

The Accountant and the Virgin
Story One of the Cupid, Inc. Series
Michele R. Bardsley

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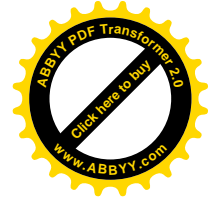
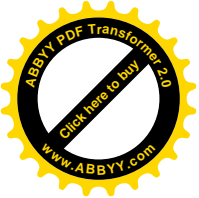
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Prologue

Once Upon A Time...

Eros, God of Love, was sent by his mother, Aphrodite, to destroy the too-beautiful mortal, Psyche. But Eros' intent—and arrow—slipped when he gazed upon the woman who incurred the wrath of a goddess.



He didn't want to piss off his mother, whose anger would bend his arrows for good, but he couldn't harm Psyche, who had captured his heart.

What's a god to do?

"Lie, that's what." Psyche's shifted her position and felt her husband's penis twitch inside her; she contracted her vaginal muscles and returned the squeeze. He groaned, then grasped her buttocks to urge her forward.

"Nope. Not until you tell the story right."

"Darling..."

"You told that Roman twit Apuleius all about our affair and embellished it with that nonsense about the grain and the wool gathering and my sisters' cliff-jumping."

"It was centuries ago, Psyche, and I was drunk."

"My sisters didn't jump to their deaths, Eros. Your mother did not make me separate grain or cross a dangerous river to gather wool."

"She made you go to the underworld to get a box of beauty."

"It was a party, remember? Proserpine talked me into that hideous astringent made of hemlock and your mother bought that nettle cream. I should have never agreed to attend a beauty demonstration in the world of the dead."

Eros cupped her breasts and stroked the nipples to turgid peaks. "She wanted me to destroy you. Instead I loved you."

Psyche leaned forward and allowed Eros to capture her throbbing nipples with his wet, warm mouth. They had played this game often in the last few weeks and not once— *not once*—had she won. She desired him too much, loved him too much, to deny him physical pleasures. And really, who cared if the whole world thought she was a helpless woman without a brain—*wait a minute!* She straightened; her breasts popped out of Eros' hands. He grabbed her thighs before she could lift herself off of him. "They think I'm naive. Weak. Silly. You and that stupid story."

"In all the time I've known you, darling, you've never been insecure. You've never cared about Apuleius' tale. Why create this game if you don't want to play?"

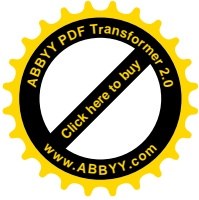
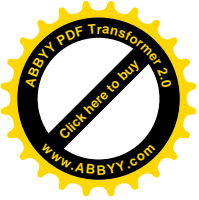
"I hoped for romance, Eros. For you to whisper the real story to me and remember the beginnings of our love ... and yet you tell your friend's story time and again."

"If you want the real story, darling, I'll give it to you."

Eros married Psyche and visited her every night. He feared that if she knew the truth of his identity, she would not love him as truly and deeply as he loved her. But her curiosity consumed her and her idiotic sisters—who didn't jump off a cliff, damn it—fanned the flames of her doubts and encouraged her to disobey her husband's orders— ouch!

Psyche twisted his nipple again for good measure. "I didn't disobey your orders!"

"In my story, you did. Need I remind you that tallow is not only hot, it hardens faster than I do? I had to rip out my chest hairs to remove it."



"You said you wanted more variety."

"You should warn a man before you do something kinky. I was freaked out when you dripped wax on me. And then you pulled out that knife!"

"How was I supposed to know you didn't see the late night dinner I'd prepared? If you hadn't run off, you would have loved the new use I found for strawberry juice."

Eros sighed. "Darling, I suggest a new plan. I will fuck you until we're both delirious. Then you tell the story and I'll be a good husband and agree with everything you said. Deal?"

He flipped her onto her back and kissed her before she could utter a word. She knew he wanted her mindless and needy; she gave up any pretense of leaving their bed. He stroked her clit with experienced fingers as he moved rhythmically inside her. The climax built; she strained upward, quickening the pace of their movements. *Almost... almost...* Eros stopped, and she cried out her frustration as he moved away from her. She looked at him; his blue eyes were darker than a stormy sea and she realized he was as close to coming as she was ... he always knew how to make their unions better ... always knew how to make her hot and horny. He was, after all, the God of Love. He pushed her legs forward, putting her ankles around his neck, then slid into her. His strokes were hard, fast. She shuddered at the contact and lifted her hips to meet him. Her hands found her own breasts; she pulled and tugged on her own nipples, feeling the rising pleasure cresting inside her. Then she shattered, her orgasm so intense, she screamed. Her husband soon followed with his own release, his voice hoarse as called out her name. Eros let go of her trembling legs, then slipped beside her and stroked her belly. He kissed the underside of her jaw, then swirled a finger around her breast. "I love it when you play with yourself."

"I love it when I play with myself."

He tweaked her nipple and she laughed. "Your turn, my darling Psyche. Finish the story as you see fit."

"I will tell the truth, husband."

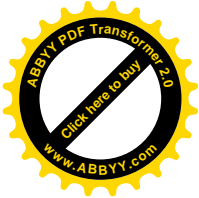
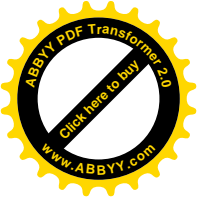
"Hmmm." He leaned down and took her nipple into his mouth, grazing it with his teeth.

"You're distracting me."

"Sorry." He trailed his tongue down her rib cage and stopped to nibble her hip.

Though Aphrodite hated the union of Psyche and Eros, she hated her son's unhappiness even more. So she accepted Psyche into the world of the gods, but used her influence with Jupiter to give the newlyweds an undertaking that would force them to live on Earth. The lovers were assigned the impossible task of creating forever-bonds between mortals. And though Aphrodite interfered at nearly every turn, they had some successes.

"How am I supposed to concentrate on the story if you're going to lick my pussy?" Psyche peered down at her husband's tawny head. He suckled her clit, then soothed the pulsating nub with his tongue.



"I want to see you play with your beautiful hooters again."

"Hooters is a terrible word to apply to breasts."

"Boobs? Mammary glands? Pleasure mounds?"

"A pleasure mound is what you've got between your lips," said Psyche. "Could you move down a little? Oh yeah ... hmmm..."

Psyche already felt a climax building. Her husband lifted his head to stare at her; his wicked grin was unrepentant. Her clit throbbed for release; she grabbed the sheets between her fists and enjoyed the pleasure-pain of anticipation.

"You forgot the part about running a sex fantasy business," he said as if he were in a business meeting and not between the legs of his wife with her pussy juice dripping off his chin. "We figured that if we couldn't get people to fall in love, we could make sure they satisfy their baser urges in a fun and safe environment."

"If you don't satisfy my baser urges, I will kill you." Psyche pushed his head down and he relented, bringing her to another mind-blowing orgasm with the ceaseless strokes of his tongue. Then he kissed his way to her navel... ribs ... breasts ... jaw ... mouth. She wrapped her arms around his neck and moaned when his thick, hard penis entered her wet heat.

"Shall I finish the story, love?" he whispered.

And they lived happily every after...

Chapter One

"Hello, my name is Psyche."

Sara Beaumont took the woman's proffered hand. *Oh heavens!* She was gorgeous— almost perfect in her beauty: blonde hair, high cheekbones, silver eyes, tall, thin, graceful. Psyche was the epitome of her Greek namesake—and everything Sara would never be. She glanced at the door behind her; she could leave right now and forget she'd ever signed up for such a ridiculous, desperate...

"Please have a seat."

Her heart beat in her chest like a bird's wings beating against its cage in an attempt to escape. She glanced at the puffy white chair, took a fortifying breath, and sat down.

"Everything checks out fine. You've signed our contract, completed the survey, and chosen your fantasy. Our doctors say you're in the peak of health and that you're on birth control— though we still require use of condoms—and that you're..." Psyche looked up, surprise etched in her gorgeous silver eyes. "A virgin? We don't get many virgins at Cupid, Inc."

"Is there some sort of rule against virginity?"

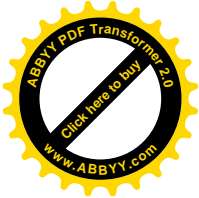
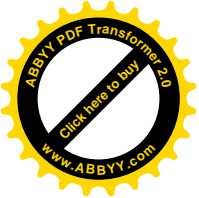
"No."

"It seems, Miss ... Psyche, that I must pay to get rid of mine," said Sara, unable to melt the frostiness of her tone.

"You're lucky, Sara. You get to choose how and where you lose your virginity. Though you won't meet your partner until the assignation."

"These are professionals, are they not?"

"No. They're clients. That's what we do—we match clients to



fantasies. The man you meet will have also chosen the Office Fantasy."

Sara blinked. She'd read the contracts three times. How had she failed to miss that disclosure? "What about... what if..."

"Afraid you'll get someone old, fat, and ugly?" Psyche winked. "That's why you filled out the survey. We match you with someone who best fits your description of a partner."

She breathed a sigh of relief. That meant that if she couldn't have Zeth Peterson, her boss and her crush, she'd get the next best thing: his double. *Well, almost.* If only she had the nerve to initiate a relationship with Zeth, she wouldn't be here, losing her virginity with a stranger and hoping a sexual fantasy come true would turn her into some kind of vixen. A vixen Zeth would notice and fall in love with and marry.

Yeah. Right.

"So what's next?"

"The fantasy. Here's our *Guide To Ultimate Sex.*" Psyche handed her a book about as thick as the Las Vegas Yellow Pages. "You can skip some of the chapters. Just read the information you're interested in. These are your complimentary condoms—flavored and regular," Sara took the two boxes and tucked them into her handbag, "and your Fantasy date." She grasped the envelope between trembling fingers.

"It's in one week, on Monday. If you don't show up, you forfeit your deposit. If you need to reschedule, call our office at least 48 hours in advance."

"It feels so surreal... so sterile." Sara put the envelope into her purse. "I'm nervous." "Nervous is good. Those butterflies in your belly now are nothing compared to what

you'll feel when you meet Mr. Make Me Feel Good." Psyche laughed, the throaty, sexy

laugh of a beautiful woman who didn't have to pay someone to sleep with her. "Do you have any questions?"

Sara shook her head. "Thank you. I'll, uh, see you around."

