whatever had happened wasn’t his business unless she let him in. Tonight he’d show her a good time, put her at ease and take the vulnerability away. He opened his door, exited and walked with purpose to the passenger side. Using the manners drilled into him, he unlocked her door. “Need help?” He offered his hand.

Briar unbuckled her belt and put her soft hand in his. He could only imagine the rest of her body was just as soft.

“So, this is the secret entrance to the lair?” She climbed out and stretched, taking notice of her surroundings.

“You’re about to see for yourself.” Sloan winked at her.

“Smug are we?”

Hell yeah, I’m smug who wouldn’t be with a gem like her on his arm. Damn, she’s too cute teasing me.

“Scared?”

“No. Just nervous.”

He guided her to the elevator with a hand on her elbow, then drew her into his side. “No reason to be.” He slid his key in the secured slot and flipped it sideways. The doors opened. Sloan ushered her inside the tiny box, using the chance to touch her back as an advantage to skate his hand over the small of her back.

“What floor?” Briar asked.

“Penthouse.” Sloan molded his palm over the globes of her ass. He heard her moan and suppressed a smile, glad to know her nervousness hadn’t killed the attraction.

“Very nice. Do you always pick up women you don’t know?” She pressed her ass into his grip, playing into his hands, sliding her body against him for more physical contact.

Sloan appreciated how easily she responded to his touch. He stopped caressing her ass, a low chuckle leaving his lips. “If I said yes, I’d be a dick. If I said no...you’d call me a liar, so let’s go with somewhere in between. I value my privacy. I enjoy women, and right now, I plan to taste every inch of your body.”

“Right now?” She squeaked, looking up. He kissed the nape of her neck. The camera bolted to the ceiling of the elevator blipped as it pointed at them. “You value privacy, remember?”

The elevator bay doors opened up and his living room came into view. “Welcome to my home.” He clasped his hand with hers, linking their fingers together to give her the grand tour in record time.

“Your home is bigger than my gallery.” Her laughter held a hint of nerves making the lilt change. “Why is everything still in boxes?”

“I just transferred—flew in today. Now...there’s the dining room, the unstocked wet bar, kitchen.” He walked her around stacked boxes drawing her down the hallway. He pushed his bedroom door open.

“I’m impressed, but I’d be just as impressed if you had a hovel.” She let go of his hand when they entered his room. “Your décor is very masculine.”

“Did you expect feminine?” Sloan tapped her on the ass, copping a feel of her little jiggle as he stepped in after her, kicking the door shut behind him. He gave her a wolfish grin and began unbuttoning his shirt with slow, deft movements. Once unbuttoned, the shirt open, he studied her with the intensity of a hawk studying its’ prey. Her eyes drank in his physique. “Why don’t we make you more comfortable?”

“Do you want me to strip for you?” Briar bit her bottom lip and jostled from foot to foot.

“Baby, I plan on peeling your clothes off layer by layer.” He honed in on the sudden intake of her breath and pressed the subject. “Tell me, do you like what you see?” Years of working hard on and off the field gave him a sculpted body he wasn’t ashamed of.

“Yes.” Briar swallowed hard. He took in the trembling of her fingers pressed to her lips.

“What about me do you like?” He advanced on her.

“Your arms are huge, abs are lickable, pecs are bunched.” Eyes widened, she gravitated forward as if to touch him, but stopped just shy, a low soft moan left her lips.

Sloan slid his hand up her silk shirt and removed the suspenders that rested on either side of her bountiful globes. Button by button, the fabric slipped aside to reveal the sexiest lavender and black lace bra known to man. Her breasts were pushed up, precariously close to spilling out. He cupped his hands around each one and groaned. “God, you’re beautiful.” His cock throbbed hot, expanded, pulsated behind his button-fly jeans. Her nipples hardened under his palm. “They fit perfectly in my hands.” He bent his head and flicked his tongue over her skin along the edge of the material, then pursed his lips and blew a stream of air.

“Don’t stop.”

“Oh, I don’t plan on stopping any time soon.” He dipped a hand into her trousers. The button gave quickly, the soft fabric teased his fingertips, sliding down her legs. He moved his attention from her breasts to lift her long legs, admiring her shoes. “Damn, perfect hips. I’m a hip and ass man.” He chuckled, letting his palms roam over her ass, marveling how perfectly the halves filled them. His mind boggled as his gaze fell on her lavender thong. Just one rip and he’d have her bare skin.

Briar sighed. “Ass and hips? I thought you were a breast man.”

“Hmm, definitely ass and hips.” He picked her up. “Wrap those long legs around me.”

“Where are you takin’ me?”

“On a hard, fast trip,” he said with a growl in her ear.

“Fast? Not too fast, I hope.” Briar sighed again when he lowered her onto his large bed.

