

Ms. Malone has created a fantasy where anything
can happen...

~ *Cataromance Review of Hellbaby*

Casey's
Night
In
Asking for Andre
PREQUEL

Minx Malone

Copyright

CASEY'S NIGHT IN
(PREQUEL TO ASKING FOR ANDRE)
Smashwords Edition

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Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Dedication

This one is for my fans. Some of you have followed me since the beginning, read all my work and sent me emails of encouragement. You don't know how much your loyalty has meant.

I couldn't do it without you and to be honest, I wouldn't want to.

Thank you!

Chapter One

Casey flopped down on her overstuffed couch and blew her bangs out of her eyes. It had been a hell of a day. She was ready to sit back, relax and do what she'd been thinking about since lunchtime.

She leaned over and pulled the shiny new magazine from her purse. She placed it gently on her lap and stroked a finger down the crisp uncreased page. She'd passed the magazine on the store rack while buying a sandwich at lunchtime and had been powerless to resist buying it. After a quick glance at the table of contents, she flipped it open to page thirty-six. A pair of brilliant gray eyes stared back at her. The same eyes that haunted her every night while she slept.

Andre Lavin.

Fashion Designer Extraordinaire. Italian Bad Boy. Multimillionaire. The article's headline was deliberately sensational but there weren't enough labels in the world to adequately describe this man. Not enough in the universe to describe the way he made her feel.

The agency she worked for handled his advertising and PR. She'd only been working the reception desk at Mirage Advertising for a few months but she'd seen him countless times. Unfortunately, the majority of those times consisted of her either stuttering or doing something equally embarrassing.

“Such as spilling my coffee all over myself.”

The dark brown stain on the front of her white blouse was evidence of her humiliation. He'd been in the hallway as she was leaving the employee lunchroom that afternoon. All it had taken

was him saying hello, those marvelous eyes crinkling at the corners. She'd been so lost in his gaze that she'd kept walking straight ahead.

Right into a wall.

Embarrassment swept through her all over again. Luckily he didn't come in to the agency every day. She needed some time before she could look him in the eye without blushing.

She had to give him credit though, he hadn't laughed at her when it happened. He'd actually been really nice, had even offered her his handkerchief. It was still in her pocket.

She wasn't accustomed to mopping up spills with delicate squares of linen that probably cost more money than she made in a week.

The entire time he'd been muttering in Italian and she'd been too flustered to point out that she didn't understand. So after he'd left she'd asked Milo, one of the designers who spoke Italian fluently, to translate some of the things he was saying.

Apparently *piccolina* meant "little one", which wasn't surprising because she knew she was short. However, the other word he'd used, *tesoro*, was something used as an endearment. Milo had given her a knowing smile when he told her it was something you'd call a lover or a close friend.

What the hell was she supposed to make of that?

"Don't make it more than it is, Casey. He probably has a pet name for all the girls who dump coffee on him."

She pulled the neatly folded cloth from her pocket and held it to her cheek. It smelled faintly of sandalwood, shaving soap and what could only be his cologne. She stroked the soft cloth over her skin, pretending it was the touch of his hand.

"Okay, enough fooling around. Time to get the laundry done."

She leaned her head back against the back of the chair to rest her eyes for a moment. There was always so much to do and so little time. Daydreaming over a handsome man in a magazine was the closest thing to a vacation she could afford. Plus it wasn't as if he'd ever know all the wicked, dirty things she'd imagined doing with him. Things she would never be comfortable doing in real life.

The sudden peal of the doorbell yanked her straight up in her seat.

"Just a second," she called out.

She swiped a hand over her face as she plodded to the door. Who would be visiting now? She wasn't expecting any deliveries and doubted any of her neighbors had suddenly gotten the urge to be friendly. She pulled open the door and stared at the man who stood with his hand raised, poised to push the bell again.

Lightning gray eyes stared back at her.

"Oh my god, it's you," she whispered.

All the oxygen in her lungs seized up into a knot. A few beats passed and her breath left her body in a big whoosh of air.

Andre Lavin is at my apartment.

She cleared her throat and glanced behind her warily at the magazine abandoned in the armchair. It was almost as if she'd conjured him up just by thinking about him but she knew that wasn't possible. If it was, he'd be at her apartment every night.

"What are you doing here?" she finally asked.

He ducked his head and looked up at her from under heavy, dark lashes. He stood casually, his lean body propped against the door frame.

“I was concerned about you. I feel so guilty for how I almost knocked you down today.” He licked his lips and her eyes followed the movement of his tongue. “I must see for myself that you are well.”

Without waiting for an invitation he pushed past her into the apartment. She was so shocked she stood staring at the empty doorway for a few moments before closing the door and turning to face him.

He stood directly behind her, so close her nose brushed against the front of his shirt. She sucked in a sudden harsh breath at the unexpected contact and took a few steps back. The scent of sandalwood flowed over her again, intertwined pleasantly with the scent of man. He smelled so good it took all her strength not to lean over and lick his neck.

“You’ve ruined your blouse.” He traced the shape of the stain lightly, the contact sending shivers through her.

His hand came to rest gently on the swell of her breast before he cupped the full weight. His thumb brushed over the nipple that pushed against the fabric.

“What are you doing?” she whispered. He didn’t answer, just pulled her closer until she stood cradled between his legs.

“Since it was my fault, I’ll replace the clothes I damaged.” He punctuated his words with soft kisses to her face, cheeks and neck.

Gentle hands rubbed over her shoulders and down her back, coming to rest on the swell of her backside. She should be pushing him away or at least pretending to be outraged. But the protest she intended to make died a rapid death when his clever fingers danced up her spine to tangle in the long, brown curls hanging loose down her back.

“Here, let’s take them off.”

He slowly unbuttoned her blouse, caressing every inch of pale skin as it was revealed. When he was done, he let the edges hang open. She crossed her arms over her chest to cover her plain white bra.

“No, *piccolina*. Don’t cover yourself. You are beautiful.” Andre slid his hand up the right side of her neck, stroking the downy wisps of hair that curled behind her ear.

One blunt finger slowly stroked the sensitive skin on her neck. His eyes held hers and she understood that he was giving her time to pull away if she wanted to. She chuckled softly. If he only knew some of the things she’d imagined doing to him he wouldn’t worry about rushing her. She clasped his hand and placed it over her heart. The rapid rise and fall of her chest would tell him more than any words.

With a harsh animal growl he took her mouth, his tongue darting out to tangle with hers. He held her head captive as he took his pleasure, feeding off her mouth like she alone had what he needed to survive.

She moaned and let her head fall back granting him access to the sensitive skin on her neck. He bit her gently on the curve of her neck and shoulder, soothing the spot with his tongue afterward.

“Yes. Dear lord, yes...” Her eyes closed helplessly as his hand found her breast and stroked her through the thin cotton. She briefly wished she had on something sexy and enticing. Not that it mattered, because the way he was looking at her made her feel sexy.

It was such an unexpected pleasure to be wanted by a man. She felt powerful and weak at the same time as his lips covered her nipple. Casey sucked in deep breaths as his mouth feathered across her skin. She moved against him, trying to ease the burning ache between her thighs. She

couldn't get close enough and the rough metal of his belt buckle against her heat only made it worse.

“Take them off. Please.” How long had she dreamed about him, dreamed about this? She didn't want to wait any longer. She didn't even close her eyes, afraid to miss a moment.

She squirmed as his hand inched up her thigh. He toyed with the edges of her panties, evading as she tried to angle her body so his hand would cover her mound. When one finger slipped beneath the cotton barrier and stroked the damp skin beneath, she finally couldn't take it anymore. She yanked on his shirt suddenly obsessed with making him as achy as she was. Boldly she wrapped her legs around his waist and squeezed.

When he stopped moving and lifted his head, the hunger in his gaze promised there was no turning back.

Andre shifted, laying her on the couch. She panted in anticipation as her arms fell languidly over her head, giving up all control to him. Andre's eyes drifted over her, his lids lowered, his mouth set in a grim line.

“You don't know how long I've wanted this.” His voice had taken on a strained, gritty quality.

He captured one of her legs and settled it on his shoulder. The movement opened her to his view, her core splayed open before him. His jaw clenched once, then again as he looked down at her.

“I bet you're wet for me.” All it took to prove his words was one brush of his knuckles against her wetness.

Casey looked away, embarrassed, as waves of ecstasy washed over her. She felt like a wanton with her legs spread open, all her secrets on display for him like a sexual buffet. She cried out at his next tentative touch, his fingers tracing the opening to her core.

He hooked his hands under her bottom, lifting and pulling her open, the sweet pressure sensitizing her nerves. One finger traced the delicate lips of her sex before dipping inside the snug clasp of her pussy. His fingers were thick and long, pushing slowly to find the deepest part of her. She'd barely adjusted to the twisting ache in her belly when his thumb dipped down to press tentatively against her tiny, puckered hole.

"Oh damn," She reared up, the sudden shocking pleasure ripping her first orgasm from her. She shuddered under his hands, her muscles clenching furiously around his fingers.

"Have you wanted me all this time as well, *bella*?" He didn't slow his explorations, just continued the steady rhythm of his fingers plunging into her over and over again. "I'm thinking..." he curled his fingers inside her pussy wrenching another soft cry from her. "...the answer is yes."

Her voice deserted her, rising waves of need curling through her again. Her back arched as she tried to find relief from the ache radiating from between her legs.

He stopped briefly to pull his shirt over his head, chuckling at her whimper. When he came back over her, it was skin to skin, the soft hairs on his chest tickling her nipples. He kissed her, tangling his hands in her hair and holding her head still as he loved her tongue with his.

That's how it felt to Casey, like every stroke of his tongue was a loving touch, every slide of their skin like an embrace. She'd never felt so cherished. So worshipped.

Or so overwhelmed.

She slid her hands into all that glorious dark hair, reveling in the slippery texture of the strands under her fingers. He closed his eyes at her touch, his face conveying his pleasure at her boldness.

