



HARMONY
SIENNA MYNX

A special thanks to Eve Vaughn and the wonderful ladies of her Yahoo Group for allowing me to share my work with her readers.

I present to you all: 'Harmony'

It's the roaring 20's and the Black Renaissance has exploded in New York. From Marcus Garvey, to Ethel Waters, Harlem is the place to be. That's also true for The Cotton Club's jazz singer Harmony Jones. Her soulful voice and unique beauty draws the attention of the most ruthless Sicilian mob boss Vincenzo 'Vinnie' Terranova. And when her brother--a numbers runner--goes missing, Harmony is his only hope.

Harmony is a tangled tale of love and hate when two unlikely hearts collide. A tribute to my fave movies: The Cotton Club, and Hoodlum.

Chapter One

The Blues

1923 Harlem, New York -

The Cotton was jumping. Milo's horn blew a story of triumph and pride through the swing beat. This was their music, their time, no instrument other than the smoky wail of a saxophone could say it better. Harmony closed her eyes and let the rhythm flow through her. The melody seduced, calmed, emboldened her in sinful ways she refused to put a name too.

"One, two, three, four," she mumbled without parting her lips, swaying a bit behind the cover of the stage curtain – slipping into her zone. Milo's horn demanded patience, selective timing – now he was ready.

Harmony emerged from stage left. Her stride was grace in movement. Each step set the sequined strands that dangled from her curvy hips to dazzle under the hot chorus spotlights. Milo blew sweet melodies from his sax that trailed her as she crossed in front of the all-Negro orchestra to the microphone. The lights of the Club dimmed in every corner and pale faces lifted from their dinners or turned from their jovial conversations transfixed.

Ladies and gentlemen the Cotton Club presents to you Miss Harmony Jones.

Harmony's lips, plump as fresh plucked strawberries, drew near the magnified chrome bulb. She offered her audience a taste by joining the brass section though their warm up, her *bee-bop-skat-shubbie-dee-bop* riding along effortlessly. Fletcher Henderson, the bandleader, gave her the cue. Harmony extended her arms, parted her lips and her voice sailed to unattainable heights. So did her hopes. Tonight she'd send both soaring. For Harmony there was little power or control over the demands in her life, though she managed to live well in the northern part of Hamilton Heights, a neighborhood referred to as Sugar Hill. Nonetheless, it never escaped her that this stage, with Milo on his horn and Coleman thrumming base, was where her stardom exceeded a colored girls

dream. That's why tonight she was going to use what she got to get all that she wants. Namely an alliance with a notorious gangster named Vincenzo Terranova.

Harmony's delivery got the band rocking, before Fletch ended the jam session with Milo blowing through her intro. Her song eased in seductively low. She watched them all through a thin veil of lowered lashes. Inch by inch her nails glistened like rubies as her hand eased down the microphone's stem. She was often told that her beauty, whether real or perceived under the glamour of the stage lights was nothing compared to her voice. Even the racist gangster who'd bought Club Deluxe and renamed it The Cotton Club, Owney 'The Killer' Madden, gave her top billing. Sultry, commanding, enchanting, her voice would inspire men both Negro and white, to send her gifts of chocolates, perfume and her favorite white roses after a single performance.

Harmony's gaze focused past the burn of the lights. Through the pearly wave of smoke and shifting shadows, ladies all dolled up, with long-stem cigarettes between gloved fingers glared. Often this was the case. Harmony was used to it. The men however, that was a different story. In dark tuxedos crisp, tailored, with perfectly groomed mustaches and hair neatly oiled back from their faces she held them captive through her song.

Willie's out there. Willie needs me to see this through. He all I got. I'll do whatever it takes for little brother.

With surreptitious glances, she searched the crowd for him. It happened. A current of excitement rippled through the atmosphere sparking hurried movement from the doorman to the waiters, each of them looking pointedly at the other. Owney Madden dashed past the stage, breaking for the club's entrance. Someone of importance had entered.

It's him. Has to be.

Harmony believed tonight of all nights he'd show. She wasn't one to normally hang her hopes on a white man, but this one was no ordinary fellow. Willie's life depended on his affinity for her songs. Harmony's gaze followed Terranova as she eased into his seduction with her voice. Dropping a little sway to her hips she ran both

hands, palms flat and fingers spread, down her curves, stirring up a couple of wolf whistles from the crowd. Terranova hadn't noticed. Not yet.

Tonight would be like all others. Always the same booth, the coal-black velvet drapes parted just enough to reveal his omniscient like presence. Terranova would sit, watch, and she'd sing. Under the glare of the stage lights she'd see little. The shadows covered his face, yet she felt his eyes – a woman always does. Often from the distance she'd see his hand appear as he gestured to someone at the table. A diamond sparkled on his pinky.

At the Cotton, Harmony soon became familiar with the faces of the notorious as they came and went, each vying for a moment of this most powerful gangster's time. Luciano and Madden were close. The gangster bankrolled the bootlegged liquor filling the patron's glasses after the late hour and the purchase of Deluxe from Jack Johnson. It ensured Madden ruthlessness remain unchallenged. But if Madden was a made guy for his associations with Luciano, Terranova was a God and not beholden to either.

A cigarette girl by the name of Paulette told her just days ago *he* asked for her schedule one night when she was absent. It was the first time she knew her suspicions were true. He was watching her. She was sure of it. Tonight, Harmony hoped that attention would pay off.

For Willie's sake.

Vincenzo 'Vinnie' Terranova eased back into the soft leather of his booth seat. The Cotton was becoming a habit. *She* was becoming *his* habit. Otherwise he'd stick to his own territory. Terranova smirked, technically he was. If things went as planned Harlem would soon become his and every small, medium, big time hustler within it.

Terranova wasn't too unfamiliar with the nightlife along Lenox Avenue. He grew up cracking skulls and breaking the law with the street gangs of South Brooklyn and earned his respect elbows to fist all the way. He'd made his bones before he was old enough to grow a mustache or drive a car. No one questioned his authority, at least not to his face.

Signaling for another whiskey, Terranova ignored the prattle of his kid brother and focused on the vision of beauty before him. He hadn't paid colored women any attention before. The Cotton was a whites only establishment, no race mixing in or near it's doors. He wouldn't have paid her any mind if it weren't for her voice. Took him by surprise when he first heard her. He wasn't a man often surprised.

Terranova licked the bitter taste of his half smoked cigar from his lips as she drew him in. They called her Harmony. He chuckled when he first heard her stage name and discovered it was indeed her Christian name. Doll had class. He had to give her that.

Harmony's hips swayed, her hands eased up and down her curvaceous sides as her voice went from smoky to wickedly sexy and low. Terranova leaned forward, Harmony was in rare form tonight – and something was different. She was singing to him. He was sure of it. Songbird was looking him in the eye. He liked that.

What a dame.

