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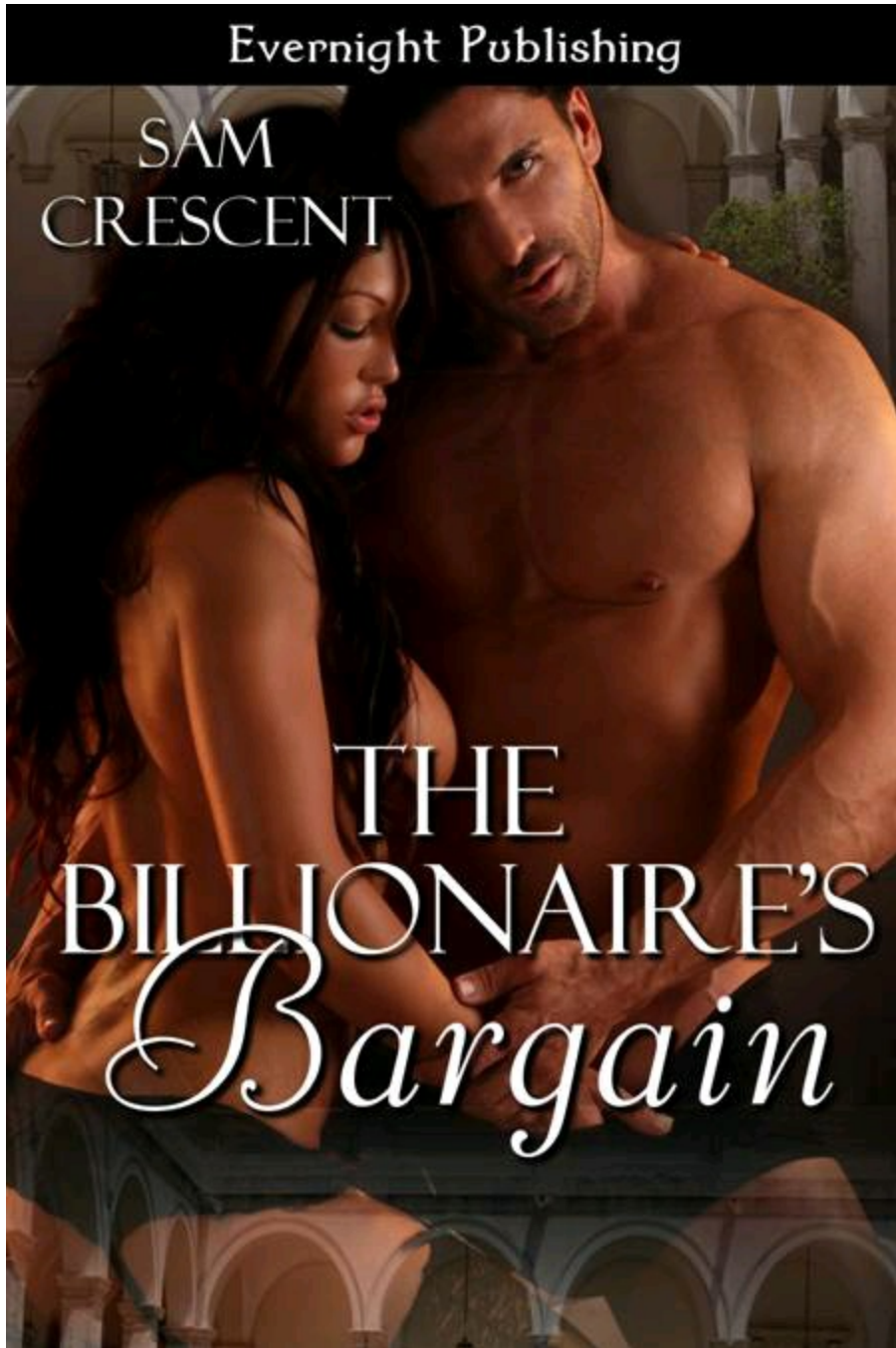
SAM
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BILLIONAIRE'S
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DEDICATION

To everyone with a dream and a love of romance.

THE BILLIONAIRE'S BARGAIN

Sam Crescent

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Chapter One

“This is fucking ridiculous.” Duncan James swore as his fist slammed down on the brand-new mahogany desk. The sound echoed around his office. The only person to witness his anger was his long time friend and lawyer, Mark Rogers.

“As ridiculous as it may sound, it’s what is in your father’s will. There is no way out. I’ve checked it over and over. There is no loophole. His will is solid, and there is no way can it be changed or manipulated. The bastard thought of everything, including how to control you in his death,” Mark firmly said again.

Duncan knew Mark was right, but it didn’t make what he had to do any easier. A wife, he needed to find a wife before he could claim his inheritance. The bastard had been a shitty father in life and an even worse father in death.

“How the hell am I going to find a wife and be married within a month? This kind of shit doesn’t happen in real life. It’s like he read some of those lame-ass romances that women love.”

“You seriously think you can’t find a woman willing to be *your* wife?” Mark asked. His friend gave him a condescending look. Duncan couldn’t help but smile. There would be any number of willing women who would queue to be his wife. He had the wealth and reputation to reel them in. All of the women in his life were beautiful and all after his money. Some were models who wanted to further their own career, while others just wanted to be on his arm. Not one of them was good enough to be his wife or mother his children. He had standards, even if they were a little hypocritical. Duncan wanted a woman who wasn’t in the public eye. A woman who’d put her family’s needs before her own. His bastard father was still haunting him from the grave. The situation would be laughable if he wasn’t the one who was being screwed over.

Since his father had passed several months ago Duncan had taken over the running of all of his companies. There was only one problem with his position. His father had decreed in his will that

Duncan could only take full control if he married a woman and stayed with her for two years. Not only did he have to stay married for two years but within that time he needed to produce a child. Being a handsome and wealthy multi-millionaire meant he was never short of attractive female company. His decision should be easy. However, he didn't want to marry a woman he couldn't stand for as long as it took to fuck her. His attention was hard to keep. One woman for two years would be hard for him to keep getting hard for.

All of the women he'd dated and fucked were not the sort of person he wanted for his wife or as the mother of his child.

He wanted someone within his life whose company he would be able to bear for more than a few days.

How was he to find a woman to agree to marry him, have his child, and then leave without a fuss?

His father definitely knew how to get his own way. He was even doing it in death. He knew that Duncan would do anything to get his heritage, as otherwise it would go to his heartless conniving step-mother. Duncan wanted Miranda James, his step-mother, to finally get her comeuppance for destroying his parent's marriage.

Shame had consumed him when his teary-eyed mother had knocked on his apartment door in London over ten years ago. His father had pushed his mother out of the family villa in Italy, to move his gold-digging mistress in. Duncan had cut off all contact, not allowing his father near him or his mother. The divorce was handled swiftly with Duncan in charge of everything. Mark had done a smashing job of keeping his father from his life. Now he was back, and he dangled the candy in front of him. Ever since his father had moved his mother out of their family home, Duncan had spent a great deal of time trying to put his mother back in her rightful place. All he needed to do was marry and produce an heir. He had never wanted to marry, but he would do so for his mother and to spite Miranda. She needed to know what it was like to suffer.

The telephone buzzed, interrupting his thoughts and his friend's questioning looks. He'd been so lost in his anger he had forgotten his friend was waiting.

"Mr. James, I'm sorry to interrupt, but Miss Williams is here for her two o'clock appointment."

The woman whose father had pilfered hard-earned money from his clients. Duncan thanked his secretary saying he would be done soon.

"So what do you suggest I do?" he asked his friend.

Mark stared at him for several moments. Duncan knew his friend was getting pleasure from this. Mark had been trying to get Duncan to settle down for years. His friend had been happily married for several years with a family, and he seemed without any need for other female company. Duncan would never admit to his friend that he envied the peace Mark had gained. It would do him no good to admit to such things.

"Well, I think if you want your father's estate and business you need to start interviewing for the bride-to-be," Mark said, standing up ready to leave.

"That's all you've got to say? Interview for a bride?" Duncan ran his fingers through his hair finding himself annoyed with the whole situation. He was a forty-year-old man. He shouldn't be considering his father's ultimatum.

"What else will you do? You've said how much you want what your father had. You want Miranda out of the villa and your mother back in." Mark picked up his suitcase ready to leave.

"You have always doubted my thoughts with regards to my parents. Why?" Duncan asked.

"Your parents wouldn't admit the truth to their son. I don't think your father's behaviour was as

cut and dry as your mother makes out. You'll do what you want, James. You always do." Mark walked to the door. "Let me know what you decide. Don't hurt a woman in the process of gaining your revenge."

Tess Williams rubbed her sweaty palms down her skirt for the hundredth time. Her nerves were getting the better of her. This interview meant so much to the future of her father. Duncan James could ruin her father in one swift phone call. She knew her father had stolen money, not only from Duncan, but also from other clients in the company. She didn't know the exact amount her father had stolen. She knew it had to be a vast sum to have him worrying about it. Today she would try to negotiate the outcome of her father's punishment. She knew it had to be a serious problem for him to go to her. Erik Williams rarely approached his daughter for anything unless he had to.

She noticed the curious glances from Duncan James's secretary. Tess knew this place wasn't right for her. She stuck out like a sore thumb, which only put her on edge. Tess ran her hands through her dark curls trying to make her hair look somehow decent. No matter what beauty product or device she used to tame the wayward locks, they always wanted to do their own thing. The glances reminded her of her school days where she felt out of place. Her full figure and wayward hair, along with her lack of propriety, had always been a topic of discussion among her peers and her father's friends. She knew Erik was embarrassed by her. He'd tried to change her while she was growing up, but she had found peace being in her garden or in the library where she worked. Being in the limelight for Erik had never appealed.

Tess didn't know who her mother was, so she didn't know where she got her characteristics from. She liked getting her fingers in the dirt and staying away from anything that would consume her passionate nature.

No one else knew who her mother was, either, and Tess had never seen her. It was the one aspect of her life that had remained a complete mystery. When she asked her father who her mother was, he would simply say, "a woman I knew".

A man came out of the office in front of her. He had blond hair and a mild manner. The secretary gave him a dazzling smile, and then he focussed his attention on her. She stared at the floor not wanting to gain any attention. He walked right past leaving her nerves on high alert. She hated male company and couldn't wait to get out of the building.

Tess ran her hands through her hair one final time before the secretary finally showed her through to Mr. James's office. As the door closed behind her, she saw that he was standing at the window looking down onto the city streets.

"Sit down, Miss Williams." His voice was filled with authority. Without question she sat in the chair across from his desk. While she waited for him to turn around, uncomfortable silence filled the room. She didn't know what to say, and she remained quiet.

Tess looked around his office noticing there was not a single personal picture or photograph in his office. All he possessed was one horrible, sterile piece of art.

It was obviously an unwanted gift, a gift he'd placed in his office, making the space feel more cold than warm.

"What can I do for you, Miss Williams?" He still stood by the window not even bothering to turn around and address her. No matter how rude he was being she had to plead her case.

"It's about my father, Mr. James. He—"

"Ah, the man who has stolen from my company and my clients." He turned to gaze at her finally. For a split second he stopped, only staring at her. "What could I possibly do for you?" His voice was

harsh as he regarded her. His full glare focussed on her.

“I wanted to know if there is anything I could do that would stop you taking this elsewhere?” She looked down to her lap where her hands were clasped together. His stare made her feel foolish and small.

“You mean the police?”

Tess nodded her head, unable to find the words she needed to speak.

This was so hard. In her mind she had thought it would be simple to request some leniency. The man in front of her was every bit as domineering as her father had said. He looked too hard and cold to listen to her. She was a librarian, not a businesswoman.

Duncan James was extremely handsome as well. Tess couldn't deny his appeal. His dark brown hair, which was lighter than her own raven colour, was gorgeous, and it made him appear darker. From what the magazines had said, he had Italian heritage running through his veins. His eyes were black as they stared at her. His body was hard and muscular. For a businessman he was well defined. She knew he must work out to look the way he did. She understood why he dominated the gossip magazines every week with more tales of his personal exploits and even worse, his callousness in the business world.

“How do you suggest I keep the law outside of your father's theft and the manipulation of my clients? He not only stole a lot of money from my company, but he nearly damaged my reputation. So, Miss Williams, how could I possibly help your father?” The sarcasm was not lost on Tess. It was practically dripping from his tone. He folded his arms walking to sit on the end of his desk. His feet were close to hers. She felt hot and uncomfortable being so close to him.

“My father has been through a trying time—”

“Do you seriously believe that is a good enough excuse to steal other people's hard-earned money?” He kept interrupting her. His tone never dropped back down from its hostility.

“How much has he actually stolen, Mr. James?”

He gave her an approximate sum that caused her eyes to open wide.

How could Erik steal that much money without getting caught 'til now?

What on earth would he spend it on?

It made her trip here pointless. There was no way she would be able to repay such a ridiculous sum. For the first time in a long time Tess disliked her father.

Chapter Two

Duncan observed his ex-employee's daughter. She was extremely beautiful. Her looks seemed out of place considering her father's bland, pretentious appearance. Her long black hair ran wild around her face. Her dark brown eyes were so striking that he thought at first she was wearing contacts. Unlike his fashion models, Miss Williams had real curves. There was no amount of clothing that could disguise her full breasts. Her curves were covered in that dreadful discoloured suit. When she fidgeted it showed the generous curve of her breasts, the indent of her waist and generous flare of her hips. Her complexion was flawless and smooth. Her skin looked soft to the touch. His palm ached to stroke her cheek to see if it was as flawless as it looked. Her voice was soothing to listen to. It was an effort not to close his eyes and simply listen to her. Her words flowed over him like the delicate silk of a bed-sheet. His cock thickened inside his pants. The desire to take her was strong. Duncan couldn't recall the last time he'd been so affected by a woman. He stared at her beauty and knew he had to have her.

She was definitely a female that deserved a male's appreciation. Preferably his own attention.

His response to her unnerved him.

No woman had left him feeling like this. He was the one who was in control. No one else. Miss Williams left him aching with the need to touch and possess her. He mentally shook himself when he noticed she was waiting for a reply. Duncan needed to gain control. She was here because of her father, nothing else.

Never before had he been so taken with the looks and the sound of a woman that he'd missed what she was actually saying. Most women talked incessantly, and he had the ability to drown them out.

What on earth could she have said? Duncan had been so busy appreciating her beauty he'd not paid attention to the conversation before him.

"What did you say, Miss Williams?" He turned from her trying to get his confused brain to work properly.

"My father is a good man. An honourable man. If there is anything he or I could do to stop you pressing charges, we'll do it." Her voice expressed her desperation. She clearly didn't know her father that well. From his few short meetings with Erik Williams he'd not been given the best of impressions. The older man seemed like a money-grabbing slime-ball who'd do anything for a dollar.

Duncan took his seat behind his desk. He considered what she'd said. She seemed desperate that there were no criminal damages brought against her father. He stared at her for several moments. She glanced down to gaze at her lap. He saw her hands fidgeting in her lap. She wasn't used to any male attention. He was sure of it. She wanted to protect her father, while he was in need of a wife to get his family home. His rightful inheritance. A plan, or rather a business contract, began to form in his mind.

It was callous, but he didn't care. He wanted what was rightfully his, and he would do anything to get it. Even blackmail a woman to marry him if he had to. Tess Williams needed him far more than he needed her. He ran his fingers through his hair at the thought of owning her. She would be his to do with as he saw fit.

"Tell me, Miss Williams, do you have a boyfriend?" he asked. Her name sounded right rolling

off his tongue. There were many more exciting ways he wanted to say her name.

The question surprised her, and she answered straight away. "No. My name is Tess." She felt uncomfortable with him referring to her by her surname.

"Thank you, Tess. Do you have a lover?"

"No."

"No special someone waiting at home?" He fired questions at her, making sure his plan wouldn't fail.

"Not that it's relevant, but no. I have no one at home waiting for me." He watched as she glanced back down at her lap before looking at him again. "What has my private life got to do with the problems of my father?" Her voice held suspicion.

Duncan had to give her credit. She knew deep down that she was caught in something. She might not know what she'd gotten herself into, but it didn't matter. Duncan always got what he wanted. Tess Williams had just gone to the top of his list of things he wanted.

"Absolutely nothing." He looked her over once more making sure that he was making the right decision. His ability to make good and firm decisions was what had kept him on top for so many years. At forty years old he was a successful businessman in his own right. He would have told his father's lawyers to fuck off if it hadn't been for his mother. She deserved justice after everything she'd been through. He'd see to it that she was restored in her home.

Tess needed him to stop any damage coming to her father. She was beautiful, and it would be no hardship to bed her. His cock stirred at the image of her laid out on his bed, her pussy dripping wet waiting for his cock. Duncan felt his body respond to the idea of bedding this temptress.

Temptress! In the clothes she was currently wearing she looked more like a drab mouse. Still, any man with half a brain would be able to see the luscious curves hidden beneath the baggy clothes. Would her fire be as passionate as he imagined? Duncan couldn't wait to explore everything with the woman in front of him. She had a submissive persona about her. He liked that. Duncan liked being in control and having the women submit to him.

He knew he would have her caught between a rock and a hard place. She would do exactly as he wanted, and she wouldn't have a leg to stand on.

Control. He would have complete control over Tess Williams. He would find the experience pleasurable. He knew how to give his woman pleasure, and he would certainly enjoy keeping Tess occupied in the bedroom.

Certain that he was making the right decision, like any natural predator he struck. "Depending on what you are prepared to do for your father, it can have everything to do with it."

He sat back waiting for her to speak. She frowned back at him, her eyebrows drawing slightly together. Duncan stared at her face and knew he wanted to see her screaming in orgasm. He shifted in his seat trying to ease the ache in his groin.

She ran a hand through her hair. The wild locks fell all around her face. He pictured them wrapped around his fist as he fucked inside her sweet cunt. The lust began to build inside him. He knew without a doubt a marriage between them would never be a business arrangement and would never be only on paper.

He wanted Tess.

She licked her lips. The action looked nervous to him. Did he affect her as much as she affected him?

"How could my private life have anything to do with the situation where my father has put himself?"

Duncan smiled. Her confusion worked in his favour.

“Tell me, Tess, what are you prepared to do to stop criminal charges being brought against your father?”

“Anything,” she said without hesitation.

He knew she’d give him the right answer. Duncan picked up the phone and began speaking to his secretary. His secretary questioned him on a few points. He made sure to keep his eyes on Tess at all times. Her eyes widened when he said the word marriage. She really had no clue as to what she was getting herself into. Erik should have warned his daughter that he didn’t like to play fair. Duncan got what he wanted by being ruthless. Every person who lived on earth had a price. Duncan always found the sum and was willing to use it to his advantage. Tess’s price was the freedom of her father. She would do as she was told or risk losing her parent. He didn’t see the real connection. Erik rarely talked about his daughter. He’d visited the man’s desk a few times. He possessed no photos of his family at all.

Tess was prepared to do anything for a man who didn’t really acknowledge her as a daughter. Duncan found her circumstance sad but to his benefit.

Another five minutes and the conversation ended with his secretary. Jane was going to make sure to purchase a marriage license along with the essentials to get him married very soon. He looked at her, and his words would shock her. Duncan knew he needed the element of surprise on his side. “In two weeks, we will be married at the local church across the street on the corner. I’ll organise a dress to be delivered to you by the end of the day. The wedding will be at ten on Friday morning.” His words were short and sharp.

He carried on with his work while he waited for her reaction. Everything in his mind had to be planned.

“What do you mean we will be married?”

“You said you will do anything for your father.”

“Not marriage—” Her voice took on a hysterical tone. Duncan felt his heart ache. For a split second he considered backing out. Tess Williams had done nothing to him. She was a daughter trying to help her parent. She didn’t deserve it.

Use her, and get your revenge. Your mother deserves to be in her rightful place at the villa.

“Shall I cancel the arrangements and get in contact with the police? I’m sure you’d like to spend the next ten years seeing your father in an orange suit.” He picked up the phone as if to phone them. Duncan saw her panic. Within seconds she’d grabbed the phone from his hand and slammed it back in its cradle. Her breathing was deep and troubled.

Duncan was right. Tess Williams had some fire in her. He couldn’t wait to see how much fire she possessed.

“Why do you want me to marry you?” She stayed standing near his chair looking down at him. A layer of sweat covered her brow. Her scent invaded him. She smelt like vanilla and honey, a savoury sweetness he wanted to taste.

Looking up at her Duncan saw the outline of her body. His assumptions had been correct. She had a full figure. Her hips were large. He knew she would be able to take a hard fucking without breaking. Models were too thin. Their bones always made him feel if he pushed too hard they’d snap in two. Duncan wasn’t a weak man. He worked hard, and when he fucked a woman, he liked to get dirty doing it. There was something about a hard fuck that set his mind at ease.

“I have found that it’s something I need to do. You’re in a predicament where I can help you. This is a win/win situation for us.” His answer sounded vague. He wouldn’t tell her the truth.

“Why do you need to get married?”

He contemplated telling her about his own deceased father’s will and the terms surrounding it in order for him to gain his inheritance. He decided against it. She didn’t need to know how much he needed this marriage. It kept him in control of their affair and brief marriage.

“It’s time for me to be married. A marriage will keep the press off my back and cleans up this bad boy image I’ve been tarred with. If you marry me I’ll not press charges against your father. Any debt that he has created would be wiped clean. I’ll settle everything. All you need to do is marry me.” He made a point of mentioning her father’s predicament. Duncan might be a ruthless businessman, but he kept to his word. He wouldn’t go back on his word.

He stood, which forced her to take a step back. Her scent was everywhere he turned. Her hand rested on his desk. Her cheeks were flushed. Duncan stared down at her chest and saw her nipples were pressed against the fabric of her shirt. She was turned on by him.

Tess stared at his chest. He was so close it disturbed her train of thought. His expensive designer suit did nothing to disguise how magnificent his body was. Tess felt an incredible urge to stroke her hand down the hard press of his chest. His suit jacket would feel soft against her fingers. His chest would press against her finger tips showing her how hard this man was, in body and in his presence. She knew he was known for getting what he wanted. She had never thought it would involve her.

He stood close to her. His masculine scent invaded her senses. She knew he was strong, but being surrounded by him made it hard for her to concentrate.

No matter how many diets she went on she’d never been able to shift her extra pounds. While she was growing up her father had used to tease her about her extra weight. Over time it had been easy for her to stop thinking about her body and just hide away in books. When she was in a fantasy world no one could hurt her. In romance books for a short while she could pretend to be heroine. She knew it was naïve, but being consumed by the fantasy world meant she didn’t have to deal with the bitter sting of rejection, which hurt so much more.

She knew her body, and she was aroused at the sudden image of them together, naked. The chance of Duncan James ever wanting anything to do with her was incredibly slim. She shook her head to remove the erotic images from her mind. Never before had she felt intrigued by a man. He stood in front of her with his dominant attitude, which terrified her. He made her think about herself as a woman and not just someone else within the scheme of things. For the first time since high school she wanted to be someone other than Tess Williams, the motherless fat girl.

She moved around his desk to sit back in her seat. The more distance she put between them the better she’d feel. Her whole body quivered at the passionate possession still alive in her mind. No matter how hard she tried to shut it off, the images kept coming back. Her hands shook as she clasped them on her lap.

“All I have to do is marry you, and you will wipe my father’s slate clean. No debt and no charges?” He nodded his head. Tess knew it couldn’t be that simple. Nothing in life ever was. She had only come here to try to stop her father going to prison. She now got all the debt cleared provided she married the man with a reputation worse than the devil. Tess knew she should be celebrating. How could she celebrate? On the one hand her father would be free, while on the other, she’d be trapped with a man who had no respect for a woman.

“How long will we be married?”

“For as long as we wish.”

So vague, so tempting, and so obviously the thing to do. She could fight him, and then her father would be in prison.

Or she could be married to this man and be free within the next few years. Marriage to this man would be a hardship. From the short time she'd spent in his office she knew he liked to control. He didn't give anything away. It's not as if he would demand marital rights from her. He could have any woman he wanted, which left her free to fulfil her own responsibilities. He probably wouldn't even want to share a house. Nothing in her life would have to change. Her last name and a ring on her wedding finger was all that was required of her. Tess felt her heart lifting. She could do this. It was the only solution, and it had been offered by Duncan James himself. All she needed to do was keep visions of them intimate together out of her mind and she would be fine.

She wondered what could possibly go wrong. It all sounded so clear in her mind. What other choice did she really have? Tess couldn't let her father rot in some prison cell. Anyway she had heard enough of the awful things that happened in prisons from her own father.

The thought of him going to a place like that made her sick to her stomach. If she had to give up her freedom to protect the only parent she had then she'd do whatever it took.

Chapter Three

Duncan watched her as she worked out his proposal in her mind. He knew she would accept his proposal. She didn't have any other solution to her father's immediate problems. He held all the cards. Just the way he liked it. Erik would see the inside of a prison cell if she refused. He'd make sure of it. Tess was on his radar now.

They would be married within the next two weeks. Any longer would risk her backing out. Duncan had everything prepared. Once their meeting was over he'd phone Mark to give him an update. Soon after his signature was taken on the wedding certificate, he would have the family estate that he'd waited so long to possess. The only other problem in his path was getting Tess to bear him a child.

The only solution he saw would be to make her fall in love with him. He would spend a great deal of time to make certain Tess Williams wouldn't be able to leave him. Duncan knew she'd never leave a child. She had that maternal instinct he'd heard Mark talk about. He knew he could do it, and within no time he would have her in his bed, and then before she knew what was happening they could conceive his first child. All parts of his father's will would be met.

His heir would be the final condition in his father's terms of his will. Duncan would have full control over the family estate and business. He knew the first thing he'd do and that would be to cut off his money-grabbing stepmother. Once Miranda was out of the picture his mother would be back in her rightful place, where she belonged. Plans of his future began to map out.

The dreams he'd held onto for so long were so close to coming true he could almost taste it. Tess had no choice.

Duncan looked forward to getting Tess to fall in love with him. Her seduction would provide him with so much pleasure. The anticipation alone was enough to make him yearn for her.

Spending time with her wouldn't be a hardship. She was sweet, beautiful, and it was his pleasure to bring her closer to him. Tess didn't need to know what he wanted from her. He'd make sure she never doubted her position at his side. She'd be perfect as the woman by his side and the mother of his children. Once his place in her life, and the fulfilment of his father's will, was guaranteed he would proceed with his own life. Duncan would take a mistress like his father had done before him, a woman to sate his appetite while Tess graced his own bed. She'd stay at home, and he'd be free to lead a life separate from the family. His plans were suitable to him and easily achieved.

The more he thought about them, the more he liked his plan. Tess need never know of his intent. He'd treat her with the utmost respect and care.

Everything sounded so clear to him.

He waited for her answer.

"Yes, I will marry you."

He nodded, containing his smile. An hour ago it had seemed all hope was lost to him. Tess was about to make it all happen. The revenge he'd wanted for the last ten years was firmly within his grasp. For that he'd be deeply indebted to the woman before him.

"Excellent, I will get my secretary to contact you with the details."

Duncan moved round the desk to stand before her. He noticed she took a step back.

“You don’t have to be scared of me, Tess. I’m not going to bite unless you want me to.” He leaned against his desk staring at her.

The drab suit did nothing for her curves. He’d make it his mission to fit her in the finest fabrics and silks. She had a body he craved to know every inch of.

“I’m not afraid of you.”

“Then why are you walking away from me?” he asked.

She stopped. Her hands fisted at her sides. “There, I’m not going anywhere.”

Duncan took a step towards her. She stood her ground. Her gaze dropped to her feet. In no time at all he’d closed the distance between them. He placed a finger under her chin and lifted her head up to face him.

“I always want to see your eyes on me,” he said.

“Why did you pick me?”

“Because I knew you wouldn’t say no. Your father’s freedom depended on your answer.”

“You’re Duncan James. You could have any woman. I’ll never understand why you picked me.”

He smiled and leaned down to kiss her. Tess pulled away shaking her head. “I’m not ready for that.”

“You’ll need to be ready in two weeks.”

“But not today. I agreed to marry you. You’ve got any number of women on your list to bed. I don’t want to be another notch on your bedpost or anything else you think. This will be a marriage in name only.”

Duncan smiled. She was only setting a challenge to him. He couldn’t wait to get started in breaking down her barriers.

“Fine, we’ll play it your way. In two weeks you’ll be mine, Tess.”

Tess nodded at him waiting for him to say something else. When no other words were spoken she made her way to the door. Her exit was silent. She felt uneasy and for some strange reason as if she had sold her soul to the devil in order to help her father. Tess rode down the elevator with her heart aching. She knew her life was about to take one of two paths. One was filled with love and happiness, and the other was so painful she could not bear to think about. She didn’t know where her thoughts came from, only that the feeling wouldn’t go away.

She tried shaking off the doomed feeling, but it followed her for the rest of the day. Before she went home she stopped off at the supermarket. She’d booked a day off at the library. The rest of the day would be spent baking at home.

Once inside her small apartment, Tess went straight to the kitchen. She tore her jacket off then turned on the oven. All of the ingredients she’d purchased at the supermarket were spread out on the counter. Tess gathered her bowls and began measuring out everything she needed. While she gave herself up to the pleasure of the kitchen she could forget about the meeting she’d had with Duncan.

She zested lemons and squeezed the juice. For the rest of the morning and into the afternoon she absorbed herself in the pleasure of the kitchen. When everything was done she collapsed on her sofa. All the energy had been sucked out of her from that meeting and the cooking.

Then her predicament dawned on her.

She was getting married.

It seemed so surreal. In two weeks she would be married to one of the most ruthless but wealthiest of businessmen, Duncan James.

Tess took a moment to think about him. He held so much control in his large frame. He’d

startled her with his presence. The way he'd stared at her had made her feel bare. It was like he'd stripped off all of her clothes, and she was naked in front of him.

Her nipples hardened as she remembered the way he'd stared at her. The desire pouring from his eyes had startled her. No other man had looked at her like she was something to eat.

Her mind was awhirl, and she was so preoccupied with her upcoming nuptials she didn't hear the phone. She jumped when the ring of her telephone finally invaded her mind. Tess nearly fell off the sofa in her rush to answer the call.

Her nerves were completely fried. No wonder Duncan was so powerful and a force to reckon with. He never showed any fear, whereas she felt ready to crumble at the sound of the telephone.

She groaned as she banged her knee on the floor then moved to pick up the phone. "Hello," she said, hoping it wasn't some salesperson.

"Tess? Honey? Are you all right?"

"Dad?" She ran her fingers through her hair. The wild curls fought against the clip she'd put them in when she'd started baking and cooking. He sounded panicked. It was the first time he'd called her "honey". He must really be rooting for her. "No, I'm fine. The phone just startled me. I wasn't expecting anyone to call me."

Erik was silent on the other end. Tess could almost sense his embarrassment. She knew he hated the fact his daughter was coming to the rescue. What other choice did he have? Prison? The thought almost made her laugh—almost. His situation was stupid. She couldn't believe he'd gotten in so deep.

"I sorted it, Dad." She felt her anger rising. The only reason he'd called was to get an update on his situation. Erik didn't care about her. For the last couple of years he'd barely talked to her. He was so silent because of his embarrassment, and yet she'd not only had to feel the humiliation of having to go and grovel to his boss, she also had to listen to the rants that shouldn't have been aimed at her at all.

She had nothing to do with his business. Tess never got involved with anything Erik had going on. He was happy for her to feel as if she'd committed the horrid crime.

Her father was getting off scot-free while she had to sacrifice her freedom in order for him to get it.

Her precious freedom was being sacrificed for his greed.

"What did you need all that money for?" Tess demanded from him, no longer caring about his feelings. She deserved to know the answers.

Thinking about her predicament made her scared. She had a right to know where the money had gone.

Tess deserved answers.

"That's none of your business," he yelled down the line.

Enough was enough.

"None of my business? I've just gone and sorted out all your problems. I've sacrificed my freedom so you won't go to prison, and you're telling me it's none of my business?" Tess heard the anger rising inside her voice. She was tired of constantly being made to feel like a spare part. When she was growing up Erik made it abundantly clear she wasn't the ideal daughter. After everything he'd done she was still trying to gain his approval.

A knock at the door cut off Tess's rant. She growled in frustration and anger. Tess rarely got chance to voice her opinions to her father. The one time she finally got the courage she was interrupted by the door. She answered the door, fuming at her father's stubbornness. He was moaning

down the phone at her. Tess planned to ignore him until she got rid of whoever it was on the other side of the door.

Not only was she his daughter, but she was the one who would suffer from his actions. Why couldn't he be grateful? So many thoughts ran 'round her head as she opened the door.

Then she froze. Her world crashed around her. Duncan James was standing in her doorway. Shocked, she just stood staring at him with the phone placed at her ear.

