

# LITTLE RED RIDING CROP

by Tiffany Reisz

Rookies.

Nora rolled her eyes as she lifted her handcuffed wrists and pretended to scratch her ear. Most days she cursed her unruly black hair for its mass of waves and curls that took an hour to tame. But she loved it on days like these.

With a quick flick of her fingers she removed a hair pin and surreptitiously bent it into the perfect shape. In less than five seconds she'd popped the handcuffs open just as Detective Cooper dropped into his chair behind the desk.

Flashing her dark green eyes at him, Nora threw her booted legs up onto his desk, crossed her feet at the ankles, and tossed the cuffs at him.

Cooper hadn't walked the beat years but he still had his street reflexes. The wickedly handsome detective caught the cuffs with the tip of his fingers.

"Seriously, Nora." He held the handcuffs up, "do you want to get locked up?"

She cocked her head to the side and smiled at him.

"Isn't that the question I usually ask you, Coop?"

With a groan, Cooper rubbed his forehead. She'd never seen a black man blush so thoroughly before. Part of her wanted to crawl over his desk and kiss him just to make the public humiliation complete. A petite but stacked white Dominatrix in red leather knee-high boots, a red and black mini-skirt with a matching corset crawling across the desk of a six-foot-tall tough-as-nails police detective and giving him a kiss on the tip of his nose? The temptation to out Detective Cooper as a secret male submissive nearly overwhelmed her. But she restrained herself. Number one, she liked Cooper and wouldn't do that to such a nice guy. And number two, she was a professional. No freebies for anyone.

"Nora..." He sat back in his chair and studied her with a mix of half-hearted disgust and barely disguised amusement. "You can't take off the cuffs yourself. It's considered resisting arrest."

"Then tell your damn rookies that when they arrest a professional Dominatrix they might want to cuff her hands behind her back instead of in front."

"Would that have really stopped you?"

Nora thought about it a moment.

"Probably not. But it would have slowed me down. Can I go now?"

"In a hurry?"

"Places to go. People to beat. And you and I both know I didn't do anything wrong. S&M is not illegal in the state of New York."

Cooper opened a file nearly as tall as his coffee mug—her file.

"The maid who stopped by the house to pick up her cell phone and heard 'gut-wrenching screams,' as she called them would beg to differ."

"The maid wasn't paying to get the shit beat out of her. My client was. Only he can press charges, and he won't because he's scared of me. He pays extra to be scared of me. So I'm going, right? You're letting me go, aren't you? Say 'yes, Mistress.'"

Cooper sighed heavily.

"Coop. Say it," Nora ordered.

"Fine. Yes, Mistress. You're free to go," he said and Nora pulled her legs off the desk and started to stand up. "The boss man is outside waiting on you anyway."

She collapsed into the chair again.

"Cuffs, put them on me. Now. Slammer. Lock and key. Never let me out. Please please please, Coop. This is me begging you. Record it. You'll never hear it again."

"That bad, eh?"

Nora sighed dramatically, put on a pout, and sunk deep into the chair.

"He's going to yell at me."

Cooper rolled his dark eyes at her.

"Nora...grow up. You're a Dominatrix. Have some dignity."

"But he's got the sexy French accent and the whole 'I'm very disappointed in you' thing, and I just can't handle that right now."

Nora turned pleading eyes to the detective.

"Go. Out." He waved his hand at the door. "Scoot before you embarrass me even more."

With a growl, Nora rose out of the chair and glared down at Cooper giving him her best Dominant stare.

"We still on for Thursday at eight?" she asked.

"Oh, hell yes," Cooper broke into a smile.

She grabbed her toy bag from the floor by his desk and flung it over her shoulder. "Later, Coop. Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

"We figure out what that was yet?" he called out after her.

Nora hit the police station hallway.

"Nope."

As soon as she walked outside a raindrop hit her forehead. Not wanting to ruin her leather she skipped nimbly down the front steps toward a silver stretch Rolls Royce idling in front of the station. A driver stepped out and opened the door for her. Throwing herself inside, Nora landed across the lap of a man reclining on the wide back seat.

The man raised his eyebrow and looked down at her as she pulled herself into a sitting position. Slowly the Rolls pulled away from the curb and still the man didn't speak. Fine, if he wanted a staring competition, he'd get a staring competition. Nora locked her eyes on his and waited. She could do this forever if she had to. After all, there weren't many men in New York, hell, even the world more fun to stare at than Kingsley Edge. Long dark hair held back tonight in a ponytail, deep brown eyes, olive skin...In his long military coat, embroidered vest, and riding boots he looked so damn handsome she wanted to slap him for it. But she refrained. Kingsley would like that too much.

"What?" she demanded when he still hadn't spoken after a whole thirty seconds of their staring contest.

