SPINSTERS & CASANOVAS SERIES

WANITTA PRAKS

Bewitched by Madam Witch



Bewitched by Madam Witch

Prequel to Madam Witch
(Spinsters & Casanovas Series Book 3.5)
Wanitta Praks

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BEWITCHED BY MADAM WITCH

Prequel to Madam Witch

Spinsters & Casanovas Book 3.5

Whitney & Darcy's Story

WANITTA PRAKS

Contents

From Wanitta Praks
Prologue
Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Coming Soon
More books by Wanitta Praks
Recommended books by Alexia Praks

From Wanitta Praks

Wow, wow, wow. Are you excited to read about Whitney and Darcy's story? Because if you loved and laughed while reading Clarice and Hunter's story, I'm sure you'll love and laugh while reading Whitney and Darcy's story too. Except this time, the dynamic of the couple will be different. Boss and subordinate. Dominant and submissive. Can you guess who is who?

Just a word of warning. Don't read while eating or drinking. I will not be responsible for choking on your food through your boisterous laughter. Enjoy this free prequel to Whitney and Darcy's full story.

Don't forget to love, laugh and enjoy life.

WANITTA PRAKS
Romance with Emotion
www.wanittapraks.com

Prologue

"Tell us why you think we should hire you? What can you bring to *E Magazine* to help it expand? What special qualities do you have that would benefit *E Magazine*?"

Darcy ran his tongue across his suddenly dry lips and swallowed to appease his already parched throat. He didn't know which question to answer first. All he knew was there was perspiration on his forehead. Not to mention his hands were also slick with moisture.

He wiped them on his black chinos, the only ones he owned at the moment, since all his clothing was put on TradeMe, an online market in New Zealand, to earn enough money to pay for last week's rent.

Is this a job interview or an interrogation? he wondered. Because right now, he felt more like he was a suspect on a murder trial and he must give the right answer or be hanged.

Darcy glanced at the panel of his four appointed interviewers. They seriously looked like they all belonged in the courtroom. One blond-haired lady with ample jowls was busy jotting down notes like one of those secretaries he saw on TV court shows. She looked quite sweet actually, glancing at him a few times between typing. Her name was Mary, as per the nameplate in front of her. He'd call her Sweet Mary.

Next to her was an old man who looked to be in his seventies, with a full head of black hair, like a newly bought mop. It was so thick and shiny Darcy doubted it was real hair. Unlike his very own healthy copper-brown mane that

was cut in a fashionable mohawk style, as advised by his new friend Hunter, whom he'd met at the salon.

Darcy glanced at the man's nameplate. It read "Head of Department of Finance, Mr. Stefan Halgo-Tatabe."

Mr. Halgo-Tatabe, Darcy spoke in his mind. It was so hard to pronounce and such a long name, too. Grandpa Mop would be a more suitable designation for him.

Next to Grandpa Mop was a woman that literally had him sucking in his breath, not because of her beauty or anything, but because she frightened him so much. If he were to so much as breathe, she might sense he was here and then cast a spell to kill him.

This woman wore a black gothic-style dress. Her hair was done up in a bun on top of her head, like two scoops of ice cream on top of each other, with the smaller scoop sitting on top of the larger one. She looked as if she had a black aura around her. Her stare was very unnerving, as if she had some sort of vendetta against him.

But he'd never seen her before. He couldn't imagine anyone having a grudge against him; he was such a nice, friendly, and handsome guy. But there was definitely no denying the look of hatred there in her eyes, and she was the one responsible for making this job interview difficult.

He didn't know what to call this gothic woman. There was no nameplate in front of her. Maybe 'the witch' since she wore all black and exuded that witch-like aura.

Finally, next to the witch, Darcy saw a man that was the opposite of Grandpa Mop. He looked to be in his early forties but was bald around the top part of his head, in the shape of a horse's shoe.

Darcy wanted to snicker at all of his appointed interviewers. How could these four run such a successful magazine that literally took the world by storm?

"Dar-cy," came the high-pitched voice directly in front of him.

Shit! Had he really snickered right in front of them? He hoped the witch didn't catch him in action. Just in case she did, he disguised his snicker as a cough.

"Would you like some water?" The witch glared at him through her black-rimmed glasses.

Darcy gulped down excess saliva and blasted his contacts to hell for playing up at this time.

Dry eyes, pure and simple.

But he was only following advice. Hunter did say to ditch his glasses and opt for contacts instead, since it would make him more presentable. Not that he wasn't handsome in the first place, but—

"Dar-cy. Water?" that high-pitched voice said again.

Shit! His mind was wondering off to La-la Land again.

He gave the witch a smile, one that almost split his face in half.

"No, no, I'm fine now," he replied and cleared his throat again. Then he looked at all of them.

A small interval passed by, the room cloaked in silence. Suddenly, he heard a tapping sound. His eyes were drawn to those long, claw-like nails tapping the tabletop. They belonged to the witch.

His eyes were so mesmerized and freaked out by those nails that he almost forgot to breathe, let alone think. He didn't hear or register anything until he heard his name being called, yet again.

"Yes, yes," he responded hastily.

“Perhaps you need more time to answer the question, Dar-cy?” the witch asked, her eyes piercing him like a spear.

His heart jumped in fright.

“The question?” he asked like an idiot.

“Yes, the question, Darcy. More time perhaps, or shall we end the interview altogether?”

Oh shit! Yes! Yes! The questions. He totally forgot to answer the questions. Wasn’t that why he was here in the first place?

His heart pounded again as he looked up at the witch. He shook his head to clear his mind and swallowed another glob of saliva.

That was a close one, he thought. He almost got sucked in by those freaky nails. And then clearing his throat once, he started his answer, his voice trembling, “I believe…”

* * * * *

It was a week later, the weather as crappy as his mood, when the result from his interview finally arrived from *E Magazine* via the mail delivery. The rain pounded like there was no tomorrow. Darcy had to put on his cap that he’d bought from the thrifty shop before heading out to the mailbox. The hat was old, but at least it did the trick of keeping that blasted rain from fogging his glasses.

Once the letter was in his hands, he cuddled it like precious gold. In fact, to Darcy, this letter was worth more than precious gold. This letter, when he eventually came to open it, would determine the outcome of his life—whether he would continue to live in this rundown apartment that was infested with rats.

Darcy slipped the letter into his coat pocket and ran back inside before his gelled hair was damaged. Nothing was more important than his mohawk right now. Nothing! Well, maybe except the letter.

Taking shelter under the veranda, he made small cuts, tearing open the letter with precision. He was so focused on his task that when his phone suddenly rang, his heart almost jumped out of his chest.

"Who… who is it?" He flipped open the phone and stammered into it.

"It's me, little ducky. Did the letter come yet?"

Thank God it was only his friend Macy.

"Yeah, it's here. I'm in the process of opening it right now."

"Ohhh, tell me. Quick, tell me."

"If you'd shut up and let me open it in peace, I'd be more than happy to tell you."

A man could only focus on one task at a time. He obviously couldn't talk to Macy and tear open the envelop at the same time now, could he? And so when Macy continued to mutter and drill him, he snapped the phone shut.

Sneaking the letter out of the envelope inch by inch, his heart competed against the thrum of the torrential rain outside.

"Oh, Jesus, please, rescue this little ducky from drowning in this rat pool," he prayed under his breath when the letter was finally out. "All he wants is a full stomach and a few pretty girls to sleep with."

When he did eventually open the letter, he almost ran into the rain and did a jiggy dance. Instead, he speed-dialed Macy.

“Well, say congrats to me, Macy,” he shouted into the phone. “I’ll be joining your flock of beautiful birds at work soon. Come Monday, I’m officially an employee at *E Magazine*. Yeah!”

“Congrats, little ducky,” Macy cheered on the other end of the line.

“Hello, beautiful women. Bye-bye, abstinence.” He chuckled to himself.

His sex life had hit a dry spell since he moved to Auckland from Wellington. He was so busy looking for a job that suited his degree and surviving on a peanut salary from his librarian job that he didn’t have time to satisfy his other needs. Like Jonathan, for example, his little brother downstairs, who’d stayed wilted and quiet for a few months now. Maybe he should go out tonight, celebrate, and bring a few girls home to make Jonathan happy again. If he were happy, then Darcy would also be happy.

“So tell me about the place.” He got down to business. It was always good to stay one step ahead. Especially if there was going to be a platter of hot girls around, as all magazine publishing companies should be. “Any hot girls there?”

“Plenty, little ducky. Plenty. Big ones, small ones.”

“Are you referring to their breast size?”

“No, you perverted ducky, their height. But you better watch out for one. She’s the mother of all tyrants. If you work under her, you’d be better off dead.”

“She’s that bad, eh? But what’s her size?”

“I don’t know. I’m not a lesbian. I don’t go around looking at other women’s breasts. Brian would think I’m a lesbian.”

“Okay, fine. Go on, then. Tell me more.”

“Okay, if you’re under her, then you’re dead. That woman goes through men like flies. She uses them and then squashes them. In fact, I heard rumors that she keeps men’s ties in her drawers just so she can attack them and control them.”

“Does she keep whips and chains, too?” he asked. If she did, then what a perfect deal. He was always into that Dominant/submissive stuff.

“Are you into BDSM?”

“What… uh… no… well… umm.” *How do you tell your friend these kinds of kinky things anyway?*

“In your fantasy, little ducky.” Macy thankfully saved him from answering her question. “But be careful with this one. Make sure you don’t get in her radar.”

“Yeah, I hope not. So I’m supposed to be a personal assistant to one of the bosses. Which journalist writes articles on destination? Who’s my boss?”

“Oh, so you’ll be working under Whitney, then,” Macy said lightly.

“Oh,” he chuckled in delight. “Whitney. That’s a nice name. Is she hot?”

“More like hard to handle. But she does have a nice body. I envy her.”

“If you’d cut down on those cakes and stop baking for Brian, then I’m sure you’d lose that weight, Macy.” He offered his kind advice to his friend.

“Anyway, you should know her.” Macy dismissed his advice. “She’s one of your interviewers.”

“Seriously? Now you’re giving me high hopes.”

His heart swelled up when he heard this news. He wondered if Whitney was the blond chick who kept smiling at him during the interview. She *was* hot. But if she was

hard to handle, too… Darcy chuckled at his own thoughts. He'd be sure to set that straight with fluffy handcuffs and a feathery whip. He was sure she'd come back for more, just like all his other women.

"Is she the blond one?"

"Blond? No, she has black hair."

"Black?"