"Tess, Tess, are you still there?" Erik said.

She stared at the phone, ending the call without speaking. The last thing she needed was for Duncan to get hold of her father. Erik wouldn't be forthcoming no matter how many times she asked him what he'd spent the money on.

Tess would have to deal with her father later. She wasn't going to allow him to get away with what he'd done. There was no way she'd be around next time to sacrifice herself in order to pick up the pieces.

"Problems?" Duncan asked. He leaned against her doorframe. He was so tall and wide he covered the entire door. She stared at the phone then ran a hand through her hair. She wore the coverall she'd put on earlier for baking and cooking. Compared to Duncan, Tess felt small. With him standing in her doorway she was trapped in her apartment.

She placed the phone on the table then turned back to him. Inviting him in would be a mistake. The bulky jacket he wore did little to hide the thick muscles underneath. She crossed her arms trying to protect herself from the nerves that were getting the better of her.

"Nothing I can't handle," she said. "Why are you here?"

He lifted up a lady's handbag. "You left this in my office. I thought I'd do the right thing and see that my fiancée got her purse back. I was also curious to see where you lived. It looks to me that Erik didn't spend a cent of that money on you."

She reached to take the bag from him. Duncan moved her purse out of reach. Tess stood her ground, her hands going to her hips. She wouldn't press her whole body over him to try to get her purse back.

"How old are you? Just give me my purse back." Tess made another grab for it only to be stopped.

"I'm forty years old. How about you?" he asked.

"Seriously? You've asked me to marry you, and only now you're asking my age?" She folded her arms furious with herself for letting him bait her.

"Yes, I never said I was conventional. How old are you?" He held her bag out of reach.

She moaned in frustration then stared at him.

"I'm twenty-three," she said.

"Are you going to invite me in, Tess? That's a usual polite response when a person shows up at your door."

"You're not the normal kind of person who shows up at someone's door," she said.

"I'm your fiancé."

She stared into his mocking eyes, taking in the slight lift of his lips showing his amusement.

"Why should I let you in?" she asked. Tess glared at him. She was tired of men trying to control her. Tess folded her arms under her breasts. She hated feeling like this. She'd only known him a few short hours. But her body had other ideas. She felt her nipples getting hard. Her mind was shutting down to common sense. Her body responded to him even though she didn't like him very much.

Attraction has nothing to do with liking him as a man.

“Tess, we’re to be married. We should get to know each other, and to do that we need to be allowed access into each other’s lives.”

His argument sounded good to her, but she was still reluctant to allow him in her home.

“You know you didn’t give me a choice. I either marry you, or my father goes to prison.”

“And you don’t think he deserves it?”

“I don’t know what to think,” she said to him. All argument left her. She stared at him a few more seconds. He watched her with his dark, intense eyes. Tess didn’t want him in her small apartment. She knew he’d dominate her space. Her apartment was her own, the small piece of heaven she’d carved out for herself.

Seeing no other choice Tess gestured for him to enter her small living space. Tess no longer had the willpower to keep him out. Duncan had stopped by for a reason. Trying to stop him would use all of her reserve energy, which she needed to keep preserved in order to deal with him.

“I thought your secretary was sorting everything out,” she said to his back as she closed the door behind him.

“I changed my mind. Is Tess short for anything?” He moved into her living room. The quaint room had two small, fluffy chairs. She couldn’t afford a sofa. A sofa wouldn’t fit in her small place anyway. Before he walked round her small room she’d never had a problem with her lack of furniture. Now she felt embarrassed.

“No, just Tess.” She moved a stray strand of her wild hair out of her face removing the clip in the process. It had been useless to try to contain her hair.

“Strange.” He continued to walk around the room looking at her books and then at the pictures dotting the surface by her fake fireplace. She had central heating but liked the look of the small fireplace in her sitting room. One day she hoped to have a proper home with a full open fire and a family of her own.

“What? My name is perfectly normal.”

“Not your name. I expected some stuffy, pretentious apartment, but it’s quite nice. A bit small for my tastes, but convenient in size.”

Tess didn’t know whether to take that as a compliment or as an insult.

“Thank you, I think.” She was really confused. “Duncan, why are you here? And how did you know where I lived?” Tess wanted to say so much more. She kept it locked inside.

He turned, putting his hands in his jacket pockets which reminded her she hadn’t offered to take his coat. He looked out of place in her small apartment.

“If you came by to see if I was responsible for my dad taking that money then you’re wrong. This is it.” She raised her arms to emphasise her point. “I can’t afford a car or the money to buy this place. I pay rent. Whatever he spent the money on, I don’t know.”

“I didn’t come here to find the money. I’ve sorted everything out with regards to your father.” He stared at her, his gaze unwavering. How did he manage to affect her with simply staring at her?

“Then why did you come here?” she asked.

“I came to bring your purse. I tried looking for more information on you in Erik’s file. He has nothing on you.

“That wouldn’t surprise me. My dad doesn’t like me all that much.” She snorted at the thought of her father even giving a damn.

“And yet, you’re prepared to do everything to keep him out of prison.”

Tears filled her eyes. Over the years she’d learnt to deal with the disappointment from her father. No person can be perfect. Erik had proven more than once that she couldn’t trust him. Just once

she wished there would be another human being out there who'd look beyond her visual flaws and see the woman underneath. Tess knew it was lame, but all she wanted was to be loved. For one person to turn 'round and care about her. She bit her lip trying to stop the emotion from clawing at her.

"He's still my father." She whispered the words even as they burnt inside her throat. How many more excuses was she going to make for a man who'd made it blatantly clear he didn't care about her?

"I looked in your bag to see where you lived. I wanted your address so I could return it to you."

"You had no right to look—" She stopped, knowing he had every right. He was helping her in every way imaginable. Looking in her bag was his right. She'd be married to him in two weeks. Soon he'd have more rights than looking in her bag and knowing where she lived.

Chapter Four

Duncan watched his future bride, taking in every detail, every movement, and found everything about her fascinating. Her whole gorgeous body was tense. He knew she was burning inside from suppressing her anger. Never in his life had he looked in a woman's purse. The temptation provided to him when he spotted the small purse was too hard to resist. The only way he could deal with his invasion of her privacy was to convince himself that he needed to know more about his beautiful future wife. He knew very little about Tess Williams. Her age was a slight concern. He'd dated plenty of young models, just not as young as she.

The attraction he felt towards her had little to do with her age and more to do with her as a person. There was repressed fire inside her. Duncan couldn't wait to unleash it.

He felt guilty for going inside her purse. There was nothing personal or degrading inside her purse. In fact, her purse was very practical. She had an outdated cell phone, a can of pepper spray, along with her passport and money. There was nothing personal to let him know who Tess Williams the woman was. Nothing personal at all. Nothing to give him the tiniest clue as to who this woman was.

The woman who had entered his office and his thoughts.

Since she left his office a couple of hours ago he'd not been able to get her out of his mind. From her looks to the beautiful way she blushed as he thought about everything about her, Duncan tried to savour every little detail for him to think about over and over again. He put his little obsession down to Tess simply being a desirable woman whom he'd not taken to his bed yet.

"I only checked to see where you lived. There was no other choice, since we had no information on your father's record, and so the only way of finding out was to check." He was explaining himself. He never explained himself.

He smiled at her.

"D-do you want a cup of coffee?" She stammered over her words. Her face flushed. Duncan found her adorable.

"Coffee would be lovely." He watched her leave the room. He went and sat on her sofa while he waited. Duncan glanced around him at the small room. She owned so many books. He couldn't believe how many she'd managed to cram in such a small area.

She read a lot of books, unless they were just for show. Staring at the well-worn binders he was thinking she'd read them all. For a beautiful woman he found it hard to believe she spent a great deal of time trapped inside a book.

There were a few personal pictures, but they were photographs of the countryside and snow covered fields. There were none of her or her family.

Tess came through a few minutes later carrying two steaming cups of coffee. He saw her concentrating on the liquid inside. He guessed she was trying not to spill the contents. The apartment smelt like chocolate and lemon.

She placed the mugs on the coffee table, and then using her fingers around the rim she handed him his mug. Tess let out a hiss as the heat burned the tips of her fingers. He took the cup from her as quickly as possible. Duncan didn't like the thought of her hurt and felt all his protective instincts rise to the surface. He'd never felt anything like it. Women meant nothing to him. Tess was screwing with

his head.

It's only because you haven't fucked her yet. He tried to reassure himself, failing miserably. It took all of his willpower for him to just sit there and not make sure she hadn't burned herself too badly.

She took the seat across from him, her gaze going everywhere in the room rather than look at him.

He tasted the coffee. The look of revulsion on his face made her chuckle. The coffee tasted bitter and disgusting. He'd never tasted anything so awful.

"What is this stuff?" He held up the cup as if it was a contaminated toxic waste bucket. She laughed more, the sound glorious to hear. Her whole face brightened up with her chuckles.

"This stuff," she took a healthy gulp, "is a cheap brand of instant coffee." A bit more sheepishly she said, "It's the only one I can afford." Her cheeks burned a bright red. "You develop a taste for it, eventually. I know you're not used to this stuff. I'd offer you something else, but all I have is tap water."

He put the cup down on the coffee table. His mouth tasted awful. He'd make sure she'd never have to drink horrid coffee again.

"Do you like French food?" Duncan loved French cuisine. It was something his mother used to love to cook before she decided the kitchen was no place for a lady with money. He wondered what his mother would think of Tess. She wouldn't approve his choice. Duncan was pleased he wasn't a mummy's boy who listened to everything his parent said.

"I don't know. I've never had French food before. I've seen it cooked on the television. It always looks expensive."

He chuckled. Her cheeks went a darker shade of red with her blush. He found her honesty refreshing. So many women wanted to talk designer clothes or the latest gossip that he wasn't interested in. Tess had something more about her.

"I'm going to take you to dinner tomorrow night. I'll pick you up around eight tomorrow night." He stood up ready to leave.

"What? You don't need to take me to dinner." Her coffee cup joined his on the table as she stood up. She moved closer to him. He watched as her eyes widened when he placed his hands on her shoulders to steady her. Duncan saw her breasts rising and falling as her breaths deepened. She was as affected by his presence as he was by her.

"I know I don't have to, but I will. My secretary will send over the appropriate dress." He cupped her cheek, not backing away. Her skin was silky smooth like he imagined. She didn't pull away. With his other hand he sank it into the wild length of his hair. Her hair was silkier than her skin. He heard her moan as he touched her neck. Duncan tilted her head back for him to see her eyes clearly. He wanted to see every reaction on her pretty face.

Her eyes dilated while her lips slightly parted for him. Duncan saw the vulnerability in her eyes. She'd never felt anything like this, he was sure of it. He wasn't strong enough to resist the temptation of her lips. He claimed her lips, the plump softness opening beneath him. He grabbed a fistful of her hair, deepening the kiss while pressing his body against hers. She was soft and welcoming. Her hands ran up his chest to circle his neck. Her eyes were closed as he captured her kiss, plunging his tongue deep inside her lips. She tasted of the coffee, but on her tongue it tasted sweet.

Her full breasts felt wonderful against his chest. The curves of her body melted against him. Duncan wanted to rid her body of the clothes and sink inside her. The need to take her hard consumed

him. It would be so easy to take her without any thought of seduction. But Tess deserved seduction. She deserved to have the time taken to love her body.

Duncan pulled back, seeing her face flushed. She licked her lips. The action was so innocent and yet so damn sexy. She had no idea of the temptation she presented at every turn. Part of her charm was her lack of knowledge of how sensual she was. He couldn't wait to have her spread out before him on his bed.

"I'm looking forward to our marriage, Miss Williams," he said, running a thumb along the seam of her bottom lip. Her tongue peeked out to lick the tip. She clearly had no idea how much he wanted to sink his cock between her lips. There was so much he wanted to show her. Before he was done she'd never be able to spend a moment without thinking about him. He was going to find everything out about her. She was his new obsession.

He couldn't resist another kiss from her. Her eyes closed as she responded to him instantly. Her tongue met his, dancing together in a searing love affair. Her passion would be his to control.

Duncan pulled away. He'd need to exhibit control to have her panting after him. The desire to lose himself in her warm heat was hard to ignore. But ignore his thick cock he did.

He left her standing, watching him as he made his way to her apartment door. Duncan turned and looked back, seeing her eyes widened and her full lips still slightly parted as if awaiting his lips. She was awaiting more of his attention. "And you better be ready for me, Tess. You're mine."

Duncan closed the door. He took a few deep breaths. His legs felt like jelly. No kiss had ever left him so shaken. There was no movement from inside her apartment. He walked out onto the street and looked up at her window. She stood looking down at him.

She held up a hand waving at him. He waved back. It was hard for him to look away. He wanted to go back up there and take the kiss further. Instead, he got in his car, started it up, and pulled away from the curb.

His hands were shaking. His whole body was aflame for her.

He had no idea what was wrong with him.

Tess touched her lips. He'd kissed her so passionately. She'd never felt anything like it before. No man or boy had ever kissed her. She didn't like the thought of the boys pawing at her body. The girls always complained their first time hurt. From all the stories she'd heard about their first time she'd put any sexual encounter off. Duncan was the closest she'd ever gotten to feeling passion. The way he'd touched her, from the gentle way he cupped her cheek to the powerful way he gripped her hair, was a combination of power and gentleness that threatened to take her over.

She glanced down out of the apartment window. He'd not appeared at the bottom. His car waited by the curb. Several people passed to admire his expensive vehicle. He walked out. His wide shoulders and the hard set of his body were hard to miss. From where she stood he seemed to dwarf everyone around him.

He turned and looked up at her. She felt her heart race as his dark gaze stared back at her.

Tess waved to him, her hand trembling. She hoped he didn't see how nervous she was. Her feelings scared her. She didn't like him very much, and yet, his kiss had made her feel so much towards him. He got in his car then drove away.

She pulled away from the curtain. Her chicken smelt done in the oven. On wobbly legs she made her way into the kitchen to finish serving up her meal. She had work in the morning. The library opened at eight. She wondered if he knew where to send the dress. He was right to send her some clothes. Her wardrobe lacked the sophistication needed to be his wife.

After her food she settled down with a good book.

Her father didn't call back, and when she tried to get him on the phone he refused to answer.

She gave up and went to bed. Tomorrow she'd worry about her future. For several hours she lay staring at the ceiling. Her body was on fire, and she kept reliving the kiss he'd given her. She licked her lips wondering if she'd be able to taste him on them. There was no one for her to talk to. She'd never been good at making friends. Most of the time she liked her own company. Friends were hard to find. It was one of the reasons she liked her books. The women at the library were nice to her, but she didn't mix well with crowds. Tess didn't know what was wrong with her. She preferred the company of books to people. Her father, while she was growing up, had made it hard for her to have friends over. He made sure they all knew what a disappointment she was.

Why was she helping him with his problem if he didn't appear to care for her in any way?

Tears blurred her eyes as all of her insecurities bombarded her at once. Just once she wanted someone to love her for who she was without trying to change her.

She closed her eyes, drifting to sleep.

Her dreams were filled with Duncan and her first ever kiss.

Chapter Five

Tess stared at her reflection in the full length mirror she kept for emergencies. She had it propped up against her wardrobe door. She wanted to turn away from what she saw there. When she looked at her reflection she remembered the kiss the night before. The touch of his lips made her want things she'd not wanted in a long time. Duncan James was a serial womaniser. There was no way she'd be happy with him. She needed to get all of her romantic fantasies out of her mind now before she allowed her heart to rule her head.

Duncan had the dress delivered at her work. She'd been surprised when the courier carried the parcel to her. She'd not had a package sent to her at work. When she'd opened the box to reveal the dress she thought her heart had stopped.

She stared at the dress she wore. The deep crimson dress had a long slit up one leg showing a long length of thigh as she walked. The low-cut bodice tantalised the onlooker with the view of the tops of her breasts, but the bodice covered enough to give her some respect. The fabric clung to every curve. She couldn't tear her gaze away. For the first time her curves didn't look fat or frumpy. She looked nice. Maybe even a little bit sexy. Tess ran her hands over the fabric. She felt her waist dip in and then flare out. She turned this way and that to see what she looked like at all angles.

Had the dress been bought by him?

She didn't know. There had been no card or anything as way of explanation. She liked the thought of Duncan spending the time to pick out the dress for her. Would his fingers graze the fabric as if testing the feel himself?

Tess shook her head. "Get it together. This is a business arrangement. Nothing more and nothing less. He wants you for something, and in return your father, who hates you, will be getting out of a prison sentence."

For a short time she could pretend to be a seductress. She burst out laughing. There was nothing seductive about her. She preferred to stay at home. There was not a seductive bone in her body.

The dress alone was more gorgeous than anything she possessed in her small wardrobe. She smoothed her hands down the fabric, loving the feel as it glided through her fingers. Each time she touched her body she imagined Duncan's much larger hand touching her. Would his touch be gentle or rough? She didn't know what part of him she wanted most. The rough businessman or the man who'd given her a chance to save her father. Early in the morning she'd woken up from a pretty steamy dream, her body humming with sexual frustration. She'd had plenty of sex dreams before but never about a man she could physically touch.

She didn't like the effect he had on her body or the lack of control she felt. However, she'd accepted the fact she did want part of him. She wouldn't act on it. No way would she beg Duncan for any of his attention. She'd accepted her body's weakness, and now she'd be able to move on. Once she saw past his seduction she'd be able to fight her attraction. He slept with every woman he met. She was no different. The only difference between her and his other women was her lack of station and the fact he could call the police at any moment if she didn't stick with her side of the bargain.

Tess went back to her reflection to make sure she looked fine for when he came calling. Her make-up was minimal with only a deep red lipstick to match the dress painting her lips. She'd never been good with beauty products either. Tess pushed the insecurities to the back of her mind. For one

night she'd try to keep them out of her mind. She wanted to enjoy her date. She ran her fingers through her hair. The locks were glossy and full. They fell around her shoulders in wild curls. She'd not even tried to tame her hair. Tonight she'd allow her hair to fall where it may. The raven colour always looked so black against her pale skin. She wished she knew where her hair colour came from. Erik refused to tell her who her mother was. It was strange. There were times she felt he was a father and other times where saying his name felt more real.

Tess stared at her reflection one final time. She looked wild and free. When she was satisfied with her appearance, she put the large mirror away.

She was so nervous. Would Duncan like the way she looked? Part of her didn't care what he thought. She should have refused his date. This was another area where he was controlling her. He'd not given her time to say no. The sane part of her wanted to refuse to leave her apartment while the other part wanted to do everything he asked. The part of her that wanted to feel like a woman and who came to life whenever he was around. For a short time she wanted to feel like a desirable woman instead of a bookworm.

A knock at the door made her jump. Her nerves crumbled as her stomach knotted. She had a desire to hide under the bed. Would she be able to hide from him? The knock came again. Her heart raced. She wanted to hide, but she also wanted to experience this with him. Instead of trying to hide she ran her fingers through her hair then made her way through her apartment to answer the door. Tess took one deep breath before opening the door.

There he stood in her doorway. He leaned against the doorframe, his broad shoulders covering the whole area. He was dressed in a formal suit and looked ready to impress. His arms were folded as he stared at her. He wore black pants with a smooth, white crisp shirt. He wore a jacket revealing the fact he wore no tie, and the first few buttons on his shirt were undone. She saw he didn't have any chest hair. From the small look at his chest she knew his muscles were well defined. Heat spiralled in her tummy, working up through her body. He looked too damn good.

"Y-you l-look handsome." She stumbled over her words and felt the blush build in her cheeks as his gaze swept over her body.

His gaze felt like a caress over her skin. She flushed as her body responded. The heat between her thighs increased with every passing minute. She hoped he liked how she looked.

"Thank you. You look incredibly beautiful. That dress looks amazing on you. It fits you like a second skin. I knew the moment I saw it you'd look radiant." He came close to her. His hands touched her waist, his touch more like a caress on her hips. She knew she should pull away. Tess liked his hands on her body. He didn't pull away or seem repulsed by her larger body. She'd never be a size zero model. His touch burned her. His hands roamed past her hips feeling his way around her back resting above her bottom. Her blush deepened. No man had ever touched her like this. She didn't want him to stop. The pulse in her pussy beat more rapidly. She wanted him.

"You bought this dress?" she asked. Her voice sounded breathless.

"Your eyes have dilated, Tess. I think you want me."

She averted her gaze staring down at the floor.

He cupped her cheek with his free hand. Duncan tilted her head back forcing her to look into his eyes. "Don't ever be ashamed to show me what you want, Tess. You want me, and I want you. We'll be married, and that's a good thing." He stroked a thumb over her lip. "Yes, to answer your question. I found and purchased this dress. You look stunning."

He kissed her on the cheek before he pulled away.

"My driver is waiting, and our seats are reserved for eighty-thirty. I don't want us to be late and

miss our table.”

“Someone would dare to give up your table?” she asked.

“There are so many people who wish to dine there. I’m sure my seating would be taken.”

She grabbed the wrap that came with the dress. Tess tried to ignore the shaking of her hands. Duncan helped her with the wrap then led her outside. The night air was cold. She placed her arm through his hoping his heat would ward off the chill. He helped her into the limo then climbed in beside her. She stared out of the window trying to distract her rioting mind from the man seated beside her.

The drive was short. Neither of them said a word to each other. The air around them was tense. She felt his nearness like a second skin to her. Tess turned to gaze at his profile. He looked straight ahead. He didn’t seem as affected by their closeness as she was. Their bodies were close as he seated himself as close to her as possible. She gasped as his thigh brushed hers. The touch was innocent on his part. She couldn’t deny the intimacy of the moment. Her thigh moved closer to his of its own accord.

The slit of her dress fell between her legs revealing the length of her thigh. She made a move to cover her leg. Duncan stopped her placing a hand on her thigh before she got the chance. She stared down at his tanned hand covering her pale leg. Tess licked her lips to try to bring some moisture to her mouth. He had a way of making her forget who she was.

He didn’t let go. His fingers caressed her knee. She glanced at him to see he was staring at her.

Tess dropped her gaze staring at his hand.

She was so aware of every movement, every breath that he took. She must be going mad. Up until yesterday she’d never felt anything for any other man. The offers she’d received from boys and men had never made her want them. Her own fears had always gotten the better of her. All Duncan had done was touch her knee, and she felt like she was coming apart at the seams. She didn’t want to give men the wrong impression of her. Did Duncan think she was some kind of hussy? She never felt it was right accepting offers from men who were clearly looking for something more from her than friendship. Her books were her only satisfaction. That was until Duncan James. Was it possible to feel this powerful emotion for someone who you’d only known for one day?

In the matter of a day she’d accepted a wedding proposal and a kiss. She knew she couldn’t love him. The fight inside her was over her attraction to someone she didn’t like very much. He was controlling, manipulative, and would do anything to get his own way.

Yet here you sit wanting to have more with him than anyone else.

What was it about him that called to her?

He wasn’t a nice person. In fact he reminded her of what Erik was like most of the time. He used people to get what he wanted. She’d been on the receiving end for most of her life.

Duncan closed the distance between them. He caught her face in his hands turning her to look at him. “Your skin is so soft.”

“Why are you doing this to me?” she asked.

“Because I can. Admit it, Tess. You want me to.” He captured her lips in a gentle kiss. There was no demanding pressure as he kissed her. Just a brush of his lips over hers. She was panting for more of him. It wasn’t enough for her. She wanted the passion he could give her.

He pulled away. “I bet your pussy is dripping wet.”

“You can’t talk to me like that,” she said. Her pussy was wet. No man had ever been so blatant with her.

“Get used to it, baby. This is who I am, and I’m not going to change for you. I’ll tell you what I

want, and how I tell it, you'll learn to accept."

Duncan claimed her lips once again, his hand going farther up her leg underneath her skirt. She cried out when he pulled away, his hand leaving a fiery trail as he moved out of reach. Her heart was racing, and the pulse between her legs was getting worse. She'd never felt so burnt up before.

"It's time you knew what a real man could do for you," he said.

I've never had a man before. You're nothing like the heroes in my romances. You're sinful.

She mentally shook herself. Tess was doing that a lot since she'd met Duncan. He had a way of messing with her head.

It is his fault.

He unnerved her unlike any person throughout her life.

"Here we are," he said, interrupting her mental confusion.

She turned to see what he was pointing at. Her nerves kicked in double time. She looked at him wondering if he was joking. She had expected a simple little restaurant. But he'd actually brought her to a restaurant in a hot spot where the media knew the celebrity world visited. They were all there taking pictures of men and women as they entered.

Tess recognised the name of the French restaurant. She remembered reading an article in a newspaper about the huge success it was having. The chef was a man known for working his way from the bottom to the top. It was the place to meet celebrities and millionaire bachelors like Duncan. It was the place to be. A million light years away from her. She shook her head. Tess couldn't do this. The moment she got out of the limo she'd be known to be with Duncan. That was too much.

"Why have you brought me here?" she asked. The tears were close to the surface. This world wasn't for her. She never wanted to be part of anything bigger than herself. She wouldn't be able to handle the public display in all the newspapers as Duncan James's latest conquest. This was a nightmare waiting to happen.

He'd done this to humiliate her. She was sure of it.

"I want to take you to dinner, and this place is superb. What better place to start spreading the news about our upcoming nuptials than the local hotspot?" He threw it off as if this was an everyday occurrence.

Tess shook her head. "This isn't fair. You did this on purpose. Why?"

"Let's just say I want our engagement known."

It may be an everyday occurrence to him, and he may want to get their upcoming relationship known, but what about what she wanted? Most of her nights were spent at home reading a book or watching a movie. He was about to make her simple life impossible to live.

She saw the paparazzi being held back by a sea of bodyguards. There was no way they'd get through without getting a picture taken.

"I'm not exactly wife material for you. This is all wrong. Take me somewhere else, please." She hated herself for begging and for showing weakness to him. She couldn't do this. Her eyes welled up with tears. She felt even further humiliation as she heard him curse. Tess couldn't stop the sob from escaping her lips. The tears stayed inside, but her heartache released out of her.

He cupped her cheek turning her to face him.

"I will be the envy of every man there." He placed his finger over her lips as she began to deny his words. Duncan shook his head "I want you on my arm, Tess. There is no other woman I'd want to replace you." She wished she believed his words. The fact he'd said them meant more to her than anything else. She took a few deep breaths to try to gain control of the craziness in her head.

"And to help this along." He retrieved a small case from his pocket. Duncan opened the case

bringing out a small diamond necklace and a small lady's band for her finger. "I bought this for you. I want you to wear it now. I want the world to know who you belong to."

He lifted her hair out of the way, then placed the necklace around her neck.

The moment the gold lay on her skin she'd signed the deal of ownership.

Tess brought her hand up to cover the expensive necklace. It was small but beautiful. Duncan grabbed her left hand then placed the delicate ring on her finger.

"Is this an engagement ring?" she asked.

"Yes, by the end of the night the whole world will know that Duncan James is off the market."

The ring felt heavy on her finger. He'd picked the right size. The ring fit her finger perfectly.

She took a deep breath before looking out at the chaos. The sounds were dampened by the lush, soundproof limo.

"Are you sure about this?" she asked as she glanced back at him.

He brought her fingers to his lips and kissed each one.

"I've never been so sure of anything. One more thing, Tess."

She glanced at him waiting.

"I need you to look like you're in love with me." He opened the door.

Chapter Six

He wanted her to look like she was in love with him. The sounds outside invaded the peace of the limo as he opened the door.

She took his hand and allowed him to help her out of the limo. The paparazzi hadn't seen them yet, but already bodyguards were moving forward to help Duncan James to the restaurant. He kept a firm grip on her hand as they made their way to the door.

The press must have been alerted by the bodyguards' movements because they were suddenly surrounded by paparazzi. The flashes of the camera shocked her vision. Duncan placed an arm around her waist. She knew that would be on one of the papers or magazines tomorrow.

Questions buzzed over them.

"Mr. James, is it true about your latest takeover bid?"

"What happened to the American model, Lyla?"

"Are you currently fighting a custody battle?"

All the questions whirled around her head. His hand tightened on hers as the one on her hips gripped her firmly against her side. She followed him as he continued up to the front door.

"Who's your lady friend?"

"Is she your latest acquisition?"

"Does she have a name?"

He ignored it and continued until they were at the door. She felt sick. How could people handle this kind of life?

"Sorry about that, sir," one of the guards said to him.

"Don't worry, Tim. It's hard to get anywhere without them these days."

She watched as the two men shook hands before they moved to the entrance of the restaurant. The moment the doors shut behind them she was greeted with silence once more.

"Are you all right?" Duncan asked.

"A little shaken. Is it like that all the time?"

"Only when I go to hot spot places like this." He tilted her head back. She held his waist as he stared into her eyes. He leaned down and kissed her. The rush of endorphin coursed around her body in a rush of heat.

When he pulled away she saw the cameras flashing on the other side.

"Was that for me or for the cameras?" she asked.

He caressed her cheek. His gaze never left hers. "A little of both."

The maitre d' came through to escort them to their table in the restaurant. Duncan was stopped several times by business associates and acquaintances. Eyes bored into her from all around the room. Many were from the men who she could only imagine were curious about Duncan James's choice of date, while the women were scowling at her. Their vindictiveness consumed her. No matter where she looked their eyes cut through her. If looks could strike she would be down on the floor and wounded.

She noticed their eyes caressed Duncan across the room while they sent daggers her way. Her hand gripped his more firmly. The security she felt from his touch shocked her.

Tess never wanted their animosity to hit her. She hadn't thought that far ahead to being his wife.

It would seem she'd be on the receiving end of all of their hate.

Within minutes they were seated at their secluded table. A small selection of candles was scattered in the centre of the table. A single red rose was in one fluted glass to the side of the table. The couples around them were engrossed in their own tables.

They were alone at the romantic table.

"How did you manage to get a table away from all the chaos?" she asked, extremely pleased that he had. She wouldn't have been able to bear all the stares for long.

"I'm part-owner of this restaurant. The chef is a close friend of mine. This table, you could say I own," he said as the waiter came to hand them what seemed like special menus.

"You told me our table wouldn't wait around forever," she said.

"I lied to get you here quickly. I knew the longer I left you alone the higher the risk was of you backing out."

"You wouldn't have let me back out, Duncan. We both know that."

He smiled then looked down at the menu.

"Why the different menus from everyone else?" she asked.

"Well, I don't always want what is on offer. The service I get is I can have any dish I choose. The chef is more than happy to cook for me." He smiled, his arrogance showing through.

"You always get what you want?" It was more a statement than a question. She already knew the answer, but she wanted to hear it from him.

"I have spent most of my life making it so. So now I indulge in all the fruits and extras it has to offer," he said. The waiter came over, and Duncan ordered a bottle of house red wine.

Her menu was taken off her.

"I don't drink," she said, trying to signal the waiter back.

"Try the wine when it comes. If you don't like it we'll get you a Coke." He mocked her.

"I'm not a child, Duncan. I just don't drink alcohol. A water would do fine." She felt her temper rise to the surface. He was always so controlling. She liked and hated it about him.

What was so wrong with her not liking wine? He didn't know everything.

"I could never mistake you for a child, Tess. Do you drink tea?" His smile brightened his whole face.

She struggled to be angry with him when he was charming. Her anger melted away.

Tess smiled back. There was nothing else for her to do.

She moved out of the way for the waiter to fill her glass. The red liquid was filled to the top. She stared at it wishing he'd asked for something else. The waiter left the table, leaving the bottle for Duncan to deal with. She picked her glass up, watching as Duncan laughed.

"It's not going to bite," he said. He laughed again as she pulled a face in his direction.

She took a gentle sip then put the glass back down. She wasn't designed to enjoy wine.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Tess shook her head and left the wine where it was.

"Don't you like it?" He took a sip of the wine. He frowned then took another sip. "It's exquisite." He took another generous sip.

"I only taste vinegar. I don't think I have the palate for wine. Would you order me a water, please."

He nodded then signalled the waiter. Tess waited for some water. The waiter came over with a wine glass and a pitcher. He took the glass of red wine then left.

Duncan smiled at her. She didn't have the energy to smile back. Everything was a fight for him,

even over her drink. Would their life ever be simple?

She looked behind her to see all the other customers farther away were still nodding towards Duncan's table.

"They're all curious about you," Duncan said, drawing her attention back to him. She turned around focussing on him. The moment her mind began to wander she started to feel nervous.

"Why?" she asked feeling her cheeks heat with embarrassment.

"They want to know who the beautiful woman is at my side. You have my complete attention, Tess. The fact I've never brought anyone here but business associates has caused quite a stir."

"Why did you bring me here?" she asked.