"Ma cherie...I do not know what to do with you."

Even worse than being handsome, he had that fucking French accent she had to put up with.

"Do with me? I didn't do anything other than my job. Not my fault the maid overheard the ambassador screaming like a banshee."

"You broke the skin."

Nora shook her head and looked out the back window. Behind them she saw an SUV with a nice, normal looking husband at the wheel and a perfectly plain wife pointing out something from the passenger seat. Their two-point-five kids probably sat in the backseat with little baggies of Cheerios and their crayons. Normal people, Nora told herself. Normal people did not have these kinds of conversations with their bosses.

She was glad she wasn't normal people.

"He tips better when you make him bleed."

"You went too far tonight," Kingsley said, crossing one long leg over the other. "I want to know why."

With reluctance Nora turned her eyes back to his.

"I've just been...stressed. Guess I took it out on His Ambassadorship."

Kingsley reached out and rested his hand on her knee right where the top of her boot met her thigh. The feel of his fingers on her skin caused her to take a quick breath, a quick breath that Kingsley clearly heard.

"Stressed, ma chérie? Or frustrated?" He let his hand trail an inch higher up her leg.

"Frustrated," she confessed. "I work all the time, King. I don't have any time for...myself."

Nora's stomach tightened as Kingsley's low sensual laugh filled the back of the car.

"How old are you?" Kingsley asked.

"You know how old I am."

"Answer me, chérie."

Nora exhaled noisily.

"Thirty-one."

"Thirty-one years old...and the most beautiful woman in New York. There's no reason you should be sleeping alone."

"Other than the fact that a certain someone works me constantly so I can't get a single day off."

In a good week Nora could make ten to fifteen thousand dollars off her rich and kinky clients. In two years Kingsley had turned her into the most in-demand Dominatrix in America. Some clients flew in from across the country or even in from other countries for a few hours of her time. With Kingsley getting fifteen percent of every penny she made, he kept her dance card as full as possible. And she was starting to get sick of it.

"I haven't had sex with someone other than myself in two months."

Kingsley's eyes widened in shock. If Kingsley went even two days without sex...no, pointless line of thinking. Kingsley would never go two days without sex.

"Two months? Quelle horreur, ma chérie. Surely there's something I can do to make it up to you..."

"A day off would do. Or two. Or..."

"Or...?"

Kingsley brought his other hand between her knees and eased her thighs apart.

"King..." Nora said in a warning tone, a warning Kingsley didn't heed. He brought his mouth down and kissed her bare knee. Slowly he pushed her skirt higher with his mouth.

"I'm at your service Maîtresse," he whispered against her skin.

Nora groaned at the back of her throat. Damn that man. All of New York's Underground considered Kingsley Edge their King of Kink. Sexy accent, handsome face, beautiful body, mysterious past...he was born to be the perfect Dominant and would have been but for one small thing—secretly he was a Switch.

Just like her.

"Your orders, Maîtresse?"

"Just keep doing that. I'll think of some orders in a minute or two."

He slipped her panties down her legs and Nora's thighs fell open.

"You don't let me do this with any of my clients," Nora reminded him as he parted her folds with his fingertips. He kissed her clitoris gently at first and then with greater force and hunger.

Kingsley paused for a moment to answer, "I hadn't planned on paying for this."

"Good. Because I'm out of your price range." She threaded her fingers through his hair and pushed his head back down. When Kingsley laughed his rich French laugh into her, Nora gasped. One booted ankle landed on the back of the seat. There. That would give Mr. and Mrs. SUV behind them something to talk about.

Nora clung to the leather interior as Kingsley pushed two fingers into her and found her g-spot. She clenched around his hand as her hips rose up. He worked all the magic his French tongue had on her. The muscles in her lower back tightened. The pressure built hard and high. After a few minutes of the Kingsley Edge treatment, she came with the force of two miserable months of celibacy behind her.

Panting, she lifted her head and watched Kingsley sit up and run the back of his hand over his wet lips. She wanted to kiss him, to taste herself, to thank him for the pleasure and the attention. But he was her boss. And she'd hardly thank the man for one orgasm when he was the reason she'd gone two months without.

"Lovely," Nora said as she pulled her leg out of the back window. "But that only makes up for about a week."

Kingsley gave her his best French pout.

"Oh fine. Two weeks then. But it'll take more than a backseat..." Nora paused, realizing she of all people couldn't come up with the female equivalent of blowjob, decided to make one up, "a backseat v.j. to make up for two months of nothing."

Kingsley sighed as he sat back and adjusted his trousers. Clearly he was in the mood to knock out another week or two.