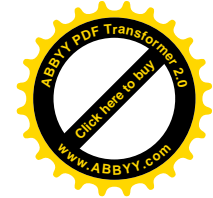
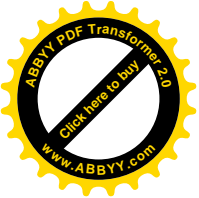
"At the follow-up appointment. We want to make sure you were satisfied."

* * * *

A Week Later...

Mondays suck. Nic Anderson wanted to blow up the phone. It had been ringing off the hook nonstop; some days he hated being the boss of the accounting firm he'd started with a ledger and a prayer five years ago. Now he had a six-room office, three full-time employees, a growing clientele, and a lifelong migraine. He picked up the receiver and buzzed his receptionist.

"Mandy, I don't want to take another call for the rest of the day. And reschedule the rest of my appointments. I'm getting out of here before I take an ax to my computer."



"Gotcha, boss. But your noon appointment is here. Do you want me to reschedule?"

Nic scrolled through his Palm Pilot. *Cupid, Inc.* One of his biggest clients. They were sending over one of their employees to clarify some recent expenses. "No, Mandy. I'll take that one. After you're done rescheduling appointments, disconnect the phone, and get out of here. Tell everyone else to get out of here, too. I want the offices emptied in fifteen minutes."

"All right, Mr. A! It's been awhile since you gave us Cheeseburger Day."

He laughed. Cheeseburger Day referred to the first time he'd told his staff to go get a cheeseburger and not come back until the next day. He liked being able to still say, "Screw it, let's party." He needed to do it more often. But he was getting more and more like his old man: working until the wee hours, giving up social engagements, forgetting special occasions. Relinda had broken it off with him after he'd missed the dinner with her parents. Three months since he'd lost his fiancée and he didn't even miss her. What did that mean?

"Mr. A? Are you ready for me to send her in?"

"Yes."

* * * *

"Where's Livia?" Psyche looked down at the young woman manning her absent secretary's desk.

"Went to Anderson Accounting to go over the books." The woman pointed to the desk calendar and tapped it with a fuchsia nail.

"But that's not Nic's address. Find out where that is."

The woman tapped some keys and peered at the monitor. "Wrote down the wrong address. This is some office in Summerlin."

An alarm bell rang in Psyche's mind. Summerlin... That was where Sara Beaumont was supposed to go for her Office Fantasy. "Look up Beaumont, Sara, and tell me the address listed for her Fantasy."

Tap. Tap. Tap. "Henderson." Psyche read the address, her worst fears confirmed. She whirled from the desk and rushed down the hall and into Eros' office.

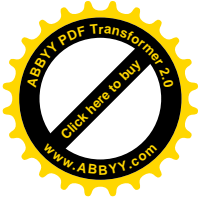
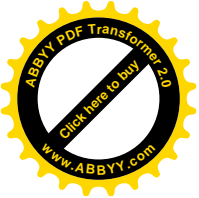
"I'm going to fire her, E. She screwed up big-time. One of our clients is at our accountant's expecting hot sex and our secretary is at one of our clients probably getting hot sex."

"I told you employee discounts were a bad idea," said Eros. "Livia's been through every Fantasy at least twice."

"I need to get hold of Nic. I won't bother with Livia. The minute she realizes she's with a client, she'll spread her legs and enjoy every minute of getting fucked."

"I suggested opening a brothel and you nixed it."

"Livia's a one-woman whorehouse so you got what you wanted." Psyche punched in the phone numbers to Anderson



Accounting and stamped her foot in frustration.
The line was busy.

* * * *

Nic felt the woman's tension the minute she attempted to sashay across the room. She closed—and locked—the door then wobbled toward him. Dressed in a trenchcoat, impossibly high heels—pink, no less, and clutching a gym bag, she looked scared, expectant... and cute as hell.

"My name is Nic Anderson."

"Sara Beaumont." She smiled. "I suppose names aren't necessary. It's not like we're ever going to see each other again."

"Uh ... right." He gestured to one of the chairs in front of his desk and she sat with a sigh of relief. The gym bag clunked to the floor. What the hell did she have in it? Bricks and steel rods?

"It shouldn't take long to go through the books."

"The books? Oh ... *the books*." She blushed. "I was hoping it would take a long time. I overheard the receptionist telling everyone to take the day off, which was nice ... it made me think you had, um, plans."

"No, not really. I was going to go with the flow. See what happens."

She licked full lips, glistening with pink lipstick. "Oh. Okay. I'm open to ... whatever. I read the book—some of that stuff, well, I can't imagine doing... But we could talk about your ideas before we begin."

It was as if Sara Beaumont was talking about something other than answering a few questions about Cupid, Inc.'s expenses. "My main idea is to clarify these expenses. And there's some information I need you take back to..."

"Wow. You get right into it, huh?"

"Yeah." Nic resisted the urge to roll his eyes. He wanted to get the hell out of this office and over to O'Riley's Bar for a draft beer and some serious flirting with Denise, the waitress he'd finally decided to ask out.

She leaned forward, her gaze filled with uncertainty and excitement. "So, Boss ... would you like me to take a little ... shorthand? Or maybe we should call it *longhand*." She chuckled.

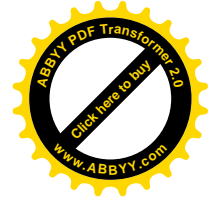
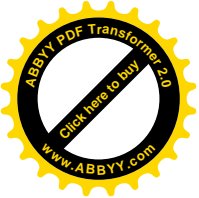
Oh geez. What a ditz. Why was she batting her lashes like that? Damn. Goodbye cold suds and beautiful blondes. "Shorthand or longhand. Whatever you want."

She drew in a deep breath and nodded. "Of course. I haven't had much practice, though."

"That's okay, I'll go slow."

Those luscious lips thinned into a frown. "Does that mean I should go slow with the ... with the *shorthand* or that you'll go slow to keep from, uh, you know..."

As pretty as the girl was, she didn't have a lot upstairs. He was startled at his disappointment. Short, voluptuous brunettes weren't his style. Even those with beautiful lips and eyes darker



than midnight. "Tell you what, we'll both go slow, okay? Take it one step at a time."

She looked relieved. "That would be nice. Um ... do you want me to start?"

So much for getting out of the office early. Unless she grew a brain within the next few minutes, they'd be here all afternoon.

"Yes, Sara. I'm ready."

* * * *

"I can't go there. What if I interrupt them? Not that Nic would take advantage of a woman offering him no-strings sex." Psyche looked at her husband who lounged behind his desk without a care in the world.

"If Sara throws herself at him, he'll figure out there's been a mistake, and call us. He's smart. He has morals, unlike our dear Livia."

"I don't know, E. I feel horrible. We're talking therapy, refund... she's a virgin for God's sake."

Eros chuckled. "Did you or did you not insist that every person we've ever worked with get tested, take our survey, and keep an updated profile ... in case something like this happened?"

"Yes. But I never expected a mix-up or problem to happen. We're gods and we can't prevent these screw-ups. It's infuriating."

"You worry too much, my darling. Shall I take your mind off your troubles?"

"No." Psyche turned for the door, but Eros shut it with a wave of his hand. She glanced at him over her shoulder. "I'm in no mood for sex or for devilry."

His sky-blue eyes glittered. "Too bad."

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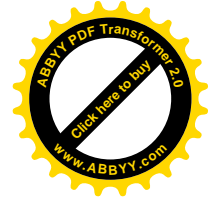
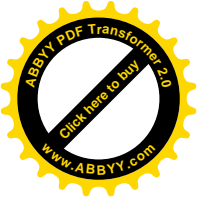
Nic watched the crazy woman round the desk until she stood in front of him. Then she loosened the trenchcoat's belt and pushed the material off her shoulders. His heart stuttered to a halt. Other than the heels, she wasn't wearing anything. Not a damned thing. She was all lush curves and full breasts and smooth skin. Her shy smile belied the woman's body beckoning for his touch. Then she dropped to her knees and reach for his pants.

"Whoa." He scooted out of her reach. "What's going on?"

"You said you wanted me to take shorthand."

"Oh." He had warned Psyche about including him in any sex-fantasy schemes. He wanted the account badly enough to go through with their tests and surveys and updates. But to send one of their clients ... wait a minute. *Wait just a damned minute.* Psyche was an astute businesswoman; she wouldn't jeopardize a professional relationship.

He felt hands unzip his khakis and reach through the hole in his boxer shorts; the sweet, hesitant pressure of a woman's fingers around his cock fogged his brain. Then a warm mouth covered him,



a tongue swirling around his length.

"Uh ... w-wait." He contradicted his words by adjusting his position in the chair so she could take more of his penis into her mouth. She was inexperienced, but eager. And those cherry lips made him hot and hard. He clutched the chair's arms and nearly ripped holes in the fabric. "Sara. Wait." He grasped her head and tugged her away. She looked up at him, her eyes luminous with tears.

"I'm not doing it right, am I? God, I knew this was mistake." She grabbed the coat from the floor and stood, shoving her arms into the trenchcoat. "I suck at this ... no, I *don't*. That's the problem."

Nic grabbed her hand and stilled her movements. "Have you ever swallowed come, Sara?"

Her mouth rounded into an O and her cheeks flushed red.

"N-no."

"Do you want to?"

"I... uh ... maybe. Probably. Yes."

"Good." Nic rose and tugged at the coat; she allowed him to remove it. "Let me go to the restroom then we'll start over."

The minute he entered his private bathroom, he grabbed his cell phone from his jacket pocket and dialed the number of Cupid, Inc. "Psyche. Now." The receptionist didn't ask for a name; his tone probably told her enough about his intent.

"Psyche," purred a sexy voice. "How may I fulfill your fantasy?"

"The question is, who's fantasy am I fulfilling?"

"Nic! I'm so glad you called. There's a young woman..."

"She just gave me head, Psyche. I think I know why she's here."

"What?" He heard her suck in a breath. "My secretary switched addresses and sent a client to your office instead of to her assignation. I'm so sorry."

"Don't be. What's the fantasy and how much will it cost me?"

"You want to participate?"

"No offense, Psyche, but I'm not in the mood for a long conversation. Fantasy and rate. What are they?"