"I wanted everyone to know you're different. I don't take the other women here. This place is special to me. Only the right woman at my side would ever get a chance to come here." Duncan reached across the table to take hold of her left hand. She watched as he twirled the ring on her finger. He then removed it and slipped onto her a finger the biggest diamond she had ever seen. He pulled her fingers to his lips and pressed a gentle kiss to her hand and the diamond.

She pulled her hand away, looking at the ring dominating her finger.

"What is this for? What was wrong with the one you put on my finger in the limo?" She panicked. Her hand felt heavy with the real weight of the diamond on her finger. This ring would be hard to miss.

"The ring in the car was a test," he said.

"A test?"

"Yes, I wanted to see how you reacted to such a small, inexpensive piece of jewellery." He leaned back in his chair watching her.

"Did I pass or fail?"

"You weren't bothered by the small item. I find that refreshing. Any other woman in your shoes would have complained about the lack of devotion on my part."

"Then you've been hanging out with the wrong women. I wish you'd stop comparing me to all your other women."

"And you don't compare me to your other men?"

Tess wanted to throw her virginity in his face. Instead, she shook her head. "No, I don't compare."

Duncan stared at her for several moments. "You have just become my fiancée. I'll make sure you have the proper tools to pull it off," he said.

"It's a beautiful ring. It must have cost you a small fortune." She stared at the ring worried in case she lost it. She looked at him, but he was staring somewhere past her shoulder.

"Yes, it did cost a small fortune, and we both know I can afford it." He motioned for the waiter to come.

"But I can't have—" She stopped talking as the waiter handed them both a menu. She opened the menu and saw it was food. She thanked him before he left them alone again.

"If our marriage doesn't last I'll make sure the ring comes back to you in one piece," she said.

"You won't want to sell it on? Or are you planning on taking me for more money?"

She noticed he didn't mention anything about her marriage comment. What were his thoughts about their upcoming nuptials?

"I don't want anything from you. You've given my father freedom. I hope he doesn't do anything else. I'm grateful for that." She gazed down at her menu.

"You don't have to order for yourself, and you can keep the ring," he said. Duncan took her

menu from her then opened his own menu.

"I can't keep the ring. People will think—" She stopped when he looked at her. His stare was hard. She was looking at the businessman.

"People will think you are nothing but a gold-digger. In all my life I have found it easier to allow people to think what they want. That way you won't spend your time telling people who won't listen that they are wrong. It is a waste of time. They will all soon realise you aren't a gold-digger. You're my wife. Now, what do you want to eat?" He motioned for the waiter to come back. Duncan ordered himself a large steak meal. Tess had the same as he did, only with a smaller steak for her.

"So no salad sticks for you?" he asked. There was a teasing glint in his eye.

"Well, from my size I think it shows that I don't go for salad sticks. I'm surprised you were able to find a dress in my size," she said. Diets were pointless. No matter how little she ate or all the exercise she did nothing stopped her size. She'd had to accept she'd always be bigger and have womanly curves. Tess was learning to accept she would never be model thin. Some days it was harder to accept than others.

"I've noticed your body, Tess. I've felt your curves in my hands, and I have to say I love the fact that you eat more than salad sticks." He complimented her. A red blush spread up her chest to her cheeks.

Tess was self-conscious. She felt his gaze on her. He made her nervous no matter what he did. His comment about her body made her really happy. He liked the look of her body. For a split second she was able to bask in his compliment before the old insecurities began to rear their ugly heads.

Was he taking pity on her?

She picked up her glass of water and took a generous sip. She wasn't used to being around anyone like Duncan.

"Be careful with the water. You don't want to drink too much before your meal arrives," he said.

She nodded then put the glass down. Tess wished she'd kept the foul-tasting wine. Maybe it would have helped her get through the rest of the evening. When the waiter brought their steaks through and placed them on the table, Duncan asked for a glass of cold mineral water.

The waiter came back with his water, and then they started to eat. It was steak with small potatoes and a green salad. It smelled delicious and tasted wonderful. The food wasn't classic French food, but she wouldn't be able to appreciate the taste and flavours with Duncan looking on.

The steak was cooked how she liked it, on the griddle with a wonderful pink centre. The potatoes were savoury and buttery, and the salad finished off the meal to perfection.

"Do you like it?" Duncan asked.

"Yes, it's the best steak I've ever tasted," she said, taking another bite of her steak. While they ate Tess could almost forget what was happening between them. The diamond ring on her finger kept catching her eye, which made her very much aware of their current situation.

Tess was too busy looking at the diamond and eating her meal to see the worry in his eyes. Duncan was concerned at whether she would like the ring or not. He'd spent a lot of time trying to find the right ring. He'd spent more time trying to find the right one for her than he'd ever spent trying to find anything for any other woman. Duncan never personally went and bought gifts for his women. Tess was different, and he needed to find something personal to fit the woman to be his wife.

He'd noticed she didn't seem to like the attention they got at the restaurant. She tried to hide away from all the onlookers. He'd seen the women who had sent her scornful looks. Other women

would have basked in the attention this place had to offer. He hadn't been lying when he'd said she was the first woman he'd brought here. She was refreshing to him after being around so much superficiality. He knew she spoke the truth about giving him back his ring. She wouldn't want anything from him other than what he was willing to give.

Tess cut into her steak, the hunger on her face refreshing. He glanced at the tables near to him to see most of the women had a salad or were pushing their food around. Duncan loved watching her eat. It was a new experience to watch a woman eat. All his other dates that he took to other restaurants ordered salads with no dressings with no carbs, no fats. The chef's were always at their wits' end by the last course of the meal.

It had become an embarrassment to have his companion order something on the menu and then list more things not to have.

Model thin maybe the fashion, but it was no longer part of his fashion. He stared at Tess knowing her curves were a huge feature in all of his future fantasies. She looked good enough to eat. He couldn't wait to get his ring on her finger.

His appreciation was interrupted by an old friend. "Duncan, what a pleasure to see you here."

Duncan greeted Carlos but didn't bother to get up from his table.

Now was a better time than any to introduce Tess.

"Carlos, I'd like to introduce you to my fiancée, Tess." Duncan reached for her hand while Carlos took her other, placing a kiss on her fingers.

Duncan watched as Carlos was startled by his news before he covered up his surprise with a smile.

"You're finally going to get married, and to this exquisite woman." Tess pulled her hand away but smiled. He saw she didn't like the other man's attention. The fact she allowed him to touch and kiss her meant a lot to him. Duncan noticed all the other guests listening.

Duncan kept a hold of her hand knowing she didn't like being on public display. She depended on him to keep her safe.

"I just saw her and fell instantly. I knew then and there that I wanted her for myself and no other. She'll be my wife very soon." He made sure to speak louder so most of the guests nearby would hear his news. The sooner he got Tess by his side and in his bed the happier he would be.

He was certain his impending marriage would be all across the news by tomorrow. He wanted Tess with a passion. The sooner he started her seduction the better. She was ripe and ready to be plucked. Her response to him made it all the more essential for him to get her where he wanted her.

Carlos gave his congratulations then left them to finish their meal.

Duncan saw how nervous Tess was. Her hand shook ever so slightly as she lifted her glass of water and took a large gulp.

He wanted her in his bed. Duncan wanted to take care of her. He wanted to own and possess her. There was so much he wanted to teach and explore with her. His revenge would come against Miranda and his father. Tess would be the icing on his cake.

In two weeks he'd be able to have it all.

He was not the most patient man. Duncan was desperate to have her.

Chapter Seven

Two weeks later

The church was full of his relatives and business associates. There were a handful of friends and her father there to watch her sell her soul to the devil. In a few short hours she'd no longer be a single woman. She'd be Duncan James's wife. She took a deep breath to try to contain her nerves.

Tess closed the door then glanced at her reflection in the mirrors provided. It was moments like these where she wished she had a mother. Her mother should be with her on this day. It didn't matter the marriage was a farce. What mattered was the fact she would be married. When she was satisfied that she looked the part as Duncan James's new bride she went and took a seat near the window overlooking the cemetery at the back of the church.

His secretary sure worked fast. The clock on the wall confirmed it was ten o'clock. It was a bigger sign of the power and money Duncan possessed. In minutes she'd be married, and Tess Williams would be a million miles away.

He didn't know anything about her. Duncan didn't know her favourite colour, favourite meal, or any of her hobbies. The more she thought about how unsuitable they were as a couple the more her fears were constantly getting the better of her. For the past two weeks she'd been bombarded with calls from so-called friends and magazines asking about her upcoming wedding with the bachelor of the year.

All of their attention was false and devoted to the imaginary woman she was pretending to be. She wasn't the Tess Williams who'd managed to snag the multi-millionaire. She was Tess Williams the librarian. Tess hadn't seen Duncan since the night he had given her a ring and took her to dinner. Not one phone call, nothing. The distance he'd created between them unnerved her.

Her dreams were filled with his kisses and daring touches. She'd had no choice but to hand in her notice at the library. The press were stalking her wherever she went. She'd spent the last week trapped in her apartment. His secretary had assured her Duncan was handling the situation.

She wished she hated her father enough to tell him to go to prison.

Tess had convinced herself the wedding was a fantasy. There was no way the most eligible bachelor would ever consider her as a wife. Then today, stylists and designers had turned up to her small apartment. They'd all surrounded her, pulling at her hair or plucking this or that until she had finally turned up as the bride-to-be. The paparazzi had followed her from her apartment to the church. She'd heard most of the events of her upcoming wedding from the news. The press had fired questions at her asking Duncan's reputation. They'd made sure she'd heard about the gossip surrounding the recent story of his conquest with the latest fashion model. Each question making her wonder if this decision was an act of desperation or the right one?

All she had to do was think of her father, and she knew she was making the right decision. No matter what he'd done to her, he was still her father, and she loved him.

It was desperation, but being married to Duncan couldn't be that much of a hardship?

A busy man like Duncan would never spend more than a month in one place. Surely most of the

time he'd be too busy travelling to even remember he had a wife. It would give her the time she needed to dedicate to her passion. Writing. She loved creating magical worlds where she could get lost. No matter what happened in the story the characters in her mind would always get a happy ending. She'd loved books for so long that her passion had soon turned to trying to pen one herself. Becoming a writer would be a dream come true. His secretary had informed her that her life at the library would have to end. Duncan James's wife couldn't work.

She'd decided to use her time married to him by trying to find her own dream. Her only other wish was to have a family of her own with a husband to love and a couple of children.

Tess stared out at the priest as he gazed out at the gravestones. Duncan stood by the priest for several moments. She wasn't able to make out what they were saying. Tess stared at her soon-to-be husband. He looked handsome from what she was able to see.

Both men shook hands then turned to enter the church. Her heart raced from seeing Duncan. She wished she had better control over her body's response to him.

Maybe she'd see this experience as inspiration for her story. She'd write a story about a woman who was trying to save her family only to fall in love with the man who was willing to blackmail her. Tess chuckled to herself. She wasn't under any false hope that Duncan loved her. The next year or so she'd make sure to never give him her heart. There was no way for their marriage to last. What marriage lasted on a bargain and a contract? Tess knew she wasn't his type. He was a rich playboy who was used to getting what he wanted. She didn't want to lead her heart down an uncertain path, and life with Duncan was nothing but uncertain. She couldn't be sure about her body. The attraction she felt towards him affected her too much.

She'd write in her own story about the passion. Maybe, after twenty-three years, she'd be able to rid herself of her pesky virginity. Duncan seemed to desire her. When she thought about each of them as couples she couldn't contain her laughter. The wealthy bachelor settling for the mousy writer.

Would he be embarrassed by his wife becoming an author and demand she stop? She visibly shook herself. Tess needed to stop filling herself with pathetic nonsense. She'd deal with any problems that came her way with regards to her new husband. She picked up her bouquet of white roses. It was time to become Mrs. Duncan James and save her father from complete chaos.

Duncan pulled at his collar. It felt irritating and too tight around his neck. He'd not seen Tess at all. He hoped she was doing okay. The style team he'd sent to her had stopped him earlier to let him know that his bride-to-be looked ready to bolt. People began to take their seats in the church. Duncan continued to pull at his collar. It must have been put on too tight. He couldn't breathe. Or had the dreaded marriage nerves struck him? It would be strange for the wedding jitters to affect him, considering this marriage was entirely his own doing. He didn't have to marry. All he needed to do was give up his vengeance on his father and not marry at all.

Mark seemed to have a constant arrogant smirk on his face. In fact as Duncan looked around the room he noticed everyone looked particularly pleased that he was getting married. Duncan had begun to believe this day would never come. He loved his freedom too much to give it up. A wife and kids had never been part of his plans. His father must have known. He wanted to control him after death. This wedding was for him to get Miranda out of his house. The moment he owned everything his father possessed, he'd set out to destroy it all.

His father would see him married in his grave. Duncan could still live his own life once Tess had completed her end of the bargain. She was eating out of his hand. Her seduction would be so much sweeter.

You don't want to hurt her. She'd different from the others. Care for her.

Duncan shook off his doubts. Tess may not be like most of the women he'd dated, but she was still a woman with a price. If she didn't do as he asked, her father would pay the price.

He glanced around the church pleased with his ever-efficient secretary. She'd produced a beautiful looking wedding in such a short time.

He'd have to give her a bonus for all of her hard work.

You made it your mission to find the right dress.

Tess needed to look the part.

Then why did you make sure the dress would not only look the part but accentuate her curves and beauty?

Duncan didn't want to leave the purchase of the dress down to his secretary. When Tess walked down that aisle he wanted to see her in the dress he'd picked for her.

The wedding bells started, and everyone, including himself, turned to look at his bride. Her father stood waiting for her as she turned the corner for everyone to see.

A gasp sounded throughout the church.

A magnificent angel stood in her place. The white dress he'd bought for her fit her curves to perfection. She looked beautiful and innocent. In the next half an hour, Tess would be all his.

His breath caught in his throat as Tess, the stunning beauty, made her way slowly towards him. All the men in the room had eyes for one woman and one woman alone. The woman who was about to take his name. The woman whom he had made to marry him. Tess Williams. A name everyone would know by the end of the day. Her white silk wedding dress clung to every curve, emphasizing her gorgeous body. Seeing her in the dress he'd picked filled Duncan with so much pride. To him, she looked good no matter what she wore. He saw past the drab clothes to the beauty underneath. Duncan knew she didn't see herself in the way others did. He hoped with the time he'd spend with her, he'd be able to open her eyes.

The dress shaped her body to perfection with a slight dip in the neckline teasing the viewer as to the swell of her breasts. They were full and pert. He imagined cupping their weight in his hands when they were alone.

He saw the men staring at her. He knew what they were all thinking. Duncan felt his body tense at the thought of any man looking at his woman. Tess was all his, and no man would desire her but him. Tess was his, and he'd never let her get away from him. Every possessive instinct came forth within him. Duncan felt like screaming at everyone to keep their looks and dirty thoughts to themselves. She was his to protect and cherish.

What about love?

I don't do love.

Tess can have everything else, except my heart.

His reaction to this woman completely shocked him. No matter how much he tried to fight the feelings building inside him, he couldn't keep them out. Tess did something to him. She made him feel and want things he'd never wanted before. He knew she was loyal with the way she'd helped her father. What would it be like to have a woman be as loyal as that to him? Duncan watched as she glanced at her father. After everything the older man had done, Tess still loved him. Duncan saw it, and for the first time in his life he wanted her love radiating back at him.

In no time at all she stood before him, her gaze on him and him alone. The emotion he saw within her depths shocked him. He needed to give her comfort. His stylists weren't wrong when they said she looked ready to bolt. Even now, standing before him in the church, he saw the slight shake of

her body as the nerves got the better of her. Duncan couldn't stop himself. He stroked her cheek in an attempt to reassure her. He wanted her to know he wasn't going anywhere. He was there for her no matter what.

She gasped at his touch. He felt the chemistry ignite between them. She might not want to admit to the passion, but her body was the best evidence he needed. He dropped his hand from her cheek then offered his arm. Erik gave her to him then backed away. Duncan turned them both to the priest to allow him to conduct the ceremony.

Tess spoke the words required of her. When it came to him, Duncan stared at his bride then spoke the words. He meant every single word he spoke. The priest spoke to both of them. Duncan frowned when she stuttered over her last words. She kept glancing at the floor. Her hand shook in his. He held her tightly, letting her know through his touch he'd never hurt her or let her go.

Duncan didn't understand where his protective instinct was coming from. All he understood was his need to make sure Tess was at his side where she belonged.

He didn't care if she didn't want to go through with the wedding. She'd agreed to it, and he wanted her more than he wanted vengeance. Soon, he'd have everything he desired most. His mother in her place, Miranda in the dirt, and Tess in his bed.

The priest asked the audience if there was any reason they couldn't be together. When no one spoke he announced them as man and wife. Tess stared at him as he cupped her cheek. It was too late for her to back out. He sealed their vows with a kiss. Her eyes closed, and her lips opened. He took advantage, plunging his tongue inside the heat of her mouth. She moaned but didn't back away. There was a round of applause. Mark slapped him on the back. Duncan knew he was being indecent. He didn't care. The whole church would know without doubt that Tess was now his. She had his name. Tess was his.

Duncan pulled away. There was a round of applause all around the church. He couldn't believe the satisfaction he felt knowing she was his to love, honour, and cherish.

Chapter Eight

When they got to the reception, Duncan watched as Tess was whisked away from his side. She was congratulated by everyone. All his friends and clients took her hand and kissed it. He followed her around observing the fake air kisses on the cheek from other women. When Tess turned away from the women she was glared at. He got a chance to see the real animosity from the women who claimed to be different. Men complimented her on how beautiful she looked and how lucky Duncan was to have such a mesmerizing bride. He was proud when he didn't growl at the men to stay away from her. She looked so shy and reserved compared to all the other guests. The after-party was held in one of the most notorious hotels. He'd wanted the best for Tess on her last day as a single woman. The champagne flowed for all the guests, and canapés and other little finger food were offered. No expense had been spared for his wedding. Tess would look on this day with pride. He'd made sure of it.

Duncan observed her going through the motions, smiling and cheering and working the crowd like a pro.

He knew her smile was stuck in place. From the short time he'd known her, he knew she didn't like the attention.

When it came to the dancing Tess made sure to be as far away from him as possible. He watched as she was spun around by every available male. While he got to watch her, he noticed how stiff she was with all the men. Even as they tried to talk, it looked to him as if she spent a great deal of time tuning them out. Duncan got the opportunity to look at his bride without her running away from him. He tried to cover up his obsessive watching by speaking occasionally to the circle of acquaintances constantly forming around him. All of his business associates were happy to see one of the most eligible bachelors tied in the chains of marriage. He knew he'd have the last laugh. Tess wasn't a woman to feel chained to.

Mark had already given him marital advice, gloating about marriage being unknown territory to him.

As if I don't know that already.

To add insult to injury, Tess seemed to find every opportunity to stay away from him. He'd hoped his lack of contact with her the last two weeks would have increased the intimacy between them. If he made a move towards her she simply turned the other way, completely blanking him. The kiss at the church had disturbed her. He knew he'd taken it too far.

class=Section2>

His gaze searched out his wife. For the few seconds his attention had been pulled away someone had zoomed in to grab her attention. She was laughing with one of his client's son, Tyler Ward. Jealousy struck hard and fast like lightning through him. Duncan ignored his companions as he moved away. He went with intent towards his bride, his stride full of purpose.

"Duncan doesn't deserve a gorgeous woman like you." He heard Tyler say with a smug sound to his voice. He watched Tess smile at her companion. She sipped her glass of champagne, her gaze wandering over the dance floor. Duncan felt his anger rise. Tess should be arguing Tyler's claim, not smiling in some sort of agreement with this foul-mouthed hooligan. There was a reason he didn't like Tyler, and his dislike was increasing with every

passing second.

"I may not deserve my gorgeous wife, but she's my wife so back off, Tyler." He wrapped his arm around her waist in an obviously possessive gesture. Duncan pulled her closer to his body. He noticed Tyler looked shocked and took a step back. Duncan kept his gaze on the other man until he'd put enough space between himself and his bride. Within seconds Tyler excused himself from their company, leaving Tess alone with him. He knew he'd acted like a jealous, dominating husband, but he didn't care. No one touched what was his.

"I never want to see you with Tyler Ward again," he said. His voice was filled with warning. He pulled her around to face him, making her body flush with his.

The desire to mark her came over him. Duncan sank his fingers into her hair as he broke the distance between them. He slammed his lips down on hers, commanding her to accept him.

class=Section3>

She submitted to his kiss. He felt her reluctance in the tenseness of her body.

"Why not?" she asked the moment he pulled away. Tess moved away from him putting as much distance between them as possible. Her hands rested on her waist, showing her full hips off to perfection.

"He treats women appallingly," he said while steering her to a quiet alcove away from all the guests. Duncan wanted her to himself for a change. He placed her against the wall, one of his hands covering her waist while the other cupped her cheek. He couldn't keep his hands off her.

Tess laughed. "As opposed to you?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" he asked. His temper rose as she continued to argue with him. Many women would love to be branded as his.

"First, your reputation as a playboy. You have a new woman on your arm every other night. Isn't that part of the appalling treatment? You use them for your own pleasure, and when you're done you toss them aside. When you're bored or another beautiful woman takes your fancy you move on. What makes you any different from Tyler?" She was glaring at him, her anger directed at him. Duncan found himself lost for words. That was exactly how he treated women.

class=Section4>

"So it's 'Tyler' now. You're on first name terms already?" He pressed her up against the wall, trapping her against the wall and his body. His cock thickened at the closeness of her curves. He needed to wipe that snivelling shit from her mind. He was a much better option than Tyler Ward. Duncan knew Tyler was closer to Tess's age, but he knew what to do with his cock.

"What other names are there? Yes, he knows I'm Tess. The stupid naïve woman who married you."

"I don't want you talking to him again," he said with a growl.

"Why? What makes him different from you?"

"I'm not Tyler." His jaw tensed with the effort it took to suppress his rage.

"How is it different? You with all of your other women?" she asked.

"None of those women are my wife."

He slammed his lips down on hers. Duncan let lose his pent-up anger on her lips. He needed to mark her. She opened to him like she always did. He held her close, grinding his cock against her rounded stomach.

She gasped. Her arms wrapped around his neck holding him close. He gripped her waist as the other hand fisted her hair at his waist. Duncan possessed her lips not letting go

class=Section5>

until she surrendered to him. Her mouth opened, giving him all the access he needed. Duncan plunged into her mouth tasting her. He'd spent most of the day wanting her. She gripped the hair at the base of his neck yanking on the strands. He growled, breaking the kiss to go to her neck, where he bit into the delicate curve of her flesh.

"You're mine," he said against her ear before going back to her lips. She gave him everything he craved. His cock pulsed in his pants. He'd need to keep her close so none of their guests would see his state of arousal. The sooner he got her to a bed the happier he'd be.

It was dark, passionate, and awakened a craving within him. He'd never felt this possessive for another woman. Tess was breaking all of his self-imposed boundaries. When men talked to the other women he dated he'd never felt jealousy or the need to mark his territory. Tess was screwing with his head.

By the time he pulled away they were both gasping for breath. Duncan rested his head against hers, their heavy breathing the only sound between them.

"I've been your wife for about eight hours, Duncan." Tess was the first person to break the sudden silence.

Her words echoed through his mind. She'd be his wife for a whole lot longer when he got his way. There was no way he'd let her go.

class=Section6>

"Regardless of the time, you're still my wife."

"I'd never break our vows, Duncan. I'm not that kind of person," she said. He struggled to hear her as she spoke so softly.

He stared at her bowed head. The dark curls and the dress made her appear younger than her twenty-three years. Duncan stared at her feeling his heart ache. She had no idea how precious she was. He wished she was older, as then he'd never have had to grow cynical about the opposite sex.

Duncan knew she was asking a question with her words. She'd never be unfaithful, but would he? He didn't know how to voice his thoughts. When he'd entered into this marriage he'd done so with the thought of still living his bachelor days. Instead of taking a girlfriend, he'd take a mistress.

He was starting to doubt his original plan. The look of innocence on her face distracted him.

Tess stared at his chest. Her lips tingled while her neck felt on fire from his kisses. How did he make her forget everything about herself? He took her over unlike anyone else.

class=Section7>

The dress she wore felt tight from the arousal he'd created. All the men she'd danced with hadn't created this kind of reaction inside her.

She waited for him to voice his agreement about being faithful. He didn't say a word. Taking a deep breath she went to move away from the wall he'd pinned her against. Duncan stopped her with a hand on the wall. His finger went under her chin. She lifted her gaze to his.

"I'll do my best to make you happy," he said.

He looked so sincere that she nodded her head. What else could she do? He held her future in his hands. The longer she stayed in his company the more her feelings for him were growing.

Duncan took her hand. "May I have this dance?" he asked.

She stared at his hand then at him. The confused glances of the guests would stay with her forever when she refused to give him the first dance. Being with him when they entered the grand hall would have been a mistake. He had a way of making her feel something

class=Section8>

different. There were times she loathed him, like his reaction to Tyler. Then there were times when she was in his arms when she felt a hell of a lot more than she could put words to.

Tess put her hand in his and followed him out onto the dance floor. All the other couples scattered as they went onto the dance floor. Duncan signalled to the live band, and a tune slowly began to filter through the room. Her eyes widened as she recognised the tune. It was one of her favourite songs. His hand went to her waist as the other cupped one of her hands against his chest. With her free hand she wrapped it around his shoulders. They were close together, the song the only sound she was able to hear.

“How did you know?” she asked, unable to tear her gaze away from him. She felt captivated by him.

“Out of all of your books aligning your walls I noticed the case for this song on top of your stereo. It looked like you listened to it a lot.”

She was touched by his consideration.

“Thank you. That means a lot to me,” she said.

“I want you to have everything you need for this day.” Everyone faded away as she stared into his eyes. For the first time she saw something more to him. His eyes were not dark and sinister. She saw gold in his depths.

He held her close, the song drifting over her as she kept her gaze on him.

“No matter how long this lasts, I appreciate it.”

They were silent as the dance continued. Neither looked away. Tess held onto him until the last chords of the last line were finished. Silence descended on the hall. Duncan held her close. The chemistry between them mounted with every passing second. She licked her lips then pulled away, their hands the last to part as she walked off the dance floor. Tess kept on moving regardless of the gossip that followed. When she rounded the corner where there was privacy, she leaned against the wall for support.

She wrapped her arms around her body as the tears she kept at bay unleashed. They silently poured down her face. She was pleased she'd said no to mascara when the stylists had tried to fix up her face.

Music drifted through the hall. Tess left her space searching for the ladies' room. She closed and locked the door as she made her way to the mirror.

“You're not going to let him do this to you,” she said to her reflection. Duncan was worming his way into her mind and heart. She felt her feelings expanding for him. The way he held her. He captured her attention and held it. She wanted to be with him at all times. Tess knew she needed to stop any such feelings for him. Duncan would never be hers. This marriage was for another reason. She wasn't stupid.

“Don't fall in love for a man who could never love you back.” She spoke the words, wiped the tears then went out to join him. Even as she fought her own body, she searched for him. He stood on the edge of the dance floor.

Tess declined any more dances. She wanted it to be over. Her heart raced as Duncan walked towards her. She knew she was falling.

She hoped she was strong enough to hold off her feelings. Duncan would only destroy any chance at love she had.

Chapter Nine

Duncan, however, couldn't take his eyes off his new bride. After their dance when she'd walked off the stage leaving him alone, she seemed to withdraw into herself. She'd come back from the ladies' room and stood on the edge of the dance floor watching the other couples dance to the music. She remained as still a statue, declining all other offers. When she'd been in his arms she'd melted against him. He'd felt the closeness building as they danced. For the first time he hadn't been concerned with anything other than the woman in his arms. They were two individual people and felt like one to him. The moment she'd come back into the room her entire body language seemed indifferent to his presence. Where he searched for her in the room at every given moment she appeared not to care about him. His ego felt battered and bruised. No woman had ever left him feeling like a hindrance. His temper was close to the surface at her lack of response. He wanted any excuse to unleash it.

He walked towards her. It was time for them to leave. Duncan wanted her alone with him.

You want to feel that closeness again. No other person, not even your mother, has ever left you feeling like that.

"What's the matter?" she asked. He noted the way she wrapped her arms around herself as if to ward him off. Duncan didn't like it. He wanted her to be open to him.

You want to feel love.

He shook off all of his thoughts concentrating on the now.

"We're leaving," he said.

"Isn't it a bit early to be leaving?" He caught her arm then began to walk out of the hall.

"I think we've caused enough of a scene for one day." They walked out of the hall. Mark, his friend, followed them out. He knew his friend was concerned. Mark had spoken to him after Tess left him standing in the middle of the dance floor. Duncan helped her into the car. Guests filtered out of the hall to watch them leave.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Mark asked.

"Why wouldn't I be?" He stopped to talk with his friend. He knew Tess wouldn't hear the conversation.

"She's different from the others, Duncan. I already see a change in you."

He ran his fingers through his hair. Duncan knew there was something going on between Tess and himself. What, he didn't know. "She's different, but like all the other she has her own price."

"You're falling for her, Duncan. I can see this." Mark followed him round to his side of the car.

"I don't do love, Mark. You know that."

"Don't hurt her."

Duncan ignored him getting in the car and starting it up.

He pulled away from the curb as she waved to their guests. His hands were shaking from the words Mark had spoken. He knew she was different, and he refused to believe he was falling in love with her.

"Where are we going?" Her voice was soft within the confines of the car. Duncan wondered if he had imagined her speaking to him. He took a quick glance to make sure she'd spoken.

"My country house," he said when he noticed she was waiting for him. With another quick

glance he saw her nod then look out the window. Darkness was falling. He knew she'd struggle to see anything outside. He needed to talk but remained silent.

Silence filled the drive leaving Duncan even more riled and annoyed. He needed to talk to her. The more he heard her voice the easier it was to calm down. After what Mark had said, he needed to feel calm. By the time he made it to his country house he was in a foul mood. Tess didn't seem to notice as he snapped at anyone who crossed his path. The few drivers on the road got more of his anger than anyone else. He pulled up outside his home. She didn't say a word as she opened the door. Duncan ground his teeth together to stop himself from snapping at her.

Even at this late hour his two staff were up and awaiting his arrival.

Both were attentive towards Tess. They ignored him completely. Everyone seemed to love her on sight. What was it about her that everyone loved? Even Mark thought she was a brilliant person, a perfect match for him. He knew she was different from all of his other women. Were the others really that bad?

Her father was a thief and a criminal. How good could she be?

Duncan knew it was his own foul mood causing him to lash out at her character.

"Will you show Tess to her room?" He cut off his house keeper's cheery conversation. The sooner she was settled the better he'd feel. His housekeeper glared at him but took Tess by the hand giving her a welcoming smile. The moment his housekeeper and Tess were making their way upstairs he got an approving nod out of Gerald.

Gerald was the one who kept his house in pristine condition when he was away on business. Duncan nodded back, happy that Gerald approved of his choice of wife. He went to his study to have a very strong whisky. He finally loosened the tie that had caused him problems all day. He released the top buttons of his shirt as well. He finally owned the first part of his father's estate. His step-mother would receive a surprise eviction notice within the week, and his mother could go and claim her rightful place. Everything was coming together. He was satisfied with the way today had gone. Except for the episode he'd had with Tess, the day had gone smoothly. Duncan sat behind his mahogany desk, booting up his computer to check for any important notices.

Several of his emails were from business associates congratulating him on his big day. One was from his secretary informing him of his honeymoon arrangements. She informed him his honeymoon would be starting that weekend along with all the necessary arrangements he'd need. The final email came from his head of security. He'd requested two weeks ago on the day he met Tess for them to find out anything on his future wife. The information was attached in a file for him to peruse. It looked like they had finally found some information on his wife. Duncan opened the secure file attached to the email. There were a few security options for him. The moment he downloaded the file, he opened it straight away. He didn't want to lose any more time finding out about his wife.

Some stuff he already knew like her being a librarian. It hadn't taken long for the press to find her and make work impossible for her.

If it hadn't been for his desperation to have her as well as his father's will, he'd have waited until she'd been fully investigated before putting his ring on her finger.

She'd signed all necessary prenuptial agreements without any concern to what she got out of the arrangement.

When she'd signed the forms relinquishing all rights to his fortune it had surprised him. Other women would have bargained for more out of it whereas Tess appeared to look forward to her freedom more than a credit card. Duncan was starting to see a whole other side to her. Her father had painted a very negative picture about her family. She was smashing all of his preconceived opinions

about her.

Or are you hoping she's different from all the others?

Duncan cut off all thought about his own feelings. He was tired of feeling in deep waters when it came to Tess. He didn't need any more reminders of their time together.

