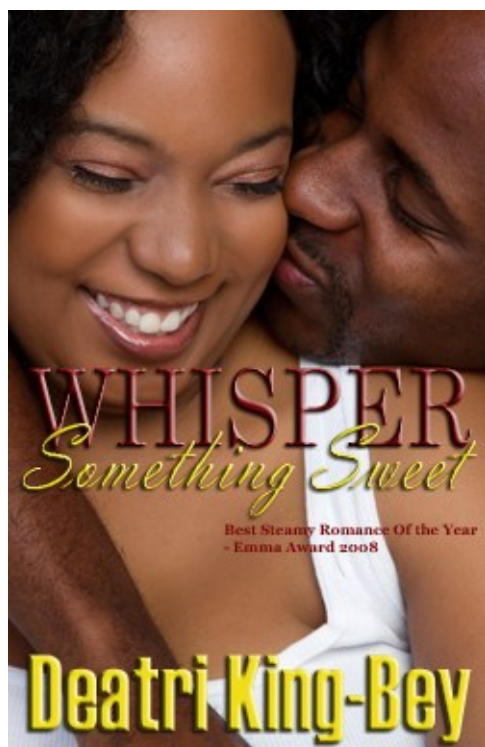


**Excerpt Whisper Something Sweet**

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*Whisper Something Sweet*

2008 Emma Award Winner

Steamy Romance of the Year

**Deatri King-Bey**



**King-Bey Productions**

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## *Dedication*

To my fellow sweet-a-holics out there!!!!

## *Acknowledgments*

I thank...

God for the many blessings he bestows on me.

My family and friends for putting up with me (SMILE).

Angelique Justin for not allowing me to say, “I can’t.”

Carlos Jackson for being a beautiful person and for giving of his time to answer my questions about police procedures.

Chesya, my developmental editor, for her attention to detail and keeping me from going overboard. Brandi Green, my copy editor, and KB Mello, my proofreader, for working behind the scenes to make sure I don’t take three lines to say what could be said in one and ensuring my “i” before “e” except after “c”. I appreciate you ladies greatly.

My readers for asking for more.

## CHAPTER ONE

The keys dropped from Sweetie's shaky hands. "I'm coming, Tess!" Her size-fourteen, double-pleated slacks didn't want to cooperate as she bent and snatched the keys off the floor. "Just two more seconds. Hold on, honey."

At the sound of her best friend's frantic voice over the phone, Sweetie had made the forty-minute ride from the north side of Chicago to the south side in thirty minutes flat, skipped the wait for the elevator and raced up five flights of stairs. She'd tried to call Tess several times as she weaved through traffic, to no avail.

Twice in as many months, Tess had explained suspicious bruises on her arms away to clumsiness. There were a lot of things folks could rightfully call Sweetie, but stupid wasn't one of them. The marks wrapped around her friend's arms couldn't have been made by bumping into anything, yet against her better judgment, Sweetie remained silent.

"If he touched her, I swear to God, I'll kill him!" She inserted the spare key Tess had given her into the lock. Door unlocked, she turned the knob, swung the door open and rushed into the apartment.

A hideous, pimp-daddy red, velvet sectional still dominated the living room. No blood stains were on the cluttered floor or tacky furniture. Dirty dishes and glasses littered the coffee table. A Lost rerun showed on the plasma screen. Clothes were strewn about. Everything was as usual, but there was no sign of Tess.

An anguished moan caught Sweetie's attention. She whipped her head toward the hallway that led to the bedroom.

"Please, Kevin, stop..." Tess whined.

*Oh shit, he's killing her.* Though a big girl, Sweetie knew better than to take on a man without a weapon to help level the playing field. She quickly scanned the room for an equalizer. The steak knife on the plate may give him a nasty cut and a bacterial infection, but didn't have the immediate stopping power she needed. She chastised herself for not speaking up about her concerns and for wearing open-toed sandals into battle.

"Kevin... please... stop..."

Frantic, Sweetie grabbed the knife and prayed for a miracle. She found her miracle in the form of Kevin's baseball bat, which was under a pile of clothes she'd stumbled over. He played for his company team, but thought he was better than Barry Bonds ever was. If he laid another hand on Tess, Sweetie would redefine "home run."

