

LEGAL DISCLAIMER:

Xena, Gabrielle, and Callisto are the sole copyright property of MCA/Universal and Renaissance Pictures. They are not, however, in this story. Characters who *look* just like Xena, Gabrielle and Callisto are. Is this copyright infringement? Welcome to the Great Uber Debate. Just to be clear though, no copyright infringement was intended in the writing of this fan fiction. Please note that no characters in this story will be wearing Polo shirts at any time. They would rather die first. The story idea and the story itself are the sole property of the author. This story cannot be sold or used for profit in any way. Copies of this story may be made for private use only and must include all disclaimers and copyright notices.

LOVE/SEX WARNING/DISCLAIMER: **(Read This Or Else)**

God, this story is filthy. You absolutely, positively must be of legal age in your state to read this story. I'm assuming that is 18. If you aren't click the back button this second! Don't even read this disclaimer. There is a good chance you will be guaranteed a place in hell if you read this story. Maybe before you even finish reading it. Is that a chance you're prepared to take? I will not be held responsible for any persons burning in hell as a result of my story. This story has no redeeming value. None whatsoever. Hardly any plot at all and what little there is centers around a Japanese cooking show that isn't even in production anymore. How lame is that?! It's filth I tell you, filth. Needless to say this story has sex in it. The people having sex are all women. There are three of them. They have sex together. I tend to write that way; it's a reoccurring theme with me. This story also has food in it. No one has sex with food. Ah...not technically anyway. Not that I have a problem with people who like to have sex with food, as long as the food is consenting. This story also has a certain amount of what might be considered kink in some circles. I've lost count of all the naughty things they do. Lets see... there is some blood play, fire play, whips and things, anal stuff, mild yet sweet bondage and discipline, karaoke, knife juggling, dancing and possibly other things I've not even thought of yet. If you don't like kink, sex, naked women or Japanese cooking shows- why did you even click on this story? There is one scene where Cass (the Uber-Callisto) gives a blowjob to a person of the male persuasion- if it doesn't bother her than it shouldn't bother you but if you're opposed to such things on principle, then even though it's one itty-bitty scene, maybe this isn't for you. If you don't like graphic stories then for god's sake don't read this. Finally <exasperated sigh> if the thought of double penetration of an Uber-Gabrielle by an Uber-Xena and an Uber-Callisto gives you nightmares then perhaps a different fan-fic choice would be more appropriate. Something in a Janice & Mel perhaps? Or you can go read stories by people who put their leading ladies in Polo shirts if you want cocoa and belly rubs. Okay **technically** there is cocoa in one scene and a belly rub in another,

but the two never happen together.

Author's note: This one's for Katja, with love.

Cooking With Fire II: Iron Chef

By Bat Morda

Started 5/3/00 – Finished 3/5/06

I'll bet you want to know what happened at the end of *Cooking With Fire*, don't you? Well, I want to sleep with Jennifer Connelly, but we don't always get what we want. See- for those of you just joining us and too lazy to read the prequel to this story (*Cooking With Fire*), it ended with all this stuff happening and Sam was going on a weekend trip to Big Sur with her three old friends and her two new friends. I'm sure they all had a wonderful time, but damn if I'm going to write about it. Somebody asked me to write about it once- but... I don't know. It just didn't strike me. I'll leave what happened in Big Sur to your capable imaginations.

And now, the film begins to roll and we are introduced to our cast. First we have Tiffany Schrade. She will be our Uber Xena this evening. She's got the black hair- the piercing blue eyes- the pissy attitude. She's an uber of 3rd Season Xena- before every other week was a bizarre comedy and we had "maternity armor" (what the hell was that all about?) And just for the record- she has no coincidental look alikes. Tiff is one of a kind. She's a chef- at a restaurant you can't afford; cooking meals you can't pronounce with equipment you don't own in a kitchen the size of your whole apartment. She has issues with peanuts because one killed her brother. If you want the background on that tidbit- then go read the first story- or the intro to the first story at the very least.

When we last saw Samantha Steele, our Uber Gabrielle, she was rather whiny. Not the "I'm all into Eli and love and I can't kill" kind of whiny that leads to butchering 8 people in *The Ides of March*, but more of "I've been wounded, hear me roar" kind of deal. She'd been dealing with that post-relationship thing where you annoy the hell out of everyone especially yourself for being such a whiny lameass. Her friends took pity on her and paid for a high-class hooker to make her shut the hell up already. I'm happy to report that Sam is in a much better state of mind these days. It's been six months now and she and Tiffany have gotten along quite nicely. For those of you not paying attention- Sam works as a food critic so she and Tiffany have something to base their relationship on besides sex. Wasn't that clever of me?

We can't forget our Uber Callisto, Cassandra Wilson. Don't even ask me "which Callisto" here. No, this is not "redeemed, Callisto-light" but the full boar uber-goddess-villain Callisto. Messy haired Callisto; screaming, "lets play truth or dare

and I'll kick your Potedidan ass" Callisto."<sigh> How I miss her evil ways. Her whole business is sex so she gets along quite nicely with Sam and Tiff. Well at least Sam. Cass and Tiff can't stand each other and it all goes back to something I was too lazy to discuss in the first story, and I'm not any less lazy now. Let's just say they have a "history". They still live together and Sam hasn't moved in. Why should she? She's got a cool house and sometimes she just gets fed up with Tiff and Cass' shit, ya know? Anyway this sordid tale starts off in an airplane so that's just where we'll go. This story takes place when the original Iron Chef was still on the air. Alas, I realize I'm behind the times.

"Tell me what you eat.

And I'll tell you what you are"

Brillat-Savarin

"I hope the theme ingredient is peanuts," Cassandra said matter-of-factly as she accepted the small packet of nuts from the flight attendant then returned her attention to her magazine.

"Tell me again why we had to bring her?" Tiffany growled, half asleep, from her seat by the window.

Sam smiled. She squeezed Tiffany's hand that was resting in her lap. The flight attendant came back and Cass requested something from her in flawless Japanese. "I think that was the reason," Sam replied, with another squeeze of Tiff's hand.

"Show off," Tiffany growled.

Sam leaned back in her seat and beamed. Strange to think she was on her way to Japan in the company of two women she'd only known for six months. In some ways it felt like she'd known them for years- lifetimes even. It was hard not to chuckle out loud. Sometimes you just met people at the exact moment when you needed to. She'd been on the mend emotionally when she stumbled upon the unlikely pair seated on either side of her. Something that night had clicked and the void and pain left by another had been filled to overflowing. Not that her two companions had become a substitute; quite the contrary. Feeling whole again she could look back on the past and remember only the positive. Her hurt had been replaced by happy memories. She was living a different life now, one that gave her perspective as well as fond recollection. Sam let out a slow sigh of contentment. She still missed what she'd lost, but it didn't hurt anymore and she adored what she'd found. She wondered to herself if perhaps this is what growing up was.

"Feeling good after an overly long flight?" Tiffany asked, not opening her eyes. Sam loved that. Tiffany could read her and follow her moods as if they were the tide.

"Just happy. Got a problem with that?" she asked warmly.

“Don’t get used to it,” Cass quipped. “Makes Ms. Schrade, nervous.”

Sam grinned. Cass and Tiffany never stopped sniping at each other, ever. She’d gotten bits and pieces of stories from both women, but knew much of their history was left unsaid. It was interesting. All outward appearances would make one think they hated each other. Yet there was a genuine respect between the two if not affection. They also each respected the fact that Sam cared for them both. Much to Sam’s relief, neither one showed any signs of any jealousy where she was involved. Beneath it all Sam knew she could count on them both should she ever need to. She knew they could count on each other as well, not that either woman would admit it.

Tiffany was cool personified. With a strong jaw framed by long dark hair, she had piercing blue eyes that could see into her very soul. She was reserved, thoughtful, warm and very, very dry when it came to humor. She let her actions speak for her and absolutely detested processing. Because of that Sam had avoided talking about what seemed obvious to her. They were soul mates. For all her sharp reserve, Tiffany Schrade was also too blind, stupid and oaf-like to realize that the other half of her soul was sitting right next to her. Sam didn’t mind though. She was in it for the long haul and knew she had the time to wait. Besides, the time spent in Tiffany’s company was good. Really good. There was a smart casualness about Tiffany. She always looked hot, yet at the same time gave the impression that she didn’t care and there was absolutely no effort involved. She wore makeup but it always looked natural, only highlighting the beauty that was obviously already there. She favored leather, dark colors and soft textures. Even in jeans and a ripped sweatshirt and worn sneakers Tiffany Schrade looked incredibly sexy.

Cass on the other hand was all emotion, fire and volume. Everything about her was loud but not unpleasantly so. Tousled blond tresses framed her face and she had the softest brown eyes Sam had ever seen. She always looked like she’d just gotten out of bed after an amazing night of fucking. She dressed to the nines and could carry on a conversation about anything with anyone. If Cass entered a room you wouldn’t be able to think due to the din that radiated off of her. She spent time on how she looked, and it showed. Makeup always perfect, clothes that always fit her to perfection. She loved color, drove a hot-pink convertible Mercedes and seldom wore pants. Her monthly clothing budget was close to the mortgage on Sam’s tiny house in the Hollywood Hills and that represented an obscene amount of money.

Sam stole a casual glance at the women on either side of her and wondered exactly where she fit in. She wasn’t as cool and reserved as Tiffany and didn’t have the ‘balls-to-the-wall’ confidence that Cass possessed. She was shorter than both women and her blond hair had the faintest hint of strawberry. She wore her hair short, with soft bangs in front, coming midway down her neck in the back. Her hair had fullness to it that Tiffany’s lacked, but it wasn’t in the perpetual state of “hair-fuck” that Cass favored either. Her green eyes were another contrast, in a face softer and less angular than her companions. She worked hard, was successful and enjoyed the perks that

went along with being a highly respected food critic. Her wardrobe had changed somewhat in the last six months. Feeling more confident about makeup and her own personal style, she found she was getting a lot more attention from both sexes wherever she went. She wore skirts and dresses more, having picked up pointers from Cass, but leather was creeping into her wardrobe as well. In some ways she was a bridge between Tiffany and Cassandra. Tiffany was her anchor and she was confident that the chef knew exactly where she stood with the food critic. Samantha had also developed a very soft spot for Cass, which baffled Tiffany to no end. Cass worked in the high priced sex trade and due to her nocturnal schedule was seldom home when Sam was over. On the rare occasion that she was, Sam enjoyed her company--whether sex happened or not. Cass was blunt, abrasive, rude and had a unique charisma all her own.

Cassandra closed her magazine, drawing Sam from her thoughts. "Bored now," she announced.

"We'll be landing before too long." Sam reassured her.

Cassandra signed dramatically. "I still don't see why we had to get here two weeks before the show. I'm missing out on a lot of money."

"I'm sure you'll find work here," Tiff grumbled. "You always do."

"I'm not sure I want to work here. This is supposed to be my vacation. I just don't see why the chef is calling all the shots." Cass had this little pout that Sam found endearing. Tiffany just rolled her eyes.

"Well," Sam began diplomatically "we don't want Tiff competing with jet lag--and it'll be cool to check out some of the local food before hand. Besides, we'll get to do some sight seeing...and shopping." Sam took Cass' hand in her own. "You'll have fun, I promise."

Cassandra grinned evilly. "I'll hold you to that dearie."

Customs was a nightmare unto itself. They were met by a delegation from the television show and every thing seemed to be going smoothly until Cassandra's bags came under inspection. It might have been the custom official's intent to embarrass, but Cassandra stood there unfazed as each item were withdrawn from her black leather duffle.

Anal beads- "it's a paperweight."

Silicon dildo- "it's a paperweight."

Stainless steel butt plug- "it's a rather heavy paperweight."

Nipple clamps- "it's a paperclip."

Hot pink rabbit vibrator- "It's a vibrating paperweight."

Nexus double-ended dildo- "its sculpture or a paperweight, take your pick."

Calmly Cass droned on after whips, crops, ball gags, scarves, blindfolds, bottles

of lubricant, flavored dusting powder, restraints, massage oil, condoms, finger cots, needles, scalpels, candles, ropes, dental dams, paddles, vibrators, gloves, body paints, harnesses, more dildos, more vibrators and more butt plugs were extracted from her bag. After forty-five minutes and with a small crowd gathering and getting quite the education, Cass was sent on her way with her assortment of paperweights and sculptures intact, losing only her collection of needles and scalpels to the customs agents in Tokyo.

“What? You didn’t bring the sling?” Tiffany remarked dryly as they were escorted to a waiting limousine.

“Well you didn’t pack the power drill so I saw no point.” Cass shot back, settling herself in the back seat and pouting.

The drive to the hotel consisted of the hooker translating the occasional comment between Tiffany and their escort. For the most part the conversation was carried on in English for which Sam was happy, but some comments were apparently best made in Japanese.

The suite of rooms at the Century Hyatt were elegant, but small by American standards. Tiffany did her best to navigate the cultural waters and thank the bellhop who’d had to make two trips for Cass’ matching Gucci luggage.

Sam moved to put her arms around Tiffany as Cass fell dramatically on the bed.

“Now how does this Iron Chef thing work?” Cass asked innocently.

Tiffany frowned. “I’ve explained it to you-- three times.”

“Oh. I must have been ignoring you.”

Sam couldn’t help but laugh. “You two are impossible! Okay, this is really simple. There is a pretend billionaire, his name is Chairman Takeshi Kaga. He lives in a pretend castle, which is really a TV studio. He has four men working for him; they are the best chefs in each of their fields. Masaharu Morimoto is the Iron Chef Japanese, Hiroyuki Sakai is the Iron Chef French, Chen Kenichi is the Iron Chef Chinese and Masahiko Kobe is the Iron Chef Italian. Tiffany will walk into the Kitchen Stadium, be greeted by Chairman Kaga then challenge one of the Iron Chefs to a cooking duel. Once she makes her pick, the secret ingredient will be uncovered and she’ll have one hour to make as many tempting dishes with the theme ingredient. When the cooking is finished, the challenger then the Iron Chef present their creations to the tasting panel who then decide who the winner is.”

“So what do you win?” Cass asked, cutting to the chase.

Sam shook her head, “it’s not about prizes, it’s about honor. We’re getting this cool trip to Japan, win or lose. It’s about giving a good show and making incredible food.”

Tiffany grinned. “It’s not quite as innocent as that. Howard is hoping that if I win Le Bistro will be put on the map for Asian tourists. Chefs who beat Iron Chefs tend to see a large spike in their patronage. Nabu is now a well known restaurant in

New York; that's where Morimoto worked before striking out on his own. Over here it's a huge deal.

Cass shrugged, nearly having lost interest. "If the ingredient is secret, then how come you were doing all that faxing? Every time I turned around, thinking I was getting a fax for a gig, you were sending love notes to Japan."

"The starting list is huge," Tiffany explained. The Iron Chefs and I narrowed it down some by each taking turns crossing off ingredients we didn't want to work with, peanuts for example. There are enough variables that it'll still be quite a surprise, whatever it is. You can stock your own pantry with some things- spices, pastas, whatever but you kind of have to pick things that will work with a wide variety of foods, then pick a few special items that will match really well with some and hope for the best."

"Bath now," Cass announced, making it clear that any further discussion that was Tiffany-centric would not be a good idea. The chef rolled her eyes but the food critic didn't mind.

Any annoyance Tiffany may have felt towards her housemate vanished the moment the three of them stepped into the bathroom.

"Wow," Sam breathed, her eyes widening at the sight of the huge tub.

"There was a reason I insisted on making the travel arrangements dearie," Cass replied smugly. "It helps to speak the same language."

Tiffany nodded and moved to the water controls. Cass playfully slapped her hand away. "No, you never get it hot enough. You two take a breather and let me get the bath ready."

Not wanting to jeopardize what could be an enjoyable bath, both women complied.

"I don't know how you put up with her," Tiffany grumbled in Sam's ear as the two walked over to enjoy the view outside the window of the suite's main room. It wasn't the sort of view Sam would call 'pretty'. It was all buildings and people, but there was an exotic foreign quality to it that reminded her of the movie Blade Runner. She lived in a city that was steel, plastic and concrete, but this was different. She felt like she was indeed in another world. Tiffany had moved behind her and wrapped strong, warm arms around her, nuzzling her neck gently.

"How I put up with her?" Sam replied with a giggle. "You're the one who lives with her. Besides, now that I've gotten used to her, I find her charming, in a lewd abrasive sort of way."

Sam turned in the strong arms that held her so she could look up into Tiffany's clear blue eyes. "Does it bother you?" she asked honestly, "that I've gotten attached to Cass?"

Tiffany smiled a warm, open smile. One of the rare ones that she saved just for Sam. “No.” She was going to leave it at that, but a squeeze around her middle from the smaller woman encouraged her to elaborate. “Cass isn’t outside our arrangement.”

Green eyes danced with mischief. “Tiffany Schrade, are you saying we have an *arrangement*?”

Cocking an eyebrow the taller woman answered. “Yes.” There was another squeeze. “Our arrangement is to keep doing this, until *this* stops working,” Tiffany replied with a squeeze of her own.

Sam rested her cheek against the chef’s chest and listened to the rhythmic beating of her heart. “That was nearly sentimental of you, Tiffany,” She murmured. “Keep that up and I’ll start to get ideas about you.”

Tiffany squeezed tighter; both knew they were well past that point. “All I’m saying is we’ve got it good here. So far we’re both doing what we want and it’s working. No one is feeling left out or cheated. Why monkey around with a good thing by calling attention to it?”

“Okay kids, bath’s ready.” Cass called from the other room.

“Because I happen to *like* mush,” Sam answered defiantly as she followed the other woman to the bathroom.

Cass hadn’t wasted her time. Flickering candles lined the black gleaming counter top. In the warm orange glow, steaming curls could be seen rising from the water’s surface. The whole bathroom smelled of the sweet foam that hinted of citrus. Sam knew the fragrance well, she’d worn Bergamot for years, but Cass had become addicted to it recently.

Tiffany was the first in the tub, sliding her muscular body back towards the end away from the faucet. Cass got in next, taking the other end and Samantha climbed between them. At first Sam just rested, leaning back against Tiffany. The water was luxuriously hot and the fragrant foam almost hypnotic. She could feel the thousands of miles and hours of plane travel melt away from her body. She was nearly asleep when she felt a firm touch on her foot. Groaning with pleasure she opened a lazy eye to see Cass massaging her foot. While the blond woman worked, Tiffany started massaging Sam’s shoulders.

To Sam it was bliss. Nobody said anything and it was perfectly comfortable. Each was enjoying the silence, save for the occasional sound of limbs being readjusted in the bath water. There was a comfort and relaxation that permeated the warm, softly glowing room.

Finally Cass released her hold on Sam’s foot and drew her long thin fingers over a muscled calf submerged in the tub. Her hand continued to climb, moving up Sam’s thigh just as Tiffany’s hands moved down from Sam’s shoulders to cup her breasts and squeeze firmly. With the grace of a cat, Cass moved from sitting to rolling up onto the balls of her feet and leaning over the reclining food critic. “I did something for you,” she softly purred, “now you do something for me.”

Sam knew what was coming, or at least she thought she did; Cass could be unpredictable at times. A sly smile spread across her face. "What can I do for you, Ms. Wilson?" she asked with all the sweetness and innocence of a Catholic High School girl.

Tiffany stopped squeezing Sam's breasts awaiting Cass' answer. The prostitute moved close, so close to Sam's face that her lips were brushing the other woman's as she spoke. "You know," Cass breathed, and then slowly moved back.

Never taking her eyes from the blond, Sam nodded slowly and began to ease her body out of the water. The bathroom was warm, but not as deliciously warm as the water had been, and Sam's skin showed it. Goosebumps and erect nipples changed the landscape of her skin as water ran off her smooth muscled form. Cass took her position on the corner ledge of the large tub, sitting out of the water with her legs spread wide open. Tiffany remained where she was, content to watch the show from her vantage point.

Sam began to move. It was quite subtle at first just the barest rippling of muscle and skin. Then with the graceful rotation of a hip and the visible contraction of abdominal muscles Sam began to dance. Cass smiled, even bright white teeth showing between darkly painted lips. "Oh, you're good," she said approvingly "Shikira's got nothing on your dancing, hon."

There was plenty of room in the tub to turn where she stood, so Sam did, adding slowly undulating arm movements to her erotic dance. Now it was Tiffany's turn to smile, her bright blue eyes raking over the nude dancer's form.

When Sam finished her turn, facing Cass once again, she stood with her legs a little more than shoulder width apart. Her graceful arms continued to move, but this time they began to glide over her skin, hands touching arms, abs and finally her own breasts. Cass eyes widened in appreciation as Sam touched herself, then narrowed in arousal as Samantha's hands moved down.

While Tiffany couldn't see the show, it was obvious what was going on from the back; the fact that Sam wasn't shy about audibly conveying how she felt made the scene crystal clear. She could hear the standing woman's breath catch, a slight gasp, a moan; all the sounds echoing off the tiled bathroom. Even submerged in bath water she could feel herself getting wet.

Sam slipped two fingers deep into herself, groaning with pleasure, her thumb providing steady pressure on her clit. It felt fantastic. Her skin was hot from arousal and cold from the air at the same time. She could move her body and make two hearts skip a beat. There was power here. When she withdrew her fingers she held them out for Cass to sample, which the seated blond did enthusiastically. As the soft warm mouth encased her fingers she could feel the purposeful caress of Cass' tongue.

"Come on slut," Cass whispered harshly when she'd licked Sam's fingers clean. "Finish the show."

Smirking, Sam turned her back on Cass and bent over. While she was

rewarding the hooker with an incredible view, she was also denying the other woman the chance to see her face. That view she rewarded instead to Tiffany.

“I don’t think I liked being called a slut just now,” Sam commented, matter-of-factly.

“Bummer,” Tiffany whispered. “However will you punish that vulgar and crass woman?”

“I’ll have to think of something.”

“Maybe I can help,” Tiffany replied. While Sam continued to move two fingers in and out of her pussy, Tiffany raised a hand out of the water and began to fondle Sam as well. Her fingers explored where the other woman was touching as well as lightly pinching and playing with her clit.

“You’re not saving all the fun for her,” Cass objected, leaning forward from her perch on the side of the tub. Gently parting Sam’s ass cheeks with her hands, she leaned forward.

“Oh god,” Sam groaned, deep and guttural. Cass’ tongue playing with her asshole, and Tiffany’s fingers at her clit were sending volumes of information along nerves ill equipped to process such traffic. Removing her fingers she used both hands to brace herself against the tile wall. Cass saw that as an invitation and moved two of her fingers to replace Sam’s. Tiffany also saw it as an invitation. With Sam’s hand no longer blocking access from the front, she leaned forward and moved her face to the place her fingers had just been playing.

“Oh fuckkkk,” Sam hissed, a visible shudder shaking her body. “That’s right,” she whimpered. “Both of you...eat me.”

Every nerve felt deliciously alive. Her skin cold, her breath coming in hot ragged gasps. She felt wonderfully full as Cass kept a steady rhythm with her hand. With Cass’ mouth on her asshole she delighted in the dance of soft dexterous wetness playing against her incredibly sensitive anus. The torrent of pleasure produced there threatened to overwhelm the tsunamic wave of bliss building from her clit and beyond. Two tongues moving against her, similar sensations and at the same time incredibly different. Cass was probing, moving in and around with an almost scattered quality; like Ragtime on the piano. Tiffany however, was smooth, slow, languid chords. She knew how to make Sam wait, how to draw out her pleasure. As soon as she realized that she wanted to feel the warm wetness of Tiffany’s tongue somewhere it was already there. Tiffany read every twitch and contraction of Samantha’s body an instant before Sam’s brain deciphered that same information.

Movement caught the corner of Sam’s eye and out of her peripheral vision could see Cass moving her free hand, she assumed, to her own mound. Glancing down she could see Tiffany doing the same with her own pussy under the bath water. That sight alone sent yet more wetness to where she already felt herself dripping. “Fuck yeah,” she purred.

It didn’t take long for Sam to come, nor did she try to put up any resistance to

the tide that was rising to overtake her. No, she was ready for it, ready for the crash of bliss that hammered at her and left her weak and content.

With a loud cry, then a gasp she slid back into the water and curled up contentedly in Tiffany's lap. Cass also slid back into the water. Sam didn't know if either of the other women came or not, but at the moment she couldn't care less if they had. She was wrung out and happy and until the resonances of feeling that good dissipated, she was the center of the universe. She sat there smiling, warm and content without a single care in the world.