He scanned through the short document as quickly as possible. There were no names as to who her mother was. Erik Williams kept all details of her maternal side a secret. His security couldn't find a single thing on the woman who'd given birth to Tess. He wondered what it would have been like growing up without a parent. His mother wasn't the best person—or mother—in the world, but she was still his mother. Tess's mother remained a mystery. According to the details his security team had managed to dig up, Tess had never been married or even had a long standing boyfriend. She lived in an apartment, which he'd seen, in a reasonable area. The crime rate was reasonable considering her meagre income. She was a librarian up until a week ago. From all accounts of the people they'd talked to, Tess kept to herself. No friends and nothing of any great importance. The document was in fact useless.

Duncan leaned back in his chair staring at the photos they'd attached. Some were taken of her in her school uniform. She looked sad in most of the photos. He noticed she always stood on her own.

Her work had to stop. The press would have a field day if he let his wife work. She'd stay at home, keep house, do her nails, or whatever a woman of leisure did.

Her lack of boyfriend and life would have to wait until morning. The day had taken its toll on him. He needed his rest. The anger he'd felt when he'd first gotten home had disappeared. Tess didn't deserve his anger. The more he found out about her, the more he realised she really was an innocent in all this.

Duncan closed down his computer then took the final swig of his whisky. He stood up and stretched out all his muscles. He was pleased Gerald approved his choice of wife. It was strange considering the man hadn't met her yet. Introductions would be taken care of in the morning.

He turned away from his desk. There was nothing in that file to help him understand what Tess was like. He felt at a disadvantage. The only thing he knew about his wife was that she was extremely beautiful and her father had stolen money from him. Most of his women left a paper trail a mile long. Tess paid her taxes and spent most of her time alone. He didn't get it. He had to be missing something. There was no way she was that perfect. He'd been around in the world too long to think otherwise.

Duncan made his way up to his bedroom not even bothering to knock on the door. He expected his house keeper to put Tess in a guest bedroom. They hadn't gotten the chance to talk about sharing a room. He walked right in to see his wife drying her naked body on his towel.

His body went instantly alert. The blood went straight to his groin with a speed that shocked him. Within seconds he was fully erect. He winced. His arousal, quick to come, had caused him pain as his shaft tightened within the confines of his pants. Tess seemed frozen, not able to do anything. She looked fucking gorgeous. No matter what he had imagined the reality of her body was so much better. A chill must have swept across her. Her nipples were red, poking out. He noticed the large buds tighten as his gaze swept from the top of her head to her toes. She was perfection. Moments later she began to cover herself frantically. When the bath towel wouldn't cooperate she charged into the en-suite bathroom. She slammed and locked the door behind her.

Duncan swiped a hand across his face. His wife had run from him. She was so beautiful. He ached to possess her. All of his imagination wasn't close to the truth of the beauty of her body, the flush in her cheeks and the weight of her breasts. He wanted his hands on her. She had a body to die

for.

He took a few deep breaths. There was no way he was letting her run from him. Tess was his wife, and he was going to make this marriage real between them. The passion they shared wasn't something they could ignore. He walked to the bathroom door. Running his hands through his hair Duncan tried to gain his composure. The last thing he'd expected to see was his wife naked.

Get a grip of yourself.

You're doing this for your mother.

Are you really?

Duncan knocked on the door.

He's seen me naked.

Duncan James, multi-millionaire businessman, has seen me naked.

Tess closed her eyes cringing at what he must think. No man had seen her naked before. She sat on the toilet shaking from her nerves. Never before had a man's eyes caressed her naked skin. Duncan hadn't looked away. His gaze had roamed her body like a caress. How could a woman get turned on by a look? She'd read about it in books, but they were fantasy, weren't they? She noticed his pants where his cock thickened. Duncan hadn't turned away from her in revulsion. She glanced down at her body and saw her nipples tighten to unbearable points. They were swollen. Her body felt like she had molten lava inside her skin instead of blood.

Tess shouldn't have noticed his physical response, but how could she not? Everything about the man who was now her husband forced her to take notice. Her heart skipped a beat whenever he was near.

His cock was huge. He'd gotten hard for you. No one else. Duncan wanted you.

She shook her head refusing to believe it. Her blush heated her cheeks. It would be too easy for her to forget about herself when he'd looked at her with so much passion.

Tonight was her wedding night. Many years ago a man would claim his wife on this night. Her virginity marked on the sheets for him to hang from his tower. She covered her cheeks at the thought of his possession. Would this be the night she finally lost her virginity?

Her virginity had been part of her for so long. She thought she'd die with it still intact.

She would never be able to tell him of her lack of experience. Duncan was used to women who knew what they were doing. All she knew was the stuff she'd read in books or watched late one night in an erotic movie on the television. Her virgin state had become precious to her. She'd made a vow when she was younger while all the other girls in her class were giving it up that she'd wait for the right man to give it to. When she'd gotten older and meeting people became harder, she'd become resigned to having no one.

Now, Duncan was taking over making her feel things she'd never thought possible for her. If her own father couldn't love her, how could anyone else?

He knocked on the bathroom door. "Tess, open up." She heard him pace outside the door. He kept stopping as he spoke. "Come on, Tess. Let's talk about this. You're my wife." His voice went through the wood for her to hear. "Go away." Tess wasn't ready to deal with him. It was her wedding night, and she was telling her husband to go away. The whole situation was ridiculous. She shouldn't be hiding in the bathroom. There was nothing for her to be embarrassed about. The housekeeper had placed her in this room thinking their marriage was a real one.

Do you want it to be a real one?

Think of those hands running all over your body. The pleasure he'd be able to give you. He'd

drive you mad with wanting, Tess.

“Come on, Tess. It’s no big deal. It’s not like I haven’t seen it all before.” There was no sound from the other side. Tess knew he regretted what he said. The anger inside her built. Not only was this her wedding night, but he was reminding her of all the other women he’d slept with. Women with much more beauty than she had.

“Great, remind me of how many other women you’ve been with. What a perfect wedding night. Just what I’d imagined. I married a man I don’t even know. And within hours of our vows being said, you remind me of how many other women you have bedded. You definitely know how to make a woman feel special, Duncan,” she said. Her voice rose as she spoke every word. Tess knew the moment her lips closed she’d said too much. Her anger had gotten the better of her. What was it about Duncan that made her lose control? “Please, just go, Duncan. This is not fair. I signed up to be your wife, nothing else.”

She heard him sigh on the other side of the door.

“This isn’t how I believed our wedding night would go either, Tess. I watched you laughing and dancing with every other man at the reception, and I got jealous. You weren’t as free with me like you were with the others. When I got you into my arms you were determined to argue. You left me alone on the dance floor while you had plenty of time to flirt with Tyler Ward. I’m not used to being the person to stand and watch.” He stopped for a second before continuing. “The first time I see you, you lock yourself away because I’ve caught a glimpse of you naked. I don’t want you to run from me, Tess. I’m your husband whether you like me or not. I’m not going anywhere.”

His jealousy and anger ran through Tess. She felt a pang of hope jolt through her heart. He must be able to care, to be able to feel jealousy because she’d danced with another man.

Her emotions were all over the place.

“I’m not leaving this door, Tess. Even if you stay in there all night.”

She wrapped her towel tightly around her then opened the door. If he wasn’t going to run off and leave her, she’d meet him half way. He stood next to the door. His hands rested on either side of the door frame. His hair was mussed while his shirt hung loose exposing the length of his smooth chest. The belt on his pants lay open. He looked like he’d been undressing and decided against it. Several times.

She smiled.

“I’m scared. I’ve never been married before,” she said. Her actions had been childish. They were both adults. He nodded, looking around the room.

“We can take it slow if you want. Your father will be fine as long as we’re married. I’m not going to force you into anything.” He moved towards his closet, his words reminding her why they had married. It was his ultimatum for her father’s freedom. Her father had not even bothered to stick around for the after-party. Erik hadn’t said a word to her after handing her over. She’d served her purpose to him. Her father’s reputation and life hung in the balance of this marriage. Would Duncan really bring charges against her father if she tried to dissolve their relationship? Probably. His reputation for being a ruthless businessman hadn’t come about by being a soft touch.

“Slow is good. Where will you sleep?” Tess tried to remain calm even though her heart was pounding in her chest. He removed his shirt exposing all of his upper body. His arms were thick with muscles. She licked her lips. The pulse between her legs increased. She felt the wet heat of her pussy at the sight of his body.

“In that bed.” He pointed to the bed in the middle of the room.

“Where will I sleep?” she asked.

“In the same bed next to me.”

Her next question dissolved on her tongue as she watched him turn towards her with his shirt off. She'd never seen a man so gorgeous and muscled. He looked hard and smooth to the touch. She was staring, but she couldn't help it. Her body responded to his unlike anything she'd ever imagined. His arms were strong and defined. No man could look that good by pure genetics.

Her mouth watered, the towel feeling heavy in her fingers as she stared at him.

“Do you like what you see?” His dark gaze penetrated hers. She stared back at him. It took all of her effort to keep her eyes on his face and not on his chest.

It was a really fine chest.

Tess wondered what the next move would be.

She wasn't use to being with a millionaire or a husband. Barring the towel she was completely naked. It was her wedding night. She stood alone with her husband in his bedroom, and the tension between them mounted.

She waited for him to decide what was going to happen next.

Chapter Ten

Her wet, dark curls curved around her face. Droplets of water ran down her neck in the valley between her breasts. Did she have any idea how tempting she looked standing there before him? All that covered her was a small towel. Such a small piece of fabric, so easily disposed of.

Duncan watched the droplets of water trailing down her body. They left a path he wanted to follow with his tongue. He'd like to lick every inch of her full, delicious body. His cock pulsed as his pre-cum eased out of the tip. He was slick and ready to fuck. Duncan knew he'd have her screaming in pleasure in a matter of seconds. His body tightened, responding to her. He saw the same reaction course through her. Her breasts rose and fell to the deep breaths she took. Her body was screaming at him to go and get her.

He dropped the shirt on the floor as he moved with purpose towards her. Her eyes opened wide, but she didn't back away. Before she had time to react, he reached her taking hold of her shoulders in his. He claimed her lips in a fierce possession.

It was the one time he understood her. When she reacted like fire in his arms. Duncan knew how to respond to passion. Everything else about her, he didn't get. Tess responded to his kiss instantly. Duncan knew how to give her what she craved. The heat between them sizzled with each touch. He knew all about pleasure. Tess was top of his list for acquiring. The sooner he got her panting after him the better he'd be.

She curled her arms around his neck bringing him closer to her. The towel was in his way. He knew she'd be soft and warm for him. He accepted every touch as she ran her hands all over him. He cupped her cheek hoping to return the favour soon with his hands all over her. He stroked her cupped cheek, running his free hand through her hair. Duncan liked gripping the length in his fist. He pulled her closer to his body with his grip on her hair. The heat grew between them. Duncan couldn't find the words to describe what his body was doing. All he knew was whenever Tess was near he needed her like he needed to take his next breath.

She released little moans of pleasure, which only drove him crazy with wanting for her. Duncan deepened the kiss tightening his hold in her hair, pulling on the fistful of hair. This was his woman. His wife. Satisfaction and pride filled him whenever he thought of her as his wife. He wanted her to know who owned her. To mark her skin in a way she'd never forget. His ring on her finger wasn't enough. Duncan needed more.

He'd be the only man she responded to so long as there was breath in his body. Duncan trailed kisses down her neck to her collarbone, and her moans vibrated down to his cock. He licked her pulse relishing the jump as he nibbled her neck.

Duncan sucked on her neck as hard as he could without hurting her. When he released the skin there was a red mark which he knew would bruise in the morning. He felt a deep male pride knowing she'd have his mark on her body.

His hands moved to her neck as he rubbed the mark with his thumb. Duncan tilted her head to the side for him to get better access to her erogenous zone. Goosebumps erupted on her flesh every time he licked, nibbled, or sucked at the flesh of her neck. Her eyes were closed, but she searched for his lips when he drew away from her body. He met her searching kiss with his lips against hers. He plunged his tongue inside her mouth searching and meeting with hers, loving her mouth the way he

wanted to love the rest of her body.

This was the beginning of so much more. Duncan knew he was addicted to her taste and response. Tess undid him, and in ways he'd never thought he'd be able to lose control. Her hands ran down his naked chest then back up. Her touch was light and innocent but making him want so much more. His pants were in the way. He wanted them both naked on the bed.

The need to feel her wet pussy surround his shaft was driving him to distraction.

Duncan wanted to sink his cock deep inside her cunt until his seed spurted inside her.

He pulled back staring into her lust glazed eyes. "I want you," he said.

"Why?" Her voice was a mere whisper.

"You're fucking beautiful." He ran his hand against her back. The towel obstructed the feel of her naked skin. He growled in protest.

"I don't understand," she said, her lips full and swollen from his kisses.

He grabbed her hand then laid it against his thick cock, pulsing in his pants. "There is nothing to understand, Tess. You're a gorgeous woman. I want you. My cock is aching to get inside your body."

Without saying anything further he unhooked her towel. He watched as it fell forgotten in a heap on the floor. Duncan absorbed every curve cataloguing it so he'd never forget. He ran his hands up her back then down, cupping her ass. She arched her back thrusting her tits up to his face. His mouth watered for a taste of her succulent flesh. His hands moved round to the tops of her thighs. Every part of her was soft to the touch. Duncan moved up past her hips to her waist. Her waist was thicker. He tested her hips with a firm grip and knew fucking her would be a dream. She'd take a good hard fucking. He couldn't wait to get her on her back or knees. Any position that had him as deep inside her as possible.

He trailed kisses from her lips down to her chest. Her nipples poked against his chest more tempting than anything in his life. Duncan captured one nipple between his teeth sucking the red mound into his mouth. She tasted so damn sweet. Her body shook. Her head fell back as he pulled away, blowing on the wet bud. She cried out when he did the same with the other breast. Duncan was on fire. With one arm around her back, he moved the other to her thigh and lifted her leg up to his waist. He looked down to see her pussy glistening with arousal. She had a thin layer of pubic hair covering her pussy. Her skin was soft and damp from her bath. She smelt and tasted intoxicating to him. Duncan couldn't get enough of her. By the end of the night, Tess would be his woman in every sense of the word. There was no way he'd let this passionate woman out of his sight without his mark all over her body and his cum dripping out of her pussy.

Tess tugged on his belt and pants. She was naked. He should be naked, too. Duncan let her go to pull the belt out of the loops then open the button of his pants. Her hands were shaking. Any negative thoughts about her body were lost in her need to see this man naked. She felt taken over by lust. A pool of heat had begun in her belly and expanded out to take over any reasoning or thought. She needed to feel all of his body pressed against hers. Tess wanted to be surrounded by him.

She began to understand the overwhelming feel that possessed everyone with sex. Her body no longer felt like her own. She felt taken over by someone who wasn't herself. The sensations he was creating with his hands and lips were ones she wanted all over. She never wanted him to stop. They were all so intense that she didn't know how long she'd waited. Duncan was throwing so much at her all at once. She didn't want it to stop. His fiery kisses burned her skin, igniting a desperation she'd never felt until now.

"Duncan, please." She begged him for more. Tess gasped as he took her nipple between his

teeth again. The sharp pain felt so good mixed with all the pleasure he gave.

"I know," he said. He moved her back until she fell on top of the bed. He followed her down moving her up to the centre. Duncan kissed her lips. His pants were still on but open.

"Please, take these off," she said.

"Are you sure? The moment we start this I won't want to stop." He gave her a warning. An out. She stared into his dark gaze and knew she wanted to stay in his arms.

"I'm sure."

Duncan left the bed to remove his pants. She watched him slowly ease his pants over his groin. The outline of his cock left nothing to the imagination.

He removed his underwear, and there he stood. His cock was thick. The foreskin pulled back from the mushroom sized head. The tip leaked his pre-cum. She might be a virgin, but she wasn't stupid when it came to the male anatomy. He stroked the length staring at her body.

"Open your legs," he said.

She did as he asked opening her legs.

He groaned. "Touch yourself."

Tess eased her hand down between her legs. She felt her clit swollen. The moisture slicked her fingers. She moaned as sensation shot through her body making her wither on the bed in absolute pleasure.

"I can see how wet you are. You're so damn beautiful, Tess. Your body, your response. Never change."

She thought she'd misheard the last part and ignored it. The bed dipped. Tess watched him climb up the bed.

He joined her, naked. She touched his arms as he leaned over her. The light cast from the low lighting gave her the perfect view of him. His thick cock pressed against her belly where he stood close to her.

Duncan kissed her hard. He cupped one of her breasts, stroking her hardened nipple. She watched and felt everything he was doing to her body. She arched up towards him, begging for more of his touches.

He held back not giving in to what she needed.

"Please, Duncan, I need more." She cried out as his other hand found her moist heat between her legs.

She whimpered. His hands were much larger than hers. He flicked her clit, his large fingers teasing her. Her eyes closed as her body opened to him. Her gasps and cries of pleasure filled the air around them. She heard them echo off the wall.

Every dominating touch was new to her innocent body, and his soft hands were causing havoc within her.

"You're so fucking wet, baby. My cock is going to slide into you easily. Do you want me inside you?" he asked.

Tess nodded her head. A second finger joined the first against her clit. She bit down on her lip as another pulse of pleasure shot through her whole body. It was too much and not enough. Tess needed more. The amazing feelings were taking her to new heights she'd never experienced before.

"Look at me, Tess." She opened her eyes. His whole body swamped her. Duncan was so much bigger than she. One of his hands lay against her head on the pillow. He stared down into her eyes. She couldn't breathe as he played with her clit.

Tess broke eye contact with him to see his hand moving between her thighs.

“Do you feel me touching you?”

She nodded her head.

“You’re dripping wet, Tess. You want me.”

Again, she nodded her head.

“Look at me.” He stopped touching her clit. Tess looked back at his face. “I’m going to make love to you,” he said softly. She was so close to orgasm. The pulse of excitement grew. He was going to make love to her. She opened her legs giving him better access. He leaned down kissing her lips first. Her heart skipped a beat at the gentle way he touched her. He moved over her as he settled between her thighs. She stared at her white pale flesh against his much darker one.

She ran her hands up his arms feeling the heat radiating off his body. Tess trusted him so completely.

You need to tell him.

No, I don’t.

Yes, you do.

She shook her head refusing to spoil the moment. Duncan didn’t need to know. She’d heard some women say it didn’t hurt. For once she’d go with the minority.

“I want you so much.” She grasped his shoulders, pulling his head down and kissing his lips.

Tess watched as he aligned his cock to her entrance. He stared into her eyes. She felt for a split second that she saw love in his depths.

“I want you, too,” he said. A second later Duncan cried out as he plunged inside her.

Tess felt like she was being split in two. She couldn’t contain her cry of pain. She pushed at his shoulders trying to get him to stop. It hurt too damn much. Tess felt him freeze. She didn’t care.

She pushed at him trying to get him to pull out of her.

It’s too much.

You should have told him.

“Get off me. It hurts too much.” She pushed at his shoulders.

He pulled away. Tess went to close her legs but stopped, leaving her wide open for him to see. “Leave me alone, please.” She begged him. Tess heard him curse. She opened her eyes and stared down between her thighs. There on the sheet was a red stain. Tears sprang to her eyes as she stared at her innocence on the sheet for them both to see.

“How could *you* be a virgin?” His voice filled with outrage.

Tess felt so humiliated. His disgust was so apparent she wanted to curl up in a ball and get away him. She scooted up the bed covering herself with the nearest pillow. He sat opposite her, his gaze accusing her with each look.

“I’m waiting for an answer,” he said. She stared at him shocked by the difference in the man who’d held her only moments before.

Chapter Eleven

Duncan didn't know what was happening. When he'd plunged inside her pussy and felt her resistance he hadn't thought much of it. Then he'd heard her cry of pain followed by her attack, and it had killed him to know he'd hurt her.

She'd been a virgin. He ran his fingers through his hair. When he glanced down at his shaft he saw the blood from her innocence. He felt like a total scumbag for the way he was treating her. Her innocence annoyed and scared him.

"I've never had the chance to be with a man before." She whispered the words. He looked at her. He saw the embarrassment on her face. He'd have never guessed at her total inexperience with men. He must look like a complete fool. Duncan had never thought for a second she'd be a virgin. Virgins were the no-go territory.

"How could you not have any experience at all?" His anger was scaring her. He saw it, but couldn't stop his anger rising to the surface. Duncan was horny and downright fucking annoyed. Tess was a virgin. Why wasn't her father taking better care of her? A woman with her innocence still intact deserved love and flowers. His plan had been to use her to get what he wanted.

"Not everyone sleeps around like you do." Tears slipped down her face. She hugged the pillow to her like a shield. Did she have no clue that if he wanted her, the pillow would be no protection?

He stopped thinking about taking her. His cock pulsed with the need to be inside her. Duncan knew he couldn't do it. In the beginning he'd thought she was a woman of experience. With a body like she had, he knew why he'd been misled.

"You're twenty-three years old. How could you not have had at least one sexual experience? You're extremely beautiful. Men would be falling at your feet."

Like you did.

From the moment you saw her, you knew you had to have her.

"That's all you care about. If a woman's beautiful she must have had several sexual experiences because she cannot avoid temptation for too long?" Duncan knew how it sounded. He wouldn't apologise for his own thoughts. He let Tess continue with her speech. "My looks don't appeal to everyone. I don't want a man who only cares for what's on the outside. I'm more than a woman or a shell. You want to know why I was a virgin?"

Duncan nodded his head. Her tears were cutting through to his soul. She looked so distraught.

"I was saving myself for a man who'd appreciate what I'd saved for him. Instead, it was wasted on you. You don't care what I had. You only see it as a hindrance. You want me because I look the part as your homely wife. That is the only reason you forced me to marry you. I fit the image of the woman you would marry." The tears fell full force down her cheeks. He ground his teeth together to stop himself from reaching out to her. Every word she spoke was the truth.

Duncan swore causing Tess to flinch at his cruel words. He didn't like scaring her. Seeing her reaction upset him. Her first sexual experience had turned into an awful encounter, and he'd been the one responsible. His first sexual experience would remain with him always. Her cry of pain would stay with him always.

He got up from the bed to pace. His thoughts were killing him. He was fighting with the need to walk out and not look back and the need to take her. She deserved some happiness. Her father didn't

care about her. He saw that more clearly with every passing second. She had no one in this world looking after her.

Duncan paced oblivious to his nakedness. This changed everything in their agreement. He'd never deflowered a virgin before. It was part of his rules to stay well clear of them. They caused too many problems. He preferred experienced, welcoming women who knew the score. He couldn't walk away carrying on with his own life like he'd planned. Tess was his responsibility. His to care for.

Every other person in her life had given up on her. The file he'd acquired on her made more sense to him now.

Tess Williams, Tess James, had no one but him.

Duncan stared at her as she laid her head on the pillow with tears seeping out of her eyes. She should have someone to lean on.

His heart broke that little bit more.

He began pacing once again. No matter how much he thought or paced, he'd hate the way this night panned out.

He stopped in his pacing when he heard Tess moving. He turned and saw she'd gotten a robe to cover herself. She appeared so small and fragile, compared to moments ago when he was about to make love to her. Her hair was a rumpled mess. She still looked as sexy as sin. He wanted her so bad. But there was something else inside him that he couldn't describe.

The desire to rub his chest was strong. His heart ached for the woman before him. There was so much that needed to be said. Instead, she stood with her head bowed waiting for him to talk.

He wished he knew the answers.

Duncan shook his head. His thoughts were threatening to drown him in a sea of emotion.

"I'll go to another room for tonight. You need your rest." Duncan went to her capturing her face between his hands. He stared into her tear-stained gaze. "We'll talk tomorrow. Get some sleep." He kissed her head then left the room. Duncan didn't trust himself to spend the night with her. He felt too raw at the situation already.

You're falling in love with her.

Like so many times before, he cut the thought off.

Tess watched him go. She walked into the bathroom and ran herself a bath. In many of the books it said a warm bath would ease any pain. The tears dropped off her cheeks. She let them. It had been way too long since she'd cried. When there was enough water in the bath, she dropped the robe and got inside.

She eased back allowing the heat to do its job.

Once the bath was finished she got out, dried, and wore the robe to bed. She lay curled up on the side of the bed where they had begun to make love. She felt so alone. Her father had never spent the time to tell her these things. With no mother either, she'd been on her own in everything. Up until that moment she'd never felt as alone as she did now. Duncan was the first man she'd let pass through her defences.

Her heart ached for what had happened. She refused to believe she could love a man who hated her innocence. Her pillow was little comfort. As she lay on the bed, she knew there was no one else to hold her. For the first time in her life she craved the touch of someone else. Where was her white knight?

No answers came to her. She cried throughout the night wondering what was wrong with her. What had she done wrong, and why was her inexperience such a problem?

When sleep refused to come she got up and went to the window. The moonlit sky greeted her. She held onto her pillow hoping for peace to claim her. The stars began to disappear as she thought about her night with Duncan. In all her life she'd never behaved with such wild abandon.

It was the first time she finally let go, and she felt as if she'd been cast aside. Tess watched the sun come up basking in the light morning glow. She heard people moving around the house, but she didn't want to see or speak to anyone; so she stayed sitting in her robe looking over the grounds.

Vibrant flowers in a variety of colours covered the gardens. It was a summer wonderland, the smells so wonderful and romantic. She saw a patio in the middle of so much beauty. She thought it would be the perfect location for a wonderful romantic meal for two.

Romance, she thought.

Something she wouldn't be experiencing for some time.

She laid her hand against the window pane. The hours passed by. Tess refused to move from the spot. Her pillow was her only lifeline.

Chapter Twelve

When Duncan had woken the following morning, he'd walked past his bedroom and gone straight to his office. He'd struggled to sleep after the nightmare the night before. Tess didn't make an appearance, and he left her. At around lunchtime his housekeeper, Grace, walked in. She slammed his coffee tray down on the desk.

"What's the matter?" he asked not taking his eyes away from the screen.

"What's the matter? You've been married less than twenty-four hours, and you've managed to ruin that poor girl upstairs." Grace had her hands on her hips.

"Tess is fine. Feed her something." He shook his hand at her dismissing her.

"She's not come out of your room. The gardener has come to the kitchen to tell me a black haired woman is sitting in a robe at the bedroom window. She's holding a pillow."

Duncan stared at Grace. "She hasn't come out of the room at all?"

"No. She doesn't even respond to the knocks on the door."

He ran fingers through his hair.

"I'll go and talk to her."

"You'd better. She's not like your usual women. You treat this one with care. I don't care how much it takes. I've got a sixth sense for this kind of thing. Treat her well, and you'll reap the benefits. Do you understand?"

Grace had been one of the few women who refused to be pushed around by him. He adored her loving nature and the way she wasn't afraid to say what she thought. Duncan found her briskness refreshing after spending quite a bit of time with men who liked to kiss his ass. Duncan nodded his head then made his way up to the bedroom. He saw it was lunchtime already.

He opened the door to his bedroom. Tess sat at the window, the pillow clutched in her fingers. She looked smaller than the night before. One of her legs peeked out of the end of the robe. For several minutes he looked at her leg remembering the feel of her underneath him. Then her scream permeated his mind cutting off his thoughts. He closed the door noisily making her aware of his presence.

He saw her stiffen, but she remained sat looking out the window.

"You've not been down for breakfast," he said, folding his arms. She kept her gaze out the window.

"I'm not hungry," she said, pulling her robe more tightly around her.

Duncan was entering new territory, and he didn't like it. She didn't acknowledge his presence at all.

"Starving yourself is childish and ridiculous." He didn't know what else to say.

"I'm not hungry. If I were, then I'd eat, but I'm not hungry." Her attention remained out of the window.

He rubbed his eyes. He didn't know what to do. Last night had been one of the worst night's sleep he'd ever experienced. Her cry of pain still echoed around his head. His beautiful wife, a virgin—he still found it hard to believe.

They'd been close last night. The chemistry had burned brighter between them. Yet, all that passion was dead at the moment. He felt lost with the way she blanked him.

“We need to talk about last night,” he said as he moved closer to where she sat at the window. The closer he got the tenser she became. Her fingers were white-knuckled on the pillow she held in her hands.

“No, we don’t need to talk about it. I was a virgin last night. Then you pushed inside me, and now I’m not. You didn’t like it, so you left. Fine. There is nothing else to discuss.” She kept her head turned away from him. He couldn’t see what she was thinking about or how his reactions last night had affected her. Her voice held all the hurt.

She thought he didn’t like it. It was far from the truth. He’d liked her innocence too damn much.

“I reacted too harshly,” he said. Tess snorted interrupting him.

“Don’t worry about it. They say when you lose your virginity it should be a memorable night. I can promise you last night will be hard to forget.”

He physically winced at her words. All his lovers had praised him on his skills in the bedroom. Duncan had spent years learning the art of love. He liked being a generous, considerate lover. For the first time ever the woman who happened to be his wife had commented on his lack of skill.

Duncan knew he’d need to make it up to her. She deserved to have a night to remember. First, he needed to build their relationship. There was no way he was letting her go. He’d taken one of the most precious things a woman had to offer. For the rest of his and her life he’d make it up to her.

Last night would be forever seared in his mind. His lack of finesse wasn’t surprising as he’d never taken a virgin to his bed.

He needed to make it up to her for now. Everything else would fall into place. At the moment he needed to repair the damage of his words. He knelt at her feet waiting for her to turn and acknowledge his closeness. She kept her body averted from him. Even when she’d gone to beg for his help with her father she’d been more open than now. In the end he cupped her cheek and turned her face to look at him.

Tears fell from her eyes cutting him to the core.

“I’m sorry I hurt you last night. I never expected to be given such a gift. I should never have reacted like that. I feel the world I live in has made me cynical about the opposite sex.”

“That’s not fair, Duncan. I have nothing to do with your life. I’m not some woman who wants this lifestyle. I only agreed to this to save my father.” He watched as she tried to pull away from him. Her tears falling thicker and faster as his words hurt her.

“I know you’re not like anyone else. We’ll get through this. Please, forgive me.” He’d never begged a woman for anything in his life. Not even his own mother. She stared at him then nodded her head. He watched as she took a deep breath closing her eyes for a second.

“All right, I’m fine.”

“So can we start over?” he asked.

Tess nodded her head. What else could she do? He was giving her a peace offering. If she didn’t agree, she risked living a life filled with unhappiness, or she walked away causing problems for her father. This marriage had been her decision. She wasn’t prepared to live her marriage hating every second of it.

She’d been right to keep her virginity. Next time she wouldn’t let passion get in the way. No man was going near her again.

“I can start over.”

“Great.” He went to touch her knee, and she pulled away. The less he touched her, the better she’d be. She lifted her leg under the robe. He remained by her side kneeling. “Will you join us

downstairs?" he asked. "Grace is having a fit at your lack of presence."

"Who's Grace?"

"The housekeeper. I guess last night was rushed, and she missed the introductions."

"I guess."

"Well, Grace is my housekeeper, and Gerald is the older guy who handles everything else."

Tess nodded her head. "I'll get dressed and follow you down."

He cupped her cheek. "I really am sorry."

She waited unsure what to say to ease his mind.

Once Duncan had left Tess allowed herself to have a long, leisurely shower. She needed to scrub the pain from the night before away. Her heart ached in ways she'd never expected.

The hot water cascaded over her. It was wonderful. The water sprayed over the top of her giving her time to ease her mental pain. While she listened to the water fall she washed her body.

Once the tension eased out of her and she began to relax Tess got out of the shower washing down the walls before she left the bathroom. She went in search of some clothes. Grace had told her Duncan had purchased plenty of clothes for her to use when Grace had shown her to her room. She went to the wardrobe to find her stuff. His clothes hung at one end of the closet while hers hung on the opposite side. Tess dressed in casual jeans and a plain T-shirt.

They fit snugly. She didn't want to think of him knowing her size.

It was around one when she finally made it downstairs to the kitchen to see Grace standing with a bowl at the kitchen counter. She was peeling some vegetables.

Tess watched her for several moments before making her presence known. She'd not seen another woman working a kitchen.

"You're finally awake," Grace said before Tess made a move.

"How did you know I was standing there?" she asked moving into the kitchen.

"I know a lot of things, Tess. Come in, sit."

Tess suppressed her wince. Grace obviously thought her lack of presence at breakfast had something to do with her being a recently married couple. She didn't have the heart to tell the other woman she'd in fact been up all night dealing with the bitter rejection of her husband after he had found out he'd married a virgin and not an experienced woman.

"Sorry I missed breakfast—" Grace cut her off with a wave of her hand. The older woman gestured to the seat in front of her.

"Nonsense, love. I didn't expect you down immediately this morning anyway. Duncan said that you'd probably skip breakfast and have a late lunch instead." The rest of Grace's words were drowned out by the pounding in Tess's head. There were so many lies in place Tess didn't know how she'd be able to keep on top of all of them. Why had Duncan come for her if he'd already told his housekeeper that she wouldn't be down? None of it made any sense.

