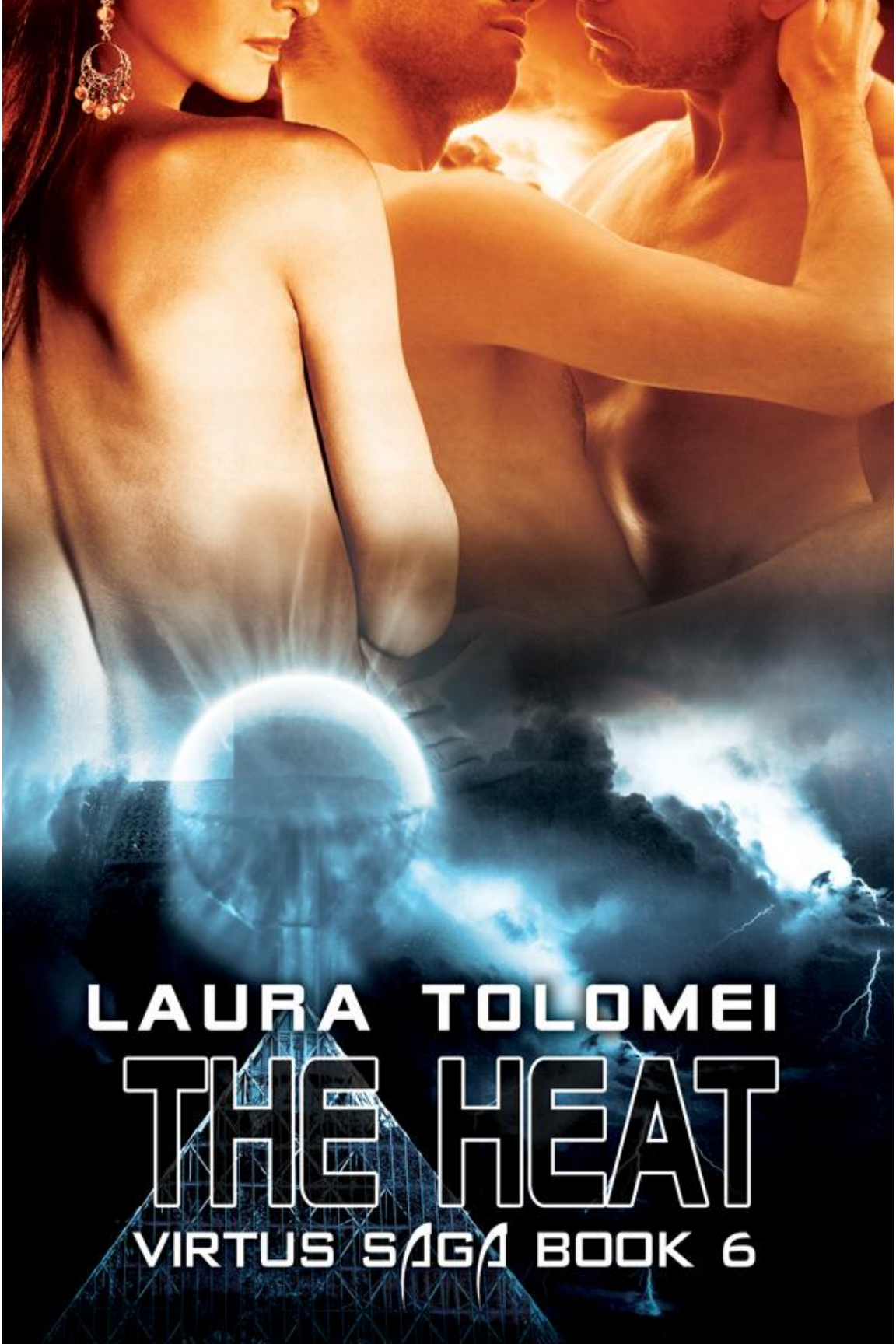




LAURA TOLOMEI

THE HEAT

VIRTUS SAGA BOOK 6

Too much gossip, too much sex, too much heat...but alas,
too little trust

Over the gossip, over the passion, over the sex, over any
possible explanation...because of the pledge, the heat will
overwhelm them, in and out of the Hall, in and out of bed.

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The Heat
Virtus Book 6

By

Laura Tolomei

Chapter One

“Leader?”

“Yes?” Looking out the window of his office at Rhapsen Hall, Prince Duncan Caldwell, Leader of the High Council, spun around.

“Hem...sorry to disturb you.” An eager young man stood at the door with a deferential air. “I knocked, but—”

“That’s all right, Freddie.” After one last glance at the late winter snow melting under Stella’s pale rays, he focused back on the servant. “What is it?”

