

# SEDUCING SANDY

MASTERS OF THE CASTLE, BOOK EIGHT



MAREN SMITH

BLUSHING BOOKS

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Published by Blushing Books®,  
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ABCD Graphics and Design  
977 Seminole Trail #233  
Charlottesville, VA 22901  
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EBook ISBN: 978-1-61258-612-0  
Print ISBN: 978-1-61258-636-6

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

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## CHAPTER 1



“Well,” the woman on the bus beside her said with a good-natured laugh. “It was hell, I’ll tell you, but I got myself together again. I got a job. I’m living on my own and supporting myself for the first time in my whole adult life, and now... look at me.” She spread her hands in a cramped shrug, indicating the whole of the seat they shared and the length of the crowded, noisy bus in general. “I’m on my way to the Castle.”

“Yeah, but...” Knowing she risked sounding out-of-place and perhaps even judgmental, Sandy Ebelson tried to bite the question back, but curiosity overwhelmed her. “Why *here*? Why *the Castle*?”

A twinkle in her green eyes, the older woman winked. “Oh, I don’t know. I guess I just wanted to do something wild and crazy before I’m too old to enjoy it.”

Sandy’s gaze danced over what few facial wrinkles the other woman had. “You hardly look ‘too old’ for anything.”

“Aren’t you a peach?” The older woman laughed.

Sandy didn’t argue, but she meant it. What was ‘too old’ these days? If forced to guess, she’d have placed the other woman in her mid-fifties, what with that hint of hard-to-cover grey in the brown of her shoulder-length hair, and lines at the corners of her eyes that

deepened when she laughed. But it was an attractive laugh and, for all that she was carrying a few extra pounds under that heavy winter coat of hers, it was a rather handsome woman with whom Sandy was sharing her bus seat. And who was she to be judging anyone else, anyway? Sandy wasn't swimsuit-model thin either, not now and certainly not in the summer months. Nor would she be seeing her twenties again any time soon.

"Screw anonymity." Smiling, the other woman stuck out her hand. "My name's Wendy."

Relaxing just a little, perhaps for the first time since bullying her way into this assignment, Sandy shook Wendy's hand. "Nice to meet you. I'm Sandy."

The bus bumped in and out of yet another rut in the long, unpaved drive that led away from Granger and the country highway they had just departed from. A wide series of farm fields surrounded them now, all knee-deep in snow at the moment and about to get deeper if this morning's weather forecast held true. Stalks from last fall's harvest still poked up through the snow here and there.

"So, tell me," Wendy said as she snuggled in for the last leg of their journey. "What brings you out here?"

Work, but Sandy knew better than to say that. Fishing expedition, that was her next option, but she wasn't sure she ought to say that either. "I just..." she hesitated, that old familiar awkwardness creeping up into her face on a wave of heat, "...want to learn more about myself, I guess."

She was blushing. She knew she was, but if Wendy noticed she didn't think enough about it to bring it into the conversation. People probably blushed talking about this place all the time.

"You and me both." Wendy nodded. "I can't wait to see what they've got planned for me."

The older woman hugged herself, but Sandy knew the shiver that went through her had more to do with excitement than chill. This was a luxury bus, with warmers in the seats and heaters

underneath. It was right on the verge of being almost too warm, but although Sandy had her coat open, she didn't take it off. It was too crowded. Not just the seat that she shared with Wendy, but the entire bus was packed. Sandy would have to stand in order to shrug out of the heavy garment, and they were in the very first row. Which meant she had a great view through the front windshield of the forest they were creeping up on at the super-safe speed of fifteen miles-per-hour that kept them from sliding off the road and into the field. Beyond that forest lay the Castle. The largest (according to their website) BDSM dungeon in the country.

Her heart gave an extra skipping jump. She couldn't see the Castle yet, although here and there she thought she could pick out the shadowy grey form of a massive stone structure deep within that sheltering forest. It was another few minutes of crawling travel before she caught sight of her first multicolored flag playing peek-a-boo through the ice-shrouded branches. Here and there, she spotted the dark shadow of security cameras planted high on the electric poles hidden amongst the trees. If she let her imagination run away with her, she could almost imagine herself on a very comfortable bus *en route* to prison. Which was ironic, really. Because that's exactly where her boss warned her she could end up if she persisted in chasing this particular story. The Castle, he said, was insanely protective when it came to safeguarding the privacy of its guests. She would not be the first person arrested if she got caught.