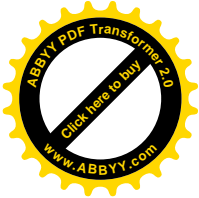
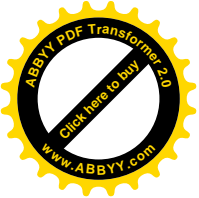
"The Office Fantasy. No charge. Ms. Beaumont had an interest in being taken on a desk and ... well, I suppose you'll figure out the rest. This is highly unusual, Nic. I'm not sure it's advisable to..."

"Advise me later, Psyche." Nic turned off his cell phone.

Chapter Two

Psyche hung up the phone. Her naked breasts scraped the shiny metal desk as Eros pounded into her from behind. With Eros' fingers working magic with her clit, pleasure bloomed into the bare edge of an orgasm. Speaking to Nic without breathing heavily had been an arduous task, but the naughtiness of talking to one man on the phone while another fucked her just turned her on even more.

"Eros!" Psyche clutched a wire file basket as she came; the



intensity of her orgasm made her bend the innocent basket in half. Papers rustle and tore. She tossed the basket and its contents to the floor and placed her palms against the desk to steady herself as her husband fucked her doggy style.

Eros' ragged moan warned her that he was close to coming. He grabbed her waist and plunged deep and hard into her vagina. Once. Twice. The third time, he grabbed her buttocks and spread them. She felt the tip of his penis against her anus, then he cried out, and warm semen spurted onto her ass.

She collapsed onto the desk. Sweat dripped from her neck to puddle on the metallic surface. "Wow."

ZAP.

They appeared, naked, under a cascading waterfall in Tahiti. Eros conjured a bottle of her favorite bath gel and a loofa sponge. In minutes, they were scrubbing each other clean. Then licking. Suckling. Touching. Stroking. Moaning. The gel bottle and sponge soon floated away in the clear, blue water. Eros lifted Psyche, wrapped her legs around his waist, and fucked her until she screamed with her pleasure.

ZAP.

Returned to the office, fully clothed and coiffed, Psyche slid into her chair and viewed the chaos of her desk. Her gaze assessed her husband, who sat in the black-leather wingback looking supremely satisfied. A god was, after all, entitled to some arrogance.

"I suppose Nic and Sara will be fine."

"More than fine."

Psyche's puzzlement turned to incredulity. "They're a match! Why didn't you tell me?"

"How do you think Livia switched the addresses, sweetheart? She may be a loveable slut, but she's near perfect at her job."

"You let me worry and rant for nothing."

"I love it when you get worked up. It turns me on."

"And you think Livia is the slut of our operation?"

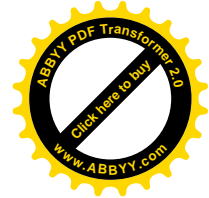
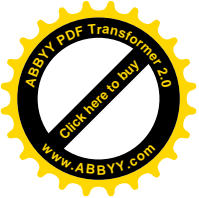
Eros' response was a wicked, wicked grin.

* * * *

Nic turned off his cell phone, snapped it shut, then shrugged off his jacket. He looked at himself in the mirror. "What the hell are you doing?" His reflection offered no answers, but the hard-on in his pants had a response he couldn't ignore. Everything was great. Good. Fine. This was a legal encounter with a beautiful, willing woman. Who was he to give up no-strings-attached sex?

Leaving his jacket and cell phone on the counter, he exited the bathroom. The sight that greeted him made his feet immobile and his heart seize.

Splayed on the desk, Sara had opted for complete nudity except for those ridiculous pink high heels, which gouged the wood as she parted her legs and offered him a view of her shaved pussy. Then her hands cupped her breasts, pinching the turgid nipples,



before coasting across her abdomen. Fingers slid down, down, down. A throaty moan escaped as one finger diddled her clit.

The shyness, the uncertainty she'd displayed earlier had disappeared. She was a siren, a sex goddess, and he was her willing slave. She opened the slick, pink folds to reveal her clitoris to him. Her dark gaze found his. "I've always wanted to fuck on a desk."

Her low voice shot sensual chills through him. He controlled the urge to run, but still managed somehow to jog. He stood before her, gaping, and damned unsure. He didn't know what the hell to touch first: pert breasts, flat tummy, long legs, or glistening pussy.

Dear God. She was a delicious female buffet.

She robbed him of choice. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she pulled him down for a kiss that nearly sucked out his tonsils. He returned the favor, unable to get enough of the cinnamon taste of her lips.

"Naked," she murmured. "Too many clothes."

They both tried to unbutton his shirt, but fumbling fingers and stubborn buttons made it difficult. Nic solved the issue by wrenching open the shirt, buttons popping, and tossed it to the floor.

Her hands slid across his chest, her palms rubbing his flat nipples until tiny peaks appeared. She leaned down and suckled each one, her tongue swirling, her lips kissing. Her hands slid down his waist to his trousers, but he was way ahead of her. His pants dropped to the ground followed by his boxers.

When she dropped to her knees and put that eager mouth on his cock, he almost passed out. She licked him from tip to base, her hands cupping his balls as she suckled, kissed, and at one point, slurped.

"Sara. Do you want me to come in your mouth?"

"Uh-huh."

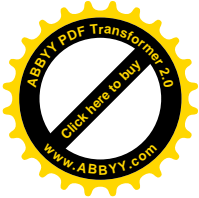
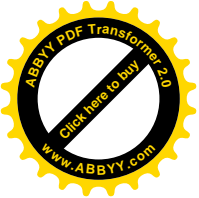
"Do you want to come in *my* mouth?"

"Uh-huh."

"Good." He tugged her by the shoulders until she rose and led her to the couch at the other end of the room. He praised the furniture gods for the foresight to buy the black leather monstrosity, a purchase he'd bitched about in the past, but would never, ever regret again. He laid on it. He didn't have to give her directions. She got right on top, backwards, and presented her pussy to him.

Nic wasted no time delving his tongue into her slit, giving the flesh long strokes of his tongue. She tasted as fresh and sweet as a peach. Her mouth on his penis was hot and wet and felt really damned good. The more he licked her pussy, the more frantically she sucked his cock. *Oh hell*. Orgasm already threatened, but he wanted her satisfaction first.

He grabbed her buttocks and pressed her closer, suckling and stroking her clitoris, almost coming when she pumped her hips slightly, moving in rhythm with his tongue. Her moans and gasps vibrated down his cock, her mouth matching the pace of her hips.



He knew when her orgasm claimed her because she sucked his cock, *hard*, and pressed her pussy against his face so that he nearly, and gladly, suffocated. Her come coated his chin as he drank from her. She tasted like warm, melted sugar.

Oh yeah. Oh damn. Oh God.

Pleasure crashed through him and held him hostage. His entire body tensed as he emptied his seed into her mouth and she drank from him like he was the ice cream flavor of the month. She licked and tasted and, yeah, slurped, until he thought he might have a heart attack and die from the goddamned bliss of it all.

After several long seconds of deep breaths and heavy shudders, she escaped the couch and stood, looking down at him. "That was fun."

"Better than a roller coaster."

She laughed, and the sound of it turned his already mushy insides extra gooey. He liked her laugh, her smile, the sensuous twinkle in her eye as she assessed his still hard cock.

Turning, she presented him with her gorgeous ass and tottered on those ridiculous heels to the gym bag abandoned on the floor.

She squatted near the bag and unzipped it. His penis twitched with an eagerness he hadn't known in a long while. His naughty, perverted, brilliant mind came up with all kinds of ideas about her in that position. His gaze traced the curve of her spine, the rounded flesh of her buttocks, and just underneath, he knew, was the smooth flesh of her glistening pussy.

He was so busy conjuring pornographic scenarios about Sara that he failed to realize she'd found what she was looking for and turned to look at him.

Heat spread up his neck to warm his face. "What?"

"I've always wanted to do this." She swept her arm across the desk and knocked off the ledgers, paperwork, and knick-knacks. Thank God his laptop was set up in the area behind his desk... not that he cared if she threw the damned thing out the window at this point. He wanted her again at any cost.

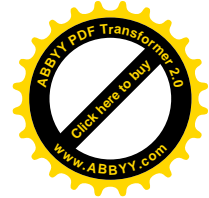
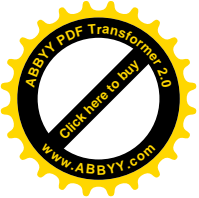
She climbed on it, giving him an excellent side view of her body. Her breasts were beautiful—full and heavy and just the right size for his hands. Her coral nipples were hard, either from the chill in the room or, he hoped, those succulent peaks represented the rousing symbols of extreme horniness.

He set the world speed record for leaping off a couch and crossing a room. He grabbed her hips and pulled her to the desk's edge, allowing his cock to tease open her entrance. He breathed hard, grabbing gulps of air to steady his pulse. "I have never wanted anyone like I want you."

She smiled, her gaze soft with desire. "Ditto."

He took it slow, wanting to make it good for her, wanting to torture her just a little longer, and knew his efforts were appreciated when she moaned.

He slid inside a teeny bit further. Damn, she was tight. "What the..." His gaze locked with hers. "Are you a virgin?"



"You knew that," she said, her voice breathy.

A virgin. Indulging in an impromptu office fantasy with an attractive, experienced woman was one thing, but taking her virginity was something else entirely.

"More," she begged.

Her restless hands floated to his shoulders, down his chest, until her fingers wrapped around the part of his penis not yet embedded inside her. He made the mistake of looking down. *Oh. My. God.* His manhood pierced that glossy, smooth cunt, and her wicked fingers stroked the exposed hardness.

"I think... whoa. Don't stop. Wait. No. *Shit.*" He dragged in some oxygen. "Condom."

He withdrew, shuddering as his penis left the warm tightness, and watched her sit up. She scooped up the items she'd taken from the bag. In one hand dangled a bullet-shaped vibrator with a small black control box, and in the other she fanned out three condoms. "Maximum Pleasure, Ultimate Pleasure, or Chocolate."

"Save the chocolate. What the hell's the difference between maximum and ultimate?"

"Would you like me to read the information on the backs so you can decide?"

"God, no." He plucked one from her fingertips and she dropped the others.

As he rolled on the condom, he watched her turn on the mini-vibrator and circle her left nipple with it.

"Hmmm ... the book recommended trying this. You'd be amazed how many places you can put this device. The vibrations are nice." She cupped her right breast and rounded the hard peak with the bullet. "You know what would be good?"

Nic blinked, realized his mouth was watering with the need to taste those perfect breasts, and managed to stutter, "W-what?"

"If you'd play with me."