Medium in height with skin sepia brown as if brushed with ginger, Harmony Jones had full succulent cherry-red lips that made him lick his. Her cheekbones were high on her heart shaped face. A distinct feature that made her almond shaped eyes slant and disappear under dark lashes when she flashed a coy smile through her performance. And her trademark was always present in her dark wavy hair. A white rose, pinned behind her right ear. She sang of secret desires. How she burned to have more. And she was dressed the part. Demure from the front but unashamedly provocative when she turned to the orchestra and revealed the low cut back. Tonight her clingy garment was the deep shade of purple and seemed to sparkle with jeweled lights as if the most precious stones were woven into the thin fabric. A sweetheart-shaped bodice separated and lifted her ample breasts upward. What a rack. Vinnie was a breast man; she was full in the hips and chest, as he liked his women.

Harmony's shifting loose sequined hem flattered her legs. When Harmony moved, and her hips often did through the melody, it provoked every man in the place to wonder about the softness between those thighs. Terranova held back. Taboo, barriers of colored's and whites didn't mean shit to him. If he wanted anything or

person, the rules never applied to him. No. Terranova held back for his own reasons. Boredom sets in when a conquest becomes easy, especially after a Dame's submission made her think his prominence meant something profitable for her. He'd rather worship this beauty, untouched, from a far. Still he wasn't a man to be teased, and his songbird was tempting the beast in him tonight.

"So as I was saying," Ciro's nasal drone mowed down his wandering thoughts.

Terranova dropped his gaze over to his second in command. "What? What were you saying?"

Ciro Terranova was short, thin, with a scar that ran from his left brow down to the middle of his cheek thanks to a nasty childhood knife fight. Ciro wasn't a thinker. He was a doer, and without the strong hand of his older brother he would have wound up on the same path as any stick-up man with a trigger-happy temper.

"Out with it." Terranova said.

Ciro cleared his throat. "Collins's on the level. He's square. This I know for sure."

"You giving me a line?" asked Terranova, his left brow arched as his gaze narrowed with suspicion.

"No. I'm just weighing in that's all. What do we need with Harlem? Brooklyn's doing alright." Ciro took a quick sip of his drink, his eyes bouncing from his brother's ashtray to his watchful stare. Terranova could smell a line or a setup. His brother stunk of both.

"Since when do you decide on what we need little brother?" Terranova asked.

Ciro's jaw tensed. Terranova eyed him, waiting. His brother didn't respond. He threw back the last of his whiskey then slammed the glass on the table. "Hey toots!" he barked at the cigarette girl. "Get a wiggle on over here. Will ya?"

The leggy toffee brown skin brunette walked over in fishnet stockings and a corset with tits packed tight in the front like cantaloupes. Around her neck hung a cigarette case. Terranova's eyes cut past them both to Mickey Collins off at the bar. Mickey lifted his glass to him. *So now Collins had Ciro making his case?* Terranova smirked. There was something to it.

The foxy brunette flicked her lighter sparking a flame that burned down the tip of Ciro's ciggy. She cut her dark oval eyes over to the mob boss. "Mr. Terranova, what can I do you for – cigar, cigarette?" She dipped so he could get a full view of her wares accentuated by her breasts.

Ciro leaned out of the booth. His eyes did a slow climb up her legs and under the ruffled hem of her chorus-girl skirt. He exhaled a wave of smoke from his nostrils and smiled in approval. Paulette ignored Ciro. She flicked her golden lighter open and leaned in to light Terranova's cigar. Standing upright, the brunette struggled to hide her disappointment.

"You new?" asked Ciro.

She blinked her reply, turned her boobs to his line of view. "No sir. They call me Paulette, I'm tall, tan and terrific!" she said. It was a canned response that the girls must all say in greeting.

Ciro smirked. "Yea well beat it, Paulie. Can't ya see we discussing business here?"

Paulette made a quick exit. Ciro chuckled. "Check out the gams on that dame," he said with a sly grin. "Always been a leg man."

"Interesting. Now tell me exactly when did you become the *man* to sing and dance for Mickey Collins?" Terranova asked.

"Awe Vinnie, I was just flapping my gums. Pay it no mind," Ciro gave a double shoulder shrug. Terranova remained unconvinced, but he let it go. His eyes returning to his songbird.

Fletch waved his hand in front of the orchestra and ended the set. Harmony took her cue and gave a curt nod of thanks to the applause. She didn't look over at Terranova. She didn't have to. The pull of his stare rained heat through her bones.

I should walk over there and lay it all out for Terranova. Tell him about Willie and ask for his help? Isn't that the way of the Sicilians? The powerful men are lord and master over the weak and needy. I heard Willie call them Don's. That's how Lewis would address him, Don Terranova. He say you give a man like Terranova your burden, and for a price they relieve you of

it? Harmony laughed bitterly to herself. That may be but this is Harlem, girl, and you're a jazz singer that can't even enter through the front of the club doors of the place everyone comes to here you sing for. Since when did the desires or needs of a colored woman mean a damn to a dangerous Sicilian like him? And if Mr. Madden gets wind of my plans I'll be on my hands and knees scrubbing floors again.

Blowing a final kiss to the applause she bowed to Henderson then quickly switched off the stage, but stopped short of the arriving dancing girls to catch her breath. From her concealed position she stole another look to the Sicilian, he continued to watch with the same blank expression he wore when he arrived. Without the glare of the stage lights she could see him clearly. Terranova had dark olive skin for a white man, with hair smoothed from his face in a golden brown wave, tapered low at the sides and extended with long sideburns. His serious features were chiseled into a strong jaw line and squared, dimpled chin. Deep-set eyes under a straight silken brow were intense, profound. Terranova had no facial hair. He didn't smile but she did notice a brief action. The corner of his mouth tip upward to something Mr. Madden said, when he arrived at this table to give a greeting. She wondered what color his eyes truly were?

"Did you hear me Momy?"

Harmony stole a glance back over her shoulder at Milo, and then returned it to the Mafia Don across the room. Milo followed her eyes.

"Oh no, Miss Momy, no," Milo said, taking her hand. He walked her further away behind the curtain. Beyond earshot, he took hold of both her arms tightly.

"What's eating you?" Harmony struggled, trying to break free.

"Momy, what'chu think you're doing? Do you know who that there man is?"

"Let go, Milo."

"Do you?"

"It's Vinnie Terranova, he's a mob boss like Luciano and the rest. Yes! I know who he is."

"No. Wrong. Next to Luciano, he's *the* guy. Dangerous. Dangerous Momy, do you understand? He's not someone you want to tease. And if Madden sees you given him the eye, lord Momy, have you lost your senses? I've been trying hard to keep them white

boys off you, and you giving *that* man eyes? I seen ya, during the act. You was singing to him. Christ, I think he knows you were singing to him.”

“Willie’s missing, Milo. He aint been home. I don’t know where he went or how long he’s been gone for. Just that he is.”

“That aint a Terranova problem. That’s a Willie problem,” Milo hissed, lowering his voice as more girls in sailor shirts and miniskirts went running by in their tap shoes.