She crept down the hall for a surprise attack.

“You have to forgive me,” Kevin said. “You can’t live without this.”

Back flush against the wall outside of the bedroom, Sweetie inhaled and exhaled deeply to calm her nerves, then tipped into the room. The sight before her eyes was unfathomable. Too stunned to move, she stared as Tess lay on the bed, dress hunched up and legs spread wide as Kevin milked her clit with his tongue.

“We can’t do this, stop...” Tess squirmed slightly, but didn’t look to be in the type of distress Sweetie heard over the phone.

“You have to forgive me.” He held her hips steady and continued his oral assault.

A sucking, slurping noise Sweetie must have been too upset to notice before filled the room. Disgusted and pissed to the highest *pissivity* that her best friend had worried her so, Sweetie turned to leave.

“But Sweetie,” Tess panted, “might be on her way...”

“Fuck that fat bitch.”

“Aw, hell naw!” Sweetie cut in.

Eyes wide and mouth wide open, Tess jolted her body upright.

Kevin spun around. “What the—”

Sweetie wound up to hit a homerun. “This fat bitch is about to fuck—you—up!”

“Shit, Sweetie.” He scrambled off the bed and backed away with his jeans unzipped, bulge shriveling and his hands up slightly. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

“You,” she nodded at Tess, “close your legs and mouth and put some clothes on. You,” she pointed the bat at Kevin, “have ten seconds to explain how you meant ‘fat bitch.’ If I don’t like your answer, well...” She shrugged.

“Dammit, Tess, get your girl. She’s crazy!”

“Shut up, Kevin!” Tess leapt out of the bed and stood between the two of them. There was a new bruise on her upper arm and shoulder her skimpy, black dress didn’t cover.

“So now I’m a crazy, fat bitch. Wrong answer!” The fear she saw in his beady, black eyes almost made her laugh. Abusive men were such punks. Her mother had dated one or two abusive men and quickly kicked them to the curb. The one thing Sweetie and her mother agreed on was not to allow a man to put his hands on you. “Im’ma show you crazy. Tess, how did you get that bruise on your arm?”

Tess’s gaze went from Sweetie to Kevin back to Sweetie. “I... I... must have bumped into something. You know how clumsy I can be. And I bruise so easily.”

“You’ve only been clumsy since you’ve been living with Kevin. Now this is the last time I will ask. How did you get that bruise on your arm?”

Tess bit her bottom lip and shifted her weight from one bare foot to the other.

“Answer me, girl!”

“Kevin did it,” Tess cried.

“You lying slut!” Kevin stepped forward, but retreated quickly when Sweetie reared back.

“So he’s so good at sucking twat you’ll allow him to cheat, beat your ass and call you out of your name. Now that’s what I call crazy.”

“What the hell you been telling her, Tess!” He tugged his sagging jeans up.

“Everything,” Sweetie answered before Tess had a chance. “Now be quiet. Is this the life you want, Tess? If this is what you want, fine. I’m out of here, and don’t call me for this mess again. If not, pack your shit, and let’s go.”

Kevin inched forward. “She’s not leaving.”

Full lips pursed, Sweetie calmly stated, “I don’t like you. Take one step closer, and I’ll show you how much. It’s your choice, Tess. I’ll support whatever you want.”

“I... I wanna go, but... but... I don’t have anywhere.”

“I’ll bet the boy wonder has you believing that garbage. Girl, pack your stuff.”

Tess hopped over the dirty clothes on the floor to the closet, tugged her bags off the top shelf and set them on the bed.

“Tess,” he barked, “I’m not taking you back if you leave with this f... with Sweetie.”

Smile wide enough to show all thirty-two pearly whites, Sweetie cooed, “Do you promise? Now strip.”

He tossed the are-you-serious look at her.

“You said I was crazy, right?” Sweetie smashed the lamp on the nightstand next to Kevin. He just about jumped out of his pants. “Well, I’d hate to disappoint you.” She glanced over at Tess who was throwing her clothes from the drawers to the suitcase.

“Sheeet...” He jerked his jersey over his head.