Sam continued to smile through the rest of the raunchy sex that night, past breakfast the next morning and well into an afternoon full of shopping. Tiffany was busy at the television studio getting a tour of Kitchen Stadium where she would compete, as well as finalizing her contract with the show's producers.

That left Sam and Cass free for a day to explore the city on their own. While she wished that Tiffany could join them she realized that the TV show was the reason they were here. Besides Sam rarely got to spend time alone with the enigmatic hooker and it was nice not to have to endure Cass and Tiffany fighting. Cass knew the city and it's customs well and Sam was grateful to have a private tour guide.

It was a mystery to Sam where Cass had acquired her education. All she knew was that Cassandra Wilson was many shades of "worldly". She spoke nearly a dozen languages fluently and had traveled the world over. Samantha couldn't help but wonder if all that travel had been Cassandra's idea, or if she had been running from something.

"You're unusually quiet today," Cass observed, her eyes hidden behind Ray Ban sunglasses as she scanned a display in a storefront window. "Sprain your tongue?"

Sam cocked her head. The high fashion shoes in the window were not as intriguing as her companion. "Is everything with you about sex?"

Cass shrugged. "Maybe. Is that a problem?"

Sam thought about it as they continued walking. "No, it's not a problem," she finally answered. "I guess I just never spent much time thinking about it. Sex I mean, and now I've met someone who is either doing it, or talking about it, and..." Sam stole a casual glance at her companion, her thoughts changing gears, "I feel like there is more to you than sex, but you don't like to show it. Why is that? You're like Tiffany that way- I swear it's the only thing the two of you have in common."

Cass arched an eyebrow. "This is where we catch the bus to the temple," she announced after reading the sign.

The two sat in silence for most of the ride. Sam was aware of the eyes on them. Two hot blond Americans stood out prominently in the homogenous landscape.

“Don’t I get an answer?” she finally asked quietly.

“Do you know why Tiff and I don’t rip each other’s heads off?” she asked in return? “Because we don’t try to figure each other out. We’ve mastered the art of co-existence.”

Sam continued to look at her patiently, waiting for more. “You know some of my history,” Cass said quietly, resigned to giving the woman an answer. “But that doesn’t define me. Maybe I am all about sex, maybe there is something else too- but I’m not the introspective sort that you are to figure out what quality goes in which bin. I swear you Virgos are such a pain in the ass that way. I’m just me, I take it as a whole and you my sweet will have to do the same.”

Sam was surprised by the honest frankness of the answer and didn’t want to push the woman further, well not much further. “I’ve noticed that the two of you never have sex with each other,” Sam observed, “What’s that about?”

The hooker turned her head sharply. She studied Sam’s face for a moment, as if trying to decipher the question lurking behind the question. “I’d think you’d appreciate having all of the attention on you?”

“Oh god,” Sam replied in a rush, “I’m not complaining. But you two seem to really detest each other most of the time, yet you’re...well...closer than most people who hate each other usually are.”

Cass shrugged. “I see your point. It’s complicated, sweetie. Do I think she’s hot? Of course I do, I’m not blind or stupid. Does she think I’m hot? Well she’s not stupid either, and... I am. We have fucked before, but we were pretty drunk off our asses at the time.” Cass shrugged, “I don’t have qualms, look at what I do for a living. Not to say I’m not picky, but I’m ready to go most of the time. Tiffany, get her drunk and well...But sober? No way. She’s still hot all right but then she opens her mouth and starts to talk and that just kind of kills it for me. Drunk, I’m not listening.” the blond woman trailed off and looked out the bus window for a few long moments as the city sped by. “Besides, I’ve got plenty of other friends to fuck who don’t make me crazy. Please don’t try to figure me out Samantha, it will only frustrate you.”

“Why does me getting to know you, the real you, pose such a threat?” Sam pushed as the bus slowed to a stop. A man behind them muttered something to his companion and Cass answered in flawless Japanese, which elicited a number of shocked gasps from the nearby passengers.

“What was that about?” Sam asked as they left the bus.

“The stud behind us said he thought I had nice blow job lips,” she replied matter-of-factly. “I told him my teeth were better and if he’d like to lose his dick I’d be happy to oblige. And I’m not threatened by you sweetie, I just don’t think you’re going to find what you’re looking for-- not because I’m trying to be coy, but because I think you’re expecting to find something that isn’t there to be found.” She smiled a little sadly “I’m sorry sweetie, I really am.” Then regaining her composure she announced, “Ah, here we are at the temple.” In a moment she was heading up the

stone path, leaving Sam in silence.

Shaking her head she followed the other woman through the awe inspiring main gate to the temple. It was gorgeous. The clean lines of the classic double roofed temple sat back behind a five-tiered pagoda. Some distance to one side she could see the cemetery and to the other a peaceful garden. The two women decided to start their tour at the main temple behind the pagoda. Samantha had been interested in world religions since her teens and felt a familiar reverence envelope her as soon as she entered. While she never considered herself a “god person”, she respected places and relics others saw as holy. Maybe, she wondered, it was because she was jealous of not feeling that sense of the divine that others did. She’d looked her whole life, but never got what it was others were worshiping. As Sam wandered around in the temple she stole casual glances at her companion who strolled around the structure as if she were wandering through a shop on Rodeo Drive. A man approached her and Cass chatted with him quietly. It must be the clothes, Sam decided. Cass could draw men like a shark to chum. Leaving her friend some privacy she turned away and headed towards a man selling prayer incense.

Sam watched what the other visitors were doing and with lighted incense in hand she knelt before the statue of Buddha opening herself up to some enlightenment. Nothing happened.

“Not feeling the glow eh?” Cass asked quietly, joining Sam.

Sadly, Sam shook her head. “No, how could you tell?”

“I know how people look when they’re in tune with what they hold dear. Since you’re in a deep philosophical mood today I’ll tell you that you’re looking for your church and this isn’t it.”

“That’s the problem, Cass. I’ve never been able to find one. I’ve looked, seriously, but I can’t find a religion or a church that works for me.”

“Nonsense,” Cass replied, shaking her head dismissively. “You’ve got your religion, same as Tiff and me-- you just haven’t put two and two together yet.”

The two women continued to talk as they explored the temple grounds. In some ways it was everything Sam expected a Japanese temple to be. Beautiful, well manicured, pristine but it was also unusual and alien. Not the stereotypical little bridges over koi ponds back home.

“Let me get this straight,” She said stopping at a Zen garden. “You’re saying that you know what my religion is, when I don’t?”

“That’s right.”

“And you also know Tiffany Schrade’s religion. Tiffany our friend the devout atheist.”

“Exactly. Calm down Sam, it’s not like I’m Cassandra Wilson: Psychic Hooker or anything. And as a matter of fact, I’d think Tiff’s religion would be obvious. Religion isn’t necessarily about some ‘god’ figure. Anyone who says it is, is probably recruiting or selling something. It’s about what pulses in your veins. For Tiffany, It’s

food. Food and power.”

The food critic frowned critically. “Food can’t be a religion. It just isn’t.”

“Bullshit. Tiff has taken you with her to the fishmonger’s in the morning, hasn’t she? You’ve seen that gleam she gets in her eye when she spots the exceptional tuna or when she’s in the zone in the kitchen. Tiffany is as good a chef as she is, not because it’s her profession, but because it’s what makes her heart beat.”

“I’m in the same field, are you saying food is my religion too? I know there are some lame religions out there, but that’s really pushing it.”

“No, for you it’s a vocation. It’s what you do not what you are. You enjoy it; you write about it, you know your shit. But what’s the first thing you do when you get up in the morning? What’s the first thing you do when you get home at night? What did you do right before you, Tiff and I did *it* for the first time?”

Then it hit her, like a bolt out of the blue waking her up to a truth that had been staring her in the face, waiting for her to blink. “Music?” she whispered. “That’s absurd.”

“Score one for Blondie,” Cass muttered. “Let me prove my point.”

Without questioning, Sam followed Cass to another bus and to another part of the city. They walked several blocks to an area that didn’t appear to see many tourists. Everywhere they went people stopped what they were doing to stare. Sam heard the music coming out of a small neighborhood restaurant before she could determine which dingy door was the entrance. She smiled. Cass was right. It didn’t matter that the notes were foreign; that the lyrics were completely unintelligible to her ears or that the beat didn’t land where her gut told her it should. It was music and Sam responded to it. They stepped into the building and met silence. The players stopped abruptly, shocked by the new arrivals. Cass spoke to them encouragingly in Japanese and they looked uncertainly at the proprietor. Cass spoke to him next, ordering something as near as Sam could tell, and after a couple more comments from the unpredictable blond, everyone seemed happy and the music continued.

“What did you say?”

Cass chuckled. “I just bought everyone a round of sake. Some things are universal.”

Sam decided it was better than shopping. They spent the remainder of the afternoon in that dingy joint- almost like any other neighborhood joint the world over. Sam felt she’d gotten more of a sense of the people and culture of Japan than she would have from a dozen tourist destinations. She could tell the mates coming in after work, relaxing after their long day. One pair was obviously a young couple on their first date for drinks. It was both the same as back home and different too.

“So sex is your religion?” Sam asked, after her fifth sake.

Cass shrugged. “Perhaps, my religion and vocation. Like Tiffany I’m into power. She likes to bend food to her will, create things that enslave a person’s taste buds and senses. I do the same things but the body is my pallet and endorphins are

my medium. It's not as much about sex, the 'getting off' as it were, as it is about the trip getting there. Not every orgasm is a religious experience for me or whatever gorgeous woman I'm with- but when it happens, it gets me closer to god than anything else I've ever found."

"So you think of yourself as a lesbian?" Sam asked, and then regretted that last sake. She hoped she hadn't offended her friend.

Cass looked at her and blinked. "Did I not tie you to the bed and fuck you ever so completely last night? What kind of question is that?"

Sam's cheeks flushed. "But the John's. The guys who pay you..."

Cass smiled. "There are women who pay me too, dearie. That's work. So I enjoy the occasional protein milkshake," She shrugged, downing another sake. "I let guys fuck me for money, or I fuck them for money, or just wear rubber and walk on them in stilettos. Off the clock I fuck only women. What does that make me?"

Sam shrugged a bit sheepishly, "Technically, a bisexual I think."

Cass rolled her eyes, clearly annoyed. "Fine, bisexual, whatever. My point is, Miss Lesbian Purist, is that the stuff that makes you feel alive, like there is actually a point to being alive, like it's all not for nothing, then that is your religion." She put down her sake cup and quietly muttered to herself "What's the problem with men anyway? They've got the disposable income."

Sam didn't know how she felt about what she was hearing. Her thoughts were muddled by sake. According to Cass' theory The Super bowl or a T.V. show could be someone's religion and that just seemed wrong. She wasn't convinced like Tiffany that there wasn't anything else out there. But she wasn't convinced like Cass that there was either. The only thing she was sure of was that food, music and sex would have gotten her low marks as answers in world religions class.

Both women were a little unsteady as they headed back to the bus stop to take them back to their hotel. Cass put a reassuring arm around Sam's shoulders. "Sometimes something is so deep, so ingrained, so primal, it might as well be religion. I can see that music taps that thing in you, for chrissakes, you alphabetize eighties band names in your sleep, for Tiff and me it's power. Tiff likes to use the elements of earth to channel her power: fire, and plants, and animals- that whole trip. I like to harness the energy within. Sometimes those things overlap, which is why we haven't killed each other yet. Once in a blue moon we sort of see eye to eye. In fact, I think she was more disappointed than I that my blades didn't pass muster at the airport."

Sam's head snapped toward Cass. "What are you talking about?" Sam had wondered what the scalpels and needles were for. She knew they weren't for drugs because neither Tiffany nor Cass was into that. She assumed something sexual, but still couldn't imagine what.

Before Cass could answer a sleek black limo pulled up to a stop next to the women and a tinted black window slid smoothly open. Cass leaned in and spoke with the occupant for several moments before turning back to Sam. "Mr. Ota here is

taking this limo to his hotel which isn't far, he says he'll have the limo take us to our hotel after we drop him off..."

"And?" Sam asked dubiously.

Cass shrugged with a twinkle in her eye. "He wants a blow job." Sam's panicked eyes shot from the limo to Cass and back. "Hey, I've been to your office and seen you work," Cass reminded her. "You've never seen me work. I think I'd like that." It must have been the sake, because that argument made perfect sense to Sam. While she had reservations about men, generally speaking, she was curious to see the other woman work.

Smiling nervously, Sam slid into the limo behind Cass and took a seat across from the businessman and her friend. He looked at her and smiled then said something to Cass. The hooker looked at Sam fondly and replied to the Japanese man.

"He wanted to know if you were going to join me and I told him no, that you'd just be watching. He likes that idea and says you have beautiful eyes, which you do." Sam smiled at him, flattered.

The man said something, making a move towards Cass who flinched out of the way. She replied quickly. Not harshly as far as Sam could tell, but made her position clear. With another smile and wink towards Sam, Cass began to caress the man's crotch as he raised the partition between the three of them and the chauffeur.

"Is everything okay?" Sam asked.

"Yes," Cass answered, her voice a gentle purr. "Our friend here just needed to be told the ground rules. No kissing, no holding my head down unless I say it's okay- watch the earrings. That sort of thing. Ota-San says he's never had anyone watch him get a blowjob and finds it quite exciting. I told him to have his wife join him with a hooker sometime." Looking down at the bulge in the man's pants Cass grinned at Sam once more. "It's show time." She said as she deftly undid his pants with one hand, not taking her other hand off his crotch as she worked. Softly Cass whispered to him in Japanese and his breath caught.

Sam was oddly fascinated. It had been some time since she'd seen a man's penis, in the flesh, as it were. She tried to remember the last time, in real life- not in porn- and couldn't think of anything past college. He wasn't a large man, certainly not compared to the men in the gay porn she occasionally watched with Cass and Tiff, but he wasn't half bad either. Certainly his size was improving as Cass worked. He was handsome Sam supposed, for a guy. She guessed mid to late thirties, well groomed, fit. His head rolled back as he let out a satisfied groan when Cass' lips slid around his dick. Sam tried not to frown but felt a pang of jealousy anyway. While Cass wasn't her girlfriend by any stretch, she still had more claim to those lips than the guy's dick. He said something unintelligible to Sam's ears as Cass sucked and nibbled lightly on his balls, her hands continuing to caress as her tongue moved up and down the shaft of his dick. Finally she closed her lips around him and moving her head

down, deep throated all of him into her mouth and throat. He groaned, licking his lips. Watching Cass at work was having it's own effect on Sam's pulse. She knew what that tongue felt like and how incredible Mr. Ota must be feeling at that very moment. She was also feeling another pang of jealousy, lacking a part of her anatomy that sensitive which could disappear into Cassandra's magnificent mouth. As if on cue he looked over to Sam, his eyes bright with wonder and pleasure. Cass also looked over at her and winked and the jealousy Sam was feeling towards the businessman ebbed away. Cass was putting on a show all right, but it wasn't for Mr. Ota. Sam smiled at him. She didn't have the heart to begrudge him the pleasure he was feeling. She might not know exactly what he felt, but she was sure that she had felt better. In moments it was all over. His voice rose, his body trembled. Cass covered his penis with her mouth, and he cried out then nearly sobbed.

"Oh my god, you swallow?" Sam gasped, stunned.

Cass laughed. "Less mess dearie." She then asked Mr. Ota something and he gratefully handed her a handkerchief. After delicately blotting the corners of her mouth she wiped off her lipstick, then handed the handkerchief back to the gentleman. He replied gratefully, bowing slightly and returned the cloth to his pocket. "I told him that you complimented him on his dick by the way. It wouldn't do to hear about squeamishness you know."

The limo had pulled to a stop. Their Japanese companion thanked Cass once again and gave her a wad of bills from his wallet. Cass bowed graciously and wished him well. He said something to his chauffeur and was gone. Cass gave some instructions of her own, and then raised the partition back into place.

"Might as well take the long way home," Cass remarked as she sat back in the leather seat, patting the space next to her.

Sam joined her in a heartbeat as the limo pulled away from the curb. "I'd better get something that your recently departed client didn't," Sam nearly growled as her lips found Cass' neck.

"The difference between vocation and religion perhaps?" Cass asked after a soft moan.

"I'll settle for your mouth." Sam kissed her hard, her mouth covering Cass' and plumbing it's depths with her tongue. Cass relaxed under the assault, more than pleased with herself that she'd gotten the other woman so turned on. As tongues dueled Sam noticed a salty bitterness in Cass's mouth, a taste she could have done without, to be sure. But still, it was something that drove her to reclaim that mouth with an urgency that surprised and thrilled her.

Schooled in the map reading of human desire, Cass could see where Sam's passion was taking her. She smiled enjoying the power, the connection, and the moment. "Make me come," she whispered urgently in Sam's ear. "Please Sam, I need you to make me come."

Sam had only had sex alone with Cass a couple of times before. She and

Tiffany had talked about it; the chef didn't mind. Tiffany knew how persistent Cass could be when the prostitute was in a mood. Sam was surprised at first at how easy it all worked out. Her connection with Tiffany's housemate was different; just as intense, but not the kind of connection that made her feel grounded and solid on the inside. This was more than merely a physical thing too. She cared about Cass, and at times like this felt white-hot passion for the woman and while it wasn't Tiffany, it was still a connection she felt damn lucky to have.

Cass hardly ever wore pants, which made moments like this convenient. Her skirt slid easily up over her thighs, the mesh thong she wore underneath easily moved out of the way. Sam continued to kiss her hard, alternating between sucking on the tongue that had taken up residence in her mouth, and teasing those exquisite lips with her teeth. On occasion Sam liked to bite, and when the mood hit her, Cass enjoyed being bit.

Already there was a pooling of moisture at the juncture of Cass' legs and Sam smiled in pleasure at finding it." Sucking off dicks get you dripping for it?" She asked mockingly.

It was Cass' turn to smile. A coy, nearly shy smile. "No dear, but putting on a show for you does."

Not buying the innocent routine for a second Sam kissed harder. "Are you trying to play me slut?"

"Will you fuck me hard if I say yes?"

It was never really a question of Cass not getting fucked exactly the way she wanted. Sam had no problem in giving each of them exactly what they craved. It was easier for Cass to be rough than gentle, challenging instead of tender- but this wasn't about hearts twining together and souls moving in to live with each other. This was about bodies demanding release and hearts that celebrated the friendly orgasm.

Two of Sam's fingers slipped easily inside Cass' wetness. With the tip of her thumb she massaged the prostitute's clit as her fingers kept up a steady rhythm. Cass sucked in her breath sharply then let it out slowly- gathering her will power to enjoy the ride as long as she wanted.

"You're so fucking hot," Sam growled into Cass' ear as she worked. With her free hand she roughly grabbed the hooker's jaw, turning it to the side and exposing more of her neck. Cass moaned. "Play with your tits," Sam demanded and she complied. It didn't take long for Cass to surrender to the building wave, riding out each surge with a loud groan.

"You are a gem," she finally sighed, cupping the sides of Sam's face and gently kissing her lips. The two continued to kiss, snuggle, and cuddle all the way to the hotel, which to Sam's liking was some distance away.

It took a few moments for the women to compose themselves and exit the limo, Cass quickly surveying the inside of the car to see if she'd made a mess. Satisfied that all was in order she gave the driver a few bills then followed Sam into the hotel.

Outside the door to their room music could be heard and Sam swiped the key enthusiastically. "I say dancing before dinner!"

Cass watched her bound into the room, deciding that Tiffany was at times worth putting up with in order to share Sam.

Tiffany had been working out, dressed in shorts and a sports bra. She'd moved the central table of the main room to the side, and there was space to move. When Sam bounded into the room Tiffany smiled, cranking the music some more. Then she joined her lover in one of their favorite pastimes outside the bed. The techno groove of U2's classic turned the small hotel suite into a three woman rave party.

High, higher than the sun

You shoot me from a gun

I need you to elevate me here,

At the corner of your lips

As the orbit of your hips

Eclipse, you elevate my soul

Sam danced with reckless abandon, completely at ease with her companions. As she moved around the room her clothes began to come off, as an after thought glancing to the window to verify that the blinds were indeed drawn. No strangers to a dance floor, Tiffany and Cass joined her enjoying the sensation of bodies in motion.

I've lost all self-control

Been living like a mole

Now going down, excavation

I and I in the sky

You make me feel like I can fly

So high, elevation

It's not like logical thought could touch what had developed between the three. Unbidden, uninvited, happiness had descended on them nonetheless, and like a snake

shedding her skin or phoenix rising from the ashes, Sam felt reborn in the company of her companions. Cass felt more than she let on and was relieved to have seriously found the connection without strings that she sought. Tiffany was baffled at the turn her life had taken but was determined not to wake from the dream if there was anything in her power she could do to prolong it.

A star, lit up like a cigar

Strung out like a guitar

Maybe you could educate my mind

Explain all these controls

I can't sing but I've got soul

The goal is elevation

As the women worked up a sweat Sam considered the buzz her body was feeling. Turned on, tuned in and alive, she briefly considered sex before dinner and decided she wanted to wait. She wanted to enjoy the tension, the building of erotic energy that had begun with watching Cass go down on some john in a limo. She wanted Tiffany to tease her through dinner and when she felt like she'd die from the sheer volume of passion she was feeling, she wanted to feel that mind blowing release through every cell of her being.

A mole, living in a hole

Digging up my soul

Going down, excavation

I and I in the sky

You make me feel like I can fly

So high, elevation

The women danced closer together, muscular bodies moving in tandem, synchronized with each other's unconscious movements. While each was in their own

world with the song and how the vibrations affected them, they were also together at one with each other and the music.

Love, lift me out of these blues

Won't you tell me something true

I believe in you

Drawn from their reverie by the shift in tempo, they slowed looking at each other taking in the fine sheen of sweat on their bodies and the pounding of hearts and lungs at work. Knowing it was almost over and wanting to enjoy it to the last beat they smiled at each other, gathering their wind for the big finish.

A mole, living in a hole

Digging up my soul

Going down, excavation

I and I in the sky

You make me feel like I can fly

So high, elevation...

As the song faded Sam collapsed on the floor happy and at peace with the world. “Man, I want a shower, a kick ass dinner then I want to come back here and have you two fuck my brains out.”

Tiffany beamed over at Cass. “Can I score the classy chicks or what?”

Dinner was elegant. They were guests at the Italian restaurant of a chef who had defeated Iron Chef Masahiko Kobe. The three enjoyed the best the chef had to offer. They were as impressed with the food as the tasters had been during his Iron Chef competition.

“So how did things go at the studio today?” Sam asked, taking a sip of wine. She studied Tiffany who was clearly enjoying her duck, but being particularly thoughtful about it at the same time. This was part of why they arrived early, to gain some insight to the palate of the people she would be judged by. Still, for all her focus

on the sight, smell and taste of the meal they were enjoying, as soon as Sam spoke, she had her lover's undivided attention.

Tiffany shrugged, vivid blue eyes taking a moment to enjoy the sight of the woman before her. All three were dressed in black. Sam opted for a soft clingy sweater, short skirt and strappy heels. Tiffany had chosen a silk blouse and slacks and Cass opted for a tight black dress that hugged every curve she possessed. The ambient noise in the restaurant diminished considerably when the three walked in.

"It went fine. The place is amazing. The stage is over 9,000 square feet. It's the largest soundstage Fuji TV has. I brought my own knives, of course, but they've got over 100 of them anyway. The sheer quantity of everything for battle is something else. The number of plates, dishes, pots & pans, not to mention ingredients is really staggering."

Cass chuckled, "So we didn't need to bring seven kinds of cereal from home?"

The chef shook her head. "Oddly enough, Cap'n Crunch, Cocoa Crispies and Frosted Flakes are not a regular part of their pantry. Every kind of Miso product you can think of, yes. Sugar infused breakfast foods, no."

Tiffany raised another forkful of duck to her mouth and took a sip of wine before continuing. "I got to meet the chefs, which was cool and chat with some of the assistants and get a feel for the pantry. The translator they provided is okay, but Cass, I'd rather have you do it if you don't mind."

Cass winked at Sam. "Sure hot-stuff. But it's going to cost you."

Tiffany rolled her eyes. "I pay anyway, at least this way I'm getting something out of it."

"Who do you think you're going to pick for battle?" Sam asked, trying for a diversion.

"I think I'll go for Morimoto for some sort of French/Neo-Japanese battle." The chef replied. Cass arched an eyebrow at the news. The gesture was not lost on the chef. "So tell me about your day," she asked, her eyes boring into her housemate's as she tried to decipher what the blond woman was up to.