“But Willie’s my problem, and Terranova may be the only way to fix this. Mickey Collins sure as hell won’t.”

Milo stepped back. He looked at her as if her head had rolled off her shoulders. What she was saying deserved the response, but it was the truth. Harmony trusted Milo. She trusted him with her life, and Milo was right. He had kept the advances at bay from men that thought they were entitled to cross the line. But his perceived power was as far as Madden and his band of thugs would let it be. If she stepped out there, Milo would be swatted back like a fly.

“He’s missing. I gots to find him. I hear from the girls that Mickey is looking for him. He could be in all kinds of trouble.”

“What’s your plan? Don Terranova won’t help you if Willie’s on the lam. And if he has Mickey’s money, he is a dead Negro.”

“Maybe, maybe not. If what you say is right... but what if'in it aint. What if I can change that?”

Milo threw his hands up “You one confused girl if'in you think you can.” He mumbled then walked off. Harmony stopped herself from going after him. Turning, she leaned out and looked across the club. Don Terranova was still there. Dangerous or not, she had to try. She was all her little brother had.

Terranova checked his timepiece again. Mickey Collins owed him a showing. So where was he? He had better not gone far.

“So what you think of Jimmy?”

“Can it.” Terranova snapped. “I told you *Ciro*, stick to the business you know. *Capice?*”

Ciro narrowed his eyes but held his sharp tongue. He forked his pasta and slurped up his dinner with an obedient grunt. Again, Terranova searched for Collins. The delay was an insult, that wouldn't go unaddressed. Collins had his issues, but he knew his place. Terranova had decided to order for him to bring Collins directly when suddenly, she appeared. His Songbird was brought to his table by the maître d'.

"Excuse me, Mr. Terranova," said Charlie with a polite nod.

Ciro stopped chewing. Sauce dripped from his chin. He frowned getting a look at the jazz singer who hovered behind Charlie. He glanced over at his brother a bit curious.

"What is it?" asked Ciro, wiping at his chin.

"Miss Harmony. She wants to speak with you, sir." Charlie looked pointedly at Terranova, ignoring Ciro altogether.

Terranova set his glass on the table. He leaned forward and he saw her clearly through heavily lidded eyes. Harmony met his gaze dead on and a hint of a smile tipped the corner of his mouth. "By all means," he said.

He watched her straighten her back and step forward to the edge of the curtained booth. She seemed confident that he would grant her wish. This intrigued him. "Mr. Terranova, sir, my name is Harmony Jones."

Terranova sat back, pleased. "Take a walk, Ciro."

Ciro's pout clouded his judgment. "I wasn't done Vinnie."

Terranova cut down his objection with a silencing yet commanding look. Wiping sauce from his face Ciro slammed the napkin on the table. He eased out of the booth. Charlie bowed deeply and backed away, signaling the waiter to bring Ciro a complimentary whiskey to ease his mood.

Terranova nodded once. Harmony accepted his offer to sit.

"Harmony. Interesting name Doll?"

"My Grams named me. She said I was born feet first, screaming. She knew with my lungs I was destined to sing. Guess she was right."

"Ah, well she must be proud of the songbird you turned into."

"She's dead."

Terranova nodded. He tapped his finger on the table and stared at her. She looked away, but it was evident she didn't approach him to fish for a compliment. She wanted something as most dames did. That was fine with him. Her being able to get it was a different matter.

"Mr. Terranova?"

"Call me Vinnie."

Harmony looked him in the eye. He liked that. "Vinnie. I asked to speak to you because of my brother." She pulled her hands down into her lap and cleared her throat in an attempt to steady her shaky voice. She was nervous, he liked that too. "His name is Willie, Willie Jones. On the streets they call him Little-Will. He runs numbers for Mr. Collins. Mickey Collins."

"I don't know your brother," he grumbled. *Maybe it woulda been better if she'd kept her mouth shut.* His interest in her tale was ebbing away by the minute.

"Yes, I know," she said quickly. "I mean to say, I know who you are. My brother's missing. I haven't seen him in two days. Word is Mr. Collins is blaming him for coming up short. There must be some misunderstanding. Willie would never do that. Never. I was wondering if you could possibly help me a turn." She hurried through the rest, to out pace his impatience. "Help me find him."

"Why not go to Mickey? He works for him."

Harmony stiffened at the question. "Not to be disrespectful, but surely you of all people know that Mickey Collins would snap my neck for asking about his business." Terranova settled on the answer. This one here was smart. Harmony tossed her chin up confidently. She held his stare with a fierce, determined one of her own. "I thought I'd have better chances with you. Since um, I've noticed you watching me."

"Watching you?"

"Enjoying my performances."

Terranova frowned, his gaze level under drawn brows. To say he was surprised was an understatement. The Negress had balls. What chances did she think she could have, for him to care about some Negro numbers runner in Mickey's crew? Mickey who furthered the insult by not addressing him the moment their eyes met. He dropped his

cigar to the ashtray then stroked his chin. "Interesting. I'll need more information on your brother."

Harmony nodded quickly.

Ciro reappeared; a few of Terranova's best men were in tow. His brother had a cold congested look of disapproval settled over his face, which seemed to disconcert Harmony because she lowered her gaze to her hands, until Terranova's words brought her focus back to him.

"Let's discuss this later, in private."

"Private?" Harmony glanced from his stare to their audience. It appeared she quickly understood what *private* meant. Crestfallen, she blushed and averted her gaze, if she had been a shade or two paler he was sure he'd see humiliation rising pink on her cheeks. The band was warming up. Harmony glanced over and Terranova noticed the saxophonist beckoning stare. "I'll meet you at the front of the club, if that's okay."

Terranova nodded. She was dismissed.

Harmony's eyes lifted to Ciro who made no effort to move. She glanced once more to the ruthless Sicilian that could possibly save her brother's life. He flicked his wrist for his brother to back off. Ciro did, with a snort of distaste.

"Thank you." said Harmony meekly, as she eased out of the booth. She straightened her dress with a tug at the sides. Her breasts heaved drawing the stares of the others. Quickly, she stepped around Ciro. She could feel eyes on her as she sashayed back to her safety zone, to the wings. She didn't dare look back. If she dared she'd lose her nerve.

The orchestra played the vamp as Harmony returned to the microphone. Fletch shot her a worried look. Milo slipped her a warning nod that Mr. Madden was indeed watching her now. She closed her eyes to block the disappointment she'd read on the rest of her band mates face, and began to sing. When she opened her eyes, Terranova's table was again crowded with Sicilians. But only one pair of eyes was fixed on her. *His.*

“If you think Don Terranova is going to save Willie over some skirt, you’re crazy!”

“Oh pipe-down Milo, I know the man isn’t the least bit concerned about Willie,” Harmony said in a gentle but firm tone. She changed behind the dressing screen where only her silhouette could be seen.

“Mony, Willie isn’t worth the trouble. If he’s double-crossing Collins, he’s a dead boy either way!”

“Don’t you dare say that, Milo! Say it again and I want you out.”