“Hurry up, Tess.” While Tess scurried about, Sweetie watched Kevin. *What on earth does she see in him?* The same height as Sweetie, he was average height for a man. She’d lay odds his light skin and “good hair” landed quite a few women in his bed. The puny package he carried between his legs didn’t impress her either. A nice thick girth and extended length were her cup of tea.

“I knew you were freaky.” A sneaky grin slid across his lips. “See, Tess, she’s just angry we didn’t include her in our fun.”

Tess didn’t spare a glance at the two, but continued packing. Sweetie laughed at his arrogance. She’d had him strip to give them time to reach their cars before he came after them, yet this jerk actually had the nerve to be getting hard and stroking himself for a taste of the

sweet one—at least that’s what her former fiancé had called her.

“Now that I see what you have to offer,” she said, “I fully understand why you prefer to go the oral route.”

Hate flickered in his marble eyes. “Bitch!” He rushed toward Sweetie. She easily sidestepped and kicked him in the butt with all her might. The force of the kick sent him flying, face first. He threw his arms out to catch himself, but hit with a loud thump and skidded.

*That had to hurt.* Rug burn wasn’t too nice as it was, especially down in the nether regions with that hard-on he had.

Tess squealed. Kevin slowly pushed himself up on all fours. Sweetie reared the bat back in case he decided to throw another pitch. “Oops, looks like Kevin’s the clumsy one now.”

“I’m done, Sweetie.” Tess struggled to zip the overstuffed luggage. “Let’s just go.”

“Excellent.” Tess hadn’t even packed half of her things, but Sweetie was grateful. They needed to make a break for it before someone ended up in the hospital or in jail. “Kevin, be a gentleman and carry the lady’s bags out to the car.”

He shook his head as he stood. Several abrasions adorned his body. “You really are crazy if you think I’m stepping out of my apartment like this.”

“You should know. After all, you are the one who deemed me crazy.” Bat still in hand, she crossed her arms over her ample chest. “Edgerton Trust is trying to clean up its image, isn’t it?” Wide eyed, she innocently tapped her chin with her index finger. “I wonder what they’d think about one of their junior execs being arrested for domestic battery.”

“Hell, woman, being arrested for indecent exposure is just as bad.”

“Duh! You did call me a bitch, didn’t you? Well, I aim to please.”

“I can’t be arrested over this stupid shit. Tess, do something.”

“Sweetie, I think he’s learned his lesson.” She hefted one of the large leather bags off the bed. “He’ll stay away from me, won’t you, Kevin?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“You’d better stay away,” Sweetie warned. “Now be a good boy and carry those bags to the door. Sorry, but I don’t trust your scrawny ass.”



Freshly showered and dressed in a yellow satin night slip and matching panties, Sweetie watched her reflection in the bathroom mirror, as she parted her natural hair into sections and twisted row after row of

her medium-length, black tresses. She'd decided to go the natural route with her hair two years ago when she gave up trying to be what others wanted her to be. No more starving herself to fit into a size eight, no more running around like a chicken with her head cut off to please others, no more putting up with shit from men to find a husband, no more sitting back at work waiting for others to realize her abilities, no more.

This wasn't to say she wouldn't be there to support others, but she wouldn't allow anyone to define who she was or should be. Since her change in disposition, she was much happier and quickly climbing the corporate ladder, yet wasn't fulfilled.

Twists completed, she realized she'd forgotten to oil her hair. She opened the jar of hair butter, scooped out a finger full and dapped the paste onto her palm, then rubbed her palms together to warm the hair food. For the most part, she loved her life and was grateful for all she had. When honest with herself, she felt guilty for wanting more when there were so many out there with so little. She massaged the hair butter into several of the twists that kissed her neck, then continued the process until all of her hair had been cared for properly.

Cared for properly. Her ex-boyfriends and fiancé could use several lessons on how to care for a lady properly. She knew there were good men out there. Her uncles, cousins and brothers proved daily that there were

plenty of good men out there, but for some unexplainable reason, she only drew the trifling men. So, two years ago, when she gave up trying to morph into what others wanted, she also gave up men. Since she wasn't attracted to women, the companionship one receives from having a special someone in her life was missing from hers, leaving her stooped in loneliness. The choice between loneliness and the oftentimes painful drama of relationships wasn't an easy one to come to, but she felt she'd made the correct decision.