So why did he come to seek me out?

"You and Duncan are not fooling anyone," Grace said.

Tess looked up. The older woman picked up a carrot and offered it to her along with a peeler. She took them. "What do you mean?"

"Don't look so scared." Grace turned her back to grab another peeler. "I've known Duncan all my life. He's never been good at keeping secrets. Gerald and I know this isn't a love match."

She tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. "How do you know?"

"When a woman is married and on her wedding night spends most of the night and early part of the day crying into her pillow, it doesn't take a genius to figure it out. I'm happy to play along

though.”

Tess swiped the peeler down the carrot. She didn’t say a word.

“I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything, sweetie. Just by looking at you I feel you’ve not had a decent break.” Tess kept her eyes down. If she gave in to more tears she’d break. “I’m not going to pry. Even if I want to know what’s going on inside that mind of yours.”

“You’re the first person to not want to know.”

“I didn’t say I didn’t want to know. I merely said I’d wait until you were ready to talk. There is a difference.” Grace took the carrot from her then handed her another one. “I feel we’re a lot like carrots. Sometimes, with certain people, we need to peel off the bad parts to get to the good.”

Tess listened to Grace talk.

“Duncan isn’t a bad man. I know he has his faults. Who doesn’t? There is something between you two. I don’t think you should leave him alone, yet.”

“I don’t know what you want me to do?” Tess handed over the carrot.

“Be yourself, and don’t change who you are. Duncan may not know it yet, but you’re different. How long have you known him?”

“Two weeks.”

“In the last two weeks he’s been different. Think about that. Now, would you like some pancakes to put you on ‘til dinner?”

Tess nodded.

Could Duncan really care about her? The way Grace spoke it seemed he did. Was she getting mixed messages?

Tess mentally shook herself. This had nothing to do with caring and everything to do with the fact that she’d been a virgin and he didn’t like it. Regardless of what he said, she’d seen the truth that night.

She recalled how humiliated she felt last night at his horrible words and actions. She cut off her thoughts trying to concentrate on what Grace was saying and doing.

Any misguided thoughts about her husband caring about her welfare needed to be crushed. Otherwise that is exactly how she’d end up if she was to start caring for her husband, crushed.

Chapter Thirteen

Later that day, Duncan was looking out of his study window to see Tess walking round the grounds with his head man, Gerald. The couple were laughing and pointing to certain plants or flowers around his garden. She looked happier than the last time he'd seen her. Gerald bent down and picked up a flower. He handed it to Tess. She smiled at the older man, and then they carried on walking.

He knew Gerald was smitten with Tess. The older man was easily charmed. If she knew anything about flowers or gardening she'd be his new best friend. Grace and Gerald had really taken to her, and it had only been a day.

Last night kept running through his mind. Even as he was finishing up a few bits of work she kept invading his mind.

How did she do it? What was it about her that captured him?

She seemed to be this little angel whom everyone adored. He couldn't find a fault with her. Everything about her was hard to believe. He'd really spent too much time being cynical. The only reason she'd agreed to be his wife was to protect her father.

To think they'd never have met if it hadn't been for her father's greed. Duncan didn't know whether to send him a gift basket or curse the man. Until she entered his life everything was neat and organised. Now, he didn't know what to do with his own life.

She truly surprised him in everything she did. Her stunning looks continued to blow him away, and to think that with all that beauty she had still been a virgin. It was an unbelievable combination. The more he thought about her innocence the easier it was for him to accept it. After the shock of last night Duncan had found himself liking the fact Tess had been a virgin. He'd been her first, and if it was left to him he'd be her only lover. He needed to make a more stable position for himself in her life. Duncan needed to make her love him. For her to depend on him.

Ever since his parents' marriage had fallen apart he'd made sure he was in control of everything.

He glanced over at his beautiful wife as she walked through the gardens and vowed she'd have all the romance she needed to make her love him. She'd never be able to walk away from him. Tess would have a wedding night to remember if it was the last thing he did. All of his good intentions and he'd screwed up last night. Duncan knew what his mistakes had been. He knew how to make them right. Soon, she'd be carrying his heir and the final condition of his father's will would be complete.

Duncan turned away for a split second at the thought of his father's will. Was it even worth his time and effort?

Getting revenge had been on his mind for so long it felt part of him. He stared at Tess as she leaned down to run her fingers through the flowers.

Grace came through into his study. Duncan turned and gave her a smile. "She came out of her room."

The older woman sent him a glare.

"What?"

"You know what." She put down his coffee with a plate of biscuits. Grace stood giving him her full attention. "That girl has been through enough. I can see it in her eyes. Whatever you're planning,

make sure to keep her out of it.”

“Nothing is going to happen.”

“I know you, Duncan James. You’re up to something. Please, don’t let that girl get hurt any more than she has.” Grace stood pleading with him.

“I’d never hurt Tess. She’s safe with me.”

Grace stared at him a few moments longer before leaving him alone in his office. He glanced out of the window, but Gerald and Tess were nowhere to be seen.

Tess didn’t need to know his plans. She just needed to be part of the solution. Duncan stepped away from the window then went back to his desk.

Duncan picked up the phone and dialled his secretary. He made the necessary arrangements to take his wife on a vacation. He prepared everything with his secretary, so all he’d need to take with him was his laptop and phone. Being in charge of so many companies meant vacations couldn’t be without technology. As long as he had a way of communicating if something went wrong then he’d be fine.

He couldn’t run his business and plan the romance of the century without being present. Duncan hung up when he’d settled the final detail of his arrangements. In no time at all Tess would be all his, and she didn’t need to know how he used her.

Duncan opened the file he’d obtained of his father’s Italian villa. It looked exactly how he remembered from his childhood. His heart ached when he thought of everything he’d lost. He hadn’t been able to say goodbye to his father.

You don’t need that. You need to put your mother in her rightful place. Miranda is the woman who ruined everything.

He shook off his concerns slamming the file closed. Vengeance would be his in a matter of weeks. He smiled to himself, pleased that there was no way that this could fail. He shut his computer down, switched off the power, and went looking for the woman he was about to dedicate all of his time to making fall in love with him.

Tess sat at the kitchen counter enjoying a delicious bowl of tomato soup. She’d spent most of the afternoon listening to Gerald discuss his garden. The older man had a passion for flowers and the earth. She loved hearing him talk. He held so much knowledge. Tess listened to Gerald and Grace banter about their youth. Grace handed her some bread to dip in her soup. The tomato and garlic flavour worked really well. She watched the couple smile at each other sharing small touches. The love between them was clearly seen just by looking at them. Tess smiled when they told something funny about their life. They were wonderful people. There must be a side to Duncan she’d never seen because this couple had been with him for some time.

“He went and knocked the man out because he’d said hello to me,” Grace said.

“Why did you hit him?” Tess asked.

“No one says a word to my woman.” Gerald kissed Grace on the head.

They were still so much in love. Time hadn’t changed their feelings for one another.

It made Tess’s heart ache. She’d never have that with Duncan. He wouldn’t allow her to get that close. What she witnessed with the older couple was the same thing she wanted to feel with her own man one day. A love more powerful than anything else. She’d only read it in books, but now she was witnessing it for the first time.

Her time with Duncan would be short. He wasn’t the type of man to settle for one woman for any length of time. She had no plans to marry again. The only way she’d marry would be for love,

nothing else.

At that moment Duncan walked in as if her thoughts alone had made him appear.

She saw him stop while processing the scene in front of him as if it was a spreadsheet filled with numbers.

Everything was a plan to him. Something to take charge of and control. Didn't he ever want to see beyond control?

People were not numbers. Not everything in his life could be organised to fit into a neat little box.

Tess ignored him and dunked more crusty bread into her soup. She closed her eyes enjoying the best tomato soup she'd ever tasted. Tess was taken aback when Duncan took the seat next to her at the counter. There were at least four other seats available to him. He was close to her. She smelt the scent of his cologne.

She breathed deeply, loving the way the smell seemed to consume her. His closeness made her nipples harden and her pussy grow wet. Even after everything that had happened between them she was still turned on by him.

His arm brushed hers as she picked up some more bread to dip into the soup. Her hands shook, but she ignored him. Or ignored him as best as she could with his body in such close proximity.

She noticed him making a circle with his finger against the counter, his large fingers gentle on the surface. Watching his hand reminded her of the way he'd touched her clit the night before, with the gentleness that had threatened to send her over the edge. What would it have felt like if they'd gotten the chance to go further?

The pain of his penetration had wiped all pleasure from the equation. Surely pain wouldn't happen during every sexual interlude, otherwise women wouldn't love sex. She knew they did. Some of the women who worked at the library talked about it constantly. Her nipples grew harder as her thoughts went deeper. In her mind she saw him sucking on her body, his tongue lathering down the valley between her breasts, over her tummy to her clit.

She bit her lip squeezing her thighs together as cream leaked out of her cunt.

"Is the soup good?" Tess turned abruptly as his words filled her mind. She pulled out of her fantasy feeling the blush spread up her neck and into her cheeks.

"Y-yes, it tastes really good." She cleared her throat trying to rid all of her thoughts of his tongue and body from her mind. "It's the best I've ever tasted," she said. It was then she noticed that Gerald and Grace had left them alone together at the kitchen counter, sipping soup.

Duncan tore off a piece of bread and dipped it into her bowl. He took a bite then moaned. "You're right. It tastes good."

"Where have Gerald and Grace gone?" she asked.

"They've gone to take a walk in the garden. They think we need to spend more time together. You don't have to be afraid of me, Tess. I want you as much as you want me."

"What are you talking about?" She hunched over her bowl hoping not to look at him.

"Your flushed cheeks. Your nipples are rock hard like bullets. I bet your pussy is soaking wet with your cream."

How did he always know what she was thinking? They'd barely known each other, and he read her like an open book.

"How do you know what I'm thinking?"

"Because I feel it, too." She dropped her spoon then turned to stare at him.

He took her hand to press against his crotch. "No matter what happened between us. You still

affect me.”

She felt his cock pressing hard and thick against his pants. “But you hated me because of my, well, erm—”

“Your virginity?”

Tess nodded unable to say the word. She removed her hand from him, but the heat of him still burned her palm.

Duncan got up from his seat. She watched as he grabbed a bowl then ladled himself some soup before joining her again.

“I was surprised. Like I said earlier I reacted appallingly, and I won’t let it affect me again. I want us to put this behind us.”

Tess thought about what he said and agreed with him. They were married. She might as well make the most of it. She wasn’t going anywhere else. Tess sipped the last of her soup wiping up the last remnants around the edges with her last crusty bread. When she was done she moved away to wash her pieces of cutlery. She didn’t like the thought of leaving it for Grace, even though the other woman had said she should. As she went to leave the kitchen, passing Duncan in the process, and his hand caught her around her wrist imprisoning her. Tess stopped waiting for him to let her go.

She gave a slight pull on her wrist to try to release his hold, but he held on. She huffed in frustration then looked at him. She shot him a glare hoping he’d let her go.

“Please, let me go.”

“I want you to stay.”

“Why?”

“I like your company.”

Tess turned to the door yearning to leave. Duncan did too much to her body for her to be comfortable. He made her want things she couldn’t have. Love, life, and a family. He didn’t know how much she craved them.

“Sit with me while I finish.” His voice made it more of a statement than a question. He didn’t let her go.

“Why should I?” She heard the hard edge to her question even though she didn’t feel angry any more. Duncan was working his way under her skin making her feel things she didn’t want to acknowledge. Not only did he make her want things, Duncan made her want those things with him. She was beginning to like and hate him all at the same time. Grace spoke very fondly of him. There had to be more to him than the corrupt businessman, surely.

“You’re my wife, Tess,” he said.

“That does not require me to sit with you. Besides this marriage is not a real one.” She gave another tug on her wrist, but still he did not release her.

She watched him tense at her words. Why did she have to be a bitch? It wasn’t in her nature to be mean. She cursed at her own lack of control. He cut her off before she got a chance to apologise to him.

“Then consider it the underlining print in the contract. While we’re married I still expect us to be civil to each other. This is a proper marriage, and you’ll behave accordingly.”

She sucked in her breath. “You expect me to behave like the proper, obedient, little wife, and you still get to live your life as if you don’t have a wife?”

“I will not behave like you don’t exist unless you don’t start to behave like a wife should. Now, sit with me. I want to talk to you. Regardless of what you think, I don’t want to argue with you.”

Tess wanted to go back to the confines of her own bedroom. When he was near she couldn’t

control herself. She felt unsure around him. His blunt manner and actions always had her heart racing. She could still feel the heat of his cock against her palm. Tess feared the more time she spent with him the more she'd want him.

He gave her such a pleading look with his dark gaze that she found it hard to resist him. Instead of leaving him, she moved to sit beside him. She began to turn her engagement and wedding band to try to distract herself. It would be so easy for her to reach out and touch him.

Would their relationship ever get past arguing? She really hoped so. When she didn't hate him, she liked him and vice versa. Her emotions confused her.

"Do you like my staff, Gerald and Grace?" he asked. His own thoughts were cut off. She didn't have a clue what he was thinking.

Duncan was an enigma to her.

"They're wonderful people," she said and meant the words. She refused to lie even to Duncan. Grace and Gerald were two of the nicest people she'd ever had the pleasure of meeting. She looked forward to spending more time with each of them, in the kitchen eating meals or in the garden talking about all the wonderful flowers in full bloom.

They'd make this period of her life with Duncan James bearable. She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. Her wild locks still refused to be tamed after all this time.

"I'm pleased you like them. Gerald and Grace have been with me for years. They have helped me through some serious hardships. It's why I've decided to give them some time off. I figured as we won't be here for some time it would give them some quality time away."

His words made her giggle. Only moments before she'd thought they'd be able to help her during her marriage with Duncan. Now, he had other plans. Her life couldn't get any stranger.

Life was moving too fast, and Tess was struggling to keep up.

"Why? Where are you going?" she asked him.

"Where are *we* going?" He stared at her with a smile. It was one of the first real smiles she'd seen him give. She relished the look on his face. He looked so at ease with everything around him. She licked her lips to try to think. His smile was infectious to her.

"All right, where are we going?" She repeated the question so he was satisfied with a smile of her own.

"I'd like us to have a honeymoon. I know you don't consider this a real marriage, but I do. I want you to have everything a marriage should have. A honeymoon is part of it. I wanted you to have your dream wedding. I've made arrangements to have us flown out to my family villa in Italy tomorrow morning, so we can start our honeymoon and begin our marriage properly."

He took her hand, running his thumb over her two rings. Duncan had picked out his own ring, and she stared at the simple gold band decorating his finger.

"Why are we going to Italy?" She could have kicked herself. She'd always wanted to go to Italy. It was one of the places she'd dreamt about visiting. She felt so happy. The desire to hug him was strong. Her heart began to beat rapidly in her chest. He wanted to make this marriage between them real. Could this be the beginning of something special?

Don't get too far ahead of yourself, Tess. This is only the beginning.

"I thought it'd be a nice change. I think we need to talk about our marriage, Tess," he said.

She nodded her head, her excitement hard to contain.

"I know we've never really discussed what would happen during our marriage, and I think we need to take care of it now. What do you think of our marriage?" he asked.

She stared at him opening and closing her mouth a few times. "I don't know what to think,

Duncan. You requested this, and it's sort of blown up in our faces already."

"Do you hate me?" he asked.

Tess gasped. Hate was a strong word, and, yes, she'd thought her emotions were on the hate side of the emotional spectrum. She gazed down at her hands where her wedding band lay. "I don't hate you, but I don't like you all the time."

"I wouldn't like me either," he said.

She chuckled.

"I want you to get to know me, the man. I don't want this marriage to be a disaster. I know you're here for your father, but do you think you could learn to feel something more for me other than dislike?"

More than you know.

"I don't know how long this marriage is going to last. I'd like for our time together to be enjoyable."

He leaned forward. "Then open yourself up to me, Tess. Learn to trust me, and we could make this marriage work for real. The chemistry between us is there. We both can feel it, and you can't deny it. We could make this marriage last. We don't have to call it quits or think of ending it. Live for the now and not for tomorrow."

She wouldn't dream of denying the attraction. Was it so bad to want more? "I'm not going to argue with you. I just want more than attraction or ... sex to be part of a marriage."

"Being together in Italy will give this marriage a real chance. I like you, Tess, and I think you could learn to like me, too."

Tess didn't know where this more reasonable man had appeared, but she liked him a hell of a lot better.

Duncan watched her closely. He was satisfied to see the excitement shining in her eyes. His words were not lies. He did want his marriage to work. He also wanted her to like him.

She had such beautiful eyes when she smiled. They were filled with love. He knew it was only a matter of time before all of her love was directed at him.

It seemed paying a quick private visit to her father before the wedding had been worth the time and the awkwardness after all.

Duncan had learned of her passion for Italy from her father. It had been a wonderful coincidence that his family home was in Italy as well. According to Erik, she'd wanted to go to Italy since she was nine years old. Gerald had informed him her favourite colour was yellow, and she loved daffodils, which is why he'd asked Gerald to plant plenty of them throughout the garden.

She took his bowl. Her whole face was animated. Duncan wanted to see that smile on her face more often.

You're falling for her.

You're falling in love with your wife.

He didn't care how he felt as long as he got what he wanted. The feelings wouldn't last long. They never did. She came back to him wiping her hands on a towel.

"What about your work though? You're a businessman. Won't you be needed here?" she asked, her smile disappearing.

He didn't like to see her eyes dim.

"Will I have to go on my own?"

Duncan saw the disappointment in her eyes, and that gave him hope. She looked so sad when

she thought he wouldn't be able to go with her. His spirits lifted at her expression. She might think she disliked him, but her mind wanted to be in his company no matter what she tried to make him think.

There was hope for him. His plan began to look more promising. He chuckled, feeling happier about their situation.

"All taken care of. I'm the boss, so I can take any time off I like; but I have put in place some back up to make sure if any problems occur during my absence they can be in touch straight away." The light brightened within her depths. It was like watching a child at Christmas time.

"This is going to be amazing. Thank you so much."

He liked seeing her smile. Duncan liked seeing her happy. The feelings were a first for him. What shocked him the most was how much he liked the fact he was the man to put the smile on her face.

She stood close to him, her honey and vanilla scent invading his senses. The jeans and white shirt she wore emphasised her curves to perfection. He'd been right in the size of clothes to get her.

He recalled all of her softness against his own body.

Soon, she'll be in your arms, and then you can wipe all memory of last night from her mind.

Duncan wanted to give her a night to remember where he worshipped all of her body all night long.

"Don't worry about packing either. I hate packing, and I've sorted everything so that anything we need will be ready and waiting for us tomorrow."

Duncan took another chunk of bread from the stand, popping it into his mouth. His soup was long gone, but his hunger for her was still present. He stood ready to leave. If he stayed longer in her company he couldn't be held accountable for his actions. She made him yearn for her in ways he'd thought long gone in his teenage years. When he was around her he felt like a horny teenage boy.

Before he got chance to leave Tess did something really taking him by surprise. She came up close to his body and wrapped her arms around his neck. He curled his hand around her waist supporting her as she brought her face close to his. His heart pounded inside his chest. Staring down into her innocent face did things inside him he didn't understand.

"Thank you, Duncan. This really means a lot to me. I'll never forget it," she said, and then she kissed him.

Her lips brushed his, gentle at first, but she then built into a passionate kiss that took his breath away. His hold tightened around her. The tips of her breasts pressed against his shirt like rock-hard pebbles. He'd tasted them and knew their sweetness on his tongue.

He moaned in between her kisses. Duncan tilted her head back, feeling her lips part, then plunged his tongue inside. She moaned, her own fingers tugging at the strands of hair at the back of his neck. Their moans echoed round the kitchen. The fire and hunger urged them both on.

Duncan fisted his hands in the shirt at her back. He wanted to turn the kiss into so much more but restrained himself. His seduction needed to be perfect. Losing control now would damage any chance he had of repairing their relationship.

Tess Williams was messing with his head. And God help him, his heart. She was the first woman to ever initiate a kiss with him. All of his life he'd been the one in charge, always demanding rather than being given. His other conquests had taken great care to act and play hard to get. Tess was different. She was an innocent. It meant so much to have her take the first step. He stepped back from her loving the hot flush adorning her skin. He kissed her on the head in order to end the fire blazing between them. She was the first woman to leave him fevered by the passion she provoked.

His plan of getting her to fall in love with him was on track.

He cut off his own thoughts. Duncan refused to consider his own seduction.
If he was to get Tess to fall in love with him then he risked falling in love with her.

Chapter Fourteen

The following afternoon Tess was still buzzing with excitement. Duncan's private jet was about to land on the helipad on the grounds of his villa. She looked out of her small window to see a picturesque mansion staring back at her. It was everything she'd imagined Duncan would possess.

"How rich are you?" she asked. The smile remained on her face. The beauty before her was worth the wait. She couldn't wait to go explore the beautiful country.

"What makes you think I'm particularly rich?" She turned towards him. His eyes and voice were teasing her. Ever since he'd announced their honeymoon he'd been like a different man.

"You own a private jet. A huge mansion in Italy. Your country house, and not mention all the other property you must own. And the fact you run your own business. It kind of makes a girl a little impressed. Impressed but also intimidated." She smiled at him. He chuckled as he pocketed his cell phone. For most of the journey he'd been working while she stared out of the window. It was her first trip abroad. His wealth scared her. He was used to so much luxury. She must look unsophisticated to a man of his riches.

"All right, I am very, very rich," he said.

"Okay."

"You're not going to ask anything else?" he asked.

Tess laughed. "I'm sure you'll tell me more when you want me to know."

She looked out of the window as the helicopter began to lower. Duncan took her hand. She stared at his hand in hers. He gave her a squeeze, but he never let go. Tess turned towards the window. She didn't see any of the view. Her mind was on the man holding her hand. He'd been so attentive.

Late last night when she'd struggled to sleep and had gone in search of something to do he'd been working in his office as she passed. He'd come out to see her.

Tess drifted to last night as the pilot and Duncan began to prepare everything for their departure.

"Tess? Are you okay?" Duncan asked. She stopped as he walked out of his office.

"I'm fine. I can't sleep. All right, I'm excited about tomorrow. I've always wanted to go to Italy. I'm acting all immature and childish, aren't I?" She pulled the robe tighter around herself.

Duncan chuckled. "Not at all. I should have kept it to myself. Come on. Grace tells me a hot chocolate and conversation are what an excited mind needs." He took her hand leading her through to the kitchen.

"Do you know your way around a kitchen?" she asked when he helped her into a seat.

"Yes, I'm not completely useless. I make a great hot chocolate. Do you like marshmallows?" She nodded watching as he grabbed a pan and some milk out of the fridge. "What are you doing?"

"Well, Grace taught me how to make the best hot chocolate. I'm following her recipe, and she demands proper chocolate with milk, cream, honey, and a dash of rum." He came back to the stove with his ingredients.

Two mugs were filled with milk then poured into a pan with two whole bars of chocolate. "Do you wish to squirt?" He offered her the honey.

She gave a generous squirt as he added a dash of rum. "Grace loves this stuff."

Tess giggled licking at the honey on her finger. He put the pan on the heat and stirred. She watched with her head in her hand. The chocolate permeated the room. "It smells good."

"Wait until you taste." When the chocolate had melted he poured the mixture back into mugs and dropped in some marshmallows. "Here it is." He handed her a mug then walked 'round to take a seat next to her.

She took a sip and sighed. Heaven.

"What do you think?"

"Jus what the doctor ordered."

He laughed. "You're an easy woman to please."

Tess took another sip. "Why are you up late?"

"Working. All I seem to do is work."

"And play hard. At least the tabloids like to say you do."

"I know." Silence descended between them. Tess didn't feel uncomfortable. She liked him talking, and she wanted to know more about the man she'd married.

"How much is true?" she asked.

"What?" He glanced her way.

"The stories the press run, how much is true?"

"No one has ever asked me that before."

She waited for him to speak.

"Some of it is true. I've had plenty of women in my bed, but it's not how they portray it."

"How do you mean?"

"The women I've dated have wanted me for something. My reputation, my money. They get something out of it."

"While you get the pleasure of their bodies?" she asked.

He frowned. "Yes, that's about it."

Tess took another sip of the cooling liquid. "It sounds like a very lonely life."

"It was the life I led."

"Do you ever want love? A family? The stuff you read about in books?"

Duncan sighed putting his mug down. "I'd like to be a father one day. I've spent so much of my life in the office I want to have someone to give it to when I'm done. Love? I don't know. It has been such a foreign concept to me. I figured I could live without it."

"What about your family?"

"I'd rather not go into it."

"Okay."

"What about you, Tess? Do you want love and all of the romance thing?" he asked.

She smiled. "Yes." Tess debated on telling him everything she wanted. She'd held so much back of herself that she didn't want to keep anything else inside. "I've spent most of my life alone. I'd love to have someone to love and for them to love me back. Children would be wonderful. Daughters and sons would be amazing. I always pictured myself having a big family. It's amazing how our life pans out."

She finished off her mug of hot chocolate. "That was delicious."

"You're not tired," he said, taking the cup from her.

"Not a bit."

"Come on, let's go and watch a movie."

Duncan hadn't ridiculed her hopes or dreams. He'd taken her into the sitting room, and they'd sat together watching a movie.

Tess came out of her thoughts as the jet settled. She gazed at the man beside her. He was the same man she married, but there was something different about him. Duncan felt more real to her.

Duncan watched as she got lost in her own little world. He wondered if she was remembering last night. If it had been any other woman who asked him about his wealth he'd have pegged them down as a gold-digger. Tess was different. Every time his wealth was mentioned she looked more nervous around him. He knew she was uncomfortable with his riches and her lack thereof.

When he'd sat down with her father and saw a glimpse of the real Tess he knew family meant more to her than money. His conversation with her the night before had confirmed any doubts. She wanted people in her life to love. Tess had been without love all of her life. Erik, her father, didn't like his daughter. Duncan never thought in his whole life he'd be so relieved to have someone in his company who never thought about money. Her conversation always surrounded life, love, and beauty. Money meant very little to his wife.

Tess was as refreshing as the Italian sun.

Before long they were on the ground and safely making their way to the huge villa. He saw Tess looking at everything. There was too much for her to see in one quick glance. He looked forward to exploring every part of this country with her. She curled into his side as they walked the short distance from the garden into the house.

Normally, Duncan hated women pawing at him. He wrapped his arm around Tess's back then continued up with a sense of pride. Each time she came to him for comfort was a big achievement to him.

You're not thinking about seduction.

You love her, Duncan.

Admit it. You want more from her than revenge on a dead man.

Once again he cut off his thoughts the moment they entered the house.

They were greeted by his wonderful plump housekeeper, Sofia. Duncan smiled as her infectious laughing smile and welcoming arms greeted him. She hugged Duncan close, giving him a squeeze and then turned her attention to Tess.

He saw Sofia assess her, and then she wrapped her arms around his wife. Sofia accepted her. He saw Tess loved every minute of the warm welcome. She smiled back and encouraged the warmth in Sofia's arms.

Duncan saw the delight of the welcome written in Tess's eyes. He noticed she gravitated towards older people. Tess looked so happy to be with Sofia. It made him wonder how much she craved a mother. By the way she kept accepting affection from Grace and Sofia, Duncan knew there was more to her feelings about her mother than met the eye.

"You're such a beautiful woman, and you've got meat on your bones. My faith in mankind has been restored," Sofia said, cupping Tess's cheeks and kissing her lips.

"Thank you." Tess blushed. He caught her hand, then pulled her closer giving her his own kiss. Sofia chuckled and clapped her hands. Duncan let Tess go, her blush turning a deeper shade of red.

“She’s exquisite, Duncan. A brilliant find for a wife, and she has lovely hips, fit to give you many strong babies. I’m only disappointed I didn’t get an invite to the wedding.” Sofia teased him in Italian. He saw the confusion in Tess’s eyes. Duncan would tell her what Sofia said later.

“Our romance happened so fast, Sofia. I didn’t want to wait a minute longer to make her my woman.”

“Yes, I can see. She’s perfect, Duncan. I can tell she has a good heart. Keep this one safe.”

“I’ll do my best.”

Sofia was on his side. She led the way into the kitchen.

He leaned down to Tess when Sofia’s back was turned.

“Sofia mentioned how beautiful you are. That’s what she was saying.” He purposely didn’t tell her about the hips and babies part of her comment. This trip was to get her to fall in love with him, not to hate him. Women and weight made a touchy subject. He liked Tess the way she was. He didn’t want her to change for him. Besides, babies were a huge step, even if he did plan to have his seed planted in her body very soon. First he wanted her to love him.

That was what he had planned for her on this honeymoon, sunshine, happiness, and loving.

Duncan told Sofia in Italian grabbing her attention once more. “She was a rare find indeed.” He kept a hold of Tess not wanting to let her go.

“I’m so pleased you came back. Will you be visiting Miranda?” Sofia asked in Italian. Duncan stroked Tess’s shoulder. She leaned closer snuggling against his chest. Duncan saw Sofia’s eyes soften. “Does she know about your family?”

He shook his head. “I don’t want her to know.” Sofia had been a member of his mother’s household before his father moved Miranda in. “She’s got her own bad experiences with her own parents.”

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“My lips are sealed, dear boy. So much drama. No woman could keep up.”

Duncan knew what she meant. It was one of the only areas of his life he didn’t like to think about. He’d cut his father out of his life for good. He’d been the only child to come from his father.

“So, I’ll let you know where everything is and get you both settled,” Sofia said, including Tess in the conversation.

“You’re leaving?”

“Honey, I have my own life to lead. Also, you’re newly wed, and you don’t need an old woman like me spoiling the fun. I’ve taken care of everything for you to stay here without wandering out.”

Duncan appreciated everything Sofia had done for him. She worked so hard and made sure he’d have a good time whenever he visited.

“I’ll be a phone call away if ever you need me. Now, stop stalling.”

Sofia took Tess’s hand pulling her away from him. He missed Tess the moment she was gone.

He followed them into the kitchen. Hearing Tess’s reactions was wonderful. She was a true delight to him.

Chapter Fifteen

After another few words from Sofia, the older woman took her hand pulling her away from Duncan. She liked holding onto him. He was a safety net. When he was around she felt protected by him. He'd never tried to physically hurt her. Even as her excitement grew from being in a country she'd fallen in love with from a girl, she still wanted to be safe. Duncan gave her that. Sofia led the way into the villa's kitchen. It must have been the size of her apartment from the vast size. It made her wonder what was in all the other rooms inside the villa.

Her hobby was cooking, and she loved looking at kitchens when she went to the DIY stores. The kitchen was filled with all the top of the line products. Tess heard Duncan explain everything was purchased from the surrounding towns.

"It's wonderful," Tess said. She gazed round the large room and felt at home. She knew cooking would be a dream. The kitchen made her think it was fit for a family. A nice large family with lots of love.

Tess was taken to the fridge, the pantry, and given more information on all the food available that needed to be eaten. Then Sofia prepared cold cuts of meat, a variety of cheeses, and some fresh baked bread to soften their building appetite. Tess loved the food, and Duncan ate all of his helping and then went for a second and even a third. Tess couldn't stop herself giggling like a little girl at the way he was behaving. The moment they'd stepped off his aircraft he'd been different. There was an air of ease about him. He looked more relaxed than she'd ever seen him. He responded in kind by laughing as well.

The experience was wonderful. Tess was unable to recall ever feeling so happy.

Once they were all cleared and well fed to wait for the supper, Duncan took her for a tour, leaving Sofia to finish preparing the night's meal. Duncan had informed her tonight's meal was a surprise. When she asked what she should expect, he'd given her an indulgent chuckle, kissed her head, and said to wait and see.

"Sofia will be spending the night here, and then tomorrow she'll be walking back home," Duncan said.

"She's a lovely woman. I'm so pleased to have met her." He took her hand once again. A thrill of excitement shot through her entire body. The chemistry between them was undeniable. She hoped they were able to work past their issues. Her feelings for Duncan were really starting to grow.

Tess feared what she'd end up feeling for Duncan. There was a side of him she didn't like, his business side. Then there was the person he appeared to be now, the kind man who smiled without expecting something. This man she liked. She wondered which man was the real Duncan James.

The house was amazing and breathtaking. From the decoration alone she knew there was no expense spared in all the rooms. Everything, from the art to the furniture, was there for a reason. Tess loved everything. She knew there had been a lot of love dedicated to the house. Duncan must have really fallen for the villa. His mark was in every room.

"Did you decorate yourself?" she asked.

“Yes. I didn’t want anyone having any part in it. It took some time, but I got what I wanted.”

“Your house is beautiful. Your time and attention really show.”

“Thank you.”