Darcy scratched his head, trying to recall who had black hair in the interview session. There was old Grandpa Mop, but he was a man. Plus, he was old. Well, apart from him, there was also… He rubbed his jaw and thought. There was only that gothic witch-like lady, but… No, that couldn't be. Of course it couldn't be her.

"No, there was no one that was hot in there with black hair," he said into the phone.

"I'm pretty sure she was in there. Oh, wait, my memory's coming back to me. She was the one who wore a black dress, black glasses. She had her hair in a bun that day. She's the same woman I was telling you about before… eating men, ties in her drawer—"

Darcy dropped his phone. He couldn't continue to listen to Macy's explanation anymore. His heart was thumping at a wild speed.

Out beyond the horizon, the sun shone over the dark-grey clouds, showing a sliver of a silver lining. Darcy stared at it. He could already see his future right in front of him, the letter of acceptance in his hand. But now, hearing this news, his future, his perfectly constructed bright future, came crumpling down right before his eyes.

"Oh shiiiittt," he bellowed. "I just landed my dream job with the boss from hell."

* * * * *

Chapter One

Six months later…

Beep. Beep.

Darcy opened his eyes slowly, his mind a little hazy as he searched for the source of the sound.

Beep. Beep.

There it goes again, he thought. *Bastard annoying ringtone.*

He rubbed his eyes to fend off the sleep. As reality finally sank in, his eyes landed on the screen of his cell. The light was flashing, indicating a text message waited in his inbox. He groggily flicked through the menu and lazily gazed over the message. His body still slouched in its sleeping position until he reached the end of the message.

On the second floor. The WITCH is heading your way.

"Holy shiittt!" Darcy swore and leapt out of his chair, almost toppling over backward in his sheer moment of panic, his heart racing a million miles a minute.

He combed his fingers through his hair, taming it as much as possible to remove evidence of the sleep-tousled strands. When it refused to obey, he swore again, hoping for the witch to believe the electric hairstyle he sported today was just the result of the massive amounts of hair gel he used this morning. He ran his hands over his shirt and pants to smooth out any wrinkles created while he was napping.

"Ah, dammit," he swore again.

Darcy closed his eyes and took one deep breath, then two, hoping to calm his nerves.

Once he was convinced his heartbeat had returned to its normal pace, he strode toward the door in a manly, composed fashion, chest puffed out and back straight. But there was no denying his legs were shaking like he was on jelly land, and by the time he'd reached the door to open it, he almost collapsed from fright when it miraculously opened by itself to reveal Whitney Madigan—to him, the witch, to his colleagues, his boss, and to the outside world, the editor-in-chief of E Magazine.

"Hello, Darcy," she enunciated his name slowly, her eyes scanning up and down his body, possibly looking for any faults, per usual.

This action only served to remind him of the first time she laid eyes on him during that interview six months back. That whole experience was still traumatizing to this day. And back then, he thought he could play the dominant role, taming her with his whip and handcuffs. But now look who was playing the submissive role.

"Ma-ma'am?" *Shit!* He whimpered.

Darcy kicked himself mentally, a firm reminder that he shouldn't be a weakling in front of this woman. *Show some power, Darcy.*

"Has the meeting finished?" he asked with more strength in his voice.

No reply. Instead, the witch asked, "Did you get all your work done?"

"Yes, ma'am," he answered immediately. "Almost there."

Darcy even faked a smile to go along with his answer, hoping to please her in some way. But clearly, the witch had

no human emotion. There wasn't even a single twitch of her facial muscles.

She must've had Botox, he thought.

There was no smile. Her lips were grim and her eyes glared at him. Straight into his. And Jesus, did it made his heart thump like there was no tomorrow. And if he didn't blink a few times to stop his thundering heartbeat, he wouldn't know where his soul would escape to.

"I'm so sorry about that." He tried to redirect their sour situation.

He clamped his hands together, his head bent forward. The posture looked like he was begging for her forgiveness.

Damn submission again. I am a Dominant! He cursed himself when he realized he was in this position and straightened his back once more.

"You do know if this happens all too often, something will need to be done," she threatened before handing him a clear file with more documents for him to go through.

Jesus Christ, when will I be able to complete all this work? It's an ongoing concern here.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered anyway, eyeing her with pure hatred. And when she walked farther into his office, he could only scream out his objection in his mind.

You evil witch! If we were in the eighteenth century, I'd burn you on a stake already. Blast you to hell, you evil—

"I'm so sorry I couldn't attend the meeting." Darcy ran right in front of her, blocking her passage, as she was about to go to his desk. "If… if only Peter hadn't taken leave so suddenly, I would have been able to."

"Mmm," was all she uttered, then looked up as if searching for something, until finally her eyes landed on his desk.

Darcy cringed. All the important documents were scattered about on the table, probably a result of being pushed around by his big head during sleep.

He moved a lot when he slept; that was what his mother had always told him.

"If you move around like this, who's going to sleep with you?" she would often say. "And how are you going to produce any children if no one wants to sleep with you?"

Yeah right, like I have time to think about that right now. Once again, he'd hit a sexual dry spell, not because there was no woman around. It was because of this witch. Stress, frustration, and tiredness. She bestowed all three gifts upon him, wrapped in a sarcastic bow of instructions.

"Is that all you need?" he asked, hoping she would get the hint and leave him in peace before his heart did another stressful spin around the racetrack.

"No, Darcy. Follow me. I need to talk to you."

Shit, now I'm in trouble for sure.

Darcy followed her into her office, which was adjacent to his own, except his was like a little storeroom compared to her gigantic immaculate suite.

The witch went to sit on her throne, then turned to face him coldly, gesturing for him to step forward until he stood right in front of her desk.

Darcy did as he was told without even thinking.

"Your tie is wrinkled. Did you iron it this morning?" she asked coldly, her voice as frozen as dry ice, her usual tone with him.

"I did." He subconsciously went to smooth his tie.

"Then why is it wrinkled?" she asked sharply, her eyes boring into his own.

Darcy knew he was in serious trouble. He'd been working for the witch for a full six months now, and he knew when she started using this tone, he was in deep.

Dear God, why does she have to be this cold? And scary?

Darcy eyed his boss. There she sat on her throne, her hands one on top of the other, staring at him like she was about to cast an evil spell upon him. Her black hair, which she usually tied up in a bun, was just like that again today. She was so pale, as if she were lacking in iron or something.

God, she's ugly, he couldn't help thinking. Those coke-bottle lenses were like magnify glasses that made her eyes look like a goldfish's underwater, like they were about to burst off her skull. And she had her usual black suit on again today, a two-piece that reached just past her knees.

What woman these days wears that length skirt anyway? Not that he was an expert in skirts, but he dated so many women in the past to know what was in fashion and what was not. The witch looked like she was out of fashion by decades.

How could they make her the editor-in-chief of E Magazine when she dresses like that?

"Dar-cy," she said again, her pronunciation of his name grating in his ears. He knew she must have done it on purpose. He hated the way she pronounced his name. It was like she was his mother, reprimanding him for doing something wrong. "Were you listening to me?" she asked again, breaking into his line of thoughts.

"Yes. I'm listening." His voice shook a bit. *Why must I feel like this? Stand up, Darcy. Be a man. Shouldn't a man dominate the work place, like in the bedroom?*

"Why is it wrinkled?" she asked again.

"I…" *Bugger!* What was he supposed to tell the witch? That he was sleeping on the job because he was so damn tired because of the amount of work she unloaded on him. Because, shit, Peter decided to take a week off, leaving him to do all his work.

Shit! The amount of work she pressed him to finish was, yes, a little overboard, but it was also his own damn fault for succumbing to the pressure of his friend Hunter.

Last night, Hunter had called to announce that his partner had accepted his marriage proposal. So what did two highly intelligent men do? They went drinking—until they were flat-out drunk. And it was only Wednesday, for crying out loud. By the time he got home, he was pooping with his eyes closed.

"I…?" The witch probed, her eyes questioning, waiting for him to elaborate. Or maybe to drop dead on the spot due to stress. If that happened, he'd sue her for inducing stress on her staff.

"I was… was…" His eyes scanned the floor, looking for a way out of his early grave. And then they miraculously landed on a piece of paper lying underneath her desk. Not knowing what excuse to give her, he immediately said the first thing that came into his mind. "I was busy looking for some documents on the floor, so I must have accidentally wrinkled it then. There's still a piece left under the desk. I'll just grab it."

He crawled underneath the table and picked up the document that lay near her feet. *God, now I feel so low, but please let the witch believe my lie.*

"You came into my office without my permission to organize my things?" she asked with a cruel sting.

"Y-yes." He got back up. *What the hell have I done? What kind of excuse was that? Why did I come up with such a lame excuse?*

Darcy knew the witch hated anyone invading her private space. She'd told him countless times. So why did he think of saying such a thing?

"Darcy, I have…"

And here she goes with the warning.

"I don't appreciate anyone coming into my room when I'm not present. If this happens again—"

Blab, blab, blab... Darcy blocked out her voice and thought instead of his latest date that he'd scored while out drinking with Hunter late last night. *I wonder if Isabella wants to go straight to third base tonight.*

"Did you pick everything up?"

"Huh?" *Has she finished with the warning already?*

"Darcy, were you even listening to me?"

"Yes, ma'am, I'm listening." Darcy straightened himself and cracked his neck. He should never sleep in that sloughy position since it would always be his neck that suffered.

"Good. Now that I've made myself clear, we can get back to work."

Phew! Darcy heaved a sigh of relief, happy that he wasn't punished. He feigned a smile and turned to leave when—

"Now take off your tie."

What? Darcy stopped in his tracks and twisted on his heel to face the witch.

You have got to be kidding me. You nasty witch, you want me to strip off my tie? Not a chance. And it's definitely not part of office policy to strip for your boss. I won't—

“Take off your tie, Darcy,” she stated again, glaring deathly venom at him.

“W-why?” he stuttered, fear creeping into him.

What’s gotten into her? Wait! That must be it. She’s a cougar, preying on young, handsome men like me. And since I’m so irresistible, she wants a piece of me like all the other women back in university. Yes, that’s it. The cougar.

“Because it’s wrinkled,” she said simply, shoving his hypothesis out the window. “I can’t have you parading around my workplace wearing a wrinkled tie, now can I?”

And you can parade around in that ugly dress? Not that he could say that out loud.

The witch stood from her chair and walked toward a set of drawers situated at the back of the office. Then stopping in front of them, she pulled something out from the top drawer. All Darcy could do was stare at her back. She then turned and walked toward him with a red polka dot tie in her hand.

She keeps ties in her office. Shit! So I’m not her only victim, then. She must be preying on other men, too. So the rumors are true after all.