With an amazing mind for details, Cass described the sights they'd seen and places they'd gone during the day. She left the steamier moments for Sam to describe, who did so after looking cautiously around the restaurant and keeping her voice down. While it was fine to talk about fun and games in a limo, albeit quietly, this was no place to talk about some of the other things she had on her mind. Giving in to her better judgment, Sam decided that a restaurant was not the place to talk about some of the edgier things she and Cass had discussed. Tiffany and Cass had a habit of rendering coherent thought impossible when the three of them were alone so she wasn't sure when she'd get another chance. Still she stuck with her decision to let it wait. There would be time enough in the days to come to ask Tiffany about needles and knives.

"We haven't played *Truth or Truth* this week." Sam mentioned after another

forkful of an amazingly perfected butternut squash ravioli.

The game had originally been *Truth or Dare*. Each week one woman would take a turn asking a question or posing a dare and all three would comply with their choice. After all three women had received permanent body modifications they decided that perhaps the dares were poised to spiral out of control. Sam had to agree, but did miss some of the dares. Her favorite had been the time Cass dared her and Tiffany to take her camping. They chose the Sequoia National Park and settled in for a four-day trip. Sam would never forget the look on the young, attractive park ranger's face the first night when she politely told them that they would have to keep it down, they were frightening the animals. For all of her spoiled tendencies Cass had been a perfect sport on the trip. She enjoyed the adventure and was roughing it by only bringing three suitcases. Sam and Tiffany weren't surprised when they'd come across the hooker a ways off the trail having her way with the attractive park ranger, her back up against a giant sequoia. Cass explained she was getting in touch with nature and had been bugging the other two to take her camping again ever since.

In all honesty Sam found the challenge of coming up with a question more daunting than a dare. Inwardly she shuddered when she remembered the first question she'd ever posed. She had thought the question innocent enough; when had each of them had their first orgasm. She realized how unprepared she was for the honesty she was going to get with the answer.

Cass' eyes grew distant. "I was eight," the hooker said flatly. "I'm pretty sure it was eight, can't imagine me being seven that's so young...It wasn't my idea, I wasn't happy about it, 'nuff said."

Tiffany nodded sympathetically. "Her step-father," she said quietly to Sam. "He was a problem until Cass was 13."

"He was a problem until the day he died, the miserable bastard," Cass shot back. "He just left me alone after I was 13. Probably too mature for him, or he noticed my growing fascination with knives." She shrugged, "I was on my own by 14 anyway."

If Sam could have chosen any other way to find out about Cass' history with child-sexual abuse she would have. But there it was and she felt hopelessly lost.

"I've heard about these orgasm things, but I haven't had one yet," Tiffany had announced. "Sam if you'd care to assist I'm sure you can show me what it's all about. I hear when done correctly, they can be quite splendid." They all laughed at Tiffany's joke, Cass had the moment to regain her composure and hadn't insulted the chef for the rest of the evening. Sam even noticed that the prostitute gently ran her fingers through Tiffany's hair for a moment as she went to the kitchen for another bottle of wine.

"I believe it's Sam's turn," Tiffany said gently, drawing Sam from her memory. Both she and Cass had put down their silverware and were giving the food-critic their undivided attention.

“Right,” Sam began. She’d worked on the question two days ago in the shower, trying to phrase it in such a way to keep the game fun. “Where is the most unusual place you’ve ever had sex. The sex has to have been a positive experience, the place has to have been of your choosing and,” she looked at Cass, “you don’t have to include any work experience if you don’t want to.”

“Very considerate of you sweetie,” Cass said, toasting the food-critic with her wine glass.

Tiffany chuckled. “But then you’re missing her best locations. The church, the funeral parlor, the DMV, the gas station on Melrose.”

“As if,” Cass huffed. “You may pick up your dates at gas stations,” she shot back, then blowing Sam a kiss added, “present company excluded of course. And don’t knock the funeral parlor job. That Goth guy was very sweet, cute and rich. And coffins are more comfortable than you’d imagine. Hmm... maybe I should call him.”

“You first Tiffany,” Sam said enjoying the way the soft lighting accented the planes of her lover’s face.

“On horseback,” She said.

“Were you actually fucking the horse Tiffany dear?” Cass asked sweetly.

“No love,” she replied, without missing a beat, “You’re the only one of this trio who can handle a literal thoroughbred. Probably two.”

“You think you’re so funny,” Cass shot back, annoyed that she’d set herself up. “Just tell your lame story.”

The chef smirked at her victory, took a sip of wine and continued. “It was the summer I handled the kitchen for this Canadian resort. They had horseback riding and I’d gotten acquainted with the wranglers. I had been out riding with Boris...”

“A guy?” Sam blurted, surprised. All three of them had slept with men, Cass the only one who currently did. But Tiffany rarely spoke of those days; she and Sam had come to their senses long ago.

“You said most unusual place, you didn’t specify great sex.” Tiffany explained. “We were behind the barn, probably not the wisest choice.” She shrugged.

Sam thought for a moment about physical logistics. “So you were um...”

Tiffany rolled her eyes and her cheeks began to color a little. “Naked, yeah. Well my shirt was still on, but open. Jeans were off though.”

Cass was positively glowing with delight. “Tell her the best part.”

The chef sighed, resigned. “Sarah McLachlan came out of the barn looking for me, and we were...ah startled and I...um...fell off the horse and broke my ankle. I mean he fell off with me, we were sort of attached and when he landed his boot and my ankle tangoed, and my ankle lost.”

It was all Sam could do to not spew red wine out of her nose she was laughing so hard. A few people at near by tables looked askance and Sam did her best to bring her laughing under control. The image of her stoic, unflappable, always in control girlfriend in that tragically comic scene was absolutely priceless. “What the hell was

Sarah McLachlan doing there, and why was she looking for you?” She finally asked, between gasps.

“She was staying at the resort, duh,” Cass supplied

Tiffany’s cheeks reddened further. “And she offered me a job to go on tour with Lilith Fair. I was the head chef for the first tour.”

“Just standing there doing her best to ignore the whole scene,” Cass chortled with delighted mirth. “Can you imagine. God, I wish I’d been there.”

“I think you were servicing an aircraft carrier crew on shore leave,” Tiffany deadpanned and turned her attention to Sam. “Now you.”

“My story is not nearly as impressive,” Sam began. “It was on the hood of a Mustang overlooking Mullholland at three o’clock in the morning.”

“What a view,” Cass said appreciatively.

“With who?” Tiffany asked a bit sternly.

“Tisk, tisk Tiff,” Cass chided, “You’re sounding like a...a what is that word...”

“Girlfriend,” Sam supplied happily. “Relax, it was a few years ago. Far enough in my past that you getting pissy about it would be comical.”

“I was just curious,” the chef replied a bit defensively. “What year was the Mustang?”

Sam shook her head, “Sometimes you can be such a guy. It was a 1965 cherry red Mustang. In *mint* condition,” she added for emphasis. “Unfortunately I wasn’t. Had a bit too much to drink or back then I’d have never done that on a first date.”

This time it was the chef’s turn to choke on her wine.

The chef and food critic turned their attention to their blond companion. Cass studied her nails nonchalantly. “On a float for the Rose Parade, 1998.”

“Wasn’t she the corn queen from Oklahoma or something?” Tiffany asked.

Cass shrugged. “I don’t know. She was queen of some sort of grain; corn, wheat, barley who the hell knows. And she was from one of the flyover states in the middle, can’t remember which one. I think it was square in shape. All red states look alike to me.” She shrugged. “I’d been hired by their people to give pointers to the girls on poise, get them ready for their close-ups as it were.

Sam sat there stunned staring at the blond woman. When she thought she’d heard the most outrageous thing this woman had to offer, she was always surprised. “Was...was this during the parade?” She asked tentatively.

Tiffany laughed. “Didn’t you hear the Bob Eubanks and Stephanie Edwards commentary on the channel 5 telecast?”

“Clod,” Cass huffed at her brunette companion. “No sweetie, it was before the parade.” She cocked her head in thought. “At least 15 minutes before the parade. They were still putting flowers on the float, and there was this sort of alcove in the grain castle or whatever the hell the damn thing was. The other wheat princesses had no idea their queen was getting and giving exceptional head. Although an equestrian unit was brought into formation behind our float before we were finished. When we

were done those guys gave us quite the reception. She sighed wistfully. “For a beginner, that corn queen had a great tongue. Cutest accent to boot.”

Sam’s mouth dropped open. Cass described the whole event as a person might recount their afternoon at a spa or beauty parlor.

“Did you know the horses are more afraid of the marching bands than the floats? I find that just fascinating,” she said as she signaled for the dessert menu.

The idea of needles and knives continued to nag at Sam ever so slightly, but she put it aside in the days that followed. The time never seemed right and there was so much going on. The three of them did a fair amount of sight seeing together. Tiffany tried to sample food at as many places as she could. From the street vendor selling a local specialty to restaurants large and small, Tiffany wanted to absorb all of it.

They frequently compared notes on the taste, smell, back finish, presentation, and mouth feel of all the foods they sampled. It meant a lot to Sam that her lover thought so highly of her opinions. Sam was confident in her culinary knowledge, but felt especially honored that Tiffany chose to include her so intimately in something she held so dear. They could spend fifteen minutes or more discussing the intricacies of something as simple as tea and rice, which bored the prostitute to no end.

The chef had said that her goal was to make five dishes, whatever the ingredient and as they tasted different dishes, they tried to come up with menus using that sort of ingredient. There was no doubt that Tiffany was taking the competition aspect of this challenge very seriously. For weeks she’d been timing herself whenever she cooked. How long did it take to perfect a Périgueux sauce, how long did it take to get the proper finish on the lamb? Sam was shocked at the decadent breakfast of eggs benedict they’d enjoyed before leaving for the airport that Tiffany had taken seventeen minutes to prepare.

Sam was also interested in the sights and sounds of the city as well. Walking down the street holding Tiffany’s hand or Cass’ or both she soaked it all in. Her conversation with the prostitute had been an eye-opener and she realized how often she was drawn to a place playing music—any kind of music. Cass took off from time to time to leave the two of them alone. Sam considered bringing up the subject of sharp objects once or twice, but something always made her change her mind. If it wasn’t an earnest souvenir vendor, it was a crowded bus stop or something. Finally a couple of days before the challenge, over a simple breakfast Sam decided it was time.

It was easier to talk to Tiffany when Cass wasn’t around. While Tiffany could be completely at ease with Sam, she couldn’t with Cass as the two could never completely check their antagonism at the door.

“So what’s the deal with Cass’ needles and scalpels?” Sam asked as casually as she could once Tiffany had put a decent-sized bite of waffle into her mouth.

Crystal blue eyes flicked over to her own; searching green as she chewed her food. Taking her time she took a sip of milk, putting her glass down gracefully. “They’re for blood play, pain, that sort of thing,” Tiffany answered casually, as she bit into another segment of waffle.

“Cass doesn’t strike me as the type who’d like to get hurt. I mean, like that.”

The dark haired woman nodded in agreement. “Usually she’s not, but if she decides she wants to get hurt... She dated a dominatrix for a couple of years once. I think that’s where she learned it.” She shrugged. “I don’t think she’s been on the receiving end of that kind of pain since then. She does enjoy hurting people though. Most of her clients could probably afford to pay her to do that. Especially if she’s in that kind of mood.” Looking right at Sam she asked, “Do you think that’s weird?”

“Isn’t everything about Cass a little weird?” Sam replied, grateful that the response came out of her mouth without thinking. After taking a sip of water and bite of fruit she had a little more time to think of a serious answer. “Honestly Tiff, I don’t know about any of that stuff. Sure there are some things I think are weird- really out there, but this, I dunno. It’s out of my realm of experience, but I’m not going to call it weird without more information. As for sex with donkeys- that *is* weird and I don’t need any additional information to say that.”

“Well I’m glad we agree on that then.” Tiffany replied with a reassuring smile.

Sam contemplated her eggs for a few moments before speaking up again. “You’re into that stuff too, aren’t you?” She said it quietly, after a few moments she feared she might have said it too quietly since Tiffany hadn’t answered.

“I’ve gone there, yes.” She finally said. “I do enjoy it. My head goes to a different place and I like the experience.” Leaning forward to make her point, her eyes locked on Sam’s “But it’s not like there is this big gaping thing missing with us. If you’re not cool with that sort of thing, it’s okay.” She sighed. “Things are good with us Sam, you don’t have to complicate it.”

Green eyes locked into blue as a one set widened in understanding. “That’s why you left your last girlfriend, isn’t it? Something to do with this?”

Tiffany rolled her eyes, the fact that Sam could read her so easily bugged her. “She thought she was cool with it, but wasn’t. But that was just a part of it. We didn’t work out for a lot of reasons, this just added to it.”

“But you’re afraid to go there with me because you don’t want to get a taste of that with me and have me discover I don’t like it.”

Tiffany smiled. “Sam, sometimes you’re really perceptive and kinda miss things at the same time. It hasn’t come up between us because it hasn’t come up. I’ve not been missing anything- yeah it’s a cool extra, but not the main event; like anal stuff. You know, it happens or it doesn’t and whatever... If you’re curious that’s cool, but if you’re not, don’t worry because no one is bolting anywhere.”

Sam wasn’t quite sure what to think. “Is this something between you and Cass?”

“Oh god no!” Tiffany blurted. “We’re both ‘tops’ Sam, besides if you haven’t noticed we’re really not that fond of each other. I don’t think either of us would trust the other with a sharp object, we’d be too tempted to slit throats.” She shrugged. “We both adore you but that’s about all we have in common.”

“But what if I’m curious?” Sam pressed, fully aware that Tiffany was already ready for this conversation to be over.

The chef smiled, knowing full well that Sam knew she was beyond finished with the conversation. “Sam, this isn’t a decision you should make lightly. I’m not interested in anything you’re not comfortable with.”

It was Sam’s turn to shrug. “Before I met you I didn’t think I was comfortable with threesomes.”

The chef couldn’t help but chuckle, “You have a point there.”

The conversation gave Sam a lot to think about in the hours that followed. Tiffany was busy with last minute pantry selections at Fuji Studios and Cass was off somewhere. There was a garden within walking distance of the hotel where Sam went to hang out and mull things over.

Over years of countless poker games with Grace, Chase and RJ, Sam had talked about a number of unusual things. At some point in the evening the conversation always turned to sex and she and her friends knew the most intimate details of each other’s lives. That understanding and lack of judgment was one reason the four had remained so close. Chase had been with more women than any of them and tended to find the more unusual. She alone had done wonders to educate the other three on the possibilities of the bedroom. Her most recent companion was way into bondage and had related stories over poker that had both turned Sam on and turned her off. But what she was considering now wasn’t about getting tied up- she’d already gone there with Tiff and Cass; what she was considering was letting someone hurt her. Not the kind of hurt caused by an over zealous nip on the neck, or too-hard pinch on a nipple. She was considering something that could make her bleed, or worse.

Letting her thoughts drift inward she thought about music. She was hard pressed to remember any experience she’d had that couldn’t be better explained or described by some song she felt. *Human* by The Pretenders was the soundtrack to her last break up only to be replaced by a Broadway musical tune when she recovered. And there were dozens of other songs too. Times when she drifted away from friends then rediscovered them again, when she succeeded or failed. She then thought about the parts of songs without words; the music, the solos, the screaming, throbbing, soothing sound waves that ran through her veins like blood. The raw emotion of songs that simply transported you. Maybe that’s what the experience did for them, put you in a physical place beyond words. In that moment Sam decided she wanted to

know. She was going to step into Tiffany's world and taste it for herself.

Sitting in a booth with Cass at the Hard Rock Cafe in Tokyo, Sam couldn't help but recall the little details of the night before. With the competition the next day she knew she'd be better off thinking about what was ahead; but like the first time you see a Van Gogh painting-- it's hard to think of anything but orange. It felt really good to be here. Not exactly like being in a church but having the relics of music surrounding her was certainly a reassuring comfort. The video system was playing *Tusk* and an early 80's Stevie Nicks was proficiently twirling a baton. Sam smiled.

"You look a million miles away," Cass commented over her lunch.

"Sometimes there just isn't anything more perfect than a burger and fries," Sam replied with a grin. "It can just be the most perfect thing in the world. This shake isn't half bad either."

"Spoken like someone remembering sex," Cass replied dryly, a knowing smile on her lips.

Sam had to grin right back at her. It really couldn't have been a better introduction into the ways of pain, though she suspected she was getting the much toned-down preview. The first thing Cass had shown her was fire. She drew a pattern of alcohol on Tiffany's nude torso then after lighting a q-tip dipped in alcohol with a match, touched the swab to the still wet stripe on Tiffany. A blue glow erupted moving across the chef's body. Cass' blood red, perfectly manicured nails contrasted vividly with Tiffany's tanned skin as she followed the blue flame with her hand to make sure it extinguished. She turned to Sam next. It wasn't something she saw as much as she heard and felt. There was a distinctive thrum and pulse of heat that emanated across her belly as Cass lit the fire. Then Cass did it on her arms, legs, between her breasts, her back. Sam felt in tune with her skin in a way she'd never been before; she was astounded at the turn-on it provided. Things didn't stop there.

Next Cass lit two white candles. With graceful movements of her wrists, the flames danced around each other, heating the candles and dropping molten wax onto Tiffany's back. Sam could hear the faint sound of flame and the distinctive hiss of arousal as the wax splattered onto the chef's back. When it had cooled, Cass instructed Sam to pry the wax off with her teeth, which she did, surprised at how turned on the other woman was getting from it.

In minutes the roles had been switched and Sam was experiencing the burn of melted wax. This time Tiffany held the candles. At the first splash of molten wax Sam had no idea what to think. Her brain was processing pain and her senses were in overdrive. There was another splash, and then another. The searing was tunneling into her reaching some dark recessed place she didn't know she had. There was another splash and something turned a corner. She didn't feel turned on...she felt angry.

Some reserve of rage got ignited somewhere and she felt the urge to dominate. She was furious. She turned over, not waiting for anyone to nibble the wax away from her body. She grabbed Tiffany by the shoulders and using a strength she didn't realize she had, she forced the dark haired woman onto her back. From the corner of her eye she could see Cass quickly extinguishing the candles but in that instant didn't care if they burned down the whole hotel. Her back burned and she wanted to hurt someone.

Looking up into green eyes with pinpoint pupils Tiffany spoke in a soft, soothing voice. "Sam, Samantha, it's okay." At first Sam didn't understand what she was hearing, she just wanted to violate someone, Tiffany actually, the one that caused the white-hot fire. With searing force she kissed Tiffany, her teeth scraping those of the other woman.

"Holy fuck," Cass muttered. Without thinking Samantha just moved, her body her hands, it was like she was everywhere over the brunettes body, her skin. She could feel muscles clench and flex and Tiffany tried to steady her. She did not want to be steadied, she did not want to be calmed down; she wanted revenge.

"Tiff..." Cass said cautiously, a note of genuine concern ringing in her voice.

Tiffany shook her head. "It's okay," she said hurriedly. "Let her do this."

"Don't fucking talk to her," Sam growled. Roughly Sam grabbed a handful of hair and pulled. "Look at me!" Tiffany winced but gave Sam her undivided attention. A part of Sam had no idea what she was doing. She knew the dynamics of their personalities. Cass and Tiffany were 'tops' and she was a 'bottom'. There was a partner that led while dancing, and it sure as hell wasn't her. But that wasn't what she wanted now. She was going to call the shots. She was going to be passion's architect. Fuck them both. Sam also realized that the two of them knew this. They'd discussed "safe words" Sam had chosen "Ompa Loompa" since she knew if she said it they'd bust up laughing too hard to continue having sex anyway. She hadn't heard the word, and she could feel Cass behind her draping the straps to the harness around her waist that held the dildo in place.

With arms strong from rock climbing, Sam grabbed both of Tiffany's wrists with her hand and pinned them over the larger woman's head. If she'd had nails they surely would have cut into the other woman's skin. Releasing the dark tresses with her other hand she roughly grabbed Tiffany's neck, her thumb resting below her jaw and putting pressure on her throat. Not just a little pressure, she put some weight behind it.

In hindsight Sam was relieved that they'd decided to do their experimenting naked. Had Tiffany been wearing pants it would have been next to impossible to stay in control and get the larger woman undressed. But in the moment all Sam saw was a woman below her, willing to be taken. Pushing forward roughly she entered Tiffany and blue eyes went wide with surprise mixed with pain.

"Fuck," she gasped, "What the hell did you put in there?"

Cassandra chuckled, reclining on the bed, ready to enjoy the show. “Mr. Flamey.”

Sam pulled back and pushed forward again. She moved her hand over the chef’s windpipe and threatened to choke. “What the fuck did I tell you about talking to her?” she demanded.

Tiffany winced again and returned her undivided attention to Sam. Her breath caught. “I’m sorry,” she breathed.

Fueled by pain and rage Sam continued. She took short strokes at first then pushed farther and father in. Even in this state a part of her mind was waiting for the safe word, another part of her fully aware that Tiffany’s arousal was fighting to catch up to hers.

“Fuck me.” Tiffany breathed quieter still.

Sam’s face leaned in, her soft lips brushing the full mouth beneath her. “I will do what I want, exactly how I want.”

Their eyes locked for a moment and then Tiffany looked away. “Yes,” she gasped.

Shoving the chef’s face to the side, and getting better leverage on the bed with her now free arm, Sam leaned in and started to lick, kiss and bite her lover’s neck. She could feel the pulse quickening beneath her tongue, the heartbeats coming harder and more quickly with every push. Her rage started to dissipate as she realized that there was no resistance to the dildo moving in and out of Tiffany. The blue-eyed woman was turned on and Sam knew it was because of her. She released Tiffany’s hands and felt strong arms envelope her, holding her close and pulling hardened wax from her back.

Endorphins already high, there was more overload pounding on neural pathways as wax was pulled free from sensitive skin. When the wax was gone, she felt short nails drag across slightly burned skin, enraging her once more. Furious she pumped harder, determined to make Tiffany feel as overwhelmed as she did.

Clearly that was what Tiffany hoped. She began to gasp loudly, a keening wail starting at her entrance moving its way up the chef’s entire body. She screamed as she came, clutching Samantha to her in a vice-like grip. Sam stopped her movements and collapsed onto Tiffany’s chest. Before she could collect herself the phone in the room rang and Sam could hear Cassandra talking on the phone in Japanese.

“That’s enough you two,” She said, amused. “Management thinks someone just died up here. I had to tell them I dropped my suitcase on my foot. If you can’t be quieter, you’ll have to go fuck in the woods.” With her head buzzing with thoughts too jumbled to make sense, Sam settled down on top of Tiffany and drifted to sleep.

Sleeping was one arrangement that Sam was surprised she’d taken to so readily. From time to time she enjoyed spending the night in her own bed, in her own apartment alone, but for the most part, she enjoyed the warmth and security provided by sleeping in between two of her favorite people. Tiffany had a king-sized bed so the

question of space was never an issue. There was room for the three of them to stretch out as much as they'd liked. Interestingly enough they slept the same for the most part in that king as they did in her antique full bed at home. She was fortunate that her body temperature ran colder than that of her companions and she rarely felt overheated. Cass was the most active sleeper, on occasion waking Sam up in the middle of the night by kissing her on her shoulders or the back of her neck. With arms and legs curling around her, she found it interesting that Tiffany and Cass never touched each other. That realization had hit home on this trip. Unless Tiffany was using Cass as an instrument to bring the food critic pleasure, the two of them never touched.

The sounds of Fleetwood Mac faded and a Garbage video started. Shaking herself from her reverie Sam brought herself back to the Hard Rock Café and looked back at Cassandra over milk shakes and French fries. She looked around at the comforting surroundings and decided she was going to push this new experience as far as she dared. Something got started and she wasn't in any mood to have it end just yet. "Cass, I need you to take me shopping." She announced. "I have something special in mind."

Four specialty boutiques later, Sam and Cass had finished shopping and returned to the hotel suite laden with shopping bags, accessories and a very exhausted Visa card. Sam had just enough time to put her purchases out of sight in the closet before Tiffany returned from Fuji Studios. Cass demurely requested some time alone to bathe before the three went to dinner that night.

There was something incredibly graceful about the way Tiffany Schrade walked. With confident steps she strode into the room and sat on the couch. For her informal sessions at the studio she'd been favoring jeans and soft sweaters. Today the dark grey low cut sweater brought out the vivid blue of her eyes. Sam realized she'd been mesmerized; staring at the chef for a good minute before realizing that Tiffany was looking at her intently.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Tiffany asked quietly.