“It’s true. Willie has to be either suicidal or dumb to think he could get away with this. Either way you aren’t going to be able to save him. You have to know this. Don Terranova wants one thing and if you leave with him, you won’t have any choice but to give it to him.”

Harmony came from around the screen wearing only her slip and a tight lip scowl. She opened her mouth to counter his prediction but dismissed the effort. Instead she picked up her peach and white floral dress drawing it down over her head. “Do me?” She turned to give him her back.

Milo rose and zipped her up. “Mony, listen to me. What would Lewis think?”

Harmony closed her eyes at the mention of her sweet dearly departed Lewis. The pain over his death was beyond her tears. She waited a beat for the anger and longing to shift to a bearable degree in her heart.

“Lewis is dead. He went out there and got himself killed working for that man. I won’t lose my brother too. He’s all I have.” She turned to face her friend. “What Lewis think don’t matter. What you think don’t matter a damn either sugar. All that matters is the promise I made to Grams. Willie’s seventeen and right or wrong he’s *my* kid brother. I got to try to save him, even from himself. Vinnie Terranova sits out there every night I perform and burns a hole in me from across the room. If there is a small chance that gangster will help deal with another, especially the likes of Mickey Collins, then I’m gonna take it. That’s the end of this discussion, Milo.”

Harmony stalked over to the vanity. She dropped down in front of the mirror. Picking up pins, she captured her loose unruly curls and pinned them back, flat to her

head. If she thought about it, what *could* happen, she wouldn't be able to pull it off. Willie's fate would be sealed then. If it isn't already.

From the mirror's reflection Harmony saw Milo drop in the chair behind her. She knew his fear. A colored girl in Harlem had few options and fewer choices. If your skin was medium brown to fair you might get the chance. She barely passed that test. So for her, singing jazz for rich white folks by night was liberating. No longer doing laundry for the same white folks by day. She was lucky though. Milo had gotten her a brownstone in Sugar Hill. Where all the other musicians, painters, authors, poets and Negro elite lived. It belonged to a friend of his and Lewis. The person whom she never met allowed a reasonable sublease once she became a headline attraction at the Cotton. This is why Willie's fool hearted ways hurt her so. Here she was breaking her back to give him more, and he was running those streets.

Milo was Lewis's best friend and an associate of Fletcher Henderson. Behind her back he hustled an audition for her at the newly opened Cotton Club when her washboard could no longer put food on the table without Lewis's earnings. His reasoning made little sense then, but now it did. Singing was all she had left. It was all she was.

"Singing jazz ain't the sin Momy, though, what them boys do out the back door with the bootlegging and gambling is. I'll give you that. What I'm asking really aint no worse than singing in your church."

"That's baloney. I see them girls coming from the Cotton, it's just a fancy hooch show. I'm tellin' you I ain't no jazz singer. Singing hymns is far from it." She spit on her heated iron and pressed back down on the linen for Mrs. Epstein, running the steam over to flatten the wrinkles.

"Hear me out. Fletch is forming his band for The Cotton. You know Jack Johnson done sold Club Deluxe to those gangsters. The place is called the Cotton Club now and it's big time, bigger than the Apollo. Gonna make us all famous."

"What that mean to me?" Harmony grunted, setting down the iron to shake out the sheet she washed clean of stains for the Epstein's until her fingers cramped and the skin on her hands wrinkled.

"It meant a new start. You grieving Lewis and I understand it, but he gone. I swore to take care of you. Best I can. That's what this deal means. And if you do it, I can get you out of here, to a better place."

"You talking crazy!" Harmony sighed.

"I'm talking opportunity."

Harmony frowned, she folded the sheet to a sensible square and set it atop of the rest of the laundry. Sweat beaded over her brow and the bridge of her nose. It was hot as Hades with both windows open. Leaving the one room flat she shared with Willie and Lewis was a dream when he was alive. She had no hope that after losing him it would be any part of her reality. Milo was feeding her a line. She wiped at her face with the back of her hand. "Sugar I can't tap or dance, I ain't been no further than the church pew. This here is all I knows. So this here is where I stay."

"Can't or won't? Don't be dense girl. What options you got? Willie is in them streets more and more daily. Is he doing anything to keep you in this place? I didn't think so. You gone make it on pennies now that Lewis gone?"

"I can take care of myself."

"Mony, that's what I'm saying. Take care of yourself. Besides Lewis used to say you got the pipes. He worked this deal for you."

"Lewis did not."

"That's why I'm here. He knew there was a chance, that um, you may need looking after. So he spoke to Henderson about you. Think on it. What harm can come of it? Sugar Hill, no more white folks laundry, doing what you love, how is that not your dream? I'll watch out for you, you got my word."

"Milo you kept your promise. You've done a lot." He had tried to protect her. Kept the paying clientele off her even withstood Owney Madden's wrath. A man who

could become mean as a rattler when crossed. Now, he couldn't stop her from walking out with a mob boss worse than them all.

"I love you for wanting to protect me. I'll be fine. I can handle myself."

Milo rose and without a word walked out of her dressing closet. He slammed the door. Harmony jumped at the final message. Her eyes lifted to her reflection in the mirror. She allowed herself no illusions about what the night would bring. "I'll be just fine. Just fine." She picked up her lipstick to dab the ruby gloss across her lips. Her shaking fingers belied her confident words.

Chapter Two

Shall We Dance?

Lenox Avenue at four in the morning wasn't any different than the avenue at four in the evening, except for the congested mix of people. Blacks and white's drove and walked the same streets in the night.

Harmony stood on the sidewalk with her coat on and her bell shaped cloche hat pressed down on her head watching others come and go. Funny how the same white folk that called for an encore just seconds after her last performance found her invisible as they passed her by. She didn't mind. Who she was at the Cotton should never cross over into her real life. Though she had the sinking feeling this would no longer be true after tonight.

Where was he? Harmony wondered about the time. Terranova should have arrived by now. She hadn't taken that long changing and Paulette said his men were still inside. The cars flew by and she worried what standing on the corner might make her appear to be. There was no solace in the fact that tonight; their impression would most likely be the truth. Feeling a dreaded sense of hopelessness, it dawned on her that he wouldn't show. Her shoulders slumped as she turned to head home. When she crossed over 142nd, a black chauffeured car rolled up blocking her pass. Harmony stopped, leery of the passenger who stepped out. The brim of the driver's fedora shadowed his face, but his eyes were still compelling. He opened the back door and gave her a respectful nod.

Sucking in a breath of bravery, Harmony walked over with steady nerves. The driver took her hand and helped her inside. *Like a lady*. Terranova patiently waited for her delivery.

"Hullo Songbird," Terranova said with quiet emphasis on *songbird*.

"Mr. Terranova." She replied in a shaky voice.

“Vinnie,” he reminded her.

“Thank you, *Vinnie* for um... for agreeing to meet with me to talk about Willie.”

