

RITE OF PASSAGE

A short story by AmandaK

(Warning: contains elements of bondage, D/s and voyeurism)

Five o'clock. Finally - she had begun to think the day was going to last forever. With several quick keystrokes Valerie signed off on the computer on her desk. As the machine powered itself down and the soft hum of the processor ceased, the phone rang. She glared at it. It was five o'clock on a Friday afternoon, for crying out loud! What was so urgent that it couldn't wait until Monday? If it were that pesky Mr. Mackey again... For a minute she contemplated to simply let the phone ring; whoever it was could call back on Monday. The noise was insistent, hard to resist and at last, with a roll of her eyes, she lifted the receiver.

"O'Leary's Real Estate, Valerie speaking," she announced herself.

"I want to take you out tonight," a deep, familiar voice echoed in her ear without preamble. "Somewhere special."

"Nathan!" Valerie breathed. A delicious shiver ran along her spine at the sound of his voice. "I didn't think you'd be back yet."

He didn't reply. Instead, he continued as if she hadn't spoken. "Wear the burgundy dress. Be ready at seven." He didn't wait for a reply. Somewhat taken aback by his abruptness Valerie listened to the beep-beep of a disconnected line.

He could have at least waited for her consent, she thought. But she wasn't upset. Truth be told, the unexpected surprises he sometimes sprung on her were one of the things she liked about Nathan. They had been seeing each other for five months now. And he was wonderful. Kind, caring, with a great body: anything a woman could wish for.

Her thoughts drifted back to the day she first met him, all those months ago. What had started as the worst day in her life, had turned out to be one of the best. Mr. O'Leary called in sick that morning and she spent most of her day rescheduling appointments and calming irate clients. At Mr. O'Leary's special request, she had gone that evening to meet one client herself, an elderly lady who lived in the Hollywood hills. On the way home her car broke down. To make a bad situation worse, her cell phone battery had gone dead. Desperate, and a bit frightened to be alone in the hills so late, Valerie had rung the bell of a whitewashed villa with blue doors and shutters. Nathan had opened the door. He had been most chivalrous, allowed her to use his phone and call the AAA, and then told her she

should wait inside until the service truck arrived. Two days after that, he had called her and asked for a date.

At first Valerie had tried to keep him at a distance. She wasn't ready for a new relationship, still hurting about the way Matthew dumped her for that ballet dancer. But Nathan had been insistent. And how could she refuse a man who sent her flowers and gifts and who desired to take her out to dinner on the moonlit terrace of the Bellarosa with its grandiose view across the city? In the end she relented and accorded him one date. They had been inseparable since. Except when he had to leave town on business. Nathan worked as a producer for a production company that specialized in commercials. He had left last Wednesday for Santa Fe to shoot a shampoo commercial and she had not expected him back until Monday evening. Valerie had already resigned herself to a lonely weekend of enforced celibacy when his unexpected call came in.

Invigorated by the much brighter prospect of a weekend spent with Nathan, Valerie hastened to close down the office and go home. She soon found that most of Los Angeles' work force had had the same idea and her white Hyundai Accent got hopelessly stuck in traffic. It was a quarter after six when she entered her apartment. Only forty-five minutes to get ready. And Valerie wanted to be ready when Nathan arrived; he didn't like it when people were late. He saw enough of that in his work, he said, to accept it in his private life as well.

She stripped off her dark blue business suit and turned on the shower. She allowed herself to luxuriate in the warm stream for a few minutes before washing her hair. After she toweled off she applied generous amounts of the expensive body lotion Nathan had given her. He said its scent on her skin reminded him of wide-open, green fields covered with sweet flowers. Valerie half-suspected it was a quote from a commercial for the product but she didn't care. When Nathan whispered such things in her ear while she basked in the afterglow, she was inclined to believe him unconditionally.

She wrapped a towel around her dripping hair and pattered back to the bedroom to get dressed. Tonight was going to be special, and she wanted to look her best. She held the red dress in front of her and studied her reflection. Nathan had bought it for her one Saturday afternoon when they had strolled hand in hand along Santa Monica Boulevard. It wasn't the sort of dress she would have picked out herself, she thought as she caressed the soft fabric. It was a dark, burgundy color, with a brighter red lining emphasizing the low neckline. The *very* low neckline, Valerie chuckled, lower than she was truly comfortable with. Nathan said it was sexy. And yes, she admitted to herself while taking another look in the mirror, the dress would look good on her.

She dropped the garment back on the bed and walked over to a chest of drawers. Nathan had requested she wore his gift; it was up to her to add the right underwear and create an immaculate appearance. Not that anyone but Nathan would get to see the full picture, of course. However, he did have a taste for perfection. Valerie opened one of the drawers and rummaged through its contents. Most of her underwear was brand new, bought in the last four months since she and Nathan had started sleeping together. Her hand brushed across a white, silk scarf and she pulled it out, a smile forming around her lips at the images associated with the scarf. It was yet another present from Nathan, one that he had given her after one night of especially naughty sex. Her cheeks colored at the memory.

About a month ago, he had taken her to see a movie and after the show invited her over for a late night cup of coffee. In the few months of their dating those words had become their code for 'I want to make love to you'. Once they entered his house, they headed straight for the master bedroom where Nathan quickly undressed her. Then, to her surprise, he had pulled several white scarves from beneath the pillow, saying he had an idea. His voice had been honed with excitement.