"Please..." Nora stared at him and let the mask of the infamous Dominatrix fall off her face. "I'm tired, King. And I'm..." She couldn't quite get the word out. Kingsley had said "frustrated." The more accurate term would have been "lonely."

He studied her face in silence. He must have seen the truth in her words, in her eyes. She sensed his resistance give way.

"You are a dangerous woman, Nora Sutherlin. This is the last time I employ someone more manipulative than I."

"I learned from the best." She smiled at him, a shallow hollow smile that covered the loneliness they both felt for the one man who could twist them both around his perfect fingers. But she wouldn't think about him today. Or ever again.

Nora said nothing more as she watched Kingsley wrestle with what little was left of his conscience.

"One month vacation."

Nora sagged in the seat. She could have cried with relief and kissed the French out of the man with gratitude but...

"But."

"But? I should have known there would be a but." Nora sat back up again and gave Kingsley's "but" the attention it deserved.

"But I need you to do an errand first. Complete the errand successfully, and I shall tell the Underground that your services have been engaged in Europe for the next month. I'll even send you to Europe, the country of your choice."

Nora raised her eyebrow.

"What sort of errand is this?" To earn an entire month off plus a trip to Europe on Kingsley's dime, Nora knew she'd probably have to kill somebody. Two months without sex and she was about ready to.

"Black Forest. I need you to go there."

Nora's eyes widened.

"Kingsley...that's-"

"They are more afraid of us than we are of them."

"Then why are you sending me instead of going yourself?"

Kingsley crossed his arms over his chest and threw his booted feet up on the seat by her thighs. His every move seemed designed to show how relaxed he was, how laid back. She didn't buy it.

"They would never let me in. I'm the enemy."

"And I work for you which also makes me the enemy," she reminded him.

"Black Forest is poaching my employees. They took Mistress Irena last month."

"I know but—"

"Hunt quit today."

Nora had heard about Irena, Kingsley's Russian Dominatrix, defecting to Black Forest—the only BDSM club in Manhattan that could give Kingsley's Underground Empire a run for its money. That had hurt. But losing Hunt, the sexiest male submissive in all of New York and one of Kingsley many bedtime companions, that was personal.

"So I'm supposed to go there and what? Ask for Hunt back?"

"Black Forest is a mystery even to me," Kingsley said. "No one ever gets to meet La Grande Dame. She won't return my calls, answer my notes..."

"She's smart then." She'd heard of La Grande Dame or just The Dame to the Underground. The Dame was something of a shadowy figure. Kingsley positioned himself as the King of the Underground, the face of Kink. He had no shame and lived so publicly he would have traded shares of his empire on the stock exchange had the businesses been legal. But The Dame had no face and no name Nora had ever heard. She couldn't be touched, couldn't be influenced, and most importantly, couldn't be seduced by Kingsley Edge.

"Too smart. I don't like not knowing my enemy. Go in if you can, find out something, anything for me. A name. A face. Or at the very least get her to stop stealing my people. Anything and you'll have your month off in Europe. If you can get Hunt back, you can take him with you."

"Now that is a serious offer." Nora knew she really didn't have anything to lose. Worse came to worse, they wouldn't let her in, she wouldn't get her month off, and life would go on as usual. No real danger involved except for failure. No real danger but for...but surely not. He wouldn't be there...would he? "Brad's not still there...is he?"

Kingsley didn't answer.

"Shit." Nora collapsed onto her side.

"One month, cherie. Yes or no?"

Nora straightened up again.

"Fine. Fine fine fine. I'm going. I'll go. Maybe Brad won't be there today. Am I going today?"

"You're going right now."

Kingsley nodded at the window. The Rolls Royce had pulled up to a dark alley shrouded by two overhanging trees. The trees had inspired the name of Black Forest. One didn't see big trees often in New York except in Central Park and yet these two seemingly had sprung from nowhere to serve as guardians of Black Forest.

As she gazed down the dark alley, water started to pound on the roof of the car as the rain turned to a storm.

"No. Today's not good. I can't get my leather wet."

Kingsley reached under the seat and pulled out a red cloak with a hood.

"No more excuses."

With a growl, Nora grabbed the cloak and pulled it around her. She covered her hair with the hood and looked once more down the alley.

"If I don't make it back alive tell You-Know-Who-"

"You will be fine. Go. Vite!"

Kingsley waved his hand.

Nora sighed.

"You'll wait here for me, right?"

"Bien sûr," Kingsley said.

Nodding, Nora opened the door and stepped into the rain. Just to be on the safe side, she brought her toy bag with her. The items in her toy bag were designed for inflicting pain—consensual pain but pain nonetheless. If she was heading into Black Forest, she would go armed.

Staring down the dark alley, she steeled herself. She could do this. She had Kingsley as her backup in case anything...

From behind her she heard the sound of squealing tires. Kingsley had gone.