At first, when Darcy started working here, there were numerous rumors about his madam being a cougar, preying on young men in her previous workplace because she was so old she couldn’t find herself a boyfriend.

He supposed no one in his right mind would want to be her boyfriend anyway. Tyrant. Strict. Cold. Vicious. You name it—all the traits a girl shouldn’t have, she possessed. In other words, she turned men off.

“Darcy, take off the tie.” She cocked her head to one side when he refused to budge.

“Yes, yes, of course.” There he went again. He just couldn’t stand up for himself, could he? *What a loser.*

Grabbing the knot of his tie, Darcy loosened it. Once removed, he scrunched it up and shoved it in his pocket.

The witch stood right in front of him, her head only reaching his chin. Despite the height difference, Darcy still felt intimidated by this woman.

Without touching him, the witch glared up at him, her eyes frosty. “Wear this,” she ordered, then dropped the tie into his open palm.

Darcy stood speechless, looking at the polka dot tie in his hand. He’d bet on his next paycheck that if he were to walk out of this office wearing that tie, he would surely be the laughing stock of the whole company.

The witch stood in the same position, right in front of him, as if waiting for him to do something with the tie. He just blinked.

“Darcy?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Wear the tie.”

“Oh, like right now?”

“Yes.”

“Can I wait until I reach my office?”

“No.”

The evil witch. Torturing me every day with the workload isn’t enough. Now I must be the laughing stock of the whole company, too. I hate you.

Darcy wanted to lash out at her, but instead, he found himself tying the tie around his neck, like an obedient little boy or a total submissive.

“All done,” he even exclaimed once he finished.

The witch had the decency to step back and inspect his goddamn work.

"Good." She nodded, smiling slyly, then turned and perched herself back on her throne, typing furiously on her laptop, her long fingernails like cat claws drumming on the keyboard. "You can leave now, Darcy," she instructed, her eyes were still glued to the screen. "And be a good boy and close the door on your way."

Bang on my ego. The witch sure knows how to use the minimum words for a maximum effect to traumatize me.

Darcy wanted to spout a comeback, a retort, anything to show she couldn't bully him, but all that came out of his mouth was, "Yes, ma'am," before he gnashed his teeth together and closed the door quietly behind him.

* * * * *

Chapter Two

"That's it. I'm quitting." Darcy fumed as he got to his seat, his hand gripping his tie, loosening it, then throwing it across the desk to land on the threshold.

He could imagine the headline news of their next issue of the employee newsletter already.

Want to have fun? Then look no farther than our very own Darcy the clown, complete with red polka dot tie to make your day.

Darcy was sure he was the official clown of the whole company now. All because of that witch and his walk of shame. Everyone stared at him like he had three heads. He bet on a rat's ass that Carina, the company gossip, would be blogging about his red polka dot tie for weeks. Even worse, Tony, the tech guy who hardly had anything better to do than go around filming anything that moved, had decided at that moment to film him on his iPhone, too. The gall when he'd even promised by tomorrow morning, Darcy would be a celebrity. All thanks to YouTube.

Celebrity, my ass, Darcy fumed. *More like the joke of the whole company.*

"Knock-knock," a voice said at the door.

Darcy shifted his focus to the door, but before he could say enter, a woman, round as a muffin, stepped over the threshold and perched her bottom on his desk.

It was Macy, his friend who'd sent him the text message about the witch heading his way.

“What’s wrong, Darcy darling? Did the witch bite your head off again?” she asked.

“Worse than that. She asked me to wear this bloody tie.” Darcy gestured to the tie on the desk, which he’d now removed from his neck. That tie was like a snake winding around his neck, suffocating him. No, it was more like that witch’s long claws. No, it was like a chain collar, strangling him. *Oh shit! I’m a total submissive to this woman. Oh shit! My headache’s coming on again.*

“That red polka dot tie? Ha! Ha-ha-ha.” Macy laughed maniacally.

“Oh, just shut up, Macy,” he growled.

“Did Tony get to you in the tie?” Macy enquired, as if the subject were the most interesting thing to talk about.

“Check YouTube tonight if you must know,” he replied glumly, resting his forehead on his desk, wanting to bang his head on that hard surface so everything could be over and done with. His headache, his job, his godforsaken everything. He was so sick of this shit.

“Ah, great one, Tony. Got to give it to him to ruffle your feathers like that.” Macy disheveled his hair playfully, which just pissed the hell out of him even further.

“Please, Macy, just stop. You’re giving me a splitting headache.” Darcy jerked his head from the desk and sank back into his chair, feeling suddenly exhausted. He ran his fingers through his already tousled hair, feeling how untamed it had become. God, he needed to apply more gel. He was losing his style. And that’s the one thing he couldn’t lose.

“Oh, Darcy darling, my little cute, adorable ducky. That’s no headache you got there. I bet on your next

paycheck it's a hangover." Macy pinched his cheek until it turned red.

He swatted away her hand. "Whatever. It's the same thing. Now get out. I want to work."

But Macy had a tendency to ignore his requests. And this time was no different. She asked, "So what were you doing while the witch had her meeting with Clarice Mason, my periodontist?"

Well, at least she changed the subject. *Thank God.* She must have known he was an inch shy of exploding if she continued on that topic.

"I was working," he said, knowing full well he was lying.

"Really, darling?" Macy asked with skepticism.

Macy was using that tone of voice again. And he didn't like it one bit. It always made him feel guilty. But not this time.

"Yes," he nipped back just as quickly.

Or maybe it was too quickly. *Does she know I lied?*

"Are you sure?"

I knew it!

"Yes. Why do you keep asking? You're so annoying. You know that? I wonder what Brian saw in you to marry you."

"Oh, zip that mouth of yours, Darcy. You're just jealous because your best friend has finally found her soul mate and you're still dangling around that dating tree, jumping like a monkey from branch to branch to find the right girl to meet your mum."

Darcy smirked and shook his head. To tell her the truth, he wasn't jealous, nor did he care about getting married. His parents had always asked him to bring along his girlfriends,

but none would fit his criteria as the perfect girl. Plus, he liked his freedom too much.

"Okay, I'm jealous. Happy now? Now get a move on." He made up another lie just to shut her up. That woman just didn't know when to shut the lid on her kettle.

"Darcy darling, you were sleeping while the witch was at the meeting, right?"

What the hell? That was random.

"Why do you say that?" He eyed her suspiciously.

"Because you have a drool stain near your mouth."

"What? Ahh!" Darcy tried to remove the drool from the corner of his mouth as Macy burst out laughing like a lunatic.

"I was only joking. Oh God, that was hilarious." Macy laughed, holding on to her stomach until she fell over backward on his desk.

"Ha-ha. Funny, funny. And you deserve that fall. Now be a good friend and shut up. I'm not in the mood to laugh with you." He snapped at her.

"Oh, stop now, Darcy darling. You have to learn to control that mouth of yours. Why don't you ever swear in front of the witch?"

Again, another question out of the blue.

"I don't know. Dammit, I just want to quit," he said, rubbing his face, having had enough of this shit. *Seriously, if it weren't for his student loans, he would've been out of this place yesterday. He didn't need some nasty old woman telling him what's left from right.*

"Then quit," Macy stated.

Except he couldn't quit. Not yet anyway.

“I have to pay back my student loans. That took a chunk of my living expenses already. God knows I hardly spend anything on myself.”

“Not yourself maybe, but your many girlfriends.” Macy kindly offered her opinion, which he didn’t want.

Then again, Macy wasn’t wrong on that one. Any money he had, he would spend it on his latest girlfriends. He supposed that was his price to pay if he wanted to get into their beds.

“They’re not my girlfriends.” He defended himself anyway. He didn’t want to feel inferior to all these women in the company. That witch had already made him feel three inches tall. There was no way he was going to let Macy bruise his ego even further. “I have a sex life, Macy. An enjoyable one, too. Therefore, I have no reason to have a *love* life. And I’d like it to stay that way.”

“So you’ll just continue to sleep with them until you’re old and wrinkly, with no woman to call wife?” Macy asked.

“Yep. I’m happy being a bachelor. Plus, all those girls are beneficial to my health.”

“You mean your sexual health?” Macy raised her eyebrow as if she didn’t believe his declaration.

“Yes. Little Jonathan is happy. Those women help relieve our stress and frustration, mostly created by that witch.”

“Darcy, you know what I think?” Macy said, completely ignoring his comments. “I think you have the hots for the witch. That’s why you’re so stressed and frustrated. You can’t seem to hold her attention for more than a minute without her telling you off in that motherly tone of hers. That’s why you go and seek attention from other women. Am I right?”

And before he could tweet out his answer, she was already yapping away again with her own hypothesis. “Plus, you like to be controlled. You masochist. That’s your nature.”

What the hell is Macy getting at? What kind of hypothesis was that? “You make me gag, Macy. I’d rather bite my own tongue than ever say I have the hots for her.”

“I only say what I see. And I see all the tension brewing between the two of you. All that tension building up inside you. You must find her so attractive. You, Darcy darling, definitely have the hots for the witch. I wonder how you manage to get any work done around her.”

“Get out of here.” Darcy had enough of their stupid conversation.

There was no way he could fall for that witch. She was old. He had one rule he abided by like his life depended on it. Golden rule number one: Never, ever date a woman older than you.

Talking about older women, Darcy remembered a certain event in his past. That last time he went on a date through youandme.co.nz, they’d paired him up with a woman who was in her thirties. The woman looked so young, but once he saw her age on her driver’s license, it made his throat run dry. He just couldn’t muster the courage to date her after that, so he’d run out of the restaurant after slamming his fifty-dollar note on the table.

Darcy snickered.

And here Macy was saying he had the hots for his boss. He shook his head and burst out laughing. That witch was a prune, a wrinkled prune, whereas his ideal lover would be a young, ripe plum. Lord, he couldn’t even bear the thought.

“Stop laughing now, Darcy. I have the eye of the future. I know you have the hots for your boss. You just mark my words,” Macy said, jumping off from his desk.

Finally!

“Yeah, Macy, just keep believing that.” He shooed her out the door.

“You just mark my words, little ducky.” She eyed him from the hallway, meaning business.

“Yeah, yeah, Macy, you can go now.” He shook his head just as the door closed.