Vinnie cut his eyes to the front and the driver nodded, pulling out onto Lenox Avenue. It was warm in the car but her nerves had her feeling ice water in her veins. Milo’s words and the spectra of Lewis haunted her, yet she focused. Could be he just wanted to talk. Could be.

She’s more fearless than I thought: fearless or desperate. The way she fiddles with her hand’s surely meant a little of both. Why I never made a move on her was simple. I pretty much stay away from birds like her. Her being a Negress wasn’t all of it. It was something about the way she put me at ease with her voice. Not looking for a dame colored or white wielding that kind of hold over me. Terranova’s gaze dropped to her lap, her coat covered the tops of her knees, still his eyes travelled over her feminine form to her face. Harmony shyly looked away avoiding his stare. The night would prove interesting indeed. They traveled out north. Terranova saw her visibly tense as it dawned on her. He said little for the first half of the ride to ease her fears. Then he spoke: “So tell me about your brother.”

“Willie’s good with numbers. Always has been. Mickey likes him cause he keeps them all in his head and never loses count. He never forgets a number. That meant Willie got more responsibility. Many colored’s are more comfortable with him running their numbers cause he was always coming up ace. He learned the ways of numbers running from my Lewis.”

Terranova narrowed his eyes. “What’s a Lewis?”

“My fiancé. He dead now. Used to work for Collins too. Willie started under Lewis, now he goes it alone. But he’s a good boy. Mickey Collins gave him a lot more responsibility like I told ya. Not that Mr. Collins did anything wrong, I’m just saying it proves Willie’s on the level.” She shifted in her seat trying to remain collected. “I mean to say that Willie is a kid, and kids make mistakes.” Harmony swallowed. “If I could get to him first, before Collins’s men do, I’m sure I can find out what he’s done or hasn’t done. I can clear things up.”

“Mickey runs his business as he sees fit Songbird. I can drop a line and see if he has the boy. But if he’s stealing...”

“Mr., uh, Vinnie, he’s not. I can assure you he’s not. I’m on the level. I checked the neighborhood and some of his friends think he may have gotten robbed. That’s why he ran, cause robbed or not if he’s short on Collins's money, you know what that means. He don’t have many options here.” Her eyes were pools of appeal. First her voice, now her eyes were getting to him.

The beginning of a smile touched the corners of Terranova’s mouth. “You care a lot about your brother.”

“He’s all I got in the world. Yes I care.”

“I have a little brother too. They can be quite a handful.”

They were headed to Brooklyn. Harmony mentally calculated how much it would cost her to catch the Jitney back to Harlem. Too much, probably. She’d have to hitch a ride. Things were going fast and she had gone too far to turn back now.

In front of his brownstone the car door opened and she was helped outside. She stepped into the street and stared up at the place. Terranova was out of the car as well, his grey trench draped around his shoulders and his black Fedora resting on the top of his head. The smile in his eyes contained a sensuous flame that set her at ease. “Shall we?”

Harmony hesitated. At what point did he make it clear he would help her? And at what point had she made it clear she’d pay his price for that help? The lines were blurred for her and her pounding heart didn’t help much. Despite the warning signs of danger she saw in his intense stare and the eyes of the men that shadowed him, he was also drawing her in with his unspoken charm. It would be easier not to resist him.

Walking around the car, she gave a small smile and allowed him to lead her to the doors of his home. They climbed the stairs but Harmony fell back on the step when the door opened. A short dark skinned black woman in a maid’s uniform appeared. Their eyes met. There was an arrested expression on her face. The servant quickly

covered it then backed away in respect and held the door for them to enter. God help Harmony but it was like looking into the eyes of her Grams.

“Good evening Mr. Terranova,” the servant said, accepting his hat and coat.

“Mabel.” Terranova said.

“Good evening,” Mabel mumbled, her gaze slipping to Harmony.

“Good evening,” Harmony answered softly.

“Your coat, Miss?”

Harmony nervously undid the front buttons to her coat then passed Mabel the coat, her hat and purse. The woman shook her head in disappointment before she walked away. It hurt, but Harmony had grown used to the sting. Singing at the Cotton had cost her the respect of many of the people in her community before she moved to Sugar Hill. She could hear the snickers of the young women when she went to church. It got so bad that even the Reverend’s wife asked her not to return. So she didn’t. Since her popularity and her one night performance at the Lincoln Theater men that knew her Grams when she was alive had propositioned her. It was exhausting. But she’d learned to endure. Jazz is about survival, and as long as she kept it to Jazz she had nothing to be ashamed of.

Harmony entered the parlor, her heels clicking noisily over the hardwood floors. Terranova had many fine things including his own private bar – stocked full with bootleg whiskey and hooch. He stood there pouring from a crystal decanter. When he turned, she saw he had two glasses. Harmony only drank hooch with Lewis once or twice and hated it. The Cotton slipped it to its patrons after late hours but never the staff. Tonight her fear was chipping away at her bravery. She needed something to help.

“Thank you,” she said, accepting the drink. She sipped it but kept a straight face as the pour burned its way down her throat.

“Have a seat.”

She did. Thankfully, he took a seat across from her.

“What corner does Willie run?”

“East 96th.”

Terranova downed the last of his whiskey as if it were water. "Anthony," he called out.

A man appeared from nowhere, another Sicilian, younger than Terranova, but with a face made for murder. She thought they were alone, except for the maid. His presence made her eye the exit once more.

"Yes, Boss?"

"Take a run up East 96th through 125th and put the word out that I'm looking for Little-Will."

"Yes, Boss."

"Oh, and get a message to Mickey Collins, that I want the kid alive. He has a problem with that tell him to see me."

"Yes, Boss."

Harmony blinked through her shock. Just like that and it was done. A cold wave of relief washed over her. She smiled at him. "Thank you so much, Mr. Terranova. I mean Vinnie. I really don't know how to thank you for this."

Harmony rose. Terranova looked up at her curiously. A tense silence enveloped the room.

"When Willie comes in I'm sure he can clear this all up." Harmony smiled, eyeing the exit.

Terranova chuckled. His expression stilled and grew serious. "If he's stealing from Mickey, you will have to. But I think it best you stay until we bring him in, don't you?"

He stood.

Harmony squeezed the cool glass until spasmodic tremors cramped her hand. She stepped back. Terranova closed the distance between them. She was forced to maintain his stare. Her breath solidified in her throat. "I don't know how I can repay you for this," she stammered again glancing toward the exit.

"I'm sure we can think of something."

"Like?"

"Sing for me. Here. Now."

“Sing?”

Terranova stepped closer and she froze. His eyes were a tawny shade of brown. Now she knew the color and couldn't remember why she wanted too in the first place. The man made her nervous. He was closer now, closer than any man besides Lewis had ever been. His gaze lowered to her bosom and lingered there. Torturous minutes went by before his eyes lifted to lock in on her face once more. Terranova was so close, his touch was certain to come next. She knew it. She braced for it. But he then walked around her and away. “Saw Bessie Smith at the Cotton the night the doors opened,” he said, stopping in front a shiny copper and gold phonograph. “Next to you she’s my favorite singer.”