Valerie had protested at first, naturally. However, it hadn't taken him long to convince her it was perfectly safe and that he would let no harm come to her; she had given in to her curiosity and his desire and allowed Nathan to tie her to his bed. Helpless, she had lain there, vulnerable, exposed to his eyes and hands and unable to prevent whatever he had in store for her.

She hadn't needed worry. Nathan had lavished his attentions on every inch of her body, making her itch, twitch, quiver and squirm until she came again and again with the most violent orgasms she had ever known. Before he took her home he gave her the four scarves. "A reminder," he had said, "of what we can be, you and I." She hadn't quite understood what he meant but the scarves brought back good memories every time she touched them. Sometimes, when he was away for a shoot and Valerie felt lonely, she tied the silk around her wrists and ankles, lay spread-eagled and naked on the bed and imagined his hands on her until she shook with desire.

Somewhere, outside, a horn beeped. With a start Valerie returned to the here and now. It was six forty-five. Fifteen minutes to finish getting dressed, dry her hair and apply her make-up. She was going to have to rush it; she'd lost quite a lot of time day dreaming about the past. Valerie put the scarves aside and concentrated on searching through her underthings. She settled on a peach-colored, satin string that was brand new. She slipped it up her legs and allowed herself a few precious

seconds to watch her image in the mirror. Yes, it looked great. Once Nathan saw her in this string, he would be hard pressed to contain himself. She grinned, snatched the dress from the bed and dropped it over her head. The thin material conformed itself to the curves of her slim figure and accentuated her long legs and firm, round breasts that didn't need the support of a bra.

She blow-dried her hair and cast another glance at the clock. Five minutes to go. She reached for her make-up kit and applied a dab of lipstick, mascara and some eye shadow. Not too much, Nathan liked her au naturel.

Just as she snapped the small container with colored powder shut, the doorbell rung. Valerie looked at the clock again. Seven exactly. Right on the dot. Sometimes she wondered if Nathan was waiting in front of her door until it was the exact time. How else did he always make it on the strike of the appointed hour?

She slipped into her black heels and went to open the door.

"Hello Valerie," he said in greeting. His blue eyes traveled down the length of her body; they seemed to penetrate the thin fabric of her dress as they took in the soft curves of her breasts and hips.

"Nathan," she whispered. Her voice was husky and she felt her cheeks color beneath his gaze while at the same time butterflies fluttered in her belly. He smiled a knowing smile and for just a second she hated him. How did he always manage with one look to make her feel as nervous as a schoolgirl on her first date?

He leaned forward and pecked a chaste kiss onto her cheek. "You look wonderful. Just as I imagined you would. Shall we go?" He didn't ask if she was ready, he simply offered her his arm. Valerie grabbed her purse, house keys and a woolen shawl –nights could be cool this time of year and the spaghetti strap dress didn't offer much warmth- and followed him to his car. The black Porsche gleamed in the light of moon. He opened the door for her and she slipped into the passenger seat. Nathan walked around the Porsche's front and got behind the wheel. She studied him from the corner of her eye. He was dressed casually: dark gray slacks, black turtleneck sweater and a lighter gray jacket. Not at all the formal wear she had come to expect from the way he instructed her over the phone that afternoon. She wondered if she was overdressed.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

Nathan smiled. "Dinner, for starters," he said. "I assume you're hungry?"

Valerie nodded. "Starving." Lunch had been seven hours ago.

"Good," he nodded. Valerie wanted to ask about his plans for the rest of the evening but Nathan had put the car in motion and was carefully winding his way through the busy downtown traffic. Valerie settled back into her seat. Nathan would tell her in his own time, and not a second before.

It took them half an hour to reach the restaurant he had in mind for their reunion dinner. He parked at the side of the building, helped her climb out of the car and offered her his arm once more to lead her inside. Valerie smiled to herself. Always the gentleman, he was. Once they entered the restaurant, she stopped in surprise. From the outside, the place had been fairly non-descript. Inside, it was decorated with impeccable taste. The walls were paneled with expensive walnut polished a warm reddish-brown. Heavy, cream-colored tablecloths covered several small tables laid neatly with glittering silverware and shiny thin-stemmed glasses. Soft music played from invisible speakers. What really shocked Valerie, however, was the lack of customers: the restaurant was empty. A rare sight on a Friday evening, even if it was still early.

Valerie turned to her escort. "Nathan, are you sure this is—"

He smiled and patted her arm. "Do you trust me?" Valerie nodded. "Then don't ask any further questions." Valerie swallowed and nodded again. He brought her to the one table in the middle of the restaurant that had two burning candles on it, pulled back her seat and motioned her to sit. From the dark shadows a waiter appeared. His appearance startled Valerie; she hadn't noticed him before. He handed them their menus.

"Mr. Wells, Madam."

It slowly dawned on Valerie that Nathan must have leased the whole restaurant that evening for a private dinner for the two of them. She beamed a smile at him. "This is... really special."

"You're a special lady," he said. He reached across the table and took the as yet unopened menu from her hands. "Will you let me choose tonight?"

Valerie blinked and gave a nod. "If that's what you want."

"It is," he confirmed. He opened his menu and studied it for a few minutes. The waiter returned with an unopened bottle of red wine.

