

The Obsession

An [Ellora's Cave](#) Electronic Publication

In association with author [Jaid Black](#)

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Edited by Lee Haskell

Warning:

The following material contains strong sexual content meant for mature readers. "The Obsession" has been rated NC-17, erotic, by three individual reviewers. We strongly suggest storing this electronic file in a place where young readers not meant to view this e-book are unlikely to happen upon it. That said, enjoy...

To Neil, my real-life broguin' hero...

Prologue I

Edinburgh, Scotland

“Good morning, Margaret.” Neil Ross inclined his head formally, offering his arm to the woman he’d been dating for approximately two months. Escorting her to a middle pew in Blackfriar Kirk’s sanctuary, he settled into the seat beside her and awaited the deliverance of the Sunday sermon.

Quietly clearing her throat, Margaret smiled as she offered him a stick of gum. “Would you care for a piece?” She blushed, growing nervous when he turned to regard her through his wire-rimmed spectacles. “I-It’s your favorite,” she stammered out.

Neil smiled slowly, his brown eyes crinkling at the corners. “Thank-you. That was thoughtful of you, my dear.” He accepted the stick of gum and popped it into his mouth. Chewing quietly, he turned his attention back toward the front of the sanctuary where even now the minister was making his way to the podium.

As the sermon began, Neil found his thoughts straying to the woman beside him. Margaret was desirous of marriage, he knew, and truth be told Neil had reached the stage in life where he no longer cared to be alone. He was thirty-nine, almost forty, could claim no children, and had never been wed. So for what was at least the fifth time in the past two weeks he allowed himself to consider the merits behind a union with Margaret.

Companionship. Mutual respect. Similar upbringings. And Margaret was a fine cook to boot. She would make for a brilliant housewife and a terrific mother to his future children. He wished he held no qualms whatsoever, but he supposed a touch of cold feet was to be expected.

Margaret was rather ordinary of face and form, neither ugly nor beautiful. She was timid and reserved by nature, preferring to defer to Neil in all things. There was nothing particularly exciting about Margaret or her life, her idea of a good time being dinner over at her mum’s every Sunday following worship services. But Neil didn’t mind.

Neil was a sensible man not given to flights of fancy or passionate exchanges. A university lecturer of mathematics, he was authoritative and a tad brusque, dealing better with numbers than with people. Margaret understood these things about him and tolerated him for what he was. In return, he tolerated her affection for the church, not being an overly religious sort himself.

In so much that Margaret was a tad humdrum, so too was Neil. He wasn’t the sort of man one puts on a guest list in the hopes of livening up a dull party, but rather he was the sort of man one calls upon when they have a flat tire and are in need of a ride to work. He was reliable and dependable, the very attributes that assured him he’d make Margaret a most proper husband.

When the sermon came to an end, Neil rose to his feet and ushered Margaret towards her car. She clung to his arm, blushing slightly at the intimate feel of his muscles bulging beneath her hand. “I had a terrific time. I thought the sermon quite good. Did you?” she asked hopefully.

Neil nodded his agreement. “I particularly enjoyed the minister’s recitation on the book of Daniel. I thought his insight remarkable.”

“Indeed,” Margaret demurred, “I can only agree.”

He smiled.

When they reached the Toyota, she handed him the keys and waited while he unlocked the car door for

her. "Will I see you at mum's this afternoon?" She released his arm and smiled demurely. "She's preparing all your favorite dishes."

Neil rubbed his belly and grinned. "How can I pass up so tempting an offer. Of course I'll be there, Margaret."

Her blush grew deeper. "I'll see you at two then."

"At two it is."

Neil watched as Margaret's sensible four-door sedan made a turn out of Blackfriar Kirk's parking lot and into traffic. She truly was all things practical and reliable, characteristics that were manifested in everything from her conservative no-frills attire to her clean but modest car.

He supposed he already knew what his decision should be. Neil was, after all, a most sensible man.

Prologue II

Atlanta, Georgia

"Take it off, baby! Take it off!"

"That's right honey! Hell yeah!"

Valentina Jason-Elliott laughed at her best friends' antics. She watched in amused delight as Cynthia and Holly jumped up out of their seats and stuffed five dollar bills down an almost naked male stripper's g-string. The stripper, who went by the stage name Hang Twelve, looked as though he lived up to his reputation. He winked at the women, grinning audaciously as they oohed and awed over the bulge in his metallic silver garment. Valentina dissolved into a fit of giggles.

"What's so funny?" Cynthia settled back into her seat and grinned as she picked up her glass of Chardonnay.

Valentina smiled. "From Holly I've come to expect the outrageous, but from you?" She shook her head and chuckled. "Too funny."

Cynthia saluted her with the glass of wine. "When the cat's away..." She let her sentence trail off playfully, wiggling her eyebrows like Groucho Marx. She knew Valentina would never judge her or think anything of the fact that a woman married twelve years was indulging in a little harmless fun on a night out with her single friends.

Indeed, Valentina had long been considered the freethinker of their group, which was saying a lot for two writers and an artist. Born to hippie parents who believed in everything from free love to the legalization of marijuana, very little had been considered taboo while growing up.

In her early twenties Valentina had dabbled in everything from lesbian sex to spending the occasional weekend getaway at nude resorts such as Jamaica's famous *Hedonism*. She'd dated men of different cultures, men of different social strata, and because of that fact she was very comfortable and assured of what made her tick.

Unlike the friends of her acquaintance, Valentina's parents had actually encouraged her to try new things, to experiment sexually that she might find what worked for her and what didn't. They'd lectured her severely to be careful, to always take precaution against diseases, but they'd encouraged her nonetheless. A fact that had made her family life seem quite idyllic and trendy amongst her peers while growing up.

Now twenty-nine and getting closer to the big three-o, she knew what she wanted, had a firm grasp on her libido and its needs. She no longer had the drive to experiment, hadn't had such an urge in over three years in fact, for she was very much in touch with her desires.

And what she desired more than anything else, she'd realized a little over a month ago, was an exclusive, monogamous relationship with a man as adventurous as she was, a man who puts the F in Fun, a man who could snag her attention and keep it.

She didn't want a boring, seemingly reliable geek like the man Cynthia was married to—Osmond was a nice man she supposed, but dull, dull, dull. No, she wanted something vastly different for herself. She wanted a man who would whisk her away on a moment's notice for a diving trip to Micronesia, take her to all of the latest gallery exhibits of her favorite artists, fly her to Paris on a whim and hold her captive there for a week or two while they made love and drank wine.

Osmond's idea of adventurous, Cynthia had complained to her, was dinner out at the local steak house and if she was really lucky a movie afterwards. Definitely not what Valentina was looking for.

Valentina good-naturedly blamed her inability to settle for the ordinary on her far from ordinary parents. They heralded from the Age of Aquarius, from a moment in time when passion had ruled over logic. And Valentina had followed in their footsteps in more ways than one.

Her mother was a performance artist, her father an equally talented playwright. By the age of ten Valentina had known she would follow their lead, and indeed, like her father she had become a writer. Where her father wrote for Broadway, however, she wrote strictly suspense novels. She hadn't quite reached the level of notoriety her parents had, but she was firmly on her way.

"So," Cynthia asked, her attention now trained on Valentina since the pulsating noise of the music and the strobe lights from the stage were winding down until the next act, "how long will you be gone to that art festival?"

"Which one?" Holly said wryly.

Cynthia chuckled. "The overseas one. That festival in Edinburgh."

Valentina smiled, her light green eyes twinkling. "A month. The festival is one of the grandest in Europe I'm told. I can't wait to see it."

Cynthia nodded. "Is this just another working holiday or a real honest-to-goodness, full-fledged vacation?"

"I guess you could say both." She picked up her White Russian and swirled it around in the glass. "Ballast Books is throwing a couple of parties there in an effort to introduce their writers to the European market. But for the most part the month is my own."

"Lucky girl."

"Yeah." She smiled. "You guys wanna come?" She looked pointedly at Cynthia. "You're supposed to be there anyway. You are a Ballast writer if you will recall."

Cynthia snorted at that. "Os would never let me leave for an entire month, girl. He'd never watch Erica while I was gone. You know that."

Holly sighed. "It's a no-go for me too. I've got two exhibits scheduled next month."

"I'm sorry I'll miss them," Valentina said seriously. "I wish I'd known about them before I went and prepaid for the entire month's trip."

Holly waved that away. "I understand. Besides, I haven't left my *Black* period yet," she said dramatically. "The pieces I'll be exhibiting are all new ones, but nothing drastically altered from my last showing in Manhattan."

Valentina nodded. "I love your *Black* period. Very smoky and sexy." Smiling slowly, she tilted her head toward Cynthia. "And if you change your mind and can get away, if even for a few days, come on over. I've already got the hotel room, all you need are the plane tickets."

Cynthia smiled, loving the idea. "Thank-you. If I can arrange it, I'll be there!"

Valentina didn't respond because the music was picking back up and a new performer dressed up like Darth Vader was taking to the stage. Besides, there was no point in responding. Cynthia would never show up in Edinburgh and they both knew it. Cynthia would never do anything to rock the boat at home in order to gain a few days of paradise sans Osmond. Cynthia was a most sensible woman, a woman not given to flights of fancy or momentary whims.

Nothing at all like Valentina.

Chapter 1

Edinburgh, Scotland

Two Weeks Later

"It really isn't necessary to purchase me a new pair of trousers, Neil." Margaret smiled up to him as they entered Jenners Department Store. "I realize you didn't mean to spill that glass of juice on my

tweed suit. Truly, the stain can probably still be worked out.”

“It’s no bother, Margaret.” He inclined his head as they made their way toward the women’s section. “I soiled a perfectly good pair of trousers with my clumsiness and I feel it only proper that I replace them.”

“How kind of you,” she demurred.

Neil made no comment as they neared a rack of chic designer dresses. A statuesque woman of medium height stood an aisle over, her blood-red nails leafing through the various selections. Her hand stilled on a black, barely-there Calvin Klein dress, then her fingers slowly ran over the material to test the feel of it.

The blood-red nails made their selection, picking up the scant piece of black material. The woman disappeared as quickly as she’d been spotted, and Neil found himself oddly curious as to what she had looked like. From his vantage point, he had seen only a tanned hand and a set of long, crimson-tipped nails. Clothing racks had blocked the rest.

“These dresses are all rubbish.” Margaret’s lips pinched together disapprovingly. “The sort of clothing a street walker might don.”

It occurred to Neil that her source of upset was a particularly classy display of Donna Karan’s, but he held his tongue. Margaret was, after all, a conservative dresser. “I believe the trousers are two aisles over.” He took her by the elbow and led her in the right direction. “I trust you’ll find something suitable over here.”

“Ah yes. Now this is more like it.” Upon reaching their destination, Margaret picked up a pair of camel tweed trousers and smiled. “This pair is rather fetching, don’t you agree?”

Neil mentally winced. Though he found the boring brown tweeds anything but riveting, he declined to mention as much. Margaret was entitled to dress as she saw fit, not to mention the fact that the trousers might look vastly different on from how they appeared on the rack. Besides, Neil reminded himself, he often times wore formal tweed outer pants to lecture in. The socially backwards Neanderthal in him, however, wished the woman he’d been courting had a care for more feminine-looking apparel.

“Excellent.” He smiled. “Would you care to try them on? To see if they fit?”

She bit her lip. “You don’t mind waiting?” she asked hesitantly.

Inwardly Neil sighed. On one hand he knew enough about himself and his dominant personality to realize he didn’t outright object to Margaret’s constant deferment to him, but on the other hand it sometimes aggravated him that she was so timid she feared for expressing her opinions at all. A quandary, that. And not one he cared to dwell upon just now. “Not at all.”

Ten minutes later, Neil checked his watch wondering how long it could possibly take to try on a pair of tweed trousers. But he was a patient man, so he stood outside the women’s try-on area without so much as a grumble. A few seconds later, he heard the door to the changing room open. He glanced up, assuming it was Margaret. It wasn’t.

A tanned hand and blood-red nails emerged first, causing Neil’s heart rate to pick up inexplicably. The attractively polished hand opened the door all the way, revealing a beautiful woman

who sported light brown hair with golden highlights dressed in a black, barely-there Calvin Klein dress.

A man of science, it didn't escape Neil's notice that the closer the woman walked toward him, the faster his heart rate picked up. He'd never felt such an elemental, primal response to a woman. The sheer, wispy dress came to mid thigh, plummeted in the front to reveal well-rounded cleavage, and was held together by lacy spaghetti straps at the shoulders.

She was provocative in her walk, sensual without trying to be. As she neared his standing position, brushing past him to make use of the three-way mirror beside him, she accidentally bumped into him, not having realized he stood there. "Oh I'm so sorry."

Smoky. Her voice reminded him of billowing, velvet smoke. Or silk sheets and sweaty sex. He coughed discreetly into his hand. "It's no trouble." He smiled, looking down into her light green eyes. A dusting of freckles across the bridge of her nose should have made her less appealing but only served to heighten her exotic look. "I should have known better than to stand in front of the only three-way mirror nearest the women's changing room."

He had made the omission in all seriousness, but she smiled warmly up to him and laughed. He found himself grinning back, pleased he'd inadvertently delighted her. "Poor guy. You're liable to get stampeded around here."

She had a sultry southern American accent that worked its way down his spine like a soothing balm. For some reason he couldn't name, it was the last bit that removed all reserve and made him grow rock hard. "I shall endeavor not to come to a bad end."