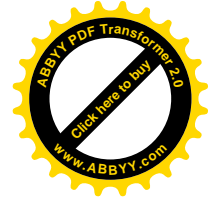
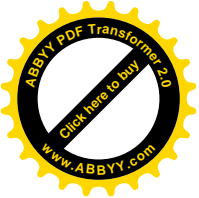
He leaned forward and took a nipple into his mouth as she played with the other one. He suckled it like it was the last butterscotch in the candy dish. How was it possible for her taste this sweet? He turned to lavish attention on the other nipple and she lowered the vibrator to her pussy. With her free hand, she cupped and kneaded the breast he'd abandoned. "It feels good, Nic."

He curled an arm around her back, scooted her until she wrapped her legs around his waist, and slowly, oh-so-slowly, pierced her virgin flesh. "You're so wet, Sara. So tight."

"It hurts."

"I'll make it good," he promised, feeling like the jock lying to the cheerleader. He slid in deeper, regretting the way she flinched, the way she stilled. The vibrator dangled from its cord in her hand. "Tighten your legs around me. Put that vibrator on your clit. Remember how good we make each other feel."

She replaced the vibrator she'd let fall away and, by her little gasp of joy, he knew the tiny machine was doing its job. He



sheathed himself all the way, allowing her to adjust to the feel of him inside her. He kept his pace slow, though it damned near killed him. She rubbed the bullet on her clitoris, moaning, and several times, she slid it through her pussy lips and over the exposed part of his cock. *Oh damn. That feels good. Too good.* He resisted the temptation to fuck her fast and hard, because he wanted to; he wanted to slam into her, and take her to the stars.

Soon, she got wet and wiggly, encouraging his thrusts. Her legs tightened, pulling him closer, and one of her arms flopped around his neck in an attempt to hold on, but then her inner muscles clenched him, and she came, her scream of completion driving him over the edge. Her orgasm milked his, and the intensity of his pleasure nearly blinded him.

It took nearly a full minute to regain his breath, and another 30 seconds to open his eyes and unclench his teeth. Both of em were sweaty, breathless, and limp, but her gaze was dreamy and her lips drifted upward into a cat-ate-the-cream smile. "That was fantastic."

Machismo nibbled away his doubts about taking her virginity, and he grinned, planting a quick kiss on her lips. "Ditto."

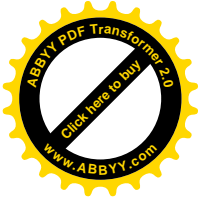
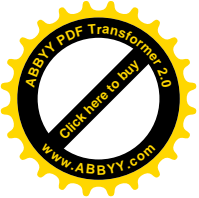
* * * *

Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, was unhappy. She'd never really forgiven Eros for his betrayal—for choosing that trollop mortal for a wife and gaining the favor of Zeus. It was *her* job to produce love between mortals, not theirs. That whole fantasy-sex business was supposed to fail, because if her son and bitch daughter-in-law failed, then Psyche's goddess status would be revoked and Eros would return to Mount Olympus where he belonged.

The best Aphrodite could do was muck up the works and hope that one day Eros would come to his senses or that she'd finally be able to break his bond with Psyche. She'd been distracted by making love matches in Greece, the only place on Earth she liked. She'd taken a vacation there, holing up in a hotel, and matched lovers for a month. Did it matter that one was married, another engaged, yet another widowed? No. Love spoke to the heart and did not care about the constrictions of the mortal world. But now, now she was back in her palace on Mount Olympus, and in the silvery liquid of her Love Glass, she saw lonely Sara Beaumont's dreams of love and of marriage.

"Zeth Peterson is who you want? Yet you settle for the second best. Tsk. Tsk." With a wave of her hand, the Love Glass changed and Zeth Peterson winked into view. He sat in his corner office, his secretary kneeling between his legs and servicing him in a way probably not outlined in her job description. He looked over a report, a frown playing around his lips, and gave no indication he was receiving pleasure from the woman.

"Not exactly warm and friendly, are you, Zeth? Or that tart between your legs isn't any good at giving head." Aphrodite pursed



perfect, lush lips and tapped a finger against her chin. "Eros thinks Nic is for you, Sara, but don't worry, m'dear. You can count on me to give you what you really want."

Chapter Three

Sometimes, Aphrodite liked the hands-on approach. When she was feeling particularly good-natured, she'd talk to her targets over an espresso at a coffee shop or sometimes she'd lure a female into an upscale shoe store so they could gossip about men while trying on Jimmy Choo stilettos. Because her trip to Greece had mellowed her mood and because Zeth Peterson was not a mortal she felt deserved her direct contact, she decided to make him fall in love with Sara the old-fashioned way.

She zapped him.

Watching through the Love Glass, Aphrodite waited until the ditzzy secretary left the office then she pointed, aimed, and *zap!* The gold and pink line traveled from her forefinger to Zeth's heart. Though invisible to humans, to immortals it looked like a laser and it had the same pinpoint accuracy. The instant it touched the man, he fell hungrily, selfishly, deliriously in love with Sara Beaumont.

* * * *

On Tuesday, the morning after she'd lost her virginity, Sara entered her office cubicle, dumped her purse and convenience-store coffee on the desk, sat down, and turned on her computer. She'd been unable to stop smiling, unable to stop doing a happy jig when she walked short distances, and unable to stop thinking about sex with Nic. He reminded her of a shaggy lion with his blondish brown hair and his hazel eyes. He'd taken her like one of those fearsome beasts, too, when they'd had a third session on the couch, and a fourth on the floor. Dear God, she never thought physical relations would be that damned fantastic. The only thing better than having sex with Nic was having lots of sex with Nic. Yeah, she was sore, her thighs hurt, and her muscles ached, but every twinge was worth it.

He said he would call her. Said he wanted to take her to dinner. She found that funny. Didn't guys usually foot the bill for a date in the hopes they'd get laid? He had it backwards. But she didn't care. She wanted him to call, wanted to see him. Oh well. If her luck with men held, he wouldn't call and she wouldn't see him again. Ever. At least he'd given her some wonderful memories to relive.

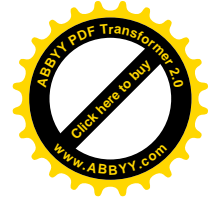
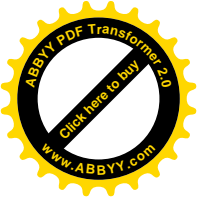
Splaying herself on the desk and Nic, there, pulling her toward him.

His wet mouth on her breast.

His thumb stroking her sensitive clit.

His cock teasing open her pussy.

Her heart tripped... her nipples hardened... an ache spread between her legs. *Whoa, girl.* Fantasy date was over. Reality had returned, but she felt good. Powerful. Beautiful. Like she could



take on the world. Like she could tell Zeth Peterson to go fuck himself because she was soooo over him. Yesterday's news, baby.

Still grinning like a silly idiot, she lifted the lid from the Styrofoam cup to pour in the tiny creamers she'd snatched from the break room.

"Sara?"

Zeth Peterson's deep voice startled her and she dropped the little plastic container into her cup.

"You scared me," she said, digging out the container and placing it, dripping and sticky, onto her desk. She looked at him over her shoulder. "Is there something you need, Mr. Peterson?"

Her heart pounded and she felt lightheaded. Maybe she wasn't over Zeth, after all. She'd had a crush on him for more than a year—since the day he'd hired her. He had a staff of 50 and she was just another minion, but she'd pined away for the man who rarely noticed her. She weaved a very nice fairy tale for the two of them: marriage, children, parties, friends, vacations in Europe.

"There's something different about you." He tilted his head and looked at her with a tender gaze.

Her pulse stuttered at that look... as if the thing he stared at, well, the person, *her*... was precious gold. Sara frowned. What game was this? Despite her desperate attraction to the man, she hadn't been blind to the way he stalked around the office making conquests of the prettier women. She had wanted to be one of those conquests, but no amount of lipstick or horizontal stripes would fix her features and her rounded hips.

"I heard you were out yesterday," said Zeth. "Is everything okay? You're not sick, are you?"

"No, I had to take a personal day. Was there something I left unattended yesterday, Mr. Peterson?"

"Of course not. I care about my staffs welfare."

Since when? Sara pushed aside the uncharitable thought. Something really weird was going on. She'd been out with the flu just the month before and being out for an entire week hadn't brought about this kind of solicitous behavior from the man.

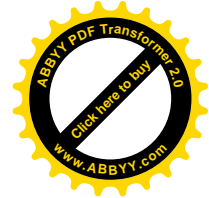
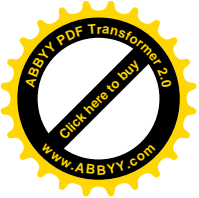
"I'm supposed to attend a dreary charity event Friday night. I thought I might be able to tolerate it if you came with me."

"Me?" She licked the sudden dryness from her lips. "What's the charity?"

"Hmmm. I don't remember. Orphans or something. It's a \$1,000 a plate, it's a good cause—probably." He laughed as if he'd made a joke. "Despite all the hobnobbing required and the tiresome speeches, the food is decent and they serve alcohol, thank the gods. What do you say?"

Zeth Peterson was asking her out to a really swanky affair where he'd be seen with her as *his date*. She'd never known him to publicly date his office "girls." She blinked. Twice. Then assessed him to see if the man before her was really Zeth and not an android look-a-like. Tall, broad shoulders, wavy brown hair, sexy blue eyes—the poor man's Mel Gibson, but a looker all the same.

"Friday night. In public. With me?"



He grinned, his pearly whites gleaming. "The limo will pick you up at seven o'clock."

* * * *

That night after work, the first thing Sara did when she entered her apartment was to check her answering machine. *Nada.*

Disappointment sat heavy and thick in her chest. Nic hadn't called. She toed off her low-heels, stripped off the friggin' hot pantyhose, and walked into the kitchen to pour a glass of wine. Another night of television, going over unfinished reports, and dreaming about men she couldn't have.

Except now, she sorta had Zeth. But she wanted Nic. Maybe she wanted them both. She closed her eyes and tried to imagine what making love to Zeth would be like. Every time she envisioned a hand cupping her breast, a mouth kissing her lips, it was Nic, not Zeth, giving her the pleasure she craved.

She carried her full wine glass to the little antique table by the door. On it sat the stupid phone and its stupid answering machine. She glared at the little red light and cursed it for not blinking. *Maybe it was broken.* She pushed the button. "No new messages," trilled the electronic voice.