Nora could only roll her eyes.

"Fucking Frenchman..." she mumbled as she strode forward. "It's like World War II all over again."

Early afternoon still, the club hadn't yet opened. The heels of her boots echoed hollowly off the wet concrete and the sound followed her to the green door at the entrance to Black Forest.

A rare case of nerves overtook Nora. She'd beaten the shit out of some of the biggest, toughest men in the world if they paid her enough for the privilege. But they'd wanted her to, invited her to...Here at Black Forest, she came unwanted, uninvited. To comfort herself, she took her red riding crop out of her toy bag and held it by the handle. One never knew...

Nora tried the doorknob and found it locked. No worries there. She started to open her toy bag to dig out her lock-pick set when the door flew open so suddenly she gasped.

The man said nothing, asked no questions, and made no introductions. Of course, he didn't need to say anything or make any introductions. Nora knew Brad, had seen him before, had met him before...but no matter how many times she'd seen him she could never wrap her mind around the sheer size of the man. At six foot four he stood no taller than her tallest ex-lover. But where most tall men tended toward the lean side, Brad was muscle from shoulder to shoulder, neck to ankle, and so wickedly handsome with his lupine smile and his salt and pepper hair that Nora could never look at him without wanting to get hip to hip.

Enemy, she reminded herself sternly. No fraternizing with the enemy.

"Shouldn't you be at the gym?" Nora recovered her composure quickly. "I can see you shrinking by the second."

"Well..." he said looking Nora up and down. He seemed to take particular note of what she held in her hand and her signature red cloak. "If it isn't Little Red Riding Crop."

Nora gave him her brightest, broadest, most obnoxious smile.

"If it isn't the Big Brad Wolfe. We meet again."

"And me not even properly dressed." Brad wore nothing but a pair of loose-fitting black pants and a black shirt...unbuttoned.

"I have that same shirt." Nora tapped her chin. "Well, actually it's a bed sheet. Same size. Very comfy."

"I've heard tales of your bed, Mistress. Urban legends."

"I live in Connecticut. They'd have to be suburban legends. I've heard tell of your bed too. Trees as bedposts, right?"

"You're getting me confused with Odysseus."

Nora raised an eyebrow impressed despite herself.

"Brawn and brains—I would never have guessed. But then again, I don't know anything about you."

"Born in Albany. Played football at Rutgers. Rhodes scholar. Love kink. Hate normal jobs. Divorced. No kids. There. That's the beginning and end of my life story."

"Divorced, huh? Vanilla ex-wife?"

"How'd you guess?"

"I'm smart too. Used to a fuck a Rhodes scholar. By the way...are you going to invite me in?"

"Should I?"

Nora thought about that question and decided honesty would win her more points than charm.

"Nope."

Brad raised a dark eyebrow at her and said nothing. Maybe she should have gone with charm.

While waiting for Brad to make up his mind, Nora started to twirl her riding crop in her hand like a baton. She did that often when burning off nervous energy.

Brad merely watched her. How many damn games of chicken was she going to get into with incredibly sexy men today?

"If I let you in, will you promise not to break anything...or anyone?"

Nora spun the crop one more time.

"Nope."

"The Dame will have my hide if I let you in and you know it."

"Then let's hope you're into that sort of thing."

Nora smiled again at him, the smile she reserved for midnight conversations whispered across black sheets. It seemed to work. Brad took a step back and let her pass.

Finally inside Black Forest, Nora took a moment to simply look around. Kingsley's Underground Empire included half a dozen clubs all over Manhattan. But he only had one club that existed solely for their kind. The 8th Circle as it was known to insiders had been carved from the ruins of an old condemned hotel. Kingsley hadn't done much to spruce up the joint. The seediness of the club suited the clientele. But where The 8th Circle catered to money, Black Forest reeked of it. Black chandeliers with black light bulbs swung low from the black and gold ceilings. Leather chairs and sofas littered the floor. A dozen doors lined the first and second floor—doors that led to private rooms for secret activities.

"You don't like it, do you?" Brad came to stand behind her so close she could feel the heat of his skin radiating from his bare chest.

"Bit middle-class, isn't it? Got a Rotary Club feel to it."

"It's a helluva lot nicer than that shit-hole you work in."

"Exactly. We don't have to look pretty to get our millionaires through the door. They get that at home."

"Black Forest is doing extremely well."

"Must not be doing that well if you have to keep poaching Kingsley's people." Nora spun around and attempted to stare Brad down. It would have worked but she had to look so far up to stare him down...

"Kingsley works his people into the ground. No days off. No breaks. No vacations."

"He's a sadist."

"He's a bad boss."

"And The Dame is so much better?"

"She is actually."