“Yes, *bella*. Touch me. You don’t know what your touch does to me.” He kissed her again, holding her head still for the ruthless exploration of his tongue. There was a desperation, an urgency to his movements. He sipped at her mouth as if he were afraid it would be taken away at any moment. As if he had to savor every last drop of their interaction.

Then he shifted downward and licked her.

Every muscle went rigid at the unexpected pleasure. The heat of his mouth was like an inferno, igniting nerves she didn’t even know existed.

“Oh my god. Oh my god...” She put her fist in her mouth to stifle her wild cries but he pulled her hand down.

“No, I want to hear it when you lose control.” He bent his head again but held her gaze the whole way down. He was a man with a purpose, intent on his task. He was ruthless as he explored her inner walls, flicking his tongue across her skin, determined to make her crazy. She clutched at his shoulders frantically as desire twisted through her.

She needed something to hold on to, something to anchor her in the midst of what felt like a hurricane of sensation.

He did something with his tongue that ripped a hoarse cry from her throat and when her orgasm finally crashed over her, she cried his name so loudly the whole neighborhood probably heard.

“Oh damn...” Aftershocks rolled up and down her spine. He was still licking into her, gentler strokes that brought on a warm, tide of sensation.

“You’re so beautiful when you come for me. It’s something I plan to see again and again.”

He licked the arousal from her inner thighs wringing another series of shudders from her. Was there no end to what he could do with that wicked mouth? She was weak at the knees without him even entering her body.

She stretched, her muscles warm and loose. He must have taken that as an invitation because he crawled up her body and took the stiff points of her nipples in his mouth, giving each a gentle bite. She gave herself up to the exquisite pleasure-pain, her soft keening cry the only sound in the room. A few moments later, she opened her eyes to find him watching her, a small satisfied smile curling the edges of his mouth.

“Why do you look so smug?” She ran a hand down his chest until she came to the straining bulge in the front of his trousers. She cupped the outline of his cock, pleased to feel it jerk under her fingers.

“You’re not the only one who can play that game.”

Chapter Two

She sat up and shoved him backward. He looked surprised but obligingly lay back against the cushions of the couch and allowed her to straddle him. She'd never been the aggressor with a man but something about Andre made her bold. She wanted to give him the same pleasure he'd so unselfishly given her.

Not to mention the fact that she wanted to know if she had the power to make such a strong man beg.

“Now let's see about getting you out of these clothes.” His shirt was already unbuttoned but she pushed the edges of the material down his arms and tugged it off. His skin was a smooth golden color, like amaretto. She hummed in delight as she traced the strong muscles of his arms and chest with her fingers, his skin rippling under her touch.

“These pants have definitely got to go.” She moved back to unzip his trousers. He lifted his hips and allowed her to pull them off along with his briefs. His cock sprang out, as if anxious to see her. A drop of pearly fluid seeped from the tip as she watched and she suddenly wanted to take him in her mouth.

She scooted down until she was on her knees before him and brushed the underside of his cock with her nose.

“*Mi amore*, don't tease me. I can't take it if you do.” He hissed as she nuzzled him, her mouth just a breath away from his tip. “Take me in your mouth. Yes...”

His head fell back as she took him completely in her mouth, swallowing him from root to tip. She swallowed a few times, surprised to hear him bark out a harsh demand in Italian. She didn't understand what he said but the tone was unmistakable. It was the sound of a man in need.

A man on the brink of losing control.

If her mouth hadn't been stretched so full she would have smiled. She braced her hands on his knees and took him deeper in her mouth until he hit the back of her throat. Then she lifted her eyes to his and swallowed again.

“Oh *bella*, you take words away from me.” He tangled his hands in her hair and held her still. He breathed in deeply through his nose as if trying to gain control of himself but she didn't want him controlled. She wanted to be the woman who made him lose it. She hollowed her cheeks and drew his length through her lips slowly. When she reached the swollen tip she licked it lightly.

Then she blew softly on the head.

“Yes, like that...” His head fell back on the couch as she lapped at the tip. It was leaking steadily now and she took great delight in swirling the pearly drops on her tongue.

She closed her eyes and sucked him in rhythmically, his long length stretching the edges of her mouth. She cupped his tight sac and stroked him in time with the motion of her mouth. His thighs tensed hard as granite under her hands as he erupted in her mouth.

“You are such a surprise, little one.” Andre tugged her arm and pulled her up until she sprawled across his lap. She crawled up and snuggled against his bare chest, his heart pounding directly below her ear. “I wasn't expecting that.”

He tipped her chin up with his finger. He brushed his mouth over hers once, then again, his tongue tracing the shape of her lips. Warmth spread through her as she pressed her lips against his, then tentatively touched her tongue to his lower lip.

The action ignited something in him because he growled into her mouth and took the kiss deeper. His tongue dueled with hers and his fingers speared through her curls to hold her head in place. She felt overtaken and dominated as he took her mouth, the strength of his arms and legs like a steel cage locking her in place. It wasn't fear she felt as she gave herself up to the sensations racing through her though. Instead she felt liberated, free to experience anything and everything as he led her down the path to sexual fulfillment.

He broke off the kiss and pressed hard kisses over her neck and shoulder. He spread her legs and settled himself between them, holding himself above her with just the strength of his arms. The muscles in his shoulders flexed and corded up as he moved over her, his mouth trailing lower to nip at her breasts. His cock brushed against her leg and she tensed slightly. It had been so long since she'd been with a man. What if he didn't live up to her expectations? What if it hurt?

"I am going to fill you up." He bit her lightly on the side of her breast before sucking her nipple, hard. She cried out when he released her with a pop before moving to her other breast. He rolled the tip of her nipple lightly between his lips before blowing on the tip.

Her pussy clenched as if to remind her that it was empty. She grabbed at his arms, restless for him to do something. As much as she loved the foreplay, she needed him to fuck her before she lost her mind.

"What are you thinking *bella*? You're blushing all over."

Heat rushed to her cheeks and she covered her mouth with her hand. He laughed and ground his cock against her. It hit her then that he was teasing her, deliberately not giving her what she needed. The thought made her a little angry but mainly it made her bold.

“I’m thinking of all the things I want you to do to me. How much I want you inside, filling me, stretching me. I want to wrap my legs around you.”

His eyes widened and she felt a thrill. He wasn’t the only one capable of teasing and she doubted he could hold off much longer when she was wet and open beneath him.

Just in case the words weren’t enough, she wrapped her legs around his waist. He moaned long and loud as she pressed her wet pussy against the skin of his stomach. In a sudden move that took her breath away, he hooked her legs over his shoulders and sank into her pussy with one thick thrust.

“Andre! It’s too much, it’s too deep.” Her words broke off as he withdrew slightly only to sink back down until he was balls deep. She was so wet that he slid right in despite the snug fit.

He set a hard pace, stroking in and back out with no mercy. He pressed his damp forehead to hers and held her gaze as he powered into her, his eyes telling her she was the only woman he wanted. The only one he needed.

He hit something deep inside her, some secret place that unleashed a storm of need. A knot of desire formed in her core and she writhed beneath him, her nails digging into his back as she braced for it. The depth of what she was feeling was so unfamiliar. Touching herself had never made her feel like this, all hot and achy.

When she came it was probably going to knock her unconscious.

“You’re so tight around me. You are mine. Mine. *Mine.*” He rasped the words next to her ear, the harsh possessive tone of his voice setting off the first wave of her orgasm. She wailed as desire crashed through her, all her muscles tightening at the same time, her pussy clamping down so hard even Andre cried out.

“Yes, oh god...” She grabbed onto him like a lifeline, feeling like she was caught in an undertow and struggling for air. He cupped her under her bottom and lifted her as he moved, the new angle splaying her open and allowing him to go deeper. He was thrusting faster until his cock was so deep she could almost taste it.

He threw his head back and growled as he came, the veins in his neck and forehead bulging from the intensity. She loved to see him like this. It was incredibly powerful to know that she put that look on his face.

He sank down next to her, careful not to crush her with his weight. “You wore me out my little tigress. I still feel your claws in my back.”

She giggled softly. He’d probably carry the imprint of her nails in his back for days. The thought of him wearing her mark gave her a little thrill. After all, he’d marked her too. The way he’d touched her, licked her and sucked her, well, she was probably ruined for any other man after this.

“Sleep, *piccolina*. Just sleep here in my arms.” He flipped until she lay across his chest and wrapped her in his arms. His body heat and the strong cadence of his heart lulled her into an easy sleep. She snuggled closer, so warm and content...

...and hit the floor with a hard thud.

“Ouch!”

Disoriented, she sat up slowly and pushed her hair out of her face. The magazine she’d been reading was on the floor next to her, one of the pages ripped out and crumpled. She ran her hands over her body in confusion. She still wore her stained blouse and skirt from work.

“Oh no. Was that all just a dream?”

She cupped her face in her hands and fought the urge to laugh. But all the evidence was there, most damning that she still wore her pantyhose. She'd slept all night on the couch in her clothes.

“Aaaarggh!” She punched the throw pillow next to her.

The faint beeping coming from her bedroom told her it was already past six a.m. She hadn't gotten the laundry or the dishes done the previous night. Her hair was probably a tangled mess.

She jumped up and walked to her room. She slapped the off button on her alarm clock so hard it fell off the nightstand and crashed to the floor. At this point she might as well call in sick since she'd definitely be late. Not to mention that she didn't have any clean clothes to wear anyway.

She snatched the cordless phone on her night table and punched the number for her office. Anya, the assistant to the owner, answered on the first ring.

“Seriously, do you ever sleep? What are you doing at the agency so early?”

Silence hummed over the line for a moment and Casey mentally reevaluated what she knew about her friend. Apparently she was more than just an assistant to the owner if she was in the office before normal business hours.

“Never mind. I was just going to leave a message that I can't come in today. Tell everyone that I'm sick.”

Anya snorted. “Sick? You don't get sick so you must have had a hot date. Did he keep you up all night?”