The beautiful pieces of art that decorated the walls were all different but all splendid. They ranged from self portraits to landscapes to passionate lovers entwined. Every detail was designed to capture the eye and keep it. The explicit art work wasn’t vulgar but portrayed as beautifully as possible. The male and female forms wrapped into one.

Tess felt her blood heating. The lovers looked so attuned to each other.

“Do you know the lovers?” she asked. She felt the heat spread into her cheeks. Why couldn’t she go a day without blushing around this man?

“No, I don’t. But I know the artist, and I know he’s incredible. The way he shows the lust in the picture is magnificent. To me, it looks like there is no one else in the world alive for them. They are devoted to one another. It is so passionate but modest at the same time. The artist has made less, more.”

Tess could only agree. As they made their way upstairs, Duncan stroked her hand where he held it, filling Tess with happiness. She felt a bond between them beginning to form. Duncan kept so much of himself locked away. This man wasn’t the same one she’d married. This man was deeper than money.

This man she could easily fall in love with.

If not for their predicament, her father’s thievery, they could have had a real chance together.

You still can if you only look beyond the problems.

Tess wanted to love someone so much, but she was scared to finally let go.

“I’m pleased you like my home,” he said, pulling her out of her troubled thoughts.

“You’re different when you’re here.”

He paused turning to face her.

“Is this a good different or a bad different?” he asked. Duncan reached out to push some of her hair off her face. His attentiveness pleased her. He stroked a line from her forehead to her lips. She stopped breathing as he ran a thumb over her bottom lip.

“It’s good,” she said. “Which one of you is real?”

“You’ll have to find out.” He took a kiss then continued on with his tour.

When they entered the master suite Tess wondered how he’d decorate the main room. Duncan wasn’t like the man she’d come to know. The tabloids had lied about him, and he’d succumbed to the reputation. She didn’t want to spoil the moment they were sharing. Tess felt so close to him. She wanted to press a hand to her lips where they tingled from his kiss. His gentleness was a contrast to the powerful man he portrayed. She wanted to get to know this side of him.

He opened the door to the master bedroom. She was surprised by how sensational the room looked. The king-sized bed dominated the room. The luxury of the room wasn’t lost even with a large bed. The bed was covered with silk sheets. They looked beautiful and soft. The pillows were plump and inviting.

She looked round and saw doors that opened onto the patio outside overlooking the vast gardens. A slight chill permeated the air from air conditioning. Tess followed Duncan as he tugged on her arms. There was an incredible en-suite bathroom with a glorious open bathtub and a separate power shower, two sinks, and luxuriousness in every corner.

Tess loved it and wanted to share it with the man at her side. She didn’t want to lose him. The desire she felt for him increased ten-fold. Tess felt the pull deep within her body. She sensed his

desire and the need he had for her. It was strange how quickly the air changed. He stared at her, his gaze dark as he looked from the top of her head down her body to her toes. Tess didn't feel scared but anxious. Her mind and body were becoming attuned to this man. Her heart was melting as her mind opened up to wanting more from him.

She was beginning to want to have a family with this man.

It no longer mattered about the shortness of time. She knew what she wanted. Duncan was proving to her there was more to him than met the eye. She was more than willing to take a leap of faith with him.

They stood close, neither moving away nor closing the small distance. For a few moments it was a battle of wills, but to Tess it felt like a lifetime. She wanted to do something, but she didn't know what to do.

Then it suddenly hit her.

I want him to kiss me, to take me. I want to finally be his wife in the truest sense of the word.

Tess wanted to forget about the disaster of her wedding night. They both could make a fresh start, here and now. She was willing to take a chance. Was he?

Duncan watched Tess closely to see her reaction to his home and the room he hoped to share with her. He recalled with great detail the pains he'd gone to have this place looking the way he wanted. It had taken many years and plenty of tears to get what he wanted. He felt the results of all his efforts by her amazed expression.

He didn't want her thinking another woman had been here before because he'd never brought any woman here. This was his domain, and that is how he'd kept it. Tess was the first woman he'd ever let see a part of himself he'd kept hidden. Why he'd done it, he didn't know.

Because you want her to love Duncan James the man. Not what the press or anyone else portrays you as.

He'd wanted to share his home with Tess. She deserved to see the beauty in the world. Duncan wanted to give her something no other man could, a chance for her to have all of her dreams. He'd got plenty of money and the means to give her the world.

"You're really rich," she said. A deeper blush stained her cheeks. He loved seeing her innocence. It reminded him of everything she'd given him. For a short time when he was with her, he could forget about his plan for vengeance. He could embrace everything life had to offer.

"Yes, I am. I think it's part of who I am. Money is the only part of me." He closed the distance between them. They stood close together. Duncan lifted her hand and stared at the two rings on her finger.

They'd come by unscrupulous means, but they were part of them. Erik, his own father didn't matter to him in that moment. Tess was with him, and she'd proven to be more than money.

The air around them became charged.

Duncan saw a difference inside Tess. There was a fight going on inside her. He saw the arousal building up with the way her nipples poked against the fabric of her shirt. Duncan anticipated her next move. His own desire was building. The way her jeans and shirt moulded against her body had him in a sweat to take them off. He knew how full and luscious her body was under his own.

His cock pulsed, his semen leaking out of the tip.

All he wanted to do was grab her, press her against the wall, and fuck her hard. Her body was so fucking hot.

He let her hand go to run his fingers through his head.

Her body appeared to be moving on pure instinct. Duncan didn't know what to do if she came on to him. Should he reject her or sate both their appetites?

Tess closed the small distance between them.

Duncan could not believe what she was doing.

He truly believed she would have backed off, but within the next instant her lips came up to meet his.

They didn't touch other than her lips against his.

Her lips trembled against his. They were smooth and plump. He felt like punching the air in victory. She'd initiated the first physical response.

Keep it in your pants, big boy. You may have taken the virgin, but you need to prepare her for your possession.

Duncan enjoyed the moment not allowing anything to spoil her kiss.

He felt the fire building within him and knew he needed to stop; otherwise his plans would be ruined.

He struggled to resist her. She was in his arms, her lips soft and pliant.

She's yours for the taking. Take her.

Duncan needed her. His hands moved up running his fingers through her hair. He couldn't *not* touch her. Pulling her close he took over, showing her the passion he felt towards her. His lips were hungry for her. He demanded her submission. Tess didn't back off. She wrapped her arms around his neck holding on. He held her close crushing her full breasts against his chest. Duncan wanted their clothes gone.

He wanted her naked tits pressed against his chest. Duncan needed her womanly curves wrapped around him as he sank his dick inside her slick cunt. All the erotic images filled his mind, including her cream dripping around his cock.

He wanted her naked, squirming as he pulsed within her gorgeous body. Duncan took her moans matching them with his own. His body was rock hard, his pre-cum leaking out a continuous stream out of the tip.

He knew he had to stop. If he didn't stop he'd take their love-making too far. He'd promised himself her sweetest seduction. Tess wouldn't trust him if every time he got his hands on her, he was fucking her like some uncontrollable animal.

Back off, Duncan. Take your hands off her lush body.

No!

Yes.

Duncan battled with himself. Her moans were driving him crazy with the need to take her over and over again.

With reluctance he kissed her one more time then pulled away.

Just looking at her flushed cheeks along with the rise and fall of her breasts as she took deep breath, killed him.

Her lips were red and swollen from his kisses. They looked so plump and enticing that they tempted him to give in to his battle. He could have her naked beneath him within a matter of moments.

"I'll come and get you for supper later. I'll give you time to relax and freshen up. You must feel some jet-lag."

With a deep breath he took a step back putting as much space between them as possible. The disappointment on her face killed him. She was the first woman to give him so much.

"I-is I-it something I did?" she asked. Her voice wobbled, tears ready to erupt.

Duncan cursed. He could have kicked himself at his lack of tact. Every time he got somewhere with his woman he made mistakes.

Get a grip, man.

He pulled her into his arms wrapping himself around her. His face pressed to her neck breathing in her fresh female smell that drove him crazy.

She was stiff, and he didn't like it.

Tess needed love.

He cupped her cheek forcing her to look at him. The tears stayed in her eyes refusing to fall. He licked his lips. He'd never been so deeply affected by a woman's tears.

"The next time I make love to you I want it to be perfect for you. I want you to have romance, flowers, everything a woman deserves. I'm going to spend all my time in pleasuring you. When I take you it will be the most amazing experience for you. The first time between us needs to be all about you. Tonight is not the right time, but when it is, you'll know."

"I'm ready now."

He sighed. How sweet her words were. "I'm not, Tess. I want you, I won't deny that. Feel this." He pushed his cock against her. Her eyes widened in surprise. "You need time, baby. Right now, I'd take you hard and rough. I wouldn't be gentle. When I'm ready I'll take you. Make no mistake about it."

Her sigh of pleasure encouraged him. He leaned down to give her a sweet kiss on the lips before he left her to freshen up. It took all of his willpower to walk away.

Chapter Sixteen

Tess touched her lips again. His words and the gentleness of his kiss would stay with her forever.

A few clever words and a kiss and you were melting at his feet.

She couldn't stop her feelings. No matter how much she tried to fight her response to him she wanted him with a desperation hard to resist.

Her lips tingled. Her breasts were sensitive. She felt an ache deep down within her body. Her clit was hard, swollen with blood. She reached a hand between her thighs to play with the little bud.

A moan escaped her as the sensation had her gasping for breath. She was so turned on. The cream between her thighs couldn't be mistaken for tap water. The shower did not help matters as it only heightened all the sensitivity within her. Each droplet of water felt like a caress across her skin.

She wanted Duncan. The man she had thought was absolutely mean was turning out to be a really caring romantic man. She tried to think of all the problems she'd mentally listed about him, but all she could think and feel were the moments he let go within her arms. There was more to him, and she was willing to take all of him for those precious parts of him.

It had been a short time they'd known each other, but for Tess she'd be able to wipe all the bad out of their situation for a chance at happiness.

Was she that desperate for love? Tess made a decision. She'd no longer be angry at him. Their circumstances were not normal. They would make the best of it. Her father had played a part in this. She'd never been a bitter person before Duncan. She refused to spend a moment hating anyone.

She looked forward to his company.

With her shower finished, she turned off the water, then grabbed a towel to dry herself.

Tess walked into the main room and collapsed on top of the bed with the white fluffy towel wrapped around her. The bed moulded to her shape. Just by lying on the surface she knew it was lovely and comfortable. Her happiness increased.

Any more of this delightful treatment and she'd turn into a pampered goddess.

Tess rolled over to watch the sun set through the glass of the doors leading out to the patio of the bedroom.

Sometime later she dressed in a simple yellow summer dress. Wearing night clothes for supper seemed wrong. She left her wild hair down to curve round her shoulders and slip down her back. There was no need for make-up. Tess stared into the mirror and felt pure and natural. The Italian atmosphere relaxed her. The knock at the door confirmed it was time to go to dinner.

When she opened the door she was taken aback by the man who stood over the threshold. She'd grown accustomed to Duncan in a business suit looking stiff and authoritative. She stared, unable to look away from the change confronting her. He was so handsome even in casual jeans and a plain white shirt. They suited him in more ways than one. Tess thought he looked sexier in the denim than in the delicate fabric of his suit pants. Her thoughts turned to wild nights, making hot passionate love under the moonlight. Duncan made her lose control of her senses.

Her head rested against the side of the door, and a contented sigh escaped from her lips. She'd never felt so relaxed, not even in her own home.

"Are you ready for dinner?" he asked.

Words escaped her, so she nodded her head. He moved away from the door. She followed him down the hall, linking her arm through his as they descended the stairs. She stood by his side and fought with the desire to stare at him.

“Ask away,” he said.

“What?”

“I know you want to say something. Say it, Tess.” He stopped on the last stair turning to her.

“You look handsome and kind.” She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

“You do that a lot when you’re nervous. Tucking your hair behind your ear. You have nothing to be nervous about.” Duncan took her hand, kissing her fingers.

“I’m sorry. I can’t think when you’re so close.”

“I’m pleased to know you’re as affected by my company as I am by yours.”

She smiled. “I’m used to seeing you in a suit.”

“I have to look all powerful and dull. I run a business and rarely have fun.” He pulled a face making her laugh. “May I escort you to the kitchen?”

“Yes. You may.” She giggled as he led the way into the kitchen.

Sofia was stood stirring a wooden spoon inside a pan at the stove. Tess was bombarded by so many wonderful scenes. As soon as Sofia saw them she shrieked and pushed them to the romantically set dining table.

Candles and flowers decorated the table along with cutlery laid out for them. The cutlery included several knives and forks, and Tess felt a wave of panic grip her. She’d never had meals with courses that needed special knives and forks to eat with.

Duncan touched her hand steering her mind away from the supposed protocol of the table.

“You look wonderful.” His voice was deep and soothing.

He held the chair out for her. She accepted his invitation and took her seat as he pushed the chair under. He leaned down brushing her off her neck to kiss her. She shivered as goose-bumps erupted on her flesh.

Tess felt incredibly self-conscious. No man had ever lavished so much attention on her. She took a sip of the sparkling water to distract her thoughts. Then she looked at the glass before looking at him.

“You remembered?”

“I wouldn’t want to ruin everything. You went to great lengths to tell me how much you hated alcohol.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I brought something for you.” She stared at him not knowing what to say as he pulled a small box out of thin air handing it to her over the table.

She took it from his waiting hands and opened it. Again he took her breath away, for inside lay a dazzling diamond necklace. She knew it matched the engagement ring. She glanced up to see him watching her closely.

“It’s beautiful, Duncan. I don’t want to sound ungrateful, but I have my wedding ring. You don’t need to buy me jewellery. I’m happy with everything else.” She lifted her finger to show him as well as gesturing around them at the home.

He shook his head. He took the box from her, extracting the necklace from its case. He took her hand kissing the wedding ring.

“I wanted to get you something. It would please me for you to wear this. I went to great lengths to get you the replica diamond in the necklace. May I put it on?” he asked.

"I didn't mean to offend you."

"I know, Tess. I think it will take a great deal of time for us to grow accustomed to each other. May I?" He held the necklace up. She nodded her head. If it pleased him to see the item around her neck then she'd wear it for him.

He got up from his seat and moved round the back of her. She glanced down at both rings on her finger as he pushed her hair out of the way. His fingers touched the back of her neck. The clasp fixed in place. The diamond lay in the valley between her breasts. His hands held onto her shoulders, his breath beside her ear.

"I want you to wear this when we make love," he said against her ear.

Her breath caught in her throat.

"I can't wait to see it resting against your breasts as I take you." Duncan moved away leaving her panting for more.

She picked up the diamond and twirled it in her fingers. The light caught the diamond and glistened in the room. Tears lodged in her throat at the beauty of his gift. He took his seat then grabbed her hand to kiss her open palm. His thumb brushed the pulse in her wrist.

"Thank you for wearing it."

"It's beautiful. I wish I'd gotten you something," she said, hating the fact she couldn't think of a single thing to give the man who had everything.

"I've got you. I'm happy, Tess. There is nothing else I'd want."

She swallowed trying to be rid of the lump in her throat, but it seemed so tight.

The gesture and words he spoke were tender and romantic. Any ice or doubt remaining around her heart melted away. She was seeing Duncan James in a whole new light. He was her husband, and God help her, she believed she was in love with him already.

"I know we didn't have the proper beginning most married couples have, but I want to do everything right. I don't want you to doubt my intentions of making this a real marriage. I want us to get to know each other." He kissed her fingers again. It was if he could not help but touch her. "This honeymoon is for us to get to know the real person inside."

She nodded and took his hand to kiss his fingers the same way he'd done to her. She noticed he wore a simple wedding band. Her finger ran over the plain gold thinking she should have been the one to get his wedding band. Tess decided it would be something she would buy him. No matter how long her search took, she'd buy him a wedding band out of her own money. She was about to say as much to him when they were interrupted. The moment was lost.

Sofia came out with small bowls filled with soup. On closer inspection Tess noticed it was a tomato and pasta soup, simple food but prepared with love by a woman who cared. She took a spoonful, and it tasted amazing.

This is what she'd always dreamed about. To be in Italy, eating food, and being in the company of someone she was beginning to feel for. Duncan ticked all of her boxes at that present time.

"After tonight, Sofia will leave the cooking to you."

She smiled, not wanting to spoil the moment with more questions. Instead, she dug into the glorious tasting food.

Bread was dotted about the table in small baskets. Tess took a huge chunk of ciabatta and dipped it into her soup.

"This sounds really strange, but this to me is perfect. I've always dreamt about visiting here and having something like this. I remember telling my Dad on one of my birthdays what I'd wished for. He'd laughed at my idealism and told me to start dreaming about something else. I'm so pleased I

never gave up that dream. Thank you, Duncan. This means so much to me that you can't even begin to imagine," she said. Thinking about Erik didn't affect her. She recalled the moment clearly in her mind, but she wouldn't be pulled down by the past.

She felt so happy eating spoonfuls of soup, hoping for the moment to never end. Duncan made her feel as if she could open up about anything. Every once in a while she gazed down at her necklace. It was so beautiful. This real moment was more romantic than in her imagination.

"Well, I hope you enjoy this meal. Sofia is an amazing cook, and of course she'd be more than happy to cook with you. All you need to do is ask for her company. She loves food, shopping, and everything that requires her to spend money. Maybe you could learn some tricks from her?"

The soup was done with, and the bowls taken away by Sofia. She didn't allow any help. Duncan poured Tess some more water into her glass as he took another glass of wine. Sofia came back minutes later with the main course, spaghetti carbonara, which was pasta with pancetta, eggs, and cream. Tess loved every mouthful. Duncan kept talking as they ate. Their conversation went all over the place. They talked food, culture, and politics. Neither gave an opinion that would start an argument. She listened to him as he expressed his passions along with the things he hated.

Sofia came in to take their plates as they talked. Tess didn't want it to end.

Duncan changed from wine to water after his second glass.

The conversation went from politics, to celebrities, to finally a game where they asked all of their favourite things. She'd read about it in several books as a way people got to know each other.

"What was your favourite pet?" Tess asked.

"I never had a pet."

"Really, no pet dog, or cat, or even a hamster?" Tess was amazed. Erik had allowed her to have pets. She believed he did it to make up for her lack of a mother. Her pets had ranged from dogs and cats to pigs and chickens. She smiled when she remembered the doubtful look on her father's face when she had asked for a pet chicken so she could call him "Pecker".

"No, no pet."

"Why?"

"Let's move on and not talk about my childhood. What is your favourite movie?"

Tess answered him watching as he chuckled. She asked him his movie. He didn't have one.

"From the sounds of it, Mr. James, you don't like a lot of things," she said.

"There is a great deal I like, but I can find more useful and far pleasurable things to do with my time, Mrs. James." He gave her a look that she knew meant he was talking about sex.

Feeling bold, she circled her glass then smiled. "Okay, Mr. James, what is your favourite position?" She ignored the blush in her cheeks or the cream soaking her panties as she stared at him.

Just as Duncan was about to answer, Sofia came out with dessert, a sweet delicious chocolate pudding. Now Tess knew she'd died and gone to heaven. There were few things she loved more than chocolate. Sofia placed hers in front of her. She dived into her portion and ate with relish even though she felt completely full.

It was much better than all the chocolate puddings she'd eaten over the years.

She finished her portion within minutes, sitting back in her chair, closing her eyes and sighing in absolute bliss. So much food and she'd consumed more than she was accustomed to. She loved every minute of the meal. She was unconsciously rubbing her stomach. When she heard Sofia clearing the plates, she opened her eyes. Tess thanked the older woman for the food. Sofia looked like she'd begin to purr at the praise. She didn't let the other woman go until she'd given her full compliments. The meal had been perfect. She couldn't think of a more enjoyable day to spend on her honeymoon.

“Thank you, Duncan. That was wonderful,” she said to him. She smiled at him showing her delight. She was so happy and peaceful.

“You’re welcome, Tess.” He returned her smile with one of his own. They retired to his sitting room across the hall from where they had just dined. The room was dark. He flicked a switch brightening the place up. Tess felt a little uncomfortable being in a room he used for business. She accepted the small brandy from him and sat in the corner of one of the sofas. It was not surprising that the sofa was uncomfortable. Tess sipped her brandy trying not to think about how different this room was from all the others in the villa.

“Do you like your brandy?” Duncan interrupted her thoughts. She looked down into her glass to see that she’d almost finished, which was strange as she could not remember the taste.

She nodded her head giving him back the glass.

“You don’t like the room, do you?” His mocking smile and question caught her unawares.

Tess rubbed her arms. “Erm, it’s different from all your other rooms. No, I don’t like it. With the other rooms I saw your love and passion, but this room feels cold,” she said.

He chuckled. “I’m not keen on this room either. I rarely come into it,” he said, looking around the room as he did so.

“Why don’t you change it?” she asked, watching frown lines appear on his face at her suggestion. “Never mind.”

“I’ve never really thought about changing it. It’s something I don’t think about. It was the last room I decorated. Something happened that made any love towards this room disappear.”

She didn’t press him for more information.

“Why didn’t you get your decorator or interior designer who did your apartment to travel here to do something with this room?” she asked.

Duncan turned away from her to refill his glass.

“Her contract ran out, and she doesn’t like going overseas.” His evasive response answered Tess’s question immediately. Duncan had been sleeping with his interior designer. Tess felt a piercing ache in her chest at the thought of Duncan with another woman. She handed her empty glass over, surprised again to see that her hand was steady and excused herself to her room.

“I’m sorry,” he said as she got to the door.

Tess turned to see him staring at her. “Don’t be sorry, Duncan. I know you had a life before me. You’re older than I am, and I certainly didn’t expect you to live like a monk. I’m tired. I’ll see you in the morning,” she said, turning away and walking up to her room.

The moment between them had been lost. She wanted to be alone.

Once she was tucked into her bed, wearing nothing as it was too hot to wear anything, she began to think about her marriage. The meal she had just shared with Duncan would be forever cemented in her memories. It was the first meal she could remember enjoying in some time. Then she thought about his relationship with his interior designer. She felt extreme amounts of jealousy at the thought of another woman spending time with Duncan, let alone in his bed as a sexual partner.

She rolled over to look out of her window, up at the moon hoping to find some way to explain her feelings.

Minutes rolled by and still no answer.

She decided she would not think about it and just enjoy her time in Italy with Duncan, and whatever happens would happen, and whatever wouldn’t, wouldn’t. Once she had decided that she drifted off to a rather peaceful sleep.

Duncan watched her leave his sitting room. The moment they'd been sharing was lost. He turned away to fill his glass up. How could he tell his current wife about his volatile relationship with the interior designer? Yvonne, the woman he'd been fucking prior to his marriage, would tear Tess apart if he gave her a chance.

Mentioning Yvonne's name in his mind made him suddenly remember that he still had not broken off ties with his current mistress. He silently cursed himself. How could he have forgotten his current mistress? The last two weeks had been a blur to him. His mind had been preoccupied with Tess and his father's will. He brushed it out of his mind like a hand moving over the whole problem making it look invisible.

He took a seat in one of the chairs hoping to forget about everything bad in his life. Listening to Tess during dinner had made him want her in ways he'd never wanted a woman.

She was slowly and surely getting under his skin.

Duncan began to examine his own feelings towards Tess. He enjoyed her company and found her interesting. He'd never found any other woman interesting before, unless he was wining and dining them to get into his bed. Once the novelty wore off he would soon grow bored and find another to satisfy his appetites.

He had never felt guilty. However, tonight thinking about his previous encounters left him feeling guilty and shallow, especially since he'd found out the hard way about Tess's virginity. He had nothing like that to offer her. In his time he'd had an abundance of women, none of them virgins.

The only thing he had to offer was his money. Duncan got up out of the chair. He went to the spirits and poured himself a generous brandy to try to help himself deal with his problems. He knew he needed to get in touch with Yvonne in order to tell her their relationship was no longer going on. Having Yvonne in the background wouldn't be right for Tess. He wanted to concentrate on nothing but his wife.

He wanted to make her happy. Duncan was willing to do anything to make that happen. Starting tomorrow, he would be taking her for a shopping trip in Milan. Women loved shopping, and with no expense spared, he was sure to woo her.

He gulped down his brandy and went to his bed, which happened to be next door to Tess. He opened the adjoining door to check to make sure she was all right. Her body encased in moonlight gave him the perfect view of her. The night goddess with all of her womanly curves lay in the centre of his bed. He felt his body respond to her beauty. Duncan shut the door so he would not disturb her, then went to his own bed.

His dreams were filled with a dark-haired, fair-skinned curvy woman seducing him. Tess, in his dreams, took him to new heights that no other female had ever done, claiming not only his body but his heart as well.

Chapter Seventeen

Tess sat at the counter drinking a cup of coffee. Sofia had left a list of instructions on how to work the machines. Tess had taken her coffee with cream and sugar. For breakfast she'd rummaged in the fridge and settled for toast with a side of exotic fruits. Tess ate most of the fruits. After the dinner last night she needed something light to balance it all out.

She knew Duncan was already up as she'd heard him moving around in his office as she passed. The house didn't feel the same without the older woman. Tess missed her company. She got up and began exploring the kitchen. There was more than enough food to last a week.

Checking her watch she wondered how long Duncan would be. She didn't want to barge into his office if he was working. The honeymoon couldn't take place without him. She wanted to go out exploring. Tess knew it would be better to go with him than try to figure out a map or anything. She poured herself another coffee then took a seat.

She ran her fingers through her hair then began plaiting the length to try to keep it at bay.

Duncan walked into the kitchen ten minutes later.

"I thought you'd let me know you were up. I figured you were still sleeping," he said. He poured himself a cup of coffee then added his own cream and sugar. He lifted the note Sofia had left. She saw him smiling as he walked towards her.

"Sofia likes you. Not many women get a note offering her services and help," Duncan said to her as he sat down beside her.

"I like her, too." Sofia was an easy topic to talk about. There was no one who could hate that woman.

"I can tell. You probably remind her off her own daughter," he said, sipping his coffee. Tess's gaze wandered down to where his shirt gaped at his chest. He wore another pair of jeans and a light blue shirt.

"She never mentioned a daughter to me," Tess said.

"She doesn't like to talk about her daughter. She died of cancer when Sofia and her husband had not long married."

"How horrible." Her heart and sympathy went to the woman.

"It was a sad time. They got over it with time and had a few more children. I remember Giada. She was a little spitfire." Duncan smiled.

"How old would she have been?" Tess asked.

"The same age as me. Giada and I grew up together. Sofia use to work for my mother and father."

"Now she works for you?"

"My parents' marriage didn't work out."

"I'm sorry. It must have been awful to have lost someone so young."

"It was. Giada was amazing. I adored her. She was the first girl I fell for. At eight years old I hadn't seen much of the world."

“You don’t strike me as very Italian.”

He took a sip of coffee. “I’m not Italian. I mean, my father was half-Italian, and he owned a villa not far from here. There is a lot of history, but I don’t want to bore you with the details.”

They sat in silence, neither speaking.

Tess didn’t push him for more. “I never knew my mother,” she said.

“What?”

“My dad wouldn’t tell me anything about her. I don’t know what she looks like or who she was. When friends at school asked about her, I never knew what to say.” She glanced down at her fingers, not knowing why she was sharing such a private part of herself with him.

“Didn’t your father tell you anything?” he asked.

She shook her head. Tears sprang to her eyes at the bitter memories she recalled from being a girl. “No, nothing. I’ve asked, and all he says is it was a girl he knew. My birth certificate has the name Bessie Williams. He won’t tell me any more. I have no way of knowing who she is. I wish I knew her. There is so much I’d love to ask her. I don’t even know if she’s alive.”

“Do you want to know the truth? If your father told you, what would happen if it hurt you more?” Duncan reached out taking her hand.

“I don’t know. If she’s alive I’d like to know why she left me behind. What was her connection with my dad? I can’t even begin to think of everything I’d ask her.”

“Why didn’t you get a private investigator?” he asked.

“I can’t afford that kind of money. I never thought it would work, and I hoped my dad would tell me.”

“What if she did die?”

“Then I’m left not knowing.” She wiped the tears from her eyes. Duncan pulled her from her seat and into his lap. She cried into his shirt as he held her.

“Let it all out. I’ve got you,” he said.

After some time she pulled back wiping the last of the tears off her cheeks. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I didn’t want to make you cry.”

“I had to tell someone. I’ve spent most of my life locking it up.”

He took hold of her braid. “Cute.”

She chuckled. “It is the only way for me to tame my hair.”

“I like your hair. It’s wild and free how it’s supposed to be. Here, let me do the other.” He took the band from her fingers then ran his fingers through the strands of her hair.

“How did you learn to do a woman’s hair?”

“Giada taught me.”

“She taught you well.” He let her hair fall back in place.

“I’m taking you out shopping. I think a trip to Milan will be perfect.”

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“You don’t have to take me to Milan, Duncan. I’m happy here.” She took his hand in hers stroking his fingers.

His free hand caressed her leg. “I want to do this, Tess. Please, let me.”

“Why are you being so nice to me?”

“You’re my wife.”

Tess let him fly her out to Milan. He always got what he wanted, and she didn’t see a point in arguing with him. She enjoyed his company as he took her to each designer boutique. Most of the clothes she wouldn’t dream of wearing. He sat and waited while she tried on new clothes.

The whole experience delighted her. Duncan knew how to treat a woman. When women came on to him, he brushed them off as if they weren't important. Once they were done he booked them into a fancy upscale hotel. They shared a room and spent the whole night watching movies. She lay with her head in his lap.

Tess knew it was the start of a whole lot more.

The days passed. Duncan didn't mention leaving Italy, and Tess didn't ask. Her time was filled with delight, sight-seeing and exploring Italy and Rome. Duncan would fly them out to a lavish restaurant for a top dining experience, even though she'd have preferred to stay home. They visited the theatre and went on shopping expeditions. They ate by candlelight in Duncan's villa.

Duncan had thought he would have to leave her for a short time to sort out some emergency, but he was actually able to get it sorted out over the phone shut away in his study. His business was soon cleared up, and he came to apologise by taking her to another theatre and expensive dinner.

Tess fell in love, completely head over heels in love, with Duncan James. Her feelings for him were so unexpected but so welcome. She wanted to be near him constantly. Tess listened to all his troubles when he talked about them. She laughed when he teased her or told jokes. She loved the way he cared for her, the time he spent making sure she was okay. Her feelings were so strong she thought she'd burst with the emotion welling up inside her.

She knew she would tell him tonight. Some of his work had come to Italy. He'd told her they needed to attend a gathering of some kind, a charity ball where money was splashed everywhere. It was her first appearance out with him, and she wanted to make a good impression.

He'd bought her a beautiful red silk gown. Her curves looked subtle as the dress fell around her waist and her hips. The neck plunged in the centre. It had taken her several minutes to arrange so her breasts wouldn't tip out. She felt beautiful. Another silver studded diamond necklace danced around her neck with matching diamond ear rings. Her hair was pulled up in a loose bun, a red hair clip in her hair keeping everything in place. Small ringlets of hair escaped around her face to enhance her features.

Sofia had come to help her with the dress and hair. She'd left some time ago as she finished her make-up.

She knew Duncan was watching her from the doorway as she twirled in front of the mirror.

He made his presence known by coming up behind her and kissing her neck. He smiled at her in the reflection of the mirror. She loved it when he touched her, his arms holding her and protecting her.

"You look dazzling, a true beauty."

"Thank you for the dress. It's beautiful."

"I love giving you nice things. Are you sure you don't mind going tonight?" he asked.

"This is our first outing together. I think it will be good to show a united front."

"You're amazing," he said.

Tess felt her whole body zing to life, and goose-bumps erupted over her exposed flesh. Her nipples hardened to soft peaks. His hands landed lightly on her shoulders. His smoldering eyes looked at her in the mirror. She recognised his desire as it mirrored her own. She felt his arousal against her ass. Tess hoped he'd stop tormenting her and make love to her by the end of the night. The days they'd spent together had been magical.

She felt seduced. Her body was ready for him to claim.

"Every woman will envy you tonight," he said with a whisper.

She sighed, loving the feel of his body close to hers. Her heart pounded erratically in her chest. "Only because I'm with you and every other woman wants you."

"But *you* are my wife. No other woman can have me." He turned her head to the side and moulded his lips to hers taking and giving a passionate kiss. Duncan left no doubt of the meaning of his words.

Tess felt the love she had for this man growing deeper. He was no longer the horrible ogre she'd first met. Duncan James had become her white knight and the first man she'd ever loved. Her body craved for him to take her and possess her. Tess wanted him to claim her the only way he could.

He'd arranged for a limousine to pick them up. Duncan helped her with the wrap then followed her inside the limo.

"Are you nervous?" he asked.

"Only a little bit. It's not every day a girl gets to go to a ball." She locked her fingers on her lap.