"Then I should meet her," Nora said, heading toward the stairs. "We can talk 401Ks and dental insurance. You get dental, right?"

For a man built like a linebacker, Brad could move with shocking speed. He interposed himself between Nora and the staircase and stared down at her.

"That's not fair." Nora flashed him a pout. "If I can't stare you down you can't stare me down."

"You're on The Dame's territory. She makes the rules. I enforce them."

"Great plan. I'd like to talk to her about it." Nora tried to push her way past Brad and got nothing for her trouble but a few delicious seconds with her hand on his chest.

"No one talks to The Dame."

"Then I'll just listen."

"No one listens to The Dame either."

"Fantastic boss you have there then. Come on, Brad. Five minutes. All I need is five minutes with her."

"For what? Are you really thinking of leaving Kingsley for this middle-class Rotary club, as you called it?"

"I don't know. Maybe. Let me talk to The Dame. If she makes me an offer I can't refuse...well, then I won't refuse it."

"I do the recruiting for the club."

"Well then..." Nora took a step back and tapped her chin with the tip of her riding crop. She saw something heated and mischievous gleaming in Brad's dark eyes. "Maybe you should try to recruit me."

"I have Mistress Irena now along with four other Dominatrixes plus three male Dominants, including me. We're not hiring any more Doms."

"Pity. I have an impressive resume. And a huge client list. Everyone's on it."

"Everyone?"

"Your dad's on it."

Brad burst out laughing and Nora only waited with a smile.

"You should be punished for bringing my father into this discussion," Brad said, raising a hand to her face. Nora didn't pull away. He might slap her. He might pinch her nose. He might even kiss her. She wouldn't have objected to any or all of those possibilities.

But instead of a slap or a pinch or a kiss, he simply caressed her cheekbone with his thumb. She started at the gentleness, the intimacy of the touch, and took a step back.

"What was that for?" she demanded, raising a hand to her cheek. The caress burned more than a slap would have.

"You're beautiful."

"And you're huge and handsome. You don't see me going around getting all personal with your face."

"Would you like to get personal with my face?"

"I..." Nora stopped and swallowed. She needed to get back into control of this situation. She could handle Brad. She could handle any man. Well, except for one... "You're trying to top me, aren't you?"

"I told you. We're all stocked up on Dominatrixes. What we really need are a few good subs."

Nora's spine stiffened.

"I don't sub."

"Not anymore, right?"

Nora glared at him.

"Come on, Nora. Everyone knows who you used to belong to. It's not a secret."

"Not a secret, no. But not anything I want to talk about."

"Was it all that bad, being a sub for him?"

Nora let her most dangerous smile spread across her face.

"No. It was that good."

"Then you should enjoy doing it again."

"You're a big man, Brad, but not even you could fill his shoes."

"Worth a shot, isn't it? You want to meet The Dame, then you have to get through me."

"Through you? Or under you?"

"Both."

Nora fell silent and considered the offer. Wasn't like she'd never subbed before. She'd been a sub longer than she'd been a Dominatrix—ten years she'd spent in a collar. Ten beautiful years. But she couldn't do that again. Could she?

"No collar," she said with finality. "One hour of you on top. I'll sub. Then I get my five minutes with The Dame."

Brad leaned against the stair railing and studied her with his pale blue eyes.

"Nora...we both know you're not going to leave King for Black Forest. Why are you so interested in talking to The Dame?"

"I have my reasons."

"Are you going to tell me your reasons?"

"Nope."

"Of course, if you submit to me, I suppose I could order you to tell me your reasons."

At the utterance of the words "submit to me" Nora's heart started to race a little faster, her breath quickened.

She licked her bottom lip in nervous anticipation.

"Yes, I suppose you could."

"Call me 'Sir' if you want to see The Dame," he ordered, pressing closer.

"So..." Nora stopped and took a breath, "what are our rules here...Sir?"

"No rules."

"No rules? Not even..."

Brad grinned at her with such hunger Nora wasn't sure if he planned to beat her or eat her.

"I'll take that as a 'not even...'" Nora said. She took a long breath in and slowly let it out through her teeth. They didn't need to spell it out. No rules meant no rules. And the one rule of the professional Dominants? No sex with the clients. But she wasn't a client. She was a Dominatrix, a Dominatrix who really needed to get laid.

A month off.

No Kingsley.

No work.

Europe.

"Fine. Done. One hour. No rules. I'm yours."

Brad only stared at her with his lips a thin hard line. He raised his eyebrow. Once more Nora sighed.

"I'm yours...Sir."

"You are now."

Brad didn't hesitate, no doubt not wanting to give her the chance to change her mind. With his right hand he grasped Nora by her upper arm and half-dragged, half-carried her up the stairs. Nora dropped her eyes to the floor and let him lead her to a room near the end of the hallway. He kicked it open and threw her in. She landed on the plush carpeted floor and stayed there not looking at him while he closed and locked the door.