The allure, however, was just too strong, especially for Sandy, who had always dreamed of being a journalist. It was a tough market to break into, though. A person had to be really, really good these days if they wanted to get away from the minutiae of writing stories like firefighters rescuing kittens from trees, or elementary school play performances, or local births and deaths, and who got arrested over the weekend and why. Granger was a small town and she'd lived here all her life. Big cities offered better news stories, but the competition was greater there. She didn't want to move

anyway, so what did that leave? As far as she could see, Sandy had one choice: She had to find a story, a big story, and she had to be the one to deliver it. She had to prove she had the skills to make it as a journalist—a real journalist—or forever be content writing articles like: “Criminals Cut Loose in Egg Aisle, ‘Chicken butt, that’s what’ spray painted in 41 colorful ways all over Tully’s Grocery.” Or covering local events like who won the chili cook-off during Dust Bark Days and who won the coveted Miss Sheep crown at this year’s Lamb and Wool Festival.

Small as Granger was, even this sleepy little berg had its share of secrets. When it came to Ohio, no secret was bigger than the Castle.

It had been in operation here for years, but Sandy had never met anyone who’d admit to ever being inside. A real-life castle, it had been rescued from demolition crews making way for a shopping mall in Scotland. Dismantled brick by brick, the infamous owner, Marshall Leaf, had shipped every last bit of it to America, where it was rebuilt in the wilds of Ohio farm country. Granger was only a few miles east of it, a peaceful little slice of American morality that had been trying for years to shut the place down. At least once a month, some church started up a petition or picketed in front of city hall. But the plain fact was, the Castle wasn’t going anywhere. Not when Granger had no other major source of business revenue or jobs to replace it, and certainly not when nothing short of Disney World moving to Ohio would have replaced the level of tourism the Castle inspired. Sure, the tourists were only in town long enough to get on and off the Castle’s privately-owned buses. But there was still money being made at the local gas stations, restaurants, the coffee shop at the bus depot, sometimes the hotels, and surely the tourist traps, because for years now they’d been springing up on both sides of the main thoroughfare through town like fudge, cheese and jewelry-selling whack-a-moles at a carnival show.

“People have a right to know what goes on in that place,” Sandy had told her editor-in-chief. “Don’t you want to know?”

"I'm pretty sure I can imagine," he'd dryly replied. "Just hold on, now. If you think you're the first person who's ever tried to break in over there, think again. I can show you a whole stack of police reports on the people who've failed." Digging a file out of his desk, he began flipping laminated clippings across to her side of his desk. "Elsa Crowley, caught on the grounds and arrested for trespassing. Daniel Webber, caught on the highway taking pictures. His equipment was confiscated, and he and his film crew were sued for invasion of privacy. He lost to the tune of half a million because the dumb shit actually filmed himself crossing the fence at one point, with a sign right there that read: No cameras or recording devices may be used on these premises and no trespassing. Andrew Harlestone, who landed a job there for about three hours before he was caught with a camera on him. He got fifteen years and will have to register as a sex offender for the rest of his life." There were more clippings in that folder—a lot more—but he stopped, dropped the file on his desk, flopped back in his chair and frowned at her. "What are you trying to do?"

"It is a statistical fact, Bill," she'd hotly replied. "99.1% of these kinds of social dungeons—" She'd put that in air quotes. "—are nothing more than fronts for illicit and illegal activities. I'm not a prude. I saw *Fifty Shades of Grey*. I own all the books. But is that what's really going on here?" She began counting off on her fingers. "Drug trafficking, sex trafficking, rape, coercion, assault—all of that could right now be occurring in our own backyard and nobody is doing anything about it."

His frown deepened. "Maybe because there's nothing happening."

"Or maybe because they're too scared of what could happen to them if they talk." She frowned back.

A leap of muscle ticked along his jawline as he studied her. But he wasn't shutting her down; he was listening.