"Last night?" Sam asked.

Tiffany smiled. "We could start there."

Sam walked across the room and sat down next to Tiffany on the couch. She ran a nervous hand through her short tousled hair. "I can't explain it. The wax hurt and something went off in my head and I wasn't thinking." Sam glanced down and fiddled with the emerald ring on her index finger. "Was it okay?" Her hands couldn't stop moving when she was nervous.

Tiffany put a strong arm around Samantha's shoulders and pulled her in close.

"It was totally okay. But if you didn't like what was happening, why didn't you use the safe-word."

Sam shrugged. "I didn't want to be safe." She considered her next words carefully. "Were you okay not being in control?"

The chef couldn't help but smirk. "Who says I wasn't in control?" Softening some she added, "I don't know that I could handle that all the time, but it was nice."

"I might do it more." Sam mused.

"You're welcome to try," Tiffany replied.

Cass finished her bath and strode into the room wrapped in a towel. "What are we up to tonight, kids?" she asked surveying a number of different outfits she had neatly hanging in the closet.

"Have you been buying even more clothes?" Tiffany asked, realizing that Cassandra's wardrobe had indeed multiplied.

"Duh."

"We're going to need a shipping container to get all your shit home." Tiffany groused.

"We're going to need a shipping container," Cass replied mimicking Tiffany in a way that was most unflattering.

Sam chuckled inwardly. Only Cassandra could so clearly say, "fuck you" without uttering the words. Considering that the battle was the following afternoon Sam decided that something fun might help Tiffany relax before the challenge the next day. "We've been in Japan for two weeks and haven't seen a single karaoke bar." She said, enthusiastically.

"You've got to be kidding," Both Tiffany and Cass said in unison.

Cass shrugged. "I was hoping to cover you in candle wax and then watch you kill Tiff, but watching her embarrass herself in a room full of Japanese businessmen is almost as good."

Tiffany shook her head emphatically. "I'm not singing Sam." She warned sternly.

"Of course not," the food-critic assured her without skipping a beat.

There was a club walking distance from the hotel that Sam had noticed on her way back from the gardens. It was closed at the time, but open now and full of businessmen on their way home from work as Cass had predicted. The food wasn't half bad and the sake was decent. Deciding on a more casual evening than the black outfits they'd worn previously; both Sam and Tiffany wore jeans and sweaters. Tiffany in the soft gray sweater she'd had on at the studio and Sam choosing something in a soft green cable nit. Sam opted for a smart pair of boots, and Tiffany sneakers. Cassandra wore a casual dress and cashmere sweater. As before, everyone quieted down when they entered the club.

Once again Cassandra took charge, buying a round of sake for the crowd and asking them to continue. Her mastery of the language was evident and a few men began to talk to her excitedly. Clearly everyone wanted to hear the Americans sing.

It took awhile for Sam, Cass and Tiff to relax enough to entertain the idea. In the meantime they listened to a number of songs get butchered. With the arrival of American women, the karaoke shifted to a number of songs they should have known.

Beat It was almost impossible to recognize. Sam sighed inwardly when Edward Van Halen's guitar solo arrived and the singing stopped, if only momentarily. The Eagles didn't fare much better and *Desperado* was attempted by a man nearly too drunk to stand. Sammy Hagar's *Mas Tequila* was bungled to such an extent that it had all three women downing sake to keep from laughing.

"Why is it that the drunker a person gets the louder they feel compelled to sing?" Sam asked in dismay.

"What?" Tiffany asked, loudly. And then chuckled at her own joke. Sam shook her head. Tiffany could be a lot of fun drunk. Granted she was a lot of fun all the time, but drunk she relaxed ever so slightly.

Not all of the performers were tragic. All three women were impressed by a young man's version of *Mack The Knife*. Several men leaned over and asked Cass to dance and she politely declined. Finally three men got up and did a classic Beatle's number, *This Boy (Ringo's Theme)*. From the first note Samantha was enthralled.

That boy took my love away,

He'll regret it someday,

But this boy wants you back again.

Distracted by a gentle tap on her shoulder, Sam looked at Cass for clarification. "Dance with me?" Cass asked quietly, looking pointedly at a small space of open floor in front of them. The song and harmony were just too good to refuse, so Sam relented.

That boy isn't good for you,

Though he may want you too,

This boy wants you back again.

"Aren't they going to find this odd?" Sam asked while gently swaying with Cassandra. "We're the only women in here and we're dancing with each other."

"I wouldn't worry about it," Cass reassured her. "It's not like many of them will remember in the morning. As if on cue, Sam felt another gentle tap on her shoulder. This time an attractive man in his early 30's looked at her hopefully with his hands outstretched. Cass gave her a gentle shove, "Go on, Sam. Live a little." Sam could see another man waiting as Cass turned to him. Without much choice in the matter Sam took the man's warm hands and began to dance.

It was all very universal. Their feet moved in tandem and the man kept a

respectful distance. Sam had to admit that he was a very decent dancer.

Oh, and this boy would be happy,

Just to love you, but oh my,

That boy won't be happy,

Till he's seen you cry

The young man managed to dance with Sam through the bridge when there was another tap on the food critic's shoulder. Her partner took one look up at the vivid blue eyes peering down at him and decided that retreat was the better part of valor. Tiffany took hold of Samantha with just a touch of possessiveness.

"Jealous, Ms. Schrade?" Sam asked teasingly.

Tiffany shrugged, a small smile cracking her lips. "Maybe a little." She spun Sam as the last verse started. "Are you complaining?"

It was Sam's turn to smile. "Not at all."

This boy wouldn't mind the pain,

Would always feel the same,

If this boy gets you back again.

This boy. This boy. This boy.

The song finished and Cass bowed to her partner. Sam found her previous partner in the crowd and did likewise. She then gave Tiffany a quick hug.

"Thank you," she said.

A short man came up to Cass and started talking animatedly. Both Tiffany and Samantha looked over to see what the problem was.

Cass chuckled, a low sexy chuckle that tended to make Sam's pulse race. She conversed back and forth with him for a moment, but the man seemed adamant, in a charming sort of way. There was something unassuming about him, but insistent at the same time.

"It seems that Shincheiro feels that since he and his two friends entertained us with a song, the least we can do is sing one for them." Cass explained, shooting an amused glance to Tiffany.

"And you told him 'no'," Tiff replied.

"Actually, not as such," Cass continued. "In fact I totally see the man's point

and I think we should sing something.” She winked at Sam. “Come on Tiff, you’ve got a good voice, I hear you all the time in the shower when you think I’m not home.”

Tiffany’s eyes flared but the next thing she knew all three women were on the stage looking over the list of songs they had to choose from. “Can it at least be in English?” Tiffany asked.

Without consulting her companions Sam saw the perfect song and made her selection. She knew they both knew it, and she hoped that it would give the other patrons of the club something to join in on. In moments the music started.

Hate New York City

It's cold and it's damp

And all the people dressed like monkeys

Let's leave Chicago to the Eskimos

That town's a little too rugged

For you and me, you bad girl

Neither Cass nor Tiffany joined in but that didn’t deter Samantha. She sang the slow opening to the song as she’d done a hundred times in the car zipping over Mullholland Boulevard in her convertible BMW. It might have been the sake but Tiffany laughed and joined in on the verse, her deep voice providing a rich counterpart to Samantha’s. With a grin Cass joined in as well to the cheers of the karaoke bar patrons.

Rollin' down the Imperial Highway

With a big nasty redhead at my side

Santa Ana winds blowin' hot from the north

And we was born to ride

Roll down the window, put down the top

Crank up the Beach Boys, baby

Don't let the music stop

We're gonna ride it till we just can't ride it no more

From the South Bay to the Valley

From the West Side to the East Side

Everybody's very happy

'Cause the sun is shining all the time

Looks like another perfect day

I love L.A. (We love it)

I love L.A. (We love it)

As she'd hoped when the song came to the crowd joining in with 'we love it' the drunken patrons were more than happy to oblige. There was a thunderous thrum of foot stomping and the words with varying degrees of accents. Cassandra had a hard time not busting up with laughter.

Look at that mountain

Look at those trees

Look at that bum over there, man

He's down on his knees

Look at these women

There ain't nothin' like em nowhere

Century Boulevard (We love it)

Victory Boulevard (We love it)

Santa Monica Boulevard (We love it)

Sixth Street (We love it, we love it)

We love L.A.

I love L.A. (We love it)

I love L.A. (We love it)

I love L.A. (We love it)

Like a great concert where you can feel the vibrations of the bass guitar pushing against your sternum, Sam could feel the vibrations of the cheers and clapping as a tactile sensation, not just an auditory one. In some ways it reminded her of the thrum of the fire against her skin. As the three left the club she could feel the happiness radiating from her companions and for a brief moment in time Tiffany and Cassandra seemed to be at peace with one another. To Samantha it was a perfect evening and she hoped it would put her lover in the perfect frame of mind for her competition in the morning. With a smile on her face as they walked to the hotel, Sam considered that there were worse religions than music.

The next morning Samantha was escorted to her seat in the Royal Box in the studio at Fuji Television where Iron Chef was filmed. She'd been on the set of cooking shows before but was still impressed by the size and grandeur of the studio. The two cooking islands already had pots of water boiling, ready for whatever the theme ingredient may be. Sam could see hundreds of bowls, baskets and assorted cooking dishes. On the pantry side where the food was kept there were dozens of different meats, fish and poultry as well as fruits and vegetables of every description. Western vegetables as well as Japanese were well represented and there was another huge assortment of cheeses, milk and other dairy products. Sam found it impossible to think of an ingredient that she didn't already see available. An entire table was filled with various bottles of wines and sake and the spice table simply made her drool with envy.

"A thousand Yen for your thoughts," a low voice said and Sam was drawn out of her reverie. Cass sat next to her in the Royal Box.

"How is Tiffany?" Sam asked.

Cass grinned. “Not as nervous as I’d like. I was hoping she’d fall flat on her arrogant face, but she’s pretty collected, relaxing in the green room. Not even hung over, the bitch. She’s still got some bruises you left on her neck the other night so I covered them with makeup. I suggested she put on some lip-gloss and she emphatically replied that she doesn’t do *gloss*,” she added with a wink.

Cassandra was dressed smartly in a sexy black business suit. She would be serving as Tiffany’s translator for the battle. Sam had her doubts as to how effective that would be. The black power suit and spiky heels contrasted so strikingly against her creamy skin and tousled blond hair. She wore blood crimson on her lips and nails and the combination of her perfume and gel she wore in her hair was intoxicating. The food critic found herself getting distracted just talking to her. She couldn’t imagine how the sous chefs could keep their eyes off of her and actually listen to Tiffany’s instructions with her low sexy voice. Sam felt a great deal of sympathy for anyone forced to concentrate after just meeting Cassandra Wilson.

“She’s got a game plan worked out for a variety of courses. If it’s beef she’ll go one way, poultry another. Octopus is the only ingredient she’s really dreading. You know she hates to kill anything smarter than she is.” Sam rolled her eyes at Cass’ dig but had to chuckle in spite of herself. The truce from the previous night didn’t last until morning. Personally she was hoping that what ever the ingredient was, it would arrive to the ingredient stand dispatched. She wasn’t looking forward to watching any seafood meet it’s end.

The panelists for the battle were ushered to their places. Sam had seen the show enough times to recognize the announcer Kenji Fukui, the commentator Dr. Yukio Hattori, the actress Keiko Sieto and a baseball coach Kazuyoshi Nagashima who everyone called “Jr.” Shinichiro Ota the floor reporter took his place as well. Sam couldn’t help but wonder if she may have encountered one of his relatives in the limo with Cass.

The director came on set and motioned for Cass. “I’m off to check on the Ironic Chef,” Cass said, kissing her on the cheek. “I’ll see you soon sweetie,” she purred. “You have a big night planned.” Sam smiled inwardly; Cass didn’t know the half of it.

A translator named Yoko Ito introduced herself and took the seat next to the food critic. She explained that she would be keeping her abreast of what was going on during the battle and tasting. While Sam would have preferred Cass, she could see why Tiffany needed her. They’d lived together long enough that Cass had picked up a great deal of cooking expertise and could keep an eye on the sous chefs to make sure they were doing things the way Tiffany wanted them. Sam’s translator was a young attractive woman with beautiful straight black hair. Sam couldn’t guess at her age, her quiet shyness probably making her seem younger than she was.

The universal motions of a director asking for ‘quiet on the set’ were obvious to Samantha. The assistant chefs took their places and the actor playing Chairman

Kaga took his place at the far end of the set. The backstage lights in the studio dimmed as the spotlights found their mark and the soundman was given his cue. It was show time.

“Today we have a woman from the United States to show us the flavor of California, her home,” Chairman Kaga said, dramatically.

Sam found it strange to her the masculine Japanese voice at one side of the studio and a few seconds behind, the soft feminine translation. The Chairman continued.

“A favorite chef of many movie stars, let’s bring her out. From Le Bistro in Los Angeles California, Chef Tiffany Schrade!”

Two cameramen preceded Tiffany and Cass into the studio. Sam could feel the breath tighten in her throat. Tiffany looked stunning. This was a Tiffany Schrade Samantha Steele seldom saw. Even when cooking at Le Bistro there was often a casualness to her that was completely missing here. She was dressed in her chef’s whites from Le Bistro. Her black hair pulled back into a ponytail and she was wearing an apron over her black leather pants. Tiffany knew she was irresistible in leather and had chosen this opportunity to flaunt that very fact.

As she entered Kenji Fukui began his commentary. Yoko translated, never missing a beat.

“Entering kitchen stadium with her translator comes the seasoned pro from Southern California. She studied in Paris and then returned home to forge her own unique style of California cuisine. She’s here to put Le Bistro on the map!”

Tiffany came to a stop next to the Chairman. With Cass dressed in black standing just to the side and a little behind Tiffany, the chef seemed to glow in white. She shook Chairman Kaga’s hand and bowed slightly. Cass had coached her well.

“Miss. Schrade, you are a long way from home, how are you feeling today?”

“I feel like a million bucks,” Tiffany replied smoothly, flashing a grin of sparkling white teeth. “You have a beautiful kitchen stadium, I am honored to cook here. I will do my best.” She gave another little bow.

Cass translated as the chairman kept his eyes on Tiffany.

Yoko nodded approvingly. “Your friend is very polite,” she said.

Chairman Kaga spoke again, “We are very happy to have you. Le Bistro has a good reputation, may you represent it well. Let us meet the Iron Chefs who will answer your challenge. I summon Iron Chefs!”

Three podiums rose from the far end of the studio and Mercers Morimoto, Chen and Sakai rose into view. “So lets hear who it will be?” the Chairman asked.

Tiffany spared the briefest of glances to her translator and spoke in a loud clear voice. “Mr. Sakai if you please!”

The director yelled “cut” and the action halted.

“You’re kidding me!” Cass blurted at Tiffany, shocked.

Tiffany smiled and cast another glance to the far end of the studio where the

Iron Chefs were stepping down from their podiums. “I knew you’d butt in as soon as I named one.” She said. “Morimoto looks exhausted. What did you do to that poor man?”

Sam followed Tiffany’s gaze and saw that indeed, the Iron Chef: Japanese had dark circles under his eyes and looked a little worse for the wear.

“I was trying to help you, you ungrateful hag.” Cass sputtered. Clearly relieved, the unselected Iron Chefs took their places in the royal box. It took a few moments for Chef Saki to take his place at the end of the studio across from Tiffany.

Cameramen repositioned themselves and when everyone was in their places the director called for action and the Chairman continued.

“We have a visitor from the West who specializes in French California Cuisine. I tried to think of an ingredient that may be a challenge for her. How would she fare with Kobe Beef or Umeboshi? But I can be a selfish man. She is known for cooking a special dessert in her restaurant that people like to watch. I decided I would like to try that. But that is not all. There is something else, and I would like to have savory dishes in addition to desserts. Unveil the ingredients.”

In a plume of dry-ice smoke, a platform rose from the dais supporting a huge vat of a dark brown liquid and a variety of bananas. Then her translator announced, “The theme ingredients are chocolate and bananas.” Tiffany nodded.

Sam was surprised at the choice. She didn’t really know what to expect, but the show was very famous for large quantities of very expensive ingredients. She’d seen battles with truffles, foie gras, caviar or even huge chunks of tuna. Chocolate and bananas seemed a little underwhelming.

“The chefs have 15 minutes to decide what to make.” Yoko explained.

It was indeed strange to watch something being filmed when you were used to seeing the edited version on television. Time seemed to slow down. Cassandra casually leaned against the counter, chatting amiably with the sous chefs. It was obvious that they seemed smitten by her and intimidated by Tiffany. Inwardly the food critic found that ironic. In many ways Cassandra Wilson was the more frightening of the two. But it was part of her job to put people at ease and not part of Tiffany’s.

The director called for places, a grip adjusted some lighting and Chairman Kaga took his place. “Action!”

With a big grin the Chairman gave his customary call to battle. “Allez Cuisine!”

Tiffany bowed to Saki as the two headed up to the stand to get their ingredients. Saki smiled, clearly appreciating her manners. Sam recognized several kinds of bananas; small monkey bananas, ripe and unripe Taiwan bananas, brown bananas and plantains. Quickly Tiffany selected several bunches, the monkey bananas, plantains as well as some of the Taiwanese variety. As she carried them back to her cooking station, she told one of her assistants to get a large bowl full of the melted chocolate.

Yoko translated the introductions that Kenji Fukui made of the two panelists and the commentator Yukio Hattori. The actress Keiko Sieto and baseball coach Kazuyoshi Nagashima had both been on Iron Chef a number of times but had never experienced a battle with an American challenger.

“Will she be slowed down by waiting for translations?” Sieto-San wondered.

“I met her American translator earlier, she speaks fluent Japanese. I don’t think that should be a problem. But I don’t know how well she is versed in cooking for the Japanese palate. That may be more of a handicap,” Dr. Hattori replied.

Sam smiled at the answer. Tiffany had spent nearly two weeks finding out as much about the Japanese palate as she possibly could. If this was the Iron Chef’s assessment he could seriously be underestimating his opponent.

Tiffany stood motionless for the briefest of moments, a black sharpie marker in her hand. She hovered over a blank piece of paper and started to make notes. Sam couldn’t see what she was writing but did see a line down the center of the paper. The chef nodded at Cass but turned to face her two assistants as she spoke.

“Yoshi, I want you to start with the stuff on this side of the page and Asura to do this side.” She pointed to her menu. “If you have any questions, please ask me. I’m going to start with some chocolate frozen bananas. We’re going to do roasted bananas with herbs. I’m making Capt’n Crunch crab cakes with fried plantains and a whitefish in banana leaves. Asura, please start the rice cooker and get some mango, pineapple, red onion and cilantro and start breaking those down, I’ll show you how I want them cut. Yoshi, please start a base for vanilla truffle ice cream. When you finish that I’ll have you make a batter for chocolate molten cake. Any questions?”

Tiffany looked at each man as Cass translated. The two men nodded and quickly started on their assigned tasks.

Yoko started to translate what the commentators were saying and Sam held up a hand to stop her.

“Actually, I think I’ll skip the commentary if you don’t mind.” She said, as politely as she could. “It’s confusing enough to watch and listen, without hearing so many different things.”

Her translator nodded in understanding. “I will let you know if they say anything particularly interesting.” Sam smiled in thanks.

With efficient movements Tiffany was peeling bananas, quickly slicing them and within the first minutes of the battle, half inch slices of banana had been dipped in the chocolate, some rolled in almonds, some left plain and placed on a rack which was put in the freezer. One assistant came back from the ingredient stand with a large amount of thyme and the other assistant started the ice cream custard. Tiffany next turned her attention to sautéing some banana slices in a mixture of butter, sugar, vanilla bean and rum. In moments they were finished and awaiting their placement in a chocolate cake batter. Before the ten-minute mark had passed small chocolate cakes with a slice of sautéed banana inside had been prepared in circle molds, waiting for

their turn in the oven. Without missing a beat Tiffany checked several items off of her menu and headed up to the pantry area. She returned with a large handful of Tahitian vanilla beans.

Already delicious scents were wafting up from the cooking stations below and it was making Samantha hungry.

“Tiff, this guy wants a word with you,” Cass interrupted as Tiffany was making a slice into the skin of several monkey bananas. “He wants to know what you think of bananas.”

Tiffany shrugged. “I enjoy eating them, they’re fun to cook with, I’ve no complaints.”

Cassandra smirked, “There are so many things I’d like to say...”

“If you’d just translate, I’d be grateful,” Tiffany warned.

After a brief exchange with the floor reporter, Shinichiro Ota, Cass asked another question. “Are you worried about making a savory dish with dessert ingredients?”

Another shrug “Not really,” she said with a sly grin.

“Your friend is very cunning,” Yoko commented to Sam. “She is not letting Saki-San know what she will be making.”

Sam nodded, “Or she hasn’t totally figured it out herself,” she said quietly.

Cass translated one final question. “He wants to know what your concept for today is?”

Tiffany paused for a moment in thought. “Oh Christ!” Cass explained and said something to Ota-San. The man nodded and moved to the Iron Chef’s side of the kitchen.

“What the hell did you tell him?” Tiffany asked, annoyed but trying to stay focused inserting a pat of butter and vanilla bean into the sliced monkey banana.

“I told him that your concept was to highlight the different moods a banana can take. That you’ll use different textures and flavors to demonstrate all that it can become,” Cass offered with a winning smile.

The chef shrugged. “That’s surprisingly articulate for you, thanks Cass. What else did you say.”

Cass shrugged. “I told him that you couldn’t cook and talk at the same time so he’d have to come back later.”

“Bitch,” Tiffany murmured and focused on her bananas once more.

The bananas with the vanilla beans were then placed on a grilling pan. Tiffany watched them as she prepared her next dish. When she’d turned them once she added the large quantity of thyme and covered the pan with a wok lid. The food critic in Sam told her that would be Tiffany’s opening salvo. It would be something in between sweet and savory that would provide a nice introduction to the sweetness and simplicity of the banana. Smoking fruits with herbs was popular in France and beginning to get traction in the States. Sam wondered how the bananas infused with

the flowery scent of thyme would be received.

Tiffany headed back to the pantry area and Sam watched as she examined a selection of fish. She walked back and forth, and finally selecting a couple of monkfish, headed back to her station. Her kitchen knives moved like silver glints of steel as she quickly cut into the fish producing nice filets of rich white meat. This more than anything else spoke to her skills and experience as a chef. Every cut was confident and no movement was wasted. As she watched Sam's mind started to drift. Something about the way Tiffany wielded steel moved her. It was a raw display of power that was undeniably sexy. She started to think about the evening she had planned and wondered if she knew what she was getting herself into.

"Hattori-San just commented that Ms. Schrade could juggle knives!" Yoko asked excitedly.

Sam looked at her in surprise. While she'd known Tiffany and Cass for about six months, she'd never seen the chef do that. "I've never seen it," she replied. "But I wouldn't put it past her."

Cass must have picked up the comment from the commentators. "Tiff they're asking about the juggling."

The chef smiled and shook her head. "Tell them it'd be rude to do while I'm cooking. I'm not Bobby Flay, I've more respect for the kitchen than that."

Cass translated and an appreciative chuckle went through the audience. As Sam watched it was easy to be mesmerized by the bright silver flashes.

Her translator gasped and drew Sam from her reverie. "Schrade-San is using cereal!" Yoko said, surprised.

Sure enough, Tiffany helped herself to a box of Cap'n Crunch cereal from the pantry. In fact there were a number of breakfast cereals she'd brought with her from the States. Immediately Mr. Ota was at her side frantically asking Cass what she was doing.

Without waiting for the translation the chef spoke. "Tell him I'm making Cap'n Crunch Crab Cakes with pineapple, mango, banana relish and fried plantains. I can't chill them as long as I'd like so we'll put 'em in the blast chiller right before frying and hope for the best."

"He thinks you're nuts," Cass replied when she'd finished translating, taking a sip of white wine she'd poured for herself.

"Did Ota-San tell you that?" Tiffany asked, mixing some crab meat into panko breadcrumbs and crushed breakfast cereal.

The blond shook her head. "He's being polite, I think he said 'daring', but he means 'crazy'."

Tiffany grinned to herself. "This from a show that has brought you 'cod roe ice cream'."

Sam looked over at her translator and smiled. "I've had those crab cakes," she said. "They're fantastic."

