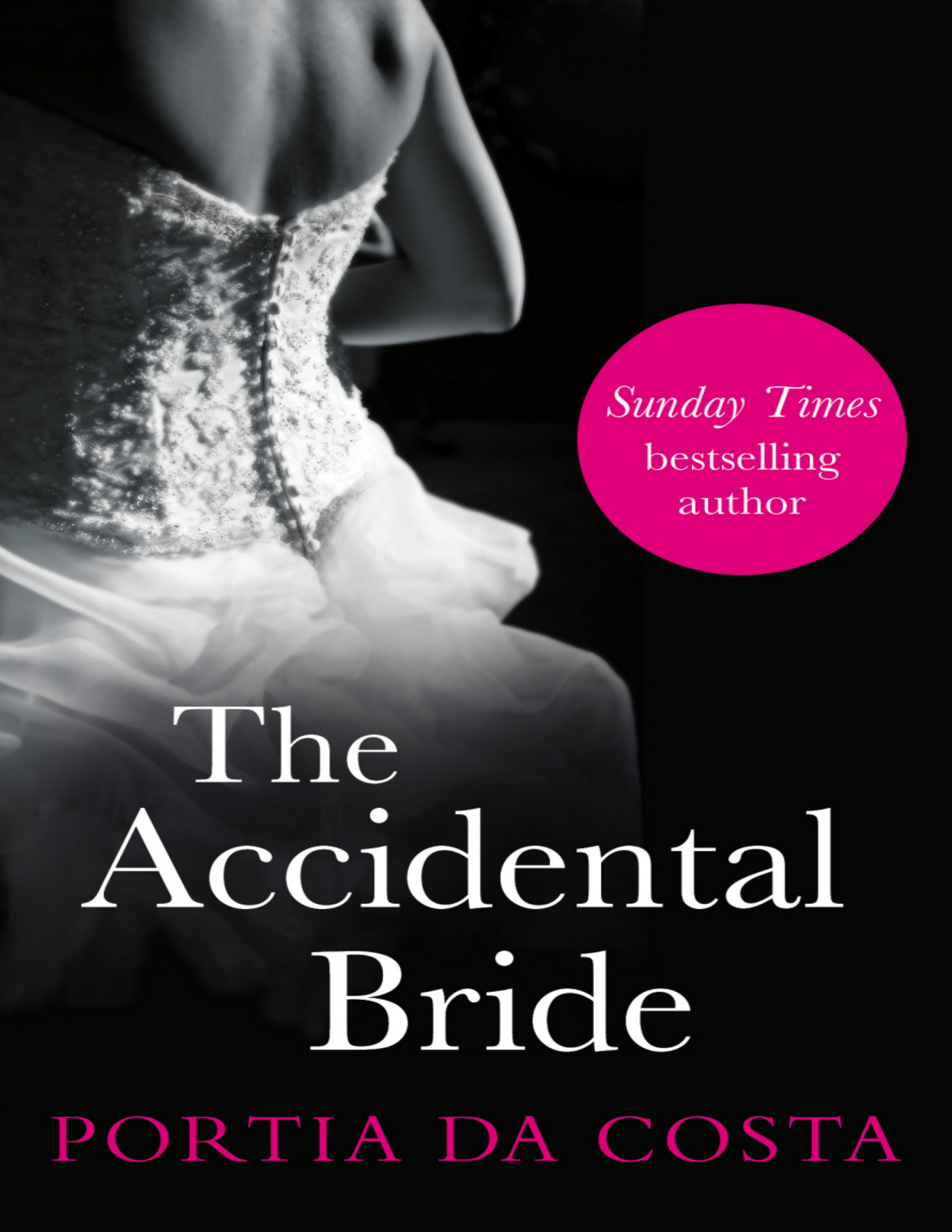




Sunday Times
bestselling
author

The Accidental Bride

PORTIA DA COSTA

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About the Book

Marrying a billionaire?

It's every girl's fantasy but ever since meeting brooding sexy tycoon, John Smith, Lizzie has never been entirely sure of his true feelings for her.

Has he proposed marriage because he truly loves her or just to keep her in his bed?

About the Author

Portia Da Costa is one of the most internationally renowned authors of erotica.

She is the author of over fifteen *Black Lace* novels, as well as being a contributing author to a number of short story collections.

Also by Portia Da Costa

Continuum
Entertaining Mr Stone
Gemini Heat
Gothic Blue
Gothic Heat
Hotbed
In Too Deep
Kiss it Better
Shadowplay
Suite Seventeen
The Devil Inside
The Red Collection
The Stranger
The Tutor

The Accidental Series:
The Accidental Call Girl
The Accidental Mistress

The Accidental Bride

PORTIA DA COSTA

BLACK
LACE

*Dedicated to 'himself' for services to international cat
rescue and general heroism*

From Call Girl to Mistress to ...