“Lady Hurst, Lord Ellis and David have just arrived.” At the man’s visible shiver, Duncan was forced to admit spring would still be long in coming, the latest heavy storms having set the record straight.

“Thank you.” Now the sky was clearer, but leaning against the icy windowpanes, Prince Caldwell spotted the black clouds looming in the distance, promising more rain. “I’ll be right out.” However delayed spring was, roads had re-opened to travelers uncaring of the risks, which made his stomach cave in and his heart pound at the thought of his imminent reunion. One last check outside, then he stepped out in the hallway.

As usual during the wintertime, the Hall was deserted, everyone home to oversee their districts’ affairs, leaving behind only a handful of servants. “Hi, David.” And no, his faithful aide had not been among them this year. Catching sight of him, a smile split his face as he opened his arms. “How are you?”

"Fine, sir." After a slight hesitation, David fell into the embrace, hazel eyes smiling back. "And ready to start a new year here at the Hall."

"Aye, the Hall needs you badly." Older than the leader, David had been at his side since the prince's earliest years, first as his personal valet, now as head of the Hall's staff. Duncan had the utmost confidence in him, bound by the longtime friendship as well as impressed by the man's high sense of duty that prevented him from overstepping his bounds. "But it's not realistic for me to expect you'd be always around. It's time you start thinking about taking on a couple of assistants to help you and be my reference points, when you're unavailable."

"Actually, I've been thinking about it and have someone I've been meaning to introduce to you, for such a capacity." Encouraged by Duncan's silent go on, David continued. "Liabeth Renn is a very smart and efficient young woman whom I'm sure will work perfectly to satisfy your needs."

"Can't wait to meet her, then." Duncan grinned. "You know how I trust your judgment in these matters, something I sorely missed when I was in Black Rose this winter." Exchanging glances, he had no doubt David understood him. Never before had he required the high cliffs, the roaring sea underneath splashing white foam on the brownish tops, the bright hills and the dark forest underneath. Yes, nothing like Black Rose gave him the sense of freedom or the extra space to train his increasing Virt. Never before, had he felt stronger or more in control of his power, with the skills to fine-tune it to his growing necessities. The trick of shifting energy was becoming second nature to him, now that he was aware of it and could take advantage of the unbalances he himself caused. So he had exercised to go from one place to another without moving, simply by distorting space and energy. To achieve

it, he had cut himself off from his connections, also the most significant ones, focusing only within, further benefited by Black Rose's emptiness.

"I missed it, too." David averting his gaze gave Duncan the impression he did not want the prince to catch the leap in his heart at the mere mention of the place. "Blue Oasis is nice, but nothing comparable to Black Rose's wild beauty." So he had no great love for Cecilia Hurst's home. What else was new?

"This time it was particularly stimulating 'cause Mother and Lizzy stayed in Belleview, to help Ruby Strepton deliver her baby." David's expression reminded Duncan the man had no great love for Carl Strepton either. Sure, he was a neighbor and a friend of the Caldwell family until the leader had crossed him off his list after all that happened. "I'm not sure when they'll return, but you can always visit whenever you like." He patted his shoulders affectionately. "It's your home, too."

"Thank you." The flush in David's cheeks seemed to confirm the rumors about his being in love with the prince. Duncan had never given them any credit. He had no intention to start now. "But I think we'll be quite busy here."

You can't imagine how much. That he had plans to revolutionize the Hall was something he had started thinking the moment he became leader, and he would work to remodel it into the center of their culture, a place where people could learn just about anything they needed to improve their lives. Courses on farming, district administration, breeding—everything and anything that could be taught would be his priority. On top of it, he wanted everyone more aware of Virt and of the negative feelings a damn mechanical device transformed into sex. If he ever managed to free his world from Virtus's influence, which was his goal, he had to start educating his people to

the side effects of being without an external control. This was his pet project, the one only he and his co-leaders could handle, if he succeeded in lessening Virtus's interference and putting them under his personal command. Truth was—he had shared almost nothing he had learned while talking to the machine, and it was not due to a lack of time. "I do have great plans—"

"Do you, darling?" Coming up behind David, Lady Hurst's masculine face lit up with curiosity. "Shouldn't you share them with your vice-leader first?" Without waiting for an invitation, she fell into Duncan's arms, holding on securely. "How have you been?" Her body pressing against his reminded Duncan he had used her often to warm his bed, when what he most craved was unavailable. "I did miss you this winter."

Because the last one you had me all to yourself, here in the Hall. Duncan chuckled inwardly, trying to draw back.