The more intense the cooking became the less Sam could hear what was being said on the floor. Tiffany was incredibly focused, as was Cass for that matter. The hooker managed to stay out of the way of moving pots and pans and still make Tiffany's requests and the sous chef's comments well known. Occasionally Cass made some sort of comment about Tiffany's cooking, but it was clear the chef was ignoring her housemate's suggestions.

"Your friends Japanese is very good," Yoko commented to Sam with a nod to Cassandra. "Her Japanese is much better than my English I'm afraid."

"I think your English is very good," Sam reassured the shy woman.

Midway through the battle Yoko touched Sam's shoulder and indicated an approaching cameraman. "Ota-San is coming over to interview you."

Sam nodded. She'd been warned ahead of time. Sinchero Ota sat down in the empty seat next to her. He directed his questions at her and Yoko translated. It felt like a surreal kind of stereo. She was sure to keep her eyes focused on the reporter when she answered.

"I understand you are a food critic from California?" He asked.

Sam nodded. "Yes, and I am a friend of Schrade-Sans."

"How do you think she is doing so far?"

Sam considered the question. "I think she is faring very well in a kitchen she is not accustomed to. She is staying focused and is making some incredible dishes I'm sure."

"Have you seen her juggle knives?"

Sam laughed. "No, that would be a first for me too if she does that later."

Ota-San smiled. "Would you like to wish her any encouragement?" He held the mic in front of her.

Sam felt silly doing it but knew it was a custom. When she looked down at the floor, she could see Tiffany standing still. She'd been listening to the interview and was clearly curious as to what the food critic would say.

"Tiffany," Sam shouted, "let your culinary skills do the talking, do your best and it will be worth your while."

The chef nodded in appreciation with Cassandra laughing behind her. The hooker leaned in and whispered something to Tiffany that made her blush, but she quickly recovered and went back to cooking. Ota bowed in thanks for the interview, and Sam leaned back in her seat.

"Well I'm glad that's over," she muttered.

The rest of the hour was a complete blur as far as Samantha was concerned. So much was going on that it was hard to tell how the various components were going to be assembled into finished dishes. The base for the vanilla ice cream had been finished and before it went into the ice cream maker Tiffany added some finely diced black truffles. Sam figured that would cut the sweetness. She imagined it'd be paired with the molten chocolate cake for a lovely contrast of hot and cold. She also noticed

a vanilla panna cotta take shape and head into the blast chiller. Sam blushed when her stomach growled. She realized now that breakfast would have been a good idea but the morning was consumed by activities that had little to do with food.

The savory dishes were clearly the crab cakes and monkfish filets that were wrapped in banana leaves. That would probably be paired with a cream sauce that was taking shape and rice no doubt.

“Asura, please get those cakes in the oven,” Tiffany said after a quick glance to her watch. “Yoshi, the herb-grilled bananas, please. Lets start plating.”

When Tiffany began to do the plating the order of her courses became clear. Sam was correct with the grilled bananas first. It had a simple sparse look, the banana, a bit of grilled herb with two sauces in a ‘yin-yang’ configuration on a stark white plate. The first was a light caramel sauce with chopped roasted almonds and pistachios. The second was a chocolate and red wine reduction. Next came her two savory dishes, the crab cakes with a warm relish of pineapple, mango and banana, served with fried plantains and a banana sauce. Sam could feel her mouth start to water. Tiffany had a way of double frying plantains that made them heavenly. Again her choice of plate was simple and spare. She chose a white square dish, which contrasted with the round crab cakes. The monkfish wrapped in banana leaves was plated next. The tied banana leaf packet rested on a heated stone and the fragrance of ginger, cilantro, chili, and coconut milk wafted up to the food critic. She couldn’t smell the banana infused white sauce but it looked gorgeous. The first dessert was clearly the molten chocolate cake with banana. This was paired with a canal of vanilla truffle ice cream as she’d suspected and two slices of the chocolate coated frozen bananas; one with the nuts and one without.

From the ingredients she’d prepared on a tray, it was obvious that she was going to do Bananas Foster for her final dessert and serve that on the vanilla panna cotta instead of ice cream. Sam decided that the choice had an element of calculation. The panna cotta would probably taste lighter than a second ice cream would, and it made more sense to serve the ice cream with the hot cake. It was a bit of a risk, the texture of panna cotta did not appeal to everyone, although she adored the dessert and would choose it over cr me brul e every time.

Artistically the dishes looked gorgeous. While Tiffany was clearly in the zone cooking, she wasn’t so overcome with her performance to overplay her plating designs. She never used gold or silver leaf feeling that decoration for decoration’s sake was a waste of time. She felt the same way about parsley. Each white plate had a slightly different design to it; it beginning simply then becoming more ornate with the savory dishes and then pared down to simplicity for the desserts.

As the final seconds ticked down Yoko translated Faku’s commentary.

“The battle has been fierce,” He began his voice building with excitement like the last seconds of a basketball game. “Tiffany Schrade from California came here to make a point. Her ingredients are unusual and her style is her own. She picked Iron

Chef Saki for a French on French battle and he has a few tricks up his sleeve as well. Bananas and chocolate, two ingredients perfect for a dessert but the Chairman wants savory dishes as well. Both chefs staying calm in the kitchen but it is up to the tasters now. That's it, time's out and the chocolate and banana battle is over!"

Only with the ending buzzer sounding did Sam spare a look for the competitor's dishes. Saki had spent his hour productively. Sam could see some little puffs of cream on a plate, a large banana gratin, fried banana ravioli in a white cream sauce with white truffle shavings. There was also a stuffed baked chocolate banana and banana crème brûlée.

Ota-San and the cameraman approached the American chef. "You've finished your battle, how do you feel?" He asked, pointing the mic at Tiffany.

Tiffany looked around at her plated dishes. "I think they're solid," she replied. "I did my best. This was a lot of fun; I had a really good time. I wouldn't have changed a thing."

"Did you communicate well with your assistants?" He asked earnestly.

Tiffany glanced over at Cass, still sipping her glass of wine. "I had a very good translator and the assistants are total pros, it went great."

"Do you think you beat the Iron Chef?"

Tiffany smiled warmly. "That is for the tasters to decide."

Saki-San provided similar comments saying the hour went fast and that he'd done his best. Then the director called "cut" once again.

Next cameras were repositioned as the tasting table and backdrop were brought in. Sam still had an excellent view although she didn't know how she'd manage watching five people eat feeling as hungry as she was.

As if on cue, Cass joined her in the Royal Box with a sampler plate of the dishes that Tiffany had prepared. She'd also included some chocolate dipped strawberries that she noticed were not on any of her plates to be submitted for judging.

"Can't stay but a moment, they're getting ready to taste but Tiff says she can hear your stomach growling from down there," Cass said with a soft chuckle.

"Thanks," Sam replied.

Cass looked at her own glass of wine, "I'd have brought you one but..."

Sam shook her head. "I know, no drinking until tonight is over. I don't want my blood too thin and bleed all over the place."

She watched as Cass descended the stairs and moved to stand at the end of the tasting table with Tiffany.

As her first dish was served Tiffany described what it was. "This is a grilled monkey banana that has been smoked with thyme."

Cass translated and the tasters began to eat. Keiko Sito was the first to speak. “The subtle sourness is quite refreshing. The two sauces provide a very different tasting experience,” she said. “Very nice.”

Asako Kishi, the well-known Japanese food critic was a little more direct, “This works very well, a perfect balance between sweetness and savory. Although I’m not as fond of the flowery taste of the herbs”

Sam tried a slice from her plate and disagreed only slightly with the Japanese food critic. It was warm but the texture still firm. Sweet, but with a little bit of sour finish that served to cleanse the palate. The thyme didn’t bother her one bit. She found it refreshing.

Tiffany gave a slight bow in thanks and signaled for her next dish. The crab cakes were served and the tasting panel looked at them with a bit of trepidation.

“You included American breakfast cereal in this?” Chairman Kaga asked.

“Yes. It gives an additional kick to the panco breadcrumbs.”

This time it was the photographer that was the first to speak up. “I will be honest, I was expecting to not like this dish. I am not a fan of sweet breakfast cereals. But this is very good. I am surprised that I am enjoying this quite a bit.” Tenme Kano said in his very measured voice.

The actress couldn’t help but chuckle, “She reminds me of Morimoto-San,” she said. “This is unusual and daring, but not overdone. The theme ingredient is still the star. It is hard for fruit to be center stage, but she’s worked it in such a way that you can still taste banana as the central ingredient.”

Kishi-San also nodded in agreement “I must add that the plantains are fried to perfection. Very nice. You have much skill for one so young.”

“Thank you Kishi-San,” the chef replied with a bow.

Sam had finished her crab cake much more quickly than the others. While Tiffany and Cass had teased her more than once about being able to put away more food than her diminutive size would suggest, Sam couldn’t help herself. There was something so beautiful about the experience of tasting amazing food. It was one of her favorite indulgences. The crab cakes tasted as crispy and delicious as ever, with the crabmeat staying moist and tender.

Chairman Kaga took a sip of the wine paired with the dish and nodded at Kazuyoshi Nagashima. “What do you think Jr.?” he asked.

The baseball coach smiled. “I think this is very good. Wonderful texture and the wines that Schrade-San has paired with the dishes are fantastic.”

Tiffany grinned proudly. “They’re all from California.”

Her next dish was brought out. The small packages of wrapped banana leaves served on hot stones with rice and the white sauce. “I wanted to use the different elements of banana,” Tiffany explained. “The rice is a mixture of Japanese and California rice. An ‘east meets west’ kind of thing.”

“The smell is so refreshing,” Asako Kishi commented as she untied the leaves

and mixed the fish with the fruit relish and rice. “This is a very sophisticated dish,” she explained. “Very refined, something for adults.”

“I don’t know,” Saito-San countered. “The sweetness of the banana, mango, red pepper and pineapple,” would probably be very appealing to young people.” She smiled warmly. “A very good way to introduce them to fish, or to eating light healthy meals. And this was so pretty to look at, we eat with our eyes before our mouths, this tastes as beautiful as it looks.”

The photographer nodded in agreement. “A nice contrast of tastes and textures. Very controlled I think,” he said.

“I think I would have preferred the fish served with the rice and tea,” Nagashima-San offered. “Don’t get me wrong, this is good, but with tea, it would be even better.”

“That is a very good idea,” Tiffany replied graciously. “I will try that.”

Sam was glad that Tiffany hadn’t taken the time to cut an extra filet of monkfish for her although after hearing the baseball coach she knew she’d have to try the dish and see if she agreed with him. She had to content herself with the warm relish, rice and coconut sauce that had her taste buds sighing with contentment. The white sauce and rice alone would be delicious rice porridge, which might have been a better strategy for the tasting panel.

“I think we are ready for the desserts,” Kaga announced.

The first dessert was brought out; the chocolate cakes with black truffle ice cream. After the first bite the baseball coach sighed contentedly. “The flavor of this dish is amazing. This is heaven.” He said.

“I have to agree with Jr.,” the Tenme Kano added. “This is a wonderful contrast between warm and cold. The cake is very hot, but with a small spoonful of the ice cream it’s perfect. They mix in your mouth as the cake melts and it’s very nice.”

Sam was very happy to see the food critic, Kishi-San grinning as well. “The balance of rum with the banana in the chocolate is also nicely controlled. I can tell you used a very good quality of rum, your care with ingredients shows in this dish.”

“Thank you,” Tiffany said with a smile, bowing respectfully. “Kitchen Stadium has the best ingredients and it was fun to be indulgent.”

Sam enjoyed the extra chocolate cake and some ice cream and once again had to concur with the tasters. She was happy to note that the rich chocolate did not overwhelm the banana and that the back finish of the dish was indeed banana. The ice cream was good, the truffles indeed adding an earthy element that left the taster ready for another sweet dish.

For the final dish a small cart was brought out. The same type of cart Tiffany had used countless times at Le Bistro. She was about to light the burner when she was stopped by Chairman Kaga.

“Perhaps you would indulge us now, by showing us your special skill?” The

Chairman asked politely.

“I don’t think you can do that on Japanese TV” Cass murmured with a smirk.

A waiter brought out several knives on a red velvet cushion.

“You’d better step back,” Tiffany warned Cass as she picked up three of the knives. “I could *accidentally* impale you.”

“Oh spare me,” Cass countered with a dramatic roll of her eyes. Still she did as instructed.

With the three knives in hand Tiffany set the bananas in a neat row, then she began to juggle. Sam was amazed. At first she just juggled the three knives, the silver edges glinting brightly in the staged lighting. Then she grabbed a banana off of the table and tossed it into the mix. Sam wasn’t sure how she did it but a tossed knife cut the banana cleanly in half. Keeping the blades moving she put down each banana half in turn and then picked up the next. She proceeded to slice all of the bananas that way and then set down each knife in turn.

All four panelists, the chairman, the audience and even the cameramen burst into appreciative applause.

“How long have you had that skill?” the Chairman asked awed.

Tiffany shrugged, “I’ve always been pretty good with blades,” she offered, a tad embarrassed.

Sam felt herself swallow, hard.

Getting back to business, the chef lit the burner on the small cart and began to mix the brown sugar, vanilla bean, cinnamon, and butter. She added the bananas to the mix and in a few moments added the rum and banana liquor. The pan burst into flames and she sautéed for a few moments more. Then she plated each slice on a plate with the chilled panna cotta.

“This custard is so good,” Sito-San said. “Are there eggs in this? Or egg-whites?”

“There are no eggs, Sito-San,” Tiffany gently corrected. “Panna Cotta is literally ‘cooked cream’ in Italian. It’s milk and cream with gelatin; custard without eggs.”

The actress nodded. “It tastes lighter than custard, very good. This would be lovely on a summer evening. Very romantic. A perfect dessert for lovers.”

Tiffany nodded in agreement with a quick glance to the Royal Box. “Many couples at the restaurant ask for it,” she said.

“Fresh and stimulating I’d say.” Kishi-San added. “The sauce and flavor is quite sexy.”

As Kano-San finished his dish he smiled broadly. “Tactful and perfected. This was not a difficult dish to make; yet in it’s simplicity the skills of this chef are really shining through. The bananas were cooked to perfection. Understated and brilliant I think. This will be a tough match for Saki-San indeed.”

With a final respectful bow from Tiffany and Cass, the two left the stage and stood off to the side as Saki’s dishes were brought out.

Cassandra was actively translating everything to Tiffany as Yoko did for Sam but the food critic was only half listening. The Iron Chef's first dish was a Thai style barbecued banana. Sam was unimpressed by the dark brown exterior of the banana skins, but the tasters seemed to be impressed with the flavor nonetheless.

"Very nice," Kishi-San said, smiling broadly. "This has a nice smoky flavor. Not too flowery, but very soothing.

Sito-San nodded in agreement, "there is something very familiar and soothing to the Japanese palate with this dish. I realize it's a Thai recipe, but I still get a sense of 'home cooking' out in the country from tasting it." It was not what the American food critic wanted to hear.

Next up was Sakai's fried ravioli. It was heart shaped and he had added some of the chocolate to the pasta dough. While the flavor seemed to impress the panel the appearance did not, especially with Kishi-San. Sam was relieved.

"Saki-San," She began. "You're normally so appealing with your presentations, but this brown color, well it just does not look appealing."

Saki bowed in acknowledgment, albeit stiffly.

The photographer nodded in agreement. "I appreciate that you were trying to utilize chocolate in this dish. The flavor matches well with the sharp cheese. I am perhaps not as put off by the color, but perhaps a sauce that didn't contrast so strikingly would have been better. This cream sauce is wonderful, but does not set off the color of the ravioli very well.

His next course was the banana gratin. It had some semi-sweet chocolate chips. This time the panel seemed split between enthusiasm for the dish and ambivalence. Kano-San and Kishi-San found it too bitter, while "Jr." and Saito-San found it just right.

Like Tiffany the French Iron Chef prepared two desserts. The first was a baked chocolate banana with little puffs of chocolate and vanilla-banana cream. Everyone was incredibly impressed with the flavor and plating of the dish.

"Simply marvelous." Was all Asako Kishi could find to say.

"This is making me so happy." Sito-San added.

His final dish was a banana crème brulee, torched on top to perfection.

There was discussion on the contrasts of the two "custards" one with egg yolks and the American chef's without.

"This custard tastes a bit heavier than the Challenger's" the actress commented.

"But the flavor of the egg is so soothing." The food critic countered.

"The crispy surface is very nice." The baseball coach added.

The photographer shook his head. "I don't know. I think it will all come down to personal preference. The custard and the panna cotta were both masterpieces."

Sam wasn't sure where the consensus lay. She saw Tiffany shrug at a comment Cass whispered in her ear, and figured they felt the same.

The director yelled, "cut" once again as the judges finished filling out their

ballot folders. They each handed them to an assistant who rushed off stage.

For Sam it seemed like an eternity but was maybe fifteen minutes. The lighting was repositioned once again, the table set broken down and cameras arranged at the top dais of the cooking stadium. Dramatic lighting was set on each of the chefs standing at their new marks behind their cooking stations where they could see the judges walk in.

When the director called for action once more, Chairman Kaga walked in with all four judges following behind. He looked at the camera and spoke.

“Today we had a challenger from the United States; an unusual woman with unusual skill. She can juggle knives, but Kitchen Stadium is not a circus. Here victories are awarded on the perfected dishes alone. She battled our Iron Chef French who is a man of great skill. I suppose it should be no surprise then that our judges were split two to two and we will decide on total points. Now the verdict.”

Tiffany blinked in surprise as the dramatic music started and the announcer’s preamble to the verdict began.

“Today a heads-up French cuisine battle by two chefs at the top of their game.” Fakui began, his pauses hitting the timing of the music perfectly. “Challenger Tiffany Schrade from Le Bistro in Los Angeles California facing our Iron Chef Herouki Saki head on. With two theme ingredients instead of one, the chefs had more flavors to incorporate, more chances for a misstep. Judges are tied, total points to decide. Who takes it, who’s cuisine reigns supreme?”

Chairman Kaga paused dramatically, looking directly at the camera when he turned ever so slightly to Tiffany. “The Challenger Tiffany Schrade!”

Sam beamed with pride and cheered as loudly as anyone in the Royal Box. She noticed that Tiffany looked surprised and bowed deeply to chef Saki when he immediately walked over to shake her hand vigorously.

Fakui-San announced the score as Cass shook her head in disbelief. “Kano-San voted 20 to 19 the challenger, Sito-San voted 19 to 17 the challenger. Nagashima-San voted 18 to 17 Iron Chef and Kishi-San voted 20-19 Iron Chef. The American Tiffany Schrade wins by one point!”

Sam followed the others out of the royal box and was met by Cass at the foot of the stairs. They’d barely managed to get near Tiffany as she was being ushered to another room for the post battle press conference.

“Congratulations.” Sam said, kissing the chef warmly on the cheek. “I knew you could do it.”

“I believe you said you’d make it worth my while?” Tiffany countered with a smirk.

“Don’t think I don’t plan to.” Sam called after as Tiffany was being led from the sound stage.

“See you at the press-conference?” Tiffany called back as they rounded a corner back stage. Sam pretended that she didn’t hear her.

“We’d better get going sweetie,” Cass said with a nod to the exit of the studio. Sam nodded in agreement. “I know. She’s going to be hurt though, and I would like to see her press conference...”

Cass chuckled, linking her arm in that of the food critic as they walked to the exit. “I think you have to have a heart to be ‘hurt’ and I’m not certain Tiffany Schrade qualifies.”

“You and I both know that’s not true. It’s the stoic ones that fall apart when things don’t go their way.” Sam replied as they made their way into the balmy night towards the waiting limo.

“Trust me,” Cass said as she opened the door. “Once you have her tied up she won’t be thinking about you missing her lame press conference.” With a bashful smile, Sam hoped she was right.

Sam lit the last of the candles and cast a casual glance at her companion on the bed. “It won’t be long sweetie,” she said softly, with a warm smile.

Cassandra didn’t say anything in return, the gag tied around her mouth made intelligible speech impossible. The blond shifted a little, trying to find a more comfortable position. The leather strap that connected the restraints on each of her wrists was threaded through a collar around her neck. It didn’t look comfortable, but to Sam’s estimation, it looked sexy as hell. The long black clingy dress and shiny black stiletto heels didn’t hurt either. The prostitute’s ankles were tied together with vinyl tape.

The door to the hotel room opened and Tiffany entered. Sam could tell from the way the chef walked that she was pissed. Sam knew she would be. She’d wanted to stay for the press conference, to enjoy Tiffany’s victory with her, but she’d made a choice: Get the preparations in order for her private victory celebration or stay for the press conference and return to the hotel together. Sacrifices had to be made and the press conference was it. She was pressed for time as it was, even with Cass’ help getting dressed. She’d had the good fortune of the whole morning to prepare the room and had left specific instructions with the bellboy regarding the chilling of the champagne. Even so, it was all she could do to get herself ready and Cass restrained before they’d gotten the call that Tiffany’s limo was approaching the hotel.

Tiffany Schrade took two steps into the room and froze. Her eyes adjusted to the candle-lit darkness as the door closed silently behind her. As the last bit of artificial light was cut off from the hallway she could see the open door to their bedroom with Samantha sitting regally in a dark leather chair. There was something different about Samantha, something about her posture, her bearing; Tiffany wasn’t sure what it was.

Before her eyes fully adjusted to the dimly lit room her keen sense of smell told

her things her eyes did not. The first was the fragrant scent of flowers. There was a gorgeous spray of colorful blooms on the low table of the suite's main room. She took another step towards Sam and detected another arrangement. A vase of fragrant red roses sat on the floor next to a small table by Sam's chair. The second scent she detected was the unmistakable smell of silicon spray; a substance used to achieve a gleaming sheen on rubber fetish-wear. The pupils of her crystal blue eyes dilated as she looked at Sam. She was just about to tell herself that she was imaging the scent when she saw that Sam was wearing rubber; a great deal of it.

For the briefest of seconds the chef wondered if she'd walked into the wrong room. Sam didn't look like herself at all. Tiffany was about to speak when movement from the bed distracted her. Clearly she was in the right room, but now nothing made sense: Cassandra Wilson was not one to be tied up.

"What the..." Tiffany stammered.

"Have a seat," Sam purred, indicating a chair across from her.

Tiffany walked the rest of the way into the room as her eyes adjusted to the candlelight. Now she could make out the details of Samantha's new persona.

The food critic was dressed more like a dominatrix than any other noun that came to Tiffany's mind. She wore platform boots that laced up her calves. Small points of candlelight reflected off the highly polished surface. Molded black rubber stockings continued up the food critic's legs with a hint of black garter showing below a shiny black short PVC skirt. Above the skirt Sam wore a rubber corset with long rubber gloves. In one hand she casually held a black riding crop. She wore no jewelry save a delicately spiked collar around her neck. Her short blond hair was slicked back. The severe style more than anything making Sam look like someone else entirely. With eyes adjusted to the light, Tiffany could see blood red lipstick and dramatic eye makeup that made her green eyes sparkle even in the limited light available.

When Tiffany Schrade had walked into her hotel suite she'd been annoyed; exhausted after a taxing hour cooking, tired from the press conference and hurt at being abandoned by her friend. With legs less steady than she'd like to admit she took the few steps needed and sat in the chair as requested. No longer tired, no longer hurt and certainly no longer annoyed, she was curious as to what the food critic had planned.

"Like what you see?" Sam asked casually as she gracefully crossed one rubber-clad leg over the other. She absently tapped the tip of a boot with the riding crop.

"I do." Tiffany whispered.

Sam smiled, a genuinely affectionate warm smile. "You've got a decision to make my dear. Pick up the napkin." The food critic nodded to the table in-between the two chairs with the vase of roses sitting next to it. An ice bucket with a bottle of champagne sat on the table next to a silver tray covered by a white linen napkin.

Tiffany lifted the napkin and her eyes flashed on the glint of metal. There was a scalpel still in its sterile packaging, a bottle of alcohol, several cotton balls, some gauze

and first-aid tape.

“We’re going to play a game Tiffany,” She began in a voice that was commanding and assured. “You’re going to give me something I want, and I’m going to give you something you want.”

“You have my attention,” Tiffany said quietly, blue eyes locking into green.

“I thought I might,” Sam acknowledged. “You see, the thing is this... you get a rush from control. I’ve had a couple of weeks to really try to wrap my head around that. Obviously I’ve known you for six months, I’ve seen you master a kitchen, I’ve seen you render the taste buds of countless people helpless to do anything but submit to your will. Hell, I’ve been helpless to do anything but submit to your will. You’ve made me come so hard I was certain I’d go mad from the sheer bliss of it. But tonight is different. I’m going to submit to your will, I’m going to let you cut me, I’m going to see what that rush feels like. But I’m also going to feel the control. I’m going to bend you to my will. You are going to surrender to me and in return I’m going to give you everything you want.”