Previously, in THE ACCIDENTAL CALL GIRL and THE ACCIDENTAL MISTRESS

When Lizzie Aitchison first met John Smith in the Lawns Bar of the Waverley Grange Hotel he mistakenly thought she was an escort in search of a client. The chemistry between them was dynamite from the outset, and Lizzie couldn't resist the allure of John's fallen angel face and the way his lean body looked in a sharp business suit. In a daring leap, she decided to play along with his misapprehension, and become 'Bettie', the high-class call girl, if only for one night.

John was captivated too. Shaken out of a state of gathering ennui, he experienced an unstoppable urge to possess this beautiful young woman whose combination of a distinctive vintage style and a bold yet strangely vulnerable personality was the ultimate call to his senses.

They embarked on an intense, kinky affair, initially for just the duration of John's stay in the area on business, but the two quickly became a couple, both realising they wanted more than a temporary relationship. But each had issues to overcome, and a troubled history. John's need to control and Lizzie's feisty independence were a volatile mix, both in the bedroom and out of it, stirred to flash-point by John's insistence that they live together.

But when a dark shadow from John's past falls over their happiness, Lizzie realises that she has a dangerous rival ...

Now read on ...

1

In the Garden

The garden was mysterious after dark. The air heavy with the scents of pine, lemon and night-blooming flowers. Lizzie had never visited this part of France before, and had never stayed in a villa. Everything was new to her, latent with promise, thrilling to the senses.

Where was he, this man of hers whom she lived with? He was as mysterious in his own way as the garden and its ambiance, yet closer to her, and more intimate with her, than any human being who'd ever lived.

The path amongst the trees was uneven and not lit, although she could see a lantern ahead. Glad of her flat sandals, she picked her way along it, nervous. He'd promised her a treat, but knowing the perversity of her lover's imagination sometimes, well, that could mean just about anything. Something to long for, or something to fear. Well, a little.

The night breeze was warm and balmy, riffling through the branches and making the leaves dance, but she shivered in her thin, loose-fitting cotton dress. It wasn't her usual style, and she wasn't wearing underwear, but that was what he'd suggested – specified – so she'd complied. It was like being more than naked, lightly clad like this, and somehow the spirit of the garden was mischievous, and had searching hands and probing fingers that sometimes brushed against her body beneath her thin dress. She would have paused on

the path, to touch herself, but she knew he was waiting for her ahead, her beautiful man.

Speeding up, she strode down the path. So what if she tripped; she just had to be with him. And there was nobody to see her tumble except the flitting night insects, and whatever scary snakes or frogs lurked in the undergrowth. Another reason to get a move on and reach him!

Ahead, now, the lamp flickered. Yellow light that seemed to dance. Intrigued, she hurried on, and after a moment, emerged into a little clearing. What was it about them and clearings, in woods? It'd brought the very devil out in them in the past, and she sincerely hoped it would do the same tonight.

It'd certainly created a demon out of her lover. She scudded to a halt, breath knocked out of her by the sight of him, so magnificent.

The glorious man she lived with was sitting at a long, rustic table set in front of a little summerhouse-like structure. Like a Lord of Darkness or the monarch of the night, he lounged in a high-backed wooden seat that fit his lithe body like a throne. It was turned to one side, and he'd stretched out his long legs before him; his pose was relaxed. Despite her awe of him, she had to bite her lower lip to stop herself grinning at the sight of his strong, gorgeous thighs, and his knees, and his calves.

He was wearing black denim jeans and low black canvas boots. Not exactly the leather trousers and riding boots she'd once described to him from one of her mad fantasies, not long after they'd met. But a good approximation, all the same. The giggles threatened as she imagined him really wearing 'leather strides', as he'd call them. He'd look fabulous in leather, of course, but it was such a 1980s rock god dominant-master-type cliché.

'What's so funny?' he said as she drew near, then halted at respectful distance.

Ack, he'd seen it. Seen her fighting not to laugh. She was for it now. His brilliant blue eyes were dazzlingly fierce behind the black silk domino mask he wore. Another 'prop' straight out of her fantasy, pure drama, and all the more so against the gold of his curling blond hair.

'You may speak,' he said, his voice soft and husky, and musical with an amusement that matched her own.

This was going to be fun, even if it would hurt a bit too. There was a broad strip of black leather draped across the table, in the pool of light created by the old-fashioned oil lantern. Beside it lay a thinner, much more dainty strip, this one with a buckle. Alongside these sat a small, carved wooden box and a black silk mask much like the one he was wearing.

'Nothing is funny, master,' she said, eyes lowered, even though it gouged her not to be able to look at him, at his dear, handsome face. 'I'm just a little bit nervous, master. Sometimes I laugh when I'm on edge ...'

'On edge, are we?' Stirring in his seat, he reached for the big strip of leather and toyed with it for a moment, as if demonstrating to her how fearsome it was. When he let it drop, he laid his long, elegant hand across his chest, as if he were demonstrating, or exhibiting that to her too. He was naked from the waist up, and his smooth skin gleamed lightly gold, having already caught a little bit of a tan from their sojourn here. The soft peppering of his sandy body hair made her fingers tingle, wanting to touch it, to tug it, or perhaps to fondle and pinch his nipples in the way he liked so much, and which sometimes made him growl and throw her on her back to ravish her.