"I'm not saying that is what's happening," Sandy had persisted, trying to rein in her exuberance and bring it back to a strictly

professional level. “And I’m sure not trying to buck for free vacation time. Maybe this really is just a place where consenting adults come for some good clean kinky fun. But if it’s not—” She paused for emphasis, bracing her hands on the edge of his desk to lean back towards him. She lowered her voice to a conspirator’s level, “—don’t you want to know? I mean, beyond all question. You’ve got four girls, don’t you? Don’t you want to know for sure every time they drive down that road, they’re not driving in front of a place where girls their age or younger are being pedaled to the lusts of the men who visit there? Why does it cost so much to get in? Why is the security so high? What are they hiding?”

It had been a low blow to mention his daughters, and Sandy knew it the minute she saw heated anger flare in the backs of his eyes. But Bill wasn’t editor-in-chief by chance. He had worked his way through the paper for twenty years, earning every one of his grey hairs, and he knew how to hold his temper.

“All right,” he’d eventually said. “You go ahead and draw up a detailed plan of what supporting evidence you have now, what you think you’ll find if you get in there, and how you intend to find it. I’ll take a look at your plan and we’ll go from there. But I’m telling you now, I don’t think you’re going to find jack shit. The Castle ain’t nothing but a place for rich people to hang out with other rich people, doing God knows what because it’s the latest craze that money can buy. So fine. You wanna go get yourself in trouble over nothing, you go right ahead. But when you get arrested, don’t come crying to me for bail money. And if you don’t get arrested, congratulations, you’re the new Miss Martha Perfect. There’ll be a charity bake sale next week at the Pentecostal for you to cover.”

She really shouldn’t have mentioned his daughters. But, on the other hand, if she hadn’t, she probably would have had to come up with the entire ungodly entrance fee all on her own. But two days after that conversation and two hours after she dropped her typewritten plan on Bill’s desk—complete with an entire section of “anonymous tips” that she’d made up, because for a story like this,



the end would absolutely justify the means—he'd called her back into his office and handed her a voucher for the entry fee. The paper had covered it.

"Don't say I never gave you anything," Bill had said, right before he arched his eyebrows in serious warning and added, "Don't get caught."

So, now here she was. On a bus next to Wendy, bouncing out of the final tooth-jarring rut right before they crossed through a set of massive wrought-iron gates into the last half-mile stretch of private woods surrounding the Castle. A manned security shack was built into the high stone wall and the gate itself towered a good eight feet higher than the top of the bus. Solid wall was all she could see stretching out the length of the property way to either side of the bus, until the denseness of the forest swallowed it up. Both wall and gate were higher than a standard ladder could reach, but not for a cherry picker. Good luck getting one of those past all those security cameras or the guard shack so someone could snap some pictures over the wall.

The creak of the gates swinging open was antique-ish and rusty and probably done solely for the shivering effect that raced right up the length of Sandy's spine. She squirmed in her heated seat, feeling the warmth against her bottom, but in a way that felt almost foreboding. At some point during her visit, her butt was going to feel this kind of warmth but in a whole new way. She'd known that for weeks.

"Don't lose your nerve." Sandy didn't mean to say that out loud. She wasn't even aware she had until Wendy laughed beside her, a slightly deeper, burble of a chuckle.

"You and me both." The older woman still grinned and the light of excitement in her eyes hadn't diminished, but it was mingled now with something that looked a little like fear. Her hands were clenched so tightly in her lap that her knuckles were white.

Sandy's hands were doing the exact same thing, she suddenly realized.

Passing beyond the shadow of the wall, the bus crept down a longer drive where the forest at last gave way to neatly manicured grounds all covered in snow. The hedge maze was planted in bristly evergreen shrubs, the only dots of greenness in what was otherwise a landscape of white, marked by naked Greek and Roman statues and salted walkways that cut through an ankle's depth of ice and snow. Those walkways spiraled out every which way, some leading into the woods and others toward a series of outbuildings, including a massive stable in the distance, easily identified by its numerous corrals.

Crowning all of that, however, was the Castle itself, guarded by another wall and a portcullis which was raised up high and the drawbridge already lowered over a liquid moat. The water must have been heated, if only to a temperature somewhat warmer than the air above it. It was steaming.

The bus pulled into a roundabout stop near the entrance, where a cluster of costumed livery men were waiting to unload the luggage. They were an orderly and efficient bunch. Being in the front row had its perks. As soon as the bus was parked and the doors swung open, Wendy and Sandy were the first to disembark and by then, the livery men had the luggage compartments propped open, with several pieces hauled out and stacked into the horse-drawn cart they'd brought with them. It was both a rustic and incredibly fancy touch, considering this was really nothing more than a glorified sex hotel.