"Sir?" Nathan glanced at the label and gave a nod of approval. The waiter opened the bottle and poured them both a glass before setting the bottle down beside Nathan's glass. "Have you made your choice?"

"Yes, we have," Nathan said. "The lady will have the Caesar salad and I'll take the fettuccine."

"Excellent choice," the waiter commented as he took away the menus.

While they waited for their food they talked about the week that lay behind them. Nathan complained about the many tasks of a producer. He entertained Valerie with stories about the stuck up actress that the company had hired for their shampoo commercial. "Sometimes," Nathan confessed in a whisper, "I wanted to take her over my knee and spank her until she pleaded for mercy."

Valerie began to laugh. "That would be something," she said. "I don't think her agent would stand for it though. They'd probably get you fired."

Nathan nodded. "Unfortunately, yes," he admitted with a theatrical sigh. "Not everyone appreciates a proper tanning. So, how was your week?"

Dinner arrived and Valerie told Nathan about her week. She mentioned Mr. Mackey who called twice a day every day, demanding to know why Mr. O'Leary had not yet found him the condo he desired. "Another person, who could do with some spanking," she giggled, blushing a little at the thought of paddling the sixty-six year old pensioner.

The waiter came for their plates. "Desert?"

"Just coffee," Nathan told him.

After the two cups of steaming black liquid had arrived, his expression grew serious. "Valerie..."

She blinked at the sudden intensity in his blue eyes. "Yes?" she replied, feeling a twitch of apprehension. Was all this an elaborate way of breaking up with her?

"Valerie," he repeated, "we've been seeing each other for, what, five months now? I've enjoyed every minute of it; I think you're a very special girl. So special, in fact, that I want to take you to a place that means a lot to me." He paused, collecting his thoughts, and she waited.

"What you are about to see might shock you. I want you to keep an open mind. Give it a chance. I see something in you; a quality that you probably don't even know you have. I'd like a chance to bring it out."

Valerie stared back at Nathan, confused. She had no idea what he was talking about and the perplexed look on her face spoke volumes. He sighed.

"I better show you," he said. "It's a lot easier to explain that way. All I ask of you is that you stay for an hour. If you still want to leave after that time, we'll go, and I won't ask you to come with me again. Can you do that for me?"

That didn't make things much clearer. Apprehension and a trace of excitement coursed through her veins. His blue eyes were so serious, the expression on his features so grave, it had to be important to him. Valerie nodded. "Yes." She felt like she had just made a decision that would forever change her life.

A pleased smile played around his lips. "Then, let's go."

He led her back to the car. After driving for fifteen minutes through the dark streets of Los Angeles, Valerie, a born-and-bred native of the city, would not have been able to find her way home without directions. Nathan had taken her to one of the downtown industrial areas, deserted and dark at this time of day. He pulled over the car, took something from his pocket and turned in his seat so he could face her.

"Valerie, I must ask you to wear this." He held up something small and after a few seconds of staring at it in the dim light of a distant street lamp, she realized it was a blindfold. Her eyes widened and she shrunk back.

"Nathan? Where are you taking me?" Her voice was uncertain and bit frightened.

Nathan reached out and trailed his thumb along her jaw. "Valerie, I care for you, greatly, and I would never let any harm come to you. Do you believe that?"

She scanned his face for a full minute, then gave a slow nod. "I guess so."

"Then please put this on."

Reluctant, Valerie reached for the blindfold and placed it over her eyes. What light there had been disappeared and she was shrouded in pitch-blackness. She

tied the straps behind her head and gave a shuddering sigh. Nathan's lips brushed along her temple, just above the blindfold.

"You're doing great," he whispered in her ear. The affection in his voice made her feel a bit better and she settled back into her seat with a thin smile. Nathan shifted gears and drove off.

It didn't take long. Some five or ten minutes later -it was hard to tell when the blindfold robbed her of one of her most important senses- the car stopped again.

"You can take it off now," Nathan said as he killed the engine. Valerie snatched the blindfold from her eyes and blinked at the sudden influx of light. They were in a parking lot. Several expensive cars were parked beside theirs; she recognized a Mercedes, another Porsche and two BMWs. Other models she couldn't make out, but every car gleamed in the moonlight and looked worth more than twice her yearly salary.

Nathan had stepped out and opened her door. "You coming?" She accepted the offered hand and let him help her climb out of the car. She smoothed the dress nervously across her body. "Don't worry, you look wonderful," Nathan said, his hand resting on her upper arm. "Remember that. One hour, all right?"

Valerie nodded, not quite trusting her voice.

He led her around the corner of a dark, two-story building and knocked on a door. Two quick raps followed by three more. "This is a very private place," he explained. "Members only." The door opened to reveal a black man at least three inches taller than Nathan's six foot two. He wore a tuxedo and the jacket strained over his wide chest. The muted thump-thump of a popular beat followed him. Apparently, this was some sort of club. Valerie wondered what all the secrecy was about. If Nathan had wanted to take her dancing, they could have gone just about anywhere downtown.

"Hey Bob," Nathan greeted the doorman.

A grin appeared on the big man's face. "Hello, Mr. Wells. Long time no see."

Nathan smiled back. "I've been busy."

"So I see," Bob commented while his eyes took in Valerie. She gave a shiver and inched closer behind Nathan's body. "She new?"

"Yeah," Nathan nodded. "This is Valerie. It's about time I introduce her to my friends."

Bob chuckled. "She'll be quite an asset."