"When's the last time someone hit you?" Brad stood in front of her, his feet on either side of her knees.

"A long time ago." She started to smile up at him but remembered her place.

"Too long. Look at you...dressed up like one of the big girls with her big girl boots. And trying to play with the big kids? It's embarrassing. Are you even thirty yet?"

"Thirty-one...Sir."

"Are you even five-feet-tall?"

"Five-foot-three."

"You're a little girl, Nora. And someone needs to remind you that this town doesn't belong to you."

Brad reached down and tapped Nora under her chin, a signal that she was to look at him. She met his eyes and waited in silence.

"So this is how we get you to shut up." Brad grinned wickedly at her and desire coupled with rebellion welled up within her. "We should make you submit more often. Cross. Now."

Nora started to stand up but Brad put a hand on her shoulder and pushed her back down.

"Crawl to it."

She hid her rolling eyes behind her hair and crawled on her hands and knees to the St. Andrew's cross on the wall.

"Up."

She stood up and waited as Brad unlaced her corset and pulled it off of her. It took a hard bite to her own tongue to stop herself from smirking as Brad stared at her now naked breasts.

"What a waste..." Brad sighed as he cupped her breasts in both large hands. The heat from his hands sunk into her skin. Nora almost sighed from the pleasure of his touch but didn't want to give him the satisfaction. "Such a beautiful woman...you should spend your days and nights naked tied to a man's bed, gagged and blindfolded with your body waiting to be used."

He kneaded her right nipple and Nora closed her eyes.

"But instead Kingsley keeps you locked up in leather." Brad kissed that sensitive spot under her ear as he unzipped her skirt. Nora suppressed a ragged breath. She didn't want to want this as much as she did. She had to control herself, stay focused, let him do what he wanted so she could get what she wanted and get out. But she couldn't quite remember what she wanted.

Brad pulled her skirt down and off her before touching her clitoris gently with the tip of his finger.

Oh yes. That was what she wanted. Now she remembered.

Naked but for her boots, Nora stood waiting as Brad assaulted her with the softest of kisses on her neck and shoulders, the most careful of touches on her breasts. His restraint was the purest form of torture for a woman who hadn't been fucked in two months.

"Turn around," he ordered but didn't wait for her to comply. He simply spun her and forced her into the cross. Nora rested her cheek against the smooth wood and waited. So many

memories crowded into her mind...memories of nights she'd left behind with the one man, the only man she'd ever loved...

"Do you like it?" Brad asked as he strapped her wrists and ankles to the X-shaped cross. "I made it myself."

"It's beautiful." Nora spoke with sincerity. She knew good work when she saw it. "Sturdy. I like the black paint. Looks a lot like the one in my basement at home."

"You keep a St. Andrew's cross in your basement? You're kinkier than I thought."

Nora shrugged. "It's good for drying laundry."

"That's it. That's a flogging for you." Brad pulled away and Nora grinned into the crossbeam.

"Oh...darn."

She steeled herself as behind her Brad whipped the air with a flogger. From the sound of it, she could tell he'd picked a heavy one. It beat the air instead of slicing through it. This would hurt.

Good.

The first blow landed without a word of warning, but she managed to stifle any cries of pain or shock. The second landed even harder but still Nora kept quiet. Sadists and Dominants loved forcing a reaction from their subs—pleasure, pain, shock, shame, it didn't matter as long as the submissive entertained them with their moans and gasps and pleas for mercy. But Nora wouldn't give Brad the satisfaction.

After a few minutes, he dropped the flogger and Nora panted as quietly as she could while her back burned and ached. What would he do to her next? Caning maybe? A single-tail? A paddle? She'd had it all before. Nothing he did would shock her or surprise her.

From behind her she heard movement, the rustle of fabric. She gasped when Brad pressed his body against her back. She felt nothing but skin and desire against her.

"Now I know how to get a reaction out of you." Brad chuckled in her ear. His erection pressed into her. She felt a drop of something warm and wet on the small of her back.

"I promise...I'm reacting," she whispered as Brad ran his hands up and down the sides of her body...over her ribcage and waist, down her hips and thighs and up again. He slipped a hand between her open legs and shoved two fingers inside her. They went in easily, her wet body giving him no resistance.

"Good reaction."

"Thank you, Sir."

Brad bit down into her neck hard enough she flinched.

"And that was an even better one. Wonder what kind of reaction I'll get when I fuck you."

"Only one way to find out," Nora breathed as Brad pushed a third finger into her.