He looked at the pile of mess on his desk once she had left his office. He began tidying it all up. Try as he might, though, he couldn’t get Macy’s suggestion out of his mind. *You have the hots for the witch.*

Darcy tried imagining the witch wearing seductive clothing. Maybe some lingerie he saw in those glossy magazines his past girlfriends used to show him. The ones they bugged him to buy before their birthdays. And when he refused, they’d make a fuss, leading to another of his many famous breakups, which all included wine, either red or white, being splashed on his face with something along the lines of, “You stingy bastard,” being lashed out at him. Yep, that type of lingerie, with the strap falling just off her shoulder, revealing her pale, creamy, milky skin, her black hair tousled down her back, with her eyes seductively shaded by those black strands and long lashes.

Beautiful. Hot. Sexy. Darcy shivered at the thought. *Yeah right, Darcy. You have the hots for the witch. Probably in your next lifetime.*

* * * * *

Chapter Three

"I do not have the hots for Darcy," Whitney said, sitting in front of her laptop, a grouchy mask on her face, reviewing the materials for the interview she would be conducting via Skype with one of the major Asian billionaires, Kenji Sakamoto, later that morning.

Apparently, this job was passed on to her from the top because none of her staff were gutsy enough to talk to this young Asian billionaire. They were in awe of him, and since they'd heard he was a cold bastard too, figuratively speaking of course, everyone ran out like cold turkeys. And since she was their boss, she had to arrange everything. Sometimes, she felt she was the only one running the whole place.

While she was busy scanning the documents, her two best friends, Clarice and Elise, who before were busy conversing about men in general, had somehow turned their attention to her and her hapless puppy of an assistant, Darcy, who'd started working at E Enterprises six months prior.

How wonderful.

And if that wasn't enough of a headache, add in little Conrad's goo-goo ga-ga, too. What a terrific atmosphere she was in. If only she were happy. But these factors only aided in accelerating the headache she was trying to keep at bay.

"Are you sure?" Clarice probed her further. "The last time we came to visit you and Elise spilled the hot cocoa onto the carpet, he was very obedient when cleaning up the mess."

“Of course he’s obedient. He’s my *assistant*. He’s supposed to listen to everything I say,” she said, her attention still focused on her screen.

“Really now?” Clarice teased her. “What he did goes beyond his job description, though.”

“Stop jabbing at me.” She flicked her eyes to her friends in annoyance. “I thought you asked me to come because it was an emergency. And here we are in Mrs. Brie’s bridal store to try on your wedding gown.”

“It *is* an emergency.” Clarice pouted. “I need you to try on your bridesmaid gown. The wedding isn’t far away. Only a month to be exact.”

“Yes, Clarice. Your emergency usually means me getting out of work at short notice to attend to your needs. Like sending us text messages in the middle of the night to tell us to meet you in front of BabyLand at 6:00 a.m. sharp so you can stock up on Conrad’s nappies before he was even born.”

“Hey, that was an emergency. The whole store was on sale. Plus, I was pregnant. I needed both of you to help me. Conrad, tell your godmother you need all those napp— Don’t chew on that toy, darling,” Clarice said to her son, Conrad, who was crawling around her feet with a stuffed toy in his mouth.

“Clarice, it wasn’t just the two of us.” Whitney drew Clarice’s attention back to her. “You brought that rascal Max and Fern with you.”

“The more the merrier.” Clarice smiled, taking the toy out of her son’s mouth.

Conrad, disheartened, crawled to Elise’s side and played around her legs.

Clarice resumed her position in her chair again and picked at her scone she was eating. “Now Conrad doesn’t need any more stuff. He’s got all his clothing and toys to last him until he’s ten years old.”

“I’m sure you’re right. With the amount of nappies in your closet, you should be set through your fifth baby.”

“Hey, Hunter and I haven’t gotten round to making any more babies yet.” Clarice blushed red.

“But you will after your honeymoon,” Whitney jeered.

“Whitney!” Clarice puffed out.

“Yes, Clarice?” Whitney teased.

“All right, you two.” Elise intervened, getting up and grabbing a hot drink from the refreshment table. “Enough bickering and back to less sensitive topics.”

“All right, then.” Clarice jumped up on the spot before Whitney had a chance to shoot her down again. “We’ll talk about Darcy, then. Don’t you think he looks hot, Elise? Don’t you think he and Whitney are like boiling hot lava, so hot they could meld together?”

“Clarice.” Irritation laced through Whitney’s voice, and her headache was just at the brink of explosion. “I seriously have work to do. If you’re here to make jokes, then I’m really off. I need to head back before twelve. I have a Skype meeting with one of our Japanese guests for our summer issue.”

Thump! Elise caved onto the floor. Both Whitney and Clarice hurried over to their friend’s sides.

“Elise, dear heavens, what’s wrong?” Clarice asked in concern.

“What just happened, Elise? All I mentioned was a Japanese guest and you fell.” Whitney led her friend to the couch.

“Sorry, weak knees.” Elise smiled sheepishly at Whitney and Clarice, then picked up Conrad to sit on her lap. “I’ll just sit here and hold Conrad, then. No more walking around clumsily.”

“All right, you be careful. You’re always swooning in unlikely places.” Clarice went back to her seat and resumed eating. “Next time, if you want to swoon, make sure it’s in front of a man,” she pointed out.

“Not likely to happen.” Elise smiled solemnly, her arms hugging Conrad for comfort. “Now back to your other topic please.”

“No, Elise, we’re talking about you.” Whitney jumped up, glad that embarrassing discussion was finished. Except it wasn’t.

“Let’s just conclude that Whitney, our witch, has the hots for Darcy.” Clarice smiled cheekily, getting back at her friend for making her blush, especially talking about Hunter and her making babies.

Damn that woman, Whitney thought. She just wanted to bonk her head. Whitney turned to her other friend sitting there smiling quietly. A smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

What is wrong with Elise? she wondered. She wanted to ask when she heard giggling fits coming from Clarice’s direction.

“Clarice, what are you laughing at now?” She frowned.

What was wrong with her two friends today? Clarice was beyond happy, teasing her at every turn, whereas Elise just kept quiet, like she was unhappy about something. But then Elise started giggling too when she saw Clarice laughing. And that got her mind going in a blender again,

because now she couldn't fathom where their weird behavior had steamed from.

She attempted to give them both her sour look, the one she liked to use with her staff in the office just to scare them, but her sour face only resulted in both friends giggling even more.

Whitney could only shake her head and reprimand the girls. "Elise, that giggly fit of yours doesn't suit your character, so stop. And Clarice, you're the mother of a baby boy and a fiancé to an ex-Casanova. Now stop making fun of other people and keep a good leash on that partner of yours."

Clarice immediately stopped her laughter and bit down on her scone, still hiding a playful smile behind her straight face. Coughing and clearing her throat, she got down to business. "All right. All right. I'm sorry, Madam Witch. Enough teasing about you and your loyal puppy assistant, then." And then she sighed. "Dear heavens, I keep on forgetting you hate to have your personal life and professional life mixed up. Maybe it's time for you to try on that bridesmaid gown. Mrs. Brie is here waiting for you."

Whitney eyed her friend, just to make sure she wouldn't broach that subject again. She then went to Mrs. Brie, allowing the woman to do as she wished with her body while she stood like a mannequin.

After tugging, nipping, and snipping excess material, she was fully dressed in a pale-blue gown with lace trimmings on her short sleeves. Her long black hair, which was usually tied up in a tight bun for her professional work, was now in loose tendrils around her oval face. With her pink rosy lips, she was a picture of perfection, nothing like

that serious businesslike witch façade she liked to display. Even Elise and Clarice couldn't stop marveling at her.

"You look beautiful, Whitney," Elise commented in astonishment.

"Somehow I keep forgetting underneath all that cool ice façade you put on is a beautiful woman," Clarice added.

"Are you a poet now, Clarice?" Whitney smiled at her friend, softening a bit now that they no longer talked about Darcy.

Whitney didn't like to mesh her personal life with her professional one. There was a big black line defining her two lives. When she was at work, she was the strict tyrant boss. When she was with friends, she was her normal soft self. Which meant there would be no relationship, no romantic liaison, and definitely no love crossing over her two lives. In simpler terms, no romantic relationship between colleagues. She'd learned her lesson once. She was not going to get burned twice.

"No, you really are beautiful. Your skin is so fair," Clarice commented, breaking her thoughts.

And Clarice was right. Yes, she knew she was beautiful. She had the skill, she had the brains, and she had the beauty. There was nothing she couldn't achieve and there was nothing she didn't have. That was why she was at the top of her game, even before she reached thirty. She was confident in herself. She didn't need a man to make her life complete, unlike Clarice, who needed a companion. Not that she blamed her. Clarice was just wired differently.

Whitney marveled at herself in the mirror. She was really fair. Maybe pale was a better word to describe her complexion. Still, she couldn't understand why she was so pallid, though. Her mother was a Kiwi and her father was

also a Kiwi, but maybe he was part Scandinavian somewhere along the line. Not that it was of any importance to her. She stopped caring about him after she turned twenty-one.

Ah, twenty-one. That awful age when she realized the people she loved most betrayed her. Her father betrayed her mother, and because her mother was so stupidly in love with him, she'd died of a broken heart. Well, it was actually cancer. But even before dying, on her last breaths were words of her beloved husband, even when said husband had run away with her best friend. How foolish!

And then there was her ex-boyfriend Jonathan, a work colleague, who she found out had cheated on her while they were dating. Straight sex with his best friend's sister. Now if they'd loved each other so much, why did he even ask her to get involved with him in the first place? How stupid!

And lastly, there was her ex-boss. He too had harassed her when she was just a little working bee.

Of course, that one small incident was the final straw that broke the camel's back. No more playing Miss Nice Girl. She should have listened to her three spinster aunts and worked her way up to the top of her career instead of dillydallying with said boyfriend. Now, though, she'd slaved day and night and had achieved a high position in her company. Through that experience, she had learned to toughen up and transformed into a strict woman who people now dubbed Madam Witch.

Straying away from those painful memories, which were best forgotten, she turned to her friends. They were still sitting in their chairs, munching away on theirs scones.

She asked Clarice, "Why am I the only one trying this dress on? Why are you two not dressed?"

“Elise already had her fitting,” Clarice said between chewing. “She’s only here to accompany me and look after Conrad. You, Whitney, neglected your duty.”

“And you said this was an emergency.” Whitney rolled her eyes and turned back to the mirror, gazing at her reflection again.

Her hair was really too long. Maybe she should cut it into a bob. Wasn’t that what Aunt Jacinta had said? The bob was in. She scrunched her hair up and tried putting it in a bun, then inspected herself from different angles.

“I was busy, if you must know,” she said to her friends’ reflection. “You just can’t keep calling me up at the last minute like this.”