She laughed again and his erection grew harder. The woman held the most primitive fascination for him. "Good luck."

And then she was walking away from him and standing in front of the mirror, taking in how the dress looked at all angles. He could have told her how it looked had she asked him. Sinfully riveting.

When she stood in front of the mirror and looked at herself from the front, Neil was able to see without any trouble whatsoever that she was wearing white bikini-thong panties beneath the dress. Her buttocks molded around the scant piece of material as if made for it, two globes of no doubt tanned flesh partitioned off with a piece of lacy white cloth.

Neil quickly looked away, pushing his gold-wired spectacles up the bridge of his nose as he did so. He was so turned on he could feel pre-ejaculate converging from the tip of his penis to saturate his boxers.

A saleswoman thankfully interrupted his lecherous thoughts, smiling brightly as she made her way towards the American woman. "You look absolutely divine!" she said with a bit too much enthusiasm, the way sales clerks were apt to do. This saleswoman, however, wasn't lying. The emerald-eyed American with the full lips and ripe breasts did look divine. He idly wondered how much of it was the dress and how much was simply the woman herself.

"You think so?" She scrunched up her nose and glanced back into the mirror. "I was thinking it looked okay, but I wasn't sure."

"Perfect!" the red-headed saleswoman gushed. "Much better than the last one. Absolutely breathtaking."

The American smiled slowly, as if she understood what the clerk was about. The petite redhead wanted a sale. "I'll take it then."

Ten minutes later Margaret had settled on a sensible pair of brown Camel tweed trousers remarkably similar to the first pair she'd tried on. She and Neil made their way to the cash register where even now the American and the red-headed sales clerk were chatting back and forth about everything and nothing. The redhead was extremely pert for the American was spending a great deal of money. "You will look absolutely ravishing at the Ballast party in this dress."

The American merely smiled. "Thanks." She handed her a Visa card. "By the way, when does the festival begin? I was under the impression it lasted the entire month of August but apparently not."

"Next week," the redhead answered as she accepted the Visa into her palm. "It lasts three weeks, not four," she said in the way of explanation.

Her customer sighed. "I wonder what I'll do with myself until then. Maybe I'll drive up to the Highlands," she said wistfully. "I've never seen them before."

"Excellent notion." The redhead scanned the credit card, practically salivating when it came back with an acceptance. "There's a terrific beach resort in Strathy Point that attracts a lot of tourism." She leaned in closer to the American and whispered confidentially as she handed her the receipt to be signed. "I've heard it told they allow you to strut about topless up there in the summer months." She winked. "Sounds like a great diversion to me."

Neil could feel Margaret stiffen up beside him. Clearly, the redhead had unwittingly offended her sense of propriety.

"You're right," the American said without pretense, "it sounds fun. What's the name of the place again?"

"Strathy Point."

She nodded. "Guess I know where I'm headed for a few days. Thanks for the heads-up."

The redhead waved that away as she took back the receipt. "Think nothing—oh my!"

The American's golden brown head shot up. She regarded the saleswoman quizzically.

"You're Valentina Jason-Elliot? The woman who writes those sexy suspense thrillers?"

Neil's ears perked up. He'd read a couple of her novels himself.

"One and the same."

"I love your work! When is the next one due out?"

The American's face colored slightly. An effect Neil found oddly charming. "At the end of the month."

"Excellent!"

A minute and an autograph later, the golden brown American with the blood-red nails made her way out of Jenners, shopping bags in tow. Neil watched her walk away, out of his life forever, and wished he'd

had no reaction to that knowledge one way or the other.

* * * * *

“Neil,” Margaret said hesitantly, “we must talk.”

Following her into her mum’s formal living room, he inclined his head. “By all means.” He took the seat she indicated, wondering at what this could possibly be about.

Margaret took her time getting to the heart of the matter, picking a piece of imaginary lint from her new trousers as she gathered up her courage.

Neil eyed her curiously, uncertain as to what he should say. “Margaret?” he prodded gently.

She looked up, ever the nervous mouse. “Neil, I’m sorry to say this but I...” Her voice trailed off as she looked away.

“What? What is it?”

Her cheeks pinkened as she regarded him. “I’m afraid this isn’t working out for me,” she whispered.

He cleared his throat. “I beg your pardon? I thought we were getting on admirably well.”

“Oh we are,” she rushed out, her mousy brown head shooting upward. “It’s just that...that...”

“Yes?”

She sighed. “Neil, let me come straight to the point.”

He nodded.

“What are your intentions?” She went back to picking the lint from her trousers. Her cheeks scalded from pink to crimson. “Do you plan to marry me?”

“Margaret, I—”

“I’m sorry!” she blithered out. “But Neil I’m to turn thirty-two next week. My biological clock is ticking quite madly.” She closed her eyes, embarrassed. “So I need to know your intentions.”

Neil knew in that moment he didn’t want to marry her. He’d been hesitant all along, not wanting to deal with his feelings on the issue, but having been backed into a proverbial corner by Margaret, he realized with crystal clarity that they would not deal well together for a lifetime. She was too churchy, too timid. He was too authoritative, too brusque—in comparison at any rate. But she was a good woman, and a woman who deserved to be given the truth.

Neil sighed, then shook his head slowly. He reached for Margaret’s hand and took it in his own. “You are all things worthy and wonderful,” he said gently, “but I...” He took a deep breath and prepared to give her the truth she sought. “But I don’t think a marriage between us would work,” he softly finished.

Margaret nodded, but said nothing.

“I’m terribly sorry. Should you ever feel the desire for my company again then I’d be—”

She held up a palm. “I’ve already wasted two and a half months of my life on you, Dr. Ross.” She was angrier than he’d ever seen her before. “I think it best if you just leave.”

Neil hesitated for a brief moment before relenting. He stood up, looking down on her. “I wish you well, Margaret.”

She closed her eyes. “Please just leave.”

And so he did, feeling lecherous for the second time in the same afternoon, though for differing reasons. It occurred to Neil during the drive home that the mousy, churchy Margaret had just worked up the nerve to dump him.

Chapter 2

Churchy, timid Margaret had dumped him. Neil sighed at yesterday’s memory as he made his way into the University of Edinburgh and towards his office. He needed to prepare lecture notes, as classes were due to commence in a couple of weeks.

Taking a seat behind his desk, he steeped his fingertips together and considered the state of his life. Dull was the only word he could think of to describe it.

Neil had never been the type of man others thought of as particularly exciting. He’d known that all of his life, but until this moment the knowledge of it hadn’t exactly bothered him. He’d been a sickly but hardworking child, excelling in his studies and harboring a deep love of mathematics.

A skinny, gawky lad, he’d reveled in the identity his school grades had given him, realizing it was the one thing he was better at than most. Firmly entrenched in the identity of nerd by the time he was thirteen, he had even begun to dress the part. He hadn’t gone ballistic, he reminded himself, for he’d always been a fine dresser. But he’d donned the spectacles instead of purchasing contact lenses and had dressed in his formal lecturer’s attire from an indecently young age.

And now at the age of thirty-nine, there was no way of living down his geeky claim to fame. That he had grown out of his sickness and had acquired an athletic, muscled body was of no import. People saw what they wanted to see, what they expected to see. And from the age of thirteen onward it had been expected that Neil Ross was a nerd.

But had he done anything to expel such a notion? No, he thought grimly, he hadn’t. He’d been content in his role as the boring and reliable lecturer of mathematics, content with allowing the status quo to remain.

Until he’d met her.

Neil's eyes flicked towards the bookshelf standing on the opposite side of his office. Withdrawing slowly from his seat, he made his way past the sofa he sometimes slept on when working late into the night and over to the oak structure, stopping to pick up a copy of *The Scream*, the latest release of one Valentina Jason-Elliot.

When she'd run into him yesterday, all green eyes and red smiles, he had wanted so much for her to see him as more than a boring lecturer of mathematics, as more than a sensible man in proper clothing. He had wanted her to see him as a virile male who had picked up her scent and was onto it.

He wondered, not for the first time, just what had gone through the novelist's mind whilst conversing with him. What had she thought of him? Or had she thought anything of him at all? Probably not.

Neil sighed, placing *The Scream* on the shelf it had been occupying. He made his way back to his desk and plopped down rather unceremoniously into his seat. Running his fingers briskly through his short, dark hair he attempted to squelch the restlessness brewing inside of him, telling himself it did him no good whatsoever to obsess over a woman who didn't so much as know his name and most likely wouldn't care to learn it.

Even now as he sat at his sensible desk surrounded by sensible items from a sensible lecturer's life, he couldn't help but to consider Ms. Jason-Elliot's current insensible whereabouts. He knew precisely where she was, exactly what she was doing, for he'd have been deaf not to have overheard the conversation she'd had yesterday with the red-headed saleswoman.

She was at Strathy Point. Possibly lying topless on the beach somewhere this very moment. The image caused Neil to become instantaneously erect.

Rubbing his palm alongside the outline of his jaw, he asked himself if he had the nerve to use this insider knowledge and do something completely out of character, something like follow Valentina Jason-Elliot to Strathy Point and attempt to become reacquainted with her. A very intoxicating, yet highly unnerving prospect.

What if, after all, she had no desire to so much as speak to him? What if he made a fool of himself?

Neil was about to discard the notion entirely when the image of churchy, timid Margaret popped into his mind. If the mouse could find the nerve to dump him, surely he could find the nerve to pay a visit to Strathy Point.

Indeed, Neil thought as he surged to his feet, sick to death of his boring life, tired of the status quo, why the bloody hell not?

* * * * *

Valentina ignored the aroused looks a few of the men on the beach were throwing her way. Her parents had been taking her to nude beaches since she'd been old enough to walk so she truly didn't find anything all that remarkable about seeing naked bodies scattered around.

Still, she wasn't naive enough to believe that everyone saw life the way she did. Not every man here was present because he'd been reared by hippie parents to love the freedom of expression inherent on a nude beach. Most of them were here simply because they wanted to stare.

Valentina found an area to herself a bit off from the other beach-goers. Spreading out a blanket on the sandy shore, she wound her hair into a top-knot and plopped down onto the blanket. Rummaging through her beach bag, she located a bottle of tanning accelerator and began working it into her shoulders and breasts. The chilly liquid caused her nipples to harden, elongated nubs of rosy flesh poking up from the puffy areolas that surrounded them.

After she'd finished coating her arms and legs, she laid back on the blanket, her hands supporting the weight of her head. Her nipples poked further upward, their reaction to the sun causing a slight carnal aching in her belly.

Valentina closed her eyes, her mind wandering as her face and body grew a rich golden brown from the sun's rays. As her thoughts strayed, she found them meandering two days backward in time to that attractive-looking man she'd met at Jenners.

The weird thing about it was, the guy really wasn't her type. And Valentina was well aware of what her type was.

She was used to dating musicians and artists, the sort of men that had a certain reckless air about them, who were forever jaunting off to try this new thing or that due to the sheer restlessness of their natures. Of course, Valentina admitted to herself, it was that very restlessness that had caused her last boyfriend to stray from her in the first place, taking on new lovers without even so much as a passing concern of what it might do to her on the inside.

If there was one thing that athletic man back in Jenners could not be called, it was restless. Valentina smiled, thinking that the stranger had waited on whomever he'd escorted to the department store with an unnatural amount of male patience. If that had been her ex-boyfriend Alex, Alex would have been trying to get up the red-headed saleswoman's skirt as a way to pass the time while waiting on Valentina to emerge from the changing room.

Valentina's mind wandered a bit further, wondering to herself as she was if a lack of restlessness in a man was necessarily a bad thing. She considered the patient stranger, not at all the type who looked like he came on to anything in a skirt. She idly wondered if he was patient in all areas of his life, namely in bed, then told herself she was acting like an idiot for even contemplating it.

The proper-looking stranger was in Edinburgh, which might as well have been an ocean away since she had no idea who he was or how to find him should she try. She fell asleep a moment later, her last coherent thought revolving around whether or not the stranger had noticed her as a woman. And why in the world she should care.

Chapter 3

Neil walked along the beach at Strathy Point feeling a bit surreal. He couldn't believe he'd actually entertained a notion like trotting off to the Highlands in the hopes of spying the American novelist, let alone seeing it through. But he was here now, he told himself resolutely, so he might as well

make the most of it.

The beach truly was a nude one, he noted. He felt a bit awkward in that he'd retained his swimming trunks whilst everyone around him was completely divested of clothing. This beach wasn't a topless one as the sales clerk had suggested, but both a topless and bottomless one. He felt like an idiot.

Neil batted his eyelashes a few times in rapid succession, the contacts he'd procured yesterday afternoon making his eyes water a bit. He was growing used to the damned things—for the most part—but conceded it had taken a few painful hours to get even this far. Well, he thought with a measure of satisfaction, should he be lucky enough to run into Valentina Jason-Elliot at least he wouldn't be doing it in his sensible, boring spectacles.

Neil scanned the shore of the beach for the woman in question, his gut knotting in anticipation of seeing her again. His dark gaze flicked this way and that until at last it settled upon the form of a sleeping and very nude author lying a ways off down the sandy terrain.

He took a deep breath to steady himself, praying to heaven that he'd find the courage to approach her and awaken her. He could only hope his body cooperated and that he didn't sustain a noticeably large and painful erection at the merest glimpse of her.