“You like Jazz?” Harmony asked, realizing immediately how stupid the question was.

“Surprised? I love Jazz, thanks to Bessie, now thanks to you.”

“Me?”

“Do you know her?”

“No.” Did he think all Negroes knew each other? “I’ve met her, saw her perform that is, and met her twice after but I don’t know her.” She quickly answered. Harmony watched him wind the handle of the crank on the side of the player, then drop the needle down on the record. *So he owned race music?* Why was she surprised? If he didn’t have an affinity to her talents or her music she would’ve never gotten the door. Turning, Terranova removed his suit jacket and tossed it to the chair, without a thought. She figured money and nice things came easy to him. She figured a woman like her came easy as well. Closing her eyes she figured she could go through with it. For Willie.

“My song?” he spoke, the huskiness lingered in his tone.

Harmony eyes opened. One of Bessie’s recent recordings filled the room. But Terranova wanted his own rendition.

“I’m waiting,” he said, extending his hand.

The symphony that played about them was sweetly enticing. Harmony itched down in her throat to join in the melody. She knew this song, had sang it before. The

band was different, but the song wasn't. She reached for his hand then stepped into his arms now humming through the intro. Other than Lewis, she'd never been in a man's arms. She found Vinnie Terranova's arms oddly enticing. So much so, she began to relax. Soon she swayed to the music singing, softly, into his ear. From over his shoulder she caught the maid Mabel peek in at them. The look on Mabel's face said it all. *For Willie, everything I do tonight is for Willie, and a maybe a little bit for me.*

Her hand rested on his right shoulder and her other was clasped in his. Their dance was gentle almost innocent. Almost. One look into Terranova eyes she knew his intent. Milo was right, bargain with the devil he'll take you for a ride.

Terranova hands took hold of her hips. Harmony forced a demure smile and ignored the pretzel tight knot in her stomach. When his hands moved slowly around to her rear, terrible regrets assailed her. She closed her eyes and tried her best not to react. Resting her hands on his shoulders, she let her singing keep her calm. Terranova responded in the like, he rubbed the side of his face against her cheek. It's not rough, the way she imagined it would be. The way Lewis' cheek was.

Harmony softened. So did the knot of fear twisting through her stomach since the moment she approached the mob boss's table. Even the maid spying didn't unsettle her. Nothing could touch her when she sang. When the record stopped, she continued to hum in time with the scratch-and-bump of the needle, having no need or use for a melody other than her own. It took her several moments to realize the dance should have ended. Lifting her head from his shoulder, she tried to pull back. But he held her firm. Their faces were inches apart, and she knew he'd see the blush cover her cheeks.

"That's the tops, sweet," he smirked.

"Thank you," she whispered, swaying in his arms.

"I've watched you for weeks. Listened to you."

"I know. I've noticed," she said softly. "Thanks for the tips."

"You knew they were from me?"

"I do now," she winked.

His chuckle came from deep in his throat. One could easily forget that this man was as ruthless as he was handsome. His chuckle simmered to a low groan. "Smart girl."

Terranova arms tightened around her. She was crushed against every hard angle of his chest and it felt good. Though she knew it was well past what her Grams would have called appropriate, having a man hold her was near sublime. She took a deep breath and adjusted her smile. Lust was rising so fast she could feel herself vibrate with need. "Maybe I should go now."

"I've always wanted to do this." Terranova pulled back and straightened from the way he held her. His hands went to her neatly pinned hair. Harmony stilled. She steadied her breath in anticipation while he pulled the pins out and let them drop to the floor. Her thickly wound pin-curls fell free in frozen spirals about her face. His fingers ran through the coarse strands, more pins dropped to the floor, raining small metallic sounds. He began to massage her scalp gently with the pads of his fingers. It felt sinfully divine. Her head rolled slowly back and her eyes shut. She'd missed a man's touch. It didn't occur to her until then. It was shameful how much she was enjoying Vinnie's. Terranova then combed his fingers from the roots through her tangles and spread her untamed tresses over her shoulders.

Vinnie. The name buzzed through her skull with such potent force she felt her self go weak around the knees, so her hands lifted to hold his sides. All ideas of how she'd escape a night in his bed dissolved. "I... I thought... I never, um... Mr. Terranova... Vinnie," she stammered.

"*Molto piacevole,*" he whispered in a tongue foreign to her. Realizing how undone she'd become, she snapped out of it. With her locks falling freely over her eyes, Harmony nervously touched her hair and stepped back from him.

"Excuse me," Harmony stammered.

"For?" he asked.

She couldn't answer. All she knew was in a blink desire had rolled its way up through her with such force she forgot her middle name. Who could blame her? Power

rippled off him in sexy waves hitting her with full intensity. Instead of reclaiming her senses that brief connection they shared melted away her defense.

"*Selo fidi*," he said and smirked. "Trust me."

Is he serious? Grams always said with a man trust is a trick horse, turn your back on common sense and get kicked in your head for it. Of course a mob boss like Vinnie Terranova thinks it should be given freely if he asked. Well, I'm no fool. Sure he may like to hear me carry a tune. Sure he wants a little more. But he's like any man. Once his appetite is satisfied that maid Mabel is going to be showing me to the door.

Terranova stepped back, but continued to hold her hand. Expectation weighed in his gaze. "You always this jumpy songbird?"

"No," she said honestly, gauging his response. Humor sparkled in his eyes but he didn't laugh. She offered him a sly smile. "I'll try to relax Vinnie."

Terranova brows lowered. Maybe he appreciated her candor. "Yes, try."

With her hand in his, he led her out of the parlor. When they entered the dark hall to the staircase Mabel had eased back into the shadows, still she peeked at her from behind a door. A stony look of disgust and disbelief turned what were possibly gentle features hard. Harmony held to her pride and made the climb with her head high. Terranova took the lead pulling her hand behind him in silence. *For Willie*, she kept reminding herself. Terranova stopped at a bedroom door and pushed it inward. Harmony could barely see inside. She didn't have to. She knew what awaited her there. *Should I delay the inevitable and make sure Willie was all right? What do I have to offer him but this, and once it's had, what then?*

"Harmony?" he said her name, noticing her resistance.

She flashed a small smile of her own then stepped inside. The room was dark, but the bed was clearly visible, and even more intimidating than the gangster that stood behind her. The door lock clicked, engaged and she bit down hard on her bottom lip. Apprehension gnawed at her confidence. She forced herself to look back when he turned on a lamp. Again, she was struck by the hard edges of his handsomeness. Here she was, alone, with this dangerous man and desire was reshaping her fear. Tall, with glossy golden brown hair, smoldering amber eyes, and the most delectable mouth she

had ever seen. He had this way of moistening his lips when she was under his scrutiny. Every time he spoke her name, she felt an insane urge to do the same. In fact, the more time alone with him those urges consumed her sensibility, and she was oddly grateful for it.