Valerie blinked. Asset? She didn't like the way the bouncer talked about her, like she was a... an object, instead of a human being. She lifted her chin and squared her shoulders. "Can we go in now?" she asked Nathan, pointedly ignoring the bouncer. "It's cold out here." She realized she had left her shawl in the car.

Bob chuckled again. "Like I said, quite an asset." He stepped aside and waved them in. Valerie followed Nathan on his heels, pressing herself closer against him as they shifted past Bob. She had half expected the beefy bouncer to cop a feel off her ass and was surprised when he didn't.

She followed Nathan through a short hallway, only illuminated by a single, shaded lamp, until they came upon another door. The music had grown louder and light peeked through the cracks at the top and bottom of the door. "Ready?" he asked. Valerie gave a nod, although she had no idea what she needed to be ready for.

Nathan opened the door and, with his hand on her elbow, guided her into the room.

Valerie froze, two steps shy of the doorway, and her eyes widened.

At first glance it looked just like a regular club. A bar along the near wall. Customers sitting on stools in front of it. A dance floor in the middle of the room, filled with couples grinding to the beat of the music. Booths were located along the far wall, some occupied, others empty. A DJ sat on an elevation in the left corner. The place was dark and smoky, and smelled of alcohol, cigars and something vaguely familiar that Valerie couldn't place. Strobe lights pierced the darkness in time to the beat and illuminated the patrons.

The males appeared rich and influential. Dressed in designer clothes and Gucci loafers, they exuded power and authority. Valerie realized the cars outside belonged to them. They weren't what had her frozen in her tracks, though.

Nearby, in the corner, a man leaned with his back against the wall. In one hand he held a glass with a golden liquid that resembled whiskey. His other hand was wrapped tight in the strawberry-blonde hair of the woman in front of him. She rested on her knees, her face pressed against his crotch. Blushing, Valerie averted her eyes.

A beautiful dark-haired girl in a white dress on a stool in front of the bar caught her eye. A gray-haired gentleman stood behind her, keeping her arms up over her head, her wrists gathered in one of his hands. His other hand was caressing her face. Another man had his nose buried in her breasts and his hands hidden beneath her skirt. Her legs were spread, her eyes were closed and although she couldn't hear her over the music, Valerie was convinced the girl was moaning in the throes of passion. "They are—" she gulped at Nathan, her eyes as round as saucers, when yet something else caught her attention and cut her short.

Across the dance floor, in one of the booths, another well-dressed gentleman perched on the edge of the velvet-clad seat. A woman lay facedown across his lap, her pale, naked buttocks reflecting the light of the colored lamps. His hand kept coming down onto her bare skin and Valerie could imagine she heard the sounds of the slaps over the beat. Nathan's remarks during dinner about wanting to spank the actress took on a whole new meaning.

Valerie drew in a shuddering breath, not having realized she had been holding it until now. Her heart thudded in her throat and panic pumped adrenaline in her veins. She turned on her heels to flee this place of horrors and bumped into Nathan whose strong arms around her waist steadied her. "Let me go," she sobbed, struggling against his hold. He didn't relent.

"You promised me one hour," he grunted in her ear. She stopped struggling. That was true. He had asked her to keep an open mind, for one hour. But this... this...

Nathan placed a finger beneath her chin and lifted her face so he could look down on her. "Valerie, trust me," he said, his voice gentle again. "Give me a chance to explain."

Understanding began to dawn on her. Nathan had been so pleased when she had agreed to his little game of tying her up. And he was clearly a regular visitor to this club. Valerie wasn't sure if she were the woman for him if he sought what she thought he did. But she had promised to give him an hour. She had never backed down from a promise before.

"One hour." She glared at him. "And then you'll take me home."

He gave a nod. "If that's what you want."

Nathan led her to the bar and motioned at one of the stools. Valerie was about to climb up when someone brushed past her. "Scuse us," a male voice muttered. She

turned around and her jaw fell. An auburn haired woman passed her. She was being led on a leash attached to a leather collar around her neck. Through slits in the front of her dress -if one could call it a dress- her breasts squeezed out and bobbed as she walked by. Small rings pierced her nipples and sparkled beneath the strobe lights.

Nathan chuckled at Valerie's obvious dismay and she gave him an accusing look. "Don't worry, sweetheart" he said, leaning to her so his breath caressed her cheek. "She's enjoying herself as much as he is. Everyone is." Valerie's stare followed the leashed woman across the room, embarrassed by what she saw and at the same time incapable of tearing her eyes away. "Believe me, everyone came here of their own free will."

Valerie studied him for a while, then nodded. "Okay, I'll accept that," she admitted. "Why did you bring me here?"

He didn't reply right away. Instead, he sought eye contact with the bartender and ordered them drinks. "I'll have a whiskey on the rocks, and the lady here will have an orange juice." Valerie's head snapped up. He knew she liked to drink white wine when they were out. Nathan turned back at her and answered her unasked question first. "I want you sober," he said. "I want you to be fully aware of what you see, of what you feel. I don't want you to make a choice with a brain dulled by alcohol." He paused, took a sip of his drink, then answered her earlier question.

"Why did I bring you here? As I said, you're very special. I like to spend time with you. I like that a lot. And I like control. I like... games." He gave a vague wave to take in the whole room.

"I don't," Valerie spluttered.