But when he drew closer and saw that her large rosy nipples were poking up into the air, his desire to fall down beside her and suck on them sent all thoughts of retaining his control scurrying away, and he noted with grim resignation that his penis was as hard as a tire iron.

He went down on his knees beside her, unable to believe that he, Neil Ross, had grown bold enough to approach her let alone be brazen enough to drop to his knees and ogle her body up close. He glanced around quickly, feeling a moment's panic at being embarrassed by others should she shout at him to go away, then breathed in relief when he realized they were quite alone on this stretch of beach and her shouts would only humiliate him in front of her. Not that that wasn't bad enough unto itself.

Neil's eyes fell to her face, noting at once that she was in a deep sleep. Reckless, that. He had the urge to scold her for it, thinking to himself that if he'd been any man but himself he might have taken advantage of the situation and forced himself on her.

And then his dark eyes found her breasts and all thoughts of scolding her flew out the proverbial window. Her areolas, he noticed, were a light pink and a tad puffy. Her elongated nipples shot up out of them like two bottle rockets on velvety soft landing pads.

Neil took a deep breath, his erection fierce, as his gaze meandered lower and settled upon her puffed up labia. One of her knees was bent slightly, offering his vision no impediment to finding out what her flesh looked like on the inside. She kept her mons shaved bald, he noted as he gritted his teeth, thinking to himself how much he'd love to run his tongue all about the sleek folds beneath it.

Neil stared at her cunt, wanting to suck on it, wanting to ride in it, wanting it period. As if the sleeping woman could read his thoughts and wanted to encourage them, the flesh between her thighs grew wet before his eyes, one pearly drop of fluid noticeable at the entrance.

His eyes shot up to her breasts. They were harder then before. So hard it looked painful to him. So hard he envisioned taking them into his mouth and—

Realization dawned.

Embarrassed at having been caught looking his fill at her naked body, Neil's gaze shot up and clashed with a very awake woman's. His cheeks went up in flames as she smiled at him and like that geeky boy he'd been at thirteen he had the sudden urge to bolt.

"Haven't we met?"

* * * * *

Valentina thought she had grown too jaded to become aroused by something as simple as a man gazing at her naked body with desire. But Christ, she thought as her nipples stabbed up into the air, this man's brooding gaze had an unnerving effect on her.

He looked at her like he wanted to own her, like he wanted to shove his fingers up her cunt and claim it. The effect was a heady one, an arousing one, and it wasn't just because she was being ogled in general but because she'd already realized whom she was being ogled by.

Mr. Prim and Proper himself. The stranger she'd chatted briefly with at Jenners.

Valentina's eyes ran over the length of him. He was impressively built, she thought. His legs were long and well-muscled, his arms not overly big like a body-builder's, but alluringly cut and vein-roped. His chest was equally well-muscled, hard and tempting. And his cock—good god—she smiled, thinking herself to be definitely *not* jaded, his cock was gloriously long and thick, bulging against his swimming trunks.

Knowing that the sight of her was turning him on, that this man she'd fallen asleep thinking about was here beside her, caused her belly to clench and liquid drops to form between her thighs. His gaze shot up, snagging hers, and his face turned charmingly red.

She could tell he meant to leave. Alarmed at the prospect, and not having the time or inclination to ponder why, she forestalled him with a smile and a simple question. "Haven't we met?"

Neil's eyes flicked towards her nipples then back to her face. He cleared his throat nervously, feeling like the biggest idiot to have ever walked the planet. "Y-Yes," he stammered out, nodding once, "we met at Jenners two days back."

She smiled at his rich brogue, coming up on her elbows then settling back on them while they chatted. Her nipples were scant inches away from his face, all hard and tempting, resting on their puffy pink patches. She made no move to close her thighs, he realized, and had in fact opened one leg a bit wider. She was not shy at all over having been caught completely nude. She seemed to revel in this intimate moment between them, and he wasn't altogether certain what to make of that fact.

"I knew I recognized you." She grinned, settling him down a bit when he understood that she wasn't angry at his ogling. "Did you ever end up getting stampeded?"

"Stampeded?" he asked dumbly. And then, remembering their earlier conversation, he smiled. "No." He cleared his throat. "I made it out in one piece."

"Good." Valentina bit down onto her lip and gnawed at it a moment, unable to believe she was about to

suggest what she was. But she felt brazen. Aroused and brazen. And she knew that she wanted to have sex with this man. She'd never been one to think beyond the present and in this moment in time she wanted him. "You know," she said as she tilted her chin, "this situation seems a bit unfair to me."

Neil's face colored. "How so?"

She glanced at his tented swimming trunks. "This is a nude beach," she murmured, "but you're wearing clothes."

Neil's cock grew longer, the muscles in his stomach clenching. She had basically just invited him to remove all of his clothing, even knowing as she had to that he was fully erect. He glanced down at her labia which was now ripe and swollen and wondered if it was possible that she actually wanted to have sex with him. He doubted it, but decided for once in his life to just go with the flow and see what happened. He stood up and lowered the swim trunks, his erection now fully revealed to her.

Valentina's breath caught, not having expected him to be *that* well-endowed. He was handsome in a very harsh, masculine way, and sexy in a very naughty-schoolgirl-corrupts-the-handsome-distinguished-professor kind of way. She smiled at him as he resumed his seat beside her. "The sun feels great against the skin, doesn't it?" she drawled.

"Quite." As Neil gazed at her nipples, he decided that his tendency to lecture found odd moments to make itself known. "Though I hope you've some manner of protection on," he added, "for you wouldn't want to burn your—" He coughed discreetly into his hand and looked away, embarrassed at what he'd almost uttered.

Valentina was enjoying this. Most of the men she'd dated had been too sure of themselves, as if they believed they had the right to take what they wanted. But this man was so arousingly unique that she found herself wanting to push him more and more, if for no other reason than to test his limits of endurance. "Why don't you rub some lotion into them for me?" she whispered.

His dark eyes shot up to meet hers and he visibly gulped. He didn't throw himself at her, but neither did he back down from her carnal challenge. "Where is the lotion?" he rasped out. He was hard, so goddamned hard.

"In my bag."

A few moments later, Neil had worked the coconut-scented lotion into his palms and was reaching for her breasts. He drew them into his large hands, moistening the soft fleshy globes with the sweet oil. When her breathing grew a bit shallow, he began massaging her nipples, working the lotion into them with his thumbs and fingers.

"What's your name?" Valentina asked breathlessly, her eyes flickering shut as he continued the sensual massage.

"Neil Ross," he answered thickly, his arousal causing his inhibitions to wane significantly. "And you're Valentina Jason-Elliott."

Her eyes flew open. "How did you know my name?"

"I overheard the saleswoman."

She stilled. “Did you also overhear me tell her I’d be vacationing at Strathy Point?”

His dark gaze clashed with her light green one. “Yes,” he admitted, offering no further explanation. He massaged her nipples a bit harder, plucking at them now. When she moaned softly and her eyes narrowed in desire he feared for spilling himself right there on her thigh.

“You followed me.” It was a statement not a question.

“Yes.” It was the truth not an apology.

“I’m not sure what to think of that.”

“I think,” Neil said softly, his erection achingly swollen, “that your beautiful cunt needs lotioned up as well.” He stilled as soon as the words came tumbling out, not quite believing he’d actually spoken them.

Valentina met his gaze and studied his features, as if considering his words. And then, surreal as it was to him, she splayed her legs wide, granting him not only a delicious view of her bald cunt and its silky folds, but permission to massage her in the most intimate manner possible as well.

Neil forgot all about the lotion as his index finger found her hole and he pushed a large finger up inside of her. She exhaled on a moan, her head falling back to dangle precariously from her neck, as her wet pussy grew wetter and her nipples continued to stab upwards.

A second finger found her pussy hole, joining with the first as he slowly began to finger fuck it. On his other hand the pad of his thumb zeroed in on her clit and he began to rub it in a sensual, circular motion. She arched into his hand, breathing deeply as he massaged her soaked flesh. “You have the most beautiful cunt I’ve ever seen,” he ground out, “so wet and juicy, so tight and swollen.”

“Oh yesss.” Valentina’s back arched further, her lips parting slightly. She was drunk on arousal, intoxicated by his effect on her.

His words, his hands, his mere presence heightened her desire. Neil made her feel like an omnipotent erotic goddess—a sensual state of being no other man had worked her into. He looked at her as if she was the most intriguing woman in the world, explored her body as though he’d never get enough of it.

“Cum for me, Tina,” she heard him murmur. His fingers began to thrust faster. The rubbing motion on her clit became brisker. “I want to watch you cum.”

Oh yes—oh god she was coming. She was so close. She groaned, her hips rearing up for him, wanting him to do what he would, wanting to cum hard for him.

His fingers were pushing up inside of her, filling her wet flesh, stretching her and making her ache for his cock. The sun was beating down on her, the wind was dancing across her nipples, tightening them further.

And then his tongue curled around her clit, replacing the pad of his thumb, and she thought she’d died and gone to a sinner’s heaven. “*Oh Neil.*”

He lapped at her quickly, flicking his tongue across the swollen bud, slurping it up into his mouth and sucking mercilessly. Valentina’s entire body began to shake as he sucked on her and sucked on her, never relenting, never even slowing. “*Oh god—oh yes Neil.*”

The low guttural sound of appreciation he made in the back of his throat was her undoing. Instinctually, she reached out for his head, threaded her crimson nails through his dark hair, and pressed his face into her cunt as far as it would go. He sucked harder still, slurping sounds reaching her ears. “*Yes.*”

Valentina’s hips ground upwards as a devastating orgasm ripped through her belly. She screamed at the intensity of it, her entire body spasming, her flesh convulsing around his fingers.

And then he was coming down on top of her, crushing her into the blanket as he settled himself between her thighs. Their gazes clashed as his hands palmed her breasts and with one powerful thrust he surged inside of her. “*Neil.*”

“Christ you feel good,” he gritted out, thrusting into her faster and faster. He wanted to go slow, to savor this moment in time he doubted he’d get a repeat performance of. But her flesh was so hot and it kept suctioning him back in, taking him deeper, making him need to scald her insides with his hot cum.

Valentina moaned, wrapping her legs around Neil’s waist. He plucked at her nipples in response, clamping down on them as he surged inside of her over and over, deeper and deeper, again and again.

“Fuck me harder,” she gasped, grinding her hips at him.

Neil’s jaw clenched as he gave her what she wanted. He released her breasts, slid his hands beneath their joined bodies to palm her buttocks, and pounded into her wet flesh in a series of deep, merciless thrusts.

“Oh god.” Valentina closed her eyes and held on for a hard ride, her legs wrapped firmly about his middle, giving him a deep penetration. She could hear the sounds of her flesh sucking his cock inside of her body each time he buried himself to the hilt.

And then she was coming, spasming around his cock, her back arching as he sank into her. She screamed out her release, wrapping her legs tighter about his waist, bringing pressure down on her clit, which made her scream all the louder. “*OH—GOD.*”

“Jesus.” Neil thrust into her cunt—deep, hard—oblivious to anything but the feel of her flesh wrapped around him. He sank into her again and again, gluttonously indulging himself of her body. He felt like an animal—territorial, primal, unable to entertain a coherent thought. All he could do was feel—feel this woman, feel this cunt he was obsessed with possessing and fucking. “*Tina.*”

And then he was pouring himself into her, hot cum spurting into the body of the woman he wanted to brand, the pussy he’d wanted to fuck and had never thought he’d stood a chance of plunging into. His muscles bunched, his entire body clenched, as he closed his eyes and pumped enough cum inside of her to put three men to shame.

His breathing harsh, Neil gazed down into Valentina’s face as he hovered over her. She was smiling dreamily, the way a woman who’d been fucked hard and good was apt to do, and in that moment he felt more possessive of her sweet cunt than he had a right to.

He fell down on top of her, replete and exhausted, the most ferocious orgasm of his life rendering him all but unconscious. He found enough strength to tip his head and sip from her lips before rolling off of her and hoisting his body up beside hers.

Anyone could walk down the beach and find them here, he knew. But he was tired, so incredibly tired.

Neil's dark head came down to rest on Valentina's breasts, his heavy eyelids closing. As he fell into a smoky slumber it occurred to him from somewhere in the haze of his semi-unconsciousness that she might try to leave him, might be gone when he woke up.

Instinctually, inevitably, Neil's hand found her engorged flesh. He thrust two fingers deep inside of her cunt, locking them together, and fell fast asleep.

Chapter 4

Neil awoke to the feel of his achingly erect shaft disappearing into the depths of Valentina's throat. Her full lips devoured the length of him, then resurfaced to tease the extremely sensitive head. He groaned, grabbing her by the back of her golden brown head. His jaw clenched as she made an appreciative "Mmmm" sound and her lips glided up and down his shaft.

She licked the length of him like a lollipop, closed her eyes and sucked on him like it was a favorite treat. "Mmm mmm mmmmmmm."

"*Christ.*" Neil gritted his teeth, unable to endure another moment. On a hoarse groan he climaxed violently into her mouth, shuddering all over as he watched her lips and tongue lap up all of his juice, then suck on the tiny hole of his sensitive head to make certain she'd missed nothing.

When his breathing steadied and he was able to open his eyes the first thing he noticed was that the sun had sank below the horizon and evening had descended. The second thing he noticed, and the better of the two, was that a beautiful bald cunt was lowering itself onto his mouth.