'Well, I certainly am. I don't know about you.'

Uh oh! She'd done it again. As she always did. Acknowledging herself as possibly the world's most useless submissive, she stared down at her sandal-clad toes again, trying to get back into her role. The way he hissed slightly,

through his teeth, told her of his amusement, and his fond despair of her ever getting it right.

You wouldn't want me to, even if I could, though, would you?

He liked her the way she was, lack of discipline and adherence to the niceties notwithstanding.

'That'll cost you, slave.'

I thought it might.

She didn't speak, though. She was getting to the stage now where it was difficult. It was hard to frame words, and stay in a role, when you were being turned inside out by rampaging lust. He was the most gorgeous man on the face of the earth to her, and possibly might be to the majority of other women who set their lucky eyes on him. It was still hard to believe he was hers, this gilded god, or as near as dammit. He'd chosen to be with her. She had no way of knowing whether that choice would last for ever, but now was not the moment to debate the unknowable future.

All she did know was that he was honouring her fantasy. This wasn't the dungeon she'd told him about, all those weeks ago, on the phone. But like the jeans, it was near enough.

'Move a little closer.'

She shuffled forward across the brushed flagstones, still fighting the irresistible temptation to just ogle him. Closer, she could smell another delicious odour in the night-blend. His distinctive cologne: spicy, fresh, yet fruity. A bit like him. Nearer, if she were allowed to look, she'd see the distinctiveness of his beauty too. His elegant, sculpted face, his sensuous mouth, and the faint lines around his eyes, just visible behind the mask, the weathering that made him far more handsome than a younger man would have been. He had the bearing of a mature man, and an aristocrat. Which was just exactly what he was, even though he was wont to dismiss the latter as meaningless.

Attempting to stand statue-still, she shook, overcome anew by him as she always was.

‘Don’t be afraid, slave.’ There was a smile in his voice, familiar to her, and beloved. ‘I won’t hurt you.’ He paused again, and the faint creak of old wood told her that he was adjusting his position in the throne-like chair. Was he aroused? Oh, silly question ... Was the sky above the trees midnight blue? ‘Well, I won’t hurt you any more than you want me to.’

She drew in a deep breath, conscious of the way it made her breasts lift beneath the thin dress. The pale fabric was barely more than voile, and he’d be able to see her nipples straight through it. He could probably see the dark hair of her pussy too, and he’d most likely planned it that way. Putting a girl with jet black hair in a flimsy, light-coloured dress ...

‘You look very pretty in that frock, sweetheart. But I’d like to see your tits and your cunt now, so let’s have you naked, shall we?’

Oh, she loved it when he was crude like this. In their everyday dealings, his manners were perfect, and his language sophisticated. Which made it all the more of a turn-on when he got down and dirty. But he’d slipped there. Forgotten himself for a moment. She’d been ‘sweetheart’ not ‘slave’. Still, nobody was perfect, not even him.

‘Well then? Strip off. Enough with the daydreaming.’

Dipping down, she crossed her arms, grasped the frock’s hem and pulled it up and off over her head in one movement. It was loose, with no fastenings, so really easy to get off when her handsome lover required her to be naked. She’d been wearing quite a few similar dresses during the days they’d been here. He wasn’t the only one who wanted to fuck at a moment’s notice.

‘It isn’t day,’ she said, flinging the garment away with a flourish. The light frock seemed to float, even though there was barely a breeze, and ended up draped across a bush.

‘And enough with the answering back too.’ His voice was amiable, amused. He never shouted or got harsh and stropky in these situations. His dominance and self-possession didn’t depend on posturing.

They’d only been together a relatively short time, and yet in that little while he’d seen all of her, and somehow, seen her more intensely than any other man had. He had some kind of ‘sight’, a beautifully focused way of looking that revealed not only the intimacies of her flesh, but her heart’s secrets too, and her soul. The way he looked now was like that: perceptive, penetrating, like a laser. Idiotically, she tried to cover herself, a hand over her pubis, and an arm across her breasts.

‘What on earth do you think you’re doing?’ He laughed softly, his smile like the sun rising in the dark of night.

‘Um ... sorry.’ She dropped her arms to her sides, and tried to stand proudly, without meeting his eyes. Slaves were supposed to be modest and humble – fat chance of that.

‘Better. Now come here.’ Lifting her eyes again, as she knew he probably expected her to, she caught his elegant, beckoning gesture. His shapely hands were as gorgeous as the rest of him, and they settled on his black-clad thighs as he made space for her between them.