"Really?" Nathan cocked an eyebrow at her. "I believe you do. I believe you enjoy relinquishing control. You enjoyed me tying you up in my bedroom, didn't you? And you enjoy me taking charge when we make love. You allowed me to decide what you had for dinner, earlier tonight. You even let me determine which dress you'd be wearing tonight."

"Yes, but that was—"

"Different? How? Valerie, the people you see here, they care for each other. They have a mutual agreement. Do you think these girls are creatures without a will of their own, that they are being abused for others' pleasures?"

Valerie nodded. "Yes." It was certainly what it looked like.

Nathan gave a tired laugh. "You're wrong. These girls are as much in control of their fates as any girl is. Do you have any idea how much power a woman holds when she bends her will to a man's wishes?"

Valerie shook no. She had never thought much about it. She protested, "But... that one girl... the guy was spanking her."

"Because she let him," Nathan said. "And liked it."

"What if somebody gets hurt?" Valerie asked stubbornly.

Nathan shook his head. "Won't happen. Everyone will have agreed to a safe word. You know what a safe word is?" Valerie gave another shake and sipped from her orange juice.

Nathan explained. "Nothing happens against the...subject's will. If someone tries to go beyond a girl's boundaries, she will say her safe word. All games cease at once. This is not about pain or power or humiliation, Valerie. It's about fun and games and love. It's exciting."

His blue eyes studied her through his lashes, over his drink. Valerie stared back, then averted her eyes and scanned the room once again. His words made sense, what she saw proved him right. Nobody looked frightened, or resentful, or alarmed. She recalled the woman on the barstool that she had watched when they came in, the way her eyes were rolled back in her head and how she was thoroughly enjoying the attention both men lavished on her. And over there, in the booth, the girl that had been spanked was resting in the lap of her tormentor, curled up against his chest and looking quite content with a dreamy smile around her lips. As Valerie stared, the girl looked up and met her eyes. She gave a proud grin and Valerie blushed, looking away.

The blush wasn't lost on Nathan. He trailed his fingers across her bare arm and was rewarded with goose bumps springing up where he touched her. His hand traveled up her arm and came to rest in her neck where it started toying with the baby down that grew at the edge of her hairline. Valerie shivered. It was one of her sensitive spots, something Nathan had discovered on their second date.

"See?" he said, inching his stool closer to hers. She could smell the alcohol on his breath. "Does she look like a girl who was just abused?"

"No," Valerie replied in a whisper. "She looks... happy."

"Tell me," Nathan continued in a low voice. "Did you enjoy it when I tied you up?"

"Yes," Valerie breathed. Nathan's hand kept playing with the hair in her neck, tugging gently and twirling the strands around his fingers. His other hand had worked its way between their bodies and was crawling up her thigh, the thumb drawing circles on her flesh. Involuntarily, Valerie shifted and her knees parted of their own volition, offering him easier access. She swallowed at the sensations his touch caused to run through her.

"What did you like about it?" Nathan asked.

Valerie tried to remember, wanted to put her feelings into words but his hand between her legs distracted her. He had reached the edge of the satin panties; his thumb grazed across the smooth material, the sensations transported by the thin fabric to the nerve endings in her skin. One of his fingers slipped beneath the edge of the panties and brushed through the curly hair that covered her mound.

"Uhhnnn," Valerie moaned. Breathing had become hard, let alone speaking. "I liked. To be helpless. In your power," she uttered in small bursts. His fingers had forced the satin aside and were caressing her pussy lips. Something tightened deep in her lower belly and she shifted again on the stool. She was hot, and tad dizzy. Nathan brought his face closer to hers and nibbled on her earlobe.

"Like now?" he asked, his voice a mere whiff of air in her ear. A finger slipped inside her moist opening, followed by a second. His thumb rubbed her clitoris.

"Yesss," Valerie hissed. She should care that they were in a public place, that people might be watching. But she didn't. All she cared about were those strong fingers buried deep inside her, the warm lips on her temple, and the sensation of utter helplessness at his touch. She was so close to the edge. All it would take was a few good strokes and she would—

"Good girl," Nathan said. He removed his hand and sat up straight. Tears of disappointment burned behind Valerie's eyes. "Here." He offered her his fingers, slick with her juices. Valerie's eyes grew round and she stared at Nathan. She gulped; she had never... He gave her an encouraging nod and much to her own surprise she opened her mouth and sucked in his fingers. The taste of her juices was salty on her tongue, but not unpleasant. She licked his fingers clean. When she let go, he kissed her. His tongue probed, demanding access and she gladly obeyed, parting her lips so he could explore the warm cavern of her mouth. The

ache that had been left in her abdomen returned with full force and her clitoris throbbed with unfulfilled desire.

Nathan pulled away. "Your hour is up," he announced. "Shall we go?"

Surprised, Valerie took his wrist to glance at his watch. Nathan was right, they had been inside this place for an hour. An hour and five minutes, even. Time had flown by. She snuck another glance around the room. The woman that had brushed against her earlier, the one with the collar, was dancing with her partner. Her breasts jiggled to the beat of the music, the rings sparkled and she ground her hips against the man before her, until he looked all hot and bothered.

Valerie hesitated. She knew she could walk away without consequences. Nathan would keep his promise; he'd never mention this place again. He would probably still want to go out with her too. However, Valerie knew she would never get to know the true man, the real Nathan, if she walked out now. Besides, the experiences of this night, the things she had seen, had awakened something in her. Something she never knew was there. A passion, a desire, a need to give herself to this man that was waiting for her decision: she wanted to belong to him.