Casey laughed. If only Anya knew. Her friend's assumption was strangely close to the truth. “Not exactly. I just overslept.”

“Hmmm. Well, I suppose Mr. Lavin will be disappointed when he comes in later. Staring at you seems to be the highlight of his visits.”

Casey almost dropped the phone. “The Lavin Group is coming in again? I didn’t see that on the schedule.”

“Andre Lavin himself called and asked for an additional meeting. I think he just wants another chance to ogle you.”

Casey was glad they were just on the phone. If Anya saw the blush that was surely creeping over her face, she’d never hear the end of it.

“I doubt that. But still I should probably come in this afternoon. I wouldn’t want to leave you guys short-handed.”

Casey hung up the phone, not even listening for Anya’s reply. She was going to see him again.

And this time she’d wear a black shirt.

THE END

...but only the beginning.

Casey and Andre's story continues in *Asking for Andre* published by Ellora’s Cave. Buy directly from the publisher for the lowest pricing. www.ellorascave.com

Keep reading for a special extended excerpt.

Author’s Note

If you’ve enjoyed this book, PLEASE consider leaving a review at Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Keep prices low by helping the authors you love spread the word about their books!

Excerpt of Asking for Andre by Minx Malone

Also Available from Ellora's Cave Publishing



Chapter One

“You need to have a fling.”

Casey Michaels grinned and picked up her headset. She'd been working as a receptionist at the Mirage Advertising Agency for three months now and as cheesy as it was, she felt she'd finally found home. She could wear business-casual attire, she had plenty of free time to do the assigned reading for her online classes and the administrative assistant, Anya Petrova, was quickly becoming her best friend.

Her only friend actually.

“A fling is the last thing I need. I said I was lonely, not slutty.” Casey adjusted the headset and pulled her chair closer to the desk. Recently she'd been given some administrative duties assisting some of the executives in the afternoon while a temp covered the phones. It was a chance for her to work on some interesting projects and gain experience for her resume. It also gave her a much-needed break from the tedium of being stuck behind the reception desk.

“Having a fling does *not* make you slutty. Having a fling with a loser makes you slutty.”

Anya fed another sheet into the fax machine. A second later there was a crunching sound and the paper came out the other side wrinkled and torn.

“Damn this place! I told Law we need a new fax machine.” Anya grabbed the sheet of paper and crumpled it into a ball before throwing it in the trash can under the desk. “That man can't see what's right in front of his face.”

Casey wisely chose not to comment. Anya had an on-again, off-again relationship with the owner, James Lawson, which caused her no end of frustration. From what Casey could tell, their boss was in love but Anya just wasn't ready to commit.

“Even if I was a fling kind of girl, there's no one for me to have a fling with. I'm not exactly Miss Popular.”

Casey'd always been something of a loner but since moving to the nation's capital it had been even harder to meet new people. Most of her neighbors worked long hours. She only saw them in passing as they came to and from work. The people she saw at the grocery store and on the subway seemed to change daily.

It was such a stark contrast to the small Virginia town she'd come from where everyone knew each other and crime was almost nonexistent. The entire atmosphere of city life was different. When she'd first arrived she'd thought everyone was talking to themselves until she realized they all had tiny cellphone earpieces in. Some of the women in the office even wore those in the bathroom. Casey couldn't think of anyone she wanted to talk to *that* badly.

It was no wonder she had trouble fitting in.

Anya looked pointedly at the clock on the wall. “No one to have a fling with? That will not be a problem, trust me.”

The doors to the agency opened again. The man who walked in wore a tailored, gray pinstriped suit with a black turtleneck. His black hair curled over his collar, the perfect complement to his thickly lashed gray eyes.

She sighed softly. Calling his eyes gray was like calling sunshine yellow. His eyes were sharp and penetrating, as shocking as a bolt of lightning. He was elegance personified, a woman's walking wet dream.

Andre Lavin was, quite simply, the best part of her day.

He pulled his cell phone from the inner pocket of his suit jacket, holding it up as if trying to get better reception. The move made his jacket ride up. All the blood left Casey's brain as he turned, giving her an award-winning view of his ass.

She gulped and looked away for a moment. What if he turned around and caught her staring? But like a homing magnet, her eyes were drawn back again and again.

God that man can wear a suit.

She licked her lips as her eyes roamed over his lean arms and broad shoulders. The same arms she imagined holding her down as his body powered over hers. The shoulders she hooked her legs over in her dreams every night. How many times had she woken in the early hours of the morning, damp with sweat, her breasts tight and aching? There were nights she could have cried from her desperate soul-stirring obsession.

Her eyes fluttered shut, her pulse racing in anticipation, her panties damp from the erotic images her brain couldn't hold back. It was useless thinking of him this way, the worst form of torture her sick mind could conjure. There were few things more futile than imagining the most amazing sex she'd never get to have.

When she opened her eyes again, Andre stood directly in front of the reception desk.

"Mr. Lavin!" She jumped to her feet. Her headset flew off, knocking over a small container of pens on the counter. They rolled in every direction, a few falling over the far edge where he was standing.

She raced around the desk and scrambled to collect the mess. As she snatched the last offender from near his foot, she looked up. Her position put her directly in line with his crotch.

She was hardly an expert but whatever was behind that zipper looked big enough to do some damage.

“Oh dear god.” Her voice was barely above a whisper but he must have heard because he made a choking sound that could have been laughter. She glanced at him warily, to find him watching her, his eyes stormy.

“This is quite a welcome, Cassandra”. He hesitated before extending his hand to help her up, his eyes roaming over her in a way that made Casey shiver.

“I’m so sorry, sir.”

He still held her hand, bringing it to his mouth to kiss her knuckles. The gesture would seem contrived coming from anyone else but was as natural as breathing to him. When he flipped her hand over to kiss the inside of her wrist, she sucked in a shocked breath. How could any culture consider this a polite greeting? His lips dragging over her skin roused feelings that were anything but proper.

“There is nothing to be sorry for. I can’t say the sight of you in any position is something to apologize for.”

With that shocking statement, he inclined his head to her in a half bow before turning and walking away. She stood staring after him, watching as he was met by the owner of the company with a hearty handshake.

The sight of you in any position...

His scandalous words of course had her imagining just what she could do to him in that position. She’d always been awkward and self-conscious during sex. She couldn’t imagine kneeling before a man, boldly taking him in her mouth while he watched.

Just the thought of Andre watching her do that brought enough heat to her cheeks to light a match.

Behind her, Anya cleared her throat. “You know, there’s a trick to a successful fling.”

Casey pressed the backs of her hands to her cheeks, hoping to cool the blush that lingered. She smoothed down her skirt and went back behind her desk, dropping down in her seat with a weary sigh. “Is there?”

“You have to pick someone who won’t expect any messy romance or complications. Someone sophisticated.” The other woman nodded pointedly in Andre’s direction before turning her attention back to the fax machine.

Casey let out an exasperated breath. Despite his flirtatious nature, Andre would never see her *that* way. He was a paparazzi favorite, regularly photographed with actresses and starlets.

So far out of her league he was orbiting in his own galaxy.

Over the past few months, they’d shared off-hand conversations about books, current events and her desire to travel. He was an unusually good listener and seemed to remember every detail she’d ever shared with him. Once he learned how much Casey wanted to visit Italy, he’d brought her pictures of his villa in Positano, told her stories of life growing up there and encouraged her to plan a visit.

Despite the fact her agency worked for him, Andre never treated her like an underling. He was courteous, respectful—everything a gentleman should be. He’d had ample opportunity to make a move on her but never did. He might flirt a little but she suspected that was just an ingrained part of his personality. Considering the type of women he was known for dating, she doubted he meant anything by it. She was hardly supermodel material.

Which was just one more reason she needed to get over this stupid crush before she ended up embarrassing herself.

Anya pulled a brown paper sack from her bag on the floor and held it out to Casey. “Oh, I almost forgot. I brought beignets from that place you like.”

Casey squealed and ripped into the bag immediately. She popped a beignet in her mouth, where the soft pastry melted on her tongue like butter. “Man, these are better than sex. Who needs men when you have melt-in-your-mouth French pastries?”

“Would you say that if you knew Mr. Lavin was asking about you the other day, I wonder?” Anya smiled craftily when Casey swiveled around to face her. “Well, that got your attention, didn’t it?”

“Mr. Lavin asked about me? What did you say?” Casey narrowed her eyes. Anya was quirky enough to do just about anything.

“He just asked how long you’d worked here. If he had known we hired you he wouldn’t have waited so long to start work on his new campaign, I’m sure.” Anya smirked.

“I’m sure he was just making polite conversation.” Casey tucked a stray curl behind her ear and tried to look nonchalant.

Anya leaned against the file cabinet and crossed her long legs. “I think he’s trying to find out more about you without being totally obvious. I told him you were twenty-six, single and in desperate need of getting laid.”

Casey gaped. “You did *not* actually say that?” She supposed it could be worse, although Anya made her sound about as exciting as a cloistered nun. Not that she’d be far off the mark. When was the last time she’d had a date?

“No, but I should have. He obviously likes you even though you give him no encouragement at all. The man is gorgeous and he stares at you whenever he thinks no one is watching. I even like the way he says your name. *Cassandra*,” she purred, rolling the “r” the way Andre did. Anya let out a dramatic sigh and popped another pastry in her mouth.

“It’s ridiculous. And embarrassing. No one calls me Cassandra. I’ve always just been tomboy Casey.”

“It’s sexy, especially with his accent. You should give him a chance.” She shook her head, seemingly perplexed that anyone would want to hide from a handsome, rich man.

“Are you kidding me?” Casey whispered. As he walked by, she scanned him from the top of his head to the bottom of his leather-clad soles. Despite all the time they’d spent talking, she still blushed every time he said hello. To her chagrin, he seemed determined to do so every time he came in. No matter who else was around or what was going on, he sought her out. She suspected he enjoyed watching her get flustered.