"Very true...you know, Nora, for that little stunt you pulled, keeping quiet while I was beating the hell out of you, I'm going to have to punish you. I think maybe I'll punish you by fucking you so hard you scream for me."

Now Nora laughed.

"I don't scream, Sir. I make others scream. In fact, that's how I ended up at the police station this morning."

"You don't scream? You say that like it's a fact," he said, unstrapping her from the cross, "when we both know I'll just take it as a challenge."

He dragged her from the cross to a small bed piled high with silk sheets and pillows. Pulling a pillow to the center of the bed, he pushed Nora down onto it, positioning it under her hips as she laid face-down on the bed. She waited while he moved about the room gathering supplies. He was cute, Brad was, Nora thought. Scream? Her? During sex?

Brad came back to the bed and took both her wrists in one hand. First he looped black silk rope around them before tying them to one bed post. She heard metal and felt Brad forcing her legs even wider open. He clamped cuffs around her booted ankles and hooked them to the ends of a spreader bar. Nora breathed deep and let her hips open up and relax into the three foot spread. Brad must be in the mood to go deep.

"Are you trying to make me scream from pleasure or pain?" Nora taunted. With her ankles so far apart, she'd probably feel Brad all the way against her bottom ribs. Fine. Let him fuck her like that. She could take and would take it...all the way to Europe for a month.

"Doesn't matter as long as you're screaming." She heard the dark amusement in his voice. Typical sadist—arrogant, superior, and casually brutal. They really were her favorite men.

Brad straddled her hips and Nora took a few slow, calming breaths. No one had been inside her for two months. And at this angle in this position...this wasn't going to be easy.

Close your eyes and think of England...Nora repeated Queen Victoria's famous wedding night advice to herself. England. France. Europe. Castles...dungeons...men who didn't speak English...the canals of Venice...water lapping at the sides of her boat...the wheels of trains passing through the Alps...the sounds of buzzing...

Buzzing?

Brad pushed a hand under Nora's hips and lifted them an inch off the pillow. She flinched with pleasure as he pressed a butterfly-style vibrator against her clitoris. A hand on her back guided her back down into the pillow, the vibrator firmly nestled against her, sending waves of bliss reverberating through her hips and stomach and thighs. Over the buzzing she heard the unmistakable sound of foil tearing.

Nora turned her face into the burgundy silk as Brad pressed his knees against hers. As wet as she was and as open, Nora took his full length into her easily. She groaned as he filled her inch by inch.

"That's a good start," he whispered in her ear. "I think we can turn the volume up a little though."

He punctuated the suggestion with a thrust, hard and deep. Nora gasped and pushed into the vibrator. Her clitoris pulsed with sensation. She pulled against the ropes that tied her to the bedpost.

"You can't get away..." Brad trailed kisses across her shoulders. He moved slowly inside her, pulling himself out to the tip before pushing back in. Nora's gasps turned to moans and back to gasps again. Brad set a steady pace and didn't deviate from it no matter how Nora moved underneath him. He kept her perched on the edge of ecstasy but didn't push hard enough to send her over. Instead he continued to thrust with precision and control. It seemed to go on forever. Nora felt herself rising off the bed as she fell into the rhythm of the sex. God, she missed this. And not only the penetration, the physical sensation, she missed being underneath a man, missed being dominated, being used. She shouldn't like this feeling so much. It put terrible thoughts in her head. Thoughts of him...the man who'd found her, made her, changed her, and loved her. The man she left and would never go back to.

Brad slipped his hands over her ribcage and cupped her breasts, holding them as he began to thrust harder into her. With such force she should have been moaning with pain, but the vibrator pulsed into her clitoris and the harder he pushed the more she wanted. Her breathing grew louder, more ragged, more desperate and hungry. She heard Brad's own grunts of pleasure in her ear. She let out a moan, deep and throaty, and Brad started to pound into her with brutal force. The pleasure slammed against pain and pushed back into pleasure. Brad reached under her and forced the vibrator even harder into her.

Nora buried her face in the sheets. Brad dug his teeth into the back of her shoulder. When she came, she came with a scream even the bed could not muffle. But not even her scream could cover the sound of Brad's groan as he flinched and shuddered with his own powerful orgasm.

Passively Nora lay beneath Brad as he caught his breath before pulling slowly out of her raw body. He untied her wrists from the bedpost, unstrapped her ankles from the spreader bar. Nora rolled onto her back, looked his naked form up and down, and laughed.

"Yes, laughing at me while I'm naked," Brad said as he looped the rope and knotted it neatly. Nora saw the amusement in his eyes. "That is sure to get you into my good graces."

"I'm only laughing because your nickname is so appropriate...Mr. Big Brad Wolfe," Nora said with nothing but appreciation for his big-bradness. "Is Wolfe really your last name?"