“I’m a heavy hitter, not a minute man...” He reached over to his nightstand and took out a foil package. “Hungry?” He took his sweet time to disrobe while watching her expression change from curiosity to ravenous. He unfastened each button, no boxer briefs lay beneath his jeans, just sprigs of coarse hair and his rock hard cock.

“Starved,” she replied in earnest.

Sloan adjusted his cock before kicking off his jeans. He tossed his shirt onto the chair next to his bed and moved between her legs. “So much bounty here.” He ran his hands up her legs, reveling in the thickness of her thighs. “I bet your pussy lips are a sexy dark pink.” He nipped his way up her thigh, pausing at the apex of her pussy to press a long slow lick. Wet heat met his tongue. Groaning, he fingered the seam of her thong, and slid inside, ripping the thin barrier apart, bearing her wet core. Fat pussy lips lay beneath with an engorged clit peeking out from her plump folds. He parted her with his tongue and speared her sex.

“Sloan!” Briar slammed her sex into his face.

“Eager, are we?” He locked his biceps around her thighs and dug in. The sweet scent of her cream covered his face. Like a starved man, he teased and sucked on her clit. Her core contracted around his tongue, legs tensed. He sucked every drop as she screamed. Her tight pussy tasted good as his tongue continued to lick her pulsating sheath. He moved his arms from her thighs, slapped her clit, and watched pleasure spike across her body. “Come for me, again.” He wasn’t even buried in her yet, and she writhed for him.

“I can’t,” Briar mumbled, yet her hands gripped his sheets as her hips rolled to press her sex closer to his mouth.

“That’s a good girl,” he coaxed giving her what she needed. He stuffed his fingers in her, pounding her pussy while licking her cream. He waited to feel her climax roll through her and across his tongue.

“Ohh,” Bri keened.

Sloan felt her tense under his assault as if to staunch off her climax before she gave in.

“Let it flow, Briar.” Devouring every drop like a mad man, he then rose up on his knees. Never before had he seen such a beautiful expression. *Damn*. He stroked his hard cock, lubing the throbbing muscle with his pre-cum. He put a foil package between his teeth and ripped the corner. The condom fell into his hand. As she came down from her climax, he rolled the latex on, and ensured it didn’t pinch.

“It’s been awhile.” She sat up, reaching for his turgid length.

“Not a problem.” Sloan appreciated that she hadn’t had a lover in a long time, spoke spades about her character. No matter her reasons for being at the pub, his pride swelled in being the one to bring her out of her lonesomeness. Mushy emotions aside, he leaned over and captured her lips. He demanded entrance with his tongue. Not to be denied, he sucked in her sweet moans, swallowing her heady scent. With her legs spread, he pressed her into the bedding. His cock poised at the juncture of her thighs rested on her labia. Even through the thin latex barrier, the heat of her sex scorched him.

“Now!” Briar reached her hand between them and grasped his girth, bringing his tip at her entrance. She lifted her hips.

Sloan tangled his hand in her hair and garnered her attention by dragging his teeth against her bottom lip. When she looked up at him, he slid into her tight channel. Home greeted him—drawing him into an abyss of endless pleasure. He stroked sure and slow. Buried deep within her was the closest to heaven that he’d ever come. Pain seized him when she dug her manicured nails into his back, raking them across his skin. His breath came out in swishes of air while sensation rocked through him. The welcoming sting

enticed him to change his pattern as he nipped her neck in retaliation. Tenderness departed and the need to mark, possess took its place.

When she screamed and clung to him, he hastened. The slap of skin striking skin filled his ears, melted away when her sweet sobs of satisfaction took its place. Guttural sounds erupted from his throat. Sloan paid homage to her breasts, tweaking, teasing her nipples, his cock still stroking her drenched channel.

"I can feel you're close, again." He slapped her nipple and wished he had clamps to put on them. Her juices encased him and ran down his balls, eliciting a groan from him. His own pleasure increased. Driven to give her the utmost enjoyment, he pushed his need to explode back and tuned into her body's demands.

His lust for Briar turned into a need to give her more than any lover she'd had before. He wanted to be the one who pleased her on more than the physical side. Drenched with sweat, he kept giving, stroking, surging within her to the point his vision blurred. She felt so good wrapped around him.

His biceps strained and he forced himself to concentrate on anything besides the mewls of pleasure escaping her luscious mouth. "Now!" he commanded and locked his gaze on her.

"Fuck me, I'm coming!" Briar screamed and jerked beneath him, flooding him with her thick cream.