“A man like that is exactly what you need in your life. Shoot, a man like that is exactly what *every* girl needs in her life.”

When Andre turned in their direction, Casey spun around in her chair. Heart pounding, she peeked over her shoulder a few moments later, just in time to see his back disappear into a conference room.

“The only reason he stares at me is because I’m always dropping things or tripping in front of him. He’s probably just trying to stay out of my way.”

Anya chuckled. “Yeah, there was that time you spilled coffee all over yourself just because he said hello. That was pretty bad. But other than that, it’s been harmless stuff. He seems to like you all tongue-tied and klutzy.”

Casey rolled her eyes as she recalled all the times she'd embarrassed herself in his presence. At this point it was best not to even keep track.

“Anya, men like that date supermodels and actresses. Not broke, fashion-challenged receptionists, okay?” She looked down at her plain, beige, cable-knit sweater and brown tweed skirt. Both items had been purchased at the thrift store three blocks from her apartment. She ran a hand gently over the soft, nubby fabric of her sweater. It was usually one of her favorites.

Casey glanced at the conference door again. No matter how nice he was, she couldn't forget they were from two different worlds. Andre Lavin probably spent more money on toilet paper than she did on clothes. The thought made her a little sick.

“Well, apparently he never got that memo because he seems very interested in getting to know you. So what are you afraid of? Are you worried that if you let your hair down a little he might actually ask you out?” Anya reached over and pulled the clip from Casey's hair. The long, brown strands tumbled over her shoulders.

“Hey!” Casey tried unsuccessfully to grab it back before giving up and twirling her hair into a low bun. She secured it with a rubber band. “I am not afraid of anything.”

There's no reason to fear something that could never happen. Andre Lavin asking me out is about as likely as a spaceship full of Martians landing on the lawn outside.

“I just hate having my hair all over the place. Some of us are trying to be professional.” Casey focused on typing up a memo. Maybe if she just pretended Anya wasn't there the other woman would give up and leave her alone.

“You're trying to be invisible. Besides, you know very well I'm talking about more than just your hair.” Anya pulled Casey to her feet and surveyed her from head to foot.

“If you would take the granny bun down and lose those outdated clothes you would actually be hot. And of course get a better bra.” She cupped Casey’s breasts, pushing them up higher on her chest.

Casey stood stunned for a moment before jumping back so fast she bumped into the filing cabinet. “Anya! What are you doing? Are you feeling me up?”

“Don’t complain. This is probably more action than you’ve had in months.” Grinning triumphantly, Anya crossed her arms. “I knew you had a good figure under those shapeless clothes. If I had a perky rack like that I would just walk around in nothing but a bra all day.”

Casey laughed despite herself and plopped back down in her chair. “It’s official. You are truly insane, you know that?”

“I may be crazy but that doesn’t mean I’m wrong.” Anya reached around her and hit the red button on the multi-line phone that sent all calls to the recorded greeting.

“What are you doing?”

“I am going to help you. And you are *not* going to say no. Think of me as your fairy godmother.” Anya grabbed Casey’s hands and pulled her up, a wicked gleam in her blue eyes. “We don’t have time to really shop the way I want over lunch break but we can at least get you some new makeup or something. I’ll get one of the other assistants to cover the phones.”

“Oh no. I don’t like where this is going,” Casey groaned. She’d learned the hard way that when Anya got in one of her moods it was best not to fight it. She was like a tornado. You either took cover or let yourself get swept up in the chaos and hoped for a gentle landing.

Besides, it was probably better if she wasn’t here when Andre finished his meeting. He would come over to say hello and she’d inevitably do something ridiculous or embarrassing. So

far, he seemed to think she was just clumsy. If he ever figured out the real reason Casey was so awkward around him he'd run the other direction.

Or worse, feel sorry for her.

"Let's go shopping on Sunday. I assume you already have a dress for the Preview Gala?" Casey nodded reluctantly. Normally she avoided social events like the plague but the company's annual meeting was mandatory, even for nobodies like her. She could only hope she didn't trip over her own feet or worse be forced out on the dance floor. Parties were only fun for social butterflies like Anya.

For shy, awkward people like her, they were a special brand of torture.

"Well, after the Gala is over we'll go shopping for your new wardrobe. No more bulky sweaters and dowdy skirts. We have to play up your assets." Anya rubbed her hands together gleefully.

"Am I going to regret this?" Casey crossed her arms over her chest. Images of her dressed in revealing club clothes floated through her mind. The other woman had great taste but she was much more outgoing. Anya wouldn't be uncomfortable in a skintight miniskirt or a blouse that showed a ton of cleavage but those things were Casey's worst nightmare.

Anya pushed her lips out into an exaggerated pout. "Have a little faith. I know what I'm doing. Besides, what's the worst that could happen?"

* * * * *

"I'm not sure about this new slogan." Andre Lavin rubbed his hands roughly over his face, trying to erase months of stress. He was so tired he almost felt intoxicated but seeing his dream come to life was worth a thousand sleepless nights. "*Living the Lavin Life*. It sounds like a rip-off of a cheesy pop song."

James Lawson, owner of Mirage Advertising Agency, patted him reassuringly on the shoulder. “Wait until you see the presentation. The campaign we’ve generated is youthful and high energy. It’s exactly what you need for a launch into the American market.”

“I hope so.” He’d already seen presentations for two alternate slogans and they were no closer to capturing the essence of what he was about than the current one. As much as he liked the Mirage Agency, if they couldn’t deliver what he needed he would have to go elsewhere. Firing his agents wouldn’t be fun but he hadn’t reached this point in his career by being soft. He did what had to be done even when it wasn’t easy.

As the eldest son of Nicolas and Stefania Lavin, he really didn’t have to work. He and his younger brother Philippe were considered two of the most eligible bachelors in Europe. This was due in part to the considerable inherited wealth left to them by their late father, a French financier, as well as the impeccable bloodline bestowed on them by their mother, a direct descendent of the now deposed Italian royal family.

There were so many who’d thought the pampered son of an aristocratic family didn’t have the fortitude to run a successful business. Some were still waiting for him to fail. If Andre had his way, they were in for a long wait. He’d waited his entire career to launch his international campaign. He wouldn’t see it derailed for any reason.

Not even friendships.

“I have the production figures. We’re in good shape.” Jason Gautier, his business partner and best friend, appeared at his left side. His blond hair was cut into a short, spiky do, more for ease and comfort than style. His friend had been accused more than once of having a calculator for a brain and a cash register for a heart. Success was his life’s blood. It was one of the things they had in common.

“Fantastic. Do we still have that conference call with the bank this afternoon?”

“Actually, there was a mix-up. We’re supposed to be on that call in about ten minutes.” At his glower, Jason shrugged apologetically and crossed his arms. “Don’t shoot the messenger. How do you want to handle this?”

“Gentlemen, I think I have a solution.” Law waved over his assistant, a stunning Eastern European woman with short, dark hair. He whispered something in her ear and she turned and sashayed off.

Law glanced at his watch. “We don’t have anything major booked for next week so if you’re planning to stay in town through the weekend, we could reschedule.”

“We were planning to fly back to Milan tonight...” Andre trailed off as they left the conference room and Cassandra entered his line of vision. His cock filled as if happy to see her again. He cursed softly and turned away, giving himself time to calm down.

It was like this whenever she was around. His reaction made him feel like a lecher, especially since from a distance she resembled a fairy child more so than a grown woman. But she was one hell of a woman.

Ever since he’d first seen her three months ago, he’d battled this borderline obsession. He knew her every expression, the way she tilted her head when listening or pursed her lips when she didn’t agree with something. Her skin was very pale and coupled with her curly, dark hair, was incredibly striking. She was delicately built, petite with slim hips, but he knew from their conversations she was no pushover. She might look fragile but she had a backbone of steel.

Then to see her today on her knees before him, *Dio*. It’d be weeks before he could look at her without imagining the scenario as it had played out in his mind. He’d imagined her leaning forward and tugging down his zipper. Her tiny hands cupping his length as her full lips stretched

around his cock. It had taken all his willpower to beat back the surge of lust and help her to her feet when everything in him wanted to keep her on her knees.

Andre turned at the sharp nudge in his side. Jason lifted his eyebrows in inquiry before stretching to see over his shoulder. Andre stepped forward blocking his view. He wasn't sure what drove the protective instinct, but in that moment he didn't want his friend anywhere near her. Jason viewed women like candy. He wanted to sample every flavor available as often as possible and he was handsome enough that seduction came easily.

Jason frowned. "I was just saying our schedule is flexible enough that we can stay until Monday. Unless you're intent on flying back tonight."

Law rubbed his hands together. "I'm sure we've mentioned this before but our annual company Preview Gala is tomorrow night. We showcase our most high-profile campaigns from the prior year and do a few sneak peeks of current projects."

Andre stilled. "A company meeting? Do all of the employees usually show up?"

Law nodded slowly. "Yes, it's mandatory for employees. Even if it wasn't, I'm sure they'd come anyway. We put on quite a party. If you're going to be in town, it would be an honor for you to drop in. Then, I'll have our designers rearrange their schedules to accommodate you on Monday afternoon."

Andre wiped a hand over his face to stifle the silly smile he feared he was wearing. He was going to see Cassandra this weekend. He'd been trying to get closer to her, coaxing her to talk to him and had shared as much about himself as he could without pushing too hard.

He'd hoped that she'd warm up over time so he could propose meeting for coffee or perhaps even lunch. Despite his efforts, she was still hesitant when they talked, probably because they were always surrounded by other people.

Andre closed his eyes and imagined dancing with her. The soft weight of her hand on his shoulder, the press of her small frame against his as they moved. He could remember every time she'd ever touched him, a fleeting glide of her fingers when she handed him something or the brush of their shoulders when they passed in the hallway.

It had been all he could do some days not to scoop her up in his arms and cover her plump lips with his. But if he did that, he'd never have a chance with her. She was obviously sheltered and so reserved he feared using stronger tactics. He didn't want to offend her.