“The fact that I’m not a bottom could be inconvenient,” Tiffany replied carefully.

Samantha chuckled softly. She had planned for this. Like a masterfully played chess match, she’d looked at things from Tiffany’s perspective and had devised a way to up the ante until her lover couldn’t do anything but put all of her chips into the pot.

She stood and tapping the crop absently against her thigh and moved to stand behind Tiffany’s chair. After a moment she carefully put her rubber clad hands on the chef’s shoulders. Even through the material Tiffany could feel the warmth of Samantha’s skin. There was also a hint of powder mixed with all of the other scents that only served to arouse.

“I’m not asking you to be a bottom Tiffany. Not in the way that you’re thinking of at any rate. I don’t want you to be anything but unadulterated you. Here’s the catch; you’re going to put on a show for me Tiffany Schrade.” Sam leaned down and whispered in her ear. “You’re going to get me so fucking turned on that I won’t care that getting my skin sliced open will hurt. There will be so many endorphins rushing through my blood that I’ll scarcely feel what that blade will be doing to me. You are going to show me just how much you want me, how much you want that control. Just exactly how much you want all of it.”

Tiffany smiled. “Sounds good, so far,” She admitted. Then added, “So what’s Blondie doing here?”

The chef could feel the gloved hands leave her shoulders and could sense that Sam was turning around. Back to back Tiffany sat and Samantha stood. After a moment, Samantha answered. “Cassandra is you’re canvas,” She said simply. “That is how you’re going to show me.”

“Whattt!” Cass’ agitated muffled voice could clearly be heard from the bed,

although the rest of what she said was unintelligible. Sam thought she caught a few expletives, but they were fortunately as muffled as the rest of her protest.

Tiffany stood up, ready to protest and turned around. The air no more than filled her lungs to speak when she was silenced. She was facing Samantha's back. The food critic was a vision in shiny black from her platform booted feet to the edge of the corset, which came to just below her shoulder blades. Her creamy pale skin contrasted dramatically with the glistening black PVC and was accented by glints from the six needles that were pierced through her skin.

Holy fuck! Tiffany thought. The chef could feel her heart start to beat faster as her arousal ratcheted up another notch. Her body tightened somewhat south of her stomach. She cracked a smile. Samantha was playing this game well. Keeping herself in check she slowed down for a moment and decided to put a few facts in order. She more than realized that this was why Sam and Cass had left Fuji Television immediately after her victory had been announced. Not only had the food critic changed clothes, but she'd allowed Cassandra to pierce her skin with needles and then had tied the other woman up. She also realized that Sam's version to Cassandra of the evenings' activity was clearly different from what Tiffany was being told now. That didn't surprise the chef. No way in hell would Cass have allowed herself to be tied up if she knew it was for Tiffany's amusement. The chef also realized that she was looking at the main component to the change in Sam's demeanor. The self-control required to sit and talk and maintain one's composure with six four inch surgical steel needles pierced in one's skin was not minimal. No wonder her posture had been perfect, the slightest movement would pull painfully at pierced skin. Tiffany could scarcely believe that Sam had been able to tie Cassandra up with the needles in place. She must have a very high pain threshold and told the hooker one amazing story.

As Samantha breathed her back moved ever so slightly. That movement alone was enough to make the reflected candlelight dance on the shiny steel surface. The needles were carefully placed three on each side, about an inch apart, piercing the skin that covered the trapizous muscle over the shoulder blade. There was a space of about 4 or 5 inches in between the two sets of three where it seemed the food critic was intending to be cut. While Tiffany was used to Samantha looking beautiful, it was indeed a brand new kind of beautiful that she was exhibiting at this very moment.

Feeling in control of herself once more, Tiffany reached out and with gentle fingers lightly touched the exposed skin stretched over the needle. She heard Sam's breathing catch, and her heart pumped faster still. It was a delicious feeling. She could hear the deafening sound of blood pumping in her own ears and felt another clench at her center. "I don't think Cass wants to play," she said, determined to keep her voice casual.

Samantha turned to face Tiffany, sea green eyes looking up into blue. "Then this will indeed be a challenge for you." She said quietly. "You've enjoyed Cass and I going at each other more than once. And I know Cass has watched the two of us

numerous times. Probably even when we thought we were alone. I want to see what that's like. I want to watch."

Cass let her opinion be known, with another string of unintelligible, but undeniably hostile words.

Tiffany glanced at the hooker and smiled, her white teeth contrasting with the red of her lips. "Is there no end to the kink you're picking up on this trip Samantha?" she teased softly, returning her gaze to her lover. "You've been burned, spanked, you attacked me, we scandalized an entire karaoke bar and now you're into voyeurism... What's next? Home-made porn?" She glanced around the room as if looking for video cameras.

Samantha smiled in return. Her end of the deal was nearly sealed, now it was going to be a matter of convincing Cassandra. "I like to think that there is more going on here than voyeurism and porn," Sam countered. She moved to the bed and with one graceful finger traced the length of the hooker's prone body. "I know what Cass's skin feels like," She threaded her rubber clad fingers through Cass' hair and gave a gentle tug. She walked back over to Tiffany and drew the same elegant finger down the length of the chef's face, coming to rest upon her lips. "I know what you taste like and you're both fucking hot. As it happens I enjoy looking at beautiful women, especially when I can vividly relate to exactly what they are experiencing." Looking at Cass once more she ran her hand down the front of her corset, over her breast and let her hand come to rest on the side of her hip. "Show me the down side?"

Sam was sure she'd seen a gleam of hunger in the prostitute's eyes. Samantha ran her tongue over her crimson lips and then the food critic turned dominatrix settled into the leather chair vacated by the chef. She crossed her legs regally. She had an excellent view of the bed.

Tiffany cast a sidelong glance to her restrained housemate. "Can I just smother her and entertain you with necrophilia instead?" The chef asked dryly. That set off a new stream of muffled expletives from the captive.

Sam tapped her boot again with the crop. "I'm interested in sexy," she warned her voice actually showing a hint of danger. "Not *Survivor*." She shrugged and then winced before recovering her composure. "If you don't think you're up to it..."

The chef's head snapped towards her. The challenge had met its mark. Now Sam decided to raise the stakes one final time. "Before you get started you may remove the needles." She said simply.

Tiffany stared at her, clearly trying to make up her mind. By force of will she was blocking out whatever angry words the prostitute was saying. Tiffany knew if she took the needles out, there was no going back, she'd be committed to give everything that was being offered as well as receive it. That included the tricked, tied up, gagged and very angry woman on the bed. She looked at Cass. There was no denying the woman was beautiful. She looked back at Sam as if really seeing her for the first time. The food critic never ceased to amaze the chef. Just when she thought she knew all

about her, something new was revealed.

Sam could not fathom what she saw reflected in the chef's eyes. For a moment she was scared that Tiffany was contemplating saying 'no'. Her cheeks began to color as it dawned on Samantha that she hadn't planned for that possibility. She didn't have a back up plan and she was quite certain that the embarrassment of being rebuffed might in fact kill her.

The chef moved closer to the chair and knelt on one knee. She was looking up at Sam, her blue eyes searching her lover's face. "Are you sure that this is what you really want? I don't have to--"

The food critic smiled, relieved. Tiffany was offering to give her what she wanted, but giving her an out if she changed her mind about the cutting. She was certainly closer to a 'yes' than a 'no'. A rubber encased hand reached out to delicately trace the planes of Tiffany's face. "I do believe I've grown terribly fond of you, Tiffany Schrade," Sam said gently. "But I'm not changing my mind. This is the deal if you want it. All or nothing."

It was Tiffany's turn to smile. "Any ground-rules?" she asked.

"I care about you both," Sam said, seriously, glancing at Cass tied up on the bed. "You know me, you know what I like and what I don't." Sam considered that it might not have been necessary to say, but she said it anyway. She didn't want the guilt she felt at misleading the hooker to compound itself by having the woman humiliated. Few things turned Sam off quicker than humiliation. "One last thing," she added, withdrawing a small card from the cleavage in her corset. She handed the card to Tiffany.

"120?" Tiffany said, reading the card.

Sam nodded. "When you finish with Cass that is the number of minutes you will wait until your head spins with colors you've never seen before."

Tiffany looked at the neat printing on the card one more time. "Then I'd best get started."

Looking down at Samantha's back, Tiffany could see the rosy pink hue of her lover's skin. She marveled again at the smaller woman's self control and composure. Unable to resist, she reached out a hand once again to gently touch the distended skin over the needles. As before, the food critic inhaled sharply.

"Do you like it?" Tiffany asked as she slowly withdrew the first needle.

Samantha considered the question long moments before answering. "It's a rush, a very heady rush," she said as the next needle was removed. Without being asked she'd handed Tiffany the alcohol bottle and a cotton ball. She winced a little as the alcohol was applied. "My head is kind of swimming, like after a few glasses of champagne. I like it, but I don't think I'd like it all the time."

Tiffany nodded. "It's got a way of creating clarity, focus," she said. "Not that you aren't focused anyways." She put three needles on the silver tray and started on the other side. As she touched the next needle she was sure she could feel the current

of Sam's body running through it. The needles were warm, having conducted the heat of the food critic's body. Tiffany felt the air heating up around her. "Any other surprises you've got in store for me tonight?" She asked conversationally.

"You'll just have to wait and see, won't you?" Sam replied.

With a sigh as the last needle was removed, Sam leaned back in the leather chair, settling herself to watch the show. Tiffany deposited the rest of the needles on the silver tray. Then stood and approached the bed. She glanced at the scalpel in its blue packaging and at the small dots of blood on the used cotton ball. How bad did she want this indeed. She turned around and looked at the prostitute. The lust she felt was not reflected in the prone woman's eyes, rather white-hot anger. That would have to change.

From her perspective, Sam had a front row seat. Cassandra's wrists were confined in black leather restraints that had a strip that ran through the metal ring in a collar around her neck. A red ball gag was tied around her mouth, her makeup not overdone adding to a look of vulnerability. Sam knew she was anything but, but the look added to the sexiness of her prone position. She wore a clingy long black dress with the slit up one side and six-inch stiletto heels. Sam reached out with her crop and touched the play button on the CD player. Soft music filled the room, no vocals, just instruments to match the candlelight.

Tiffany approached the bed carefully. She was dressed as she had been at the studio. Leather pants over black boots and her chef's whites with the Le Bistro logo delicately embroidered on the front. She opened the buttons on her shirt to reveal the soft t-shirt Sam had bought her at the Hard Rock Café.

Cassandra was staring at the chef intently, Tiffany recognized the look and approached the bed carefully even though there was no way the prostitute could kick her. She sat on the edge of the bed and ran a slow languid hand up the prostitute's prone body. Cass said something unintelligible, but the angry tone was unmistakable.

The blond woman jerked at the restraints furiously as Tiffany straddled Cass, settling herself over the prone woman's hips. At this point there wasn't anything Cass could do. "Shhh" Tiffany soothed as she ran gentle hands over the prone woman's body; over her torso, her breasts and up and down her arms Tiffany touched with feather light finger tips. "Come on Cass. This could be worse," she reasoned. "My touch isn't all that bad."

Sam could see that this was indeed having the desired effect. The food critic knew all too well the electricity she felt on her skin when Tiffany touched her like that. The type of touch that you want to last for hours, and at the same time, desperately want to become something more. After long moments Tiffany leaned close to her housemate.

Sam could see her whisper something in the prostitute's ear but couldn't make out any of the words. Brown eyes flashed over to Sam then returned their steady gaze to Tiffany.

There was something intriguing about seeing the two of them together, Sam decided. They were a world of contrasts; the yin to each other's yang. Tiffany's black hair cascaded around her face, blending into Cassandra's platinum blond locks. With a casual toss of her head, Tiffany shifted her hair to the side of her face away from Samantha, giving the food critic an unobstructed view.

As Samantha watched, Tiffany placed a series of soft kisses along the blonde's jaw-line and exposed neck. The first couple of times Cass flinched then seemed resigned to the touch. The prostitute moved her head to the side, allowing for better access. Sam smiled; Cass had the most beautiful neck. She had graceful lines of tendon and muscle with the most delightful hollow space where her collarbones met. Samantha enjoyed kissing the blond woman's neck almost as much as the blond woman enjoyed being kissed there.

Without warning Tiffany stood and walked a couple of steps to the bureau across from the bed. She didn't speak as she removed her chef's jacket and picked up a tie to bring her long black hair into a ponytail. She glanced at Sam one more time before taking off her boots. "Any requests?" she asked not trying to hide the lust from her low husky voice.

"Surprise me," Sam replied in a voice equally dripping with sex.

With her hair pulled back, Sam had an unobstructed view of her lover's face. Her expression was unreadable which Sam had to admit made the whole scene sexier still.

Tiffany climbed onto the bed her leather-clad legs straddling the woman in the dress once more. With a light touch she caressed the skin of Cassandra's exposed arms. Lightly touching up one then down the other once more. Fingers moved to the blond woman's neck and she lightly traced the planes of her jaw and throat. "You want this off?" she asked softly running her index finger over the ball gag in the blond woman's mouth. Cassandra's head nodded once, very slightly. "Then move your hands," Tiffany commanded.

There was enough play in the leather strap that connected the prostitute's wrist restraints that she could move her hands to a position just above her head. A secondary rope was attached to another "d-ring" in the back of the collar that was tied to the bed. Cassandra had some limited movement, but she couldn't untie herself and she couldn't get off the bed. Tiffany positioned herself so she could hold onto both of Cassandra's restrained hands with her left, and with her right hand undo the buckle on the gag. Tossing the gag off the bed, Tiffany lowered her mouth to Cassandra's lips before the prostitute had time to say anything. For long moments Samantha watched them kiss noting the exact moment when Cassandra began to respond, encouraging the chef to kiss her more deeply. Sam was certainly surprised when Tiffany sat bolt upright with a yelp of pain, her hand reflexively going to her mouth, which was bleeding.

"What the fuck did you bite me for!" the chef demanded.

Cassandra laughed. “If you’re going to play with fire, dearie, you might get burned.

Tiffany got off the bed and headed to the bedroom closet. She rummaged through the bags and suitcases on the floor of the closet and emerged with the hooker’s black leather bag of professional equipment.

“I was going to be nice about this,” Tiffany explained angrily as she went through the contents of the duffel. “You want to play hardball, that’s fine with me.” As she extracted several objects she looked meaningfully at her housemate. “This stainless-steel butt plug could have your name on it,” she said in a warning tone. “Oh look, nipple clamps, a flail, a paddle...”

“That’s my stuff Tiffany,” Cassandra countered calmly. “You think I’m afraid of it? Keep looking and you’ll find the electric nipple clamps. *Ooh* those are *really* scary.”

“Here we go,” Tiffany announced triumphantly, finally finding what she was looking for.

“An itty-bitty Swiss army knife?” Cassandra said, unimpressed at the diminutive knife the chef was holding. “She’s the one who wants to get cut, Einstein.”

Tiffany approached the bed with a sinister grin on her face. She opened the knife and looked pointedly at the prostitute’s shoes. For the first time a hint of fear crossed the hooker’s face.

“If your shoes and I got in a fight, Cassandra,” she said levelly, “which one of us will win? I’ve got an itty-bitty knife and they’re...ah, just expensive.”

“You wouldn’t fucking do that,” Cass countered, although the doubt in her voice was evident. She was not expecting this.

Tiffany shrugged. “But what’s a twelve hundred dollar pair of shoes when you make the kind of money that you do,” she offered. “That dress though,” her eyes traveled a bit higher. “I know for a fact that’s a Vera Wang original.” She closed the small knife and instead opened the itty-bitty scissors next to the blade.

“You cunt,” Cass spat. “You wouldn’t fucking dare!”

Tiffany laughed. It was a warm, friendly laugh. The kind of laugh you’d hear at a poker table with old friends. She sat on the bed, her legs outstretched, leaning against the footboard. She used the scissors to easily cut through the vinyl tape that kept her legs together. Next she put down the knife and removed one of the prostitutes black shoes and carefully tossed it on the floor. She began to massage the blond woman’s foot.

“Cass, I want you to think long and hard,” she said conversationally as strong hands worked the ball and heel of the other woman’s foot. “Think about how long we’ve known each other. How many dreadful things we’ve said to each other. How many dreadful things we’ve done to each other. What makes you think, for one second, that I wouldn’t cut the dress right off of you?”

“Sam wouldn’t...” Cass barely had the words out when the chef cut her off.

“Sam *would* find that sexy as hell, don’t you think?” Tiffany said logically. “Have you ever watched a woman rip the clothes off another? I’m guessing you’ve done it more than once. The news flash for you *dear* is that tonight Samantha’s in this for herself. Tonight I’m in this for myself. For one night we’re both playing your game, Blondie. We’ve both got goals we’re after that doesn’t have a provision for your feelings. I think you’d call this ‘seeing how the other half lives’. You can put our shit aside for tonight and enjoy yourself or I’ve got a closet full of clothes to fuck up when I’m finished with the one’s your wearing.”

“Is this how you get all your women?” Cass challenged. “With destructive threats?”

Samantha smiled. While the hooker’s words were fierce, the food critic did notice how she’d replaced the foot that had been massaged with the one that still wore the shoe. Cassandra loved little more than being touched. Tiffany removed that shoe as well and began to massage the other foot.

Tiffany shrugged. “I usually only have to threaten the first time. After that they come back for more,” she added, “If you get my meaning.”

“You’re such an inarticulate clod,” Cass fumed.

Tiffany grinned again and Sam was under the impression that the chef was really beginning to enjoy herself. “Yeah, I really am.” She said as she began to massage the blond woman’s ankles and calves. “But I’m wearing leather,” she massaged a bit higher still. “And I’m in really fucking good shape.”

“Yeah, yeah,” the blond woman murmured. “Come here and kiss me.”

Samantha had no idea how the chef was going to forge a truce with her housemate, yet she was watching it unfold in front of her. While the food critic had no illusions that it was going to last longer than tonight, it was clear that both women were serious about putting aside their differences for her enjoyment. Tiffany did as she was asked and spent long moments, her body stretched out over her adversary’s, kissing her deeply. The cut on the chef’s lip apparently forgotten, Cass snaked one of her legs over that of her companion to keep her close. Tiffany pulled back briefly and looked at Cass, then resumed the task of kissing her once more. For Samantha’s estimation, it was indeed as hot a scene as she’d imagined it could be. Probably moreso given the antagonistic fire that flared between the two.

“Untie me,” Cass demanded the next time Tiffany broke the kiss for air.

“Why?” the chef challenged.

“Because I can’t get your clothes off of you if I’m tied up, you fucking nit-wit.” Cass struggled against the restraint. “I can’t suck on your titties if they’re clothed, now can I? And how are you going to lick my titties, much less anything else, if they’re covered up by this insanely expensive dress?”

Tiffany smiled and leaned back on her knees. In one fluid movement she’d lifted the t-shirt off of her body and tossed it towards Sam. In another instant her bra was gone as well. “That’s one problem solved,” She announced happily.

“Oh come on Tiffany,” Cass protested, then after a moment’s consideration she lowered her voice. “I’ve got nails,” she husked. “Something that would feel pretty good against your skin. I know exactly where to touch you. I promise, no tricks.”

Tiffany watched Cassandra for long moments absently stroking the prone woman’s breasts before making up her mind. Having reached a decision she leaned forward, her left breast landing right at the hooker’s mouth as she began to undo the restraints. Cass took the hint and reached out a delicate pink tongue to lick the pierced nipple dangling before her. The nipple rings were a recent acquisition. This was her body modification from *Truth or Dare*. In moments bright white teeth had clasped onto the steel hoop and given a gentle tug. Tiffany hissed in appreciation.

Not completely distracted from the task at hand, Tiffany freed the prone woman and kneeled upright again on the bed. She carefully removed one wrist restraint and then another, massaging each wrist in turn to make sure her circulation was restored. Cassandra got to her knees as well and with the chef’s help slipped the clingy black dress over her head. Tiffany was not surprised to see that she wore nothing underneath. Now clad only in a black collar Samantha felt her pulse increase another notch looking at the exquisitely tanned and toned woman. While undeniably skinnier than Tiffany, her body was no less perfect. She didn’t have the muscles from long hours at the gym. Oh, she had muscles all right, but they tended to be less visible. Yoga was her passion and Cassandra Wilson was the most flexible person Sam had ever met. Still, the faint outlines of a six-pack could be seen on the blond woman’s abdomen; she certainly had muscles where it counted.

Once her dress was out of danger, Cassandra wrapped an arm around the back of Tiffany’s head and roughly pulled the taller woman to her. Bright red nails could be seen clenching a handful of soft black hair as she held the chef’s head still. With her other hand she unceremoniously reached for Tiffany’s leather pants and slipped her hand down the front.

“Jesus!” Tiffany gasped, pulling back a little.

“Don’t get all puritan on me Tiff,” Cass chided. “I’ve decided to do this. You’re hot, I’m hot, Sam is hot,” she added with a wink to the food critic. “As she said, there is no downside.” Before she could say anything else, Cass withdrew her hand from Tiffany’s pants and put two fingers on the chef’s mouth to keep her quiet. “Look *Hon*, if you want moonlit walks and puppies and hand-holding you can fuck-off. You’re not going to impress me Tiffany. If you want to impress your girlfriend and get her worked up and play with your knives, then lets move this the fuck along.”

“I was complaining that your fucking hands are cold,” Tiffany growled at Cass. She brought her hands to the smaller woman’s biceps. With a twist, the chef fell back on the bed, to the space Cass just occupied. Wrapping one arm around the smaller woman she continued the onslaught with her mouth and with her other hand helped Cass undo her pants.

Watching from her vantage point Sam felt the ambient temperature in the

room ratchet up another ten degrees. Or she realized, it could just be her own body temperature. There was no denying the supreme sexiness of watching the two women before her kiss and caress each other. Kissing was not something that she'd ever seen them do before and in some ways it was like watching the unstoppable force meet the unmovable object. Even from her position underneath the smaller woman, it was clear to Sam who was leading this dance. Tiffany's hands were everywhere from long languid caresses to the occasional pinch and slap. Her mouth appeared to be everywhere as well. Cassandra's breasts, neck, and mouth all seemed to be receiving equal attention. For her part the blond was keeping pace with the woman below her. Sam could see flashes of blood red nails as she lightly scratched Tiffany's thighs, abdomen and arms. She used her teeth to pull on Tiffany's nipple rings more than once, each time satisfied with the gasp of pleasure and pain she heard in return.

"Just how hot are you?" she challenged teasingly.

"Hot enough," Tiffany grunted in reply, twisting to pin the smaller woman below her on the bed. With a firm hand she reached down to stroke the prostitute at the apex of her legs. "Apparently, so are you," she commented, bringing two glistening fingers to her mouth.

"You're making me hungry," Cass purred, watching the chef suck on each finger in turn.

With a crooked smile, Tiffany turned, repositioning her body over Cassandra's to the classic sixty-nine position. In tandem they each began to feast on the other and this time it was Tiffany's turn to use her teeth to gently tug on the ring pierced through the hood of Cassandra's clitoris. Sam had been particularly glad Cass had gone for that dare.

"Oh fuuuuckkk" Cass moaned, temporarily distracted from what she was doing.

"Concentrate Cass," Tiffany warned, releasing the ring and burying her face between the smaller woman's legs once more.

To Samantha's estimation, it was one of the sexiest things she'd ever seen. She knew how Cass was feeling, having experienced Tiffany's skillful single-mindedness herself. She also knew how Tiffany was feeling; being well acquainted with the prostitutes no less skillful but playful nature. Together they were indeed the perfect yin and yang; black hair and blond, quiet and loud, muscle and lithe gracefulness. At almost the same time each woman added fingers to the ministrations they were performing with their mouths. After long steady strokes both women seemed to be climbing higher and higher each wanting their own pleasure but steadfastly determined to see the task carried through to the end for the other. It was a very specific sort of discipline required to enjoy and give pleasure at the same time, and both women were masters of it. In the moment though, Sam knew it didn't make it any easier.

"Harder," they both grunted in unison as they provided the final strokes to

send each other over the edge. Amazingly, both women clasped on to the other with their mouths as they came which served to muffle their own cry of rapture. Sam well knew that those vibrations would also serve to make the orgasms each was feeling that much more powerful.