"Yeah, yeah. Don't rub it in."

She raised her glass to take a long drink of wine. The phone rang and its shrill bell startled the hell out of her. Her hand shifted and merlot splashed onto her white silk blouse.

"Goddamn it. *Now* you ring."

But still, despite wet, cold wine dribbling down her shirt and soaking her skin, her heart lightened. Me, *please be Nic...*

"Hello?"

"Sara? It's Zeth."

"Oh." Her excitement plunged. "Hi, Mr. Peterson."

"Call me Zeth. We're not at work, are we?" His chuckle was low, intimate. "I was wondering if you'd like me to take you shopping."

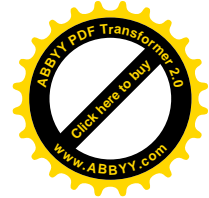
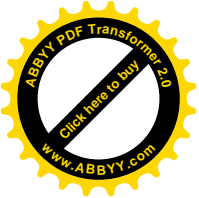
"Do you need office supplies?"

"Oh, Sara, you are such a darling. I'm not interested in talking about work. I wondered if you'd like to go buy something suitable for the charity dinner. My sister shops at this divine little store ... what's it called? Dina's ... Dinkie's..."

"Diva's?" Sara sucked in a breath. Diva's was a very exclusive appointment-only, you-better-have-gobs-of-money-to-set-foot-in-the-door woman's clothier shop. It was the kind of place women whispered about in the same tone reserved for Sunday mass and for ordering a dozen Krispy Kremes. It was reverent, holy, and unattainable.

"You want to take me to Diva's? I'm sorry, Mr. Peter ... Zeth. I can't afford it."

"I can. I'll buy you whatever you want. Dress, stockings, shoes, jewelry. We can go on Wednesday. We'll take the afternoon off and have lunch out, too."



Her boss wanted her to ditch work to go shopping and out to eat. Holy shit. Sara wished she was the kind of woman who could take Zeth up on his offer. If only she was a heartless slut, she could date him, run amuck with his credit card, and, being rich as well as tawdry, could risk losing her job and getting dumped.

"I'm sorry, Zeth. I'm not comfortable spending money that's not mine or getting to take half a day off because I have a date with the boss."

"I admire your integrity, but you're making me feel helpless. A man wants to provide for his woman."

His woman? Unease snaked up her spine. What was he doing? Did he want to get up her hopes, make her believe he wanted her, then pull a Carrie-prom-night scenario on

her? Maybe getting pig's blood dumped on her head was better than getting her heart stomped on by Zeth.

"I promise not to embarrass you by showing up in jeans and a sweatshirt."

He laughed, but the sound rang hollow. "I have no doubts that I will have the most beautiful woman in the room on my arm this Friday night."

"I thought you were taking me?"

"Sara, Sara, Sara. You don't give yourself enough credit. We'll talk more about Diva's later. I'll see you tomorrow. Sleep tight, sweetheart."

"You, too ... er, cupcake." She dropped the receiver into the cradle. What the hell was that all about? Going out to a charity event was one thing, moving on to credit card abuse and endearments was another. Everything she'd wanted with Zeth was unfolding— too fast and too furious, but still progressing in a very dreamy, delightful way.

So why did her mind insist on ruining the moment by torturing her with images of Nic?

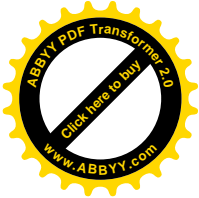
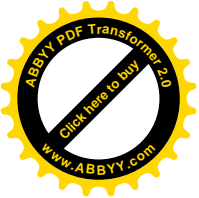
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On Tuesday evening, just shy of five o'clock, Nic picked up the phone to call Sara and leave a really naughty message on her answering machine. He wanted to see her again. Naked, yes, but more than that, he wanted to spend time with her even if that meant a table and two plates of pasta between them.

As the receiver dangled from his hand, he realized the worst thing *ever* had just happened. Before now, the worst thing ever had been relegated to fifth grade, when Todd Malloy punched Nic in the face and he went down like a big ol' sissy, blubbering all the way. That painful humiliation remained a blight on his manliness, but this, *this* was way more heinous.

He'd lost Sara's phone number.

Five hours of the hottest sex Nic had ever had in his entire life with the most delectable female on the planet and he couldn't find her fuckin' phone number. What had she written it on? A Post-It? A napkin? His sock? The details were fuzzy because he'd been



fantasizing about her naked as he watched her pull on the trenchcoat and pack up the toys. He liked her naked. A lot. So he got distracted when she was writing down the phone number for him.

"Damn it." He crawled under his desk and combed the carpet for the little piece of paper. Instead, he found the chocolate-flavored condom.

"Uh... boss?"

Nic raised his head and smacked it against the underside of the oak desk. "God-freaking-damnit."

"Did you lose your pen, or your mind?"

"My mind. What is it, Mandy?" He pocketed the condom and scooted out, standing up and rubbing the sore spot on his skull. His secretary, God bless her, handed him a packet of Tylenol.

"Psyche with Cupid, Inc. wondered if you'd drop by tomorrow morning around nine

a.m."

"I'll call her."

"She seemed insistent you come by the office."

Nic ripped open the square plastic packet, downed the pills, and swallowed them with a swig from the half-full water bottle on his desk. "Don't I have some clients coming in?"

"No ... well, you did, but both of'em cancelled their appointments and just minutes apart, too. You don't have anything else scheduled until after lunch."

"Okay. Fine. Whatever."

His secretary left. Nic dropped into his chair and stared at the desk, remembering how he'd taken Sara's virginity right there. She had the greatest laugh, the cutest smile, and a wicked sense of humor. She was curvy and beautiful... *oh yeah*, she had the most curvaceous ass he'd ever laid eyes on. His penis hardened and he sighed at the ache throbbing in his groin.

Damned if he wasn't half in love with her already.

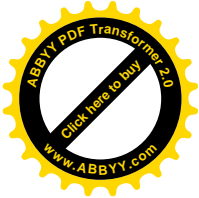
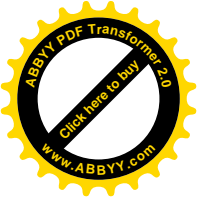
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Early Wednesday morning, in the offices of Cupid, Inc., Psyche peered into the mini Love Glass on the wall behind her desk and watched Sara's love-heart divide in two. A human's love-heart was visible only to the gods. It was pink and gold and it ruled the emotions associated with falling in love and in lust. Sara had always desired Zeth, but after her experiences with Nic, she had been ready to let go of her crush on her boss. Only one goddess could have brought about such a division.

"Interfering old bat," muttered Psyche. "Why can't she butt out?"

Eros laughed. "Darling, she's the goddess of love. It's her job to make people fall in love, too. And really, you shouldn't stoop to name-calling."

Psyche turned, her gaze so cold, frost formed on his eyebrows. Eros wiped off the ice then put up his hands in the age-



old gesture of surrender. "I'm not taking her side, dearest. Mother meddles in our love matches far too often."

"She wants us to fail and she wants *me* to die a very painful, slow death." She tapped her chin, her lips twisted into a frown. "Well, she can't have Sara Beaumont. Zeth Peterson is an asshole. Aphrodite's powerful love zap can't overcome his flaws. Eventually, the slime factor will ooze through."

"A match rarely goes smoothly, even when Mother doesn't take an interest in our business. We'll help Sara and Nic along. It's what we do."

"I know, I know." Psyche waved a hand over the liquid-silver glass and Nic came into view. He was getting into his SUV, annoyed about his summons to Cupid, Inc. and anxious about connecting with Sara again. Her lips curved into a smile. "You're right, E. All they need is a little help."

Chapter Four

When Nic entered the Cupid, Inc. offices, he wanted one thing: Sara's freakin' phone number. Last night, he'd searched the Las Vegas Yellow Pages and the Internet, and he'd called every Beaumont in the city to no avail. It was as if his dream girl had disappeared. He didn't know where she worked, though they had talked about her job, briefly, before she stopped the conversation by bending over the desk and wiggling her ass. He'd shut up and taken the invitation.

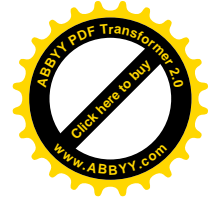
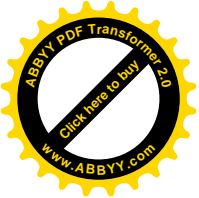
Yowzer. He swallowed the knot in his throat and silently begged his libido to stay in check. He didn't want to face Psyche with a hard-on tenting his pants. He shoved his hands into his pockets and grimaced. When he had dressed this morning, he'd tucked two sex toys into his pockets: nipple clamps and a tiny finger-worn vibrator. He'd felt almost ... compelled to carry these objects with him. Geesh. Did he miss Sara that much? Even if he were to miraculously bump into her today, it didn't mean he could stick her in the nearest dark corner and use these objects on her luscious body until she screamed with pleasure.

His dick responded with rabid interest to that little fantasy and Nic turned his thoughts to ice cubes. Snow. Glaciers. *Friggin' Antarctica.*

"Mr. Anderson? Psyche's ready for you."

He crossed his legs and glanced at the secretary, Livia. She was tall and leggy, Cameron Diaz-gorgeous, and sported purple hair like no other woman dared. Her nose was pierced with a tiny diamond and contacts made sure her eye color matched her hair. She looked like a nymph—the kind he'd been forced to read about in Greek literature during high-school English.

His stomach lurched. In all his worrying about Sara, it hadn't occurred to him why Psyche wanted to see him. *Shit.* Did she want to fire him? Did she want to make sure he didn't sue her for the mistaken Office Fantasy? Did Sara call and demand a refund? To his relief, his penis reacted to the idea that Sara hadn't enjoyed its thrust-joy by wilting like a summer rose. *Thank God.*



"Mr. Anderson?"

"Yeah?"

Livia's purple eyebrows rose to her hairline. She tilted her head and jerked it toward the office door. "Go in."

Heat flushed his cheeks. He grinned sheepishly as he rose from the chair and tried to keep his walk casual as he entered Psyche's office.

"Nic!" Psyche rounded her desk and embraced him, then held him at arm's length. "Oh my. You do look well. Perhaps you should take advantage of our discounts and schedule another fantasy."

"With Sara?"