Now Andre would get to see her in a different environment where she might be more comfortable. Something inside him felt absurdly excited to discover the secret thoughts Cassandra only hinted at. He wanted to know everything, especially the things she was too shy to say in front of others. He wanted to know what she wanted and what she desired. He was ready to deliver anything she needed.

"Well, if we're staying through until Monday anyway, we'd love to attend your party. Thank you for being so accommodating." He nodded briefly at Law.

Jason fell into step next to him as they walked back down the hall. "What's going on with you lately? You've been distracted. Impatient."

Andre stopped abruptly when they reached the front of the office. The reception area was empty. His fairy was gone. He'd missed his chance to say goodbye and see her cheeks redden as she smiled up from beneath her dark lashes. He rubbed the center of his chest absently and glanced at his watch. Even fairies had to eat lunch it seemed.

"Nothing is wrong with me. I don't have time for anything to be wrong with me." He squeezed his eyes shut when he realized he was glaring at the empty receptionist chair as if it held the answer to all his problems. "Are you as tired as I am?"

“Probably. I just make tired look good.” Jason chuckled softly. “You on the other hand, look like shit.”

“Thanks *amico*. This is what friends are for.” Laughing, they pushed open the agency’s glass double doors and stepped out into the crisp winter air. The cold slap in the face was exactly what Andre needed, clearing the cobwebs from his brain and sharpening his focus.

As tempting as it was, he couldn’t afford a mental vacation right now. Not when so much was on the line. He pulled out his cell phone. There were ten voicemails waiting since he’d last checked an hour ago. Most of them probably from his mother who was intent on marrying him off to one of the beautiful but empty-headed young women in her exclusive social circle. He doubted his email inbox fared any better. More messages from people who wanted something from him, no doubt.

He loved his life but there were times when being Andre Lavin was exhausting.

* * * * *

“I’m calling for Olivia Michaels, please. Yes, I’ll hold.” Casey tucked her cell phone into the curve of her shoulder so she could pull her pajama bottoms on.

Her mother worked the night shift at the Pleasant Hills retirement home because the later shift brought in more money. Since Casey didn’t feel comfortable making personal calls during her work hours, she’d gotten into the routine of calling her mom before she went to bed. By then most of the seniors had everything they needed for the night and her mom was able to take a break and chat.

“Hi, babycakes, how are you?” Olivia sounded upbeat but Casey could hear the exhaustion in her mother’s voice.

“I’m great, Mom. In fact, I got a promotion at work. It’s more money and more responsibility. I’ll actually be working with the marketing team now instead of just sitting behind the front desk.”

“Oh baby, I’m so proud of you. I knew that would happen. Didn’t I tell you? Anybody can see what a hard worker you are and how smart you are. I’ll just bet they promote you again once you finish your degree.” Her mom sighed, the sound filled with contentment.

Her mother never criticized her or made her feel guilty but Casey knew her mom’s life would have been completely different if she hadn’t gotten pregnant and had to drop out of college. She worked so hard all the time but never complained. The only time Casey’d ever heard her cry was when she called to tell her she’d flunked out of school. It felt good to give her mom a reason to smile again.

“I hope so, Mom. I’m just glad that I’ll finally be able to help you out with the bills some now,” Casey said.

“Cassandra Anne, I am just fine. I told you I make more working the late shift at this place. They gave me a nice increase to steal me away from the hospital. They have a hard time finding nurses with the patience to deal with some of the older folks here. They can get a little ornery sometimes. I just want you to concentrate on your studies. I don’t need anything,” Olivia stated.

“Mom, you can at least go back to the normal shift again. The extra money I’m making means you won’t have to work so hard all the time. You deserve to take a break.”

“But I don’t want to change shifts, baby girl. I’ve gotten used to this schedule and well, I have friends here.”

Casey grinned. Her mom almost sounded *embarrassed*. “Mom, do you have a boyfriend at work? Is it one of the other night nurses?”

“Now, I didn’t say anything of the sort, Cassandra. I just enjoy my work, that’s all. They need me here at night. Another nurse might not understand why Mr. Jansen likes his dinner plate arranged in the same order as the color wheel or why Mrs. Hodges wears pink bunny slippers to bed.” Olivia huffed.

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it, Mom. I just want to make sure you’re not running yourself into the ground.”

“Casey, stop worrying about me so much. Worrying is supposed to be my job. Well, I should probably get back to work now. Keep up the good work, baby girl. Love you.”

“Love you too.” Casey tossed her cell phone in the middle of her bed. Growing up it had always worried her that her mom had to work such odd hours and sometimes multiple jobs to make ends meet. She was going to send her mom money whether she wanted it or not but it was nice to know her latest job was making her happy at least.

Casey flopped down on her bed and grabbed her backpack. She needed to get in at least another half hour of studying to keep from falling behind. She propped the textbook open in her lap and started reading.

Her eyes drifted closed before she finished the first page.

Chapter Two

The next night arrived faster than Casey could believe. She stood in the Grand Ballroom of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and gazed around nervously. It was a stunning room with enormous crystal chandeliers and intricate moldings. Waiters in black tie scurried back and forth hefting trays of champagne, and a small ensemble band played soft jazz in one corner. A woman glided by wearing a necklace with emeralds as large as quarters.

She stood up straighter, suddenly appreciative of all the times her mother had corrected her posture and insisted she wear heels to church. They hadn't had much money but her mother was determined to raise her the "proper" way, as a true Southern lady. She'd hated her mother's old-fashioned ideas growing up but was extremely thankful for them now. The other women in the room looked like the type to wear lace and pearls even when they were sleeping.

"I'm definitely not in Kansas anymore," she whispered.

A passing waiter offered her a flute of champagne and she took it, grateful to have something to do with her hands. She raised the glass and took a healthy gulp. The cool liquid tingled over her tongue, a refreshing surprise. She finished the glass and then snagged another from the next waiter she saw. Since the company was paying for the event she might as well have a good time.

Everyone else seemed engrossed in their conversations and no one seemed to notice her, which was probably a good thing. Someone passing on her left bumped into her elbow. Champagne sloshed over her hand.

"Oh hi, Casey. I didn't see you." Milo Hamilton held her arm in a steady grip and flashed a toothy grin. "I'm usually not so clumsy."

Casey found herself smiling back easily. “No problem. Where’s Mya?” A waiter appeared like magic, taking her glass and handing her several napkins to mop up the spill.

“Mya hasn’t arrived yet. She’s coming straight from an offsite meeting with a client. Until then, I’m forced to socialize on my own.” Right then the music changed to something up-tempo.

Milo held out a hand and she took it automatically. “Let’s dance.”

When he moved toward the center of the floor where several couples were already dancing, Casey began to have second thoughts.

“I’ll try not to step on your feet,” she joked.

He led her through the moves of the dance, leading with gentle nudges left and right. He spun her and her mouth dropped open in surprise when she didn’t stumble but executed a perfect turn.

“Wow. I actually did it! You make this seem so easy.” Casey grinned as he spun her again.

Milo winked down at her. “I figured I should go easy on you. I appreciate you taking pity on me so I didn’t have to stand by myself.”

Casey laughed when he made a pleading face. She had no doubt he would have no shortage of companions when he chose to mingle. It was more likely that he was taking pity on her.

“I’m more than happy to hang out with you. I was almost on the verge of leaving and going home.”

Milo regarded her thoughtfully. “I don’t think you want to do that. Not until you put your admirer out of his misery.”

Casey’s head shot up. “Admirer? What are you talking about?”

Milo smiled and looked behind her pointedly. “You’ll see.” He released her and nodded at something behind her.

She turned slowly and scanned the room. She could see people moving out of the way as someone walked through. Her ears started buzzing and the hair on the back of her neck stood up.

Somehow she just *knew*.

Andre finally came to stand next to them. His eyes never left hers but his words were for Milo.

“This doesn’t seem fair, Mr. Hamilton. You can’t keep all the beautiful women to yourself.”

Milo threw his head back and laughed. He was such a handsome man with his wavy brown hair and blue eyes. But his laugh didn’t cause her heart to race. His touch didn’t make her lose her breath. Only one man had that effect on her and he was standing to her side, observing them with a mixture of suspicion and hostility.

“All I’m going to say, Mr. Lavin is now we’re even.” Milo seemed to enjoy Andre’s discomfort.

Casey glanced between the two men. “Even? What does that mean?”

Andre growled something in Italian which caused Milo to grin even harder. Casey crossed her arms as the two continued to stare at each other.

“Hello? Will someone please tell me what’s going on here?”

Milo shook his head. “I’ll leave that for Mr. Lavin to explain. I’m getting out of the line of fire.”

Casey watched as he turned and joined a group nearby. She turned back to see Andre watching her with a thin-lipped smile.

“Mr. Hamilton is just paying me back for a little misunderstanding that occurred while he was wooing Ms. Taylor. I’m starting to understand his position.”

“Oh, you were dating Mya?” Casey hoped the tremor in her voice wasn’t as obvious to him as it was to her.

“No. He just thought I was. That was bad enough, believe me.” His eyes fixed on her face. “So it’ll just be the two of us. Disappointed?”

Casey placed a hand self-consciously over her exposed cleavage. The movement drew his attention there and she watched as his pupils widened before he ripped his gaze back to her face.

“Of course not. I’m always happy to talk to you, Mr. Lavin.”

He grimaced and clenched his fists at his sides. “Don’t call me that. Please.” The last word was less of a command and more of a plea. “Call me Andre. We’re not in the office. There’s no need to be formal.”

Casey stared at him for a long moment. He was behaving so strangely. She had a hard time believing it really mattered to him one way or the other what she called him.

“Okay. Andre.” Just saying his name brought a rush of heat to her cheeks. Her heartbeat stuttered and began to beat double time.

“Let me get you a drink.” He motioned one of the circulating waiters over.

“Oh no, you don’t need to,” Casey sputtered. She’d already had too much as it was. But before she could protest, he plucked another crystal goblet of the sparkling gold liquid from the tray of a passing waiter.