"You never came visit me." So she tightened her grip.

"I was too busy to go anywhere." He made it sound final as he removed her hands from his arms.

"I'm sure you were." Her dark eyes searched his face, as though asking for assurances she had not blown off her chances in his bed. "Don't worry. We'll make up for lost time."

Not if I can help it. "I'm sure we will." To be on the safe side, he took a precautionary step backward. "After we've taken care of the Hall's re-organization."

"What's there to change?" Perplexed, she stared at him wide-eyed. "Things work fine, and they have ever since I can remember—"

"Not good enough. For one thing, I'd like you to have a staff of your own. There are going to be so many things to do that you won't be able to follow them all by yourself."

"Assign the vice-leader's responsibilities to someone

else?" No, definitely it was not the Hall's way of doing things, not since Arthur Fairchild, the last leader, had concentrated all power in his hands alone, allowing no one near it.

"Exactly. We have to learn to delegate in order to make things work more efficiently around here."

"I...suppose you're right." Not totally convinced, she turned around, just as Prince Caldwell spotted a distinguished old man, still handsome in spite of his years, coming toward them from around the corner. "It'll be like a new start, so to speak."

"We can start right now by greeting our first guest." *And why am I not surprised he's here so ahead of time?* Rapidly sifting through an imaginary agenda, he was sure the earliest official council meeting of the season was a long time off. "Richard, it's a pleasure to see you." Extending his arm, the leader shook his hand.

"Lord Ellis, what are you doing here?" Blunt as her usual self, Cecilia had no compunctions in making a show of his timing. "You never reach the Hall before late spring."

"Yes, I know." The councilman could not hide a deep flush reddening his cheeks. "But I couldn't stand Ridgeview or my family a moment longer."

Yes, definitely the Ellis sisters could qualify as a good reason to leave home. "You'll have plenty of time to recover here." Duncan grinned. "We are practically alone."

"Really?" The dismay in Richard's expression confirmed Prince Caldwell's guess. He knew exactly what or rather who the old man was after, though he would be damned if he made his task any easier. "So it's just the three of us?" Licking his lips nervously, Lord Ellis peered at the dark hallways.

"I'm afraid so." Duncan nodded gravely.

"Then...hem...Lord Templeton isn't here?"

Chapter Two

“There it is.” On his horse, poised on top of a hill, Lord Christopher Templeton indicated the large estate sprawled in the valley below, relishing the feel of his bracelet, Prince Caldwell’s personal gift right down to the rose-shaped green stone at its center, sliding to his elbow. “Home.” He glanced at Fair Haven, nestled inside the Dartmouth Mountains, which gave the name to the district. Gleaming white snow covered the highest peaks, reflecting back a hurtful glint that forced him to focus only on the rider at his side. “What do you think of it?” Somehow, it seemed inevitable for his breath to catch in his throat at the sight of her elegant frame and flashing green eyes, so he averted his gaze to prevent his cock from stirring again and taking her back to the clearing where he had just rammed her ass.

“It’s...” Lady Ylianor Templeton cleared her throat. “Nice.”

“But it’s not Black Rose.” Chris had no trouble interpreting her hesitation.

“No, I didn’t mean—”

“Save it, sleeping beauty.” His voice grew softer. He still could not believe how much he loved her, in spite of his heart belonging to one alone since forever. “You and he are the same. Without Black Rose, you feel lost.” He fixed her intently. “It’s the source of your energy, yours and his, and it’s plain obvious how much you both miss it, whenever

you're far from it."

"I suppose it's easier for you." A warm smile curved her lips. "Places don't affect you —"

"I only want to be where he is." That he loved Prince Duncan Caldwell from the first time he set eyes on him was no mystery, much like the hot sex stemming from the phase complicating matters. "Though you're all right as an alternative." But never as much as the pledge.

"I better be, since we're stuck together for the rest of the winter!" She scoffed in mock annoyance.

"Which you'd have rather spent at Black Rose with him." Tightening the hold on his reins, Chris looked away to lessen the accusatory effect.

"It would've been quite a difference this time." As her horse shifted, Ylianor pressed her knees to keep her balance. "With his mother and sister gone —"

"You really can't stand Lady Caldwell, can you?"

"How can I, when she hurt me on purpose?" Ylianor sighed. "She was awful to me. A mere child without a mother, she couldn't wait to kick me out of Black Rose before Prince Charles was even cold."

"If it's any consolation, my mother really likes you."