*A tap, tap...* at the bathroom door knocked her out of her musing. "Come in."

Dressed in an oversized white T-shirt, Tess tipped into the room and stood beside Sweetie. The two were as different as sandpaper and lotion, but had been best friends since junior high school. *You remind me so much of Mama, it's scary*, thought Sweetie.

Tess slowly lifted her sad hazel gaze to Sweetie's warm brown one. "I'm so sorry you had to come save me..." her slender shoulders slouched, "...again." She picked the brush off the cream marble sink and absently brushed her long, straight, honey-blond hair. "I'm so tired of this..."

"Your life won't change until you take the steps to change it." Sweetie took the brush from Tess and brushed her hair to the back. "I can't do it for you." She sectioned her best friend's hair and began oiling then

braiding it into large plaits and fastened each one with a ponytail holder. For as long as Sweetie could remember, Tess had played on her beauty to use males to get what she wanted, just as Sweetie's mother had. Over the years, the tables turned in a way Tess hadn't expected, and now she was dependent on men.

"I'm not like you." Tess fidgeted with the jar of hair butter. "You're the definition of strong, black woman."

Many complemented Sweetie on being a strong, black woman because she had her "head on straight" and "takes care of business," yet there was a piece of the equation some seemed to forget. Two years ago she'd also cut loose many of her "strong, black woman" friends. They actually believed if a woman wanted to be more than desired by a man, wanted to be loved by a man, she was defining herself by her man and therefore less of a woman or saying she needed a man to be complete. In Sweetie's opinion, they were the ones defining themselves by their "man's" status. Either way, she had as much time for those women as she had for the trifling men that were so attracted to her.

She pulled the braids away from Tess's face. "Don't believe the hype." She nodded at the bandana on the counter. "I need to tie your hair back or you'll be one giant zit in the morning."

“Hype my foot!” She fastened the bandana while Sweetie held her braids back. “You have everything!” She giggled. “Hell, I wish I could be you when I grow up.”

“You’re a fool.” Sweetie joined her friend in laughter as she turned on the tap, and they washed her hands.

“I’m serious. If I could just say no to dick, I’d be in there.” Tess snatched the hand towel off the rack.

“And tongue.” Totally tickled, Sweetie dried her hands on the opposite end of the hand towel. Though joking, Sweetie knew Tess’s real problem was love of money—actually, the things money could buy her. Unfortunately, Tess’s only criteria for dating a man was how much he could spend on her.

“Oh Lawd have mercy, Kevin can work that tongue!” Tess fanned herself. “I don’t know how you do it, sista girl!”

“Open that drawer down there for me.” She motioned toward the corner linen cabinet.

The way Tess timidly pulled the drawer open and peeked inside, you would have thought she expected a poisonous snake to jump out. “Oh snap!” She selected a rectangular box a little over seven inches long and an inch or so in width. Smile spread across her lovely face, she teasingly asked, “And what do we have here?”

“Welcome to Sweetie’s toy box.” She crouched beside Tess. “In here you will find everything from the G-

spot tickler to the Lily Vibe,” she continued in her best announcer voice. “Batteries not included.”

“Daaayum, I knew your freaky butt couldn’t give up sex.” She sat on the floor with her legs crossed.

“Oh no. It’s still one of my favorite pastimes.” She tapped the boxed Classic Vibrator Tess had initially taken out of the drawer and was still holding. “This was going to be your birthday gift, but you might as well have it now.” She shuffled through the drawer for the unopened bottle of anti-bacterial toy cleaner. “Here you go.”

Accepting the cleanser, Tess’s narrow shoulders bounced as she giggled. “You are such a mess.”

“Humph, I don’t see you turning down the gift. You act right, come Christmas you’ll find a Champ dildo in your stocking.” She winked and made a double click sound with the back of her tongue as if to tell a horse to giddy-up. “Come on. This tile is too hard to be sitting on.” She pulled Tess along and grabbed a second bandana to tie her own hair back.

“Shoot, I ain’t mad at you.” Tess left her new toy on the dresser, then took the bandana from Sweetie and fastened her hair with it. “But don’t you want a real man sometimes?”