The feel of her pussy contracting around his cock stole his restraint. He pummeled her hard, drawing out her last moments of release, his own milked into the reservoir. Tension riddled him. He froze above her. The sight that greeted him melted his hard-won discipline to avoid attachments. Tears fell from her eyes. Confused, he swiped them away thinking he'd hurt her. "Briar?" He braced himself up without placing his full weight on her and wiped the salty tears from her face with his thumb. He trailed a finger tenderly down the side of her face.

"I'm sorry. I—this crying isn't normal for me."

He eased out of her, realizing he'd have loved staying within her for hours more. "How do you feel?" He plucked the condom off and tossed it into the trashcan by the bed. Worried, he lay down next to her, a protective air engulfed him. Pulling her half over his chest, he rubbed her back in a soothing manner.

"I haven't felt this good in a long time. I've had cobwebs in my vagina for months. I don't know why the water works came, must've had a lot of pent up passion to release." She blew out a steady breath.

"As long as I didn't hurt you." He toyed with her hair, tenderly rubbing her scalp as if he'd made the gesture a thousand times. Like comforting her was the most natural thing to do following the best sex he'd ever had.

When her body stopped trembling, he realized her slight hitch of breath evened out to a light rhythm. He rolled her to the side long enough to pull his coverlet up. Time stood still while he studied her sleeping form. Finally looking at the clock, it showed the early hours of the morning. Only when he relaxed and found himself unable prevent the yawn coming from his mouth, did he give into the need to sleep. Wanting to take care of her for the night, he pulled her back against his chest and tucked the cover around them.

Chapter Four

Briar woke up and extricated herself from under Sloan's body. *Damn, the man had the goods all right.* She slipped off the bed quiet as a mouse and grabbed her purse. On tiptoes she went in search of his facilities. Inside the bathroom, she closed the door softly behind her. After she finished relieving her demanding bladder, she retrieved her phone from her bag. "Call Suzanne." She gave the voice command a second time when her phone didn't respond.

"Calling Suzanne." An automated voice obeyed. On the third ring her friend picked up.

"Suz."

"Hey, we've been waiting for you to call!" Suzanne piped over the phone. "Where are you?"

"I was occupied," Briar whispered into the phone. "He has me in some bat cave, lair thingy. I'm such a slut, Suz. He did things to me Westly never did. Makes me wonder how I sold myself so short. I thought he was an escort at first. That ya'll bought him for me. He's so freaking gorgeous and all. Suz, the things he did to my body have to be outlawed in fifty of the fifty-two states."

"What? That's so funny. We hadn't even thought to do that. Can't wait to hear the dish on this. Good for you for having a good time."

"How do we get me out of here?" Briar asked. "I broke down and cried afterwards, it was so damn embarrassing," she admitted.

"Damn! You cried?" Suzanne sounded astonished.

"*Yeah*, let's not broadcast my psychotic breakdown after mind blowing sex." Briar hushed her tone upon hearing movement. A knock on the bathroom door interrupted her next thought.

“You okay in there?” Sloan asked with an edge of sleep in his tone. She liked the tenor of his morning voice. Sexy.

“Fine, using the facilities...so to speak.” She paused, then put the phone to her ear. “Suz, how do I get home?”

“You need to have some morning nookie first, and then have lover boy drop you off.”

Suzanne hung up with Briar still huddled over the toilet. After picking up her jaw, she righted herself and turned on the faucet to wash her hands and face. The easy, no care in the world woman was gone. When she emerged from the bathroom, she tried to avoid meeting Sloan’s gaze. *God, he was sexy.* “I have to work in a bit.” She bit her lip, questioning why he didn’t feel as awkward as she did.

Sloan slid his arms around Briar and kissed her neck. “Let me toss on some sweats and then I’ll run you home.”

“Sounds good.” She ducked any more physical contact and picked up her articles of clothing. Lost in her own thoughts, she dressed in under two minutes. Her hair couldn’t be helped, she smoothed down the tangled mess and dug into her handbag for a clip. Finding one proved tedious. “Ahh.” She closed her fingers around a rubber band, pulled it out and worked the thick mess into a halfway passable ponytail.

Sloan approached with a T-shirt and sweats on. He wore basic clothing well, sexy and lethal with an animal like prowl. *God she’d read too many books.*

Did he know his appeal? How hot he turned her on in mere seconds? She tamped down her physical yearn and smiled. “I’m ready.”

“I have a conference in two hours. Why don’t I call you when I’m done to take you for a late lunch?”

He walked with her into the elevator and pressed the garage button.

“Okay, but only if you’re sure. I don’t want you to feel obligated to take me out or anything.”

"Care to explain that, Briar?" Sloan hit the stop elevator button.

The jolt of the brakes slowing them to a stop threw Briar off balance so hard she fell right into his arms. "I—ahh we had fun last night let's...leave things without complications." She pressed the garage button to get the box moving again.

"Think about lunch at least. Last night was amazing so nothing says we can't continue."