Terranova walked over to the other lamp near the bed and turned it on. The surface was bathed in a soft light, just enough to chase away the shadows. Her eyes skipped over to it. Art Deco in design, it was the largest bed she'd ever laid her eyes on outside Pinkleston's furniture store. Why would a single man like him need a bed so big? She and Lewis shared one less than half its size and Willie slept on the other side of a strung up sheet on a cot.

"You're still nervous," he said, approaching.

Harmony opened her mouth and closed it, knowing that a litany of excuses were certain to tumble out. When he stopped in front of her she had to look up into his eyes again. Terranova traced his finger along her jaw to the center of her chin then with a pinch he tilted her head back. Harmony took in a few quick breaths through her nose, attempting to stop the breakneck pace of her heart. Her body slowly began to unwind. Terranova lowered his head and stole a kiss. It was slow, teasingly slow. A brief touch of lips that remained gentle and sweet. When his mouth parted she realized hers gaped for more. Embarrassed she pressed her lips together and double blinked up at him. Heat slid through her awakening body and she swallowed hard. She wanted a kiss. A real one. *Should she say so?* One arm held her. The other free hand caressed her cheek with the back of his hand.

"You are lovely."

"Maybe we should wait for news on Willie. I might have to um, talk to him."

"I think I've waited long enough, songbird." Terranova's voice hardened and so did his hold. He tilted her head back with the pinch of her chin. He ran his hand along the center of her neck, stopping at her collarbone a brief moment then travelling over the exposed mounds barely seen at the front of her dress. "Soft," he said, easing his hand inside. Two buttons were pushed undone by his pursuit. His eyes flashed upward to lock with hers again. "I can feel your heart beating in my palm." Terranova smirked,

giving her breast a gentle squeeze, then pulling on her swollen nipple until it was tight. "I've always wondered if the skin between your thighs felt as beautiful as your voice. Does it?" he asked removing his hand then reaching behind her to pull down the tab on the zipper to her dress.

Harmony closed her eyes. The front of her dress lowered but she caught the fabric before it dipped to low. His penetrating stare said he didn't approve. She slowly lowered her hand. The dress dropped down the length of her arms. She had to tug it over the bend of her hips in order for it to fall to the floor.

Now in her full slip and heels, her neck, shoulders, and the tops of her breasts were available for his perusal.

Terranova took a small step back to be sure he could see her fully. "I've imagined quite a bit since I first laid eyes on you. Your breasts for starters. I've given them considerable thought." His thick Sicilian accent didn't garble his words. In fact, it only added flavoring to the precise way in which he spoke.

"Have you?" Harmony let out a shaky breath and moisture gathered between her thighs then dampened the seat of her panty. A kiss. If he kissed her once more she was certain the last of her trepidation would melt away. Should she kiss him? If he was closer she would. Under the heat of his gaze she found herself unable to move or speak. The shadows in the room chased from the bed, were mostly in the corner where he stood. They cast his face in mystery. It was clear that pleasure awaited behind the veil of taboo. No one need to know, why not indulge until her back wore out. Sweet merciful Mary she could really go for a bit of forbidden now.

Harmony pressed her lips together. She reached for the silk strap of her slip on her left shoulder and eased it down. Her actions peeled away the soft fabric from her left breast revealing her stiffening nipple.

Terranova smiled.

Her hand trembled as arousal curled tighter in her stomach. Mindless, she eased down the left silk strap and uncovered both breasts. Harmony hand lowered, both hands went to the sides of her slip and began to tug--never taking her eyes off his. The slip fell from her body in a satin wave to her ankles, she then stepped out of it. A shiver

went through her and her cheeks warmed as she faced his inspection. Harmony stood before him in her panty and gartered stockings, with the heels she'd borrowed from the Club. She watched his hand rise, then reach out to touch her, and could feel the heat from his fingers, barely centimeters from her skin. She didn't know what to make of the tease. Her eyes dropped down to where he barely touched her and for long breathless moments just stared until his hand lowered.

Terranova was stunned. Never in his life, had a woman affected him so. Not even his sweet Annie, who left him when his violent nature became too much. He knew his fondness for Harmony stemmed from her voice. But now, he had to question that reasoning. There was something different about this dame. It was her. All of her. This woman who was the polar opposite of any that shared his bed. Before him in her panty and garter stockings she was a vision, but she could have remained fully clothed and still affected him this way. He could sit and stare at her all night. Hell how many times at the Cotton had done that very thing.

She crossed her arms over her breasts and visibly shivered. Was she cold? Why couldn't he move on her? Dammit this was ridiculous. "Come here," he barked, his voice hoarse with desire.

Again she maintained his stare. She approached him slowly, keeping her lovely breast concealed behind her crossed arms.

"I've also imagined what you would taste like. Here," he dipped his head to the side of her neck and ran his tongue over the rapid beat of her pulse. Then lifted his face and noticed her lids fluttering. Terranova unsnapped her garter belt and fastens, tossing it aside. He eased his hand down her back and slid a finger over the nylon of her panty, down the crease of her buttocks to rub her forbidden hole. "And here," he said giving it a tap. His other hand went between them and eased between her legs to rub two fingers over the seat of her panty that concealed the plump lips of her vagina. "And here."

Her lids finally parted and she gazed up at him with such heat banked in her beautiful brown eyes.

"I imagined how you'd beg me to fuck you with my tongue in everyway possible, how delicious you'd be."

Terranova let her go. He circled her, stopping directly behind her. His arms went under hers causing them to lift in acceptance. Then, finally, came his touch, both his palms flat against her belly. She exhaled and swallowed another nervous gulp. "Tell me what you need. Do you want me to fuck you now or let me explore you first?"

His palms went smoothly up to her breasts. She pressed the side of her face to his as her head tilted back to his shoulder. He could hear her sweet gasps soft against his ear as his hands became filled with them both. Using his thumbs, he ran them across her sensitive nubs. She shuddered and heaved her chest with deep sighs, into his palms, whimpering for more.

"Yes please..."

"Please what, Harmony? Should we wait for Willie? Should we make it no more than a deal between us? His freedom for yours?"

"What do you expect me to say?" She shook her head as he now massaged her breasts in continuous rounded motions, making her squirm. Forcing her to rub her thighs together--weak attempts to quell the aching way her pussy dripped.

"I'm hanging on by a thread here doll. Don't want to rush things, scare you, but... tell me something quick." He caught the distended tips between his thumbs and forefingers, squeezing lightly. His other hand went between her thighs forcing her feet to part, and made a slow climb upward. Liquid heat spiraled from her breasts down to her center. He fondled her through her panty and Harmony climaxed where she stood. Exhilarated she shuddered within his touch and squirmed as soft moans escaped her.

Terranova hadn't lied. The passion squeezing his cock urged him to abandon restraint and fuck her hard and strong. But the delicate feel of her, the sweet smell of her breath, and the lovely sound of her voice when she spoke tamed his instinct. His cock twitched and strained against his zipper. "You're remarkable, so ripe and ready. Wet and ready. You're so sensitive. I like that." He did. He wanted to know more, feel more. Releasing her nipples he tracked his hands down into her panty.