Valentina's blood-red nails spread her pussy lips far apart, which served to make her tiny rosebud clit bulge out further. "Suck on me, Neil," she murmured in that smoky Southern American drawl, "I love the way you eat pussy."

There was no time for a reply, for her wet cunt had found his lips and his tongue was shooting out to flick at her clit and curl around it. He drew the sensitive piece of flesh into his mouth and began to suckle from it in long, drugging sips.

"Neil."

Valentina began to ride his face in slow undulations, the same as she would have ridden his cock. Her head fell back, her unbound hair cascading onto his stomach as she moaned into the night and rode him. Each time her hips lurched back in their circular motion her clit was tugged at by Neil's lips and suctioning tongue. She moaned, her nipples stabbing out as her orgasm drew nearer.

Neil groaned appreciatively, his hands reaching up to cup and knead her buttocks. Valentina began riding his mouth faster as he massaged the twin globes, her drenched flesh pressing into his warm mouth.

“God yes.”

Neil began to suckle hard from her clit, drawing from her relentlessly, forcing her to gasp and moan, to undulate on top of him in frenzied arousal. He could feel her body shake and stiffen simultaneously, letting him know that she was coming. He sucked harder, offering her no mercy, wanting her to think of him and him alone when she needed release.

“Neil.” Valentina expelled his name on a primitive moan, her hips thrashing madly, her cunt drenching his face with its dew. Her nipples stiffened into impossibly tight points as her flesh convulsed around his mouth and blood rushed up to heat her face.

Panting heavily, Valentina ground her throbbing vagina one last time into Neil’s mouth, then slid it down his lips, down his chin, gliding down toward his chest. He thrust his tongue out, lapping at her in one long lick from her hole to her clit as her soaked flesh slid off his face.

“Mmmm.” Valentina smiled down to him as she perched herself on his chest. “That was great.”

Neil’s eyes flicked toward the distended nipples that hovered over his line of vision. He reached up and cupped her breasts, plucking at her nipples in a way he knew she liked. “I’ve got something else I want you to ride,” he murmured.

Valentina grinned, knowing his erect manhood was poking at her, wanting entrance. “I’ll have to think about it,” she teased.

But Neil was in no mood to be teased. He felt like an animal in heat, a predator that wanted to rut inside of its mate. “Sit on my cock,” he said demandingly, no trace of humor in his voice.

Valentina was surprised at the way her body responded to his dominant tone, soaking itself for a smooth entry, submissively preparing itself to be fucked. She grabbed him by the base of the penis, drew herself up to her knees, and sank down onto his stiff shaft, impaling herself in one fluid motion. “Better?” she breathed out.

“Infinitely.”

Neil plucked at the puffy nipples he loved so much as she rode him long and hard. For the next twenty minutes he gluttoned on her flesh, greedily accepting all of her climaxes, all of her moans. He was obsessed with her, he knew, obsessed with her body, obsessed with her cunt, wanting to own it. He was obsessed with her period.

As his muscles bunched and corded and he spurted his hot cum deep inside of her body he also realized something else. When they were alone like this, together like this, mating like two animals in full rut, he was more in touch with who he was as a man than he’d ever been before.

There was no hiding behind facades where Valentina Jason-Elliott was concerned. No roles, no assumed identities. There was just Neil Ross. An elemental male determined to keep his mate.

Chapter 5

“So tell me about yourself. After the night we just spent together on the beach I’d love to have my curiosity indulged a bit.” Valentina grinned at Neil as she sat across from him in the hotel’s tiny restaurant. They were dressed casually today, both of them wearing simple jeans and tee-shirt combos; an every day event for Valentina, an anomaly for Neil.

Neil grinned back, feeling more carefree than he could ever remember being. The fact that he didn’t feel the need to conform to a pre-determined role for himself was manifested in everything from his casual attire to the fact that he’d just spent the last several hours making love on a nude beach to a gloriously sexual woman ten years his junior. He felt wonderful, alive and wonderful. He never wanted their interlude to end.

“I’m a lecturer of mathematics at the University of Edinburgh,” he said as he picked up his glass of Cabernet Sauvignon. “I’ve been there for close to eighteen years now.”

Valentina smiled, his deep brogue sending warm, fuzzy feelings down her spine. “Have you ever been married?”

“No.”

“Ever come close?”

“Once.” He shrugged, the memory of his college sweetheart feeling like a lifetime ago. “But in the end Susan decided a lecturer of physics was more her style.”

Valentina nodded knowingly. “So she was having an affair. My last relationship came to an end for that reason.”

“He cheated on *you* ?”

Neil had asked the question incredulously, as if he couldn’t fathom any man so much as even considering sleeping around when he had Valentina to come home to. The fact that he felt that way to begin with sent butterflies coursing through her belly and made an unidentifiable emotion lodge in her heart.

He thought she was perfect. He thought every man on the planet should be obsessed with having her. She didn’t agree, knew it wasn’t true, but such feelings on his part made her want him all the more.

“Yeah he did.” She smiled wryly. “Multiple times actually.”

Neil reached out and touched her hand. “Are you okay now?”

Her answer was important to him for a couple of reasons, he knew. He didn’t want her hurting and just as importantly he didn’t want her pining away for another man. Such a thought, he possessively admitted, was far from pleasant.

“Yeah I’m fine.” She grinned, her eyes crinkling at the corners. “At the time I was pretty upset. For three days I meandered around the house feeling dramatically tragic. But when the fourth day came and I no longer cared I realized that I couldn’t have been in love.”

“How so?”

She splayed her hands in a gesture that Neil took to mean he should have already known the answer. “I was over Alex in three days. If I’d been in love with him it seems to me I’d have walked around feeling tragic for at least another couple of weeks.” She chuckled. “Or at least another couple of days.”

Neil smiled, more elated by the knowledge that she hadn’t loved Alex than he should have been, than he had a right to be. He had no idea, after all, if Valentina planned to continue their affair beyond Strathy Point. Because such a topic didn’t settle well with him he discarded it, refusing to deal with anything other than the here and now. And right now he was here with her. It was all that mattered.

“So,” Valentina cheerily interjected, breaking him from his thoughts, “how long do you plan to vacation up here?”

Neil smiled wryly. “How long do you plan to stay?”

She laughed, remembering his earlier confession that he’d followed her to the beach. She supposed such an event should have frightened her somewhat, but it didn’t. Perhaps if there was something weird about him, or if the attraction wasn’t mutual, she would have been alarmed. But she most definitely was not alarmed. On the contrary, it made her feel terrifically sexy that Neil would go to such lengths to be with her. “I’ll be here another three days. Well not here exactly, but in the Highlands in general.” She shrugged. “I planned on leaving Strathy Point this afternoon and going camping on Cairn Gorm for a couple of days.”

“Camping sounds lovely,” he murmured, their gazes locking. Reality dawned for a fraction of a moment and his face colored slightly as he broke eye contact. He’d just all but invited himself along when she was most likely ready to be rid of him. “I meant to say that I’m certain you’ll have an excell—”

“You wanna come?”

His dark head shot up. “You want me to join you?” he asked tentatively, thinking he must have misunderstood her intentions.

“Definitely.” She grinned. “The question is do *you* want to join *me* ?”

“If you don’t mind,” he murmured, deciding not to question his good luck.

“I don’t mind.” Valentina shook her head and smiled. “I don’t mind at all.”

* * * * *

“It’s beautiful up here.”

“Indeed. It truly is.”

Valentina glanced curiously up at Neil while they worked together to pitch the tent. Between checking out and returning her rental car, they had gotten a late start leaving Strathy Point so it was already close to midnight. Luckily it wasn’t totally dark outside for the sun never truly sets in the Highlands during the

summer. "You said that almost nostalgically."

Neil shrugged, but the gesture was far from casual. "It's a shame, I'm well aware, but I've lived just a few hours drive away from here all of my life and never took the time to experience it for myself."

"Cairn Gorm you mean? The mountain we're on?"

"Yes." He smiled, gazing down at her, his dark eyes raking over her clothed breasts, sweeping across her shielded mons before returning to study the tent they'd just erected together. "That and other things."

Valentina's body had an immediate reaction to his casual perusal and carnal insinuations. Her nipples tightened into elongated pink buds and a liquid heat infused her belly. She observed him through hooded eyes, very much turned on, very much wanting him. She shook it off, telling herself this was no time to be concerned with her libido. They had pitched the tent, true, but it still needed some fixing up on the inside. Besides, it was quite chilly out and they also needed to start a fire.

"Tell me about yourself," Neil said as he began arranging kindling within the pile of logs. "Between our conversation in the restaurant this morning and our drive up to the mountains tonight I doubt if there's anything left to tell about me. You, however, are still an enigma."

"An enigma?" Valentina glanced over her shoulder, momentarily distracted from her work of smoothing out the bottom of the tent. "I'd hardly call myself that." She smiled, resuming her work. "What would you like to know?"

Everything, Neil thought. "Whatever you'd like to tell." He located a box of matches and struck one against its grainy side, igniting it. "I gathered from your accent that you're from somewhere in the southern United States, but I can't quite pinpoint where."

"Georgia," she replied somewhat muffled, her face inside of the tent while she arranged things as she wanted them. "Atlanta."

"Ah." Neil smiled, absently noting that the kindling was now lit and the log settled on top of it was starting to go ablaze. He glanced over his shoulder. "A Georgia peach. I—"

He stopped mid-sentence, distracted by the sight of her lush derriere pointing skywards. She was down on all fours, the upper half of her body buried inside of the tent doing who knew what, the lower half of her jeans-clad body bared to the elements.

In a sensual daze he stood up, taking to his feet as he walked up behind her. He ran his hand over her buttocks, causing her to gasp as he slipped his fingers in between her thighs and rubbed her clit through the denim. "Take your clothes off," he said brusquely. "Now."

It occurred to Neil from somewhere in the back of his aroused mind that his voice had sounded a bit harsh even to himself. But he couldn't seem to stop himself, couldn't seem to tamper down his commands. When he was near her like this and his thoughts turned carnal he felt no more intellectually advanced than a Neanderthal, a caveman that wanted to rut inside of the mate he'd claimed. He'd never been like this before with any other woman and because of that fact he didn't know how to control it. Nor was he certain that he cared to.

Valentina came up on her knees, turning around to regard him. Her light green eyes had gone wide, clearly having been surprised by the tone of his voice. But he offered no rebuttals, no apologies.

“Take your clothes off,” he repeated without so much as a flinch, his dark eyes narrowed in desire. “You may finish your work after you’ve removed them.”

Valentina’s nipples hardened instantaneously. She should have been outraged by his words, or at least offended by them, but she wasn’t. She liked playing the submissive to him on a sexual level, reveled in the way he dominated her body as though he owned it.

Neil Ross was an egalitarian on a social level, she knew, but on a sexual plain of being he wasn’t capable of higher thought. She’d never met a man even remotely like him before, one that not only wanted to dominate her body, but was incapable of doing anything less. When Neil wanted to fuck he turned primal, animal, rational thought discarded. She loved it.

Valentina stood up, suddenly feeling a bit shy and nervous. She smiled inwardly at the incongruity, thinking to herself as she unzipped her jeans and stepped out of them that this man made her feel anything but jaded. Her shirt came off next, followed by her bra and thong panties. When she was finished undressing she reached towards him, her crimson-tipped nails honing in on his zipper.

He stilled her hand. Her golden brown head shot up, wondering at such an action.

“I’ll take you when I’m ready,” he said thickly, nudging her back towards the tent. “For now I want merely to look at you whilst you finish your work.”

He wanted to enjoy being aroused, she thought, knowing he could fuck her when his urge became too great. She found her own body responding to his desires, her clit swelling as she went back down on all fours face-first into the tent.

“Mmm very nice,” he murmured. “Spread your legs a bit wider apart whilst you fix up the tent. All I want to see is ass, thighs, and bald cunt.”

Valentina closed her eyes briefly at his words, intoxicating as they were. She imagined him staring at her swollen clit, at her puffed up labia, and felt liquid gather between her thighs as she did so. She knew his eyes were trained on her wet flesh, could almost feel them branding his name into her. She wanted him buried inside of her so badly that she ached for him, yet he didn’t so much as touch her let alone mount her.

Five minutes later she announced to him that the tent was ready. “I’m done,” she whispered, so aroused she could scarcely breathe let alone talk.

“Then come sit beside me on the blankets,” he said hoarsely.

Valentina complied, her entire form emerging from the cover of the tent. She came down on her knees beside him, noticing at once that although he was still fully clothed he had released his swollen erection from the confines of his jeans and was stroking it. It stood up as though carved of flesh-covered steel, so gloriously hard and stiff. “May I suck on him?” she asked through passion-drunk eyes, meeting his gaze.

“In a minute,” he murmured.

Neil reclined back on his elbows, his cock poking straight up. Craning his neck and upper torso, he leaned into Valentina and curled his tongue around one elongated nipple. She shuddered, pressing her breast closer to his face.

Drawing the nipple into his mouth, Neil sucked at it leisurely, pulling on it with his lips, rolling it around with his tongue, as he took her hand and guided it toward his scrotum, instructing her without words to massage him there.

He released the nipple on a groan, loving the feel of her silky hand toying with the tiny balls inside of his sac. Falling onto his back, he placed his hands behind his neck to support the weight of his head, then watched her through glazed over eyes. "Suck on him, Tina," he murmured.