"Oh no. We're not a dating service. We try not pair couples more than once." She led him to the opposite side of the room. A small antique table held a tea service for two; on either side of the table sat fat pink wingback chairs with lace doilies on the arms. Nic tried not to shudder as he settled into the frilly seat.

"What happened Monday was entirely our fault, Nic. I've been uneasy about the entire situation, particularly since Sara doesn't know you weren't her original assignation. I fear what might happen ... she has every right to sue us."

"I don't think she'd do that."

"No?" A thin blonde brow rose. "Perhaps not. But all the same ... I'll have to tell her." She poured a fragrant tea into the cup nearest to him and, without asking, poured in cream and added two cubes of sugar. "Go ahead, Nic."

He picked up the china cup, shuddering at its delicate and entirely too girly shape, and sipped. Surprised, he turned to her. "My mother used to make me this tea when I was upset... what was it called? Jasmine chamomile. With just about the right amount of cream and sugar, too."

"What a lovely coincidence." Psyche sipped from her cup and smiled at him over the rim. "Usually there's a long and involved process with our clients, and you've skipped over the formalities. One thing we do is a follow-up interview. Why don't we do that now?"

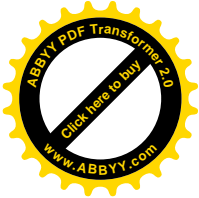
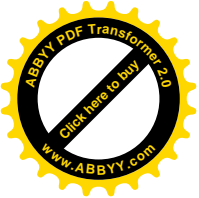
"Psyche, it was a happy accident that Sara Beaumont walked into my office. I have no intention of sharing with you what happened between us." He took another drink of tea before putting the cup onto its matching plate. "Are you planning on finding another accounting firm?"

"No. We like you very much. But I will need you to sign some papers put together by our lawyer, basically agreeing you don't hold us accountable, you participated of your own free will, and so forth."

"I don't have a problem with that." Nic cleared his throat, tried to calm his nerves by inhaling a deep breath. "So ... um, you said, you don't pair couples up more than once?"

Psyche laughed. "We provide the pairing up for sexual fantasies. Marital status isn't a issue, mind you, so it doesn't make sense to do the hearts and flowers routine."

Marital status? For a moment, his mind blanked. *Sara*



married? Then he remembered he'd been her first man, and if he had his way, her *only* man. No way was she married.

"What if your clients want to date?"

"If our clients wish to carry on a relationship outside the confines of the fantasy, we have no problems with that. Our contract includes a clause that once the fantasy has reached its conclusion, Cupid, Inc. has satisfied its promise."

A whoosh of relief made his limbs tremble. "That's great. That's really, really great. So, all I need is Sara's phone number and I can move on to the dating part."

Psyche frowned, her gaze suddenly sympathetic. "Oh dear. I'm sorry, Nic. I can't give you that information. Only Sara can."

"She did, but I..." He sucked in a breath. "I lost her number."

"The best I can do is tell Sara you'd like to see her again ... at the follow-up appointment. In the meanwhile, maybe she'll surprise you and call you."

"I doubt it. She probably thinks I don't want to talk to her again. The guy always has to make the next move. It's *my* move." He knew the desperation showed in his gaze. "I can't tell you how much I want to make the next move."

"I'm truly sorry. I'll convey your ... enthusiasm to Sara." Psyche rose, as regal as queen, and crossed the room to her desk. "Let me make it up to you, Nic. There's a coffee

shop around the corner that has the most divine lattes you'll ever drink. I'll give you a gift certificate."

Nic rose, too, and resisted the urge to tell Psyche where she could put her gift certificate. He knew she was protecting her client, but surely she could see his intentions were good. And it wasn't like he was Joe Schmoe off the street. Aw, crap. Waiting for Sara to get in touch with him would be like waiting for it to snow in the Bahamas.

"Oh! I forgot about this." Psyche frowned, pulling out a square black invitation from the same drawer she'd withdrawn the gift certificate. "The Las Vegas Children's Charity Fund. It's this Friday and I have another engagement. Are you going?"

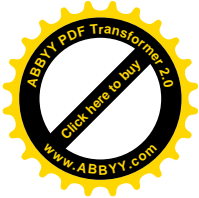
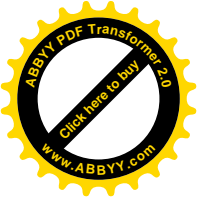
Nic took the invitation, looked at it, and whistled. "It's too fancy for me, Psyche. My accounting firm is doing well, but thousand-dollar-a-plate is too much moola." He saw the look of censure in her eyes, as if him not giving to charity was a strike against his humanity. "My employees and I pick a charity each month to donate our time to. We've held picnics and softball games, been Special Olympics coaches, read books to underprivileged kids. Right now, it's the best I can do."

Psyche's smile nearly blinded him. "Dearest Nic! Eros was right. You are the one."

The one what?

"Would you mind going to the event in my stead? I've already paid for the ticket. It might be a good place to network and find more clients. You never know who you might meet."

Unless his psychic pleas to call him reached Sara, he had nothing planned for Friday. He wasn't in the mood to be social



today, and he seriously doubted that sentiment would go away in time to enjoy the weekend. But Cupid, Inc. was still his biggest client and he wasn't so flush with success and money he could afford to blow off an event like this.

He nodded. "Thanks, Psyche. It would be my privilege."

"Wonderful!"

He took the invitation and turned, but Psyche rounded the desk and grasped his arm. "Don't forget your gift certificate for Bacchus Cafe. It's the best coffee you'll ever drink, I promise."

"Bacchus? Isn't he the Greek god of wine?"

"And of merriment. These days he's in love with coffee."

* * * *

Zeth Peterson didn't understand his obsession with plain and pudgy Sara Beaumont. Up until yesterday, the woman rarely, if ever, crossed his mind. She was good at her job and presented no problems as an employee. She wasn't exactly beautiful, though her eyes were a nice chocolate-brown and her lips were full and kissable. Her body was too curvy, too lush. Usually his women were bone thin and tall. And blonde.

Sara was none of the things he liked in a woman.

But he had to have her.

All of her.

Forever.

That's why he'd spent the last hour picking out her wedding gown from the Paris fashion magazine open on his desk. He knew he couldn't pop the question right away. Maybe in a week or two.

He was handsome, well educated, charming, and rich. Women

loved him. Always had. Until now, until Sara, he cared nothing for women other than what they could give him. They were, in fact, very expensive toys, and he didn't mind paying the high prices if he got what he wanted.

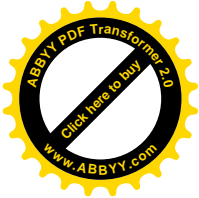
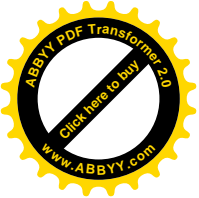
He looked at the gold clock on his desk, the one attached to the expensive pen set his father had given him when he'd taken over this small section of the company. 9:30 a.m. He had a sudden, inexplicable desire for coffee. A peppermint latte. From Bacchus Cafe. *What the devil was Bacchus Cafe?*

He buzzed his secretary. "Mattie, please tell Sara Beaumont I need to see her."

He was surprised at his nervousness. He put away the magazine, squared up the paperwork on his desk, made sure his tie was straight, and slicked back his perfectly cut hair with his hands. As the door opened and Sara came in, his pulse raced and his heart tha-thumped.

"Hello, Sara."

"Hi, Mr. Peterson." She stayed near the door, looking cute and uncertain, so much so he wanted to take her in his arms and reassure her that everything was okay. She looked at him then down at her sensible low-heeled shoes. He frowned. Those sort of shoes would never do for his bride-to-be. He made a mental note to



take her shopping as soon as possible.

"Did you want something, Mr. Peterson?"

"Must I send you a personal memo to call me Zeth?" He winked, disappointed when she didn't react with the usual twitter and blush he'd come to expect from the women he flirted with.

"I find myself craving a peppermint latte. Would you mind running to Bacchus Cafe for me? You're welcome to get anything you like as well."

Her mouth rounded into an "O." "I have a report to finish, Mr. Pe ... Zeth. It's due today."

"I'll reassign it to someone else."

"Please don't do that, sir. The employees might get ideas ... I don't want to cause any inter-office resentment."

"If anyone says a bad word to you, Sara, I will fire them." He crossed the room and pressed a twenty-dollar bill into her hand. "Bacchus Cafe. Peppermint latte. And please get something for yourself."

He leaned forward, because he couldn't resist, and brushed a soft kiss on her cheek. "You smell good. Like peaches."

"Th-thankyou."

He let her go, immensely satisfied with the blush staining her cheeks. Then she turned and escaped through the door, leaving him with fantasies of his bride in white. *Hmmm ... maybe they'd wed in Paris.*

* * * *

Sara stood in line at the very crowded Bacchus Cafe and silently grumped about Zeth Peterson. Something about his sudden attention made her wary, nervous. The man hadn't looked at her for the entire year she'd worked for his company. Why the tender looks, the soft kisses, the invitations to fancy schmancy events?

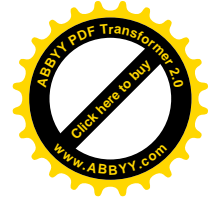
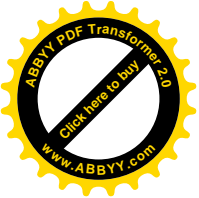
You should be thrilled. This is what you wanted, remember? How many times did you plan the wedding? Envision the children? Think about the parties and the vacations?

Foolish, that's what she was. Dreaming a little girl's dreams instead of creating the life she wanted with someone who wanted her. Someone like Nic. Her stomach felt like it had plunged to her toes. Disappointment wedged itself into her heart, right alongside the unacknowledged thought she might be in love with Nic Anderson.

Stupid, Sara. You thought you were in love with Zeth, but now he's just creeping you out. Nic took your virginity. That's all. If he wanted a relationship, he would've called. He didn't. Live with it. And don't cry!

The tears welled anyway, and she blinked them back. If their liaison hadn't been a paid arrangement through Cupid, Inc., she could go to Nic's office and demand an explanation from his promise-breaking ass.

Ten minutes passed. Then fifteen. The line inched forward. Sara wondered just what the hell was in the coffee. Gold flakes?



Soon, only two people were ahead of her, and she tried to curb her impatience. Already the rumors about her attending the benefit with Zeth zoomed around the office. She could just imagine what her co-workers were saying now that she was on an extended personal errand for the boss.