“Real man—yes. The drama associated with him—no thanks.”

“I hear you. I’m through with Kevin. I should have kicked him to the curb the first time he hit me. But I can’t give up men all together. I wish to God I was strong enough.”

Sweetie flicked off her slippers, then slid between the sateen sheets of her Camelot king-sized bed. The cherry wood finish of the head and footboard blended perfectly with the hardwood floor and muted copper tones used to decorate the room, but she’d grown to hate the bed. She’d pleased herself in every way imaginable in her bed, but the closest she ever came to having a second body in it was when Tess would spend the night.

The first few months of celibacy were difficult, but the more she distanced herself from men outside of work, the easier it became. She’d thought she’d conquered the want for male companionship until... She sighed as she sunk into the bed and propped her head on a pillow. Everything was hunky dory until Gabriel Windahl. Six months ago she’d called to give him a status report on a project, and her life hadn’t been the same since.

He was her firm’s largest client and had seduced her with his voice. When and how he accomplished this feat, she didn’t know. What she did know was that the mere thought of his deep, sensual voice had her moist between the legs and wishing Tess would sleep on the couch so she could have private playtime with her toys.

The sound of Tess laughing broke Sweetie out of her lustful trance.

“You’re thinking about Mr. Sexy Voice again, aren’t you?”

“Go to sleep, Tess.” She turned away and switched off the lamp on the nightstand.

“You’re not getting out of this so easily, young lady,” Tess poked Sweetie’s shoulder. “Come clean. What’s up with you two?”

“Nothing.”

“What about the phone calls?”

Sweetie sucked air through her teeth and rolled over to face Tess. “Those are strictly business.”

Lips pursed, the sliver of moonlight that escaped through the cracks between the shades did little to hide the disbelief on Tess’s face. “Yeah right.” She palmed her breasts. “And I didn’t have a boob job. You two talk in code.”

Sweetie stifled a giggle. “Code?”

“You know what I’m talking about. To the outside world it sounds like you guys are discussing facts and figures, but the current, the tone, the feel would make a phone-sex operator blush.”

This time Sweetie actually laughed, and laughed hard. There was no reasonable explanation, but Tess was correct. Anyone reading a transcript of the “business calls” between Sweetie and Gabriel wouldn’t think

anything out of the norm, but to actually witness one—as Tess had on several occasions—was a totally different story.

“So we’re both passionate when we talk shop. It’s no big deal.”

“You actually said that with a straight face. He’s been trying to get you to travel across the pond to see him for months, but you keep weaseling out.”

His last attempt to get Sweetie to his home country, Sweden, was the cutest by far, but she’d outsmarted him, yet again. A financial analyst by trade, she broke down the financial feasibility of new and established businesses. She did everything from writing business plans for upstart companies to cost assessments to help corporations decide investment opportunities.

This time Gabriel hired her firm to conduct a financial analysis of a software development company in Stockholm, Sweden. He had expressly asked for Sweetie—actually Monica Fuller, the name placed on her birth certificate thirty-five years ago—to lead the project.

The higher-ups bent over backwards to keep Gabriel Windahl happy and his money in their firm, and since Monica was their best financial analyst, they quickly assigned the project to her. Over the last two or three weeks, she’d allowed Gabriel to assume she would be heading to Sweden with the rest of the team she’d assembled to conduct interviews and pour through

documentation at the main site. A devilish smile tipped her lips. It had to be at least midnight her time, so pretty soon he'd find out he'd assumed wrongly.

"I don't get you, Sweetie. You and this guy spend half the day talking, then you end up working half the night so you don't get behind. I Googled him, so I know he's one fine chocolate-chip, dimple-cheeked, deep-pocket brotha."

Sweetie didn't have anything against white men; she just wasn't physically attracted to them. And though Gabriel sounded like a brotha, she'd checked to make sure her fantasy man was actually a brotha. Needless to say, she was not disappointed. And those hands of his... she released a drawn-out breath of longing... how she wanted those thick fingers to caress her body into compliance for anything he wanted.

"Snap out of it, girl!" Tess clapped her hands. "Talk to me. You've been acting so non-Sweetie lately. Why won't you go for Gabriel?"