She obeyed, taking him hungrily into her mouth as though there was nothing else on the planet she wanted more. She paid special attention to the head of his cock, sucking vigorously at it, knowing that because he was like most European men and therefore uncircumcised he would be especially sensitive there.

"*Christ.*" Neil gritted his teeth as his muscles instinctually clenched from the near-delirious pleasure. The sucking sounds her mouth made accompanied by the look of rapture on her face made the hedonistic pleasure damn near painful.

Breathing heavily, he tried to forestall her erotic efforts with his hand so he could mount her body and empty himself inside of her, but when he attempted to do so her mouth merely latched onto him tighter and she began to suck on him faster and more briskly. Clearly, she meant for him to cum in her mouth.

"Tina," he ground out, his muscles cording, his jugular vein bulging, "I'm coming, sweetheart."

That admission induced her sucking to become animalistic, moaning as her head bobbed up and down on his stiff erection. Long red nails wrapped around the base of his cock as full, swollen lips devoured the length of him, over and over, again and again.

"Jesus."

Neil came on a groan, his eyes squinted shut, his teeth bared. He shouted out his satisfaction into the wilds of the Highlands, the echo reverberating throughout Cairn Gorm Mountain.

When Valentina had sucked him dry, depleted him of all that he had, her face bobbed up into his line of vision looking utterly adorably and more than a little mischievous. She was pleased with herself he could tell, pleased that she'd driven him to such vocalized lengths.

Valentina grinned. "Wow Neil. That shout could have put Tarzan to shame."

He half laughed and half groaned. "I'll work on perfecting my vine-swinging abilities a bit later."

She chuckled, coming down on the blanket to lie beside him. He gathered her close, kissing the top of her head. Wrapping her hand around his warm, flaccid penis, she sighed contentedly as her head came down on his chest. "I've never actually seen an uncircumcised cock before," she admitted with a smile in her voice.

"No?" He kissed the top of her head again. "American men are all circumcised?"

"For the most part, yeah." She grinned. "I've only read about men like you in books."

"In books, eh?" He considered that for a moment. "Is that also where you learned to suck an uncut man

so well?" he asked acidly, not meaning to be brisk but unable to waylay the possessiveness in his voice, "From a book?"

"Actually yes," she answered, unperturbed by his territorialism, reveling in it even.

Neil's heart began beating again. He released a breath as he kissed her forehead, pleased more than he cared to admit by her answer. "Good."

They lay there in silence for a protracted moment, both of them simply enjoying holding each other after the intimacy they'd just shared. After a minute or two of this nonverbal bonding time it was Valentina who spoke first. "You know," she said confessionally, for some reason or another wanting to share the most inane things with him, "I've been thinking for some time now that I'd like to try my hand at penning an historical novel."

One dark eyebrow shot up. He wondered why she'd been thinking of novels at a time like this. "I love the ones you write now. I'm certain you'll excel at whatever you try," he said truthfully.

Her head shot up. She searched his face. "You read my books?" she murmured.

He bent his neck a bit so he could kiss the tip of her nose. "Yes."

She smiled, strangely contented by his answer. "The reason I brought the subject up to begin with is because I wanted you to know that when I write that historical I'm going to name the hero after you."

Neil's body stilled. He thought that the most wonderful compliment a woman had ever paid him. "I would be honored," he said, his brogue a murmur.

Valentina cleared her throat, realizing that the moment had grown too serious. She just wanted to enjoy Neil's company for the time being, not ponder all of these inexplicable feelings of affection she was developing towards him. "I wonder what I should name it," she said on a smile.

Neil sensed her shift in mood and let it go with good grace. He realized that now wasn't the time to push his own agenda onto her. And so, thinking on her statement a moment or two, he squeezed her gently and grinned. "How's about 'You've Got Chain Mail'?"

Valentina's light green eyes widened brilliantly right before she threw her head back and laughed.

Neil smiled, secretly wondering if it was possible for a man to be any more contented than he.

Chapter 6

The next two days were to be the happiest and most poignant hours of their lives. It was on top of this mountain, after all, where their affection for each other grew in unnatural leaps and bounds and both of them came to realize what it meant to truly care for and about another person.

Many, many years from now, when both of their heads were silvered and neither of them had a natural tooth left in their mouths, it would be back to the two days atop Cairn Gorm that their minds would forever wander, remembering the glory of having first discovered each other.

They wiled away those few precious hours on the mountain making love, taking long walks through the forest, eating meals over a campfire, and simply talking. Valentina's stories about what life was like growing up with two hippies for parents amused Neil to no end, while Neil's stories about his awkward childhood and adolescent years had the opposite effect on her and saddened Valentina for the pain life had unfairly dealt him. She never said as much to him, just held his hand and listened, sensing somehow that her silent affection and validation was all he needed or wanted.

But inevitably, just as all of life's magical moments do, their time on Cairn Gorm came to an end. Two days became one, one turned to none, and before they had quite realized the trip to Paradise was over, they were side by side in Neil's Lexus headed back to Edinburgh...and to reality.

Neil couldn't quite squelch the brewing restlessness that stemmed from not knowing what would happen between the two of them when they returned to civilization. He wondered at what she'd think of his sensible, ordinary life and the other pretentious, stuffy professorial acquaintances he was forever forced to endure at one university function or another.

Little did he know Valentina was staring out the passenger side window worrying her lip as she fretted over the same thing, though with a different twist. She was wondering whether or not Neil had room in his life for a feisty, passionate artist type when his own life was already so well structured and so visibly lacking in the very characteristics that comprised her personality. Perhaps that had been on purpose, she thought somewhat sadly. Perhaps he had looked at his time with her as a rendezvous and no more. Perhaps when they reached Edinburgh he wouldn't want anything more to do with her.

Half an hour later the Lexus cruised down Princes Street and came to a halt in front of The Balmoral. Neil's eyes flicked over the hotel where Valentina was staying before flicking back to her. "Well," he said, trying his best to tamper the sound of disappointment he was certain was laced in his voice, "we're here."

Valentina smiled over to him as she opened the passenger side door. "Thanks for the ride." She grinned. "Thanks for everything. I had a terrific time."

"So did I." Neil's gaze fell to her lap, his dark eyes taking one last appreciative sweep over her fertile form. He took a deep breath and expelled it on a resolved sigh. A woman like her, so vital and full of life, would never be happy with a man like him, a man who for all intent and purposes was her antithesis.

She might enjoy him for another day or two, perhaps even for the whole of her stay in Scotland, but inevitably she would leave him and he wasn't altogether certain he'd be able to deal with it. He was going to have a difficult enough of a time returning to his mundane existence as it was.

"Thank-you for a memorable weekend, Tina." He cleared his throat. "I shall always look back upon it fondly."

Valentina's light green eyes clashed with his. He thought for a stunned moment that she looked a bit sad, but then a moment later a beautiful smile was fixed on her face and he decided he'd been imagining things. "So will I," she said softly.

Unable to resist, Neil reached across the space that separated them and kissed her gently on the lips.

She kissed him back, sweeping her tongue inside of his mouth, brushing against his own. And then, almost as if by magic, she had retreated from the Lexus and was gone.

Neil watched Valentina walk into the hotel feeling more lonely and miserable than he'd ever felt before. He couldn't shake the feeling that he'd just lost the best thing that had ever happened to him.

Chapter 7

"You look as though somebody just killed your best friend."

Neil's head shot up at the sound of his friend and colleague's voice. Seated behind his desk inside of his office at the university, he waved a hand at the empty seat across from him, indicating he could sit there. "Good morning, John. I haven't seen you since you left on holiday to Rome. How was the trip?"

"Brilliant." John Hastings, outfitted in the same sensible lecturer's attire of tweed trousers, formal shirt, and suit jacket that Neil was wearing, nodded toward his friend as he shrugged his trousers up at the knee and took a seat. "I'm teaching a class on Roman law this term so the trip will come in handy. I spent a few days touring the legal libraries there, seeing the antiquities firsthand. It was excellent."

Neil thought it sounded vastly boring in comparison to the three days in Eden he'd spent, but declined to say as much. No use in detracting from John's fine mood just because his own had been in the sewers for the past three Tina-less days. "I'm glad you had a terrific time then."

"As am I." John studied his face for a moment or two before saying anything else. He threw a hand toward him as he nestled further into the seat. "Ok. What gives?"

Neil looked up. It occurred to him that he probably appeared to be somewhat distracted. Not that he wasn't. "What do you mean?"

John sighed. "Come on, man. I've known you since we went to university together. What's going on? Why do you look so depressed?"

"I look depressed?" he asked, hoping he seemed surprised.

In reaction, John merely sighed again.

"Alright, alright," Neil said, doing a little sighing of his own. He pushed the gold-wire spectacles up the bridge of his nose and regarded his oldest friend. He shook his head, trying to downplay the situation a bit. "It's a woman."

"A woman?" John studied his features curiously. "Margaret hardly seems the sort to bring a man low. No offense to the mouse, but I—"

"I'm not speaking of Margaret. She dumped me a week ago as a matter of fact."

John's eyebrows shot up. He leaned in closer to Neil's desk and grinned. "The mouse worked up the nerve to dump you, eh? Do tell. And whilst you're at it make certain you tell me of this other woman." His grin was infectious. "I want details."

Neil shook his head at his friend's curiosity, but gave him the detail he sought. He told him about meeting Valentina in Jenners department store, about Margaret calling an end to their relationship that very afternoon, and about having worked up the nerve to follow Valentina Jason-Elliot up to Strathy Point.

Twenty minutes later, the story having been brought to a conclusion in front of the Balmoral, John steepled his fingertips together and regarded him. "I'm amazed," he confessed.

Neil snorted his agreement. "As am I." He sighed. "I can't believe I had the nerve to follow her in the first place let alone—"

"That's not what amazes me." John grinned. "Though it does set one back a bit."

Neil looked at him quizzically. "Then what precisely is it that you find so amazing?"

The expression on his colleague's face indicated that he should already have known the answer. "That you let her walk out of your life so easily, of course. You didn't even attempt to see if things could have gone further."

"For what reason, John?" He chuckled self-depreciatingly. "I'm hardly a man that leads an exciting lifestyle. Can you imagine someone like Valentina Jason-Elliot, given all I've told you about her and her life, being happy in the long run with a lecturer of mathematics?"

"And why the bloody hell not," John answered incredulously. "Not a damn thing wrong with that."

"It is boring," Neil said distinctly, over-enunciating each word. "I am boring." He waved a hand dismissively. "Let us discuss this no more. I'm trying to simply push last weekend's events from my mind and continue on as before."

John sighed, shaking his head slightly. "If that's truly your wish..." His voice had been inflected as he'd spoke, indicating he didn't really believe Neil wanted it that way.

"Of course I don't wish for it," he bit out, "but neither am I prone to indulging in an overactive fantasy life."

"It sounds to me like you're scared."

"I resent that! I am not scared!"

"No?" John's brow drew together disbelievingly. "Then pick up the phone and give her a call."

Neil didn't know what to say to that. He glanced toward his desktop and began absently toying with two paperclips laying atop it. "I'm certain she's busy," he mumbled.

"Uh huh."

His nostrils flared. "I am not scared," Neil gritted out. "I am merely...realistic."

"Uh huh."

"Oh bloody hell but I wish you'd quit saying that!"

John scooted closer to the desk. "You know what I think?"

"No. But I'm certain I'm about to be made privy."

"Don't be so sarcastic, Dr. Ross." John inclined his head succinctly. "I think you're letting the fear that a larger than life writer couldn't possibly entertain the notion of falling for an ordinary lecturer of mathematics rot your brain. What you're forgetting, however, is that she's just a person like anybody else."

"Thank-you for that riveting commentary on my sordid mental state. I shall cherish it always."

John sighed, standing up. "Hey I tried."

Neil watched him walk away feeling decidedly wretched. It hadn't been necessary to snap at his oldest friend simply because they weren't on agreement in the matter of Valentina Jason-Elliot. "John?"

"Yes?" He turned around and regarded him.

"Thank-you." He smiled. "I shall think on your words."

"You're welcome." John grinned as he opened the office door. "Let's just hope you take my advice and give her a call."

* * * * *

Later that evening inside of his flat Neil stared at the phone broodingly, sensing it was his fate to pick up the damn thing, also sensing he'd hate the outcome of having done so. "Shite," he muttered as he reached for the receiver and pounded out the number to the Balmoral on the keypad.

"Balmoral. How may I direct your call?"

He cleared his throat, already feeling nervous even though he was currently only speaking to one of the hotel's staff. "Valentina Jason-Elliot's room please."

"I'm sorry but that's a blocked line. I can only put the call through if your name is on her list of approved callers. What's your name, sir?"

Neil sighed, his heart plummeting. "Neil Ross, but I'm certain I'm not—"

"I see your name. One moment and I'll put the call through."

Neil was too stunned to react. He wasn't given any time to adjust to that potentially telling piece

of information either for a moment later a certain Georgia peach was drawling over the connection, her smoky voice giving him an instant erection. "Hello?"

Neil opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out.

"Hello?" she asked again.

Neil's mind flew in a thousand different directions as he tried to come up with a plausible excuse for having called, and hopefully one that didn't sound overly pathetic. He cleared his throat. "Tina? This is Neil."

"Hi Neil!"

Was that excitement he heard in her voice? He shifted in the chair restlessly, his erection broaching painful. "Something occurred to me after I dropped you off at the hotel a few days ago and I was hoping we could discuss it."