In slow, even steps, she approached. Right up to him, her bare legs just an inch or so from his clothed ones. Without speaking, he nodded to the mask, and the leather collar, lying on the gnarled wood of the old table, beside the box. Curious, and a little fearful of what the casket might contain, she lifted the mask and fastened it around her upper face, framing her eyes. It created a weird shadow round the edge of her vision, and vaguely reminded her of another mask, a far more elaborate and costly one, that she’d once worn to attend a risqué party with him. Tying the black ribbon at the back of her head, she managed to get it right, first time. She’d been practising in the mirror, imagining how the great Bettie Page might have looked, in one of her fetish films.

‘Good,’ he said, reaching out and touching her cheek, just below the mask, the contact feather-light in a way other contacts, coming soon, would not be. ‘Now kneel.’

She sank to her knees, trying not to shake, but it was hard to avoid. The smell of him, and the sight of him, were like the yummy, rambunctiously rustic local wine they’d been drinking. Wildly and intensely intoxicating. Heady. His skin gleamed like satin this close up, and beneath the soft, weathered denim of his trousers lay a huge bulge.

‘Uh oh, naughty, naughty. None of that until later.’ In an efficient gesture, he swept up the thick, black curtain of her hair. ‘Hold it out of the way,’ he instructed, and when she did so, he fastened the little leather collar neatly around her throat. Then, hooking a finger into it, he tugged, drawing her face towards his denim-covered erection, and just holding her there. She could feel the raw heat of him, through the fabric, against her cheek.

‘You’d like some of that, wouldn’t you?’

She nodded, rubbing her face against the object in question. Rubbing more enthusiastically than he probably wanted her to, but not caring. In a bold, pre-emptive strike, she kissed it through the dark cloth. She’d pressed her face to his crotch like this on the first night they’d ever met, in a quaint, old-fashioned hotel room, in another country.

‘I’ll fuck you, slave, but you’ve got to earn it.’ He tweaked on the collar. ‘You know that, don’t you? You’ll have to indulge my nasty foibles and predilections. Let me spank that perfectly beautiful, perfectly creamy bottom of yours until it’s pink.’

She kissed his crotch again.

‘I take it that’s a “Yes, I concur” then?’

She nodded.

He slid his fingers beneath her chin, compelling her to look up at him, her mate – and despite everything – her equal in his matching black mask. ‘You haven’t forgotten our safe word, have you?’

‘It’s “chintz”. But you won’t hear it.’

‘Is that so?’ His smile was like Lucifer’s, beautiful yet infinitely dangerous.

‘Yes!’

‘Well then ... Let’s see, shall we?’ He touched her hair, her cheek, her mouth, rubbing his thumb over her lower lip. ‘Up you get!’

As she started to rise, he slipped a hand beneath her elbow to help her. Even at his most magisterial, his manners were faultless, ingrained in him by his background and his natural humanity. These were the qualities that made her happy to submit to him. To her, he was worthy of her awe, as no other man ever would be.

Guiding her with his touch, he positioned her across the table. The old wooden surface was firm against her crotch, and the urge to massage herself against it was powerful. Her pussy ached. For touch, and for him, but there was a road to travel yet, and it was one that promised to be hard. But still she could barely control her excitement, and she savoured the feel of the polished wood against her mound, her belly and her breasts. Cradling her head on her folded arms, she attempted to harness the biofeedback techniques he’d started to teach her. But it was hopeless. She was a turbulent mass of fear, anticipation and raw lust.

‘I think we should make this a bit more interesting, don’t you?’ His hand was cool as it smoothed over her back and her buttocks, testing her resilience. Each fingertip was distinct, especially when he dipped two into the cleft between her buttocks, coasting teasingly over her anus, but not lingering. What was he planning? There was something in that wooden box, she was sure of it. Something that would go somewhere, but she wasn’t quite sure exactly where. It could be something for her mouth, her pussy ... or her arse. A long shiver swept through her.

‘Are you cold? Would you like a blanket?’

She shook her head. 'No, master. I'm fine. Quite comfortable.'

He laughed. 'Really? Well, we'd better change that, hadn't we?' His voice was merry, and she could imagine his blue eyes twinkling behind the mask. She wanted to twist round and look at him, but she had to stay still and compliant, no wriggling and no looking. Focusing on the sight of moonlight filtering through the green darkness of the shrubs and trees, she reached for a calm place.

It was tough, though, when she heard him open the box, and she couldn't see what it was that he took out.

All she could hear was tiny, deft little movements, so quiet they were indecipherable. It was only when something very cold and slick made contact with the entrance of her vagina that she knew, or at least could guess, what was coming.

He was applying lube. Lots of it, even though she barely needed it. She was pretty sure she was already making a wet spot on the table edge, she was so slippery. He pushed plenty in, though, compelling it into her with two unyielding fingers. More, then more. She was scared she'd squelch in a most uncouth way.

'Steady.' His free hand on the small of her back, he applied more, then, before she could prepare herself, he reached for something and pressed it against her, cold, smooth and hard.