The elevator opened and he stepped out. The walk to his car remained a silent one. He opened her door, helped her in, and climbed in on the driver's side. Once he got on the highway, he turned to her. "I need to know where I'm taking you."

"83rd and Winchester." She'd made a complete fool out of herself by crying, an action she couldn't even blame on the alcohol, since neither one of them left the bar drunk. Twenty minutes of dead space passed between them. She acted content, as if last night didn't happen. Inside, she wanted it to happen again, and again, but she had a business to run. He made for a nice diversion, but she'd never give herself to a man again. Suzanne was wrong. She wasn't on the verge of becoming an emotional cripple. She was living life on her terms by choosing not to place herself in the position of being devastated again. As they pulled up to her house, she turned to face him but refused to meet his eyes. "Thank you for everything." When he reached for her, she shrank from his touch.

"Ouch. I'd say you're welcome, but this is not how I pictured this ending." Sloan stepped out of his car.

"Stop. I can get to my own door."

"I was raised differently," Sloan growled at her, rounded over to her side of the car, snatched the door open and pulled her none-too-gently into his arms. His lips crashed down on hers. In full public view, he punished her nonchalance with his tongue, spearing arousal into her body. Angry at her body for liking the kiss, she let out a hiss as he released her.

“That was uncalled for.” She pushed out of his arms and regained a semblance of composure. Fool, she berated herself, and then rattled off her phone number before running the rest of the way to her building.

Two hours later, she sat behind her desk at Artistic Expressions going over the recent changes in her life. She’d won her bid on a lark and paid for the building in cash from her inheritance. The art she bought catered to a variety of customers. Being able to sell to any class of society made her dream a reality. Many people appreciated fine art, but couldn’t afford to purchase on a high end scale.

The artists she’d commissioned, along with the ones who had come to her, agreed wholeheartedly art should be available to anyone who enjoyed the inspiration artists brought to life, regardless of financial status. Supporting her community, her brothers and sisters gave her the fulfillment she thought she needed. Now she questioned her other needs.

Just then the television flashed and she saw Sloan. Confusion washed through her, followed by clarity. How could he be part of some sick scheme to hurt her further? Her mind spun as her gut clenched in anger over being used, tricked. She felt tears of humiliation before they filled her eyes. With shaky hands, she picked up her purse and left her building as if the devil were on her heels. She walked down the block to where she recognized the conference was being held. Furious with nothing else to lose, she pushed herself past the photographers and reporters and stopped directly in view of him. This new act of cruelty was the last straw.

“Briar?” He spoke into the microphone, having the nerve to beam a smile at her.

“You are worse than the snake behind you. Did you have fun? Did all of you laugh?” She turned her rage on every team member in front of her. Cameras whirred behind her, but she didn’t care. Those same members of the media killed her heart with their cameras six months previously.

“What are you talking about, Briar?” Sloan hushed the crowd with a look.

“Unbelievable. You can hush an entire audience with one glance, but I’ll be damned if you silence me. Am I supposed to be the pity of my hometown again? Is there no escaping the scandal that ripped me apart? Do you all find humor in tearing me down further? This is surreal.” Oh he played blind ignorance well. He had to know. After all, as the new owner of her ex’s baseball team, he should know all the players’ public pitfalls.

“Would someone, anyone, care to clue me in to what she’s ranting about?” His eyes turned obsidian black, the way his jaw ticked as he spoke sent a ripple of unease through her. This wasn’t a man to mess with. But he sealed his fate by taking advantage of her.

“I repeat, would someone tell me what is going on here?” He gripped the podium. Vehemence laced his voice when he repeated his question.

No one in the press bothered to make the first move.

Pathetically, only Westly had the nerve to step forward. “She’s my ex and she’s bitter, so don’t listen to her. We didn’t last. I met and married someone else. It’s not my fault she can’t get over me and move on with her life.”

“Someone besides this idiotic prick care to enlighten me?” He snarled at Westly.

A local reporter decided to fill Sloan in on what led to this scene. “Mr. Jonston scandalized the public when he cut Ms. Thompson off without a dime...while they lived together. We received word from a reliable source that he closed all accounts and married another woman right under her nose. When the pictures came out, the unveiled bride wasn’t Ms. Thompson. They’d been together since high school. He used to play up their relationship to us so the story shocked the community.”

Sloan glanced her way, but once again she was removed to the day she found out, exposed and vulnerable. Ashamed she hadn’t seen the end coming. Shaken.

Sloan turned to Westly. “You have to be shitting me. Are we being punked?” He gave Westly a scathing scowl. “Fucking prick.” He crossed the small space, through the other players and slugged Westly in the nose. The sound of cartilage breaking echoed in the coliseum. “Get this jackass off the stage.”