"Your mother is very sweet." Her expression brightened. "She's a healer, which already makes all the difference. And she always wanted a daughter. But Lady Caldwell..." Ylianor shrugged helplessly. "She only cares for her son. No one else is welcomed to her, not even her daughter, Elizabeth. It'll be really hard for any eventual mate the prince may bring home."

"She'll make life miserable for her." Having known Sophia Caldwell for as long as he had known Duncan, Chris was well aware Ylianor spoke the truth.

"She certainly will, which is why I'm sorry we didn't have the chance to be at Black Rose while she's away at Bellevue."

We could've had the place all to ourselves."

"Don't remind me Carl Strepton is a father." Heaving, he blocked his disgust before it reached his stomach.

"Come on. Don't be so negative." Nudging Starlet forward, she came closer. "It could improve him."

"Carl?" *No way!* "He's beyond improvement."

"Only because you two had a falling out—"

"Falling out, my ass! I had sex with him only to get back at the prince. It was the least I could do, considering how Carl had tormented me before our phase even began. It was my special time with him." *My phase, my chance to explore sex for the first time with a friend of my same age and gender!* "Goddamn it! Why did our phase have to begin in Bellevue?"

"Maybe because Carl was there."

"What?" Too late he realized she was provoking him on purpose. "Yeah, sure, as if I needed him to turn on the prince." So he calmed down.

"You still used Carl to that effect." As though perceiving he had caught on to her game, she drew back.

"It was what he deserved." Chris chuckled, remembering the two years' estrangement from his lover that had ushered Carl back into his life, with the disastrous sex he still regretted.

"Not his mate, though." Ylianor's lips twisted.

"Ruby hated me long before I ruined her pledge." He straightened his shoulders. "Which didn't fare any better after I was out of the picture."

"Pledges can be tricky on their own." Ylianor sniggered.

"Tell me about it." He grinned. "Still can't believe I pledged to a witch who got her way with the leader, too." He licked his lips. "And we're still wondering how she managed to convince us both." As a matter of fact, nothing could be farther from the truth since the unusual three-way

promise, instead of the conventional male-female pledge, had sanctioned a state of fact that had been in the making for the past two years.

"That's because I love you." So close they could kiss, she pressed her lips to his. "But I also love him and couldn't favor one over the other." Her warm tongue slipping inside his mouth, he savored her lemony taste. "Not to mention I richly deserved having both of you after what you've put me through."

"Or maybe it was all part of the plan, like you always believed and the multi-pyramid tower in the Nephis Valley confirmed." *Your unwanted guests, too.* But since she had no sense of them, he avoided the issue. Not her fault if her Virt of reading auras was also a gateway that had granted refuge to Arthur Fairchild and Charles Caldwell, Duncan's father. The problem now was to get rid of them and their dangerous habit of draining her energy. When alone, the leader had told him Computer Virtus had suggested how to do it, only they had to find the right time for it.

"Like your fathers being phase mates, too?" That James Templeton and Prince Charles had preceded their sons' footsteps was something Chris and Duncan had learned only recently.

"Yeah, something like that." Actually, it was more complicated. The machine-like Virtus had revealed an elaborate plot by which Duncan had arranged for the three of them to come together in this life, following a distress call from the tower itself. Amazing, to say the least, but if anyone could pull it off, it would be his lover.

"True, he feels a bond to your father, which is probably why he sent us here."

"After the mock-up pledge, I think he owed it to my father." Since Virtus, the evil one Chris had contributed to create, had prevented Ylianor from completing her promise

during the Fitting, Duncan's lie that things had gone as expected weighed on him, especially in James Templeton's regards.

"Then what are we waiting for?" With a giggle, she kicked Starlet forward. "Race you to Fair Haven."

"Hey, wait." He urged Black, trying to catch her, but the horse seemed slowed down. *Fuck! Forgot the damn witch can also talk to horses.* "Not fair!" Pissed off at having come in second, he jumped off Black the second he reached Fair Haven's front yard. "You cheated." Then he ran to her, grabbing Starlet's reins before she had the chance to dismount.

"Who said it would be fair?" Laughing harder, she threw back her head to block him from pulling her down, something he did anyway.

"You are the worst." Sliding her down, he soon realized it was a mistake. Her curves pressing so hard against his already tense body coaxed his shaft to erect. "You and your magic tricks—"

"Welcome back, Lord Templeton."

Without letting her go, Chris turned his gaze on the cute young man hurrying out the door, then stopping midway with a deferential air. "Hello...hem..." *Tim? Tom? Tony?*

"It's Thuly, sir." The man took a step forward.