An egg. A tempered glass egg. Quite a big one. Despite her resolve to stay quiet, to best him with silence, she moaned as he pushed the devilish thing into her. Its unyielding bulk taxed her as it went in, nudging around inside, pushing against the muscular channel as he pressed it higher. When it settled against her womb, it felt gigantic inside her, jostling the root of her clitoris from within as she breathed. She could feel the tickle of a fine silk cord, too, trailing from her entrance.

You devil. You know how this gets to me. You know I'm already almost coming, before you've even got started!

She didn't have to speak it. She knew he'd heard her.

'I bet you'd really like to touch yourself, wouldn't you?' he said, striding around behind her, clearly admiring the way she was arranged, her thighs parted and the little cord dangling. Was it white? Or black? Or some other colour?

'Yes ... Yes, master. I do want to touch myself.' Defiantly, she churned her hips, then yelped out loud at the wicked sensations of the rolling egg inside her. Her clit felt enormous, as if it were bulging out from between her pussy lips, pushed by the obstruction inside her body.

'Be still, wicked girl. Be still.' He reached beneath her, just stroking her entrance, then giving the tiniest tug on the cord.

Breathing hard, she fought not to whine. God, if she was like this now, how on earth would she feel like when he really went to work?

'Would you like me to make you come? It might make the ordeal easier if your body is filled with pleasure endorphins.'

'No! That's no true test ... master. And I'm an old-fashioned girl. I'm used to earning my rewards. I enjoy them more that way.'

It was nonsense. She was dying to come. But it seemed a better way to play the game.

He leaned over the table at her side, and she could feel his mouth close to her ear, and his breathing ruffling strands of her hair. 'I adore you. You know that, don't you?' said her lover, not her master, his voice softer, gentler, more emotional.

She didn't answer. She didn't have to. He knew she adored him right back.

Then, he straightened again, and passed his hands over her buttocks and thighs, in a slow, almost insulting glide. He was testing her muscle tone, assessing her susceptibility, and that made her hornier than ever. His arrogance made her want to touch herself all the more.

‘Very well, then. Let’s proceed.’ As he spoke, he lifted the wide strip of leather – the slapper – and trailed it over her bottom slowly and tauntingly. It was supple, yet substantial, and she feared it. He’d spanked her with his hands, and with rulers and switches, and even with a table tennis bat, when they’d been fooling about, back at home. But he’d never punished her with actual leather before, apart from the sole of his slipper once, ad hoc, and then only a couple of strokes. She had a feeling this would be far more momentous. Far more painful.

She didn’t know why she wanted it. But she did.

‘Be ready, dear slave.’ He let the leather rest horizontally across her bottom as if he were sighting the first blow, measuring exactly where he wanted it to fall, and then he lifted it up.

Holding her breath, she willed him: *Do it! Do it!*

And he did.

There was a whoosh through the air, and then the impact. For a moment she couldn’t even quantify the sensations. Had it hurt? She couldn’t tell. She could only mewl out, like an animal, but she didn’t know whether it was from leather on flesh, or the way the egg bounced inside her, rocking against sensitive nerve ends and stimulating her clit from within. Was she coming? Perhaps ... But just as pleasure bloomed, a flaming wall of red agony slammed into the muscles of her backside, the sensation delayed by warped time and perception.

Not sure whether she was in heaven or hell, and suspecting it was both, she rocked and squirmed against the wood, hands clutching her buttocks as if that might assuage the fire. Her clit throbbed in time to the pulsation of heat in her buttocks.

God, yes, she was coming! Her vagina clenched, rocking the egg more, making things worse ... better ... worse ... Fuck alone knew!

‘No, no, you know better than that.’ He dropped the leather for a moment, and prised her hands away from her bum. ‘Hold on to the table.’ Gently, he drew her hands forward, and reaching out, she obeyed him, grasping the far edge.

He didn’t speak again, but the leather spoke for him, flashing down again, hitting her like a chunk of the very wood she was lying against. So hard. So merciless. Pummelling. Pounding. Her whole rear was in flames after one, or was it two blows? She’d lost the ability to count. Holding the table as if it were the last spar of a wrecked ship that had gone down, she hurled her pelvis to and fro, grinding her crotch against its resistance, still not sure if she was climaxing even while she burned. Her bottom felt as if it had been savaged, yet, wildly, she lifted it. Enticing him. *Give me more*, her sizzling, walloped flesh seemed to be saying. *Do your worst, you demon, fuck you, I can take it!*

How long had he been spanking her? Part of her mind suggested hours, a thousand long hours, but the one last little bit of her consciousness that was still able to record such things told her he’d laid on only five blows and it had taken less than a minute.

‘Oh my darling ...’ His voice cracked and she heard the leather slapper fall on the stone flags, somewhere at their feet. He flung his body over hers, his thighs and the fly of his trousers cruel against the agony in her buttocks. He slid his hands along her arms, lacing his fingers with hers at the edge of the table, circling his hips, stirring her pain, yet pressing her against the table’s edge to give delicious pressure to her clit, working it, massaging it. She cried out, high and clear, her soaring voice nothing to do with the torture in her bum, and everything to do with a fresh orgasm that melted beauty in her loins, circling and knotting around the obstruction of the egg. He completed it by reaching beneath her to stroke between her legs.