Someone grabbed her by the arm and yanked her out of her precious spot. She looked over her shoulder and tried to step back into her space. The guy who'd been behind her, a geek with a long ponytail, fake Raybans, and a pierced eyebrow, smirked as he stepped forward and closed the distance between him the guy placing an order his coffee. *Damn it!*

Anger pumped through her and she turned, ready to kill the SOB with a plastic spoon if necessary. "Why the hell did you..." Her mouth dropped open and her breath hitched.

Me.

"Sara! I almost didn't come here. I mean these kinds of places go out of their way to ruin a good cup of coffee, but Psyche gave me the gift certificate and I thought Mandy might like one. Truth is, I had this strange urge to come here so I did, and I'm really glad I stopped because here you are! Right here!"

Nic beamed at her. She blinked. Stepped out of his embrace. Crossed her arms. Jealousy jabbed her. "Who the hell is Mandy?"

"My secretary. I didn't think I'd see you again."

"You would've seen me just fine had you called."

Nic nodded. "Yeah. Except I lost the number. I stayed up until two a.m. last night trying to track you down through the phonebook and the Internet.

"I'm unlisted."

"I figured that out." Obviously ignoring the coldness of her tone and of her stance, Nic dragged her into his arms and kissed her with such passion, she dropped the pretense of her anger. She was glad to see him, glad that he was thrilled to see her.

He lifted his head, his eyes sparkling with desire. "C'mon." He led her through the crowded tables, to the back of the small shop, into a hallway, and down a little flight of stairs. There were two bathrooms. Both held square blue signs indicating the restrooms were to be used by men and women. On the left door was a CLOSED FOR REPAIR sign. He took her inside, flipped on the lights, and locked the door.

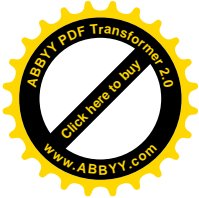
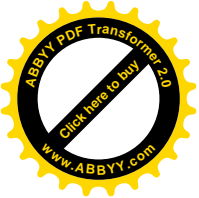
"What do you think you're doing, Nic?" Her heart raced at the look in his eyes. He looked... hungry.

For her?

"I'm supposed to be getting coffee for my boss. I don't have time to..."

He shut up her protests with another kiss. His tongue traced the seam of her lips and she opened for him, as ravenous for his taste as he was for hers. Her breasts tingled, her pussy ached, and she pressed closer, nearly moaning when he deepened the kiss, twirling his tongue with hers. His hands slid to the waistband of her gray skirt and untucked her red blouse.

Sara broke the kiss and looked at his strong tanned hands as



they unbuttoned her blouse. She grabbed his wrists, stilling his movements, then looked at him.

His gaze was opaque with desire, the intent glittering there so ravenous, her knees nearly buckled. "W-what do you think you're doing?"

Nic leaned forward, his breath brushing her lips when he whispered, "I'm going to fuck you, Sara."

Chapter Five

Sara almost swallowed her tongue. The ache in his voice, the roughness of his words, made her heart jump. He wanted her. Just as she was. No dieting or make-up or better clothes or spa treatments necessary. His raw need made her wet and wanting.

He wanted to fuck her.

Oh hell, yes.

She lifted her skirt, rolled down the hose, and kicked 'em off with her shoes. When she grabbed the edge of her lacy thong to take it off, he stopped her. "No. Leave it on."

Her front-snap bra matched the white lace of her underwear. With two fingers, he unhooked it and revealed her breasts; the cool air in the bathroom stroked the nipples to hardness. His mouth closed over one taut peak and she groaned at the sensations prickling through her.

He suckled the other nipple, but too soon, he lifted his head.

"Don't stop, Nic."

"Bend over the sink. Hold onto it."

Sara walked to the wash-and-dry area and grabbed onto to the middle of the three sinks. In the rectangular mirror above the sinks, she saw the fullness of her breasts, the stiff nipples, the edges of the blouse teasing the sides of her tits, and in her own dark gaze, she saw the aching need for Nic to take her, to pleasure her.

"Look what I found." He withdrew a small, heavy metal ball with two chains extending from it. On the ends of the chains were tiny clamps.

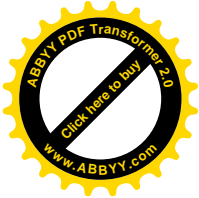
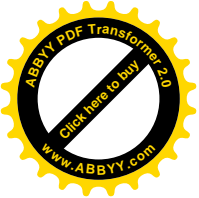
Sara's brows rose as she contemplated the toy. "You just carry one of those around, do you?"

"Wait'll you see what's in my other pocket." He leaned forward and clipped each nipple. The weight of the ball made the clamps tug her tender nipples. She sucked in a breath at the rippling pleasure-pain, and clutched the cold ceramic.

"You stole it from my toy bag," she complained.

"This, too." Nic pulled out a teeny vibrator that he slipped onto his forefinger. The controller stayed in his pocket, but she heard the tiny whirr as he turned it on.

She watched in the mirror as Nic unbuckled his trousers and allowed the pants and boxers to drop to the floor. His smooth, hard cock jutted, a testament to how much he wanted her. *Oh God.* He rubbed his penis against her ass, the tip tracing sensual lines on the rounded flesh. He paused and she realized he was rolling on a condom. She shuddered as he slipped his cock between her thighs



and slid it... deliciously... slowly... into her wet cunt.

Swaying to his measured rhythm, she switched her gaze between watching her own flushed reflection and watching Nic fuck her. The ball on the chains swung, increasing the pull of the clamps; her nipples tingled from the tight grip and the constant motion.

Nic grabbed a hip with one hand then slid the other around to her clitoris. The vibrator sent tiny waves of bliss into her core as he increased his rhythm. "Nic, I'm going to come. Oh God. Yes. Yes!"

Her orgasm rolled over her in a huge wave of blinding joy and she nearly bit a hole in her lip stifling the scream.

"Sara!" He pounded into her now, the slap of flesh against flesh, the throaty moans floating into the air, the vibrator still working its magic, the way his hand clutched her as he stilled and emptied his seed... she came again, violently, nearly collapsing onto the floor.

He withdrew from her and she turned, slowly, because her limbs felt like wet noodles, and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"I want to see you tonight," Nic said.

"Okay."

"I want to see you Thursday night."

"Okay."

"I want to see you Friday night."

"Oh... Oh no!" She laid her head on his shoulder so she wouldn't have to look into his eyes. She didn't want to admit she had date with her boss. It shouldn't be a big deal. It wasn't like she and Nic were *exclusive* ... or were they? Maybe great sex addled her brain, but waking up to Nic every morning for the rest of her life sounded like nirvana. She sighed. "I've got a... thing on Friday."

"I've got a thing on Friday, too. Maybe I can escape early. We could meet at my house—or my office." His tone turned wicked... and Sara laughed.

"Is your desk clear?"

"It won't even have a paperclip on it. So, what do you say?"

"Okay."

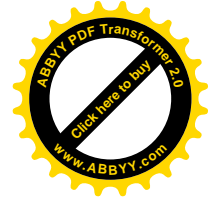
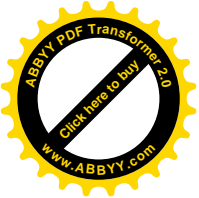
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Bacchus, a big jolly man with apple cheeks, sparking green eyes, wide girth, and fire-red hair, watched the two lovers leave, without ordering coffee, and laughed. His staff, and even some of his customers, knew he was prone to laughing without any obvious reason so no one stopped and wondered about his outburst.

"Hermes!"

A tall thin man with long silver hair appeared. A row of seven silver studs graced his left ear, while his right held only one. He wore a loose white shirt with silver biker pants, and an odd-looking pair of silver sneakers. "You bellowed, my liege?" His reedy voice dripped sarcasm.

Bacchus pounded the little god on the back and chortled. "Take a message to Psyche. Tell her, 'Mission accomplished'."



"There is such a thing as a phone, you know. Or email. Ever heard of instant messaging?"

"You're more fun to send. Besides, technology..." Bacchus waved a chubby hand in dismissal, "is just a fad."

Hermes rolled his eyes, but his lips betrayed a smile. "Anything else?"

"No. Not unless you're willing to drink a lukewarm peppermint latte."

* * * *

I thought I was fired when I returned to work on Wednesday, but it was as if no one realized I was gone. Zeth didn't even ask about his latte. That night, Nic and I met at an Italian restaurant. We ate spaghetti and drank wine, but we couldn't keep our hands off each other. By the time we reached the car, he was so hot and bothered, I gave him a blow job right there in the parking lot! I think I'm getting better at those.

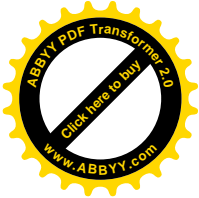
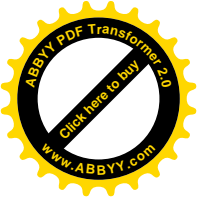
On Thursday, all I could think about was seeing Nic. He is a big distraction. So is Zeth, but in a more annoying way. I had to tell him, repeatedly, that I did not want to go shopping. After I got back from lunch, the idiot put a bouquet of red roses on my desk. I might as well wear a sign that says, "Dating The Boss." Except, it wouldn't be true. My crush on Zeth Peterson was such a childish infatuation. What I feel for Nic is different. It's ... real. So, anyway, after work, I met Nic at his office and we had sex on the desk again. Damn, I love that thing. It's huge. Both of us can get on it and there's still plenty of room. He wanted me to come home with him and spend the night, but I couldn't. Not yet. Oh, I wanted to. But there is the Zeth issue to deal with...

Now, it's Friday. I wish I could tell Zeth I didn't want to go tonight, but it would be unfair to leave him in the lurch. I just wish he'd back off. It's funny, a year ago I would have lapped up this kind of attention from him and now ... truth is, he's creeping me out. But, all I have to do is get through this evening. I'll give Zeth the "let's be friends" speech, but if I break up with the boss, I should probably start looking for another job.

I wish I could see Nic tonight. We have a date in the morning—at Bacchus Cafe. I think he's hoping the bathroom is still closed for repair. Ha. Ha. I couldn't bring myself to tell him about going to this event with my boss. I don't want him to think I'm seeing anyone else. I'm not, really. I shouldn't be so worried. Once the evening is over, I'll tell Zeth so long, and that'll be that. There's only room in my heart for one man: Nic Anderson.