"I'm so excited," Wendy kept saying as they crossed the drawbridge together, followed by a trail of hopeful koi, begging their passing shadows for food. A burlap bag full of fish pellets set just off the drawbridge quickly identified itself as the reason why, along with a plaque above it that read: Feel free to feed the fish. No more than one handful, please.

Sandy almost stopped to do so, but squeals from two younger women racing each other to the bag let her know those fish wouldn't be starving anytime soon. They didn't take just one hand-

ful, either. They took two apiece and made several trips, until a gruff salt-and-pepper haired ‘servant’ in clothes that didn’t look much different than the burlap bag, albeit layered and probably warmer than her own coat, called out to them in a heavy Scottish brogue, “Dinna make me send ye fer switches!”

“Ooo,” Wendy leaned into Sandy to whisper. “I like him!”

“Do you like switches?” Sandy whispered back, because really, to her that would have been the bigger concern.

Wendy just giggled. She might have been fifty, but that giggle had schoolgirl mischief stamped all over it. It was enough to make Sandy laugh too. She shook her head and, despite the seriousness of the cause to which she’d already condemned the Castle, together they went to the admission tables to collect their fake names, their information packets, and the bracelets they would wear for the duration of their stay.

“Oh my God, this feels so real,” Wendy—now Jasmine—said as they found two empty seats. They sat together, because the devil you knew was always better company than the one you didn’t know, especially at a fantasy BDSM resort. Not that Sandy—now Ginger—had ever been to one before, but it was starting to feel incredibly real to her now too. When she opened her manila envelope and shook the bracelet into her waiting palm, she felt yet another trembling quiver roll through her in waves. This was it. This was the point of no return.

Which was pretty much her exact same thought the moment she’d boarded the Castle’s private bus.

And again, when she’d stepped out of her car in the Starbucks parking lot where the other Castle guests stood sipping their lattes, talking about the weather and how much snow was expected before tomorrow, and waiting for the buses to arrive.

Except this time, it really was the point of no return. She was here. The buses would soon be leaving again, if they hadn’t done so already. The gates would be closing and she would be stuck in the middle of this frozen nowhere, miles outside of town, surrounded

by woods—and quite possibly wolves—in a place she had convinced her boss might actually be a sex slave operation.

The crowning of a new Miss Sheep didn't seem so bad right now.

What the hell had she been thinking?



“WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING?” Eric demanded, his blue eyes huge with disbelief.

“Why the hell are you giving it to us?” Reeve added, taking the assignment file out of Eric's hands to better see the details for himself. Red hair, green eyes, definitely a looker, judging by the photocopy of her driver's license. But then, it wasn't attraction that concerned him regarding this case. It was the word 'reporter' spelled out all in caps above her name, highlighted in neon yellow and circled in bright red ink.

“Two sets of eyes are better than one,” Marshall answered, leaning back in his throne of an office chair, fresh cup of coffee in his hands. Both drapes over the tall, narrow-paned windows behind him were wide open this morning, but ice obscured the glass, which in turn reflected color from one of the waving turret banners, turning it the same eerie shade of blue as Marshall's eyes.

Those eyes were almost as well-known as this entire resort. Called the Master of the Masters for a reason, Marshall could make even the brattiest submissive back down and the most alpha of his dominants submit with little more than a stare. The joke below stairs was, it was so penetrating, that stare was all he'd needed to impregnate his wife, Kaylee. Whether Marshall had heard that joke yet was anyone's guess, but since it was still being passed around, probably not. Regardless, Reeve hated that stare. Marshall only had maybe five years on him, but getting called into the Master of the Master's office was like getting called into his father's study at the end of a day that he already knew was about to get a little bit worse.

At thirty-one, Reeve would have thought he was too old to spank, but sitting in this straight-backed chair meant for naughty submissives, staring at those two crook-handled canes on the wall directly behind the throne... well, Reeve half-way expected it.

Every single time he got called in here.

"I know you two have tag-teamed other guests in the past," Marshall continued. "I should think this would be just another day on the job."