“You’re always busy.” Clarice dusted the last crumbs off her lap and walked to where Whitney stood. She surveyed her friend’s hair, then started holding different accessories to it. When she found a flower clip, she put that in, then nodded in approval. “I think we should wear flowers in our hair.” She decided. “It would look nice. Don’t you think, Elise?”

“I don’t want to wear flowers in my hair. Take it off.” Whitney began to remove the hair accessory, but Clarice was having none of it. The woman slapped her hand. “Ow. What was that for?” she yelped.

“Don’t take it off. It looks nice on you.”

“No, it doesn’t,” she said. And when she saw her friend pouting, she laughed. “Are you pouting now, Clarice?”

“No, I’m not.”

“Don’t deny it. I don’t know what’s wrong with you these days. First it’s the teasing and then the slapping, and now you’re pouting. What did Hunter do to you? Ever since

you've been with him, you've gone a bit loopy. Is your head all right?" She tapped Clarice's forehead for emphasis.

"My head is perfectly fine." Clarice swatted Whitney's hand away again.

"Then what's wrong with you? Elise, what's wrong with her?" Whitney asked Elise instead.

"Maybe she's in love," Elise replied, smiling at the pair bickering again.

"Ahh." Whitney laughed, shaking her head.

"Maybe I am." Clarice pouted again. And then she went to clasp Whitney's hand. "Maybe you should go a bit loopy, too. It's a wonderful feeling." Clarice smiled passionately, like her mind was away in fairyland.

God, my friend is such a romantic, Whitney thought. "No, thank you," she said firmly, unclasping Clarice's hand.

Oh, she remembered all those feelings all right, that silly feeling Clarice described. That butterflies swarming in the stomach, the constant shortness of breath. All those symptoms that put you in the category of love sickness. Yes, it happened to her once. But it wasn't likely to happen again, though. Even though sometimes she wondered if it would all be different if she were to fall in love again.

Then feeling ridiculous about this whole love notion, she turned her attention to more immediate matters. Like her short skirt. "This skirt is too short. I don't like it. Can we choose another dress?"

"You have lovely legs, Whitney. Long and slim. It suits you. Elise, what do you think?" Clarice asked Elise for her opinion again.

"I think it looks beautiful," Elise commented. "Does Godmother Whitney look beautiful, Conrad?" she asked,

and Conrad replied with a coo in her ear. “See, even Conrad agrees.”

“See, Elise agrees. Conrad agrees. And I agree. Three against one. We win,” Clarice announced.

“Conrad’s cooing doesn’t necessarily mean he agrees.” Whitney defended her case.

“Doesn’t matter. It’s still two against one.” Clarice grinned.

Whitney shrugged her shoulders and went to pick up her top-notch designer glasses, the ones she liked to wear for work, the ones she’d overheard her staff call her “coke bottle glasses.”

Didn’t they understand these glasses were worth a fortune? They were a designer brand, vintage style. And her black dress was also vintage, not an old hag’s clothing.

Anyway, why should she care what people thought of her? She stopped caring ages ago. She wasn’t dressing up to please them. She only did it to intimidate them. Just to keep them in line. She knew if she didn’t act or dress like this, no one would respect her. She was just too young to become the editor-in-chief of the well-established company, E Enterprises.

Whitney was about to place her glasses back on when Clarice slapped her hand away. Again.

What’s with this woman? Whitney thought. She was sure Hunter had put in some drinking potion to make her friend behave like this. Clarice was spicier now.

“You’re not wearing those for my wedding. Wear contacts or something.”

“Clarice, Whitney doesn’t need glasses. Her eyes are perfectly fine,” Elise supplied.

“Right. I forgot. Then it’s a deal. Whitney, you’re wearing that gown on my wedding day, no glasses.”

“But—”

“No buts,” Clarice and Elise chorused.

“Fine.” Whitney huffed, giving up.

She didn’t like to fight with any of them. Clarice was already sensitive when it came to these matters. It was her wedding after all. Whitney would comply with her friend’s wishes, even if she had to go against her normal dress code.

Oh well, it wasn’t like anyone at work would see her in this dress anyway. She could still keep her professional life and private life separate. And that included her wardrobe.

As Whitney was about to remove the flower from her hair again, Clarice dropped another bomb out of the blue. “We’re getting married in Queenstown.”

Whitney wheeled her eyeballs like marbles to her friend, her hand still in midair. “You have got to be kidding me. In Queenstown? Why?”

That was totally a surprise she didn’t see coming. Never had they discussed Clarice’s wedding destination. She’d always thought they would get married in Auckland. It was her home after all. Why Queenstown, for God’s sake? And why did she just tell her now?

“Because.” Clarice’s face blushed pink again.

Oh God, this doesn’t sound good.

“Because of what? You know how cold that place is.” Whitney was almost at her limit. All these surprises. They weren’t doing her heart any good. Nor her head.

“Oh, stop it, Whitney. Just because you don’t like cold places, you can’t stop me from getting married there.” Clarice turned her face away.

What is up with my friend?

“Don’t tell me you want to get married in that place just because of the beautiful scenery. There’s more to it, isn’t there?”

There must be more to it. Whitney knew. Clarice disliked traveling as much as she did. And especially to cold cities, too. That was why she’d moved to Auckland in the first place, to stay away from that cold, godforsaken city Dunedin.

Whitney was about to ask Elise, but she was already chuckling as if she already knew the answer.

“You know, Elise?” She whipped her attention to her other friend.

Elise shook her head but still had that silly grin on. Whitney turned back to Clarice. “What is it? Tell me. Don’t keep me in suspense here.”

“But she’s shy,” Elise said, still grinning. “Tell Godmother Whitney that Mommy is too shy to say it.”

“All right, tell me right now, Clarice. Or else I’m not going.” She threatened her friend. “You can get married with just Elise as your bridesmaid.”

“Okay, okay. I want to get married there because it was the place Hunter and I did it the first time.”

“Oh, fudge.” Whitney massaged her temple. “Just because of that? So you want to reminisce your sexual encounter, honeymoon thingybob, on that same bed, in the same hotel?”

“Yes.” Clarice nodded.

“Oh God, Clarice.” She thumped her forehead in frustration. “Your fiancé owns Silverton Hotel in Queenstown. Why on earth would you want to sleep at Torque?”

“I told you already. We want to reminisce our time there,” Clarice replied casually.

“Please tell me it’s his evil idea. He convinced you, didn’t he? He planted that seed inside your head until it brewed. Didn’t he?” She knew Hunter had given her friend that secret potion. There was no doubt about it now.

“Nope, all mine. I told him that,” Clarice replied casually again, which surprised Whitney.

“Oh, I bet he jumped on you,” she guessed.

“Nope, I jumped on him,” Clarice revealed.

“Oh, Clarice, where has my timid friend gone?”

Whitney messaged her temple again. That headache was now here, throbbing like a drum. But still, she couldn’t believe what Clarice had just said. Just because they accidently had sex when they were in Queenstown together didn’t justify them to get married in that cold, wretched weather. Especially in the middle of winter, too.

Oh drat. This was utterly dreadful. Clarice knew Whitney despised cold weather. Sometimes she thought she was a reptile born in human skin. She always needed the warmth to keep her sanity.

And thinking about things she despised, she despised this dress, too. She just wanted to get back to her witch persona so she could vent her frustrations. Maybe on her little personal assistant, Darcy.

Ahhh, Darcy. Why did she even call him little anyway? There was nothing little about Darcy. He was big, gigantic, huge. His broad shoulders were almost a meter wide. Okay, maybe that was stretching it a bit. But the point was Darcy was huge. He never failed to make her heart pound whenever she had to stand next to him. Like yesterday, for example, standing next to him to give him that tie.

Gosh, that boy. He didn't know when to rest, did he? Those bags under his eyes. She wondered what he was doing last night. Probably up playing his Xbox or PlayStation, like all young boys did. No wonder he was sleeping while she went to meet Clarice yesterday. She wasn't that stupid not to know when his hair was evidence enough, like a sparrow's nest. Thankfully, she didn't punish him further, but just let him wear that tie. It was her way of intimidating him.

Maybe she should rephrase that. She had to act brave to intimidate him. The truth was she was the one intimidated by him. His sheer physique alone frightened her. And she wasn't small by any standard. Among her friends, she was the tallest, followed by Elise, and finally Clarice, their petite little friend. But still, whenever she saw him, she couldn't help shaking in her high heels.

Maybe he reminded her too much of her ex-boyfriend, Jonathan. But the two men were as different as chalk and cheese. Jonathan was strong, brave, a man who could protect a woman in any weather, whereas Darcy… What could she say? He was as timid as a mouse. Just her pretending to be the witch, he was already shaking in his boots. But she supposed that was a good thing. She really did enjoy teasing him. Especially when he was the one who was responsible for humiliating Clarice on that date they went on a year or so ago.

Oh, she remembered his face all right, the minute he sat in that chair during that interview six months ago. And she was glad he got the job. Now she could tease him all she wanted.

Glancing at the clock, Whitney turned her mind to more important matters. There was no time to think about her

submissive personal assistant right now. She had to get back to the office for that meeting with Kenji Sakamoto. So she quickly unzipped the bridesmaid dress and got into her black one. Except when she was about to zip it back up, the zipper broke.

"Blast and triple blast, blast," she swore. "What just happened?"

Clarice hurried to her side, inspecting the damage. "See, that's what happens when you're in a hurry." Her friend had to add salt to her already open wound.

"Don't worry. Just wear this gown to work," Elise offered, picking up a random lilac dress from a nearby rack.

Whitney didn't know what she was getting into until Clarice zipped her up. Her eyeballs almost dropped to the floor as soon as she saw her own image. This dress showed more of her skin than her bridesmaid dress. It literally accentuated her slim hourglass figure.

"I am *not* wearing this to work, guys. I'm working. I'm in my serious businesslike persona. The witch, you know, as Max always says. Hence, I need my black dress." Whitney panicked. There was no way she was dressing in this attire.

"I know, Whitney, but obviously, we don't have time for the seamstress to fix your dress right now," Clarice said, patting her arm.

This was ridiculous and utterly, utterly… Oh, she was just too beautiful, too cute. It wasn't her style at work. She needed to look serious.

"I can't wear this. I look like a sixteen-year-old kid out for her first date. Isn't there anything else I could—"

"I thought you had a Japanese guest waiting for you? Shouldn't you be off now?" Clarice reminded her.

"Oh, shoot! I almost forgot. I need to go."

Kissing Conrad on the cheek and waving good-bye to her friends, Whitney ran out of the bridal store and straight into her car, slamming on the foot pedal and zooming the car out of the lot, hoping to reach her office before her assigned meeting time with Kenji Sakamoto, forgetting altogether that she was in that wee cute dress.