“Well, I suppose one more can’t hurt.” She would just sip it slowly. Savor it. It would give her something to concentrate on besides how good Andre looked in black tie.

Casey’d only tasted champagne once before at an impromptu farewell party for a friend back home. She held her glass up to the light, admiring the color. The bubbles seemed to pulse in the soft light of the ballroom chandeliers, rising to the top of the glass in intricate patterns.

“It’s so beautiful.”

She heard Andre’s murmured agreement but when she lifted her eyes, she found him observing her, not the glass. He smiled and her heart jumped around in her chest again. She felt as if he could see everything she tried to keep hidden, all the flaws she desperately wanted to conceal. It made her want to find out what he was thinking just as surely as it made her want to run in the other direction.

“Come. Let’s go outside. I need some air.” Andre motioned for Casey to follow him through the tall double doors leading onto the balcony. He held the door so she could walk ahead of him. They placed their glasses on a small table before they passed through.

Casey stopped abruptly when she saw how high they stood. She’d never felt comfortable with heights. Tentatively, she touched the wrought iron railing, the only thing keeping them from plunging to the manicured walkway below. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. When she opened them, Andre stood beside her, so close she felt his heat.

It struck her that their position was incredibly intimate, standing together in the dark with their shoulders brushing. Casey shuddered when Andre moved closer, his leg settling right next to hers, their hips bumping gently. She tried to move a little to her left but found herself next to a large column. She was now trapped between the column and six-foot-plus of hard, Italian male.

Gulp.

“I wasn’t sure you would actually come tonight. I know you’re very busy.” Casey sucked in a breath when he turned to face her. This close she saw the varying shades that made up his unusual eye color, darker around the edges blending into a lighter color closer to the pupil.

“I am busy, yes. But I am learning to make time for what’s important to me.” His eyes didn’t leave hers. After a few charged moments, he turned and stared out over the walkway below.

“Life is for living, right?”

This side of the building was half shadowed, with small sconces at each balcony entrance providing muted illumination. The garden below seemed designed to encourage clandestine meetings and lovers’ trysts. Several couples walked slowly in the moonlight, hand in hand, enjoying the crisp night air. She shivered a little and wished she’d brought a wrap. Andre immediately slipped out of his jacket and hung it on her shoulders. It smelled of him, aftershave and his unique scent. She smiled gratefully up at him.

The door behind them swung open. A woman, obviously inebriated, stared back at them before giggling and going back in. As the door swung shut, Andre sighed.

“I’m so weary of this.”

Casey turned to face him, a question on her face. He smiled ruefully and gestured around them.

“I used to find inspiration in the people around me, the energy of each city I visited, the sights, the sounds. But for a long time nothing has inspired me. Everything looks the same. No mystery. No excitement.”

She laughed and crossed her arms. “No mystery or excitement, huh? I didn’t realize I was that boring.”

He grimaced. “Sorry. That came out wrong. It’s just this whole routine is so...routine.”

They laughed. Casey studied the beautiful scenery. She couldn’t imagine considering champagne in a five-star hotel as routine. “I suppose you come to a lot of parties like this. Poor baby, your life is so difficult.”

Shock flickered across his face before a smile tugged at the corners of his lips. “I sound like a spoiled brat, huh?”

She shrugged. “Maybe a little. But I really think you have it all wrong. People may seem predictable sometimes but they’re never boring. People are complicated and fascinating.”

She gestured over the balcony to the gardens. A couple below was dancing in the middle of the pathway, oblivious to everything around them. “This is a perfect example. Tell me what you see.”

Andre squinted down at the couple. “I see a couple dancing. I see this at these parties quite often. People get bored and wander off. Growing up, my brother and I were forced to attend many social events. My mother is very concerned with appearances, you see.” He chuckled and sent her a sly look.

“If she only knew how many of her prim-and-proper friends we caught in compromising situations over the years, she probably wouldn’t have been so insistent that we attend those parties.”

Casey giggled when he winked. She nodded toward the couple again. “You say they’re a couple but how do you know? Just because they’re dancing together?”

Andre leaned over and whispered in her ear. “No, I assume because of the way he has his hand on her ass.”

Casey peered over the railing again and her breath hitched. The man had one hand firmly on the woman’s bottom while the other rubbed slow circles on the skin exposed by the plunging back drape of her gown.

“I bet she’s *really* cold,” she quipped. Even as her face heated and she started to turn away, the woman stood on tiptoe and pressed her mouth against her lover’s. She looped an arm behind

his head and held him to her, caressing his back, neck and face. Casey couldn't turn away, their dueling tongues visible even from a distance. They kissed with such passion it embarrassed her to watch.

She peeked at Andre. He seemed completely at ease observing the other couple's passion so she strived to seem as unaffected as he.

“That doesn't mean they're a couple. Look at how they touch each other. They're so desperate. So urgent. Perhaps they're forbidden lovers. Maybe they haven't seen each other in a long time and this is their only chance to be together.”

Andre glanced over at her, obviously amused. “That's very romantic but I doubt it. It's more likely they're just another bored married couple who got tired of socializing.”

They turned to face each other and Casey instantly knew she'd made a mistake. The sudden movement threw her off balance and she had to grab onto his arms to avoid falling. She molded to him from chest to thigh, every inch of her skin heating at the intimate contact.

The urge to wrap herself around him and explore the hard muscles under her hands overwhelmed her. If only she could be as bold as the woman below. She could pull up her dress and wrap her legs around his long frame and finally stop wondering what he tasted like.

As if he heard her thoughts, Andre brushed his lips over her forehead. Then he froze, awaiting her reaction. She closed her eyes, her mind telling her to do one thing and her body crying out for her to throw herself into his arms. In the end she compromised. She turned her face up to his and licked her lips. That was all the invitation he needed.

He groaned and swallowed hard. “*Tesoro*, you don't know what you do to me.”

“What does that word mean?” Casey whispered.

Andre swallowed hard. “It means treasure. My treasure.”

Before she could process the words he was kissing her, his lips feathering gently over her eyes, her cheeks and then finally, finally her mouth.

His taste exploded on her tongue, heady like sandalwood, cinnamon and man. She clasped his shirt in her fists and pulled him closer. With a stark, animal sound, his hands settled on her lower back as he kissed her deeper, only breaking apart to take desperate, greedy breaths.

It was too much at once, too many sensations to process. Casey opened her eyes and the world around her seemed to spin and swirl. She broke away and covered her face with her hands.

“I am so sorry. I just can’t...” She heard his harsh breathing but he didn’t try to touch her again. He probably wondered what her problem was. She couldn’t tell him because she didn’t know herself.

“You don’t have to apologize. I shouldn’t have been so rough. I didn’t mean to frighten you.”

Casey regarded him thoughtfully. He thought he’d been too rough? She shook her head slowly. “You weren’t rough at all. I’m just not very good at this.”

Anya thought she needed to have a fling, but she didn’t even know how to approach a man. It wasn’t the kind of thing easily learned either.

Maybe Anya could give me remedial love lessons. Seduction 101.

“Love lessons?”

Casey jumped at the soft whisper against her ear. She didn’t realize she’d spoken aloud. She bit her lip nervously and he leaned forward at the sight before letting out a rough, grating laugh.

“If you only knew the things I would love to teach you, *piccolina*. The things I’ve dreamed of doing to you.”

“Excuse me?”

“Don’t you know how you affect me?” Andre sighed heavily and leaned his head back. “I’ve tried to be discreet with my attentions so I wouldn’t offend you. Even still there are times when it seems you’re avoiding me.”

Blushing, Casey turned to stare at the people walking on the path below. Anything to avoid looking directly into his eyes. “I didn’t avoid you because I felt offended,” she whispered. “You make me nervous.”

Andre touched her hair, tentatively. “Truly? Do you feel this same obsession, this longing? Or am I the only one in torment?”

“Torment? Because of me?” Was this his idea of a joke? A man who could have any woman he wanted didn’t *long* for the receptionist at his advertising agency.

“Yes. These past months have been torture. Watching you, wanting you. And now you stand here asking for love lessons.” Andre skimmed a finger over her cheek. “You have only to ask.”

The husky timbre of his voice skidded along her nerves and her nipples tightened as his finger trailed down her neck and over the swell of her breast. This had to be a dream, a champagne-fueled hallucination. But if this was a dream, Casey figured it couldn’t hurt to ask for one thing.

“Kiss me.”

Andre moved so quietly in the dark, his breath warm on her neck as he embraced her. She breathed in deeply, his scent overwhelming her senses. She reacted instinctively, curling against him, pressing against his erection.

He stilled, the arm around her waist tightening until she couldn’t move. He held her gaze unblinking as he lowered his head and touched his mouth to hers.

They both sighed at the gentle touch of his lips against hers. He watched her as he brushed against her lips again and then she felt the first tentative stroke of his tongue. She had no chance to feel awkward or nervous. She simply melted, her mouth open against his, her arm wrapping around his neck.

He lifted her, carrying her behind the column into the shadows. All the while, her hands traveled over the flat planes of his chest to the rosy muscles of his arms which tensed as he clasped her to him. He was hard everywhere, his arms and thighs like steel cages locking her in place. Andre circled her wrists and held her still as his lips glided over her cheek to torment the skin on her throat. He tugged at the thin straps of her dress until they slid over her shoulders, exposing her lacy strapless bra to his view. He pushed the lacy cups down until her breasts popped out. When he took a taut nipple in his mouth, she bit her lip to stifle a wild cry.

“I want you in my bed, where you won’t have to hide the sounds of your pleasure. I want to hear what my touch does to you.” His lips against her skin sent a chill of sensation through her.

“I thought you were teaching me about kissing?” she teased. She was on fire, every nerve ending at attention.

Andre chuckled, a dark husky sound. “*Cara mia*, I never said I would only kiss your lips.”