"Right." If Chris forgot names and sometimes faces, his memory retained the most important details like the cock and ass shapes, which for this particular man were worthy of notice. "Thanks." Hauling sleeping beauty, he went for the front entrance. "Oh, by the way..." Whirling around, he spun Ylianor to stand in front of him. "This is Lady Ylianor Templeton, my mate."

"Pleased to meet you, Milady." Thuly bowed low. "I heard you pledged." Now the look was all for him. "Congratulations to you both."

Leaving sleeping beauty behind, with a couple of strides he was on the young man. "Having pledged doesn't mean I won't be requiring your...skills later on." To emphasize his point, he brushed Thuly's cock.

"I'm always at your complete disposal, sir." So Thuly pressed against him.

Satisfied, Chris returned to Ylianor, grabbed her hand and dragged her to the house. "Oh, one last thing." Pausing on the doorsteps, he caught Thuly's eyes again. "Is anybody home?"

"Only your mother. Your father is out for a local council meeting and your brothers are at Lord Sentry's." Taking both horses' reins, the young man led them toward the stables. "Your mother is—"

"I know where she is. Thanks." Without wasting more time, he set foot inside the long hallway.

"Picking up where you left off the last time you were here?" Ylianor teased.

"What if I was?" He pinned her to a wall, digging his frame into hers. "You're still a slave." His breath played on her face before he dipped to bite her neck, forcefully. "So I'll require you to service however many come my way." Raising his gaze, he challenged her. "Is that understood?"

She nodded slowly, her body so tense Chris knew he could make her come by a simple stroke of the cunt grinding his crotch to pieces. So he carefully avoided it, pulling her inside the drawing room instead.

"Welcome, my dear." Quick to rise at the sight of them, Claire Templeton threw her arms around Ylianor first. "It's so good of you to have accepted our invitation."

"I'm deeply touched, Lady Templeton."

"It's Claire to you." Lady Templeton held her at arms' length. "I've so wanted a daughter all my life that I hope you forgive me if I—"

"It would be an honor." Sleeping beauty looked adorable as her face became bright red, however hard she tried to hide it in his mother's bosom.

"Oh, Christopher, I'm so glad to see you." Then it was his time to be smothered in the loving embrace, something he submitted to without too much fuss, inhaling his mother's familiar scent to his lungs. "You both look so very well." Claire scrutinized each in turn. "The pledge is agreeing with you." She bent on Ylianor's ear, lowering her voice. "And the heat must be working great." Not enough for Chris to miss her comment.

Ylianor's flush deepened. From everything Chris had heard the heat was something very similar to the phase, a melting of the senses that caused an uncontrollable passion. Unlike the phase, it happened between opposite genders, probably the same thing he had experienced already in the Nephis Valley more than once.

"I...guess it does," Ylianor lied.

Point of fact—Chris could not say they had felt anything close to the heat, since they had left the Nephis Valley. Sure, the last time they were there, for their three-way pledge, their sex drive had been so irresistible they had not even made it to the shelter. Like animals in the throes of lustful craving, they had fallen to the ground and fucked the entire nightlong. Of course, they had also just purged Computer Virtus of his negative build-up, which, according to Duncan, explained their insatiable appetite. Safe to say, after it was done, Chris had not felt anything even remotely similar to it. And neither had sleeping beauty.

"Then you shouldn't waste precious time." Lady Templeton sniggered. "Your room is waiting for you, Christopher." She blushed. "But if you'd like something more...comfortable—"

"My room will do just fine." Chris smiled. "The bed

worked great for the phase. I don't see why it should be any different for the pledge."

Demon, you're bad. No, she did not say it, simply flashed it across her amazing green eyes.

"All right, then you know the way." Claire signaled in a general direction behind a closed door. "We'll talk tonight, when your father returns from his meeting."

"Thanks, Mother." Gripping Ylianor's hand firmly, Chris led her away to his room, set apart from the main building, at the end of a long deserted hallway. Opening the door, memories rushed back at him, like they always did whenever he returned.

"By the gods." Her voice just a husky breath, sleeping beauty hovered on the threshold. "You...you..." Her gaze searched his room, swinging frantically from the double window facing the door, to the bed underneath it, which looked too big for the available space, to the huge fireplace in a corner. "You trapped him." Her eyes flew to his face. "How did you manage it?"

"Manage what?" Thoroughly confused, Chris took a step inside.

"To trap his aura, here." Hesitantly, she went to his bed and outlined something on the wall.

"I'll be damned." At her mere gestures, Chris recognized it immediately. It was the familiar picture that popped in his head every time he set foot in the room, only he had never thought it was actually there. "You see him?" Amazed, he reached her.