* * * * *

Chapter Four

"Damn the traffic jam," Whitney swore under her breath. When she was in a hurry, why must she get stuck in traffic like this? Then again, she shouldn't be complaining. E Enterprises, the building she worked in, was nestled right in the middle of town, the central metropolitan area. And right now, cars were beeping left and right, causing her mood to erupt.

And then the phone had to ring, too. Who would it be but her second aunt, Gerda? She rolled her eyes and put on her earpiece.

"Hello, Aunt Gerda."

"Whitney, my dear." The soothing voice of Aunt Gerda rolled into her ears. "Oh, wait, I sense you're in hurry. You are in a hurry, right, Whitney?"

"Wow, Aunt Gerda. You really are the clairvoyant. Yes, I'm in a hurry and you're calling me while I'm driving," she said with annoyance.

"You've got your earpiece on, right?" Gerda commented. "Otherwise, you shouldn't be talking on the phone like this."

Whitney was starting to get irritable. "Yes, you're right, Aunt Gerda. Then I shall disconnect the call."

Whitney was about to when her aunt screeched into the phone. "My dear, not yet. We need to discuss some things."

Whitney rolled her eyes again. "Is there anything you need right now. I'm in a hurry." She turned the corner and almost hit a student, crossing the road. Her temper just hit the roof. She rolled the window down and yelled out, "Hey,

where are you hurrying to? You want to meet your maker or something?"

Rolling the window back up, she exhaled, puffing out some steam on the way.

"I'm not in a hurry to go anywhere. I thought you're the one who's in a hurry." Her aunt's voice broke through the earpiece again.

"I'm not talking to you, Aunt Gerda. It's those university students. They don't value their lives one bit. Crossing the street like it's a playground."

"Well, you know, these uni kids. Hot bloods they are. Anyway…"

Oh, this wasn't good. She knew this was coming, and no matter how many times she dodged their invitation, there came a time where she could no longer refuse.

"The girls and I"—her aunt started—"want you to come over. After work, perhaps?"

"I don't know, Aunt Gerda. I'm kind of busy right now. Clarice is getting married, and I'm a bridesmaid. I have to prepare myself mentally."

That excuse sounded quite logical. Hopefully, it would get her off the hook.

"All the more to prepare your mental state at your aunt's house," her aunt fired at her. And now there would be no escape. "Come over after work. Okay?"

"I don't know, Aunt Gerda. I'm really busy right now."

"Oh, come now, Whitney. There're only the four of us now. We have to look after each other. Plus, you don't want to disappoint your Aunt Beatrice."

Oh God. No. Not Aunt Beatrice. Whitney could do anything, but she could never ever make Aunt Beatrice cross.

After her mother died and her father left to live with some woman, she'd lived with her three spinster aunts until she was twenty-five. She supposed a part of her behavior steamed from being brought up by them, too.

Aunt Gerda, the second aunt, worked as a clairvoyant. She called herself that, but most of the time, her predictions never came true. But she couldn't tell her aunt that. Aunt Gerda was too sweet. She could literally burst into tears if anyone mentioned her fake quality.

Aunt Jacinta, her third aunt, on the other hand, was a fashionista. Her fashion sense was inherited from this particular aunt. Vintage, her aunt had called them. Coke bottle glasses, black couture gowns. All the latest fashion trends she ever needed advice on, Aunt Jacinta was the one she went to.

Now Aunt Beatrice, her first aunt, she was the strict one. No boyfriend. Be home at a particular time. Work your way up to reach the top of the career ladder.

So, in conclusion, her habits, behavior, and fashion style had all been inherited from them.

"No. No, I'll go." Whitney snapped out of her thoughts. "Tell Aunt Jacinta and Aunt Beatrice that I'll be there. See you all tonight."

On arrival at E Enterprises, her temper had exploded to smithereens. She jammed the car to a break and strutted out, not forgetting to slam the door so hard it vibrated on the hinges. She made her way inside, stalking into her office like a predator aiming for its prey, oblivious to the gawking male members of her staff, almost not recognizing their tyrant boss was this cute angelic woman, walking into the witch's lair.

When she got into the office, she slammed the door shut and fired up her laptop, already knowing she was late for her Skype meeting with Kenji Sakamoto, one of the most talked-about billionaires on the whole globe, all because of his many successful attributes. Not to mention he was very young. Only twenty-two years old. She guessed a majority of it was his famous legacy, the Sakamotos, who engineered cars.

"Sakamoto-san, thank you for waiting. I'm so sorry. I was delayed in a traffic jam." She hastily apologized when he came online.

Kenji laughed. "It is perfectly fine, Madigan-san. Auckland sounds pretty much like Tokyo."

Whitney smiled. "Whitney would be fine, Sakamoto-san."

"Then it's Kenji to you, Whitney-san."

Whitney smiled at Kenji. The man who was staring back was of Japanese descent with thick black hair falling over his black pupils. He was quite handsome, in his Asian way. Despite all this, he spoke perfect English, almost with a hint of an Australian accent. He must have studied in Australia, she surmised.

Which made her wonder. What part of Kenji was supposed to be an arrogant, cold bastard? He seemed pretty warm and friendly to her. Or was this just his professional front, like her mask she was wearing now at work?

"When would be the best time to arrive?" she asked once they got the greetings out of the way.

For the *E Magazine* upcoming summer issue, Kenji Sakamoto was the featured article. Kenji would need to come to New Zealand sometime before summer so they

could conduct their interview in person and take a few photos for the article.

"I want to come in spring," Kenji said, eyes not focused on her. It was like he was staring off into space.

"Ahh," she cleared her throat, drawing his attention back to her. "Then it would be around about September to October, three months from now. Our seasons are the opposite in Japan. Yours must be in autumn, then?"

"Yes, it is."

"So shall we make it October, then? I'll organize all the accommodations for you. You'll be staying in one of my friend's partner's hotel, the Silverton. It's a lovely hotel. I'm sure you've heard of it."

"Yes, I have." Kenji smiled, although the expression on his face was a complete contrast to his smile. And once again, he stared off into space. He looked to be currently reminiscing about his past. That look reminded her of her friend Elise.

Mmmm. She wondered why that expression, then realized one possible reason.

"If you don't want to stay at the Silverton, we could accommodate you in another hotel," she offered, thinking Kenji might not want to stay at Hunter's hotel.

"No, no, it's not that," Kenji said politely. "I'm fine. New Zealand is the only country I haven't been to yet. I look forward to coming over."

"That's great. Then we shall conclude our meeting. Once again, sorry for being late."

"That's fine. I understand." Then Kenji eyed her suspiciously and smiled. "And by the way, Whitney," he said before signing off, "you make a lovely bride."

“Ahhh.” Whitney was speechless at Kenji’s parting comment. She could only stare at the blank screen. “I make a lovely bride? What does Kenji-san mean?”

Whitney was still speechless as she closed the laptop and walked absentmindedly to the wall mirror in her office. She glanced at herself in the mirror.

“What the… fudge?” Words leaked out before she could stop herself.

She eyed the door. It was closed.

Thank God. No wonder Kenji said she looked beautiful. Like a bride. It was because she was still wearing that lilac dress.

She supposed she was too focused on getting to that interview with him that she’d totally forgotten she wore this dress.

Oh well. It wasn’t like it mattered anymore. All her staff must have seen her looking like this already. She supposed once in a while, it was nice to dress in something colorful, a contrast to her black clothing. Maybe that would shake her staff’s equilibrium a bit.

Whitney laughed at her own thoughts as she stared at herself in the mirror, examining her scrunched-up hair. That flower Clarice had put in was still there. She pulled it out and all her hair cascaded down like a black curtain.

Oh, all these accessories in her hair were starting to make her heart palpitate again. And not in a good way.

Shaking her head, she started taking off her dress, too. Except she found the zipper was way at the back and the dress was so tightly bound to her that she was struggling to even unzip the damn thing. For a whole ten minutes, she struggled with until she was so exhausted. Losing strength in the battle with her zipper, she slumped down in her chair…

Only to hear a wheezing sound coming from her chair.

"Stupid, clumsy chair. How troublesome," she moaned, shifting in her seat. Or maybe it was she who'd gained weight. "Got to have more of those salads for lunch."

Not that she was obsessed with beauty like all of her younger staff members, but she had to keep healthy. What with work piling up like Mount Cook, she had to keep fit in order to maintain her work status and her witch persona. There was an image she must uphold. If the boss gained weight, her staff would think she was just some joke.

"Ah, what a day," she commented, sinking farther into her chair. And then her stomach had to make an angry growl, too.

That just did it.

Tired, exhausted, and now so damn hungry. Excellent.

Whitney regretted not eating those scones back at the bridal store when both her friends were munching on them. But didn't she say she wanted to lose weight? And how much sugar was in those scones? Oh, the sadness of reaching thirty. Fat just kept piling up around the midsection if you didn't eat right.

Thinking of better lunch alternatives, she grabbed the phone and rang her personal assistant. As soon as she heard Darcy's voice, she snapped out her instructions.

"Darcy, grab me a salad, rice rolls, and a bottle of mineral water."

* * * * *

Salad, rice rolls, and mineral water. Salad, rice rolls, and mineral water. Darcy recited the items to himself like a litany, those words rolling off his tongue, embedding in his

memory, a bit like a steak sandwich on top of bread, one of his all-time favorite snacks that he would never forget. He was positive and more than a hundred and twenty percent sure he could recite those items back to the waiter, given his memory skills, but when the time arrived, he stopped short, unsure of the answer.

"What flavor would you like in the rice rolls?" the waitress asked him again, smiling, showing her braces, which contained pink and yellow loops around the brackets.

What a way to surprise a customer, Darcy thought as he almost jumped back in fright when she smiled. He supposed he couldn't blame her for scaring him like that since he'd worn braces too when he was young. Hence, his once ugly, protruded, and crowded teeth were now rectified by orthodontic work. It was a grueling three years, but what emerged was a swan instead of the ugly duckling.

"Mister, the flavor? Chicken, prawn, or vegetarian?"

Shit! he swore mentally. He'd totally forgotten to ask the witch on her preference.

Was the witch an herbivore, feeding on plants and making peace with animals?

Darcy snorted, doubting this theory. So she must be a carnivore. But that didn't fit with the theory of the mineral water.

Darcy almost had a hard attack when she rang him up and threatened him to get her the mineral water, like it was some special potion that would make her look young and beautiful or something. *Yeah, like you'd ever be young by drinking mineral water. Even if you drink a million tons, you aren't getting any prettier with a face like that. Perhaps she will only succeed in blowing that flat stomach of hers up like a puffer fish,* he thought.