Before she could change her mind, Valerie shook her head. "No. I think I like to stay for a bit longer."

Nathan managed to look smug and relieved at the same time. "I knew you would like it," he grinned. Inwardly, Valerie smiled. Perhaps he had been right, about a woman's power. Affection surged through her at the thought that she had put that grin on his face, when she made the decision to stay.

He pulled her close, kissed her again and hugged her tight. So tight, in fact, that she could feel the bulge that strained against his pants. Valerie realized that Nathan was as aroused by her consent to stay as she had been when he brought her off right here on this stool. Well, almost brought her off, she thought with a sigh of disappointment as she returned his hug.

"Let's dance," Nathan said. Without waiting for a reply, he pulled her with him toward the dance floor. An uptempo song was playing, something from the eighties, Valerie thought. She could sing along with the words yet couldn't recall either artist or title of the song. It didn't matter. Nathan was a good dancer and she felt as if they floated across the dance floor when he led her into the most intricate patterns. The room faded into a blur of color and all she could see sharply was the face of the man in whose arms she rested. She was out of breath when the song finally ended and laughed as Nathan let her go. She tried to catch her breath.

The DJ put on a slow song and Nathan raised his eyebrow. Oh yes, she wanted to dance some more. At least this song would give her a chance to get her breath back. Valerie returned to Nathan's arms and rested her cheek against his chest as they swayed to the music. Around them other couples did the same. Valerie didn't see them. She was only aware of the warm hands on her lower back, his breath tickling the hair on her scalp and the regular beat of his heart beneath her ear.

"Valerie? Take off your panties." The words were soft in her ear and at first she was convinced she had misheard them.

"What?"

"You heard me," Nathan said. "Your panties. I want you to take them off."

"What?" Valerie repeated again, stupidly. "Here? Now?" She glanced around, for the first time seeing the densely packed floor and the people watching the dancers from the booths and bar stools. "People will see..." She drew back so she could look up into his face.

"I know," Nathan said. A smile played around his lips but the look in his eyes bespoke the danger she was in. Valerie swallowed, beginning to understand what her decision to stay would mean, to her, to their life together.

"I—" Valerie began. Another couple glided past them; the woman's dress was hoisted over her hips and she was naked beneath it. The man's hands dug into her buttocks. Valerie looked away, searched for an escape and, finding none, looked back up at Nathan. His expression was unreadable. Valerie gulped. "Okay," she whispered, a crimson blush appearing on her cheeks at the thought of what she was about to do.

And how the hell did one take off one's panties while slow-dancing on a packed floor? Nathan began to lift her dress. "It'll be easy," he said. "Don't worry about anyone else." Valerie gulped again, her throat suddenly turned to parchment, and a slight nausea began to build in her stomach. What had she gotten herself into?

However, at the same time a familiar tingle began to manifest itself in her lower belly, where her legs joined her body. Her clitoris, denied satisfaction earlier, began to throb painfully at the mere thought of what Nathan requested of her. She felt fresh moisture begin to form in her folds and it horrified her. What if she took off the panties? Nothing would keep the moisture from trickling down her legs or seeping through the fabric of her dress.

As if he could read her thoughts, Nathan pushed her away a little and sternly looked down upon her face. "Valerie. I want you to do what I said." He had lifted her dress almost to her hips and if he pulled it up even higher, Valerie knew, the peach colored satin would be in full view of everyone that cared to look. She nodded her consent, reached down so she could slip her fingers beneath the hem of the dress, and hooked them under the edge of the panties. Here goes nothing, she thought, and pulled the material downward. It stuck briefly against her moist crotch, then let go.

When she came to the end of her reach, the panties were only halfway down her thighs and clinging to her skin. She looked back up at Nathan. He had allowed the dress to drop along with the panties and Valerie thought her actions so far might have been covered by it. Or so she hoped.

"You'll have to bend," Nathan informed her, almost cruelly. "Or lift your feet." Her cheeks glowed even redder when the blood rushed into them. She shook her head. "What?" he asked. "You want to walk around with your panties half-mast?" Valerie shook her head again. "Valerie, nobody cares about what you do. Except me." His voice had grown gentler as he became aware of the depth of her embarrassment.

She took a deep, shuddering breath, nodded, and bent over to slide the panties down the rest of her legs as quickly as she could. In her haste she got them tangled up with the high heels and only Nathan's quick action kept her from falling face forward onto the floor. That, she thought as she tried to regain her balance with his hands helping to steady her, would have been the epitome of shame.

"Easy does it," Nathan chuckled. He pulled her close to his chest and Valerie tried to calm her ragged breathing. She kept the panties balled up in her fist. Her head hung forward, her hair covering her face. When her breathing was more regular and her cheeks didn't burn quite so hot anymore, Nathan asked, "Hold them up to me." Her head snapped up. He couldn't be serious, could he? The look on his face told her he was as serious as hell. Her blush must have spread all over her body – it certainly felt that way: she was glowing from top to toe. Keeping her eyes trained on Nathan's chest, she held up her flimsy string for anyone to see. Nathan gave it a few seconds, nodded in satisfaction, accepted the panties and, to Valerie's utter relief, stuffed them into the pocket of his slacks. She had half expected him to display the garment in the breast pocket of his jacket.