"Oh? And what was that?"

Yes—*what was* that? he asked himself grimly. He'd never been very good at winging it, so to speak, but at the moment he supposed he was performing even less stellar than usual. "We uh...we..."

"Yes?"

"We didn't use any manner of protection." Hey, come to think of it they really hadn't. He warmed to his topic, deciding it was the perfect, plausible excuse to call. He cleared his throat. "I wanted to assure you that I am in sound health with no manner of disease at all."

Valentina gasped. "My god I can't believe it slipped my mind! I've never behaved so recklessly in my entire life," she said as if she couldn't quite believe it. "Thank-you for letting me know. I'm sure that eventually I would have realized it too and worried. Oh and by the way, it's the same with me. I have a clean bill of health too."

Well, Neil thought gloomily, there was the end of that conversation. "I never doubted it."

"I guess I should also have mentioned that I'm on the pill, so there's no worry that I'll become pregnant either."

Neil wished that news cheered him up, but he found that it only served to make him feel that much worse. "Excellent." He sighed, unable to think of a damned thing else to say. He decided that if he could work up the nerve to call her again he'd come prepared with crib notes the next time. "Well," he said, "I suppose I should go then."

She hesitated for a moment. "Thank-you for calling."

"Certainly." He fidgeted with the phone cord. "Goodbye then."

"Goodbye."

Neil hung up the phone feeling a curious mix of excitement and depression. Excitement because he'd spoken with her again, depression because he now knew with all certainty that she wouldn't be pounding

on his door pregnant and demanding he do the honorable thing and marry her any time soon.

Goddamned, bloody, fucking birth control pills.

Chapter 8

Valentina sat inside the Ballast tent that had been erected within the boundaries of the Edinburgh Festival with the other Ballast authors, signing autographs and doing her best to sell copies of *The Scream*. Her head shot up when her peripheral vision snagged a pair of camel tweed trousers, but was disappointed when she found them attached to a blonde-haired man instead of one certain dark-haired man she couldn't seem to let go of. The stranger was handsome, but he wasn't Neil.

It had been four days since he'd called, a week since she'd last seen him. Unfortunately, time wasn't helping to ease her sense of loss at all.

"I was hoping I might get an autograph." The blonde man smiled down to her. "I've already got this book, but what the hell, another copy won't put me in the poor house."

Valentina grinned. "Glad to hear it. Who do I make it out to?"

"John Hastings." He smiled, watching her eyes for a reaction. "I'm a friend and colleague of Neil Ross's."

He wasn't disappointed. Her light green eyes widened fractionally, tellingly he thought, before she returned her gaze to the book. "And how is he doing?" she asked a tad too nonchalantly as she scribbled onto the book.

"Like shite," he said bluntly.

Valentina's head popped up and John grinned at her. "So if there's even a miniscule chance that you're feeling the same, perhaps you should give him a call."

She searched his eyes hopefully. "Did Neil send you here today?"

"No." Her heart fell with John's admission. "Truth be told I live just around the corner and decided to come out for a wee stroll. When I saw the Ballast tent I figured I'd pop in and say hello."

She sighed, handing him the autographed book. "What makes you think Neil wants me to call him?"

"As I said, he feels like shite. Has ever since the day your little—" he cleared his throat—"rendezvous came to an end."

"Really?" She nibbled at her lower lip as she regarded him.

John chuckled. "Yeah really." He looked at his watch then glanced back to her. "If you can take a few minutes break, I'd be happy to buy you a drink and tell you all about it."

Valentina grinned, rising to her feet. "You've got it."

* * * * *

"I'm stunned." Absently swirling her White Russian around in the glass, Valentina met John's gaze. "I've been walking around depressed for an entire week thinking he didn't want heads or tails to do with me. And now you show up and tell me it's because he thinks he's boring?" She shook her head, mystified. "If there is one thing Neil is definitely not it's boring. Where did he get an idea like that?"

John chuckled as he set his glass of wine down on the pub's tabletop. "Men are notoriously odd creatures. We can't seem to help it."

She grinned at that, feeling more lighthearted than she had in days. "I owe you big time. If it wasn't for you I never would have known any of this. Neil didn't seem at all inclined toward wanting to see me again which is why I didn't push the issue."

"And now?"

Her smile was slow and full of mischief. "And now I'm going to prove to Dr. Ross that he's anything but dull and sensible."

John raised his glass of wine in salute. He grinned. "I'm afraid when all is said and done I'm going to have to press Neil for details."

She toasted him with the White Russian. "They should be good ones. I have a flair for the dramatic. Can't seem to help it." She chuckled. "It runs in the family."

Chapter 9

Neil pushed his gold-wire spectacles up the bridge of his nose as he took to the lecture hall. His eyes swept dispassionately over the bevy of students, noting at once that he had a full house of thirty of more. He opened his briefcase as he arrived at the podium and retrieved the class roster from it. "James O'Donnell."

"Present."

"Marion McKenna."

"Present."

And on he went for another thirty or so names until he reached the end of the list. "Have I missed anyone's name?" he asked as he pushed his spectacles up the bridge of his nose again.

A hand went up in his peripheral vision. "Mine."

"And your name?" he asked as he looked up. "What is your—" His breath caught in the back of his throat when he realized who his visitor was. But she wasn't behaving as though anything out of the ordinary was happening. Hell she wasn't even acting as though she recognized him, a fact he didn't care for at all.

Valentina was dressed in a wantonly tight shirt that showcased her impressive bosom and the outline of her nipples, as well as a tight little skirt that came up to the tops of her thighs. The completely white ensemble was finished off with a pair of high heeled shoes, shoes that would put her close to his six foot frame in height while standing. "What is your name?" he asked as calmly as possible.

"Valentina Jason-Elliot."

"Fine." Why was she here? he asked himself. What was she doing? He pretended to record her name. "I've added you to the roster."

It took supreme effort, but somehow or another Neil managed to commence his lecture. Turning to the blackboard he began scribbling out names and dates, giving the students a brief history of mathematics. Well, he thought grimly as he continued to scribble, if she hadn't thought him a complete and utter bore before this moment, she no doubt would after hearing him pontificate on the usefulness of calculus to the sciences.

"And so," he droned on as he returned to the podium and continued his lecture, "the way for differential and inferential calculus was paved by Sir Isaac Newton..." His lips kept working, spewing out dates and facts, but his mind was in turmoil and because of that fact his eyes flicked toward the one causing it.

Neil watched in fascination and shock—unable to do anything to stop her, unable to call attention away from himself—as Valentina slowly parted her thighs, revealing the fact that she was wearing no panties. Wet, bald flesh glistened from the first row of desks and he had to look away to keep from making a fool of himself. His penis was so stiff he feared it might explode.

He continued his lecture, not moving away from the podium this time for fear a student might see his erection. "Following Sir Isaac Newton's thesis on..." He deserved a medal for his fortitude, for being able to resist looking at her, he thought to himself.

But, of course, Neil could only take the suspense so long. He had to know what she was up to, had to see for himself what she was now doing. Against his will, his eyes strayed once more to Valentina's desk, widening upon their discovery.

She was playing with herself. Right there at the desk. Right across from him as he lectured. It occurred to him that she had planned her seating well, off to the right as she was, for she was able to reach down and masturbate her glorious cunt without making any but him the wiser.

Blood-red fingernails slithered around her labial folds, opening them wide for his inspection. She drew her swollen clit between her index and middle fingers, poking it out for him to see, as she began to work it around in a circular motion. Her light green eyes were glazed over as she looked up at him, boldly

meeting his gaze as she sat there in the lecture hall and masturbated.

And somehow he continued to talk, somehow he continued to draw the attention of the class toward himself and keep it there, somehow he managed to keep glancing away from that scrumptiously wet cunt long enough to keep suspicion at bay. "...which resulted in the implementation of the calculus we use today..."

He didn't know how he kept a straight face, didn't know how he managed to refrain from breaking out into a sweat, for all it took was one glimpse of her pussy and he had reverted right back into the primal mode he'd spent that entire wondrous weekend in. "If you would turn now to page..."

But somehow or another he got through the lecture, managed to act as though nothing was amiss for another twenty minutes, even as Valentina played with her flesh the entire time. She never once stopped, he noted, not until he called an end to the class and told them he'd see them on Wednesday.

"Ms. Jason-Elliot," he announced, amazed he sounded so calm, "I would like you to stay after class so we can discuss your schedule this term."

"Of course," she answered, sounding for all the world as though there was nothing out of the ordinary going on.

By the time the last student had filed out of the lecture hall and he'd shut and locked the door behind them, Neil had withstood as much torture as he could take. He walked toward the desk Valentina had occupied without saying a word, noticing absently that she was now standing next to it rather than sitting.

Unzipping his trousers, he released his stiff erection in one motion and raised her short skirt up to her hips in the next. His eyes flicked broodingly over her clean-shaven mons as his hands lifted her tight little top up over her breasts, freeing them for his palms. She gasped as he cupped them, her eyes narrowing in desire as his thumbs brushed over the nipples. "Turn around," he said softly but forcibly.

He released her breasts as she obeyed him, allowing her to turn around in a half-circle and spread her legs apart so he could rut in her from behind. She bent over the desk as far as she could, closing her eyes in anticipation as she raised her buttocks into the air.

Valentina gasped as a long, thick cock surged into her wet flesh from behind. "*Neil.*" She moaned as he took her, groaning when he cupped her breasts from behind and played with her nipples while he fucked her.

Neil gritted his teeth as he rode her body, pumping in and out of her tight hole in long, agonizing strokes. His fingers tugged at and tweaked her nipples as he slammed into her again and again, wringing her body of orgasm after orgasm.

"Oh god."

"Does my cock feel good?" he murmured into her ear, his balls slapping up against her ass he was pounding into her so hard. "Does it?" he ground out, his jaw clenched.

"Yes."

Neil tugged at her nipples again, pulling them in the way she liked as a reward for her answer. She moaned, causing him to rut deeper and faster. "Has my pussy been bad this week?" he asked almost

casually as he surged into her again and again. "Has it fucked anyone else?"

"No." She met his thrusts, gluttonously loving every moment of it.

He rotated his hips and slammed home hard, his fingers still pulling and tweaking her elongated peaks. "I'll give you more cock then," he growled, "since you've been a good girl whilst away from me." He lived up to his word, driving his stiff shaft into her over and over, again and again, making her cum more times and more violently than she'd previously thought possible.

Valentina closed her eyes and smiled, wanting him to go on fucking her forever, wanting him to slam into her for hour after hour, but sensing that his orgasm was drawing near. She met his thrusts greedily, slapping her buttocks back at him, groaning as he wrung her pussy into sopping wet flesh.

"Tina."

And then he was coming, groaning as he surged into her for a final time, releasing her breasts, grabbing at her hips and digging into them with his fingers as he spurted his orgasm deep inside of her body.

He could scarcely breathe let alone move, so he kept her there for a protracted moment, pinned to the desk and joined to him at the flesh while he regained his senses.

When he let her up a moment later, she whirled around and regarded him, a smile tugging at her lips. She looked adorably wanton, he thought, her wide luminous eyes an innocent contrast against the top that had been shoved up over her breasts and the skirt that rode around her hips. "The spectacles are an arousing touch Neil, but I think next time you should remove them." She made to break away from him. "No sense in getting them broken."

Next time? he thought hopefully.

She pulled her tight white top down to conceal her breasts, then did the same with the skirt, hiding her bald cunt from his view. "You have another lecture in an hour, don't you? At least that's what John said. You better prepare for it."

Neil shook his head to clear it. He was having a hard time getting back into lecture mode when the woman of his dreams had just sauntered into his hall, seduced him and fucked him mindless. "Y-Yes," he stammered out, reigning in his thoughts. "Yes of course."

She smiled, her purse going over her shoulder as she strolled towards the door. "See you later then."

"Later?" He cleared his throat as he put his sated penis back into his trousers and zipped up. "When later?"

Valentina's hand stilled on the doorknob. She regarded him from over her shoulder as she made to open it. "Soon."

He nodded.

"Oh and Neil," she said as she opened the door, stopping when it was half ajar, "one more thing."

He searched her eyes. "Yes?"

“You are anything but boring.” She smiled slowly. “But if you call what we just did dull then feel free to bore me to tears any time.”

Neil watched her leave, realizing that somehow or another John had found her and spoken with her. There was no other explanation.

A grin tugging at the corners of his lips, he removed the gold-wire spectacles from his face and tossed them into the trash can as he strode from the lecture hall.

Chapter 10

“Bloody hell.” Neil muttered under his breath as he fished his spectacles out of the trash bin. He supposed he should have waited to complete the symbolic gesture of casting off the old and starting anew until after he was done lecturing for the day.

He’d realized almost from the onset of his last class that he wasn’t able to make out his own chicken scratches without visual aide. He had a final class left today and the contact lenses he’d worn to the Highlands were back at his flat.

Neil retrieved the spectacles, noting thankfully that no trash of any sort had been thrown on top of them. Hopelessly fastidious nevertheless, he couldn’t stop himself from taking them to the men’s washroom and giving them a thorough cleansing.

As he stood in front of the sink and dried the lenses, he glanced up at himself in the mirror. Pushing the gold-wire spectacles up the bridge of his nose, he noticed for the first time that they no longer looked right on him.

He had changed. She had changed him. Nothing was the same anymore and it never would be again. He smiled to himself, realizing that he didn’t mind that fact. Then he frowned, wondering what precisely that meant and whether or not Valentina Jason-Elliott would be a part of this new life.