‘Oh God ...Oh hell ...’ She surged again, writhing beneath him, arching and pushing against him. She didn’t need the table edge now; he was doing the work, rubbing her clit with his fingers, working it with a rough, tender magic.

‘I love you,’ he gasped, and she broke apart into a million happy pieces. How she’d wanted to hear those words, even when she’d told herself that they didn’t matter, and it was actions that mattered more, and loving deeds. He still didn’t speak them randomly, spilling them meaninglessly at every opportunity. When her lover said ‘I love you’ it was always with momentum, always fresh and as precious as the first time.

‘I love you,’ she answered, rubbing her painful bottom against his groin, actions complementing words again. ‘I want you,’ she added, barely any breath to get it out as her body gathered, ready to shine again.

‘Here? Now?’ he asked, as if she were offering to grant him a magnificent privilege. He was still her master, but she was his mistress now, his equal. They were matched creatures, sex deities of the night.

‘Hell yes!’ she cried, widening her stance to invite him in. ‘Bloody well have me! But you’d better get that fucking egg out of me first. You’re a big man, lover, there isn’t room for both of you!’

He laughed; the sound was pure happiness. Levering himself away from her, he reached down and plucked at the string. At another time, he might have withdrawn the egg slowly, teasingly, but the need that flashed between them was too great to dally. She growled like a she-wolf as it popped from her body, creating another fleeting orgasm. His fingers had plied her clit, all the while.

The egg rattled and rolled across the flags when it landed, forgotten for the moment.

The sound of his smooth-running zip was like heaven to her ears, as was the barely audible rustle and tear, the condom being unwrapped. The feel of his cock, hot and

large, was the perfect pressure against her entrance, the longed for thing. She wiggled and he pushed in, sure and deep, barely noticing the way the teeth of the zip pushed against her burning bottom as he thrust and thrust, ploughing into her, his curse words of happiness almost like lighted sigils flying out into the perfumed air amongst the trees.

‘Yes! Oh John, my darling John! Yes! Yes! Yes!’ she cried, dishing her back, still gripping the table for purchase as she pushed her punished flesh against him, her hips working in a reciprocating action. She barely needed his touch, but still he bestowed it, caressing her even as he growled and blasphemed and flung his body at her.

‘Oh Lizzie,’ he answered, his own voice strange with pleasure, broken with joy. His hips hammered, hammered, hammered in the old familiar strokes, and deep where the egg had rocked, his hot seed pulsed and spurted inside latex.

As they collapsed against the table, she came again.

It didn’t feel too bad. Not really. Not at all.

Craning around to look over her shoulder into the mirror, Lizzie hiked her nightdress up with one hand and gave her pink bottom cheek a tentative prod with the other. It wasn’t even sore enough to make her yelp, but she did suck in her breath rather sharply.

You clever devil. It’s just enough to make me know I’ve been seen to, but not so fierce that it’d ever put me off wanting it again. I knew a little bit about BDSM before we started, but I didn’t know people could do what you do. I never knew a man could have such crafty skills, Mr Smith.

Her bottom actually looked quite pretty in a bizarre sort of way. The crown of each cheek had a ragged patch of rosy pink spreading across it, like the map of some obscure independent principality, and she could see faint, finer lines within the redness, which marked out the point of impact of

the leather. She knew a lot of people would be horrified by the sight of her marked arse, but to her, the splodges were badges of honour, marks of regard, hard won, but richly rewarded.

He'd been like a wild beast across that flipping table, though, and she was sure she still had splinters in her belly to prove it. Pulling up the long, peach satin nightdress at the front too, she hooked the slithery material in a bunch at her hip, and ran her fingertips over her abdomen. No splinters. Well, none she could detect. She pinched the flesh there. No, no extra inches as yet. They were both eating like horses, here at the villa. The Provençal food was so sumptuous and fresh, with loads of tomatoes and olives and delicious fish. But she supposed the enormous amount of sex they were having, coupled with plenty of healthy walks, and even a few jaunts out on bicycles, was offsetting the billions of calories they were consuming.

'Well, that's the most beautiful view in the entire south of France, and I'll fight any man who says otherwise.'

Lizzie spun round at the sound of his voice. His dear, familiar, low, thrilling voice. John was standing in the open doorway, leaning on the jamb, admiring her. He had that twinkle-eyed predatory look in his eyes, and his lips were curved in a possessive masculine smile. When she prepared to loosen her grip on her nightdress, and let it fall over her belly and legs, he said, 'Uh oh, leave it as it is,' almost before her brain had sent the message to her hand.

He strode towards her, and took up his station right behind her, peering into the mirror.