Nathan smiled, a smile full of affection, and pulled her back into his embrace. She let him, feeling safe within the circle of those strong arms, hiding from the

derision that no doubt waited outside them. But after several minutes her feelings began to change. Had she really just done what she had done? She, Valerie Grant, assistant in a small real estate office? Wow. A sense of elation came over her and she let out a breath. She lifted her eyes and searched Nathan's face. He smiled down at her.

"You've done great, Valerie," he whispered, his tone filled with fondness. "I know that was hard. I'm so proud of you!" Valerie felt herself swell at his praise. Nathan was proud of her. Hell, she was proud of herself! Never had she done anything so daring.

"Thank you," she muttered. He planted a kiss on the top of her head in reply.

When the song was over, Nathan guided her to one of the booths. His hand rested on her lower back and his fingers spread out across her buttocks. The warmth of his touch seeped through her dress and contrasted starkly with the rush of cooler air on her bare pussy as she walked. Both sensations made Valerie extremely aware of the fact that she was completely naked beneath the dress. The thought was arousing and her pussy began to glow with renewed heat. Her nipples perked up and strained against the dress. She hoped nobody would notice.

"I'll get us some new drinks," Nathan said as he guided her to sit in the booth. He gave no indication that he had noticed her aroused state. He walked to the bar and Valerie followed him with her eyes. She admired his strong back and well formed shoulders, barely hidden by the jacket. He was pleased with her, she could tell, and that thought made her happy. She wondered when and where this evening was going to end, when he was going to allow her the release her body craved so much. Being pantyless only increased the itch in her groin.

"We haven't been introduced yet. Mind if I sit down?" A masculine voice encroached on her musings and Valerie looked up. A tall man with chiseled features and dark hair was looking down at her, a glass of beer in his right hand. He was slightly familiar and Valerie thought she had seen him once or twice on one of the daytime soaps. She couldn't recall his name, however. She snuck a glance in the direction of the bar but Nathan was busy ordering their drinks.

"I... guess so," she said, sliding deeper into the booth to make room.

"I'm Curtis," he said, and extended his hand for her to shake.

"Valerie," she replied, looking again at the bar. She wasn't sure how Nathan would react to her talking to a stranger in **this** place.

"I saw your... performance, just yet." Curtis grinned and nodded at the dance floor to indicate what performance he was referring to. Valerie's eyes widened with dismay and she shrunk deeper into the booth. "You're new, right?" he continued, apparently unaware of her discomfort. "You did very well."

"Hey." It was Nathan's voice and Valerie looked up with clear relief. He was back. He'd tell Curtis to leave her the hell alone. But much to her shocked surprise, Nathan grinned at him, placed another glass of juice before her and slipped into the booth at her other side. The two men had her hemmed in.

"Good to see you, Nate," Curtis said. They shook hands across the table. "I was just telling your girlfriend that she gave quite a show."

Nathan smiled and despite her discomfort, Valerie could see the pride in his eyes. "Yes, she did, didn't she? Valerie here is going to be quite a prize." He leaned sideways to run his lips along her temple and one hand caressed her right breast through the dress. She shifted, uncomfortable that he touched her this way with another man present. His left hand, however, had slipped around her waist and he held her close so she couldn't slide away from him.

"However," Curtis continued after taking a swig of his beer, "I see she's going to need tutoring."

Nathan nodded. "Yes, she does. Tonight is her first time here, so it's all a bit new and frightening."

It was weird, to have them talk about her as if she wasn't there. Valerie experienced a surge of anger and she cleared her throat, noisily. Curtis laughed. "Feeling a bit left out, little one?" he asked. Valerie glared at him and drew closer toward Nathan. She didn't like this stranger, or the way he talked about her or looked at her with barely concealed lust. And she most certainly didn't appreciate being called 'little one'.

"Think she can handle another lesson tonight?" Curtis' question was directed at Nathan but he kept his eyes trained on her breasts. At Nathan's touch, her nipples had sprung to attention and they were clearly visible beneath the thin fabric. Curtis' stare annoyed Valerie, yet at the same time it filled her with an odd sense of pride: this man found her desirable.

"Maybe," Nathan said. He sounded a bit uncertain. "I haven't assigned her a safe word yet."

"Ah." Curtis straightened. "That's definitely something we need to take care of first." He scanned the room. "What about... palm tree?" Valerie followed his eyes toward the far end of the room where a neon palm tree blinked to the beat of the current record.

"Palm tree..." Nathan repeated the word slowly, as if tasting its sound on his tongue. "Works for me. Valerie, think you can remember that, 'palm tree'?"

She glowered at him. What was she? A little girl? "Of course I can."

He ignored the dark look she gave him, instead he took her chin to bring their faces close together. "Remember what I told you about the use of safe words?"

Valerie nodded, a bit taken aback by the grave look in his eyes. "Yes. When... I... want you to stop..."

Nathan smiled, leaned forward and kissed her cheek. "Good girl. Don't forget that."

"So, how about that lesson?" Curtis pressed.

Nathan laughed. "You never give up, do you?"

Curtis chortled. "Nope. You know me. Always willing to teach a novice. Especially one as pretty as your little one here."