* * * * *

Seated at a table inside of her hotel room, Valentina sipped thoughtfully from a glass of Merlot as she considered her next move. When she had first decided to go to the university this morning, a tiny tremor of doubt had assailed her before she’d seen the seduction through. If John had been wrong in his assumptions, after all, she would have felt like a fool.

But no. John had been right. Neil still wanted her. She was sure of that now. The problem as she saw it was getting a certain stubborn lecturer of mathematics to realize that they were made for each other.

She didn’t want doubts between them, didn’t want him constantly wondering if the bond they’d formed in the Highlands had been a fluke. She wanted him, all of him, and she wanted him to long for her so

badly that he'd overcome all reservations to the contrary and seek her out.

So she'd decided to seduce him...and to keep seducing him until he couldn't stand the thought of a day going by without seeing her. She'd know the mission was accomplished when he could no longer wait for her to come to him and he hied off to find her instead.

With most men such a gesture would have been meaningless, but with Neil she realized it was just the opposite. When he came to her, when he could no longer bear the separation, that was when she'd know he was hers hook, line, and sinker.

Valentina raised the glass of wine to her lips and sipped slowly. She was going to seduce him again. It was just a question of how.

Chapter 11

Two evenings later, dressed formally in a tuxedo jacket and kilt, Neil made small talk with the mathematics colleague seated to his right inside the University of Edinburgh's banquet hall. He couldn't wait for the boring meal to come to an end, wanting as he was to go back to his flat and sort out his tumultuous thoughts in privacy.

He had thought Valentina would want nothing to do with him after their return from Cairn Gorm, but he had been wrong once. She had come to him and seduced him in his own lecture hall. But then she had disappeared and he hadn't heard from her since. He wasn't certain what to make of that.

After that morning two days ago when he had taken her over the desk, Neil had driven by her hotel room that night and contemplated going in. But he hadn't. In the end, indecisive as to what he should do, he had merely sat in the car, broodingly staring out of the Lexus window, his emotions all over the place.

He was changing, life was changing. He felt like a pioneer trying to decide on the best course to take.

"Ah there you are. And I see you saved me a seat."

Neil sighed a breath of relief, grateful that John Hastings had at last shown up. His arrival gave Neil the perfect excuse to quit chatting it up with the boring professors seated to the right of him. "Hello, John. It's good of you to have finally made it," he said pointedly.

"It's not like any of us has a choice," John said under his breath as he took the seat to Neil's left. He plastered on a smile as he inclined his head toward the wife of a tenured professor. "Duty calls."

"Mmm yes." Neil grinned, meeting his friend's gaze. "Nothing quite like a university function to slow down an already dull day I always say."

"It's about to get duller." John sighed. "Professor Hamilton is approaching the podium."

"Oh joy," Neil said dryly. "I hope he tells us the story of how he made Queen Elizabeth's acquaintance

whilst in London. We've only heard it...what? Eighteen or nineteen times."

John chuckled softly, then winced as Professor Hamilton began to speak. "Looks like twenty."

Left with no choice, both men turned their attention toward the podium and listened as Hamilton droned on. Neil found his mind wandering, a natural reaction to sheer and utter boredom he supposed. As his thoughts scattered, he found them solidifying around the enigma of one particular woman. He couldn't help but to consider what Valentina was currently doing. And just as importantly, whom she was doing it with.

Neil became so lost in his thoughts that it took his brain a suspended moment to register the fact that something out of the ordinary was happening, something he hadn't been expecting at all. And it was occurring right at this table. Or more to the point still, right under this table.

Neil held himself steady, beads of perspiration breaking out on his brow, as a very warm and wanton mouth wrapped itself around his cock and took him all the way in. He knew that mouth well for it had sucked him off many times before, sinfully delicious in its skill. He could be blindfolded with a thousand different women taking turns giving him pleasure and he'd still be able to pick out a blowjob from Valentina without any difficulty at all.

As inconspicuously as possible, Neil glanced down toward his lap, brushed aside the table cloth a tad, and saw a long pink tongue dart out from between a pair of crimson-stained lips to lick around his sensitive head. He turned poker-hard in an instant.

Setting the tablecloth back in place, Neil took a deep breath as his gaze flicked around the room and he considered how in the hell he would possibly survive this banquet. He could feel the cum building up in his balls, knew he was going to shoot a huge load. He could even feel his breathing growing labored, though he did the best job he could to steady it.

Neil's eyes closed briefly as Valentina began deep-throating him. He could feel her lips around the base of his cock, feel them stroking upwards in a smooth slide, feel them stopping at the head and sucking briskly at it. He felt his toes curl and his muscles clench as he did the best job he could do to keep from groaning aloud.

From the right, Professor Atchinson mumbled something or another to Neil under his breath. All he could do was smile and nod back once before turning away from him and facing the podium once more to shield his facial expressions somewhat.

He wiped the sweat from his brow as Valentina's hands began to massage the muscles in his thighs. He took a deep breath as she paused to nibble at his head, then resumed her sucking.

She turned animalistic then, sucking on his cock in a fast up and down motion. Voracious. Greedy. Wanting his cum, wanting him to burst in her mouth right there under the table.

Her sucking became faster, faster, and faster still. Neil closed his eyes and breathed deeply, praying for once that Hamilton would keep on talking so that all eyes would remain trained on him up at the podium.

The sucking intensified around the head of his cock, all of Valentina's considerable skill focused on that one highly sensitive area of his manhood. Fingers joined in to massage his balls and Neil knew that he was inevitably close to coming.

He could imagine what she looked like, see her golden brown head bobbing up and down on him in his mind's eye, knew the look of carnal rapture that would be intrinsic to her facial features, knew what those puffy red lips would look like as they feasted on him. It was all he could take.

Hamilton's speech came to a finale and applause broke out just in time to muffle the small groan Neil wasn't able to suppress. He spurted into her awaiting mouth once, twice, three times, a seemingly endless eruption of sperm, as his muscles clenched tightly and his jaw went rigid.

"Thank god that's over," John murmured from beside him. "That was a bloody boring speech."

Neil took a deep breath to steady himself. He had cum so hard he felt ready to black out. And now she was sucking at the tiny hole on his cock, her lips and tongue greedily cleaning him dry. He gritted his teeth. "Boring—right."

Chapter 12

Neil awoke the next morning with a rigid hard-on. Stumbling out of bed naked, he wished a certain woman was lying next to him so she could take care of matters for him. But she wasn't. Just as she had the morning she'd seduced him in the lecture hall, so too had she disappeared after sucking him half to death at last evening's banquet.

She hadn't stopped at one blowjob. She had gone on to give him two more. It still amazed him that at almost forty he could get so hard so quickly and produce such vast quantities of cum for this one incredibly arousing woman.

Prowling into the bathroom, Neil flipped on the shower and stepped under it, quickly washing his body and shampooing his hair. He had some work to take care of in the office today, though lord knows it was going to be difficult at best and impossible at worst to keep his brain tuned to mathematics.

Turning off the water he toweled himself dry, careful not to hurt himself in the process. His erection was quite large and painfully swollen. Slinging the towel over his shoulder, Neil padded back into the bedroom, his thoughts in chaos.

He wanted to go to her, wanted to find her. He needed her.

It was more than just sex that he desired from Valentina, more than mounting her body and riding her flesh into oblivion. He wanted all of her...heart, soul, as well as body. He wanted what they'd shared on Cairn Gorm and he wanted it to last forever.

But would he make her happy in the long run? he asked himself for the umpteenth time. Could a twenty-nine-year-old passionate woman possibly remain happy living out her life with a reserved lecturer of mathematics ten years her senior?

These thoughts continued to plague him as he left the flat and made his way to the university.

There were so many questions, so many damned doubts, but he also knew totally and completely that there was only one answer.

He had to have her, regardless to anything else. He had to find a way to keep her at his side.

Neil withdrew his office key from his trousers' pocket preparing to unlock the door. The door swung open at his touch, however, so he stepped inside figuring he must have forgotten to lock up before he'd retired home last night. The sight that greeted him made him stop in his tracks.

"Hi."

The erection Neil had sustained all morning grew that much more pronounced as his eyes feasted on the reclining form of a very naked Valentina Jason-Elliot. She was lying on the small sofa in his office, the one opposite his desk, her legs spread wide, her bald cunt glistening.

Her breasts were thrust upward in invitation, the nipples already stabbing up from their puffy pink bases. She was simply lying there, wearing nothing but a mischievous smile, her legs splayed submissively wide for his thrusts.

"Hi." Neil's eyes burned possessively into hers as he closed the door behind him and began unbuttoning his shirt.

"I was going to wait until tonight," she admitted, her light green eyes hooded in desire, "but I found that I couldn't." She watched in anticipation as his muscled body emerged from the clothes.

"I'm glad you didn't," he murmured, "because I need to fuck you right now."

And then she was reaching out for him, pulling him down on top of her as he settled himself between her thighs and surged into her in a singular powerful thrust. He could offer her no foreplay, no words of affection, for his mind had long since gone primal and his body had taken over in its need to mate with her.

Valentina gasped as he entered her, clutching the back of his shoulders as her legs wrapped around his waist. Her head fell back on a moan as he slammed into her hard, bringing her to the brink of orgasm.

She could hear her flesh slurping up his cock, hear him groaning as he pounded away into oblivion, mindless of everything save the body he was claiming. His hands found her breasts, cupping them and forcing them up and close together so he could suck on her nipples while he fucked her.

"Neil." Valentina climaxed violently, her back arching and her nipples poking up into his warm mouth stiffer than before.

He groaned, sucking the peaks more vigorously, surging into her sopped flesh in fast, deep strokes. Her legs continued to cling to his waist, affording him a deep penetration that aroused them both to a fevered pitch.

His mouth firmly latched onto a jutting nipple, he moaned onto her breast as he came. His entire body convulsing, Neil erupted into her violently, spurting his hot cum deep inside of her womb.

He could feel her hands roaming over his back, massaging his buttocks as his breathing steadied and his

eyelids grew heavy. He didn't let go of the nipple, wouldn't let go of the nipple. He fell into a sated sleep still drawing from it.

Chapter 13

"Oh Cynthia, please tell me you're joking."

"Fraid not." Her sigh could be heard clearly across the telephone connection. "That worthless bastard left my ass."

Valentina chewed on her bottom lip as she clutched the phone firmly in her palm. "Oh sweetheart, I'm so sorry. I never realized the two of you were having problems. You and Osmond seemed as though you were meant for each other, both of you being sci-fi writers and all."

"Looks can apparently be deceiving. As we speak, my husband is moving in with the cover model from his latest novel."

"Oh dear." Valentina closed her eyes briefly, feeling Cynthia's pain as if it were her own. The two of them had been the closest of friends ever since they'd met at a dinner party hosted by Ballast Books. Both women wrote for the publishing company, though in different departments.

"What am I going to do, girl?" Cynthia sighed wistfully. "To be honest, I haven't been in love with Os for years, but he was still my husband. I'm so depressed I can barely see straight."

Valentina pondered that over for a moment. "Well," she said, clearing her throat, "why don't you come over to Scotland and stay with me for the next week?" She smiled, thinking it a truly wonderful idea. "Not only would I love tooling around with you, but if you hadn't been so worried about what that jerk would think of you vacationing in Europe in the first place then you'd be here any way. As a matter of fact, you're *supposed* to be over here with the rest of the Ballast authors."

"That's true," Cynthia agreed, sounding as though she was warming to the idea.

"You could stay right here with me. Ballast set me up in a nice room."

"Forget it." Cynthia chuckled, her first sign of good humor since she'd called Valentina's room a little over twenty minutes ago. "No offense Tina, but the last thing I'm in the mood to do is listen to you be all lovey-dovey with that guy you met."

Valentina's face colored slightly. "Have you ever known me to be the lovey-dovey type?" She refused to think about the mushy feelings she harbored for Neil. "Besides, he's never even been up to my hotel room."

"Uh huh. So you haven't slept with Dr. Stud then?"

"I didn't say that," she mumbled.

Cynthia threw her head back and laughed. "Never mind, girl. Now I really don't want to know."

Valentina chuckled, shaking her head slightly. "Just say you'll come. Bring Erica if you want. Just please say it's okay for me to call the front desk and reserve you a room?" she asked hopefully.

Cynthia was quiet for so long that Valentina was certain she was going to say no. But then, miraculously, she did an about-face and changed her mind. "I can't bring my daughter because school will be starting soon, but I'm sure my mother will keep her for me. It is a working vacation after all."

"Then..."

"Yes." Cynthia chuckled, feeling more wicked and brazen than she had in ages. "Go ahead and reserve that room. For one week."

Valentina grinned, unable to believe she'd managed to convince her. "Excellent. I'll call downstairs right now. Book that flight as soon as we hang up!"

"I will honey. Thanks for everything." Her voice took on a tremulous note, letting Valentina know she was getting excited about the idea. "If there's a seat on tonight's flight I'll be there tomorrow morning."

"I can't wait."

"Me neither! See you then."

As Valentina hung up the phone it occurred to her that a week wasn't a very long time, not very long at all. And yet that's all the time she had left with Neil. One more week and she'd be headed back for Atlanta. The thought was depressing in the extreme.