"Young, naked and more beautiful than ever," she whispered. "He's obviously waiting for you to get back to bed." Tentatively, she trailed a fingertip along the wall, right below the window. "His hair is really long, longer than I ever remember seeing, and he's stretched out, leaning on an elbow. His legs are down this way." She gestured away from

the window. "And—"

"Yeah, I know exactly how he is." He had carried the image forever it seemed, long enough for the witch to pluck it right out of his head. "To think I'd gotten this bed for his second visit, while we were in the middle of our phase. Didn't think you'd pick it up, though." *Go trust an aura reader.* He chuckled inwardly.

"It isn't the only thing I pick up in this room." She glanced in front of the marble fireplace. "I also see your younger self, the sulking child, reclining against the couch. See there?" She pointed at a large faded spot on the carpet. "That's where you were watching the flames, angry over another of your father's presumed faults." She shook her head. "You're every bit the demon who came up Black Rose's hills on that summer day, the one he turned into an angel with a simple shift of energy." Frowning, she stared at her mind's image more intently.

Chris left her the time to focus. Like what she had seen before, he remembered this particular occasion very well, and she had described it perfectly except for one detail—

"Hey, you're cradling something, something very important to you and..." Her green eyes wandered around the room, following a shelf going all the way to the door. "Which is this." Moving to it, she picked up a small duck, a wooden toy. "This feels original, not a hand-me-down. It's made out of love." Slowly, she turned it in her hands, as if getting the feel of it. "And power."

"Funny you should mention it." Or more a sign of her Virt. "Arthur made it for me when I was born." Taking it from her hands, he squeezed it. "Did you know he was an excellent wood craftsman?" Then he put it back on the shelf. "Somehow, I never came round to throwing it away."

"He loved you, Demon." She took a step back. "And you've been holding on to his ghost all this time."

More than you know, sleeping beauty. He could almost see Arthur's mocking gaze inside her green eyes and prayed he would not come out now. A shot from his fiery energy would probably be enough to dispel him, but Chris would rather prefer her intruders stay right where they were—buried deep within her. "I suppose it kept me company."

"No, you were just a scared little boy afraid of the dark." The taunt was unmistakable.

"Must be the reason I'm going to sleep with an insignificant slave for the next two months." If she wanted to play, he was more than ready for her. "Instead of choosing a different man each night."

"Ha! As if it were a choice!" Ylianor spat. "The way you treat them, there wouldn't be much left of anybody to sleep with."

"That's exactly how you're going to end up now." Bolting, Chris pinned her against the fireplace. "'Cause no one's going to bother about your worthless hide here in Fair Haven." Breathing hard, his tongue traced the edges of her ear as he slashed off her clothes.

"If you think you can scare me, Lord Templeton, think again." Defiant, she threw back her shoulders, her naked skin trembling in the pale evening glow.

"And if you think scaring you is my aim, Lady Templeton..." Raising his pocketknife, he slid it across her throat. "You're dead wrong."

"I wouldn't be so sure." She stiffened for the impact. "I've learned to expect the worst from the likes of you."

"Glad to oblige." So he struck, breaking her tender flesh with repeated blows. It was all part of the game anyway, much like the hurtful words said on purpose, which meant nothing. "I'm just sorry you like it so much."

"Don't flatter yourself." In spite of her statement, she gave more skin to his blade. "I couldn't care less one way or

another."

"Never as little as I." Taking advantage of her offer, he dipped deeper, reddening her stomach. "And if you think you can keep turning this puny game of ours against me..." Which she already had, damn her! "Think again!" He sliced her arms viciously.

"Too late, Demon." Her green eyes blazed. "You're already mine."

"I belong to one alone." It was the goddamn truth he was hers—bound, sealed and delivered by the excitement turning his cock to stone. "And it isn't you, honey." His fault for allowing her to beat him at his own game. "I should've erased your fucking memory the first time around, like I do with all my other victims." No mere droplets, blood now spurt from every cut and mixed together in large rivers.

"It wouldn't have made a difference." She scoffed. "In the end, I'd have gotten you anyway."

"You wish!" To improve the game, he dragged her to the bed and tied her wrists to it, careful to avoid damaging her bracelet with the rose-shaped blue-gray stone, then flattened her stomach to the mattress.