For a few moments neither moved and all that Sam could hear besides the dulcet tones of cello music was the heavy breathing of her two lovers. Finally Tiffany rolled off of Cassandra and lay on her back, taking a couple of deep breaths.

“Magnificent,” Samantha breathed.

“I’m glad you enjoyed it,” the chef said dryly. Looking up at the ceiling.

Sam rose from her chair and walked the couple of steps to the bed. She kissed each woman in turn, noting the subtle differences in how each woman tasted. “That was perfect,” she said, simply. “I don’t think I’ve ever been quite this turned on in my life.”

Tiffany laughed and then looked at Sam seriously. “Unfortunately I’ll have to leave you in Cass’ care. If you don’t mind I’d like a shower before proceeding with our evening.”

Sam hadn’t expected that. “Is there something wro...”

Cass reached out and put her hand on Sam’s rubber clad leg. “I fear our chef is herself worked up enough that if you let her near a scalpel in this condition, you might be missing a vertebrae or two by morning.” Cass said as she ran her hand over the rubber surface of Sam’s leg. “I’m sure you can entertain me until our *dear* Tiffany has regained her composure.”

“Don’t flatter yourself,” the chef warned getting off of the bed. “I smell like you and it’s making me nauseous.” She was halfway to the bathroom when she stopped. Then she turned around and walked back to the bed. She kissed the prostitute tenderly and whispered, “Thank you.” She kissed Sam just as tenderly “I’ll see you in a few minutes,” she said.

When the bathroom door closed Cass propped herself up on her elbow. “You owe me *dear*,” she said her voice deadly serious.

Sam looked at her nervously. “I’m sorry about that Cass,” she began “I didn’t know what else to...”

“No, no,” Cass said, cutting her off. “I’m not interested in your apologies.” She looked pointedly in the direction of the bathroom. “That could have been worse. Tiff may treat me halfway decently for a week or two now.”

“Then what...”

“Tiffany was dead wrong when she said my wants are not on the agenda this evening,” she announced levelly. “My wants are *never* off the agenda. You make me blissfully happy and I’ll leave you two love birds alone so Tiffany can carve something suitably sappy into your skin.”

Sam could see where this was headed. She had to admit it was not unexpected.

“What do you want?” the food critic asked, awaiting the obvious answer.

Honestly she was worked up enough that she probably wouldn't settle for any other answer.

Cass laughed, a maniacal laugh that Sam had grown rather fond of. "Sweetie, go take a good hard look at yourself in the mirror. Then see if you can figure out what I want."

"But I don't..."

"Just do it," Cass insisted.

Sam did as she was told and stood in front of the mirror by the bedroom dresser. She had to admit that she scarcely recognized the figure looking back at her. As she'd gotten dressed she was paying more attention to keeping on schedule than exactly how she looked. At Cass' request she took a couple of moments to really look at herself. She had to admit that the color black did something for her. If pressed, she'd say she thought of herself as an upbeat, positive person. This look though added a hefty element of threat and danger that she'd never equate with her personality. The rubber gleamed, bright streaks and points of light reflecting off the surface. The form fitting clothes showed off her lean muscles and compact frame. She had a small waist, decent-sized bust, toned abdomen, legs and arms. While in her day-to-day life she'd call this look "fit" at the moment it maintained an air of threat. Her strong arms were now instruments of discipline and torture if she chose them to be.

She stood taller than she usually did and this added to her feeling of supreme control of everything, including the very air around her. After all, she'd just convinced two arch-enemies to make love with each other and it ended on a surprisingly tender note. If she could do that, then what couldn't she do if she wanted to? So as she gazed at herself, she wondered what indeed did she want to do? As she considered she caught Cass' reflection in the mirror. The prostitute was looking at her hungrily. She also glanced down and saw the open duffel of sex toys that Tiffany had pulled out of the closet. She began to question her own aversion, the thought of making someone do something, and punishing her if she wanted to. She considered that it may be a slippery slope, but that there were degrees to humiliation and Cass' look in the mirror said she very much wanted to be dominated. By her. Sam turned around a new woman; her mind was made up.

"Hands and knees," Sam commanded, striking the crop against her leather clad thigh with a crisp *thwack*.

With a smile on her face the prostitute complied. While a part of Samantha was feeling more than a little uncomfortable at the role she was about to assume for herself, she knew that too was part of Cass' game. The food critic realized that the persona of dominatrix was probably not what interested Cass as much as pushing her into psychological territory that Sam was unsure or uncomfortable with. That was indeed one of Cass' favorite indulgences, watching people grapple with things that scared them. There was little Cass wouldn't consider if she could make someone push the envelope of their own psyche.

Sam rested a booted foot on the bed. Leaning over her knee she commanded, “untie it,” when Cass moved closer she added, “with your teeth.”

Cass gave her a quick wink and then set to the task. Halfway through Sam could see that she was slowing down. Her own temperature rising as she watched the woman submit to her will, she was angered at the delay. She tightened her grip on the riding crop and brought it soundly down on the prostitute’s backside. Cass gasped and picked up her pace with the laces. Sam hadn’t thought she’d hit the blond woman very hard, but a red strip did appear on lean backside. The pattern repeated itself with the other boot. Cass got halfway through and slowed down and Samantha gave her a sound smack on the other cheek. When the task was finished Sam stroked the red stripes gingerly, causing the prostitute to arch in bliss. She wasn’t sure of what to ask next. Deciding to stay on a theme, she pointed to her boot. “Lick,” she commanded.

Cass rose up onto her knees. “What if I say ‘no,’” she asked.

Sam reached into the duffle and extracted a set of nipple clamps. “Let’s try this again,” she said attaching the clamps to the prostitute’s nipples. “Lick.” She gave the chain between the two clamps a not so subtle tug. In an instant the prostitute’s head was at her foot, her soft pink tongue contrasting with the shiny black surface of the boot. Satisfied that Cass was taking her seriously she gave her next command “Take them off,” Cass immediately removed each boot in turn, setting them neatly by the chair. Sam was beginning to get into this. “Leave the skirt on, stockings next,” the hooker complied detaching each stocking from the black garter belt and unrolling each down the length of her leg. Each foot and calf was then massaged in turn. Samantha smiled; this sort of attention could prove addictive.

“Gloves next,” she demanded, trying to strike an indifferent tone in her voice. The small smile that creased the hooker’s lips did not escape the food-critics attention.

“What are you grinning at?” Sam demanded, danger threading her voice without effort. The crop came down again across both ass cheeks, hard.

Cass looked up, a bit surprised. “Nothing, mistress,” the prostitute replied softly.

“I didn’t think so,” Sam said and extended a toned arm so Cass could remove the glove. “Suck first.”

The kneeling blond took Sam’s hand in her own and wrapped her lips around each finger in turn, stroking them with her tongue and sucking expertly. When she’d finished she removed the other long glove the same way. As she worked Sam absently touched the clamped nipples with the tip of her crop. When she’d finished with the blonde’s nipples she lightly touched the crop tip to the three rosy stripes on Cass’ backside. Wanting to feel that strong tongue against her skin she moved her right hand up to Cass’ mouth once more and inserted her index and middle fingers. Immediately Cass began to suck, her expert tongue massaging the digits. Sam dropped the crop and touched the pink streaks lightly with her finger. The skin felt hot and the

way Cass arched her back let her know she was enjoying the contact. “Does it hurt?”

Sam’s fingers were released from Cass mouth long enough for the hooker to answer. “No mistress. Your touch is divine, *all* of your touches.”

The food critic grinned and let her hand drift down from Cass’ ass to slip her index and middle fingers deep inside the woman on her hands and knees before her. She used her thumb to gently toy with the hooker’s anus. Sam extracted her other hand from Cass’ mouth and lightly tugged on the nipple clamps. With labored breathing Cass began to writhe back and forth pushing against Sam’s hand.

“Keep still,” Sam demanded; a request that was promptly ignored.

Sam withdrew her hand and spanked Cass’ ass, hard. She was satisfied with the sharp intake of breath she heard in response.

“We’re going to try this again,” Sam explained, moving to Cass’ bag of tricks once more. She withdrew a small set of anal beads and began to insert them one at a time into the prostitute’s ass. Intermittently, Cass sighed and groaned blissfully. “If you move, I’m going to stop.” Samantha warned.

“Oh god...” Cass murmured as the final bead was inserted. “That feels so good.”

“So good what?” Sam reminded her.

Cass sighed blissfully, enjoying that Sam had taken to her new role nearly as much as she was enjoying what the woman was doing to her body. “So fucking good, Mistress.”

“It’s going to feel even better if you behave,” Sam warned, taking a silicon dildo from Cass’ bag that she knew to be the prostitute’s favorite. She didn’t need any lube, the blond woman more than wet from her previous activities.

“Yes....” Cass groaned again as the dildo slipped inside.

Sam pumped a couple of times and when the blond woman started to move back she stopped and waited. Cass gasped; this was clearly going to take some concentration. Very slowly Sam pulled the dildo almost all of the way out and then forcefully pushed back in. The hooker gasped with delight but kept her body very still. Sam let her other hand drift down to the nipple clamps. With the dildo she would build up a steady rhythm and then slow down again. Cass gasped in frustration and then panted when the nipple clamps were removed and blood rushed to the sensitive nubs. The food critic played with each nipple in turn and then brought her free hand to the prostitute’s ass. As her left hand continued to pump steadily she slowly extracted the first anal bead.

“Fuck yes,” Cass panted approvingly.

Sam slapped her on ass cheek hard. “Not another word she warned,” knowing full well the self control it would take the incredibly loud woman to keep it under 100 decibels. She pulled out another bead and as she could feel the woman’s climax rising she began to pull them out more quickly the last one escaping as strong muscles clamped down on the dildo for a final, powerful shove. Sam shoved back sending

Cass' face into the bed where she did her best to stifle her scream of rapture.

She let her lover rest for a moment before gently pulling the dildo free and helping her to a more comfortable position.

Cass rolled over and looked up at Sam, a devilish grin on her face. One long elegant finger stroking down the front of Sam's shiny black corset. "God, I love you in rubber," she purred.

Sam smirked, a self-satisfied grin on her face. "I think I'm rather fond of the arrangement myself."

Just then Tiffany emerged from the bathroom, freshly showered but looking no less turned on than when she'd left them. She looked Sam up and down, now wearing nothing but her PVC skirt and corset.

"Well that's my cue," Cass announced matter-of-factly. "I think I'll treat myself to a nice *long* hot bath." She kissed Sam softly on the mouth and winked at the chef. "Have fun kiddies."

"Did you enjoy your stay at Casa Dominatrix?" Tiffany asked, a warm smile creasing her mouth.

Sam nodded. "I think I could grow fond of that."

"Oh really," Tiffany said, arching an eyebrow. "Just how fond?"

Sam put her arms around the taller woman and gave a gentle squeeze. "Not too fond," she amended. "Maybe I'd like to see you in rubber sometime," she said. "Pick up a few pointers."

"Now you're just flirting," Tiffany replied, her voice sultry.

Sam shrugged. "Is it working?" She took the chef's hand and led her back to the bed, glancing purposefully at the clock. "It's 10:48 she announced. Perhaps you'd like to get started."

Tiffany blinked. She'd forgotten the three numbers printed on the card.

"Right," She said. "Are you sure about this?" she asked, her voice tender, still holding Sam in the circle of her arms.

Sam leaned her head against the chef's chest listing to a heartbeat she knew nearly as well as her own and nodded. "If I can't handle it you'll hear me say Oompa Loompa." Sam announced bravely. "I'm in good hands, I'll be fine."

Tiffany nodded and began to unfasten the laces to the corset Sam was wearing. "You look amazing you know," she murmured.

"Mmm" Sam replied absently, soaking in the wonder of being held and undressed at the same time. "I'm glad you approve."

The final lace undone Sam inhaled fully, the first deep breath she'd been able to take in some time. The added oxygen nearly making her head swim. Tiffany carefully tossed the corset to the leather chair and started on the skirt. It was removed and tossed onto the same chair as the corset. Tiffany stepped back from the food critic to appreciate her handiwork.

"I see," she said surprised.

Sam chuckled. "Courtesy of Cassandra, she thought I was ready for a change."
"From trimmed to shaved, that's quite a change."

"I didn't think you'd mind?" Sam asked a little uncertain.

Tiffany shook her head. "Fuck no. Although I suppose Blondie is going to think I owe her one." She shrugged looking appreciatively at her lover once more. "I can live with that. Lets just hope I don't get the two of you confused now."

Sam rolled her eyes and mimicking the tone Cass used frequently with the chef said "I'm not the one who's pierced you clod."

Smiling the chef extended a strong hand and guided Sam to the bed. She had to move the sheet, given the wet spots that were accumulating there.

Sam complied and lay down on her stomach. She patiently waited for what would happen next. The food critic could hear her pick up the silver tray and place it next to her on the bed. With a gentle hand she traced the small pinpoint left by the needles, happy to see that they were not bleeding. Tiffany then lowered her hand and gently traced the small tribal tattoo just above the crack of her ass. This had been her body modification concession to their *Truth or Dare* game.

"This has healed really beautifully," she said appreciatively.

"Thank you," the food critic replied.

Bringing her hand up Tiffany traced an area in the center of Sam's back between where the needles had been. "Would you like it here?" she asked, her index finger tracing out a general area. Sam nodded as a breath caught in her throat.

"You're sure?" Tiffany asked one final time.

Sam nodded once, now not trusting herself to speak.

The next thing Sam felt was the cold sensation of rubbing alcohol as it was applied with a cotton ball. Tiffany took a kneeling position next to Sam on the bed and leaning over the smaller woman started to cut.

Sam wasn't sure exactly what she was expecting, but was acutely surprised at the sensation. She knew the scalpel was incredibly sharp, sharper than an x-acto or cooking knife. She'd sliced her fingers many times, but this was a much more profound pain. After an instant the sensation ended. Sam resumed her breathing, only then realizing that she had stopped.

"You okay?" Tiffany asked.

Sam nodded still not trusting herself to speak. This felt very different from the pinpoints of white light she felt searing through her with the needles. This felt more like a ripping or tearing of her skin. She could only imagine the deep gaping gash that must have been opened on her back. As if reading her thoughts, Tiffany assured her.

"It's a small cut, about a quarter-inch long, as deep as a solid scrape." She said. "It always feels more dramatic than it is. When this heals, it probably won't leave a mark."

Sam nodded again and took a deep breath. In the same way that the needles induced clarity, this did the same thing. She was feeling high on endorphins, her skin

electric and alive. Again she felt the burning pull, as if she were being torn open. She felt as though any toxic thought or environmental impurity were draining from the open wound. All negativity came rushing out like some psychic drain had been uncorked. Any ill will or bad memory was slowly seeping away like blood. After a moment the tearing pain stopped and Tiffany leaned close.

“I swear I can smell your blood,” Tiffany whispered. “It’s the most beautiful red.”

As the chef continued the pain began to change form, morphing from a burning tear into a purely heightened state of being. It seemed like an eternity, moments upon moments being carried by a sea of endorphins and dopamine well beyond the constraints of her physical body. She felt connected to Tiffany, connected in a way that she understood would tie them together forever. Beyond being an act of submission and trust it was a shared ritual in which they were equal partners. Surrounded by white light Sam felt like she could fathom forever, understand eternity and move past any boundary of physical space. She could see her past and her future and was certain that in this moment she was in the exact right place. Finally, after what felt like flying forever, she felt herself floating down, spinning back into control and rejoining her body once again. The searing pain was gone; the dull burning sensation replaced by a hot ache. Her psyche exhausted from contemplating the infinite yet sated, her skin tired and angry she felt a little changed. For the most part she was still herself, but something was different and there would be no returning to unknowing what she’d experienced.

“Can you sit up?” Tiffany asked when she’d finished blotting Samantha’s skin.

For the first time Sam looked at the spent squares of gauze and felt a little light headed at the amount of blood she saw. She sat up and Tiffany handed her a mirror. She moved so her back was to the large dresser mirror and looked at herself reflected in the hand-held mirror. She blinked a couple of times, very surprised by what she saw.

She had been certain that the blade cuts were arched in shape. She had assumed that was what the pulling sensation was from. Instead she saw a small rectangular area of skin, maybe four inches wide by three inches tall filled with a series of vertical and horizontal cuts. The cuts themselves were maybe a quarter of an inch long, their geometric pattern creating the ultimate illusion of a rectangle. A small amount of blood was continuing to seep up and Tiffany blotted the wounds carefully. She didn’t think ‘beautiful’ was a word she’d use to describe the marks but she also felt that it did indeed suit her. It was ordered, focused, contained, and introspective. All words she could use to describe herself. Tiffany covered the cuts with the larger gauze bandage and used some of the cloth tape to hold the bandages in place.

“Don’t scratch at it when it itches and it might not scar. If you scratch it, all bets are off.” The chef warned.

Sam put down the mirror and glanced at the clock. It was 11:06. She couldn’t

believe it'd only been nineteen minutes. She would have guessed a half hour or more. Absently she wondered if endorphins or dopamine could slow down time.

The chef uncorked the chilled champagne and handed Sam a flute. "What does it do for you?" Sam asked quietly, taking a sip.

Tiffany drank deeply from her own glass before answering. "It's hard to put into words. I feel connected. I feel close to you, in complete control, focused. Probably a lot of the same feelings you were feeling as I did it. There is a level of trust..." She shrugged taking another sip. "It's a heady rush for me as well," she finished quietly.

"Let's talk about trust," Sam said softly. "You know how much I trust you, how much do you trust me?"

Tiffany arched an eyebrow. "You saying you want to cut me?" she asked, curious.

Sam shook her head and looked pointedly at the black wrist restraints lying on the bed.

"I see." The chef said quietly. She was silent for several long moments and then leaned over to pick up the restraints. Without a word she handed them to Sam and held out her wrists.

"I promise you won't regret it." Sam said softly as she attached the leather cuffs. She made sure they were tight, but didn't restrict the circulation and helped the chef position herself on the bed. She propped up a couple of pillows as she raised the chef's arms over her head and attached the clip to the rope, which was tied around the headboard. While she was in the same general position as the prostitute had been earlier, she had to admit that the chef did not have even the slightest air of vulnerability. There was no doubt that Tiffany Schrade was lying, bound to a bed because she wanted to be.

This didn't bother the food critic. She wasn't trying to prove anything to herself or her lover. She'd received the surrender she'd asked for already, this was just a bonus. As such she wanted to make the most of the situation for Tiffany as well as herself.

"Comfortable?" She asked softly.

The chef nodded and tested the hold of the rope. She wasn't going anywhere unless she felt like breaking furniture.

"You shouldn't be so antsy." Sam teased gently as she eased off the bed and padded across the room to the door. "Back in a sec."

She returned a moment later with a small silver tray of food. Tiffany smiled as the chocolate covered strawberries were set down on the bed.

"I appreciated the tasting plate this afternoon," Sam said as she held a strawberry for her lover. "You really outdid yourself. You deserved that win,"

Sharp white teeth neatly cleaved the strawberry in half. "I was amazed to win. That usually doesn't happen unless the Iron Chef blows it." She shook her head. "I

don't think it was the cooking that did it, but the juggling."

Sam shook her head emphatically. "Your juggling was not nearly as impressive as the food," she said, poking Tiffany in the chest for emphasis. "Are you forgetting that your girlfriend is a very highly respected food critic? I'm telling you that everything tonight was right on. Okay, knife juggling is sexy as hell, but if your food wasn't kick-ass you know you wouldn't have won."

Tiffany grinned. "Pass me another strawberry and I won't argue with you."

"You're in no position to tell me to do anything Ms. Schrade," Sam replied rolling her eyes. She noticed a bit of chocolate at the corner of the chef's mouth and grinned. "Here, let me help you with that."

She leaned in close and gently licked the speck of chocolate from the chef's lips. Tiffany leaned in for a kiss but the food critic pulled away.

"Not so fast, hon," she said with a smile. "It's only 11:17." She picked up the champagne flute and held it so the dark haired woman could take a sip. Then gracefully moving off the bed she walked to the bedroom closet. After pulling out Tiffany's hard sided suitcase, she used it as a step stool to reach the top closet shelf. Shoving one of Cass' make-up cases to the side, she withdrew a rectangular box. She headed back to the bed stopping once more at the prostitute's black leather duffel and extracted two more items. A blindfold and a bottle of massage oil.

"What's in the box?" the chef asked curiously, looking at the elegantly stitched satin container.

"A present for you," Sam replied taking a seat next to Tiffany on the bed once more.

The chef tugged at the restraints. "I might have a problem opening it."

Sam smiled. "Then I'll just have to open it for you," she said. The box was red satin with delicate embroidery. A little over a foot long, about five inches across and probably four inches deep. It had a delicate gold clasp that fastened the lid shut. "Care to take a guess?" she asked.

Tiffany smirked. "I'd say a pearl necklace, but Cass is the only one of us who wears those."

"Ewww," Sam replied in spite of herself at the double entendre. "If you're going to be a smart-ass I can put it away," she said matching Tiffany's dry tone. "It's not like I don't know what's in the box after all." She sat the box down next to her on the bed.

"No, no, no," the chef said quickly. She gently nudged Sam with her leg. "I want to see it."

"Pretty please?" Sam asked with an arch of her eyebrow. The smirk faded from the chef's mouth as she looked at Sam. "You might as well get used to begging," Sam added cheerfully. "You may be doing more of it."

"Awww come on Sam," Tiffany tried, her voice a low husk. "You know you want to show me."

The food critic picked up another of the plump strawberries and bit into it forcefully. A small trail of juice squirted out and headed down the blonde's chin. Unconsciously the chef licked her lips and swallowed. "Let's see, I'm insatiably hungry and I've got a whole plate of strawberries to eat and you're insatiably curious and have a gift sitting six inches from you," Sam said conversationally doing her best to imitate Tiffany's frank tone to Cass from earlier. "Who's going to hold out longer?"

Tiffany took a deep breath. "Against your appetite?" The chef shrugged. "You win. Please, Sam?"

"That's more like it," Sam replied happily, gently holding out another strawberry for the chef." She bit down, less carefully this time so juice did indeed run down her chin. Without hesitation the food critic leaned in gently licking the juice away. Tiffany was beginning to catch on. After providing her with another sip from the champagne flute, Sam set the glass down and picked up the red satin box once more. She held it close so the chef could see. The stitching was beautiful. It depicted a cypress tree on a mountain overlooking an embroidered ocean. Sam flipped the latch and slowly opened the box.

"Do you like it?" the food critic asked watching carefully as Tiffany gazed at the contents of the box.

"It's gorgeous, Sam," the chef replied. "Although I'm not sure it's my size."

Sam chuckled. "Oh, I don't know about that."

Tiffany looked from Sam back to the phallus in the cushioned box once more. It was made of clear blown glass, intricate designs of blue and green in glasswork threading through the shaft coming to a stylized but softly pronounced head. The base had a glass loop with a hole in the center that could be used as a handle. Tiffany decided that diminutive was not a word that could be used to describe the glass sculpture in any way.

Sam closed the box with a soft snap. "For later," she said.

There was an unconscious tug at the restraints and the food critic smiled. She picked up the blindfold and looked pointedly at the chef.

With a wary glance at the box by Sam's side, Tiffany nodded once. With ease her lover leaned over and tied the black silk blindfold around the brunette's eyes. She settled herself back on the bed and it was Tiffany's turn to wait for what would happen next.

For long moments there was no movement or sound and then she smelled the sweet fragrance of strawberry mixed with chocolate move close. Another strawberry was offered. There was something different about eating with one's eyes closed. The fragrance took center stage a moment before taste confirmed the sensation. In a moment bubbles tickled her nose and the champagne was offered once more.

Then Tiffany felt Sam's weight shift off the bed. All was quiet for a moment and then a gentle finger lightly touched her lip. Tiffany opened her mouth and the soft taste of orange blossom honey filled her senses. Not only that but the delivery

vehicle was a finger she knew all too well. She sucked firmly on the digit, licking every bit of honey clean. Unable to stop herself, her heart beat faster and the chef knew it was showing.

Another digit was offered, this one coated in a honey of another sort. Not waiting for prompting, Tiffany took the finger in her mouth and sucked voraciously. She could feel Sam lean close. "It's only 11:27," she whispered. Tiffany groaned in frustration. This was going to be one long fucking night.

"Settle down sweetheart," Sam soothed moving off the bed once more. "You've got all the time in the world to enjoy overdrive. Why don't you enjoy some coasting first?"

As she spoke Tiffany could hear her flip the top of the bottle of massage oil and then could smell the fragrant scent of eucalyptus and spearmint, her favorite brand from Bath & Bodyworks. Sam had thought of everything. The chef could hear the sound of hands rubbing together and then warm hands were at her left foot. Tiffany sighed. A long night might not be bad after all.