"Wait!" she gasped, taking hold of his wrist.

"I want you now, songbird." He whispered back. "*Selo fidi*, remember?" He smiled. His finger tangled briefly in the short nest of curls guarding her femininity before dipping lower.

She feared he'd tear her panties off her. But his touch was gentle as he removed them, leaving her only in her garter belt and borrowed stockings.

"Yes," he replied, rubbing his knuckles up and down her dripping slit. Her panty stretched and slipped from her hips, it was pushed down her thighs. She rolled her ass against the bulge pressing against her. Then he inserted a finger into her causing her to rise on her toes.

"I like the way you move, struggle against me, mmm..." he flicked his tongue at her ear. "What do you want from me Harmony? What do you want?"

"You, please, just um, yes, do me."

"Fuck you? With what? My finger?" He inserted another finger and that released a silent cry from her pouty lips, her buttocks shuddered against him. "My tongue? My cock?"

Again Harmony moaned, she couldn't utter a word. How could she say those words, she'd never said those words aloud before. Her throat went dry as her temperature spiked another degree, while he drove two strong thick fingers in and out of her. She felt her inner muscles in her vagina constrict and release so she grabbed his hand and forced his fingers deeper. "Yes!" she cried out then shuddered through another warm sweet release. She moaned louder as her head thrashed against his shoulder.

It had been over a year since Lewis died. So very long since she'd been touched. Her head swam under the promise of the intimacy she'd been missing in her life. She grew weaker as he loved her with his hand. Slowly her channel adjusted to the sweet invasion. Now responding bodily she began to work her hips and indulge in the sinful sensations.

"You move so sweetly with my hand," he grunted against her ear.

Terranova released her. Harmony turned to him and her panty dropped down her legs. She was sticky with her own juices between her thighs. Here she stood, her undergarments at her feet, her sex throbbing for him and he was neatly groomed, tailored, not a strand of his thick hair out of place. He smelled of whiskey, tobacco, and a mossy maleness. There was no point in denying, even to herself, that she wanted him. Every inch of him.

Gripping the sleeves of his shirt Harmony's mouth inched closer to his. Slowly her head went back and her eyes lowered when he made the same move on her. The brush of his lips was electrifying. A jolt of power washed over her. She felt her own potency in his kiss, and how slowly he was slipping under. Terranova's warm, strong, tongue swept over hers. The exchange left her breathless. Her hands lifted to his hair grabbing the silky strands and they slipped through her fingers. She felt their connection, felt his need and returned it, devouring him with her kiss. His passion, slow and controlled, had her desperate and demanding more.

Next her feet left the ground as he lifted her, and she wrapped her legs around his waist, prepared for the journey. It was short steps to the bed, and he placed her there delicately. That was the shocking contrast of who he was for her now. All gentle touches and sweet kisses. Was she to believe this behavior change too was part of the man who evoked fear in many?

Harmony watched him undo her shoe buckle then toss it, then the other. When he lowered her foot she scooted back into the lush pillows in nothing but her garter stocking's rolled to mid thigh.

Terranova opened his cuffs and then the collar of his shirt, before he unbuttoned. His gaze hard, Harmony swallowed another dose of nerves. Shrugging off the shirt he dropped it aside. The shirt discarded, she was left a clear view of his broad shoulders and his long lean arms, slightly muscular but not massive. She was taken aback by the knife cuts and healed scarring where he was either stabbed or worse. Is that what life in his world meant? A life that stole her Lewis away. She cast her gaze away, but again was compelled to look his way again.

When he dropped his pants, she caught the way his penis sprang out. Terranova let his gaze travel along the line of her body with an unspoken command. Harmony rose on her elbows. Neither of them spoke. Sucking down a breath of courage she scooted down to the center of the bed, parting her legs for him. He dropped a knee on the bed, and his hand lowered to her bent knee and pushed it down to the mattress. In the dim light she caught the swirl of desire in his irises. To her delight his head lowered and he kissed her at her below. The kiss he gave her pussy was soft at first then demanding and scorching with intensity. His tongue swept in deep then withdrew masterfully.

Harmony squeezed her eyes shut. He blew his cool breath over her hot wet sex and she shuddered. She felt dizzy with lust. "Ugh!" She panted in response.

She arched her back with the heels of her feet resting on the center of his back, as his face remained buried between her thighs. Her head tilted all the way back into the pillows.

Terranova plunged his tongue into her channel and then thrust it in and out with such force her pelvis shook. To her confusion he grabbed hold of her wrist and brought her hand between her thighs when she neared climax. Lifting his head he studied her as he forced her to play with her clitoris then lowered his face to lick and penetrate her hole with his tongue deeply once more. Harmony did as she was instructed, plucking and twisting her clit while throwing her hips up into his face for more. It was so sinfully bad, she knew she'd be damned for sure, but she couldn't stop. She wouldn't stop. Then he knocked her hand away and took her jewel into his mouth sucking it hard. She exploded! Her inner walls clamped down on his newly inserted fingers and she gripped his hair tightly before releasing a scream.

Never in Harmony's life had she experienced such beautiful intensity. Letting go of his hair she gripped the sheets. She was mortified by her lack of control. But she saw him mounting her and knew he wasn't. Delaying the loving no longer, he positioned his bobbing cockhead at her entrance. Without warning he bore down with his hips, sinking, giving her inch after inch.

His face came in close and she turned from his lips coated with her essence. He pressed those lips to her cheek and she closed her eyes.

"You are a Goddess," he groaned.

Harmony gasped, Terranova delivered thrust after thrust. He forced her to receive his tongue. Blinking rapidly at the salty flavor, she had to close her eyes. He licked at her tongue and lips smiling while moving inside of her.

Taking her by the lush mounds of her ass Terranova pumped his cock into a hot clenching channel that set his toes to curl. Harmony whimpered and moaned beneath him. He wanted to fuck her so hard, but he knew she wasn't ready for that. Not in the way he really wanted to take her. So he forced himself to slow, willed himself to behave. But Harmony moved one time too many and despite his restraint he thrust harder and faster. The warmth of her silken channel sent his mind to spinning with foolish thoughts: *I want her to be mine, only mine, always.* Terranova shook away the delirium.

Her nails scored his back and he winced. He blinked at her and she gave him a wicked smile. Terranova growled dropping his face to her neck and pumping the ache of his cock in and out of her with fierce determination. They bounced on the bed. He pinned her wrist down and she fought to be free. Nothing, not even the sweet sounds of her pleas could stop him. He was lost.

Harmony cried out in his ear and he kept going. Terranova thrust long and deep, their bodies sweating and gliding over each other. Her hands free they rubbed his back. She dug her nails in and he kept going. He kept going until his muscles locked and he let go every ounce of his seed.

Terranova fell on top of her, listening to her rapid heartbeat, his ear against the comfort of her bosom. He kissed her sweaty breast and held on to her, too spent to do much more.

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