His dark head moved back and forth between the tips of her breasts, alternately sucking and biting on them. She’d never known she could feel these sensations, had never guessed at the force of passion that lay untapped within her. She wanted to crawl out of her skin and all over him. She wanted him inside her and all over her. She never wanted him to stop.

She panted into the wind as he stopped his attention to her breasts, shifting to hitch up the long skirt of her dress. The material glided over the skin of her thighs, the soft rustle of fabric

unbelievably erotic. His hand moved under the material to cup her between her legs. The darker tone of his skin against the pale white of her thighs was raw, animalistic.

A whimper escaped her lips as he stroked the damp silk at her core. Andre hooked a finger through the edge of the lace and ripped it with a sudden jerk of his arm. She cried out, first in surprise then in pleasure as his fingers met her wetness for the first time, skin to skin.

“I knew you’d be wet for me. I have to feel you.” One long finger sank deep and she moaned at the decadent sensation.

There was something primal about being backed up against the wall with one leg cocked over his hip and his hand playing between her legs. He shifted, the base of his palm rubbing directly against her clit. The heat built as he continued to caress her internally, every press of his finger and grind of his palm sending her closer and closer to orgasm. She shifted her hips, unconsciously tilting up with the rhythm of his hand.

“I didn’t intend for our first lesson to be about the G-spot.” He chuckled softly as she clamped down on his finger when he tried to withdraw.

“Is that what that is?” she panted. As she felt a second finger slowly working its way next to the first, she cried out and gripped his shirt.

“You’re so tight, so perfect.” He muttered something in Italian, before capturing her lips in a drugging kiss. “*Cara*, you make me want.” Control obviously gone, his accent thickened.

That she caused him to be in that state felt incredibly satisfying, especially when she unzipped his pants and grasped the evidence of his excitement. His length pressed long and thick against her fingers. At her touch, he jerked and his fingers rammed harder inside her. The sudden shocking pleasure brought tears to her eyes.

“More.”

Andre pulled back at her tortured whisper. “You like it hard?”

At her shaky nod, something dark and intense passed over his face. He fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a condom, ripping the packet with his teeth. She watched as he rolled it over his cock, her desire building with every breath. Some hazy part of her knew this was a bad idea but she wanted him. Nothing could stop what was coming, not even if the entire party came out on the balcony with them.

He kissed her again, his tongue invading her mouth and all thought fled. He lifted her easily and angled her back against the wall. Then he drew back and thrust home, the moisture of her arousal easing the way. His gaze captured hers as he fucked her and despite her embarrassment, she couldn't turn away. He watched with carnal satisfaction as she accepted every rough thrust, every penetrating glide of his cock through her tender sheath, his eyes soaking up every nuance of her expression.

Her orgasm surprised her, its heat spreading from her toes, up through her core and radiating out, tingling even the tips of her ears. She looked down to where she stretched open around his cock. The sight ignited a second, smaller orgasm.

Casey squeezed her eyes shut as her sheath clenched uncontrollably, every spasm leaving a soul-crushing wave of pleasure in its wake. He stiffened beneath her and moaned into her mouth as he came.

He waited until her shudders subsided before withdrawing. The wet glide of his cock leaving her body sent a jolt through her system. He wrapped the condom in a tissue and put it in his pocket before carefully zipping up his pants.

“I've never felt like this before.” Casey buried her face against his shoulder and tried to catch her breath.

Andre anchored her face with a strong hand and kissed her again, pulling her up until she was straddling his leg. She bit her lip at the exquisite pressure, every move they made causing her mound to rock against the muscles of his thigh.

“Cassandra, tell me what you want.”

Andre inhaled deeply as he tried to slow himself down. He hadn't ever felt so hot and achy with a woman, hadn't ever wanted to cherish every inch of her the way he did right now. She was extraordinarily responsive despite her obvious inexperience. When she'd asked for deeper penetration, he had almost come in his pants.

Despite the spine-numbing orgasm he'd just experienced, he could feel his cock thickening again. Her scent was driving him crazy. He knew they had to stop now before someone saw them but damn if he didn't care about that now.

“Tell me what you want.” Andre gripped her slim hips and rocked her against the muscle of his thigh. He teased her unmercifully and continued to stare into her eyes, willing her to answer. He watched as her large, dark eyes drifted closed while she tried to shake her head.

“I just want one night. One night to learn about all the things I'm missing.”

He dropped his forehead to hers. If she thought they could work this out of their systems in one night she was more innocent than he'd assumed. Either way he was happy to volunteer himself for the night.

Her pert breasts rose as she stretched in his arms. He leaned down and drew the stiff point of her nipple against his tongue. He laved it repeatedly, loving the soft texture, the rich smell coming off her skin. Everything about her intoxicated him.

“*Piccolina*, I want to be inside you again.” He knew his desire was evident in the strain etched on his face as well as the bulge in his pants.

Part of him wanted to say to hell with propriety and take her again, right there standing up against the wall. He could hook her legs over his arms; the angle would be perfect. She would be so wet and open, he could thrust into her and sink deep over and over until they were both sated.

But as he looked down at the line of her profile, something stronger rose up in him, some instinct to cherish and protect. He wanted only to please her and see her smile. Making a spectacle of her with the people she worked with would hardly fall into that category.

“Cassandra, we need to go back inside. We have to at least say goodbye to the others before we leave.”

“Leave? You mean, together?” Her eyes flew open and darted around as if seeing things for the first time. “Oh no, we can’t leave together.” Casey pushed away from him so quickly he was startled into letting her go.

“What is the matter, sweetheart? Did I hurt you?” Andre watched, bewildered, as Casey pulled the straps of her dress up on her shoulders until she was fully covered. He reached out to pull her back into his arms but she twisted away, shaking her head furiously.

“I’m so sorry. I’m so very sorry but I have to go.”

She raced to the door and yanked it open, the noise and light from the party spilling onto the patio, illuminating her face. Her eyes were huge. Something like regret flashed across her face before she turned and ran in.

“What the hell just happened?” Andre raked his hands through his hair. Up until a few minutes ago, she’d been right there with him. He could still taste her and the sounds of her quiet cries were still ringing in his ears, torturing him. But considering that he’d just mauled her in a semipublic place where any of her coworkers could have walked by, he was lucky she hadn’t slapped him. He deserved it.

Though his father had been dead for over a decade, he found himself wondering whether Nicolas Lavin would be proud of him now. This was definitely not how he and his brother Philippe had been taught to treat women. The older man had been true to his mother until his death despite her barely concealed contempt for him. He looked up at the star-filled sky and let out a long, slow breath. He'd pushed Casey too hard and scared her off. He'd be lucky if she'd even talk to him now.

The door opened again and he turned, hoping she had come back. Milo Hamilton stood there smirking.

He glanced down at Andre's obviously aroused state. "Things not going so well?"

Andre cursed and turned away. "Apparently not." He heard the other man's knowing laugh before the door slammed shut leaving him alone in the dark.

Alone with a massive load of guilt and a raging erection.

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Excerpt of Teasing Trent by Minx Malone

Also Available from CrushStar Romance



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Chapter One

“Just keep your hands to yourself and you’ll be fine.”

Trent Townsend climbed the steps to the second floor landing of an older townhouse and knocked a fine layer of snow off his boots. Virginia winters were usually mild, but this year Mother Nature apparently had PMS. It had been snowing for the past three days and more was on the way. He was inordinately happy to be out of his house even if he knew the evening would be one step short of erotic torture.

"Anything is better than being stuck in the house watching reality TV." Cabin fever was like a disease. He couldn't eat any more cereal or watch one more rerun of Jerry Springer without losing his mind. He patted his pocket, feeling the rustle of the tiny wrapped package. This was also his first chance to give Mara her 25th birthday present since he'd been too busy last weekend.

Too busy coming up with reasons he should stay away from her.

Seeing Mara always made him hard enough to poke a hole through his pants, and he'd promised his best friend Matt that he'd take care of his sister, not drool all over her.

They'd become entirely too close over the past year. Something that had to stop when Matt's tour of duty ended next month.

“You just have to get through dinner. Keep your hands to yourself and it’ll be fine.”

The door in front of Trent flung open. Mara Simmons stood on the other side regarding him warily. Warm, amber eyes with long, inky lashes narrowed as she leaned against the doorframe. Her thick dark hair was twisted back from her face and left to fall loose and curly on the sides. She looked like a warrior princess ready to do battle. He groaned as his body immediately responded with a salute of its own.

“Are you still wearing your pajamas?” He cursed under his breath as he took in the sight of Mara in a curve-hugging tank top and the tiniest pair of cotton shorts he'd ever seen.

"These are my exercise clothes. I'm doing yoga." She put one hand on her hip. The top stretched across her chest in just the right way, emphasizing her petite figure. "I saw you as I was passing the window. I wasn't expecting you to come so early."

He grimaced at her choice of words. He was about to come where he stood. Her shorts were practically indecent. There were miles, just *miles* of smooth, creamy skin on display. His nails dug into his palm.

She even *smelled* good.

She's Matt's little sister. Keep your hands to yourself.

Trent sucked in another deep breath. He needed more than a weak mantra reminding him who would kick his ass if he screwed this up. What he needed was a bucket of ice down his pants and a blindfold.

“Why are you just standing out here talking to yourself anyway?” Mara shook her head and grabbed him by the arm. She pulled him across the threshold and closed the door behind him.

“Just thinking out loud. I do that sometimes.” Trent felt oddly defensive. Having a raging boner could do that to a guy.

“What, think?” She chuckled as he glowered at her.

“Ha ha, smart ass. I'll remember that the next time you need my help with something.”

He turned to watch her flip the deadbolt, his eyes taking in her long legs and bare feet. She wore bright purple polish and had a little silver ring on the second to last toe of her right foot. A wave of heat almost forced him to his knees. The girl even had sexy feet. Good thing she wasn't in the habit of going barefoot.

He turned away and busied himself with removing his jacket. He needed to focus on something else or he'd never get through the night.