He turned to the manager and Commissioner Jackson. "As the new owner of the Devils, I want his shit packed up and out of the locker room within the hour. I have zero tolerance for taking bets in general. More when they're bets from a player against his own team. Everyone listen up. Heed my words. To work for me, or play for me, I demand the highest level of integrity and honor, on and off the field. Anyone who doesn't possess those qualities will be removed from the team. In the event I am needed at my other business, the manager will take over in my absence."

He then stepped off the podium, and stormed out into the sea of people who parted for him. He found Briar, and moved the reporters out of her face. He snaked his hand out and drew her into his arms. "I didn't know. I'm sorry. I'd have told you what I did for a living if I'd known. Believe me when I tell you I'd never be the cause of your hurt and embarrassment." He kissed her forehead. "I broke his nose." He winked at her.

Briar groaned. "You didn't have to. I'm sorry for this." She'd assumed the worst, judged him unfairly instead of asking.

"No problem." He bent to whisper in her ear. "Next time, go all accusatory and hellcat in my place, so I can fuck you hard again." He kissed her behind her ear, smiling at the cameras.

"Are you and Ms. Thompson an item?" a reporter asked with pen and pad on the ready.

"You better believe it. And, I know how to take care of what's mine."

"We just met last night." Why did he want more after her insane explosion?

"Everyone has to begin somewhere." He caressed her chin and then kissed her softly.

Briar couldn't help but chuckle as she allowed Sloan to whisk her away. No one understood firsthand the damage done to her, but he got her. The reasons for his need for privacy began to make sense. A look into his personal and professional lifestyle, if the conference was anything to go by, spoke volumes on how media could affect a person's personal life.

She stifled a case of the giggles as he flipped his designer sunglasses on and gave the reporters a parting grin. *It's a crime to be that sexy.*

Leaning over to the driver's seat with the intention of touching him, heat suffused her face as his gaze sent spikes of heady sensations ricocheting between her legs. She'd bet all the money in her bank he knew what she had planned. "I want to go all hellcat on you right now," she teased before she ran the tip of her tongue against his lobe. His heated skin warmed her palms. She wound her hand up his chest to play with the hair curling at his nape. He leaned back and licked her lower lip. Desire clouded her judgment, so much so, she forgot about the press just outside his car, how she embarrassed them both by taking what she wanted. She didn't stand a chance when he kissed her, teased her lips open. He tasted of darkness, of sin, and damn it if she wasn't glad she was his.

A moan left her mouth, or his, she couldn't tell. She had lost herself in the taste of him. Firm lips melted with hers. She broke off the kiss and sucked her bottom lip into her mouth. "Take me to your place." His expression caused her core to explode in wetness. He held that wild look, all serious and aroused, as if irritated that they couldn't continue.

"What the lady asks, she shall receive." He gunned the engine and shot into traffic.

Briar squirmed in her heat-activated seat when he pushed on the massage button. "You're bad." She gripped her arm rests and sighed. He'd get his as soon as they reached the privacy of his home.

"Feel good?"

"Yes," Briar croaked. As she relaxed watching the scenery whiz by her inner hellcat continued to purr in her ear, pushing her to egg Sloan on. So he wanted to play...she would too. With one deliberately slow move, she pressed her hand to his inner thigh and squeezed precariously close to his goods.

He groaned, gripping the steering wheel. "Briar, you're going to make us wreck."

“What? Don’t tell me you can’t do two things at once,” she taunted with her hand now on his cock. A soft brush over the material hiding his flesh from her, and the car lurched. He shot her a scathing look that made her tremble with want. She slipped, stroking him again. His growl was accompanied by the brakes slamming on at a red light. The glare he shot her showed the effect her touch had on him. “Oh my...” She let the words drop. If looks could kill she’d be dead or well fucked if the intent on his face rang true.

When he steered into his garage and drove up the ramp to his private parking space, Briar’s heart beat skipped. She hadn’t the slightest idea if she still held control over their playtime or if he’d turned the table on her. Her shallow breathing hastened. Thankfully the compact seats couldn’t handle too much movement, or so she thought. The noise of a seat lever and track slamming back startled her. She stared at Sloan.

“Time for talking has passed—” He manhandled her onto his lap.

“I’m scrunched!” She moaned at the delightful contact but fumbled for the door handle. Freedom loomed in front of her. Briar wriggled off his lap, falling haphazardly out of the car. Too bad he followed right behind her. Just as she stood she felt him, all of him pressed against the crease of her ass.

“Not so fast.” He picked her up.

“No fair, I’m in charge.” She slid down the front of his body and grasped his hand, leading him from the car to the private elevator. “No touching.” After hitting the button for his floor, she released his hand and stared him down. The door chimed and the bay doors opened. Briar slapped at his hands, then wagged a finger at Sloan when he reached out to touch her. “No touching.”