“Mister, the flavor?” the girl asked again, drawing his attention back to reality, this time a slight tinge of annoyance in her voice.

“Ah? Oh, I think I’ll go for the chicken. Thanks,” he hastily replied.

“Thank you. Is there anything else?”

“Oh, yes, the mineral water,” he said smiling, showing his great white teeth.

The girl with the pink and yellow braces took the mineral water out of the chiller and the chicken rice roll out of the cabinet, then rang them through.

“That will be $11.50, sir. Anything else?” she asked, looking nervous.

He wondered why. *Probably nervous to be sharing the same space as this handsome man*, he thought to himself, smiling. *Girls just can’t get enough of me, can they?*

“No, thank you,” Darcy said, handing her the cash, then headed out the door. When he turned back, he found the source of her nervousness. There was a long line waiting behind him, measuring about five meters, a various assortment of shapes and sizes, but they all had one thing in common; they all glared at him like a bunch of zombies out to suck his blood. *No, wait. That would be vampires.* These people were like a bunch of zombies that hadn’t had food for centuries and now were out and about, ready to feed on his flesh. *Yeah, that’s more like it.*

Darcy being Darcy just continued to walk out. As he was about to reach the exit, though, a man of a generously large proportion, centering mainly around his pot belly, which he assumed must be the consequence of consuming too much beer on the couch in front of a television with his

eyes on the SKY network, made a snarl at him, like a lizard on the verge of dying.

Just chill, Lub-Tub. Darcy psychically sent his message to the man before exiting the shop. *Starving would do your stomach some good.*

The sun was hot as he made his way back to the office building of *E Magazine*. Sweat poured from his temples like damn waterfalls. Not wanting to ruin his shirtsleeves by wiping them on his temples, just in case the witch decided she wanted to play office boy strip tease and ask him to stripe his shirt off instead of the tie, he resorted to using the handkerchief he got from his mother as a birthday present when he turned twenty-four.

What kind of present was that? A handkerchief. And to top it off, it even had flowers embroidered on it.

When his mother gave him the present, he was so damn excited, only to deflate like a balloon the moment he saw the handkerchief with the flowers on it. He wanted to throw it away the minute he was alone, but he didn't have the heart to do so since he loved his mother, so now he carried the goddamn handkerchief like it was his lifeline.

Darcy was too consumed in his thoughts and didn't realize he'd reached the witch's front door. Holding the rice rolls and bottled mineral water, he inspected himself to make sure he was presentable enough. Then he knocked on her door, dispelling that niggling feeling that he'd forgotten something important. Try as he might, he couldn't think of the item.

Oh well, it's not like I'm going to die or something if I can't remember it.

So Darcy knocked softly on the door to draw his boss' attention to his presence. But when he didn't hear any sound, he went in without permission and—

His jaw hung all the way to the floor and his breath stopped. He almost had a nosebleed, too. That was usually the case when he saw beautiful women. And there was no denying inside his boss' office was a beautiful woman. One he'd never seen before. Well, from the look of her back anyway.

The beautiful woman was busy unzipping her dress, exposing her ivory back to him. Her long black hair hung like a curtain, reaching almost to the small of her back.

Oh God. His mouth salivated with lust. He just wanted caress those strands with his own fingers.

How did God know I like my women with long hair?

Darcy didn't know how to react in this situation. Just staring at her ivory back almost had him going into cardiac arrest. What would happen if she turned to face him? Wouldn't he just die right there and fly to heaven?

Obviously, she was oblivious to him standing there, gawking at her like some angel descended from the sky. Maybe he should offer her some kind of assistance since she was struggling so hard with that gown.

"Can I help you?"

Smooth one, Darcy. Now she thinks you're a damn Casanova.

But it did the trick.

She turned around. And he saw her green eyes and her straight nose and—

Oh shit! It's that witch.

Just then, her gown slipped out of her hands and her breasts were revealed, followed by—

Oh, triple shit, shit! Little Jonathan just woke up.

* * * * *

Chapter Five

"Ma'am, your breasts are showing." The words floundered out of Darcy's mouth without thought. He couldn't believe the woman standing half naked in front of him was his boss, the one and only evil tyrant boss of his. She… she…

"Darcy, what are you doing? Get out of my office!" Whitney screamed when she saw Darcy looking at her half-unstated dress. And the damn fool didn't even blink once.

Poor Darcy didn't know what to do when his boss screamed at him like that. He was half mesmerized and half scared at the witch's behavior. But he couldn't help it. She was just too hot for words. There was no description for this type of serene beauty.

"I… I… I…" *Stupid stuttering fool. Just answer her*. He mentally kicked himself. "Ma… ma'am. I'm sorry."

And without further ado, seeing his boss in such a distressed state, he plunged into the commotion and took that zipper in hand, unzipping her dress with all his strength, until it fell off her person entirely so now she was only standing in her knickers.

Whitney was so capsized by this whole scenario she couldn't even speak. And it was only when Darcy started talking again that she woke from her delirium.

"What the fudge are you doing?" Whitney screamed, half covering her nakedness with one hand. "Get out. I can manage by myself."

"I…" Darcy was stuck in a standstill, his hands still on her bare arms. He didn't know what to do. Should he

continue to help her take that dress off? Well, apart from her stepping out of that lilac fabric, there was really nothing else to do. But he really wanted to touch that smooth skin again. That was very addictive. He could hear her siren calling out to him. To be touched. To be caressed. “But you’re half naked,” Darcy said, breathing down her neck.

And Whitney could feel his hot breath on her skin, a searing tingling sensation that made her breathing became erratic and her skin flush hot, which she disliked.

She scrunched up her face in irritation. “I know that. I don’t need you to tell me so. Go. Or I’ll fire you,” she threatened.

And just when Darcy was about to release her and step out of their embrace, he stupidly tripped over her dress and fell, dragging Whitney along too.

And they both went tumbling to the floor, Darcy landing on top.

Freaking hell. Her breasts are soft as cotton balls, Darcy thought when his face happened to land smack in between them.

He’s flattening my breasts and I can’t breathe, was Whitney’s thought as she struggled to intake air.

And it was precisely at that moment when Macy and Mary had to walk in.

“Ma’am, we need you to sign—” Mary paused, her eyes opening wide seeing Darcy and their tyrant boss in a compromising position. She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. She was like a fish out of water, gasping for air. In fact, she was so shell-shocked she didn’t know whether to stay put or run to spread the juicy gossip to her colleagues.

Macy, on the other hand, just smirked at the sight before her, knowing she'd gotten some good cards up her sleeve for teasing her little friend later.

"Get out, both of you. Now." Whitney breathed fired at her two assistants as they continued to stare at Darcy and herself like fascinating zoo animals about to mate.

Mary was scared shitless at her boss' demand and she scrambled out of her office as fast as her legs could take her. Macy just smiled and nodded, then casually walked out the door.

These assistants of hers. *God! How embarrassing. What are they going to write about me?* She knew sooner or later, she'd be faced with this bushfire of news.

Oh, she knew all right. All the gossip about how she kept men's ties to punish them because she had a fetish for BDSM. But it wasn't that. She just liked men's ties in general. It was just one of her hobbies. Tie collection. But now this. Would they assume she started seducing boys too? Especially this young one lying on top of her.

Wait? On top of her?

Fudge. Darcy was still on top of her, staring at her naked breasts.

She smacked him on the head. Darcy howled in pain and tumbled from his position.

Whitney hurriedly sat up, crouched into a seated position, and scooted backward until she could go no more. Her back was blocked by the wall. She glared poisonously at Darcy. Knowing that she was half naked, she searched for anything to cover herself. Her hand landed on some papers.

That'll do. Taking a sheet, she positioned it before her nude front.

“Get your ass out the door now, Darcy. Before I fire you.” Her voice trembled with anger and something else, like… desire. *Oh fudge. What is wrong with me?*

Darcy stood nimbly. He nodded, shivered in fright, and rushed to exit the door like a good obedient boy. Then realizing he hadn’t given over her lunch, he rushed back through the door and—

Holy cow! His boss was wearing a G-string. And her butt cheeks were showing. *Holy guacamole!* Her butt cheeks were the perfect size for his hands to squeeze.

How had he never realized his boss was the perfect species? Hidden underneath all those ugly black garments was really a goddess in disguise.

Whitney noticed the slight breeze as she was getting changed into her black gown. She flipped her eyes to the door and saw Darcy, his eyes the size of a saucepan.

“What the hell are you doing here again? Turn around. Don’t look at me,” she shrieked.

“Yes. Yes. I’m not looking at you, ma’am. I won’t look at you, ma’am. I promise,” Darcy quickly said, facing toward the door. His palms were sweating and he felt hot. Was it just the temperature in this room? Had the A/C broken down? Or was it just him?

Darcy loosened his tie and bit the side of his cheek, a habit he usually did when he was nervous, and waited patiently for his boss to finish dressing. But then the curiosity to look was so strong he almost turned around. Only his conscience stopped.

I’m a man. A man who’s given his boss the word that I will not look.

Bloody hell. Who was he kidding? He wasn’t a gentleman. He wasn’t a man that kept his word. Of course

he turned around and looked. And since his boss was busy putting that black thingamajig dress on, he marveled at her bare bottom without distraction.

Oh my goddess! Those butt cheeks had to be the best-looking by far. They were so fine, like ivory china, so silky smooth like a—

What the heck is that? Darcy's eyes zoomed to a small piece of discoloration right in the middle of Whitney's bottom. It looked like… if he guessed right, a mole in the shape of Australia.

Just then, Whitney slipped on her black dress and his once unobstructed view of that fascinating map on that ivory globe was covered by black silk. Darcy winced but hastily faced the door again.

Whitney glared at Darcy to make sure he wasn't being a pervert. Once all dressed, she couldn't resist picking up an eraser and throwing the damn thing at him, just to release a little steam.

Crap! My aim is way off.

Her lovely eraser bounced against the opposite wall and disappeared behind the filing cabinet, a task that would require a good contortionist to retrieve it.

Whitney snorted through her nose and marched to Darcy, her high heels clip-clopping on the wooden floor.

Whitney tried her very hardest not to smack her subordinate's head again when she stood behind him. Instead, she decided to approach him with her own subtle move.

"Darcy!" she called softly

"Yes, ma'am," Darcy responded immediately. He knew what was coming next.

“You may turn around now.” That soft voice continued again.

“Are you all dressed, ma’am?” Darcy asked. He knew he’d die in the next ten seconds, but who knew? If he pretended to be a gentleman now, maybe his boss wouldn’t fire him. He knew he’d stepped over the line this time.