* * * *

Sara closed the journal and stared at the glittery floor-length black dress draped across her bed. She spent an hour at the hairdresser's getting her mousy brown locks cajoled into an upswept hairdo, which included a row of rhinestones up the side of



it. Then, completely unskilled with the level of make-up required for high society, she'd paid an outrageous sum for a professional to create a very un-Sara glam look. Her head felt strangely heavy. She never realized how much mousse and hairspray and really expensive make-up could weigh. Wearing only a black silk bra and matching thong, she stretched out her freshly waxed legs and assessed her red painted toenails. *I wish I was dressing—and undressing—for Nic.*

Tap. Tap. Tap. She used the pen to beat a tattoo on the journal's worn purple cover. It was a sure sign of her stressed-out mental state that she'd pulled the ratty thing out of the nightstand drawer. Writing in it usually calmed her, but she still felt restless. Foreboding whispered through her, touching her belly with cold fingers.

The journal held pages and pages about Zeth Peterson. She'd written down her fantasies about him, her dreams about their lives together... just like a silly schoolgirl. Embarrassment and shame heated her cheeks. *Pathetic, Sara.*

Maybe she'd needed those fantasies because it saved her from taking a real risk on love. She wasn't someone who enjoyed the rituals of dating or maybe it was just the jerk

factor of the men she'd gone out with. The truth was, she'd hidden her fears about relationships, choosing false longing over trying, *really* trying, to find a man worth having.

Like Nic.

"Problem solved." She rose from the bed and took the journal into the kitchen. She tore out all the pages about Zeth Peterson and dumped them into the metal sink. In a drawer, she found a book of matches. She lit one and dropped it onto the papers and watched, in supreme satisfaction, as they burned to ashes.

* * * *

When Nic spotted Sara at the charity dinner, his tongue nearly dropped out of his mouth and rolled across the floor. Hubba! Hubba! Then he noticed the tall, blonde, handsome man next to her, his possessive hand caressing the small of her back as they maneuvered through the tables.

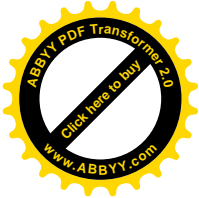
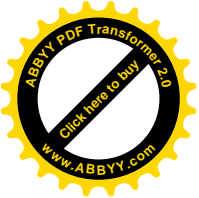
I've got a... thing on Friday.

The charity dinner was Sara's *thing*?

Or was her *thing* the guy?

He felt like someone had ripped out his guts and filled the gaping hole with acid. Despite the burning ache eating away at his insides, he felt cold—cold and frozen. What should he do? Confront her as she stood next to Mr. Suave? Or skulk away like a wounded animal and pray she didn't see him?

Okay, okay. So Nic and Sara hadn't agreed, formally, to be an exclusive couple. They had great sex, lots of laughs, and good conversations. He'd never thought she was seeing someone—if she had a boyfriend why did she pay for a fantasy to get her cherry popped?



Clenching the stem of his champagne flute, he tracked the couple's progress. Sara seemed distracted and more than once she frowned at the man who could not keep his goddamned hands off of her. He rubbed her shoulder, trailed fingers across her hip, stroked her arm. Nic noticed Sara tried to put distance between her and the dickhead, but he was too slick. He found a way to get into her space almost as soon as she found a way to part from him.

Nic put the glass on the nearest table and straightened his tuxedo. The one-plus-one equation equaled three ... except someone was getting subtracted from it—and now.

* * * *

"Isn't he dreamy?" The lyrical voice directed the question at Sara. She turned to look at the woman who'd just joined the little circle of small-talking rich folks and sucked in a breath. She was the most beautiful woman she'd ever seen. Tall and thin, yet somehow curvy and lush, she wore the simple white Versace gown with a grace no mortal woman ever had. Her ash-blond hair was piled high with ringlets dropping just-so down her neck. She wore a diamond affixed to the dimple at the base of her throat—no chain at all. She looked like a Roman princess. No, maybe more like Helen of Troy might've looked ... and if so, the reason Paris kidnapped her was entirely justified.

The woman's perfect lips curved into a half-smile. "Call me Helen."

Sara's eyes widened at the coincidence of the lady's name. She blinked, feeling dowdy, fat, and ugly. A cold knot of envy lodged in her throat. "Sara Beaumont." She flicked a glance at Zeth, who was bending the ear of some poor elderly gentlemen about stocks and bonds and God knows what other boring subjects.

"How did you manage to tame Zeth Peterson? He's been a bachelor for so long... no one believed he'd settle down."

"I... uh ... we just work together."

"Oh, pish tosh. I've seen the way he looks at you. Believe me, darling, I know when a man is in love. And you? You must be ecstatic to be engaged to such a catch."

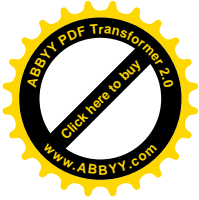
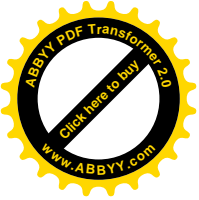
"Engaged?"

Sara whirled, the dread lodged in her stomach all evening blooming into fireworks of shock and guilt. "Nic!"

"You ... you're engaged to this guy?" His gaze was dark and dangerous. Anger vibrated from him, but she saw the hurt in his eyes before he masked it.

"He's my boss. He asked me to come, but we're not engaged. We're not even dating. Really." Desperate, she cast her gaze around the room as if proof of her innocence would suddenly appear.

"Sara! Nic!" Psyche and Eros stepped into the circle of people, beatific smiles lighting their perfect faces. Psyche squeezed between Helen and Sara and jostled her closer to Nic. "It's such a pleasure to see you." Sara turned to Nic, her arm on his sleeve and froze. Every human in the room froze, still as statues, leaving only



Helen, Psyche, and Eros animated.

* * * *

**Helen a.k.a Aphrodite rolled her eyes and crossed her arms.
"What are you doing here?"**

"Fixing your screw-up." Psyche's melodic voice was tinged with irritation. "The match was already made."

"Need I remind you it's been my job much, much longer than yours?"

When Psyche fisted her hands and stepped toward the arrogant beauty, Eros wrapped an arm around her shoulder and stopped her. He looked at Helen. "Mother. Please."

Helen's gaze softened as she looked at her son. "She wanted Zeth. I gave her Zeth."

"She deserves better."

"Rich and handsome and deliriously in love isn't better?"

"We've always disagreed about this." Eros pulled Psyche out of arm's reach of his mother. "Love is not hearts and flowers. It's a difficult path, filled with challenges as well as rewards."

"I know about love, Eros. It is my gift and my curse. To love my son ... and see him betray me with a mortal woman..."

"She's immortal now, Mother. She was given ambrosia by Zeus and made a goddess with his blessing. Speaking of grandfather... do I need to seek his counsel about this situation?"

Aphrodite huffed. "Do you always have to threaten me with him? You think I don't know how to handle my own father?"

"We'll give you Greece, free and clear."

"I want Italy, too."

Eros looked at Psyche. His wife inclined her head. "For how long?" "Five hundred years." "One hundred years," countered Eros. "Three hundred." "Done."

Aphrodite smiled. "Until next time." She disappeared in a blaze of pink and gold sparks.

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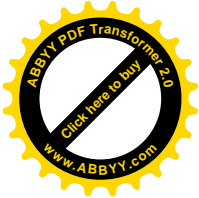
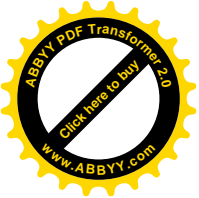
Sara blinked and found that she was staring into Nic's eyes, holding onto his sleeve. His gaze was filled with both longing and despair. Why hadn't she told him she was attending this stupid charity dinner with her boss? Better yet, why hadn't she told Zeth to take a hike? An ache welled in her chest, clutching at her throat, bringing tears to her eyes. What could she do? Say?

Take the risk on love, Sara. It's the only way.

"Nic, I..."

"Forget it. I don't need an explanation. It's not like we're... Damn it." His jaw clenched and he shook off her hand. "You don't owe me anything. We both got what we wanted, right?" He spun on his heel and stalked away.

Sara turned and saw that the circle of people chit-chatting had dispersed, including Zeth, who was flirting with some tall, thin



blonde several feet away. Psyche and Eros stood next to her, their avid interest in what had transpired obvious in their expressions. With self-pity creeping through her, she looked at Psyche. "He ... he just paid for s-sex like I did. I shouldn't expect him to ... care..." Tears welled, but she sniffed them back.

"I was going to tell you at our follow-up appointment that Nic ... oh dear. Sara, I'm truly sorry. It was a mistake sending you to his office. He's our accountant. His address got mixed up with the address of your assignation."

"You sent me to the wrong office?" Sara tried to process the information. *Wrong office, but the right man.* "Nic wanted me because it was *me*? Not because..."

Psyche smiled. "What are you waiting for, my dear? He's getting away."

Sara ran as fast as her heels would let her and caught him at the door. This time, she grabbed onto his arm with both hands and held tight. "I love you, Nic. We've known each other less than a week and we met through a sex service and maybe I'm stupid for saying it, but I believe it with every fiber of my being. I love you."

His gaze softened, the hurt and anger cleared away like clouds scuttling past the sun. Sara's breath hitched as he leaned forward, his lips a whisper away and said, "I love you, too."

Epilogue

One year later...

Eros looked up when Psyche entered his office and waved a thick cream envelope. "It's a wedding invitation from Nic and Sara. They're getting married."

She danced a sexy jig to his desk and grinned with such silly, carefree abandon, he felt his chest constrict. *Psyche—my heart.* He would never forget the day he saw her, the day he fell in love with the mortal woman who gave him such joy ... even at the price he paid, he never regretted his path on the rocky road of love.

"What should we send them?" he asked.

Psyche's grin turned wicked. "A bed, I think. Made from a very large desk."

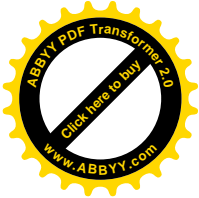
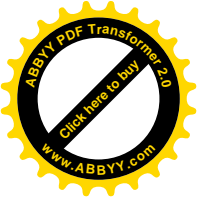
The End.

About the Author:

Award-winning novelist Michele Bardsley lives in Las Vegas, Nevada with her husband and their two children. When she's not writing, she's ignoring housework, playing "Make Mama Crazy" with her kids, eating chocolate, or watching "Trading Spaces."

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