With each step she took toward his bedroom, an article of clothing fell to the floor. Flinging her bra away, Briar smacked something with her arm. When one of the boxes started to topple over, Sloan rushed to catch it. In his hurry to grasp the box, their hands

met. The cardboard crushed inward on his end. "I'm so sorry. I didn't know I was so close." She relinquished her hold on his possession.

Briar saw him flinch for just a second, as he ran his hand over the name Sam. But before she could say anything further, he turned on her, the glint back in his eyes. Time to get back to business at hand, but she'd definitely ask about the box later. She turned, reaching for the zipper on her skirt.

By the time she'd reached the thick frame of his door, only her thong and heels remained. Not once did she look back to see if he was close. She could feel his warm breath on the nape of her neck. Briar did a sultry turn, facing him with her hand resting on her hip. "I hope you're ready for me." She pointed to the bed and slapped his ass when he passed her. Dutifully, Sloan stripped off his suit in jerky movements. Thick biceps, lean muscle, and tight hot ass filled her vision. *Damn. What a sight.* Sloan took up most of the bed with his size. Briar moved over to him. "Are you ready?" She straddled his sex and raked her nails over his chest.

"Hell yeah, cariña." His husky voice filled with arousal heightened her ever growing appetite.

"Am I your sweetheart?" She leaned down to flick her tongue over his nipple. The tiny bud hardened. She liked his response to her and licked again. Her wet core lay right on top of his throbbing cock. She slid her thong away from her sex and lifted her body to slide onto him. When he slapped her ass, she moaned, her eyes widened as reality hit. She'd forgotten the condom. She plucked it from his hand, ripped the packet open and sheathed him. No words were necessary. Passion drove her, she met his gaze with hers when she positioned herself over him, and slid down. His cock fit wall-to-wall inch by torturous inch. "So big." She eased up and set her own rhythm.

"Briar."

"Too slow?" She responded by dragging her body even slower, rocking her clit over his pubic hairs. The friction electrified her, sending shards of pleasure through her body.

He snorted.

“My...my...my...Someone’s a bit impatient.” She rose and slammed down on him, taking her time to bask in her power over him.

“Don’t forget turnabout is fair play, cariña.” He brushed his fingers over her nipples and pinched hard.

“Sloan.” She rocked hard down on him, and began a tempo to take them both over the edge. Her breasts throbbed with fullness from his touch. She covered his hand to keep him kneading and toying with her. She clamped her thighs on either side of his hips, to anchor her on him. His throbbing vein beat against her sensitive channel, causing a shudder of pleasure through her body. The wetter she became the easier his wide cock battered against her womb.

“Fuck Briar—” He fingered her rim and she shook. “Like that do you?” He rubbed the striated ring of muscle again and pressed his finger just inside.

“Sloan.” She panted, hastening her jerky movements.

“Feels so good, cariña. Ride me hard.” He held her hips to him and ground up.

The force of his cock added to the torture of his pelvis on her clit drove her to madness. She rode him like a demon possessed, imagining she was on a mechanical bull. He bucked under her and she clenched her muscles together sucking his thick erection deeper into her. She heard him grunt and felt her climax fast approaching. “God, I’m going to come!” Past exhaustion, she let it wash over her. His body shuddered underneath her, as her walls stole his orgasm. She heard him curse.

“Something wrong?” She licked the sweat beaded on his chest.

“I was going to fuck the shit out of you, cariña.”

“I know you wanted to, but I wanted a turn. This was my turn. Next time you can be in charge.”

“Damn straight—”

“But right now I want a nap,” she said and slid off his cock. She lay down on his bed, watching him toss the condom in the trash. She enjoyed his perfect body and made room for him to join her. Her head fit well tucked into the crook of his shoulder. Her last thoughts as she drifted off to sleep were of him.

Epilogue

In the following months Briar became a permanent fixture in his life. Sloan watched her arranging the artwork he'd purchased from her gallery on the kitchen wall. Rather, he watched her ass wiggle as she stretched to hang the item in the perfect spot.

"How about here?"

"Looks great cariña."

"You said that last time. Are you giving me an honest opinion or staring at my ass again, Mr. Guitierrez?"

"Both." She cast him a scathing glare. He'd only bought the art to show support and have one of her pieces to stare at when she wasn't around. He hadn't wanted that deep of connection with anyone in a long time.

"Gah, why do I bother?" She stepped off the stepladder and moved aside. "I give up. You decide where to place this."

"You're sexy when flustered. The abstract piece is good where you have it now. Heck, the first, second and third places were good too." Sloan ran a hand over his hair, trying to fathom her reasoning, coming up short in the end.