There were too many reasons to number. The main reason—she'd seen the women who clung to his side when she'd Googled him. Thin, beautiful, so light they were almost white, long straight hair—Tess. Though Sweetie considered herself beautiful, she wasn't thin, loved the kink in her natural hair, and no one would ever come close to mistaking her for white. "I have the perfect fantasy man. Why would I want to ruin it?"

“Because your fantasy can become reality with Gabriel.”

“I’m sorry, but there is no way the real Gabriel can compete with my fantasy Gabriel. I’ve built him up so much in my mind.” The fantasy Gabriel desired her for her mind, body and soul. The fantasy Gabriel didn’t complete her, but complemented her. She rolled onto her belly, stuffed the pillow under her arms and rested her cheek on her interlaced fingers. “Logically, I know that no man can compete, but I can’t stop my mind from comparing, finding flaws and holding them against him. I value my friendship with him too much to let some stupid horny hormones screw this up.”

“I guess I see your point. I just... Well, it seems like the only reason you allowed him to get this close is because he’s halfway across the world. With him so far away, you don’t see him as a danger to this life you’re living.”

“I guess I can’t call you a dumb blonde today.”

Tess giggled as she motioned about the bed. “This is a no hate zone. Seriously though, are you sure about this?”

“I’m not trading in a great friendship for a bunch of drama. No, make that international drama. With his money and looks, that man has worldwide drama as his shadow.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. I’ll bet he has a long trail of women following him.”

The thought of Gabriel with other women sent jealousy-laced chills through Sweetie. “Girl, stop messin’ in my fantasy and straighten out your own life. You need to stop falling for these shallow pretty boys with a little pocket change and get a real man. What about James from the office?”

Tess jerked back as if slapped. “That broke tailed janitor. You are out your mind!”

“First off, he is the maintenance man, not the janitor. And even if he were, so what? He’s a good man, has a steady job, fine as all get out and interested in you.”

“Girl, please. I need a man who can afford me. For such a great catch, I don’t see you going for him.”

“He can’t compete with my fantasy Gabriel, and he is interested in you, not me. You keep going after the same type of man and ending up in the same type of unfulfilling relationships. I think it’s time to try something different.”

“Humph. This from a woman who hasn’t been touched by a man in years.”

“By choice. Now what are your plans?”

Tess rolled onto her back and placed her hands behind her head. “You’re right. Forget men. I gotta get my finances together. I don’t understand where all the money goes. I have credit card bills out the yang!”

Sweetie wasn't shocked. Tess worked as her personal assistant and earned an excellent salary, but she didn't make convertible Mercedes-type money—of which Tess had just purchased a new one a year ago at a ridiculously high interest rate. “Bring in your statements tomorrow, and I'll see what I can do. You need a budget, to cut debt, join shop-a-holics anonymous and to start a savings plan. Did you know that many times you can call credit card companies and simply ask them to lower the interest rate?” she rambled on. Talking shop excited her almost as much as the thought of hopping on a flight to Sweden dressed only in a fur coat and surprising Gabriel.

“You lyin’.”

“Nope, ask my brother, Charles. I had his rates dropped from eighteen to ten percent on most of his cards and set his butt up with a payment plan and budget. He is even investing monthly now.” All three of her brothers had done well for themselves career-wise. Two were obstetricians and one was a contract lawyer. Though all four siblings had different fathers, their mother ensured each father paid heavy child support, so they all were raised in the best private schools and had no issues making tuition payments for college. Another lesson Sweetie's mother pounded into her head was: “Don't have no babies with no broke-ass man!”

If Sweetie had the choice of having her father or the money he sent monthly, she would have chosen her

father. She didn't completely fault her mother for her father's absence. That was his choice. What she faulted her mother for was seeking men who wouldn't be more than paydays.

"Man, Sweetie. You brighten up whenever you talk business. You need to start your own firm."

"I love what I do. If I start my own, I'd have to give up the part I love and replace it with daily operations type stuff. No thanks." Guilt unexpectedly needled her. I should have told Gabriel I wouldn't be traveling with the team.