“Yes, Darcy, I’m all dressed and covered up.”

Darcy shyly rotated his body around until his eyes were facing Whitney. Hoping she would at least hold a pleasant expression, he tossed in an irresistible smile that his past girlfriends couldn’t even resist.

Except the face that greeted him was anything but pleasant.

Whitney had on a sour mask, so sour he could taste the damn awful flavor on his tongue. But the worst part wasn’t the expression; it was when she leaned forward so suddenly and her nose was literally inches from his own. Darcy was so taken by the situation that he backed up into the wall. And Whitney followed.

She stood on tiptoe and intruded in his personal space. She spoke in a threatening tone. “You didn’t see anything, Darcy. Say you didn’t see anything.”

Poor Darcy was like he was under a witch’s trance. He repeated everything his boss said to him. “I didn’t see anything. No, I did not.”

“You didn’t see my back, nor anything on my body.”

“No, I didn’t see your back. Just the mole in the shape of Austral—” Darcy realized his mistake and quickly clamped his mouth shut.

“What did you say?” Whitney caught on, fire already burning in her eyes.

Darcy refused to speak. He continued to clamp his mouth shut and shook his head vigorously.

"I said, what did you say? Repeat it!"

Darcy finally unclamped his mouth and spoke nervously. "I said I didn't see anything." Darcy nodded, trying to convince his boss of his honesty.

Whitney breathed heavily to pacify her anger. "If anyone asks you what happened, just tell them we both fell over accidently and your face just happened to…" She couldn't speak any further. Her face was flushed red, this time with embarrassment, at the thought of saying "between my breasts." "You get the idea. Yes?"

"Yes. Yes." Darcy nodded, hypnotized by those green eyes. "I promise, as a gentleman, I will not utter a single word to another human being."

Whitney assessed Darcy again, checking the validity of his promise. Satisfied, she uttered the word, "Good," then backed herself off him. "Now… let's get to the more serious issue." She turned up the volume to her voice. "Did I tell you to come back inside my office?"

Oh hell! Darcy had thought the interrogation was over. But their previous exchange was just a vow for him not to break his silence. Now, it was the real deal. With a voice as high as a mouse squeaking, he said, "No, ma'am."

"I can't hear you, Darcy."

"No, ma'am." He stood straight and tall, as if he were in the army, saluting his captain, the witch.

"Then why did you come in? Again!" Whitney's soft-spoken sentence ended with a loud screech at the end.

Darcy was more scared than ever before when that screech reached his ears. He knew no amount of pleading would allow him to redeem himself. But what the hell? He'd

just try one more time. “I’m… I’m here this time to give you your lunch.”

“Which is…?” Whitney flipped her gaze to his hands.

“Which is…” Darcy followed her movement. And stared at his empty hands. *What the hell! Where is her lunch?*

Apparently, in his moment of sheer panic, he’d thrown her lunch on the floor, plunging straight to the rescue. And looking at the floor now, he saw the plastic water bottle and the packet of rice rolls near the corner of her desk.

“It’s on the floor,” Darcy said meekly.

He crouched on all fours and picked up the two items of his boss’ lunch. Standing back up, he tossed a megawatt smile in her direction.

“Your lunch.” He presented the slightly smashed drink bottle and half-skewed rice roll.

Whitney had steam shooting out her ears. This was the last straw. She’d had no food since this morning. She was hungry. Her dress, which cost a few hundred dollars, was now ripped, and on top of that, Darcy might or might not have seen her naked. Her peace of mind was in turmoil. And now, no salad for lunch. Life had to be better than this.

“Darcy!” she screeched like a banshee queen. “You came into my office without permission. Yet you forgot my most important food source.”

“Your food source?” Darcy wrinkled his brows in confusion.

“Where is my salad?” she snapped.

Oh shit! So that’s what he’d forgotten.

“Would you like me to get it now?”

“What do you think?” She seethed.

Darcy looked at her blankly. And there was only one thought running through his mind. *I think I want to eat you up, ma'am.*

What the hell was that? Did he just think of eating his boss for lunch?

Darcy shivered. "Yes, ma'am. Right away, ma'am. I'll get you that salad. I'll be right back, ma'am."

And hastily, he made his escape through the door. Shutting the wooden barrier behind him, he didn't realize his legs were shaking.

"Oh my shit!" He muttered under his breath. That was a close one. Not under any romantic light could he see himself falling for that witch, even when she was half dressed with her perfect breasts and that slim waist and those bare—

Holy shit! He was in deep shit now. Macy was right.

He did have the hots for that witch.

* * * * *

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Darcy is also in trouble. After tasting the forbidden fruit, the hatred he feels for his boss has now somehow turned to heated desire. Now he can’t stop thinking about her. But Darcy knows one thing for sure. When it comes to matters of the heart, Whitney may be the dictator in their office, but only he will come out on top in the bedroom.

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Baby Be Mine
Spinsters & Casanovas Book 1

Turning thirty is like a big sale at the meat market. You have to go on discount before someone starts considering you. And that's not the only problem Clarice Mason has to deal with, because right now her biological clock is ticking and she realizes that one morning she might wake up with white hair and a walking cane as her only companion. So to soothe her problem, Clarice has resolved to have a baby.

Enter Anton Silverton, the man that possesses all the traits Clarice has ever wanted in a mate: tall, handsome, smart, and an overall gentleman—all the perfect genes for her baby. All she has to do now is ask him nicely to donate a little sperm so she can conceive. But damn Hunter Silverton—Anton's smart-mouth, no-good cousin with the title of number one Casanova in Australasia—has to come stirring up trouble. And now, under the influence of hormonal imbalances, Clarice finds her craving for a baby might not be enough, for she is beginning to crave the love of one of these men.

Free to download on www.obooko.com

Baby I'm Yours

Spinsters & Casanovas Book 2

The Casanova

Hunter's life has never been so perfect, until he meets the spinster Clarice Mason. He accidentally impregnates her, then confesses to the whole world that he wants to sleep with her again.

Knowing Clarice will think he's the same playboy Casanova as always, Hunter is determined to prove her wrong by being the perfect partner and father for their baby. But nosy people tend to crop up where he least expects them, out to destroy his chances.

The Spinster

All Clarice Mason's thoughts are preoccupied with her unborn baby. When Hunter comes barging into her life, claiming he's taking responsibility as the father, it's like he's grown three heads. She can take care of herself. It is her baby after all. If the father of her baby is this Casanova, then she would prefer he's not involved at all. But when Hunter begins displaying all the traits she so desires in a man, she knows her *heart* is in grave danger.

How can Hunter prove to her that he is utterly and undeniably in love with her? That he's giving her his heart and soul for all eternity? All he wants to say are those three words that will bind him to her forever…

Baby, I’m yours

Baby Love Me

Spinsters & Casanovas Book 3

The Casanova

Cooking, cleaning… List all the household chores a housewife can do, and Hunter can do them better. In fact, his life has made a complete one hundred eighty-degree turn, from being the number one Casanova of Australasia to the number one partner for Clarice. And he loves his new life.

But as the days leading to the birth of their child lessen, someone is planning to tear them apart. Will he ever hear Clarice say, “I love you,” or will the forces of his past reputation ruin his chances at this one happiness?

The Spinster

Clarice is basking in her happy glow. Having Hunter by her side on the day of their baby’s birth is all she’s ever wished for. But when she witnesses Hunter with another woman, her world shatters.

Now she must ask herself, should she risk the heartbreak of losing the man she loves or continue to live as a spinster with her baby forever?

TWISTED LOVE TRILOGY

From the author of the comedic series, Spinsters and Casanovas, comes a sizzling and intense new series full of deceit, fierce love, and betrayal. Twisted Love features the story of Julian Devereux, a broken billionaire whose thirst to reclaim his rightful place as heir to the Devereux Legacy leads him to the one woman who can heal his dark past.

Captivated By You

Twisted Love Book 1

"I want to be scorched by your flame. I want to be enticed by your touch. Let me in. Open the door to your heart so I can save you."

What is it about the enigmatic and taciturn Julian Devereux that captivates me so? His kind and selfless acts towards others ignite my compassionate nature to protect him from the bitter onslaught of his brother, Joshua Devereux.

But is it merely my nature to help the weak, or is it simply to indulge myself in pleasure, watching in delight as two brothers battle for my attention and their family inheritance?

Maybe deep down, I already know I love him and am willing to sacrifice and back him up in every ordeal. But I didn't anticipate the path I chose would eventually spiral out of my control, tearing at my heart and tossing me into a labyrinth of illusion.

Trapped By You

Twisted Love Book 2

"Your touch singes me. Your kisses are like drugs. I am addicted to you. I am trapped by you. Yet I don't want to escape from this beautiful prison."

Julian Devereux. So beautiful and mysterious on the outside yet so damaged and broken on the inside. Who is this monster standing before me?

I thought I knew you well, but the past was only an illusion. But why do I find myself coming back for more? Do I enjoy being your pawn in your elaborate game to gain back the title of heir to the Devereux Legacy? Or am I so captivated by you that I am trapped by my own doing?

Maybe deep down, I want to dig for the truth, to find out why you turned out to be this monster. But I didn't anticipate the story unfolding was beyond what I could imagine. Julian, what have you gone through?

FORBIDDEN LOVE TRILOGY

The love story of Zac and Ivy

Forbidden Love

Forbidden Love Book 0.5

Prequel to Love Me Today

Free to download on all ebook stores

Love Me Today

Forbidden Love Book 1

Ivy only wants two things in life. To become a lawyer when she grows up and to stop having those nightmares of her parents, and brother dying in that car crash. To achieve these goals Ivy moves to a new city with her grandma, sister in-law and niece.

A new school. A fresh start. Life is now good. Until she meets Zac.

Zac, with his inky black hair and deep emerald eyes, makes her want things she doesn't know existed. But wanting Zac is the one thing she cannot have, because to her, Zac is forbidden.

Zac, the lead singer of Apollo, is attracted to Ivy on first sight. He knows he's got to have her. But he can't understand why she keeps pushing him away. When he finds out the reason behind her action, he pursues her even more. But as internal conflict collides, would he still be able to tell Ivy those three words hidden deep within his heart…

Love me today.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS
by Alexia Praks

His Hired Girlfriend
Highland Kiss
A Rogue's Desire
The Duke's Revenge
Falling for Sakura

Books Coming Soon by Alexia Praks

His Crimson Rose Vol. 1
The Daemon's Wrath Vol. 1
When the Sun courts the Moon

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