For the past seven days, ever since the evening of Neil's formal university reception, she had been seducing him in new ways each day. She'd made herself available to him in his office, sneaked into his flat and made love to him there, she'd even lured him to Sterling Castle and rode him into ecstasy on the palace grounds.

And yet, after all of her effort, Neil still hadn't sought her out.

Valentina stood up with a sigh and strolled over to gaze down upon her view of Edinburgh from the window. Crossing her arms over her breasts, she wondered if all of her planning and plotting had been in vain. Perhaps Neil was content to have an affair with her while she was here, but maybe he truly didn't want to continue things beyond her remaining scheduled week.

He knew she was planning to leave, knew that her tickets back to Atlanta were a week from today. He hadn't said anything to try and thwart those plans. Nothing at all.

Valentina slumped down in the nearest chair and took a deep breath. She had the same nervous feeling in her belly that she'd had while waiting on Ballast to get back to her concerning whether or not they planned to buy her first manuscript. Only this time, she conceded, the stakes were a hell of a lot higher.

* * * * *

The next evening Neil sat in his Lexus staring broodingly up at the Balmoral. This was the second day straight that Valentina had not come to him. All last night and today he'd been walking on eggshells, wondering what new erotic situation she had devised for him to partake of. He'd waited at his flat tonight for her until after ten o'clock in the evening and then, unable to bear it any longer, he had gotten in his car and drove over to her hotel.

So now here he sat wondering whether or not he should go upstairs, wondering whether or not she would be pleased by such a move on his part or wishing he'd leave her alone. Perhaps she hadn't shown up for a rendezvous these past two days because she'd decided she wanted nothing further to do with him. She was scheduled to leave in a week. Perhaps she wanted a clean break.

And perhaps he wouldn't let her get away so easily.

Neil's fingers gripped the steering wheel so harshly that his knuckles turned white. He was tired of playing Mr. Nice Guy, sick to death of letting life happen to him instead of taking what he wanted from it, consequences be damned. He had been raised to be a considerate gentleman, for all the nothingness that had brought to him. Well no more.

He wanted Valentina, needed her. Nothing was the same anymore. Hell, he didn't even dress as he used to. Gone were the gold spectacles, gone was the sensible lecturer's attire outside of university, gone was everything he had ever called normal.

Glancing down at the snug-fitting black jeans and polo-shirt he wore, Neil arrived at an irrevocable conclusion. If Valentina hadn't figured out by now that she would never be going back to Atlanta then she was about to figure it out tonight.

Wrenching open the car door, he alighted from it smoothly, his steps determined. Making his way into the Balmoral he bypassed the lobby entirely and headed straight for her suite upstairs.

When he got out of the elevator on the fifth floor, he perused the room numbers until he located the one he knew belonged to her. Knocking abruptly, he waited impatiently for her to answer the door, glancing at his watch when she didn't appear right away.

She wasn't there.

Neil narrowed his eyes, his mood grim. If she wasn't in her hotel room and she wasn't with him, then where precisely—

The sound of familiar feminine laughter struck his ears and made its way down his spine. Neil turned around slowly, cautiously, all of his senses on alert. Eyes narrowing in possessiveness, his hands balled into fists as he watched Valentina's voluptuous form leave a suite that didn't belong to her. Giggling, her eyes went wide in—shock? fright?—as she came to a halt in front of him.

"Neil," she breathed out, "what are you doing here?"

His eyes flicked over her breasts before settling on her face. "I think," he said distinctly, his words clipped, "that the more appropriate question is where in the bloody hell have you been and who have you been with?"

Valentina's eyes widened. She'd just come from helping Cynthia settle in across the hall so she hadn't been able to go to him today as she'd planned. And yesterday—she sighed—yesterday she had been so distraught over the idea of leaving Scotland, of leaving Neil, that she hadn't been able to work up a sexual appetite of any sort whatsoever. Seduction had been the last thing on her mind at the time. She supposed she'd better lay all of her cards on the table and tell him her feelings. After all, there was only six more days left. "I think we better go inside my suite and talk."

His nostrils flared. "Like bloody hell."

Valentina spun on her heel, thinking Neil was about to leave her, her heart plummeting because of that fact. But he didn't walk all the way back to the elevators. Instead of leaving her forever as she'd thought he was about to do, he stopped in front of Cynthia's suite and started pounding on the door like a man possessed.

"Open up you goddamned bastard!"

Valentina's jaw went slack as it dawned on her that Neil thought she'd been inside of Cynthia's hotel room with another man. If she hadn't been so elated by the fact that he was jealous, that he didn't want her with anybody else, she would have thrown something at him to keep him from humiliating her in front of her best friend. He was banging on the door quite loudly after all.

"Neil," Valentina said, her voice finally working as she rushed over to his side, "please quit pounding on that door. You're going to regret it!"

"Oh I am, am I?" he said through clenched teeth, the veins and muscles in his forearms visibly cording. "Somehow I doubt that." He pounded louder, his voice gone mad. "Open up damn it! Open up this door before I kick it...uh...in," he finished softly.

Neil stared down at the tiny form of a very beautiful African-American...*woman*. He was so taken aback by his mistake, so grateful that it indeed had been a mistake, that all he could do was continue staring down at her.

Cynthia's hands flew to her hips. She scowled up at him. "The door is open, Rambo. Now what can I do for you?"

Valentina was quick to intercept. "Cynthia," she said, clearing her throat, "I'd like for you to meet Neil. Neil, this is my best friend Cynthia."

"Cynthia," Neil repeated, his dark eyes lighting up, his lips kicking into a grin. He was simply too relieved to be embarrassed. "How do you do?"

She shook his hand and chuckled, effectively letting him off the hook. "I'm doing alright considering I almost got my ass whooped for having an affair with my best friend."

Neil had the good grace to look chagrined at that. "I, uh, I had no intention of whooping your ass as you so plainly put it. I was just uh, I was extremely anxious to make your acquaintance."

"Uh huh."

"It's true. Tina's told me a great deal about you."

“Uh huh.” Cynthia grinned. “The doors aren’t sound proof you know. I heard everything you said to Tina before you threatened to kick in the door.”

Valentina bit her lip, stifling a grin. She was pleased to note that Neil was recovering quickly.

“Well,” he burred, “perhaps you will allow me the privilege of making this rather awkward meeting up to you tomorrow. Perhaps I can take the two of you out for drinks or something?”

Cynthia chuckled, nodding her acceptance. “Sounds good.” Her eyes flicked to Valentina. “Y’all go ahead and talk. I’ve got some unpacking to do.” She smiled up to Neil. “Nice meeting you, Rambo. Tina, I’ll meet you for breakfast.”

Valentina chuckled as she watched Cynthia make her way back into her suite. She shook her head at Neil and grinned. “I told you you’d regret it,” she murmured.

His smile was sheepish. “I suppose you did.”

She waved a hand toward her own suite. “Would you care to come in?”

He met her gaze. “Very much.”

A few minutes later they were seated at a table inside of her suite sharing a bottle of wine. Valentina wasn’t certain how she should go about telling him her feelings, but she intuitively sensed that this was the time to make them known. “Neil,” she expelled on a sigh of resignation, “we really need to talk.”

Neil watched her face, not certain he cared for the expression writ on it. She looked down in the dumps, depressed, perhaps already contemplating her planned departure—a departure she didn’t yet realize she’d never be making. “Go on.”

She sighed, smoothing back a tendril of golden brown hair. She met his gaze. “There’s something I’ve been needing to say to you for days now only I haven’t been able to work up the nerve to say it. I...” She took a deep breath and expelled it, looking away.

“Is this bad news?” he asked. “Because if it is I’m not certain I want to hear it. Let me rephrase that. *I know* that I don’t want to hear it.”

Valentina’s smile was bemused. “I suppose the definition of bad depends upon your vantage point.” She bit down on her lip and nibbled at it for a moment. “And if I knew what your vantage point was it would be a hell of a lot easier to say what needs to be said.”

Neil’s eyes raked over her body, over her face. He didn’t want to hear any more, didn’t want to chance the fact that it could be bad news. In that moment his only concern was to bind her to him, to keep her with him always. Despite the doubts, the worries he’d sometimes entertained since meeting her, he had always known that when they were together sexually they were as one mind in all things. He decided to use that knowledge to his advantage.

“Come here,” he murmured, holding out his hand, “I want to play with you.”

Valentina’s head shot up. A part of her wanted to say no, to insist that they talk without sexual contact of any sort, but another part of her, the insecure part, wanted to be with him one last time before

being forced to tell him that she was in love with him. If he didn't return her feelings after all, she would never be able to be with him again and enjoy it.

And so she stood up and pulled her cotton sundress over her head, exposing herself to him with a few small tugs. She was naked, he was clothed, and for the first time since she'd met him she felt utterly and completely vulnerable to him.

"Come here," he coaxed, his eyes burning into her flesh, "whatever you have to say can be said whilst sitting on my lap."

Valentina walked the small distance that separated them and stood before Neil. Before she could sit down on his lap as he'd told her to he buried his face in her chest and popped a nipple into his mouth. He drew on it, hardening and elongating it, inducing her eyes to close and her head to fall back on a moan.

Neil's hands roamed all over her body, settling at her golden buttocks where he palmed and kneaded them as he continued to draw from her breast. He was losing control as he always did when he held her sexually, all higher level thinking quickly discarding itself to be replaced by primitive need. He pushed her hand down to cover his erection and groaned when she began to rub him through the jeans material.

"Take him out and sit on him," he said thickly, releasing her nipple. "I need to feel you wrapped around me."

Valentina did as she'd been bade, unzipping his jeans and freeing his stiff erection. Neil took the liberty of divesting himself of his shirt while she ran her hands over the expanse of his chest, loving the hardness and musculature of it. "Do you still think we're not suited for each other?" she asked boldly as she came down on him and straddled his lap, her vagina poised at the head of his cock.

Neil's fingers dug into her hips as he surged upwards, groaning as he entered her, gritting his teeth at the feel of her warm, wet flesh enveloping him, taking all of him in. "I never thought..." It was so difficult to speak, so difficult to think. He surged upwards again, ringing a gasp out of her. "I never thought that."

"Then why did you wait until tonight to come to me?" Valentina held herself still, refusing to ride him into orgasm until he answered her. She knew she was toying with him, knew he'd only be able to endure so much.

"Because," he said, his eyes narrowed in primal anger, the primitive part of his brain fully registering the fact that his sexual mate was withholding from him. His fingers dug deeper into her hips as he thrust upwards in a powerful, smooth motion both of them found highly stimulating. "Because," he ground out, "I wanted to be certain you wanted me here." He surged up again, earning himself another feminine gasp. "But I've decided that I'm keeping you regardless."

Valentina smiled slowly. She rewarded his unexpected answer with some brisk, hard riding. He moaned, his tongue coming out to instinctively curl around her nipple, drawing it in, rolling it around with his lips and tongue.

"I love you, Neil Ross," she whispered as she rode him, her bald flesh sucking up his cock over and over again, the slurping sounds of their flesh joining echoing in the room. "I love you so much."

There were few things that could have penetrated Neil's brain in the midst of being in full rut, but those words were at the top of the list. His dark eyes widened as he released her nipple and gazed into her light green eyes. "Then marry me Tina because I love you too, darlin'."

Valentina smiled fully, bending forward to kiss him on the lips. "I was beginning to think you'd never ask."

"I don't want you to go back to Atlanta," he said in a dominant brogue, his eyes searching hers. "Not now, not ever."

"I know. I'm not."

He grunted arrogantly. There was only so much intelligent conversation a highly erect man could engage in at one sitting. Especially when said man was buried to the hilt inside the woman of his dreams.

In one fluid motion he stood up, his arms wrapped around her, their bodies still joined, and carried her over to the bed. Coming down on top of her, he paused in his lovemaking long enough to growl out one last command. "No more birth control pills."

"You want me to have your baby?" she whispered, overcome with heady emotion.

He merely grunted in response.

Valentina giggled, taking that as a yes. She splayed her thighs wide, giving him ready access to the flesh he needed. Neil surged in deeply, groaning as he re-entered her, and rode them both into mindless oblivion.

Epilogue

Five Years Later

Neil stood atop the mountain of Cairn Gorm in the purplish early morning light reflecting on what a glorious life he was leading. Five years of marriage to the woman he loved, successful careers for both of them, two gorgeous daughters, and now Valentina told him they were expecting their third child to make an appearance into the world sometime around Christmas.

Life had been decidedly good to them, had blessed them, and thankfully showed every sign of continuing to do so. Even their friends had found good luck, Valentina's best friend Cynthia and Neil's best friend John having fallen in love and married only weeks after meeting. Cynthia had retained custody of Erica, she and John had created two more children together, and their family of five's posh flat was but a five minute walk from the Ross's.

Neil's eyes strayed from the view below the mountain back over to where the nude body of his

sleeping wife lay. He smiled slowly, thinking to himself that life was full of poignant ironies. If someone had told him a week or even a day before he'd met Valentina that five years from now he would be standing naked atop a mountain in the Highlands celebrating his fifth wedding anniversary to the most provocative woman he'd ever laid eyes upon he would have told them they were insane. But that was indeed what had happened.

Neil walked back to where his wife lay and kneeled down beside her. His dark eyes crinkled at the corners as she came slowly awake and reached out for him, wanting him to become a part of her.

He came down on top of her, burying himself in her warmth, knowing a day would never go by when he wouldn't thank the fates for bringing him Valentina.

Neil was, after all, a most sensible man.



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