Hands stuffed in his front trouser pockets, Gabriel watched the runway. Soon, soon he'd finally meet the woman with the sensually-seductive voice. The voice he had become addicted to from the moment she purred, "Good afternoon, Mr. Windahl. This is Monica Fuller." So businesslike, yet sweet and sexy. He found himself calling her daily and talking "business" about issues outside of the project her firm was assigned. But it was more than the voice. One second she would impress him with her knowledge, then the next, he would be laughing at something she'd said. How he wished he felt half as free as she did to express himself. And work... She could

talk circles around him regarding the financial business world, and her instincts were right on point.

The women he tended to draw were quite beautiful physically but didn't have much more to offer. After his last failed relationship, he barricaded himself off, using work and indifference as brick and mortar. Quickly approaching forty years old, he wanted more than a showpiece on his arm, and he wanted to be more than a cash-filled wallet. He absently kicked at one of the seats. No more investing emotionally in hopes of finding something that obviously didn't exist. Yet, every time he spoke with Monica, he could see himself in a meaningful relationship with her. How she'd been able to weave her way through the barrier he had erected had him stumped.

A search on the Internet for her picture had been fruitless. He leaned against the window. Though he had fought to keep from drawing an image of her in his mind, he had lost the battle. The fullness of her voice and freedom of her spirit brought forth images of a full-figured, passionate woman, nothing like the model types his parents routinely set him up with. Many a night's sleep was beyond his reach, pushed further away by fantasies of making love with his fantasy Monica. *Damn.* His manhood stiffened at the thought of tasting her, of delving so deep into her he lost himself.

He shoved the sleeve of his designer suit up and checked his watch. Almost 8 A.M.; to Monica and her team, it would feel like 1 A.M. Their flight would be landing any second, and he had everything prepared. They would go by limo to the pier. From there they would cruise on his yacht from central Stockholm to his villa, located on one of the many islands that made up Stockholm. He would allow everyone to take a nap, and hopefully by noon, the day would have warmed up to the promised fifty-seven degrees and he could give Monica a personal tour of his private island. If things worked out properly, Monica would allow him to keep her warm and his months of self-imposed celibacy would be a thing of the past. He had wanted to purge himself of the women he had been involved with and clear his mind, then Monica's voice seduced him, and he wanted no other. Once he discovered she wasn't married and only a few years younger than him, the chase was on.

He saw his jet making its approach for landing. He snatched his lightweight leather jacket off the seat and headed for the runway. Showtime had finally arrived. He stopped mid-stride to compose himself. Yes, he throbbed for Monica in the most delicious ways, but he didn't want to run out there like some dog in heat. He strolled to the limo and waited for his guests. He'd had all flight traffic at his private airfield halted until a few hours after Monica's flight was to arrive. He knew it was a bit much,

but he wanted to impress her. Unlike the other women he had dated, Monica had built her own wealth, so it would take more to impress her.

Twenty minutes later, a black and a white man—both average size and in their early forties—exited the building and headed for the limo, bags slung over their shoulders with an older white porter close behind them pushing a cart of luggage. Gabriel stepped out of the car.

Uninterested in the men, Gabriel was tempted to ask where Monica was. “Hello, I’m Gabriel Windahl.” He bowed slightly, then glanced around the luggage rack toward the entrance. No one walked through the door. He gulped the lump of disappointment down his throat, then plastered on a smile for the gentlemen. “And you must be Mr. Jordan Levy and Mr. Alex Daniels. Pleased to meet you both.”

After exchanging pleasantries and handing their remaining luggage over to the chauffeur, all three men settled in the limo. Frustrated beyond belief, Gabriel continued to be polite, but found it difficult. Monica had never said she would be accompanying her team, but he just knew she would jump at the chance to spend time with him. He gazed out the window at the lush trees that lined the road. Last time they spoke, she’d been excited about an upstart publishing company she might be assigned to write a business plan for. Granted, she

wouldn't be needed in Sweden, but he had hoped she would choose to see him over this new case.

He laughed internally for his foolishness. Their conversations were all business, except for the undertone. *Or maybe I'm imagining...* He allowed the thought to slip away. He had never been insecure before, and he wouldn't start now. Monica would be his.

End of excerpt:

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