"Lord Templeton, you're so predictable." She spat, arching her back and raising her butt, as though to invite him inside. "I know you had no intention of keeping the promise you made to the prince right before the pledge—"

"Unlike you, I'm in no hurry to start a family." To shut her up, he straddled her to slash her back, relishing the intricate pattern of incisions reddening it. "Your ass remains your best feature anyway." As usual, he steered the blade clear of it. Why ruin such magnificence? "The only thing worth taking." It was getting unbearable this craving to plunge into her. His shaft was standing on its own, however restrained by the pants he had not bothered taking off before. Now he could not stand his own skin. Jumping up,

he removed every bit of clothing, pausing to admire the round, firm buttocks swaying to a rhythm all her own. "Hard and painfully." At this point, he had no pity. He shoved into the narrow hole, uncaring if it was ready for him. Too bad Ylianor's muffled groan was one of pleasure. In adjusting his position, he slipped a hand under her belly and realized she was drenched. "I said pain." In spite of his harsh tone, the fact she liked it did not make him angry. But she was mistaken if she thought she would have it so good.

Using the hand beneath her, he raised her butt the same moment he slammed down. The friction was getting in the way, and since her tightness did not help his cock slide to the hilt, he insisted with a series of thrusts until he was right where he wanted to be—deep in her ass, practically to her guts. Ylianor thrashed, whether to accommodate him farther or to throw him off, Chris neither knew nor cared. Everything was burning inside, from the tip of his erection to his healing Virt that itched to burst.

This was the secret of his knife game, one sleeping beauty had discovered and used against him. The way his Virt worked, the healing side of it was also connected to his sexual energy. If rubbed the right way, the two would explode together in the most devastating climaxes, which was what he aimed for at the moment.

Ylianor tugged her arms, trying to get free of the binding. The movement only advanced his cock to her throat, though it did not prevent her further attempts. He knew she wanted to touch herself. Denying her spun his tempo out of control.

"Please, Master." Her muffled voice halted his flight. "Free my wrists."

"Why should I?" Not entirely, though. "A slave is in no position to ask for anything." Then he could not hold it back. Exactly like he wanted, it shattered him with the double intensity of the orgasm and the healing that closed all her

wounds, erased all the blood, retuned her skin to its immaculate perfection without any traces of scars or blemishes. "Fuck, sleeping beauty." Dropping next to her, he slashed the ropes holding her prisoner. "You should've kept your mouth shut, if you wanted me to last a little bit longer." That her body was screaming for lack of pleasure was no mystery. Tense to the point of being rigid, it pressed to him in search of relief he had no intention of giving, not until he had straightened out a few matters. "Now listen to me, sleeping beauty." For good measure, he pinned her hands behind her back and crushed her to him. "This was just the first lesson in your winter training."

"What training?" Perplexed, her eyes widened.

"The one to make you become a real slut."

"Me?" A slow smile curved her lips. "I can never hope to compete with you, Lord Templeton."

"True, but there's always room for improvement."

"I suppose he'll like me better, too?"

"Absolutely." He smirked. "One thing I noticed after our reunion was how much he appreciated all the things I'd learned while staying with Arthur."

"They must've been really formative," she mocked.

"You have no idea." Taken back by the memories, Chris was momentarily lost in the chambers full of young naked men, whose cocks he had to service in order to please Arthur. "Since my only sex experience had been with him, at first it seemed impossible I could take on so many cocks in one night. But practice makes perfect, and the more I focused on a cock's need, the less I missed him."

"Bullshit!" Dissatisfaction obviously made her aggressive. "You love cocks, no matter what the excuse!"

"So what if I do?" Focused on the present again, he glanced at the empty fireplace. "Cocks and their reactions are fascinating anyway, which is why I want to have as

many as I can."

"But I'm not like you." It was more of a whisper.

"Who cares? It's not like you have any choice in the matter." His tone, instead, became harsher. "When a master commands, a slave can only obey."

"What do you want me to do?" Resigned, she lowered her head.

"I want you to get fucked by the biggest cocks of the district." His shaft twitched at the mere thought.

"Where am I going to find them?"

"I'll take you to every goddamn celebration people will throw for us." At the second jerk, he realized it was not just the conversation, more her tempting body too close for comfort. "And you'll be the one to pick them."

"Me?" He allowed Ylianor to draw away. "No, I can't. I mean..." She blushed violently. "You don't understand—"

"I do, sleeping beauty." Letting go of her hands, he caressed her face. "I know you have a hard time dealing with crowds because the auras get in the way."

A grateful expression crossed her eyes, as though she had not expected him to be so attuned to her distress. "They're like a thousand lights flashing all at once—"

"And you get panicky and become extremely shy. I know." He deposited a sweet kiss on her lips, wanting to reassure her. "But you'll have to get over this now that you're my mate and that we'll be living in the Hall, which is full of people by default. You're also a council member and, if it weren't enough, you're the closest person to the leader, besides me, naturally, so you can't allow this to prevent you from interacting with everyone else."