"You really like her, don't you. Do you want to see her tits?" Valerie jumped at the calm question. Her head whipped around toward Nathan, the question burning on her lips. He didn't really mean that, did he? He caught her dismay. "Shh, baby. I told you I won't let anything bad happen to you. Trust me. Just remember your safe word."

Valerie nodded, reluctant. Yes, she would. Still...

Nathan lifted her up so he could pull her onto his lap. Curtis raised his hands toward the spaghetti straps across her shoulders and Valerie slapped them away. Nathan grabbed her wrists. She struggled but he held her hands firm at her sides. A small sob escaped her throat. "Please..."

Curtis looked past her, his eyes searching for Nathan's permission. When he saw what he was looking for, he began to lower the straps from her shoulders one by

one, savoring the moment. Valerie closed her eyes and shivered at the unfamiliar fingers on her skin. Something stirred beneath her buttocks. She realized that the prospect of this stranger undressing her was arousing Nathan. She shivered again, not quite certain whether it was in disgust or excitement.

Her dress was no match for Curtis as he continued to push the straps down her arms and with rising horror, Valerie felt the fabric give way. It slid down her body, rounded the upper swell of her breasts, slipped over the perky nipples until it fell free and her chest was bare. She whimpered, squeezing her eyes shut.

"Open your eyes." Nathan's breath was hot in her ear. She didn't want to comply; she didn't want to see the look on Curtis' face as he feasted his eyes on her. Yet, she knew she couldn't disobey Nathan; he would be so disappointed. She drew a shaky breath and did as she was told.

His breath a hiss, Curtis inhaled. "They're beautiful." His eyes had grown dark and taken on a feverish glint. Beneath his intense gaze, her nipples stiffened further as if they possessed a will of their own. Nathan shifted and was tugging the hem of her dress upward. Valerie raised herself a little, obedient, until the dress slipped out from underneath her and was nothing but a burgundy drape around her waist. Curtis cupped her breasts in his hands, weighing them, rolling the nipples between his thumbs and fingers until she hissed in both pain and pleasure. Nathan's hand found her folds, warm and moist, and he pushed two fingers deep inside her. A nail was grazing her clit; every time it touched her an electric current shot from her nub all the way up her spine. Valerie moaned; she had quickly reached a high state of arousal. Her body had not yet forgotten that it had been denied a climax recently. Her body craved, no, demanded to be satisfied this time.

Curtis leaned forward and began to suckle on her nipples. First the left breast. He sucked hard, then flicked his tongue over the nipple before biting down lightly. Valerie gave another whimper and arched her back, pushing her breasts into his face. His mouth was hot, as hot as the inside of her pussy where Nathan's fingers were rubbing her. Her muscles clenched around his fingers and she growled deep in her throat. Valerie was no longer aware of her surroundings, of the club, of the pounding music or the blinking lights. Neither was she aware of the spectators they had drawn. Several couples had gathered around their booth, enjoying the show as much as the performers themselves. Hands started groping beneath dresses or were stuffed down pants in mimicry of the spectacle before them. Valerie didn't notice.

Her world had contracted to the hands on her body and in her body, the warm mouth on her breast, Nathan's hot tongue as he licked the sensitive skin of her back. Her eyes had closed again and her body began to quiver as she felt herself approaching the edge. Closer, closer, almost there...

Curtis' mouth closed on hers, startling her and distracting her for a brief, agonizing second. His hands were still upon her breasts, kneading the soft flesh cruelly. His tongue probed into her mouth and without thinking Valerie allowed him in. She was close. So close... Her hips began to roll back and forth on Nathan's fingers in an attempt to increase the friction. He groaned behind her.

Oh, how great was her frustration when his fingers left her warm folds, leaving her mere inches from tumbling into oblivion. She growled, loudly, a wail of disappointment echoed by the spectators. Valerie's dismay didn't last long. Strong hands raised her high, then gently sat her back down and impaled her onto Nathan's hard cock. He filled her, pulsated hotly inside her. Valerie sighed with contentment. Oh yessss...

She began to rotate her hips again, rocking back and forth, riding Nathan, as she pressed her breasts tighter into Curtis' hands. One, two, three strokes was all it took and Valerie fell down the abyss. Waves of pleasure crashed over her, again and again, taking her breath away. She cried out. Her eyes rolled back into her head and her whole body convulsed with the spasms of a violent orgasm. Beneath her, Nathan reached a climax of his own and released his hot and sticky load deep inside her body.

At last the waters calmed and she floated on the surface. Her breath returned, her heartbeat slowed to a normal cadence. Gradually Valerie became aware of a rhythmic noise. It sounded like... applause? She forced her eyes open and for the first time saw the dozen or so people that had gathered around their booth to watch her learn her first true lesson in Nathan's world. Surprisingly, not in the least to herself, it didn't embarrass her. Instead, she smiled softly and leaned back so Nathan could fold his arms around her. She tilted her head until her cheek rested on his chest. He kissed her forehead.

"Baby, you were beautiful. I'm so proud of you. I love you." Valerie's heart hopped at the sound of those words. He had never said he loved her before. She murmured something that sounded like "Love you too," and snuggled up against him, her eyes drifting shut.

Curtis' face twisted in a grin as he straightened and gazed down upon the contented couple. Leave it to Nate to find the best girls. He waved the onlookers away. Show's over, folks. Then he looked around, in search of his wife. The painful erection in his pants needed taken care of. And she would just know how.

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