'Turn,' he instructed, and when she did, he ran his hand down the outer slope of her hip and thigh, thumb just skirting the rosy pink patch he'd created. 'That looks very pretty.' His thumb slid across the punished acreage, testing, assessing, making Lizzie wriggle with a mix of discomfort and renewed desire.

She couldn't believe that she wanted sex all the time. But she did. Being on holiday with John made her libido go ballistic.

'I'm not sure it feels pretty. It feels a bit sore to me.' She rocked against him, still clutching at her skirt, rubbing against his hip. He was wearing midnight-blue pyjama bottoms, and nothing else, and the cotton was very light. Swaying closer, she pressed against the inevitable bulge. She wasn't the only person this trip was turning into a horn-dog.

'Not too sore, I hope,' he said, pressing his face into her hair. In the mirror, his tanned skin looked startling against the black. They'd both caught the sun in the two weeks they'd been here, and although Lizzie would have said it was impossible for John to look more handsome than he normally did, somehow, with a sun-kissed glow, he was managing to. Her own tan was very light, because her skin was fair, and she burned if she wasn't careful. John was scrupulous, though, keeping a watch on her, and commanding her to get into the shade after a strictly monitored amount of sun. Sometimes, she felt like defying him, just for the sake of it, because he was so prone to act like a boss, but it thrilled her too, his benign domination. She knew he had her welfare at heart, but being a man so used to giving orders, calling the shots, in all things, was second nature to him.

'No ... Not really. Just, well, making itself known. Leather makes more of an impact than hands, or plastic rulers, or even switches.'

He frowned in the mirror, his eyes full of concern.

'So it does,' he said quietly. 'You will always tell me, won't you, if I get a bit too enthusiastic for you? You're a rare and cherished treasure to me, you know that, and I can't bear the thought that I might push you too far.'

As they sometimes – in fact quite often – did, the imps of curiosity and jealousy came out to dance. It was daft to be

envious of women he'd had and played with before her, but she couldn't help herself.

'Don't worry. If I don't like anything, I'll holler "chintz". But I trust you, John, and I know you've had plenty of practice to perfect your techniques. With plenty of lucky women getting the benefit ... I know there have been parties and whatnot. Like the one at the mansion. Lots of gorgeous women there to spank, I guess.'

He slid his arm around her, and as she reciprocated, her nightdress slithered down, the sleek fabric gliding over her punished flesh like a breath. The nightgown was one of quite a few he'd bought her, part of a great haul of gorgeous lingerie. But John was thoughtful. He didn't just buy her things that he liked. Yes, she now owned a lot of delicate, slinky items like this one, but he also bought plenty of the kind of thing she'd have chosen for herself: funky pyjama bottoms in stripes and wild patterns, simple T-shirts and vests, white and coloured. She'd chosen the peach silk number tonight because the delicate fabric was kind to a punished rear.

John turned her in his arms, and looked down at her, his blue eyes clear as the noon day sky here. Honest.

'Yes, there have been women. You know that, love. I've never denied it.'

'I do ... I suppose I'm just jealous.' Why lie? 'Women are like that about the ex-girlfriends of the men they love.'

He slid his hand against her cheek, gently cradling, and then pressed his lips to hers in a soft, intense kiss. As she'd noted in the garden, he still didn't come out and say the 'L' word all that often, but he kissed in a way that was just as telling.

'I wouldn't call most of them that. They were more like liaisons than girlfriends.' He kissed her forehead now, his breath ruffling her black fringe. 'In fact, I've never had a girlfriend quite like you before. Never one who's actually been a girl.'

A word, a name, clanged in her brain. Clara!

What was she, then, Mr Smith? She must have been a girlfriend, once. You must have been around the same age. You still are around the same age.

But she didn't mention the 'C' word. It was as rarely heard as the 'L' word. It felt bitchy to remind John of the woman who'd hurt him so much, twice over. Lizzie knew, though, that he knew she was thinking about the woman she considered her rival.

'Don't start the age thing again,' she said instead, sidetracking him with another issue, that wasn't an issue, really, more of a running joke between them.

'I can't help myself. I'm twenty-two years older than you, love.'

'Look, granddad, you're forty-six, that's all. If you were ninety-six, we might have a problem, but you're not, so just be told, will you?'

John grinned. 'Stroppy madam!'

'Bossy tyrant!'

'Shrew!'

'Despot!'

Laughing, he held her face between his two hands, and kissed her again. Hard, this time, tongue pushing in. It was a bossy kiss, a possession of her mouth, but boy, how she liked it.

She was gasping when he freed her mouth, smiling at him, feeling a tenderness in her lips that was a pale echo of the simmering glow in her buttocks.

'But seriously, Lizzie, you're going to have to accept that from time to time, the age difference between us will bother me. And make me feel guilty.'

'I don't know why.'

'Just humour me.' He tidied her fringe, where he'd ruffled it.