Reeve exchanged looks with Eric. They'd been best friends practically from the day they'd met, serving together in the army, sharing women even then, and certainly sharing the same kind of kinky proclivities that made working at a place like the Castle something of a dream job.

"You're setting us up with a vanilla," Eric told him.

"A dangerous vanilla," Reeve added. "The kind that takes notes and files lawsuits."

"No, read the file. I'm setting you up with someone who claims to be new to the lifestyle. Unlike some, who lie through their teeth because they don't want to be seen as ignorant—" Like Marshall's own Kaylee, who had entered the Castle exactly that way. Reeve and Eric exchanged looks, but neither said that. "—at least she's willing to tell the truth. She's also filled out a list of potential likes and dislikes, which she claims eagerness to explore. And that means you get to treat her like any other guest who enters these premises. She's interested in rope and bondage, right up your alley," Marshall told Eric, and then turned to Reeve. "She's also interested in flogging and spanking, which gives you something to explore. Or, at least she says she's interested. But she's also a local reporter, born and raised in Granger, and no doubt possessed of all the same prejudices that have plagued us from the moment we decided to set up in this town. So, as I said before, two pairs of eyes watching over her every move are far better than one, especially while showing her all around our lovely, safe, sane and consensual, and completely law-abiding—" He caught himself and rolled his eyes. "Apart from

that whole ‘no adult can lawfully consent to receiving physical bodily harm from another’ bullshit, of course—completely law-abiding establishment. Now, are you willing to accept this assignment, or do I need to find somebody else?”

That was an order posed as a question and Reeve knew it.

So did Eric, who stopped rubbing his eyes. He dropped his hand into his lap and pasted on a smile that was only phony to those who knew him well. “I love it. I’m excited about it.”

“Count me in,” Reeve agreed, but only so he could get out of this chair and out of this office with what few shreds of domly self-esteem he had left.

“I can’t wait to get started.” Heaving out of his chair, Eric took back the file. “When do we meet her?”

Marshall didn’t smile, not exactly, but there was a glint of mirth in the ice of his eyes when he said, “Mistress Miranda should be finishing up her speech in the courtyard now. She’ll be waiting for you in the Meet and Greet.”

Reeve startled. “What, she’s here now?”

“We don’t even get a day to plan it out?” Eric seconded. He kept his smile and his falsely cheerful tone, however. “Well, this just gets better and better. I can’t wait.”

“Dismissed.” Marshall chuckled.

“I just can’t wait,” Eric repeated on his way to the door, still cheerful although the strain to remain so could be heard in his voice. As soon as the door shut behind him, he dropped both the smile and the false tone, smacked the folder against his thigh and grumbled, “I just can’t wait to wrap my hands around her neck and throttle her. Wait. Does she like breath-play?” He opened the file to look. “Hard limit. Damn.”

Reeve scrubbed his face with both hands. Already his analytical mind was drafting a list of things to do. “We need to get into costume, reserve a room, figure out a game plan... Any ideas?”

Flipping through papers, Eric said, “She put no to role-playing, but yes to age-play.”

Reeve snorted. “She probably thinks we’re peddling out children.”

“Probably,” Eric agreed. “But that gives us a place to start. What do you think, should we be brothers again or just really good friends?”

“Do I have to see you naked if I say the latter?”

Eric snapped the file folder closed long enough to give him a wounded gasp. “You love seeing me naked. It gives you something to aspire to.”

Reeve punched him in the arm, but his amusement was short lived. As they walked, Eric opened the file, acquainting himself with her limits and her likes, and Reeve stole another glance at the woman’s photo ID, stapled to the upper inner corner of the folder jacket. She really was pretty—a redhead with a shapely face that probably crowned an equally shapely body.

Not that *that* mattered. She was a Granger reporter; she was here looking for trouble. Knowing what he did about this town and its incredibly small-minded populace, Reeve was glad all the rooms came with a fully stocked chest of adult toys. It wasn’t often that he opted for man-made when it came to sexually fulfilling his role as the ultimate Dom and seducer of an assigned submissive. But in this case, he’d happily purchase all the toys it took, because he would not be touching her intimately.

All that pretty red hair, shapely curves and a smile that looked so innocent and friendly. Reeve tsked and shook his head.

If only a person’s appearance matched the deviousness of their intentions...