Duncan chuckled. "You have nothing to fear. Everyone will love you." He took her hand kissing her fingers as he laid her hand back in his own lap.

"What happens if I embarrass you?"

"I'd have to care what the people think. Tess, this is not a social gathering. The people we're about to meet are not my friends."

"They're not?"

"No. Mark, the best man at our wedding, he's my friend. These people don't rate very high on my list," he said.

"Then why go at all?"

"It's good for business. There is a lot of stuff I have to do which is good for business. I don't always like it." He stroked the pulse in her wrist. She noticed he liked doing that. "The only part of tonight I find bearable is the fact I'll be leaving with you."

"I'm not going anywhere, Duncan. I'm here to stay."

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

She stared at him, knowing there was more meaning to his question.

"Yes, for as long as you want me, I'll stay."

"You're special to me, Tess." He leaned over and kissed her. She moaned. They'd been sharing kisses for several days. No matter how many times he kissed her, his kisses felt as wonderful as if they were the first time.

When he pulled away she stared into his eyes. "You're special to me, too."

"I better leave you alone. I'll mess up your make-up and hair. You look stunning."

They moved apart. She stared out the window. None of it registered as she was lost in her own little world. Her lips tingled. Gazing out of the window she saw her nipples rock hard and pressing against the dress. Her pussy was wet. She wanted Duncan. If he didn't take her soon she'd die of anticipation.

This is how women felt. She understood the passion now. She was experiencing it herself for the first time.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

She followed his gaze to see the paparazzi flashing their cameras at passing couples.

"Wow, are these guys everywhere?"

"I'm beginning to think they have some kind of tracking device. Anyway, they'll want to get a picture of you and me together. How do you feel about that?"

The limo pulled close to the curb. A man outside waited for a signal to enter. "I'm fine with it. Please, make sure I don't embarrass anyone. I couldn't stand to see my picture in the newspaper for everyone to ridicule."

Duncan laughed. "You're precious. I'll take care of you no matter what. Smile for the cameras."

The door opened, and she was swamped by all the attention. Cameras flashed at her. Duncan didn't let her go. He kept his arm wrapped around her at all times. When the time came for their picture to be taken as a couple, Duncan pulled her close and took her lips in a kiss.

She forgot about everything. He knew how to distract her.

Chapter Eighteen

Tess gasped at the delight of the building where the charity ball was being held. A luxurious place with dazzling lights and picturesque views, it was far grander than anything she imagined. The ball was up on the second floor looking down along a star-studded garden and a beautiful romantic fountain. Couples gathered around, drinking sparkling champagne, dancing or talking in groups. Duncan had his hand wrapped possessively around her waist guiding her to groups of couples. He introduced her as his wife. She heard the proud note in his voice as he spoke. His arm around her waist was comforting. When people fired questions at her, Duncan took over if he thought there was anything she couldn't handle. Within no time at all she became old news. Duncan never left her side as they moved around. Several times guests tried to separate them, but he held onto her, his fingers caressing her waist.

Tess felt like she was on cloud nine. After a time, everyone began to be nice and seemed to accept her as one of their own. She sipped one glass of champagne not bothering with anything else. Duncan smirked every time she took a sip. Tess struggled to contain her revulsion at the taste.

There was a difference in him. His attention along with each of his touches felt as if they were speared to something more.

She believed tonight Duncan would finally make love to her the way he should have done on their wedding night. Her nerves were firmly in place, but she couldn't wait. The temptation had been there since he'd said how good it could be between them.

Her body trembled with excitement, the anticipation making her feel slightly giddy. The champagne had nothing to do with the head-rush she felt. The way she was feeling was directed at the man beside her.

"Are you having fun?" Duncan leaned down to ask.

She looked into his intense eyes and smiled. She could not think of any words to string together.

"Y-yes," she said with a croak. Tess cringed at her response.

Tonight meant the world to her. Why couldn't she grow some balls for a change?

Tonight was supposed to be all about Tess. He wanted to please her completely. Duncan had gone to great lengths so he'd be able to show her what true lovemaking could be. Tess looked so beautiful, and he didn't want to scare her with his passions. He loved sex and wanted her to see how amazing it could be between two people.

He hadn't planned on leaving her for any time throughout their honeymoon, but when he'd remembered Yvonne was still in his life he'd flown back to end things. His original plan had been to keep Yvonne in his life. He hadn't believed his sexual needs would be met by Tess. After spending the last few days with her, he knew there was no other choice left. His first thought had been to fly back to end his relationship with Yvonne, which had seemed the better option than ending it with her over the phone.

Duncan knew Tess was getting to him. Before, he hadn't thought about others' feelings, but now he thought about them.

When he took Tess and made her his, he'd wanted to do so without Yvonne being in his life.

Duncan had told Tess he'd needed to fly back on some important business.

He'd been on the helipad ready to fly back home when an attack of conscience had stopped him from boarding the plane. Tess had been standing in the security of their home while the private plane waited to take off. How could he lie to her? Leave her to go and break it off with another woman? It was her honeymoon, and he didn't want to leave her alone to go and deal with another woman.

Instead of boarding the plane he'd gone inside and locked himself away in his office with the intent of calling Yvonne.

He sipped the champagne recalling the moment when she answered the phone. He'd hated every second of the conversation and knew he'd gotten away easy.

Duncan sat behind his desk with her number on the card she'd given him to be able to contact her at any time. She lived in an upscale New York place. He knew because he'd paid for her to live there. Her reputation as an interior designer had grown over the last few months, so now she could support herself.

Yvonne loved sex. She was compatible to him in appetite as she didn't require any emotion from him. Their relationship had lasted longer than he'd anticipated.

He thought about Tess seconds before making the call. She was changing him. He felt it inside himself. There was a time he wouldn't have cared about having Yvonne in the background as he was pursuing another woman. He wasn't Yvonne's only lover. The woman was too insatiable to have one man at her disposal.

For the first time in his life, Duncan felt really nervous. He wanted to be with Tess and not making a call to another woman. .

He picked up the phone and dialled Yvonne's number.

She answered on the first ring.

"Sweetheart, you called." Yvonne practically purred as her voice came over the line. His body didn't respond to the need he heard in her voice. For the first time ever his body did not respond to his mistress.

"I have missed you, Duncan. I have an ache which only you can fix." Yvonne was always more than willing to try something new. He knew she was trying to make him have phone sex with her.

"We need to talk, Yvonne." The sooner he dealt with her the sooner he could get back to his own woman in the next room.

"Is this about that woman you were with? Don't worry, sweetheart. I don't mind sharing? Or do we have to be more discreet? You know what I can do for you. How good I can make you feel." Her voice went deeper as if she was trying to play at keeping their affair a secret.

"That woman I'm with is my wife."

That stopped her in her tracks. "Your wife?"

"Have you missed the papers? It was everywhere," he said. The change within her was instant. He heard the change in her voice. She became shriller.

"You have a wife?"

"Yes."

"You got married?"

"Yes."

Silence descended.

"It won't last." She snapped at him. Her voice grew louder, screeching. "She'll realise what a callous cruel bastard you are, and she will leave you." Her voice was hard.

Duncan felt his temper rising. This woman had no right to question his relationship with Tess. He'd never treat her so appallingly. How dare this woman say such things to him?

"No, she won't." He told her. "You can keep the apartment. I'll sign over the deeds. You can keep the jewels and clothes I've purchased over the months. You'll cease all contact with me." He waited for her final response before putting the phone down.

"What makes you think your wife won't leave you?"

"Because I'm only a bastard to women who deserve it. My wife is better than you in every way." He made his parting shot and slammed the phone down. He'd kept himself inside his study until he calmed down. Duncan didn't want to take his anger out on Tess. She didn't deserve it.

After he'd finished his call and calmed down, he'd gone in search of his wife. She'd been in the kitchen reading a book near the stove. She looked so perfect and relaxed. They'd talked for a few minutes, and he decided to take her out of dinner and a theatre. First, he needed a shower to wipe all traces of that disgusting woman from his mind. Duncan felt ashamed to have even been associated with that woman. He needed to keep Tess away from her.

Once he showered, he'd taken Tess for a dinner and a show. They'd had a wonderful night, and he loved every second of being in her company. She wasn't like all of his usual women who tried to get more out of him. She was pure and everything he wanted in a wife.

Duncan came out of his thoughts. Tess in his arms was smiling out at the dance floor. Tonight, he would take her to his bed, and if he had to, he'd keep her there until she felt the same. He loved her. There was no denying it any more. His feelings scared him, but the thought of losing Tess scared him a hell of a lot more.

Chapter Nineteen

When they made it home Tess felt her hands shaking. He took the wrap from around her shoulders, his fingers caressing the skin.

“How did you find the ball?” he asked.

“It was exciting but a little boring,” she said. Her eyes closed as his lips went to the curve of her neck. “Exciting, because it was my first ball, but then boring because they only seemed interested in work and fashion.”

“You’ve been driving me crazy with wanting you.” Duncan nibbled her neck, his teeth sinking into her flesh. She moaned. Her body was on fire for him. He moved the straps of her dress down her shoulder. Her breasts sprang free from the fabric keeping them in place. She watched as his hands moved round her waist pulling her back against him. “Do you feel that?” He pressed his cock against her lower back. “I want you, Tess.”

“I want you, too, Duncan.” She cried out as he cupped her tits in his hands.

“I’m going to show you what true passion is.”

He took her hand leading her up the stairs to his room. Their room.

“From now on, we sleep together,” he said.

She nodded her head. Being in his arms is where she was supposed to be.

“You’re finally in my room. Our bed is there. You’re a beautiful, enthralling woman. I’m so sorry to have ever treated you differently, Tess.” She saw a shine of tears in his eyes. She covered his mouth with a finger.

“Don’t do that to yourself. We’re here, and I forgive you, Duncan.” He wrapped his arms around her bare back. She began to open the buttons to his shirt.

“I don’t want you to regret this,” he said.

“I won’t regret this. I want you, Duncan.” She pressed her head against his. Tess desperately wanted to tell him she loved him. She kept it inside. It was a huge step to take. She wasn’t ready.

She felt the hardness of his body pressing into her belly. He was hard and thick. He stroked her back. Tess continued to open his buttons until his shirt lay open on either side. She ran her hands up over his chest then watched as the shirt fell to the floor. Tess saw the anticipation in his eyes. He wanted this as much as she did.

“Hold me.” He pulled her close. Her breasts pressed against his chest, and she gasped. He felt so warm.

“I’m ready for this. Please, don’t make me beg.” She stared into his eyes not turning away.

“I’ll have you, Tess. First, I need to get you ready.” He grabbed the fabric at her waist and pushed it to the floor. “I’m going to lick your pussy until you scream out in orgasm.”

Duncan moved her back to the bed until her legs hit the end of the mattress. “Trust me,” he said.

She sat down watching as he sank to the floor in front of her. She couldn’t tear her gaze away from his. He lifted one leg forcing her to lie back. Duncan placed her legs on the end of the bed then grabbed her waist closer. Her legs were bent but gave enough room at the bottom of the bed for him to lean on.

“You look so beautiful spread out on my bed. I can’t wait to lick the juice from your creamy cunt.”

Tess moaned.

“Do you like it when I talk dirty to you?” he asked.

“Yes.” She cried out as he ran a finger through her slit. She knew she was dripping wet.

“You have such a pretty pussy.”

Her fingers sank into the silk sheets as his tongue circled her clit. She bit her lip to keep in her screams. The pleasure was more than anything she’d ever imagined.

His fingers opened her pussy exposing her. She closed her eyes feeling every little touch. His tongue moved to her cunt and pressed inside her.

“Oh my God.” She moaned, and her head thrashed on the bed.

It was too much and not enough.

A finger filled her cunt pushing up inside her. She felt her inner muscles gripping his digit.

“You’re so fucking tight,” he said.

She heard him lick and suck at her clit. A second finger pressed inside her. She thrust her pelvis up onto his face then tried to fuck his fingers. Her tits moved with each thrust of her body.

“More, please, more.”

He added a third finger opening her up to him.

“That’s it, baby. Let go. I want your cum in my mouth. Give it to me.” His words sent her over the edge. She screamed as her body lost control. His free hand held her down as she tore at the sheet under her. His assault on her clit didn’t end until she lay panting on the bed, her body covered in sweat.

“You taste so fucking sweet.” He climbed up the bed pulling her up to the top. Her muscles wouldn’t work. She lay in total bliss.

Duncan pushed the hair off her forehead. “Did you like that?” he asked.

“Yes, that was amazing.”

He leaned down kissing her. She tasted her cream on his chin. “You’ve still got your pants on,” she said.

In the next second he threw his shoes and pants to the floor. He lay on the bed, naked. Her body was wound so tight. Staring at his thick arousal made her pussy tighten with renewed excitement. She moaned as his hand pressed between her thighs. Tess watched him dip a finger into her pussy. He removed his fingers and sucked her cream into his mouth. His hand returned to her stomach.

“You’re shaking.” He moved his hand up to cup one of her breasts. She arched into his hand. Duncan fingered her nipples rolling the bud against his finger and thumb. He pinched the tip making her cry out. The pleasure went to her clit. “You’re so responsive.”

“I want to touch you,” she said.

“Go ahead.” Duncan pulled back. Tess leaned over him. She placed her hand on his chest. Her fingers circled his own nipples starting a path down to his navel. “I love your hands on me.”

She glanced up to see him propped against a pillow. “Show me what to do.”

He took her hand in his, then placed it around his cock. Duncan showed her the amount of pressure he liked. He pulled back the foreskin and ran her finger over the slit. She saw a drop of his cum ease out of the tip. Running her finger over the drop she licked it off her finger.

“Fuck,” he said. She turned to him to see his eyes glazed over. “That looked so damn sexy.”

“Can I lick you the way you did me?” she asked.

“No. I wouldn’t last with your mouth on me. I want this to be about you. Another time, maybe but not tonight.” He took her hand away laying her down at the side of him.

He kissed her lips then eased down her body to claim her left nipple. She moaned. The sound

echoed around the room. His hands were all over her body. She didn't get a chance to process everything he was doing. Each touch sent her to new heights she hadn't dreamt about.

Her body squirmed under his driving him crazy. Duncan felt the blood rush to his cock. He was rock hard, and yet she kept sending more and more to his cock. Her response took him completely by surprise. Her wanton abandon was a pleasure to witness. He loved feeling her like this, lost to all thought and just losing herself to the moment.

Duncan held her close as he touched every inch of her body. Unlike last time he took his time learning every part of her. She liked an edge of pain when he touched her nipples. Her large tits made him think about lying on them as he slept.

He took her lips in another searing kiss. Duncan moved over her body. Her legs opened up as he settled between her thighs. She wrapped her arms around his neck holding on. He nibbled her neck going down to suck on her nipples. He growled his appreciation, deep and throaty, as he tasted her. Tess responded to him with her nails scouring his back. The pain from her marks went straight to his dick. Her passion, a true sign of her need, was marked in his back. When he felt them he'd recall this moment in his mind wherever he was.

"Touch me," he said, claiming her lips once more. Her hands went all over his body. He pressed his cock against her core. She was dripping wet. "I'm going to fuck you now."

"Yes," she said.

Duncan leaned back taking hold of his cock. He gazed down at her. She looked so fucking perfect. Her legs were splayed open, and her cunt glistened with her arousal. He ran the tip through her creamy slit watching her reactions as he touched her clit. She moaned, her hips thrusting up to his cock.

He eased the head of his cock into her entrance. She was tight and wet. Duncan moved his hand away when the tip of him was inside her cunt.

Placing his hand at her head he looked down into her eyes. She stared up at him, her eyes wide as he slowly eased inside her.

There was no pain this time. He could tell by the way her eyes softened as he entered her. She held his forearms as he pressed every inch of his shaft inside her body.

"How are you?" he asked. It was taking all of his willpower not to plunge hard within her.

"Amazing. I never knew it could be like this."

"This is how it will be between us."

"Always?"

"Always." He thrust up into her relishing her whimpers. Duncan took her hands holding them beside her head as he slowly made love to her. He held back the need to fuck her hard. This time he'd go slowly. She needed to know what true lovemaking meant.

They moved together. Each time he penetrated her body, Tess moved up to meet him thrust for thrust.

"That's it. Come for me, Tess."

Sweat covered their bodies as they moved together. She held on as he moved hard inside her. He swivelled his hips feeling every part of her cunt wrapped around him. She was wet and gripped his cock so tight.

Duncan took her to the stars, holding her in his arms as she came apart. His cock pulsed inside her. His orgasm took over as his semen spurted inside her. She moaned, her legs wrapped around his.

He took her lips not letting her pull away as he loved her mouth.

She lay in his arms, spent. He was still seated inside her as he lay to the side, her leg over his. He stroked her side and back as they stared at each other.

“You’re so beautiful,” he said.

“You keep saying that.”

“That is because I mean every word.” He stroked her cheek. The love he felt for her consumed him at every turn.

“I like being with you, Duncan,” she said. Her hand lay between them on his chest.

“Even though I forced you into this?” he asked.

“You may have forced me to marry you, but my dad was the asshole who stole money from you. I could have said no.”

“Would you have risked your father going to jail?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. He may not be a very good father. He’s still my father though. I couldn’t let him go to prison even if he does deserve it.”

“I’ve paid for the therapy he needs.”

“Why do you hide this part of yourself?” she asked.

Duncan didn’t know how to answer her. His seduction was at the back of his mind as he held her in his arms. “It’s easier to let people see the hardness. I’m a businessman. It’s required.”

She was quiet for several moments. He’d never talked with a woman after he’d made love. He’d never made love to a woman. The experience he’d just felt with Tess had been the first time he’d felt close to someone. All of his life it had been easier to let everyone go. Love only hurt people. Look what happened to his mother and father. They’d never survived Miranda.

Staring at the woman in his arms Duncan knew he’d never cheat on her. Tess was the woman for him, and he’d never do what his father did. She would only know love in his arms.

“I like this Duncan. You’re worth so much. I wish you could see that.”

He kissed her lips and held her as they fell asleep. Duncan remained inside her body throughout the night. The love he felt for her was getting stronger with every day.

Chapter Twenty

“Wakey, wakey,” Duncan whispered against her ear. Tess moaned in denial as he kissed down her back. She wanted to stay in sleep. He’d woken her twice throughout the night to make love to her. Her body was sore and in need of rest.

“I need to sleep,” she said. Her hair was loved out of the way. He kissed around her neck then moved down her back to her bottom. She giggled as he took a bite out of her ass. “Stop.”

He moved back up. She rolled over.

“You look so damn sexy first thing in the morning.”

“There is something about matted hair that you like?” she asked.

“I like your hair. It never looks neat even when you brush it for an hour. Come on. You smell from all that sex.” He climbed off the bed then pulled her into his arms. She squealed as he picked her up in his arms.

“I don’t want to go,” she said. He slapped her ass forcing her to be quiet. “We’re alone in our room, and you want to wash?”

“Who said I only wanted to wash?” He dumped her in the bathtub, which was already filled. “There is so much fun to have in a tub this size.” He joined her wrapping his hands around her waist. He pulled her onto his lap.

Her own cheeks heated from the intimacy of the moment. They were alone in the bathtub together. She felt his cock against her pussy. He was hard for her once again. Duncan was insatiable. Tess felt desire and love for him combine inside her chest. She loved this man so completely. Any doubts had been wiped from her mind. The mere thought of life without him left her feeling hollow and alone.

Duncan cupped her cheek when her hands rested on his chest. His big rough hands held her, and his thumb ran over her bottom lip. She wanted him to kiss her. Her whole body trembled with arousal. His cock pulsed hotter than the water that surrounded them.

“Show me how much fun a bath can be,” she said.

“With pleasure.”

His hand disappeared under the water. She felt him ease his cock into her body. Tess held onto his shoulders seating herself on his length. Her legs wrapped around him as her arms went around his neck.

He was hard inside her.

“Are you having fun already?”

“You’re always hard.”

“Is that a complaint?” he asked.

She shook her head. “I don’t know how I’m going to keep up.”

His hands moved to her hips pulling down. She felt him slide deeper into her core. “You need to get used to it. I’ll always want you,” he said, placing a kiss to the pulse in her neck. Her eyes closed as his hands cupped her ass lifting her up then slamming her back down on his cock.

She cried out as he growled against her neck.

“Kiss me,” he said. She sought his lips, plunging her tongue into his mouth. One of his hands released her ass to grip her head. He held her in place kissing her deeply. She felt his need matched

hers. His kiss was hot and hungry. Their moans mingled in the air, the intensity of their heat scorching her. She didn't think of anything else but Duncan. He captured her so deeply. She wanted to do nothing but please him. Her fingers sank into the damp hair at the nape of his neck. Her lips felt bruised from his possession. The strength inside him took her breath away.

Tess didn't know how to deny him.

She broke the kiss and trailed her lips down to his neck. Both of his hands went to her ass. She felt him lift her up then pull her down onto his shaft. She cried out each time he hit her cervix inside her. She nibbled and sucked his neck into her mouth.

"You're going to mark me, Tess."

Tess pulled back to stare at him. His lips were swollen, and his eyes glazed over with arousal.

"Don't you want my mark on your body?"

"Yes." He cupped her cheek, his fingers sinking into her hair. He fisted his hand gripping her hair. "But you have to wear mine."

"With pleasure."

Duncan took over his mouth sucking at the flesh of her neck. Her nipples brushed his chest.

She felt his restraint at her neck. Tess wanted him to lose control. She wanted him to give her everything. No holding back from each other.

The pull on her neck increased. His teeth nibbled down. She whimpered as she felt the pull between her thighs.

Her pussy tightened around his cock in her cunt.

When he lifted from her neck she did the same to him. She wanted her mark on his body.

"That's it, baby. Mark me. Let me know who I belong to."

Tess bit down sinking her teeth into his neck. She didn't draw blood. He tensed, but when she licked the spot he relaxed under her.

She lifted from his neck looking into his eyes. "I want you to fuck me, Duncan."

"Tess."

"I know you're holding yourself back. I want this to work, and for it to work I want all of you. Please, fuck me, Duncan."

"I will after we get cleaned."

She watched him grab a sponge then lather her body.

They washed each other while she sat with his cock inside her.

The desire pulsed between them. Neither said a word as the tension mounted.

Duncan lifted her from his lap. He pulled the plug then climbed out of the tub. She watched him grab a towel before helping her out of the tub.

Tess kept her gaze on him at all times while he dried her body. When they were done he took her hand leading her back into the bedroom. She didn't know what the time was. She didn't care.

His cock stood out long and thick as he walked. She stared at him. The animal inside him was locked and at bay. Tess wanted him to lose control.

"Fuck me, Duncan."

He growled taking a step towards her. This was a side to him she'd never witnessed. There was something animalistic in him. Her nipples tightened, and warmth seeped out of her pussy.

He sank his fingers in her hair. She gasped, part in pain as he pulled her close. Duncan glared down into her eyes. "Do you have any idea what you're tempting me with?"

"I want you. Every part of you."

Her breasts heaved from the deep breaths she was taking. Her nipples were tight, hard and

poking against his chest. The hold on her hair didn't let up. His dark gaze glared at her.

"You were a virgin."

"I'm not any more. I want you, Duncan. All of you. I trust you." She did. Deep down she knew he'd never hurt her.

"Fine." He pressed down making her sink to her knees on the floor. "I won't hurt you. Don't hate me if you can't stand this."

Tess knew what she was asking for. The passion between them threatened to burst. She'd only read about things like this. She wanted to experience everything she'd read about. Duncan may think she'd only read about love and roses. She hadn't. There was a collection she'd kept in her room under her bed, a small collection of books that contained so much explicit material it threatened to burn from the lust she'd felt.

She gazed at his length in front of her. His cock stood in front of him. She saw the tip glistening in the light from the sun coming through the patio doors. There was no sound other than their deep breathing. Tess couldn't stop staring. She'd seen him last night, but at eye level he looked huge. A lot bigger than last night. She felt a stirring deep inside her. She wanted to feel him pounding inside her.

Her body trembled with need.

"Last night you wanted to suck my cock, and I didn't let you. Now, I want to feel those plump lips wrapped around my dick." He reached down fisting the length in his palm. The action looked angry. When he touched her pussy his hands were gentle on her.

He pressed the tip to her lips. She opened her mouth letting him sink inside her. His cum slid along her tongue as he eased inside her. She heard him hiss when she moved his palm away holding the length of him in her hand.

She wanted to touch and love every inch of his body the same way he'd done for her the night before. Duncan stroked her hair while she bobbed her head on his cock.

Tess pulled off his shaft. "Tell me what you like."

She licked the tip then took more of him until he hit the back of her throat.

"You're doing just fine."

Tess smiled.

"Put your fingers around the base." She did what he asked. "Now sink your mouth to where your fingers are. Then move your hand like I was doing. Fuck, that feels good. Harder. No teeth."

She did everything he asked, creating a rhythm that drove him crazy. She glanced up to see his eyes on her mouth.

"You look so fucking beautiful."

Tess worked his shaft feeling his cum leak out on her tongue. He tasted musky and salty.

"You're going to stop, or I'll blow in your mouth." Tess kept on. "I don't want to lose control in your mouth, Tess." He pulled on her hair giving her no choice but to let go. She moved off with a pout.

"You don't know what it means that you like sucking my cock." Duncan lifted her up from the floor then dumped her on the bed.

His hands gripped her knees opening her legs wide. He moved fast sinking to his knees. In the next instant his mouth was on her pussy liking her clit.

She cried out when his finger slammed inside her. Tess pushed up to meet him.

"You're so beautiful. I want to watch you come apart." He bit down on her thigh making her cry out. His large hand held her open to him. She leaned up on her arms to watch his head move as he licked her clit.

Duncan pulled away, and his chin glistened with her own cream on his face.

“Watch,” he said. She gazed down to see three of his fingers inside her cunt. He pulled them out. They were covered in her cream. His free hand moved up her leg over her tummy to cup her breast. He flicked the tight nipple making her yelp in surprise.

Duncan came up on the bed kissing her lips. She tasted her cream. Before she could do anything else his mouth went down taking a nipple into his mouth.

Tess couldn't contain her screams any longer.

He seemed to know what would drive her over the edge. His teeth and hands worked her body perfectly.

Duncan took her hand and wrapped it around his cock. Together they pumped his shaft as he sucked on one nipple then the next. She was dripping wet. There was nothing clean about this lovemaking. They didn't make love. They were fucking.

Their moans echoed round the room. Their combined growls and whimpered filled the room. Tess felt so consumed with passion. Their hands clawed at each other.

“Can you feel what you're doing to me?” he asked. Duncan didn't know what to think of this woman fisting his shaft. She oozed innocence, and yet she'd demanded he fuck her. She wasn't running from the room in fear. Tess was taking his passion and giving him back so much.

He kissed her. His tongue stroked inside her mouth meeting her tongue with his. She matched him stroke for stroke.

Her fingers pumped his shaft harder. He was so close to losing control that he pulled away. She lay on her arms on the bed. Her cum leaked out of her pussy as he stared at her. Duncan took a step back to look at her.

“Play with you pussy,” he said. His hand cupped his balls finding the part of him to ease some of the hardness away from his shaft.

Tess's hand went to her pussy. He watched as two fingers stroked the swollen nub of her clitoris.

“Have you done this before?” he asked.

She nodded.

He watched her ease two fingers to her entrance gathering her cream to glide them up to her pussy.

“How do you know how to finger yourself if you were a virgin?”

“Because I read books that turned me on.”

He liked this side of her. It looked like there was more to Tess than he first thought. For several moments he watched her play with herself. The view of her fingers on her pussy was more erotic than anything he'd ever seen. Her cum leaked out of her in a stream. She was getting closer to climax.

“Stop,” he said.

Her hands moved away with reluctance. Duncan moved to the bed. He grabbed the pillows and then lifted her up to place them under her butt. With his hands on her ass he pressed the tip of his cock at her entrance and slammed inside her cunt.

She cried out. Her pussy gripped him like a tight fist. He watched her head turn to the side. Duncan forced her to look at him by grabbing her chin. “You have to tell me to stop now, Tess. If you don't want any more or if this is too much for you, tell me now.”

The longer she waited the more Duncan struggled to control. She was tight, and all he wanted to do was fuck her hard and rough.

“Tess!” He warned her.

“Yes, I want you. Don’t stop.”

He pulled out of her body then plunged back inside. His pace sped up.

Her tits bounced with every thrust. Duncan tried to go deeper inside her, but the angle was all wrong.

Pulling out of her, he turned her onto her knees. He pushed the pillows out of the way then slammed inside her.

She cried out. His hands on her hips were bruising.

Tess met him thrust for thrust pushing back onto his shaft. He looked down watching his glistening cock disappear inside her wet slit.

Within seconds his orgasm was screaming at him. He held off reaching under her to tease her clit.

She came apart in his arms. Her pussy squeezed his cock as his own orgasm slammed inside him. Both of them came apart.

Duncan took them both to the bed collapsing over her.

He heard and felt her crying. Duncan panicked. “Tess? What’s the matter? Did I hurt you? Tell me, Tess.” He’d never felt anything so amazing in all of his life. He’d lost control with her and given her everything he held.

She rolled over. Tears streamed from her eyes, which broke his heart.

“It was so beautiful. It felt amazing. You didn’t hurt me, Duncan. I never knew I could feel like that.” She pulled him closer. Her lips found his, kissing him.

“You’re the most amazing thing to happen to me, Tess. You mean the world to me.”

She cupped his cheek. Her eyes were shining with her tears.

“I’m going to saying something to you, and I don’t want you to panic.”

“I’m listening.”

He waited for her to speak. His heart pounded inside his chest. Tess didn’t have a clue how he felt for her.

“I love you,” she said.

His world stopped. Those magical words meant so much to him.

She smiled at him.

“You’re not running away?”

Duncan shook his head unable to voice the words in his mind. He knew she wanted him to say the same, but for some reason he couldn’t. He did love her. His heart wouldn’t deny his emotions anymore.

“You have no idea how amazing you are,” he said. He leaned down, taking her lips in his.

The words were not spoken, and he tried to show her with his body what he couldn’t say with his lips.

Duncan made love to her. There was nothing rushed this time. He didn’t demand anything from her. He gave, bringing her to climax around his shaft. He listened to her moans. When he could bear it no longer he thrust frantically, climaxing within her, his moans more the growls of possession.

He collapsed on her. His strength left him as all his energy had been used in the most amazing sex of his life.

All the time Tess held onto him, and her words echoed around his head.

Chapter Twenty-One

One month later

There honeymoon had come to an end. Duncan's business called to him to return. She'd spent the last two weeks moving all of her stuff out of the apartment to move into his country home. When they'd been on their honeymoon she'd told him about her dream to become a writer. He'd set up her office in his home.

Most of the days she sat staring at a blank screen. She missed him so much. He phoned her throughout the day.

And every morning he woke her up to his passionate lovemaking, even though he took pleasure from her at night. He'd come home late, and she felt him waking her up. It was still dark outside. Whenever he was near her body grew hot. This night was no different.

Tess's breathing deepened, and she opened her eyes to see the intense heat radiating out of Duncan's gaze. His hands moved from her neck to her collarbone following the curve down to stroke her arms. Goose-bumps erupted over her body causing her to shiver ever so slightly.

"Are you cold?" he asked in a whisper against her ear.

"No."

Her body felt tense and in need of loving. She wanted him to touch her anywhere and everywhere. She felt consumed and on fire.

Tess moved and waited for the sickness she'd been getting to spoil the moment. It didn't happen, and she smiled at the man above her. His hands roamed around her body stroking her belly, her arms, her neck, but never near the places she felt so desperate. She moaned every time he moved away, frustration driving her insane.

"Do you want me to touch you?" He teased her. She hated it when he made her beg for more.

"Yes, please, Duncan." She begged him to understand her need.

"Where do you want me to touch you?" He looked into her eyes in the mirror. Duncan had made it so they'd be able to watch each other in the mirror. He was watching her entire body's reaction in the full length mirror. She knew he was enjoying the havoc he was creating with her body.

Tess groaned. He was going to make her say it. He'd already made her beg, and now he was going to make her instruct him.

"Please, Duncan. Don't make me tell you." She pleaded with him.

His hands dropped from her body. "I'll leave you here unless tell me what you want, Tess."

Tess moaned in anger and frustration. He broke down all of her inhibitions until she was a panting, wanton mess.

"Touch my breasts, and stroke them." Her moan echoed as his hands went straight up to cup her breasts covered by the silk negligee he'd bought. Her eyes closed as her breasts throbbed from the mere touch.

"Open your eyes. I want you to see what I'm doing to you." The command in his voice made her pussy weep with wanting him.