'I will. But you're going to have to accept that living the deluxe life, to which you're so accustomed, is going to make

me uneasy sometimes too. I'm just an ordinary girl, and sometimes it all gets a bit too rarefied for me and I feel panicky. Travelling first class ... private villas ... buying honking great mansion houses just so we can live together. It's all very rich for my blood, you know?'

John's brow crumpled. Ah, storm clouds. And not about Dalethwaite Manor either, she guessed.

'And let's not start that again either!' His voice was fierce, not threatening, but not far from it. 'You fucking well aren't an ordinary girl, Lizzie! Didn't I just tell you a moment ago that you're rare and precious to me? And I'm lucky to be with you. Do you hear me?'

'Yes ... OK ... Truce. I'm a fabulous goddess. I'll try to remember that.'

'Remember it because it's the truth,' said John, smiling again. He looped his hands at the small of her back, carefully avoiding the sore areas in her buttocks. 'Now, can we please find a way to make love without hurting that gorgeous bottom of yours?'

Oh yes! Oh yes!

'Don't worry too much. You are a clever man, Mr Smith, and it really doesn't hurt that much.' She gave him a slow, sultry look from beneath her lashes. 'And even if it did, I can stand a twinge or two if you can cope with the moaning.'

'I love the moaning,' said John roundly, tightening his grip and drawing her inexorably against his erection. 'Especially if it's mine!'

Lizzie kissed the side of his neck as she moved in close. 'I love it when you moan. What can I do to make it happen?' She reached down and cupped his hard flesh. 'Suck you? Squeeze you? Ride you? Your wish is my command, boss man.'

John embraced her, hands roving, fingers not so careful of her soreness now. Not that she cared.

'You're a she-devil, woman. Temptation incarnate. You know how greedy I am. You've made me want all of those ...

and more!' He kissed her passionately, violently, gripping her bottom, and making her moan and wriggle.

Massaging her pelvis against his cock, Lizzie kissed back. The spanked places on her bottom were fizzing, intoxicating her blood like pink Champagne. She wanted him. Wanted him now.

Laughing, John hauled her across to the bed, and then sat down on the edge, tugging at the cord of his pyjamas and freeing his cock. It bounced up, eager and hard, ready for her.

Lizzie made as if to kneel and give him head, but he drew her towards his pelvis. 'Kneel and straddle me, darling. I need to be in you again. I want to make you come, and see your lovely face as you do.'

Sizing up the situation, Lizzie climbed onto the bed, John shuffling back a little and helping her into position. Her thighs at either side of him, she poised herself as he held his cock, allowing her to view the beautiful length of it as he reached for the ever handy condom.

For a moment, she stood apart from the intimacy of their tableau, wondering if a time would ever come when they no longer used condoms. The wonder of being skin to skin with him was something she'd been thinking about and fantasising about, but there never seemed to be the right moment to raise the issue. And whenever she'd hinted, she'd got the distinct impression that John made a conscious point of not taking that hint. For some reason ... Could it be that it was simply a closeness too far for him?

And yet, the way John's eyes flared as his cock nudged her pussy almost made her wonder if the notion was crossing his mind at this very moment. He held her by the waist, supporting her in a sure hold, their intimate flesh touching yet not touching, his and hers, yin and yang, but still separated. She almost spoke, but then held back. Why spoil everything by getting into complications right now?

‘You’re so beautiful ... so beautiful ...’ he whispered, hips lifting, not pushing right in yet, but breaching her entrance, stretching her. His hands were strong; he was supporting her weight, making it easy for her, even though she wouldn’t have minded at all if it wasn’t easy and her thighs were screaming from the tension of holding herself aloft. ‘I don’t know what I’ve done to deserve you, you wonderful woman, you.’

She wanted to say she was the lucky one. The ‘ordinary girl’ who’d won the heart of an extraordinary man. He was everything she’d ever dreamed of. Kind, intelligent, sophisticated, funny. As handsome as sin, and a lover nonpareil. All that would have been an embarrassment of wonderfulness; but the whipped Chantilly cream on the top of the dessert of it all was that he was also fabulously wealthy, a man of enormous means who could put resources at her disposal and help her achieve goals and dreams.

‘Don’t tease me, you beast,’ she said, laughing. ‘That big beautiful cock of yours ... Don’t be mean. Let me have it all!’

‘Then have it, my sex goddess, have it.’ His smile was like the sun, glorious, teasing, loving, wonderful.

And his cock, as he pulled her down onto him, was unequivocal.

He filled her body, her heart, her soul, her life, and when she was settled, he sought her clit and stroked it. Lovingly.

Coming, she praised his name and howled, ‘I love you!’

Later, she changed her nightgown for an old one of hers, one of the few she possessed, and John gently massaged a bit of his super-secret muscle balm – formulated by a posh London apothecary – into her bottom to soothe it. He’d told her it was for his tricky knee, although she’d yet to see any evidence of said trickiness. His knees were as magnificent as the rest of him, in her opinion. But the balm was good stuff, nevertheless, and actually did reduce the soreness.