The food critic took her time, slowly and thoroughly massaging up one leg before beginning on the next; hands strong from rock climbing pushed into muscles that were only too happy to give way.

As she moved her arms, Sam felt the occasional twinges of pain, her back clearly protesting any movement at all after the night it had endured. The twinges only served to remind her of how she felt, what she'd done and where she was headed. It was indeed a good kind of pain.

When she'd finished massaging the chef's legs, she continued up the torso, casually avoiding the juncture at the prone woman's legs. There would be plenty of time for that later, she told herself firmly. She concentrated on what she was doing, enjoying the feel of pliant skin giving way to her touch. She enjoyed looking at Tiffany's muscular body. Her dark hair was set off nicely by tanned skin and the shiny glints of steel from the hoops pierced through her nipples. Moving up the torso she massaged Tiffany's breasts, not overtly sexually, but not all that innocently either. She wanted her captive to cool off a little, but not lose her lustful edge completely. By the time she massaged past Tiffany's shoulders, neck and arms she could really feel the other woman relax.

This is what Sam wanted; Tiffany really letting go, although she might not know it as such, and just let her take the chef wherever she wanted to go.

Leaning close, Sam whispered, "turn over lover." And without the slightest hesitation Tiffany complied. Sam glanced at the clock, she was right on time and continued her massage paying careful attention to each muscle group as if she had all the time in the world. There were scratches on her back from the prostitute's nails, as well as on her thighs and arms. She considered how very similar those markings were to the ones she now wore on her own back- not as deep, not as deliberate, perhaps more easily forgotten.

With a gentle nudge she instructed Tiffany to roll back again. Even though the blindfold covered her eyes, Sam could see the relaxed planes of her lover's face. Sam smiled. There was something so incredibly beautiful about seeing the woman you loved at peace with the world. It wasn't an expression Tiffany wore often and Sam felt grateful each and every time she saw it.

Now her touches shifted. No longer probing pliant muscles, the touch became feather light. Not quite teasing, just enjoying and exploring. She stroked the chef's legs, traced the firm muscles of her abdomen and up again to her breasts. She lightly touched one of the silver rings and very slowly lifted the captive bead with a fingertip, just barely moving it around.

The chef sighed with pleasure, subtly offering up more of her body for the food critic to touch. Sam gently released the ring and lightly touched the other. Another audible gasp was heard and she was happy Tiffany couldn't see the silly grin that spread across her face. This was indeed fun.

Long moments more were spent touching the chef's arms. Sam caressed her shoulders, forearms fingers, even threading her hands through her lover's long hair and giving a gentle tug. She finally pulled away and made the chef wait for the next onslaught.

Now lips, teeth and tongue were replacing light finger touches. Starting at her ankle and delicately licking the ball of Tiffany's right foot, the chef groaned when Sam began to suck on her big toe. The onslaught continued first the foot, leg and then up the side of the prone woman's torso.

"That is so nice," Tiffany purred after Sam spent long moments sucking on her right nipple, playing with the ring in her mouth then blowing gently across the thoroughly wet surface.

"You like being teased?" Sam challenged, teasingly.

"Is that what you're doing?" The chef asked. "Then yes, I absolutely love it."

Sam glanced at the clock, it was 12:23. She switched positions, this time moving the onslaught down the left side of the chef's body. The sucking started at the fingers; holding the restrained wrists she sucked each digit luxuriously. As she moved down Tiffany's left arm she paid careful attention to the inside of her elbow and under her arm. Her efforts were rewarded by the dulcet tones of labored breathing.

"God, keep going," Tiffany gasped.

The food critic had no intention of stopping and continued down the chef's body finishing as she had begun with the ankle and big toe of the other foot. Sam looked at the clock once more; it was 12:31. She backed away to give Tiffany a chance to wonder what would come next. Gently she pushed at the prone woman's thighs who happily moved them apart.

The touch that came was not what Tiffany was expecting. She had assumed a finger, or tongue or perhaps even the glass dildo. No this was soft, pliant, warm then her senses put together the sensations and she realized that Sam was touching her

with her breast. The stroking felt fantastic and the last thing in the world she wanted was for it to stop. Unfortunately it did.

“Ugh...don’t stop,” she panted.

“Don’t stop what?” Sam asked sweetly.

“Don’t stop what you’re doing to my dripping wet, frantically turned on pussy,” the chef clarified.

Sam chuckled. Adorable as that was, that wasn’t what she was looking for.

She moved up the chef’s body, settling her weight across a torso that was beginning to sheen with sweat.

“I’m looking for a word, lover,” she whispered in Tiffany’s ear.

“Please,” Tiffany whispered, and then she was offered the wet nipple. Tiffany, ecstatic for the chance to touch Sam’s body began to lick and suck in earnest. All too quickly the breast was pulled away and once again she had to wait.

12:34, now Tiffany felt the touch she’d been longing for. “Yes...Sam...” she panted as the familiar feel of soft hair on the inside of her thighs was followed by the food critic’s experienced face at her center. “Please, more!” she demanded as the blond woman took her time, exploring the drenched wetness painfully slowly.

The chef felt as though she were on a roller coaster. The massage had been indulgently relaxing, yet began that climb to where she wanted to be. Sam’s next onslaught had certainly been full of twists and turns, even throwing her for a loop or two. Her heart was racing; her body pulsing and she craved nothing more than that final release. The crest of the final hill that sent you hurtling down into wild abandon. She felt the falling alright, but it was like the first drop in *Goliath*, it was so long by the time you screamed your lungs out getting to the bottom, you had to take another breath and continue screaming before you actually arrived.

“Please Sam,” she openly begged, not caring about anything else anymore. “Make me come now!”

Sam didn’t answer her; she only slowed down.

“No, no,” Tiffany panted, sounding frantic.

“Shhhh,” Sam soothed. “You’re going to be fine.”

12:38 Tiffany heard the box open and close and wanted her lover to get back immediately to what she had been doing. Sam did not disappoint, picking up with the slow strokes right where she’d left off, occasionally thrusting her tongue deep into her lover before resuming attention to her lover’s clit. The chef’s breathing was audibly strained now. Well past wanting release she was certain she’d go mad any second if she didn’t get it. “Please....please...” That was the only word left her brain had the capacity to form.

Sam shifted her body and Tiffany felt the coldness of the hard glass dildo at her entrance, she was shocked she didn’t come just from it being inserted, but Sam did it very slowly and deliberately. “Please...” she panted again, the word becoming a chant for her.

Back and forth with maddening slowness Sam moved the instrument. There was absolutely no friction as turned on as the chef was. She began to build up a bit more speed and Tiffany would beg, then she would slow just enough to keep her from the climax she desperately craved.

12:43 Sam was watching the clock out of the corner of her eye, hoping that she had timed everything correctly. Tiffany was thrashing at the restraints at this point; the bed creaking in distress. Fast and slow, hard and soft Samantha Steele played with her captive. She used her thumb to occasionally rub the chef's clit once or twice and then made her wait. When the clock read 12:46 she replaced her thumb with her mouth and used her tongue instead.

12:47 "Yes..." Tiffany began to cry out knowing that release would not be denied her this final time. She felt the very hard fullness inside of her clenching with strong muscles to not let it escape again. "Please...yes...please...yes..." The thrusts were met with pants as Sam began to suck on the chef's clit. As the clock changed one final time Tiffany Schrade let out a cry of rapture that was completely new to her and indeed, her head was swimming with colors she'd never seen before.

Tiffany felt like she'd never stop coming. Spasm after spasm surged through her. Her body shaking, her mind near utter meltdown, she had never felt exactly this way before in her life.

With one final move on the chessboard of love: "*Check*" Sam thought to herself. Samantha Steele had a gift for reading people. She knew Tiffany wasn't expecting anything this profound. She also suspected that had Cassandra Wilson not been in the bathroom mere feet away, the chef might have actually broken down sobbing.

Sam had wanted to step into Tiffany's world of power and control and she never did anything half-assed. She knew that the resonances from Tiffany's annoyance at being left at the studio, through her tryst with Cass, through the cutting would have left her senses already near overload. She'd used the massage to distract her somewhat and then skillfully began to push that envelope of overload as far as she could. She realized that the entire night had been for this, to truly bend Tiffany Schrade to her will.

Sam stretched out next to her lover and quickly undid the restraints. She kissed and caressed trembling hands feeling the warmth of strong familiar arms circle around her. She removed the blindfold expecting to see eyes shining with emotion and she was stunned.

She thought three words "*Check and mate.*"

Tiffany Schrade's eyes were shining with an emotion but it was raw, white-hot passion. This was not a woman who wanted to be held and comforted after her release. Sam had started a fire, proceeded to pour gasoline on it and then tossed in a propane tank for good measure. It was the chef's turn to explode.

"Sit on my face, now!" She demanded.

It wasn't what Sam was expecting, but she wasn't about to argue. Her senses had gone to such a profound place during the cutting that she wondered if an orgasm was indeed what she wanted right now. She no more than settled herself over her lover's mouth than she realized it was indeed exactly what she wanted.

Tiffany wasted no time in enjoying Sam's freshly shaved smoothness. "Oh Jesus," Sam exclaimed, wasting no time in enjoying that either. She could feel how inhumanly wet she was the second Tiffany touched her. Looking down she could see the wet sheen already covering the lower half of Tiffany's face. It was no surprise she realized; she'd watched two hot women fuck, and then dominated and fucked each hot woman herself. She did indeed have a great deal to be turned on about. Even just looking down, watching blue eyes look up at her and seeing hints of pink as her tongue flicked this way and that; loving her, she was turned on indeed.

"Having fun kids?" Cass called as she came out of the bathroom. "Oh I *see*," she said. "Am I interrupting anything?" She asked as she moved to the head of the bed to get a good look at Sam and what Tiffany was doing to her. To Sam's surprise it was Tiffany who answered.

"No," she panted between mouthfuls, "Get the Nexus for me and the harness for yourself."

Cass chuckled delightedly, "Goody," she said. She rummaged through her bag and returned with the unusual double-ended dildo. Made of marbled green and white firm silicone it was almost shaped like an "L". The smaller portion Cass deftly inserted into Tiffany and used some of the woman's copious wetness to lubricate the larger shaft. It was one way to wear a dildo without a harness, absolutely nothing coming between the lovers.

Sam was already close to climaxing as it was with both hands on the headboard, she rode Tiffany's face up and down finally gasping with release. "Fuck yes," she panted, riding out each internal contraction.

"Move down," Tiffany demanded, sounding just as insistent this time. Sam was a little confused; she thought she was done. "Now," the chef demanded with a not so gentle shove at her hips.

Sam moved, not quite sure what was going on in Tiffany's head. Slowly she eased herself over the slick dildo and felt awash with arousal once more. "Oh god," she panted, feeling deliciously full. Only now did Tiffany smile.

"Oh yes," she purred, her blue eyes shining happily. "You're done getting fucked, when *we* are done fucking you." Sam tried to rise up on the dildo to push down once again, but strong hands and arms held her hips exactly where they were.

"No, no," Tiffany soothed sweetly. "You made me wait lover, now it's your turn. Tell me exactly how you feel."

Sam was having a hard time concentrating. Chemicals in her brain were demanding one thing and thinking or speaking wasn't it. "I feel full," she panted. "So deliciously full."

“Two strokes,” Tiffany said allowing Sam to comply and then stopped her after the second one. “And now how do you feel,”

This was frustrating. “I feel so wet Tiff,” she moaned. “I need you to stop talking and start fucking me right now.”

“Amen to that,” Cass commented from the foot of the bed.

“Oh no,” Tiffany replied, a warm teasing smile on her face. “You’re always into talking. About my feelings, Cass’ feelings...” she released her hold and let Sam ride the dildo a couple more times. Sam heard Cass move onto the bed behind her and wasn’t sure what the prostitute was up to. “Now we’re going to talk about *your* feelings.”

“I just want you to fuck me Tiffany,” Sam pleaded. “Please let me come, I can’t think...”

“It’s not about thinking sweetie,” Cass whispered soothingly by her left ear, “It’s about feeling.”

Sam’s eyes went wide when she felt the prostitutes lubricated hand at her ass. Only now did she realize what was going on and she was terrified, but too turned on to do anything about it. “Oh god...” she gasped. “I don’t think I could take...”

“Relax lover,” Cass whispered once more. “We’ll take care of you.”

With a gentle shove Cassandra urged Sam forward. Sam leaned towards Tiffany allowing for better access to her ass. Now very close to the blue eyes shining back at her, she was startled by what she saw. There was profound love in those eyes and Sam was sure she’d drown in that blue. No longer did she have hands restraining her, she pumped up and down a couple of times watching that as she did so Tiffany gasped in pleasure. She felt Cass gently probing her asshole with a finger, taking her time to get her ready. Only then did she realize that Tiffany wasn’t fucking her, it was a completely mutual experience. Then she felt Tiffany’s hips thrust up and the food critic gasped with delight.

“Yes, Tiffany,” she pleaded. “Please fuck me.”

“I will do exactly that,” the chef reassured her.

“Hold on Sam,” Cass murmured as the prostitute’s warm body moved in at her backside. Sam’s eyes widened at the sensation of an additional, thankfully smaller, dildo pushing into her.

“Ohhhhhh,” Sam sobbed, emotion starting to overtake her. Surrounded by warmth, surrounded by skin, filled to bursting there was not a single additional sensation she could possibly tolerate.

“Tell me,” Tiffany urged, thrusting steadily. The chef’s voice cracked as the dildo moved inside of her as well. Once again she too was nearing that precipice.

“I am so full,” Sam panted. “I have never felt like this.”

Cass was doing what she did best. She wrapped her lithe arms around Sam’s torso and held the smaller woman. She timed her thrusts in connection with Tiffany’s. Sometimes both moving in simultaneously, other times alternating.

Sam's body was starting to tremble. Tiffany wrapped a hand around the back of her neck and brought trembling lips in for a tender kiss even as her own hips shook with impending release. "I love this," Sam panted. "God I love this," she panted again a giant wave cresting. "I love you," she gasped, "I love both of you."

The wave of her climax hit and Sam wasn't sure if she'd blacked out for a moment. She thought she heard Tiffany cry out in release but couldn't be sure. All she knew was what she felt and that was simply more than she could contain. One sob followed another, and then another. Sex had never made her cry before, but she simply had no other release for the tide of emotion that overwhelmed her.

"Shhh..." Tiffany soothed, holding her gently.

"It's alright," Cass whispered, settling her weight on Sam's back after discarding the dildos. The prostitute ran her hands through Sam's slick hair as Tiffany gently touched her face.

"I love you too," Tiffany whispered.

"As do I," Cass added, her voice a tender whisper as well.

The three of them rested for a few moments when Cass eased her comforting weight off of Sam's back. Sam slid off of Tiffany to the side, surprised that the room was dark, only a faint light illuminating anything.

"The candles...?" The food critic murmured, confused.

"Shhhh," Cass reassured her. "I blew them out; you Virgos, I swear."

Sam turned her head to thank the blond and was horrified by what she saw. The entire front of Cassandra's body from her breasts to her pelvic region was smudged with blood. The prostitute shook her head. "It's alright Sam, you bled a little, I don't mind."

"Do you feel okay?" Tiffany asked, a little worried at the amount of blood on the prostitute's front as well.

Sam sighed, "I can honestly say I've never had a more perfect moment than this one, right now."

Tiffany grinned. "Not bad for our first trip to Japan," she said.

"Maybe we should check out the hot-springs before we go home?" Cass asked sleepily; drawing the covers up around them and settling in behind Sam for sleep.

"I will go anywhere the two of you take me," Sam said as she drifted to sleep. "Anywhere, anytime, forever." That was answered by two sets of arms, squeezing her lovingly.

"We are beginning our final approach into Los Angeles International Airport," the pilot's voice crackled through the speakers. "Local temperature is sixty two degrees, light breezes off the ocean. Local time is 9:23 pm."

Sam smiled in spite of herself. The trip had been fantastic but there was

something special about coming home. She was sad she couldn't see the mountains but was instead treated to a light show that even looked magnificent from outer space. Her back still ached, but the days added to the trip to enjoy the local hot springs had indeed been a good idea.

"You feel alright?" Tiffany asked from her place by the window.

Sam chuckled. "Since when do you care so much about feelings?"

"She cares if they belong to you," Cass butted in. "Stop nagging Tiff- her back is healing perfectly. God you can be such a mother hen sometimes."

"Maybe I wasn't talking about her physical feelings?" Tiffany shot back, defensive. Both Cass and Sam looked at her incredulously. Tiffany shrugged. "It could happen."

Cass shook her head. "We're on a plane approaching LAX and now is when you choose to talk to her about this?"

"Talk about what?" Sam asked.

"Well," Tiffany shrugged again trying to get comfortable in her seat and abjectly failing. "We should figure this out. Talk and stuff...we need to know which house to go to and..."

"Talk about what?" Sam repeated beginning to lose her patience.

"You are the world's worst girlfriend and I don't know why Samantha puts up with you," Cass shot back, clearly irritated.

"If the two of you don't stop talking to each other and talk to me, I'm going to spank you both!" Sam shouted, quite a bit louder than she intended.

"Oh my," they heard from a woman sitting behind Tiffany gasp.

Tiffany shifted again in her seat. She looked out the window a moment and then shifted again. "I've been thinking..."

"That's a stretch..." Cass murmured, noticing that near by passengers were beginning to lean towards them to better hear their conversation.

Tiffany looked at Sam, then Cass then back to Sam. "Well Cass and I talked and...although this is totally my decision and it isn't about her and..." Tiffany began to get lost.

Sam put the book she'd been reading down with a thump. "Spit it out Tiff."

"I want to know if you'd like to move in with us."

Sam's jaw fell open, her book fell on the floor and a man across the aisle dropped his drink. "Sell my house?" Sam asked a little confused.

"No dear," Cass reassured her, leaning down to pick up the book. "Keep it, you can rent it out if you'd like and when you come to your senses about Tiffany you and I can live there without her."

"Are you hearing this?" The man sitting next to the man with the spilled drink asked his companion.

"This is so cool," the spilled-drink man replied.

Tiffany ignored the comments focusing her attention on Samantha. "The house

is big enough. Cass has even agreed to move her clothes and shit out to the guest house so you can have her closets.”

Without thinking the Virgo in Sam spoke up much to the food critic’s dismay. “I’ve got a quarter of the clothes as Cassandra, I’d need, like, one closet.”

“Perfect,” Cass cut in. “You can have the main walk in, I’ll keep the others. This is working out much better than I expected. Cass took a sip of her wine and smiled warmly at the two men across the isle staring at her.

Sam turned back to Tiffany. “You do realize that what you’re suggesting here is some sort of relationship that many people might consider...rather...permanent.”

Tiffany was beginning to blush. “I know.”

“You go girl!” Spilled Drink Man’s companion said.

Sam turned to Cass, “Why did you agree to this? Don’t tell me there isn’t something in this for you?”

Cass beamed. “Well you of course, and Tiffany said I could get a puppy if I let you move in.”

Another man seated behind Cass snickered. The prostitute undid her seatbelt and rose up in her seat turning around to face him. “What’s wrong with puppies?” she demanded. “I’ve always wanted one or three. You don’t think I should have them?!”

“Oh no,” the man said the color draining from his face. “You should totally get some puppies.” He quickly signaled the flight attendant and asked for another drink.

Cass settled back into her seat, satisfied “See this guy even agrees with me.”

“I move in and we adopt puppies,” Sam repeated just making sure she was on the same page. Both women nodded. “Let me get this straight; you’re offering me evenings of cocoa, bellyrubs, walks on the beach...and puppies.”

Tiffany looked a little bashful. “Well in addition to the mind blowing sex, that is.”

“It’s a little ironic, isn’t it?” Cass said.

Sam chuckled, feeling her eyes well up. “Who can argue with that.”

“Excellent!” Cass and Spilled Drink Man said in unison. Cass glared at him and he returned his attention to his companion. “When we get home I’d like to go for a drive in my new car,” Cass continued, holding out her hand to Tiffany.

“Oh give me a break,” Tiffany grouched. Cass gestured for her to hurry up and Tiffany fished a set of car keys from her pocket. After taking the keys off the key ring she handed them to the prostitute.

“I can’t have the key ring?” Cass asked, annoyed.

“No, Sam gave that to me,” Tiffany shot back. “Remember, no paint job- you promised.”

Cass shrugged. “Fine, fine whatever. I’ll look just as sexy in black.”

The food critic was puzzled. “You’re giving Cass your Porsche?” The chef nodded.

“Don’t look so sad,” Cass replied. “You get to drive my Benz.”

Sam snickered. “The ‘hot-pink’ Mercedes?”

Cass nodded, “It’s the only one I’ve got.”

“Why on earth did you give Cass your car?” Sam asked.

Cassandra was beaming. “Remember the other night when you had me tied up to the bed with the gag in my mouth? And you wanted to watch our dear friend Tiffany have her way with me?”

There was no denying that the undivided attention of the first four rows of the airplane was solidly on them. Sam swallowed feeling her cheeks redden.

“Did you see Tiff lean over and whisper in my ear?” Cass continued.

“That’s enough Cass,” Tiffany warned.

The prostitute ignored her, “She offered me her Porsche if I wouldn’t fuck up her chances with you.”

“Awwww,” the spilled drink man and his partner cooed.

It was Sam’s turn to frown at the spilled drink couple. She then turned to her brunette lover stunned. “You bribed Cass with your Porsche so you wouldn’t let me down?”

The chef shrugged. “I still own it,” she muttered.

“Only because I don’t want to pay the insurance. That car is mine!” Cass replied firmly.

Tiffany took Sam’s hand “You’re worth a lot more than a Porsche.”

“I think I’m going to cry,” spilled-drink man said and his partner shushed him as all three women glared in their direction.

Sam took pity on her lover; she was not sure how much more unadulterated sappiness the chef could endure “Are you sure this whole moving in thing isn’t so I’ll let you borrow my BMW.”

Tiffany beamed, squeezing Sam’s hand tighter. “I hadn’t thought of that!”

“Looks like I’m moving in then, doesn’t it.” Sam said, kissing each woman tenderly.

To the trio’s embarrassment they were soundly applauded by the first four rows of the airplane and the flight attendants brought them more champagne.

Sam took hold of each lover’s hands and grinned from ear to ear. “Don’t you just love LA?” she said.

Epilogue: As the theatre lights come up and the credits roll we can hear Stevie Nicks singing *Love is a Hard Game to Play*, *Bombay Sapphires*, *Love Is* and *Trouble in Shangra-La*. I mention this because had it not been for these four songs, listened to over and over and over, I’m not sure how I would have finished this story. You, gentle reader, might find this choice of soundtrack ironic because in the wonderful world of fan-fiction we can drift off to sleep knowing that our three uniquely deviant heroines will indeed get

their happily ever after. They will spend their time traveling the world and having many splendid adventures.

Samantha Steele will eventually become a big muckity muck at Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia. Given her experiences with Cass and Tiffany, Sam had no problems working with Martha at all. She incorporated more leather and rubber into her wardrobe and had Martha eating out of her hand (figuratively of course). In fact more than once Cassandra Wilson had been hired as a consultant. Martha was impressed by her frankness as well as fashion sense. Samantha also went on to write several books about food and even adopted pseudonym for her tome on food in the bedroom; she called it *Taste Buds & Bondage* Surprisingly, Oprah did not choose it for her book club but several studios wanted to option the movie rights.

Besides the odd job for Martha Stewart, Cass continued her profession as an unbelievably high priced call girl although she was in semi-retirement. She also established an animal shelter in the Hollywood Hills and funded a charity that focused on getting prostitutes off the streets and into classrooms. She refused to admit that Sam was having any sort of redemptive effect on her whatsoever. She and another high priced madam who had served time in prison, went into business opening a first class bordello in Nevada; Wilson-Fleiss Entertainment Inc.

For Tiffany's part, she devoted herself to the woman she loved and her work in that order. Sam was never far from her thoughts, regardless of what she was doing. They experimented together in the kitchen as much as they did in the bedroom. She opened her own restaurant, *Trio* in LA and one in Vegas so she'd have something to do when she wasn't gambling or seeing strip shows. The logo for both restaurants consisted of a rectangular set of vertical and horizontal lines, scars of which she sported on her back between her shoulders. She accepted the unconventional life fate had handed her and woke up every morning amazed at how happy and content she was. In the final analysis, what more can one ask for?

The End