Her eyes opened. He took her on a rollercoaster ride the moment she looked into Duncan's gaze. His acute desire was written in his eyes. This pleasure was about both of them taking and giving at the same time.

"Take off the negligee." Tess did as he asked. She stared at her reflection. Her breasts were bared for him to do with as he wished.

When his hands caressed her naked breasts, she almost collapsed because the touch so intense. They were so sensitive to touch of late. She didn't know what was wrong with her. Duncan held her close to his body. She felt the pulse of his cock behind her, begging for attention.

She turned cutting off his touch. Tess pulled open his shirt. The buttons went flying around the room. She smashed her chest to his taking his lips in a deep searing kiss. She took his moan, matching it with her own. His arms wound around her back, pulling her even closer into his body.

Soon they were on the bed, their clothes forgotten on the floor.

They kissed and stroked each other's bodies, bringing each other so close to climax but stopping before they reached the peak. They heightened each other's experience 'til they could no longer wait. Duncan moved over her, opening her legs and driving home into her pussy. The groans were loud around the walls of the bedroom.

Duncan found her breast and took her erect nipple between his lips, grazing it with his teeth making her squirm and moan around him. She panted, begging him to stop because it was too intense but begging him not to because she loved it so much.

His thrusts became erratic and uncontrollable. He took her lips making love to her mouth the same way he was making love between her legs.

Tess felt the pleasure building. Before long she was soaring over the edge screaming his name. Her pussy pulsed around his hardened shaft. Moments later, Duncan followed, pulsing his seed deep into her womb. His scream of pleasure was her name shouting out of his lips. They gave way, his weight completely on top of Tess. Their breathing was fast and strong.

Tess loved the feel of him around her. She wrapped her arms around his back trying to keep him close. She loved this man with her mind, her heart, and soul. She could not even think about life without him. He meant so much to her. Their connection grew stronger. They were no longer married out of necessity. She wanted to be with him.

Moments later, Duncan lifted up. He moved the hair from her face.

"That was amazing." He kissed her lips, smiling.

They kissed and made slow love into the night. They showered together lathering attention on each other, and finally when they were both exhausted and extremely satisfied, she curled up against him then fell back to sleep. Tess knew she'd need to see a doctor soon. The exhaustion and sickness were not doing her any good. She didn't want to worry Duncan. He'd not said the words of love to her, but she knew he cared for her.

At least, she hoped he did.

Duncan watched Tess sleep. He enjoyed being with her, and he liked talking to her about anything. No matter how much he tried he couldn't speak the words of love he felt. He continued to hold himself back even though he didn't want to.

Work was starting to get difficult. Most of the time he wanted to spend his days with Tess. He knew she was writing her story, and he was proud of her. Duncan hoped he'd provided her with plenty of inspiration. He'd found her saucy material the other night, the erotic books she liked to read.

He loved seeing the passionate side to his woman.

Duncan found as days passed with Tess he did not think about other women. The passion between them was growing stronger, and he certainly wasn't getting bored. Tess was fresh, vibrant, and brave, an absolute beauty, and a lady in the company of others. She was funny and innocent with him, but in the bedroom a wild wanton woman appeared. He'd have never put both women together. Her wildness was all for him. She constantly tested him to his limits. Tess was unpredictable, and he never knew what was going to happen next.

Gerald and Grace were still enjoying a much needed vacation. Tess liked running his home. She seemed to thrive from working.

His plan to simply have Tess fall in love with him so she'd have his children had been a silly one. An even bigger mistake had been in thinking he'd keep a mistress. That seemed just cruel to him now. Yvonne had been in touch to try to start up their affair. He'd declined, hating himself for ever going near the spiteful woman. Being with Tess was opening his eyes up to the cruelty over the years. He'd used women like toys for his own pleasure. He no longer wanted any other woman. He only wanted Tess, his beautiful, unpredictable wife. He stroked her hair from her eyes. She looked so innocent in her sleep. Their time together meant everything to him.

Duncan knew he'd need to tell her the truth soon. He didn't want any secrets between them. His mother wanted nothing to do with his marriage. She didn't like the fact he'd married a woman without money of her own.

His mother had never lost her temper until then. Duncan hadn't liked what he saw. His mother was usually a calm person.

"I won't let anyone hurt you," he said.

Her eyes stayed closed. Her body was curled up in a ball. He leaned over and kissed her temple, but she didn't move. Duncan lay beside her, staring at her.

"I love you, Tess." He knew she was asleep and wouldn't hear the words. Duncan spoke them over and over while she slept. Saying them to her face when she was awake was impossible for him.

"You're my world." He gave her another kiss then lay back. His hand lay on her stomach, and he wondered if his baby grew inside her. He'd not worn a single condom with her. Duncan knew it was selfish. When he was with her he didn't want anything between them, not even the latex of a condom. He didn't feel anything different about her. She'd been sick a couple of mornings, but other than that he'd not seen any other signs.

Part of him wanted her to be pregnant while another part didn't feel ready. Their marriage had been quick. What if Tess learnt of what he'd done? Miranda had been made homeless because of him. The more he thought about his actions the harder it became for him to justify them.

He closed his eyes waiting for sleep to claim him. All of his worries eased out of him the moment sleep gripped him.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The sickness and aching breasts continued for the next couple of weeks. Duncan kept trying to get her to a doctor, but she refused. She had a feeling she knew what was causing all of her problems. A nine month problem. When he went to work on Tuesday morning Tess saw him off in his car. Once he was gone and she had the house to herself, she grabbed her purse then walked all the way to the nearest pharmacy. The walk helped to clear her head. She spent a great deal of time debating what to do. There was a chance she wasn't pregnant. The pharmacist gave her an odd look when she bought six packets. She wanted to make sure they were right. It would be her luck to get a duff packet.

She walked home to find three messages on the phone from Duncan. Before doing anything else she pressed play on the recorder.

"Hi, babe, it's just me. I wanted to check in and see how you're doing. You didn't vomit this morning. I think we need to go to the doctor. Anyway, see you soon."

"Why haven't you called me back? Are you all right? I don't like this silence, Tess. Please, call me back."

"Okay, if you haven't called me back in an hour I'm coming home." She checked the time then picked up the phone to call him. She'd learnt his work number off by heart. He picked up on the second ring.

"Tess, this better be you," he said.

"Yes, it's me. How are you?" she asked.

"Concerned. Where have you been?"

"I went out for a walk. It seems to have helped."

"You really should see a doctor."

"I'm fine, Duncan." He kept going on about his concerns. She liked his concern as it showed he cared about her. Tess assured him she was fine. He didn't sound convinced.

Twenty minutes later she put the phone down then went to pee on some sticks.

An hour later she sat looking at the six boxes of all sticks. Each stick showed the same thing. Tess looked down at the stick as it turned a scary shade of blue.

Each stick she picked up said the same thing.

"Maybe something is wrong with my pee?"

Her hands were shaking.

"You've had unprotected sex, you silly woman. And now you're talking to yourself. Great, just another reason to get you sent to the nut house."

"I wish I had a mom."

Her head fell into her hands.

She was pregnant.

She was pregnant with Duncan's son or daughter.

Her breasts were tender, and her tummy was going to get bigger with every passing week.

"I'm going to look like a whale."

Questions whizzed around her mind.

When had it happened?

What does it mean?

Will Duncan be happy with the news?

That question brought Tess up short. How could she tell him? Would he think this was another

way of confirming an income from his wealth? He always saw things at odd angles. She didn't want any of his fortune. The baby excited her. She'd wanted to make a family of her own for so long. What scared her the most was Duncan. They'd not discussed children. He hadn't even said he loved her.

There was so much to consider. Her own feelings meant nothing to her. Would he be happy with the news?

She shook her head trying to clear all the negative thoughts whirring around her mind. The news was supposed to be a happy, positive one. She wished Grace was there to help her. She had no one. Not even a mother.

Tess was pregnant, expecting another beautiful human being. The thought wouldn't sink in. She got up off the bathroom floor then went to look in the mirror. There was no difference in her body. She lifted her shirt to gaze at her tummy.

How far gone was she?"

She should be happy.

Your marriage isn't the most conventional.

Again she felt the doubts filling her head and her heart.

Well, there was only one way to find out and that would be to tell him. Tonight, she would make a beautiful romantic meal for two, and after they had made love well into the night she'd tell him.

Not after you've made love.

You need to tell him before then.

Tess grabbed the used pregnancy tests to dump in the trash. She stared at the phone by the fireplace in the sitting room. Her hands shook as she reached for the phone. She picked it up then dialled his number before putting the phone back down.

"This is stupid. Just tell him. Duncan is not the cold man you thought he was." The phone rang making her jump. "Hello."

"You called me, baby. What's up?" Duncan asked.

His voice calmed her rioting nerves.

"I-I've got something to tell you."

"Are you all right? Do you need me to come home?" His concern made her smile.

"No, you don't need to come home." She ran her fingers through her hair. Her mind struggling to focus on what she needed to tell him. "I know why I've been ill."

"Have you seen a doctor?"

"No, no doctor. I've suspected for a little bit but put it off."

Silence was on the other end.

"For fuck's sake, Tess, tell me."

"I'm pregnant."

Tess waited for his anger or anything.

"You're pregnant?"

"Yes, I'll need to book an appointment to see a doctor. I don't know how far gone I am or anything."

Silence came over the line.

"Are you still there?"

"I'm here, baby."

"Are you happy about this, Duncan? I know we haven't discussed this before. This is a good thing. Right?" She twirled a strand of hair around her finger. Her heart pounded inside her chest while

she waited for him to answer.

"You have no idea how happy this makes me. I can't wait to get home so we can celebrate. I'm going to spend the whole night making love to you. I want you so much, sweetheart." His voice took on the growl she loved to hear when he was pounding inside her. She blushed at the thought of what he might do.

"Do you want me to come to you?" she asked.

"You've unleashed an animal. If you come here I can't guarantee to keep my hands to myself."

Her nipples throbbed painfully.

"I'd like to put a new memory of myself in that office. I'll see you soon," she said.

"I can't wait. I want you so fucking bad."

She hung up the phone, her body on fire for him once again. She felt constantly aroused by him. Tess got up to get changed. Duncan had spent so much money on clothes for her. She wanted to see him lose his mind.

The fears she had were gone. The moment she saw him every concern would leave her body. She walked up the stairs to the room they shared.

In the walk-in closet she settled for a knee-length pencil skirt and a white buttoned down blouse.

Duncan put the phone down. His cock was thick with arousal. He placed a call through to his secretary to cancel all of his lunchtime appointments.

Tess was pregnant. The second part of his father's agreement was complete. He smiled, but the happiness wasn't about his father's will. Duncan was going to be a father.

"Sir, I'm sorry to interrupt. There is a Miranda James here to see you. She says it's urgent."

His happiness was dampened by the mention of his stepmother. Duncan glanced at his secretary.

"She's refusing to leave, Sir."

"Send her in. Then get security alerted in case she starts to cause a scene."

He watched his secretary leave then waited for Miranda to walk in. She was older than he remembered. He knew she was in her late fifties or early sixties. Her hair was grey all over. His mother dyed her hair to keep it the same shade of brown. Instead of a cold looking face, Miranda stared at him with love. After everything he'd done to her she still smiled at him.

Duncan was waiting for the backlash.

"Hello, Duncan," she said. She walked with her head held high and took a seat across from his desk.

"Miranda. My wife will be here shortly. Please, say what you need to say and get out."

"Your father warned me you'd hold a grudge even after his death. He hoped when you got married you'd see things differently." Miranda chuckled then opened her purse.

"Don't try to pretend you know me. You broke my parents apart. I hope you're happy with yourself."

"I did no such thing, Duncan. I've never hurt anyone in my life, and I refuse to take responsibility for your father's marriage. I don't expect you to like me, but I do expect some respect from you. You do not know me. Do not presume to judge me."

He felt taken back by her words. She was nothing like his mother had painted.

"I apologise. I've heard so much about you," he said.

"And yet you haven't met me. I think you'd be pleasantly surprised."

“Why are you being nice?” he asked. “I threw you out of your home.”

She chuckled. “Do you really think your father hadn’t prepared for everything? I have never lived in that villa in Italy. I never wanted to. Your mother left a cold shell. Your father never dethroned her. She left willingly and in turn ruined every chance your father had to build a relationship with you.”

“You don’t know what happened.”

“Regardless of it, he asked me to give you this.” She handed him an envelope. “He wanted you to be happy. I hope you’ve found happiness with your wife.”

Miranda got up to leave. He didn’t call her back. Duncan stared at the letter she’d given him. Part of him wanted to tear it up while the other needed to know more.

He opened the letter. His father’s writing reminded him of being a boy. Duncan began to read.

To my beloved son, Duncan,

As I write this tears spill from my eyes. I know I shouldn’t admit this, but so much has been wasted over a fight that was not your fault. I love you, son.

If you’re reading this, then that can only mean one thing. I am dead, and we are still not speaking to each other. I know you hate me for divorcing your mother and marrying Miranda, but I’ve been in love with Miranda all of my life. I was a teenage boy when I fell for her, Duncan. She means the world to me and I hope you’re happy with the woman you married. Your mother and I were never meant to be together. Your grandfather begged me to marry her, and I did to let him die at peace on his deathbed.

It nearly destroyed Miranda when she heard that the man she had given her heart and innocence to had left her to marry a wealthy heiress. Miranda was poor, but I loved her, and she loved me. I can’t go into too much detail of the pain I caused, only I spent the rest of my life trying to make up for it. She left me, and I couldn’t find her. By then, my relationship with your mother had produced you. An heir.

I couldn’t live without the woman I loved, and I searched until I found her.

I found Miranda broken in a London hospital. My name was the only one on her, so I claimed her and helped her to survive. I wanted her so badly, but I had hurt her so much she would not speak or allow me to come near her. I divorced your mother because I knew we’d never be happy. She left the villa in Italy even though I’d taken Miranda away from there.

I’m not a proud man. I’ve been diagnosed with terminal cancer, and I know I’m not going to make it past this year. Miranda will be all alone. I wanted you to know that I love you, Duncan. Out of everything I’ve done that I regret, you’re not part of it. I’m proud of you, son, and hope that you can find it in your heart to forgive an old man in love.

Love

Your father

P.S Do not blame Miranda for my faults. She is the innocent one in all of this.

Duncan closed the letter with tears pouring from his eyes. There had been so much wasted. The time he’d spent hating his father should have been time spent getting to know the man.

Tess walked into the office ten minutes later. He was still crying.

“Duncan? What’s wrong?” she asked. He opened his arms waiting for her to come to him.

He handed her the letter his father had written. Duncan picked her up in his arms carrying her to his office sofa. He sat with her in his lap as she read the letter. For the rest of the afternoon he spent the time telling her about his father and Miranda.

Tess listened as he spoke. Her fingers ran through his hair. Sex was the last thing on his mind.

“What has your mother said about all of this?” she asked.

“My mother won’t talk to me until I divorce you,” he said to her.

“Me?”

“When she found out I’d married a woman with no money of her own, she refused to talk to me. The only news I can give her is my divorce. She thinks I’ve been stupid.” He wiped the tears from his eyes.

“What do you think?”

“You’re carrying my child, Tess. I’m not letting you go.” He kissed her lips then held her close. “I’m not going to lie to you. I’m not a saint. I never have been. I hope you can forgive me for the way I treated you when we first met.”

She chuckled. “So, we didn’t have the most conventional of starts. Regardless of how we got here, Duncan, we’re here.” She grabbed his hand to rest on her stomach. “And we have a family. A small family but a family we can be proud of.”

“How did I get so lucky?”

“You took a chance?” She smiled then settled down in his lap. “Do you want to go home? This must have taken you by surprise.”

“I need to talk to my mother. Is it okay if I drop you off at home?” he asked.

“Sure. I’ll be waiting for you when you get back.”

Duncan drove her home and made sure she got in safely before making his way to where his mother lived. It was a two hour drive, but it gave him enough time to clear his head.

The housekeeper opened the door looking put out. He knew his mother wasn’t the nicest person to work for.

“Mr. James, I don’t think your mother expected you to visit.”

“I imagine she’s cursing my name, Tilly. I’m not leaving until I speak with her.”

“Then go on through. I want no part in this.” Duncan watched the older woman move away.

He found his mother seated by the fire reading a book. The moment he walked in she sent him a glare but remained in her book.

“Hello, mother.” Staring at her now he understood the attraction with Miranda.

“I hope you’ve come to tell me you’ve divorced that woman. What an awful situation. I’ve had Yvonne ringing me constantly. That woman is at least a little better than that tramp you’ve married. At least she is already part of your crowd.”

“You know Yvonne?” he asked. Duncan felt his stomach dip. What the hell was that woman doing with his mother?

“Of course. She’s the woman you should have married.”

“That woman is no lady. She sleeps around and is in no way worth the spot as my wife. Tess is worth a million of her.”

His mother snorted. “You’re as pathetic as your father. He couldn’t get past his affection for that whore of a woman. I showed him though. You didn’t speak another word to him. I promised him if he chose that bitch over me I’d make him pay.”

Duncan couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “You planned this?”

“Of course, you stupid boy. I was not going to be passed over for that slut. I had money, and I’d given him a son. He could have kept her on as his little plaything. I didn’t care. The moment he wanted more, I took care of it.”

“You ruined any chance of a relationship I might have had.”

“Stop your whining, boy. Yvonne should be arriving at your home to take the trash out.”

“What?”

“I told Yvonne she needed to go and fight for you. Tess doesn’t stand a chance against her beauty.”

Duncan finally saw everything falling into place. The callousness of his mother. The truth hidden behind his father. All the pain and loss caused by this woman and her determination to destroy any relationship he could have with his father.

“When did she leave?” he demanded.

“Ten minutes before you arrived. Be a gem and do this for your mother. You’re worth so much more. Tess can be your plaything.”

“Tess is pregnant with my child. I love her, and I’ve been a fool when it comes to you. You ruined my relationship with my father, but you won’t ruin any more of my life. I’m done with you. You can find your own way. As far as I’m concerned I have no mother.” Duncan walked out without looking back.

He got in his car and drove towards home. He dialled his home number. Two hours felt like a lifetime.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Tess worked on her story. Duncan had opened up to her, and she felt everything was going to fall into place. She phoned her father in the hope he'd finally answer her questions.

"Hello," he said on the third ring.

"Hi, dad, it's me."

"Hi, Tess. How are you?" he asked.

They made small talk for several moments, her heart racing. Whenever she approached the subject of her mother he always cut her off and refused to talk about it.

"I want to ask you about my mother," she said, nibbling on her lip.

"Tess!"

"What do you have to lose? I'm going to be a mother. The least you can do is tell me about her. Please."

She heard him sigh over the line. "The truth is I don't know much about her, Tess. I know her family were gone. She told me that. She was a woman I met while travelling. I fell in love with her. She got pregnant, and then she gave birth to you. After some fight with the courts and proving I was your father, they gave you to me rather than letting you become a ward of the state."

"Where is she? Didn't she want me?" she asked.

"Bessie wanted you. We were both going to make a life together. We got married in a cheap reception abroad, and when we moved back here we were going to have the big ceremony. She got pregnant while we were touring around Europe, and we decided to stay for as long as we could. Nine months soon passed, and we were travelling back home when her waters broke. You were born in the back of a car. I didn't know what to do. I hadn't witnessed any births or anything. I saved you, but your mother didn't make it to the hospital."

Tess heard his tears over the line. "She's dead?"

"She died the night you were born. Bessie had no other family, which is why I got you so easily. I couldn't bring myself to tell you. Everything about her hurts to remember. That's what I was spending the money on, Tess. I wanted to forget. I didn't care how. When I was using that money and gambling it away, I got a short time of forgetting. There is no one to remember her. I'm the only one who did."

"You must hate me," she said.

"I never hated you, Tess. I've not been the best father to you. It hurt too much to look at you. I hope you find happiness, and I know you'll make a wonderful mother."

"Where?" she asked.

"What?"

"Where is she buried?"

She took down all the details then hung up the phone. Sadness consumed her but also peace. Her mother did want her. She felt better for knowing what her father had kept to himself for so long.

The doorbell chimed. She closed her down her computer to go and answer the door. A beautiful slender woman with large breasts and a tiny waist stood on the other side. Tess saw the nastiness on the woman's face.

"You're Tess. Duncan's wife?"

Tess nodded. "Who are you?"

"What? Didn't he mention the woman he'd been fucking prior to you? Can I come in?" Before she got chance to argue the woman brushed past her and walked into the sitting room. Tess followed her feeling like a stranger in her own home.

"I don't know who you are?"

"I'm Yvonne. I helped Duncan design this house. Beautiful, isn't it? You could say our relationship was much more physical than work."

"You're the interior designer he slept with?"

"So Duncan has mentioned me?"

Tess knew she could handle this woman two ways. She could allow her to make demands that left her feeling small, or she could fight for Duncan. She knew him better than this woman.

"No, he hasn't mentioned you at all. I knew he wasn't a saint when I married him. You're proof he wasn't. I take it you're here to smear his name?" Tess asked.

Yvonne looked surprised.

"Maybe I should save you your voice. Duncan didn't mention you. We're expecting a baby together, and there is nothing you can say to change that," Tess said.

"You really think that?"

"I know who Duncan is. You didn't get the man. All you got was what he wanted you to have." Tess stood up. She felt the fight rise inside her.

"You mean nothing to Duncan. He's a businessman, and all you are is the person he needed to put the pieces together."

"I have no idea what you mean. He loves me," Tess said.

"Does he? I've not heard him say those words ever since I've known him."

"Tess!"

She jumped at the sound of the front door crashing open and Duncan's scream of her name. He came into the sitting room glaring at Yvonne. "What the fuck are you doing here?" he asked.

"I've come to meet the woman you chose over me."

He turned to Tess cupping her cheeks with both of his hands. "Are you all right?" he asked. Tess nodded.

"I take it you haven't told her of the need to marry in your father's will?" Yvonne asked.

"What?" Tess kept her gaze on Duncan, but the other woman's words penetrated her mind.

"It doesn't matter. I'll tell you everything. Don't listen to her."

"You're pregnant, right? Stage two of the master plan."

"What?"

"Duncan needed to marry to claim his father's estate. For as long as I've known him he's been trying to ruin Miranda. The evil stepmother who ruined his parents' marriage. His father passed leaving him a fortune which he could only collect by, A, being married and B, having a child. He doesn't love you, Tess. He's used you to get what he wants." Yvonne came closer, her spite following her.

"Is this true?" Tess asked him.

He'd not taken his hands off her. "I've got so much to tell you. I told you I wasn't a saint. Please, Tess. Trust me."

Tess stared at him. Her heart pounded inside her chest. She gazed into his dark eyes and saw the pleading look he was sending to her. How many people had walked away from him? Her own mother was dead, and her father couldn't be around her. The only person to care for her was this man

in front of her.

“I love you,” he said.

“What?”

“I’ve never spoken the words before in my life. I love you, Tess. Please, let me get rid of her, and I swear I’ll tell you everything.”

“You love me?”

“With all my heart.” He placed her palm over his heart. “Please, believe in me.”

She stared at her hand lying on his chest. His heart was beating rapidly against his palm. “I love you, too.” Tears filled her eyes as she looked at him.

He slammed his lips down on hers. “I promise you won’t regret this. I’ll be right back.”

She watched him walk away grabbing Yvonne roughly by the arm then dragging her out. The man in his place looked menacing. She heard shouting then the door slam.

He must have kicked the wall because she heard him curse. She sat down on the couch, her tummy turning. She pressed a hand to her stomach to try to ease the sickness. It was too much excitement. Tess ran out of the room then up the stairs. She knew she was going to be sick.

“Tess, look out,” Duncan shouted. She didn’t see the pulled up carpet on her way. Her feet missed the next step.

Her scream filled every part of the house like a deafening sound. Her hand on the banister lost its grip. She couldn’t keep herself up.

Tess felt the each of the stairs as she fell down. The world went black as her world stopped moving.

His screams were the only sound she heard.

Duncan dialled for an ambulance. Gerald and Grace walked in the door. The smiles on the elderly couple’s faces went immediately when they saw his tears.

“She’s fallen.”

Grace rushed over placing her fingers to Tess’s neck. “There is a pulse.”

“An ambulance is on its way. She’s not waking up, Grace.”

“She’ll be fine, Duncan. Have faith.”

“She’s pregnant. I messed up, Grace.” Tears poured down his face. The pain inside him was driving him crazy.

Ten minutes later the ambulance pulled up. Tess was beginning to come round. Moans poured from her mouth. They bundled her up in the ambulance. Duncan followed with Grace and Gerald travelling behind. He held her hand while the paramedics ran tests. When she got to the hospital, the doctor asked for details then followed his wife into the room.

Duncan sat in the waiting room as they finished with his wife. Grace and Gerald sat with him.

“Well, I never thought I’d come back to this excitement. You’re certainly keeping the passion in your life,” Grace said.

“I’m an idiot. I married for revenge and fell in love. If anything happens to Tess I’ll never forgive myself,” he said.

“There was no blood, Duncan. Don’t beat yourself up. We’ve all made mistakes.” Gerald tapped him on the shoulder.

An hour later the doctor came out looking at a chart. “Are you Tess’s husband?”

“Yes.”

“She’s asking for you. There is nothing wrong with your wife other than a headache and slight

damage to her pride.”

“What about the baby?” Duncan asked feeling relieved about the health of his woman.

“The baby is healthy. You were lucky. I’d advise making sure she’s more careful around steps. I’m keeping her in for observation, which is protocol. She’ll be home tomorrow.”

Duncan shook the doctor’s hand then went back to see his wife. Gerald and Grace smothered her in kisses giving her a lot of love.

He smiled seeing her face blush at the attention. When the others left for the day he took the seat beside her.

“I’m so stupid,” she said.

“No, you’re not. I’m surprised you can still blush after everything we’ve done together.”

Duncan took her hand kissing her fingers. “Why were you running like that?”

“I felt sick. All the emotion and everything—it was too much. I knew I was going to be sick, and I ran up the stairs so I wouldn’t have to clean up any mess.”

Duncan chuckled. “I love you.”

“You really mean that?” she asked.

“How can you doubt it?”

“I love you, too.”

“Yvonne wasn’t lying when she said that about my father’s will,” he said. He knew the sooner he got this out of the way the better they’d be. “When he died I inherited his estate and business. My mission was vengeance against Miranda. I needed to get married and have a baby in order to rightfully claim what was mine.”

“What changed?” she asked.

“You. When I got to know you, it changed who I was. I didn’t want to think about the pain of anything. For as long as I can remember I’ve felt this bitter resentment towards Miranda. Yvonne wasn’t lying. I had an ulterior motive of being in control. When your father stole that money and I saw you, I knew I had to have you no matter what. You weren’t like the women I knew. I thought everyone had a price. Yours was your father’s freedom, but it wasn’t your own price. You wanted something else from me.” He took a moment to lick his lips. It had been years since he’d cried. Staring at her in the hospital bed made him feel out of control.

“I wanted love from you,” she said.

“You asked for far more of me than anyone else. I love you, Tess. With all of my heart and soul.” He kissed her fingers. “My original plan was to keep you as my wife and to force you to fall in love with me. I intended to keep Yvonne as my mistress to satisfy my needs. Everything changed with you. I wanted you.”

She chuckled.

“Why aren’t you angry with me?” he asked.

“I love you, Duncan. Okay, I didn’t like you all that much when we first met. I can’t argue with love. You found a way in, and I can’t let you out. So you had a plan, which would leave me with nothing but happiness. Your plan succeeded.”

“You’re a very forgiving woman,” he said.

“I’ve had a lot of time to get over a lot of issues. I spoke to my father, and he finally confessed about my mother.”

“Tell me,” he said. Duncan didn’t want to ruin the moment. Tess forgave him. They were going to be a family. They’d come through so much together, and he was more than happy to give her the world if she asked.

“Her name was Bessie Kemp, and she had no one else in this world. She died giving birth to me. He wanted to lose himself. He loved her, Duncan. She wanted me as a daughter.” The tears poured from her eyes. He didn’t care what the nurses or doctors said. Duncan climbed up on the bed and placed her in his lap.

He stroked her hair feeling her sobs down in his soul. Duncan soothed her as much as possible. He kissed her head and offered words of love and comfort. “There is no one in this world who couldn’t love you, Tess. I’m sure it would break your mother’s heart to hear you think otherwise.”

“She wanted me, Duncan. I always thought she’d gone or something.”

“Did he give you an address to where she’s buried?” he asked. If not, he’d make the bastard pay for causing these tears.

“It’s at home. Please, can I go home? I don’t want to stay here.”

“The doctor said you needed to stay for observation.”

“I want to fall asleep in our bed with your arms wrapped around me. I need you tonight, Duncan. Take me home.”

Duncan couldn’t deny her. He found a doctor and arranged for a nurse to stay at his home to monitor her for the night. Tess stayed in his arms for the rest of the day. The love they felt was growing between them with every passing second.

Epilogue

Duncan sat on the park bench. His son was on his knee as he gazed over to where his wife stared at the gravestone marking her mother's resting place. It had taken Tess over a year to build up the courage to come to the cemetery. Duncan hadn't pushed. He didn't see the need to. His wife was strong. When his son, David, had been born Duncan had felt so afraid and yet so happy to finally have a family of his own.

Tess tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. She wore a thick winter coat over the large clothes she'd worn. David had been a large baby. She spent a great deal of time complaining about her weight while Duncan spent most of his time loving every inch of her body. She'd given him a son, and in return he'd given her more love than he thought was possible.

He saw her lips move as she spoke to the stone. David moaned in hunger. Duncan pulled one of the milk bottles out of the bag. Tess had expressed the milk that morning. He liked playing his part in raising his son. Grace and Gerald helped where they could. They'd become their own little family. After a short time she walked over to him.

"I want you to come with me," she said.

Duncan followed her, wrapping his arms around her shoulder as he calmed his son. She took him from his arms to feed him the bottle.

"Mom, I'd like to introduce you to Duncan. He's my husband, and this here is David. My son."

She turned to him with a sad smile on her lips. "I don't know if she can hear me. I hope she does. I'd like her to know that I'm happy."

He pulled her in his arms. "She'll know you're happy. No one could doubt it." He kissed her head looking out at the dark clouds overhead. "We'll have to come back, Tess. It looks like a storm is brewing."

They walked back to the car. She sat in the back, and he drove home. Grace and Gerald took David for the rest of the day as he planned a romantic evening for the two of them. He wanted Tess all to himself.

He left her to take a long relaxing bath while he finished up the stew Grace had made. The scents were wonderful. Tess came down the stairs wearing a beautiful red dress. Her tummy was still nicely rounded. He loved her curves and wouldn't change a thing about her. She was his woman, and he loved her no matter what.

The candles were lit. Her glass was filled with water as they served each other food.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"I'm happy. Sad about the lack of a mother but happy. I love you and David. We've got a family."

"There is something I wanted to give you." Duncan cleared his throat then knelt down before her next to the table.

"Duncan, what are you doing?"

He took her hand. "We never got a real proposal. I forced you to marry me. This is my time to

make amends. Tess Williams, I've known you for almost two years. I've fallen in love with you and the son you've given me. There is nothing in the world I wouldn't give you. I will spend the rest of my life making you happy. Will you do me the honour of becoming my wife?" He opened the box containing a new ring.

"It's beautiful, but we're married already, Duncan."

"Then marry me again. Only this time have the wedding you want. I'll pay anything. I want you to have a wedding you can look back and enjoy. Our day wasn't like that," he said.

"Where were you on our wedding day? I didn't organise the day, but to me it was perfect. You mean more to me than a day, Duncan. You're my future. All the days until I die will have you in them. I don't care about one day out of all the days I'm going to spend with you. I love you."

She cupped his cheek as she leaned down to kiss his lips.

"I love you, too. When did I get so lucky?" he asked.

She chuckled. "You decided to take a chance on me."

"You were the best chance I ever took."

She kissed his lips, her smile warming his whole body.

"Now, make love to me and show me."

Duncan pulled her into his arms. He didn't have the willpower to wait until they got upstairs.

Tess was pressed into the wall as he tore at her clothing. They couldn't keep their hands off each other. The food was forgotten in the search for their passion. Duncan couldn't believe what he'd gained by seeing this woman in his office all those months before.

What had started out as mere lust had turned into so much more.

He loved her with all of his heart and soul. Never a day went by where his heart and thoughts were not filled with her. Tess made him a better man. She allowed him to rant and rave, and at the end she held him to calm his spirits down.

She wrapped her arms around his neck holding on. He kissed her lips, loving her neck and taking her nipple into his mouth.

His desperation never let up until her tight cunt was wrapped around his cock.

Together they went to the stars. Their arms wrapped around each other. They were protected and in love. Duncan held her in his arms, carrying her up to his bed where he loved her until the sun came up.

The End

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