Brad gave her a wink.

"Is Nora Sutherlin really your name?"

"Touché. So it's been an hour. And you made me scream, you bastard. Do I win? Do I get my five minutes with the Dame?"

Brad sighed heavily.

"Talking about your one motivation for letting me beat you and fuck you won't really get you on my good side either."

This time, Nora couldn't see the smile.

"Brad...you knew I was here to see The Dame. One hour with you, five minutes with her. That was the deal." Nora raised up on her elbows, wincing at the soreness between her legs.

"The deal. Right."

"You and me...we're supposed to be professionals here," she reminded him.

"I don't fuck my clients." Brad pulled on his pants with brisk efficiency. "Neither do you, I hear. What happened here wasn't business."

"Yeah...but it was a lot of fucking fun." She winked at him and Brad finally cracked a smile.

"I can't argue with that. Okay, get dressed. The Dame's office is opposite this one in the other hall—black door, red knob. Don't bother knocking. Just go in."

"Will she be nice to me?"

"Depends on her mood. I'll see you out."

Brad left without even kissing her goodbye. Then Nora realized how odd it was she even wanted him to. Just sex. Just a trade. Just business.

Careful of her flogged back, Nora dressed in her skirt and corset and pulled on her red cloak once more. She took her time for reasons she didn't want to consider. She needed to get this over with so she could get out of town and forget about Kingsley, about the Black Forest, and especially about the Big Brad Wolfe. She'd lay down her little red riding crop for a few weeks and come back to New York more vicious than ever.

Nora strode down the hall to the black door with red knob. After one quick breath, she turned the knob, stepped inside and felt her jaw hitting the floor.

When she finally picked it up again, she could only manage one single sentence.

"My goodness," Nora said to The Dame, "what a big...crop you have."

Brad escorted Nora to the door of the Black Forest.

"So what are you going to tell Kingsley?" he asked, running a hand up and down Nora's arm.

"I'll tell him the truth. I met The Dame. I talked to The Dame. The Dame promised to stop poaching King's people if King promises he'll stop sending spies into Black Forest."

"Very good. What if Kingsley asks what The Dame is like?"

Nora grinned up at Brad, up at the mysterious Dame who no one ever saw but everyone had heard of.

"Like I said, I'll tell him the truth. I'll tell him The Dame is amazing in bed."

"You can also tell Kingsley The Dame will send Hunt back to him if Kingsley's willing to give the poor boy two days off a week."

Nora nearly sagged with relief.

"You're giving Hunt back? I'm a better lay than I thought I was."

"Top five of my life. Definitely."

"Thank you, Sir. You're not so bad yourself."

With a final grin thrown over her shoulder, Nora left the club and headed back to the real world, to the streets of Manhattan, the streets she couldn't wait to leave behind. All the way back to her house in Connecticut, Nora thought of Brad and the brilliant ruse of The Dame—the club-owner no one ever saw but ruled her dark little world from behind the sheer curtains of Black Forest. She'd somehow earned Brad's trust, earned a glimpse behind that curtain. And more importantly, had earned her month off, her month in Europe.

She barely slept that night while trying to decide where she'd go, what she would do with all her time off. The next morning she packed fast, grabbed her passport and decided to book a ticket at the airport. Fate would decide her next move. She'd pick a destination based on the next flight out when she got there.

At Kingsley's townhouse, she picked up her last paycheck for four weeks and parked her car in his garage. In the cab, she told the driver to take her to JFK and drop her at any gate she wanted. Nora leaned back in the seat and closed her eyes. Freedom...she'd earned a month of freedom. No boss to tell her what to do, where to go, what things to do, what people to beat. Exactly what she wanted, right? So why did she feel so uneasy?

The cab jolted as it hit a bump and Nora opened her eyes.

"What happened?"

"Sorry, Miss. Construction. Had to take a detour," the driver said.

Nora nodded and looked out the window. To her right she saw none other than the entrance to Black Forest. She shifted uncomfortably in her seat as memories of Brad inside her body caused desire to well up inside her hips and stomach.

The cab started to inch forward and Nora let out a "Stop!" saying the word before she even knew why.

The driver slammed on the breaks. Nora grabbed her suitcase and threw a hundred through the window.

"I'm getting out here. Thanks."

Nora half-walked, half-ran to the door of Black Forest and knocked until her knuckles turned red.

The door flew open.

Brad stood staring at her. The stare turned into a smile that turned into a laugh that filled the Black Forest.

"My...what a big smile you have," Nora said, trying to rein in her own idiotic grin.

Brad grabbed her by the arm, pulled her into the club, and slipped his hand under her skirt.

One kiss on the lips turned into another and another.

"Why..." he whispered as his mouth trailed down her body, "all the better to eat you with."