"You need a crash course in art and the importance of showcasing. The centerpiece of the room or hallway is the main decorative piece."

She prattled on while he rubbed the rim of a bottle with the hem of his shirt, before taking a sip. Nothing like a good beer to end an otherwise hectic day.

"You toning me out already?"

"I hear you sexy." He admired her passionate nature in and out of bed.

"Hmmp." He watched her gauge the wall, deciding if the spot worked. "Now what about that last box?"

“What box? You unpacked everything.” While he'd been content to live among stacked cardboard and strewn furniture, she hadn't. Not since they spent more time in his penthouse than in her apartment.

“You know, the one marked Sam.”

“That's not going to be unpacked. It's on the shelf in my closet.”

“We can go through his things together. You said I was the only one you trusted to talk about him with, how he protected our country and paid with his life. Such a man doesn't belong on a shelf in the dark. His memory belongs in the light with memories that heal in time.” Briar ran her hands up his chest, and placed a kiss on his lips.

Sloan set the bottle on the table behind him to thread his hands through her hair, deepening the kiss. He parried and molded her body to his. The need for oxygen abated leaving only a burning desire to taste her, his piece of salvation.

“Stop distracting me...”

“You kissed me first.” He winked and slid his hands around her curvaceous ass.

She swatted his hand away, forcing him to turn her body to face him, with nowhere to go.

“You gonna leave me all worked up like this baby?” Sloan enjoyed the way her eyes dilated when she was aroused. Yeah, she felt the rock hard part of him against her belly.

“Let's tackle Sam and then...I'll take care of you...Real good care.” With the final breathy order, she grabbed his cock and palmed the length through his jeans. His dick jerked in response.

“Sex first?”

“Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, thrice and more shame on me. Every time I bring up Sam you distract me with sex. You'll not be making first or second base this time.” She pressed a finger to his lips. “But you can have a homerun if you cooperate.” She gave one long slow stroke to his dick and dropped her hand.

He let out a hiss to gain control of his body and stepped toward his room. Briar linked her hand in his and padded down the hallway by his side.

He led her into his master bedroom and dropped her hand. Briar sat on the edge of the bed as he went to retrieve Sam's box. "You are good at blackmailing."

"Women's prerogative."

Sloan ignored the pang of grief within his chest and fought the overwhelming guilt that came with outliving a sibling who never had a chance to have a family or a future. He understood Briar's need for him to move forward. However, telling her his most personal hell didn't mean she got to take charge and fix him. A man was entitled to his own grief.

"I love you Sloan Guitierrez. I fell in love with you the moment our eyes connected. We can hardly name our son or daughter after their heroic uncle if you can't see past your hurt and guilt to tell our namesake why your brother was so special." Strong with a hint of vulnerable, she put him on notice and shocked the shit out of him.

"You're, we're, having a baby?"

"Yes. Didn't I just say so?" He caught the twinkle in her eye as she slid off the bed to meet him, the box resting between them.

"This is why you've pushed this so hard." As he spoke the words, she nodded in confirmation.

"Now that I have your total attention..." She pointed to the box. "This isn't going to unpack itself and I promised you a homer."

"I want more than one. I want a lifetime of them with the woman I've loved since first glance." Raw emotion constricted his vocal cords. Instead of answering right off, she bent down, he followed suit and helped her move Sam's memories to the living room where empty shelves lining the walls waited for them.

His eyes fell on familiar objects as he opened the lid. The encased in glass baseball with his signature, a gift to his brother when Sloan had made his first Major League

Baseball team. Pictures of them with their father in their seats, Sam's Shadow Box. Briar leaned forward and kissed his lips. She lifted the flag from his hands and carried it to the wall to hang in remembrance. He hung the family pictures on the rungs like she'd shown him at her place. When he was finished, he placed the glass encased baseball on the mantle. Pictures of him smiling with his brother still hurt to see.

"One day this won't hurt so badly. I promise you." Briar locked gaze with him from across the room. He hadn't said a word out loud. How was it that she read him so well in a short period of time? As he carried the empty carton to the trash compactor, he thanked God he wasn't alone for this.

The transformation of the room surprised him. In the few minutes he'd left, Briar added a few finishing touches. He leaned back against the door frame with his arms crossed, still processing becoming a father. The thought of new life promised a balm for the constant sting of the one taken before his time.

"Why?"

"You know what they say about laughter soothing the soul. You are a strong man who keeps a constant game face on. You let that face falter once and let me in to see all of you, for a fraction of a second during our walk after seeing the Kansas City Ballet. I fell for you harder then. The room is complete now. I'm so proud of you Mr. Guiterrez." Briar licked her bottom lip and whipped her shirt over her head. Sloan groaned low watching her sexy striptease. Her flirty skirt came next, landing in a pool on the floor. Breasts he ached to lick played peek-a-boo behind the lacy bra barely covering them. "You gonna stand there and stare big boy?"