"I know, but—"

"No buts, sleeping beauty." The odd tenderness that sometimes hit him, when she said or did something moving, swept over him. Annoyed, he chased it away. "I'm sure

there's a way you can learn to keep it under control. It's a fucking Virt, after all, which should be an asset, not a liability." His anger was all for show, a rouse to dispel his weak feelings. "You should start thinking about using it, instead of letting it overwhelm you."

"Using it how?"

"To your advantage." Pulling back, he searched her face. "These lights must be saying something about the way people feel, so interpret them to know what the general mood is and adjust your reactions to theirs. Would that be so hard?"

"I...I suppose not." Now it was her turn to press forward, as though seeking protection.

"Good." So he embraced her. "And while you're at it, you can also determine who wants to have sex with you and invite them to do so."

"I couldn't." Deeply red, she buried her face in his chest.

"Of course you can." Yanking her hair, he gazed in her green depths. "It's enough for you to tell them your ass is dying for a good fuck, and they'll follow you anywhere."

"And you?"

"Don't worry about me." He grinned, already relishing the scene of seeing her surrounded by hungry erections. "The important thing is that you choose the biggest cocks of the evening and give them access to the whole of you."

"What do I get if I obey?" That she was challenging him was evident from the straightening of the shoulders.

"For one thing, you won't get punished the next day." Of course, it was not what she wanted to hear. "And if you're really good..." With a deep stroke, he reached down between her legs. "I may give you a certain measure of satisfaction." She immediately arched to get more. "But don't count on it." He took away his hand. "For sure, I won't touch you unless you've fulfilled my expectations."

“Does that include now?”

She was adorable and irresistible, so open and vulnerable it would have taken him no effort at all to hurt her again. Instead, and damning the tenderness blocking his finer instincts, he wanted something sweeter this time. “Maybe not.” Then he attacked her lips, his tongue slipping through to savor her to the fullest. She surrendered immediately. Her legs wrapped around his waist and pulled him against her pelvis that started a seductive rub on his cock. If his erection was already straining for a deeper fit, he ignored it. Focusing on her needs for a change, he slid down to reach her cunt, stopping only to pinch her nipples hard. It was his only concession to pain this time. His real objective was her honeydew stickiness that streamed the moment the tip of his tongue licked it lavishly.

Ylianor jumped, literally. He clutched her hips and held her still as his tongue dug in the moist folds, trembling for release. Oddly, the pleasure was not just for her. He was getting high on her intoxication, something he never thought he would achieve with a woman. The harder he brushed her pussy, the stiffer his shaft until it was about to explode on its own. There were only two ways to end the torture, hers in particular, and he selected the easiest.

After rimming the edges of her slit, he moved up to her clit. Ylianor was thrashing by now, completely senseless to anything except her need to burst. The swollen knot seemed to dance on its own, or perhaps it was begging to be quenched. Either way, he wanted to put it out of its misery. Two well-aimed tongue laps and her scream pierced the air.

Like an avalanche, her muscles contracted and released spasmodically, her pelvis shoving as to get inside his mouth, her clit rubbing frantically against his wet tip. Tightening his grip to continue, he drove her even crazier, so she came again and again, each time shattering under his touch.

When he could not stand his own pressure any longer, he rose and dived in her pussy. Normally, he would have targeted something narrower, but it was the closest hole available, and he was in such sore need, he had no time to waste. A quick pumping in her drenched slit and it was game over for him, too.

“Just don’t get used to this, sleeping beauty.” Collapsing on her, he rolled to a side. “This is for special occasions alone.” He dragged her to him. “From now on, I’ll treat you only like a slave, and you’ll have to obey and ask no questions. Is that understood?”

Nestling her cheek to his chest, she heaved. “Perfectly, Master.”

About the Author

Born 1965 in Rome, Italy, I grew up in Lagos, Nigeria, then moved to Atlanta, GA, to complete my studies. In Rome, I graduated in Political Science and now work in international trade.

I have always loved writing and started in college by working with Emory University's magazine *The Phoenix*. Since then I have been writing and publishing in both Italian and English, specializing in gay M/M erotica in various genres, mostly fantasy, sci-fi and paranormal, sometimes trespassing into the contemporary. And while you're at it, don't miss my series—the dark and bloodier *ReScue*, the contemporary and romantic *Soulmate* with *To Seduce a Soul Mate* and *The Pirate's Surrender*, and finally my ongoing fantasy series, the *Virtus Saga* now at its fifth chapter after *The Sex*, *The Game*, *The Festival*, *The Leader* and *The Pledge*.

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