Damn Matt for putting him in this position. It was just like him to join the military and play the hero overseas. His college buddy was that type of guy and someone Trent felt proud to know. Matt had come through for him more times than he could count, and the only thing he'd ever asked in return was for Trent to keep an eye on his twin sister Mara during his deployment. He wished he'd known in the beginning how hard it would be to keep that promise.

And how hard it would be to keep my frickin' hands to myself.

"So, how fast can you get ready to go?" Trent folded his coat over the arm of the couch. He looked around her place curiously. She changed things often, bringing home stray furniture found at a thrift store or adding weird knickknacks picked up on eBay.

Her place reflected her eclectic spirit. Bright, wildly patterned furniture clashed with the mint green wall behind the couch. He'd helped her paint the crazy color just a few months ago. She'd said she was going for "energetic." He thought it looked like the inside of a funhouse.

"Well, I was thinking maybe we could just stay in." Mara flopped down on the couch and curled up with her legs tucked under her. In that position, her top stretched tight across her breasts. He could see tiny indentations where her nipples pressed against the fabric.

Damn.

“I know you had a big happy hour night-on-the-town thing planned but ... I don't know. I just don't feel like going out. Do you mind?”

Trent blinked a few times and then dragged his gaze away. He glanced around desperately. There was a yoga video playing on her TV and the lamp on the side table next to the couch cast a soft amber glow across the room. A warm smell emanated from the kitchen, making his mouth water.

“You cooked?”

She sat up and threw one of the fluffy green pillows on the couch at him. “Yes, I cooked. You don't have to sound so surprised. I made some lasagna and rented a few dvd's. I figured we could do dinner and a movie here.”

She was watching him expectantly, so Trent nodded. A smile spread across her face and his heart turned over a little. He looked away and tucked his hands in his pockets. If something as simple as staying in put that look on her face, he'd gladly do it.

Trent sat on the edge of a dainty wing chair. Somewhere in the kitchen there was a soft ding and Mara hopped up.

“It's time for me to put the lasagna in the oven. It doesn't take that long to bake. Do you want a beer while we wait?”

His gaze followed the sway of her hips as she rushed to the kitchen.

“Trent? Hello, earth to Trent.” Mara stood in the doorway to the kitchen, waving her hands back and forth like an air traffic controller.

He looked up, heat flooding his cheeks as he met her gaze. “Huh?”

“A beer. You want one?” She said the words slowly. Great, now she thought he was an idiot.

He gulped and nodded furiously. “Sure. A beer. Right.”

She narrowed her eyes at him before turning into the kitchen. As soon as she was out of sight, Trent’s strained smile fell.

It was Matt’s first year in the service and he worried about Mara being alone so much, especially on their birthday. Their parents weren’t keen on traveling from Florida again so soon after the holidays and Mara couldn’t get the vacation time to fly down to them. Trent no longer had a girlfriend so it hadn’t been any imposition to spend a little time with Mara. He’d arranged a perfectly safe birthday dinner in a public restaurant. They’d eat, dance a little and head home, end of story.

The plan did *not* include a cozy dinner for two, followed by a movie on the couch with only a remote control as chaperone.

And it definitely didn’t include licking her from the top of her head to her pretty little purple-painted toes.

Shit.

Chapter Two

“So I hope you don't mind if I finish my exercise routine. The food will be ready in about an hour.”

Mara returned from the kitchen and set the beer down on the side table next to Trent. He was perched on the edge of a wing chair looking uncomfortable as hell. His dark blond hair was spiked up at the top like he'd been running his hands through it.

“Uh, sure. No problem.” He took a sip of his beer and rubbed his hands together. He was looking everywhere but at her.

She picked up the remote control and navigated the DVD to the place she wanted to start. Not that she really *needed* the video. She'd practiced how to tease him all week and fantasized about it for years.

Tonight she would finally seduce Trent.

They'd gotten closer than ever since Matt's deployment. She knew her brother was behind Trent's sudden interest in keeping her company but she didn't mind at all. She was a big girl, despite what her brother seemed to think. It was ironic; her overprotective twin was actually *pushing* the object of her interest right in her path. If she had her way, she'd get a lot more for her birthday than a Hallmark card.

"Namaste. Let's breathe deeply and reach for the sky."

Following the instructions of the melodic voice on the DVD, Mara stretched her hands over her head, knowing her tank top would rise and reveal several inches of belly.

"Now swan dive; touch the ground."

Mara bent slowly and touched her fingertips to the polished hardwood. She peeked at Trent from the corner of her eye. He held his beer with a death grip. His sky blue eyes stood out in stark relief against the blush on his cheeks.

"Reach for the sky again. Sun Salutations."

Mara turned so her profile faced Trent. This way he got the full effect when she bent over. She was a little curvier than what was in fashion, but more than one of her ex-boyfriends had commented that her back view could bring a man to his knees.

She bent slowly, keeping her legs straight, her bottom pert as she touched the floor. A strangled sound came from behind her. "You okay Trent?"

He cleared his throat a few times. "Wow. You're, uh ... really flexible."

She arched her back a little as she reached toward the ceiling again. "Yeah, well, I do yoga regularly and I also jog a few times a week."

He made a soft sound that could have been anything from "Working out is great" to "Come take my clothes off."

"Downward Facing Dog. Spread those fingers. Sink your heels to the floor."

Mara smiled a little as she transitioned into Downward Facing Dog pose. It was one of her favorite positions anyway but it had the added bonus of letting her wiggle her bottom in Trent's face.

"Would you mind spotting me?" She smiled up at him brightly. Hopefully he wouldn't know enough about yoga to realize that people didn't use spotters.

"Sure, what do you need me to do?" He hopped up and stood next to her. She looked up in time to catch him looking at her bottom again.

"I've been having some back pain so I think I just need you to steady me as I come back up."

He moved a little closer and tentatively touched her waist. "Here?"

She stood up straight and then pulled him behind her. "Right behind me actually. We're about to do more Sun Salutations and I need a little help when I bend."

Sure enough, the instructor's soothing voice told them to reach for the sky again. Mara stretched her hands up, feeling Trent's fingers clench uncertainly against her skin as she moved. She looked over her shoulder at him and smiled. "Are you ready?"

He shook his head slowly, as if in a daze. "Not really but go ahead. I wouldn't want you to hurt yourself."

"Now swan dive; touch the ground."

Mara bent over slowly, angling her back so she pressed against Trent from hip to thigh.

"Oh crap ... " Trent muttered.

Trent gulped. He had no doubt Mara now realized exactly how much he wanted her. The evidence of that was currently trying to poke its way through her yoga shorts. He'd never thought of exercise as sensual before but he wasn't sure if he would survive this yoga session.

He looked at where her bottom snuggled up against his groin. Her ass was full and heart-shaped, more than enough to fill his hands just the way he liked. His fingers flexed at her waist and she made a soft sound.

"Are you okay? Do you need any help getting up?" He hoped he hadn't gripped her too hard in the midst of his fantasizing. He was supposed to help her with her stretches, not imagine her stretched out on top of him.

"I'm fine. I just have a leg cramp." She sat down on the floor abruptly.

"Well at least that's something I have some experience with. I used to get them when I played football. Let me see." Trent kneeled beside her and helped her stretch her leg out. "Lie back and let me massage it out."

As soon as she stretched out on her back, Trent realized this was an incredibly stupid idea. He was supposed to look at her on her back while he massaged her thigh without being visibly turned on?

Right.

Well, if he did this carefully maybe she wouldn't know. He could hold her leg and stretch it out without her getting a glimpse of the Olympic-sized pole vault in his pants.

Mara startled slightly when Trent lifted her right leg and placed it on his shoulder. She looked up, and their gazes caught and held. For a long moment, Trent wondered if they were imagining the same thing : Him holding her leg up with both stark naked.

"I'm just going to apply a little pressure and you can press back against me." He leaned forward, forcing her thigh to press into her chest. "That's it. That's not too much pressure, is it? How does that feel?"

How does that feel? You like that baby?

"Shit." Trent closed his eyes as the erotic images played out in his mind. He opened them to see Mara watching him. She raised a hand and ran it gently over his hair.

A loud *ding* came from the kitchen and Mara jumped. Trent released her leg and moved back, appalled at what he'd almost done. Another second and he'd have hooked a finger in the waistband of those little shorts and tugged them to the side. Another second after that, he'd have been massaging her from the inside out right in the middle of her living room.

"You should go get the food Mara." He moved away from her and ran a hand over his face. She looked hurt for a second before sitting up straight.

"Sorry. I'm just in a bad mood today. I don't mean to take it out on you princess." He leaned over and kissed her lightly on the forehead before sitting on the couch.

"No problem. Thanks for taking care of my leg." She rose in a graceful motion and walked over to the DVD player. The screen went black for a few moments before the words *An Affair to Remember* rolled across the screen.

"You're going to torture me with a chick flick now? Isn't that something girls only do to their boyfriends?"

Mara looked over her shoulder and stuck her tongue out. "You're practically my boyfriend anyway. You take me out to dinner, you fix stuff when it breaks and you're the one I call when I see a bug. The only thing you don't do is..." She quickly looked away. Her cheeks flushed pink.

"I'll just go get the food now." She rushed into the kitchen.

The only thing you don't do is make love to me.

The thought hung in the air as palpably as if she'd spoken it aloud. Trent dropped his head into his hands and sighed. He really hoped Mara wasn't in a chatty mood. Because if their conversation went back to boyfriend duties, he feared he'd give her a demonstration of *exactly* what he could do for her.

About The Author

Multi-published author Minx Malone lives in the Washington, DC metro area with her three favorite guys, her husband and their two sons. She's been writing since college when she finally figured out that daydreaming could be good for more than escaping boring business classes. Most of her novel ideas come to her at the strangest times, such as when waiting in line at the bank or while on the metro. She also gives some of the credit to her incredibly vivid dreams. She's the only person she knows who dreams in HDTV with surround sound!

Minx is the founder and a contributing blogger to *The Naughty Girls Next Door* blog.
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