Sloan pushed off the wall and countered her every step.

"Teasing me woman?"

"A little tease never hurt no one?"

"Such a smart mouth, what am I going to do with you?" They found each other on opposite sides of the couch. "Come here." He unbuckled his jeans and sat on the middle

cushion. Briar complied, straddling his hips, her heat searing his dick through the fabric. She elicited a moan as his cock jerked in response. Sloan flicked the hooks of her bra with one hand and buried his face between her firm globes. Her skin scented with the intoxicating perfume she wore.

“I need you in me now.” Deft hands freed his dick from the confines of his pants.

Sloan gripped the side of her lace panties and ripped the seam in half. She let out a shocked gasp, causing him to chuckle. When she impaled herself on him, the same chuckle became a hiss as wet heat encased him. Sloan flicked his tongue over her distended nipples, giving each equal attention. One hand rose and fell with her slow ride. Vaginal muscles clenched around him, retreated and grasped him once more.

“Cariña.” She’d be the death of him, torturing him as she was. He traced her skin with kisses, beginning with the valley between her breasts, his fingers grazing her sides as she rode him hard but slow. His dick threatening to blow, but he staved off the inevitable, concentrating on tracing a path down between their bodies. Briar placed her hands on his thighs and leaned back. He pressed his thumb to her clit and rubbed the bundle of nerves, his gaze never straying from her expressive face as she neared climax.

“Sloan.” The sweet husk of his name fell from her lips seconds before tremors rippled her channel walls. He pinched and rolled her clit between his thumb and finger and felt her pussy quicken against him. Briar’s once smooth gyrations turned jerky, as if she backed off from the over stimulation.

“Come back here baby.” Sloan licked his thumb and took Briar’s hand pulling her forward. He pressed his fingers drenched in her juices to her mouth, a short growl leaving his lips as her soft lips enclosed around his digits sucking them clean. *Hell, I can’t take much more.* She wrapped her arms around his neck, pressing her lips to his, waging a war of control. Sloan thrust his tongue into her sweet orifice and grasped the globes of her ass, bringing her on and off his cock, giving her a reminder of who she was dealing with. She acquiesced holding tight, hitched breathing escaping her when their kisses broke off.

“That’s it cariña, let go, come for me.” The dam broke, flooding him with her essence. Convulsing muscles held him in a gridlock grip continually squeezing. He plunged and withdrew fighting the constriction seizing his dick. “Ride me now. Hard and fast.” Slapping her ass spurred her to move, his hands guiding her pace, bringing her off his dick and over the crown of his cock and down the shaft. Her quickened shallow thrusts brought him to the edge. He bit down on the cord of her neck and slammed up, ropes of his seed shooting into her womb.

“Have I told you how much I enjoy your homeruns?” Briar rose off his cock and sucked him down her throat. His cock jerked. He held her hair guiding her mouth over him, eyes closed enjoying the sensation.

Briar worked him to full arousal with her talented mouth, swallowing him whole. Moans vibrated against his shaft as she breathed. *Fuck, I’m about to blow.* She knew it, preyed on his lack of control when she was at the helm. He fisted her hair tighter, fucking her pretty mouth hard and fast. His balls drew tight as she toyed with them in her hands, rolling them, her fingers tight at the base of his dick. Sloan came in blinding intensity. He released the hold on her head and moved to push her away. Briar halted him, pulling off only after she’d ingested every seed spilled from his dick.

“We have now blessed every room in this penthouse.” She rose from her knees and slid up his body. He caressed her skin. “Already? We need a new place. A vacation house for the family.”

“I love the way you think.” Briar rubbed her cheek against his. “A large one with a lot of room, in case we have more children. Maybe a carriage house or small cabin for extra make out spots.”

“Sounds good, we’ll need space as we grow old together.” Sloan wrapped his arms around her. Their paths crossed in an unlikely place for people to meet and they managed to have a healthy relationship. He thanked God for the night he entered the pub and found woman of his dreams.

THE END

About The Author

Being smart and sassy with a great sense of humor comes easily for Mahalia Levey. An avid reader of books, she found herself enchanted with disappearing completely into the worlds authors created. One day she vowed to herself she'd be one of them. Then family life came, and college right after. Swayed from her childhood course of action, it took many years for her to get back to that place she held dear as a child. Now she is running full steam ahead to keep up with the many ideas flowing freely. She plans on taking her work to higher levels and expanding her genres. Her main focus is giving her readers variety. Her works in progress include paranormal, fantasy and mainstream romance. Taking characters and watching them grow past what she's imagined is her true passion.

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